

Testimony from Jenna Russell

I transferred with my advisor part-way through my PhD. At our old institution, health care was completely covered, and wages were higher due to the union negotiating for fair pay as the cost of living dramatically increases. UMD would create a much better work environment for their students if we didn't have to worry about things like the rising costs of healthcare and having enough take home pay to do more than scrape by. It's embarrassing that UMD does not care about nor recognize their graduate students. It shows that UMD sees graduate students not as the cornerstone of the university but as cheap labor to exploit as much as possible. This summer, pay was withheld for over a month due to errors and miscommunication from UMD, which for some of my peers would be devastating. How are students expected to continue research when they cannot even pay rent? When asked, I tell all potential students not to come to UMD, as the university offers terrible benefits and salary as compared to peer institutions. All of the other 6 PhD programs I was accepted to have and recognize their graduate unions. JHU, just up the road, offers a salary over 50k per year as well as healthcare and other benefits. While most of my fellow PhD students haven't known differently, I can speak first hand about the lack of community and support at UMD in comparison to peer universities. The state and university need to stop embarrassing themselves and recognize the graduate union,.