

Resolution # 69-16

**The Graduate and Professional Student Association (GPSA)
The Pennsylvania State University**



of the 69th Assembly
March 11, 2020

Be it decided by the Assembly of Elected Delegates,

**Call to Address Graduate and Professional Student Challenges Involving
COVID-19**

**In support of protecting graduate and professional student populations during the COVID-
19 response**

(Decided: [Y / N / A])

1 **Nature of the Situation**

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3 The precautions taken by Penn State in response to COVID-19, commonly known as the novel
4 coronavirus, are necessary for public health on our campuses and in our communities. However,
5 we have the opportunity to enact policies, programs, and practices in the conductance of these
6 emergency changes to relieve burdens placed upon the university's students and employees. In
7 that vein, GPSA in partnership with the Coalition of Graduate Employees (CGE) and other Penn
8 State student organizations, ask the university to consider and respond to the needs of students,
9 graduate/professional and undergraduate, which reflect the diversity of needs and to holistically
10 serve the safety and security of our community members.

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12 **Recommended Course of Action**

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14 By adopting this resolution, the GPSA formally recommends that Penn State and the Graduate
15 School commit to the following actions, which we believe will best protect our most vulnerable
16 community members.

- 1 **1. Guarantee workers will not face lost pay.** Instructors of all kinds, and employees and
2 staff associated with education, campus maintenance, food service, and more will be
3 prevented from working in a traditional capacity. It is imperative that this situation not
4 force them into financial instability for the good of our local communities and economies,
5 and out of a responsibility to those that make Penn State what it is every other day of the
6 year. To that end, we ask that Penn State guarantee pay will not be lost for those not needed
7 to fulfill duties on an empty campus, and for those feeling unwell.
- 8 **2. Guarantee graduate/professional and undergraduate students will be permitted to**
9 **remain in dorms without contest to the reason given.** There are many reasons students
10 may want to refrain from vacating their dorm in the face of this public health emergency
11 beyond economic hardship, and many of those reasons carry stigma with them. Students
12 must be allowed to submit a statement of their intention to remain in their dorm without
13 giving a specific cause other than this was the best personal choice available to them at this
14 time, in order to ensure we do not unnecessarily send students to homes not conducive to
15 their academic, physical, mental, or financial health.
- 16 **3. Refund students for Penn State room and board costs, proportional to the amount of**
17 **time that they are not freely permitted to live in the dorms.** Students will often have to
18 pay additional room and board costs elsewhere, so this would create an additional rent
19 burden for many students.
- 20 **4. Guarantee additional support will be provided for students who have specific**
21 **questions and needs.** The individual needs of students in this time will vary vastly and
22 will be unpredictable. For that reason, Penn State must demonstrate its care for each student
23 by establishing *well-staffed* resources and providing timely means to speak with additional
24 university support service providers during this time, such as through a hotline or email.
25 Finally, these short-term changes offer an opportunity to expand online services provided
26 by CAPS both now and long-term. University Health Services (UHS) should also release
27 readily available information about the status of the virus and refer students to relevant
28 federal resources.
- 29 **5. Guarantee legal support for international students.** As international students may have
30 specific legal questions regarding their visas and immigration status, or otherwise, Penn
31 State should continue to provide, free-of-charge, legal assistance to them, and reach out to
32 international students with those resources in anticipation of these concerns.
- 33 **6. Guarantee international students will be able to maintain their visas or immigration**
34 **status.** As these changes are enacted, it will likely affect the nature of international
35 students' immigration status. Penn State must proactively guarantee to legally support the
36 maintenance of visas/immigration status for international students during and beyond this
37 three-week period. The university must also extend the support of Student Legal Services
38 to international students who must leave the country and/or university because of changes
39 in status, in order to help them complete their intended education at Penn State.
- 40 **7. Guarantee help to international students specifically regarding Optional Practical**
41 **Training (OPT) and Curricular Practical Training (CPT).** DISSA provides workshops
42 that will not be offered during this time. The university must provide the necessary
43 information that would have been covered during the workshops online. Online workshops
44 must be offered before the respective application deadlines.

- 1 **8. Guarantee that costs related to testing and treatment will be covered by the**
2 **university.** While we understand that testing and treatment are unstable at the national
3 level, we ask that Penn State cover the cost of any testing and treatment students' healthcare
4 providers are able to offer.
- 5 **9. Guarantee that policies will be non-discriminatory.** As policies and decisions are set,
6 their effects on the campus community will become clear in predictable and unpredictable
7 ways. We ask that the university guarantee a continued eye to the impacts and offer
8 assurance that any policies that place undue burden on any class of community member be
9 promptly revised.
- 10 **10. Reimburse travel expenses** incurred by graduate and professional students for academic
11 and professional travel (e.g. conferences) canceled due to the university's travel
12 prohibitions, with no loss of access to funds for professional development and other
13 university-related travel in the future. We ask that the university make it clear that
14 departments should honor reimbursements that were planned before the travel restrictions
15 took place.
- 16 **11. Make a public statement** denouncing potential xenophobic or racist responses to COVID-
17 19. Reporting procedures for acts of intolerance should be included in this statement, as
18 well as a strong message that anti-immigrant and anti-Asian sentiments are unacceptable
19 responses to feelings of stress and anxiety.

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21 We also recommend that the Graduate School at Penn State consider the following additional steps
22 in regards to assistantships and graduate milestones:

- 23 **1. Open up an anonymous reporting tool** for graduate students to report when their
24 supervisors are actively not following practices recommended by the Graduate School or
25 other departments and units. For example, the College of Engineering has issued a
26 statement reading "All TAs and RAs have work responsibilities whether it is to their
27 instructor or their researcher. These responsibilities need to be met. *If the responsibilities*
28 *can be done remotely, then they should do so.*" Graduate students need mechanisms to
29 report when recommendations or policies are not followed.
- 30 **2. Require remote work to complete research assistantship duties when possible.** Many
31 graduate students can work remotely at times, and only come in for part of the day for
32 physical experiments when necessary. This would potentially reduce the rate of
33 transmission as lab environments result in close quarters.
- 34 **3. Provide information and resources, whether financial or technical, for graduate**
35 **assistants and professional students to learn how to access technology in order to work**
36 **and take classes remotely** including but not limited to computers, internet, and other
37 necessary equipment.
- 38 **4. Provide information on the movements restrictions on campus** for the purpose of
39 research and/or work, especially for the purpose of collecting materials required to
40 complete the aforementioned research and/or work.

1 **5. Guarantee that postponements in courses of study will not endanger academic**
2 **standing.** If graduate students are prevented from participating in academic milestones,
3 such as exams, defenses, or dissertation data collection, due to COVID-19 treatment or
4 self-quarantine, this should not negatively impact their academic standing.

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6 Respectfully submitted,

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9 President, GPSA

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President _____

Affirm

Veto

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The Graduate and Professional Student Association