

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

SB 521
Supporting

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

I have been a PhD student at UMD for 7 full semesters now. I was a TA for 3 semesters and an RA for the other 4. Each TA session involved teaching 2 groups of 25 students each. I was required to lead 2 lab sessions each week- a total of 6 in-person hours- and grade lab reports, sit in office hours, as well as attend lab prep meetings weekly. On occasion, I would also be asked to substitute for other TAs or faculty members who were unavailable.

Although I was paid during these semesters to be a TA, I would describe this work as filling only about half of my allotted time at work. Every TA in my department also has to make progress in their research, and (in the initial few years) take several courses in their research specialization. So there are a lot of responsibilities, and they are not mutually reinforcing. It is very difficult for a TA to ask a potential advisor for more time to complete a research task because they have to spend all night grading exams or lab reports for the class they are teaching. On the other hand, if their advisor decides to terminate their position in the group for any reason, or withdraws advisory support, there is nothing a TA can do about it. TAs are dependent on advisory support not only for career advancement (and that dependence is almost complete), but also for things like maternity leave and childcare leave.

Given how much TAs and RAs contribute to the academic program at UMD, having some form of collective bargaining agreement to provide basic worker protections is the least that should be available to grad students

Sincerely,

Naren Manjunath

PhD, Department of Physics