

Delores G. Kelley, Chair
Brian J. Feldman, Vice Chair
3 East Miller Senate Office Building
Annapolis, MD 21401

SB 658
Supporting

Dear Chair Kelley, Vice Chair Feldman, and Members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Kraina Sarah E. Ostrach. I am in my final semester of the Master of Library Science (MLIS) program with the College of Information Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. From August 2018 to August 2019, I served as a Graduate Administrative Assistant for the deans of my college.

I consider myself lucky because I did not experience many difficulties in my position, though I was distinctly aware of not having any infrastructure upon which to rely should problems arise. Although my official supervisor was the dean, we only met twice during that year. Instead, I worked with his executive assistant to discuss the details of my position, duties, schedules, etc. All of this information was informally discussed in person or over email; there was no codified contract or document outlining my duties, expectations, schedule, etc. While I am grateful that my time was respected, I must emphasize that I experienced anxiety feeling as though I had no protections should the requirements of my position change. And although I had an amicable relationship with the deans with whom I worked, I was distinctly aware of the hierarchy between us and never wanted to do anything that could jeopardize how my work or I was perceived. Indeed, I once hurt myself on my way to work and ignored the injury, trying to arrive on time. My superiors were understanding and patient as I made a stop at the health center - but I am frustrated that I even thought I should try to go to work first. But that is what happens when there is no clear protocol for such situations.

I would like to reiterate that my experience was generally a positive one, but only due to the individuals with whom I worked. Should my superiors have demanded more of my time or changed their minds more frequently - which has happened to my classmates, and even to myself in an hourly campus position with absolutely no formal delineation of duties - I would have had no recourse to protect myself. The anxiety caused by this situation was exacerbated by the positions of my superiors as the most senior administrators in my college. In addition to taking pride in my work and wishing to do a good job, I was also concerned that any conflict or other situation could have serious repercussions.

I urge the legislature to give graduate students the right to collective action - give them a choice. The anxiety I experienced while working as a Graduate Assistant is unnecessary and negatively affects students' ability to pursue their studies and work. The difficulties that my classmates have experienced with ever-increasing duties, erratic pay schedules, and changing deadlines are unprofessional, unfair, and extremely detrimental to academic pursuits and even mental health.

Graduate school is stressful enough. Employment where the goal posts are ever-shifting, or could shift without notice, is an unnecessary source of stress and hardship and is relatively easy to fix: give students the right and power to demand contracts, a clear list of job duties, and clear protocols for the common situations that arise while working.

Sincerely,

K. Sarah Ostrach
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