

July 17, 2020

From: All Graduate PhD Students of the CS department of GSU
To: Computer Science department

This letter is prepared to voice an important and urgent concern of the graduate students of the Computer Science department in Georgia State University, regarding the current stipend rates allocated to the students.

For the past 5 years, the rate of the PhD students' stipend has been stagnating at \$19,000/yr and there is strong supporting evidence that shows continuation of this situation is not sustainable. Below, we enumerate the most important arguments as to why this decision has been damaging both the graduate students' living condition and the department's research and teaching quality.

- With the 2.4% inflation rate in Atlanta, the stipend should have increased by \$530/yr, which would have made the stipend in 2020 to reach \$21,565. Moreover, the rental increase in Atlanta, is significantly higher than the inflation rate, as in 2020, it climbed 4.7% compared to 2019.
- Recently, as per the new USG's insurance standards, the annual cost of the SHIP plan increased by 5%, from \$2,674 to \$2,808. Moreover, due to the new changes, the cheaper alternative plan (i.e., ISOA) is no longer ACA compliant. A combination of these two changes, leaves a student with an additional annual cost of \$800-\$1500 (depending on the student's age). To put this in context, according to the recent polling we conducted among our graduate students, more than 60% of us have been insured by ISOA, while only 12% could maintain their SHIP plan.
- Looking at the nation-wide data on graduate students' stipend, GSU's Computer Science department rate is among the least competitive rates (among Computer Science, Information Technology, and Data Science programs). Moreover, the normalized gross pay for our department is 0.81, much lower than 1.0 that indicates the given stipend is barely enough for the necessary costs.
- The extremely low stipend rate that has remained stagnant for several years, leaves graduate students in a fragile position that forces them to live under constant fear of unexpected bills and unfortunate accidents. Our students reported on different occasions that their monthly budget that is left after they pay the student fee, insurance, rent, and utilities, is less than \$300 that should be managed for all the transportation and grocery shoppings. This has caused a high level of anxiety that directly impacts students productivity in both their research and teaching assistantship roles.
- Given the living conditions of the current graduate students, it is not difficult to imagine that many prospective talented students could easily be attracted to other universities' programs that offer higher stipend rates.

The above points only scratch the surface of the issue and the difficulties they have been causing the students. But we strongly believe that the CS department perfectly understands the depth of the problem, sympathises with the current condition of the students. We, the graduate students, suggest the stipend rate of \$26,000 that gives us the after-tax rate of \$21,600/yr, with the following monthly breakdown of the costs: \$233 for SHIP, \$250 for student fees, \$800 for housing and utilities, \$417 for food and groceries and 100\$ for transportation.

We sincerely ask the CS department to urgently take the necessary steps for resolving the issue. Please contact us for further details on the issues mentioned above or any other concern.

Sincerely,
(On behalf of Graduate Students of CS department)
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