Getting a Raise

TA Pay Negotiations at Syracuse University

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Assessing the Situation

Syracuse has wide range of TA stipends

- Anecdotal evidence of $12,500 - $28,000 range
- Common story of TAs working outside jobs to supplement income
- Mandated minimum of $12,155 for a 9 month, 20 hour contract

Fall 2012, Syracuse GSO decided to conduct survey

- Looked into different survey partners
- Began investigating TA contact info
- Established committee to construct survey
Surveying

Early spring 2013, GSO moved forward with a surveying partner

- Used in house survey group (Office of Institutional Research and Assessment)
- OIRA has experience and teams of statisticians
- Long history of good data stewardship
- OIRA operates on a client model - questions and data are owned by client
- Maintained due to the decentralized nature of SU
- Easy access to university employment records to generate contact list
- Also, free!
OIRA and our committee formed the question list in spring 2013

- Our focus was on pay levels vs expenses
- We asked about employment category, program
- Length of contract, hours per week - both contracted and real
- Benefits expense and usefulness
- Summer funding availability, amounts, expectations
Conducting the Survey

We moved forward with the survey in April 2013.

- Used university employment records to send to exactly the population we wanted
- Ultimately, OIRA sent the survey, not us
- Administration was comfortable with sharing employment data with OIRA, would not have given it to us directly
- Survey was open for two weeks
- Incentivized with gift cards
- 407 out of 1405 students responded
OIRA conducted the analysis on our behalf

Slicing apart the data showed us which programs were chronically underpaid

The expense numbers gave us information on living wage levels for our students

Further research on City of Syracuse confirmed our wage computation

Determined that living wage in Syracuse is $19,350, and 59% of TAs, RAs fell below
$19,350 (for 9 month, 20 hour contract) is a big leap from $12,155

- Phased, 3 or 5 years of increases
- Percent increase per year more palatable
- Approximately $3 mil total increase
- Less opposition from depts and deans with phased approach
Major Factions

- Trustees
- Upper administration - Chancellor, Provost, Budget and Planning
- Deans
- Department Chairs
- University Senate Budget Committee
The Approach

By end of summer 2013, we had a direction of attack

- Graduate School Dean on our side from start
  - No budget impact on Grad School
- Too small an impact for Trustees
- Administration and deans at SU hate to make promises
  - We knew we couldn’t pin them down
- Major proposal made to Senate Budget Committee
In early October 2013, we presented to the Senate Budget Committee

Major arguments

- Low overall budget impact
- Decrease outside jobs students take, increasing focus on research and teaching
- TAs are 39% of FTE instructors at SU
- Increases programs’ applicant draw
- Helps us mitigate against increasing loan rates

Primarily focus on why this made all of SU better, not just us!
Committee came out on our side
Committee officially requested an analysis from administration
Administration members now on record saying pay should rise
Question has been reframed as how big of an increase, not should it happen
Discussion now moving to specific numbers
Issues Arisen

The biggest obstacle has been RCM

- Each dean creates their own budget
- Little central planning means little central control
- No requirement that a dept give out Grad School approved TAships
- If pay rises too quickly, depts might jump ship, invent their own pay levels
- Forces us to consider a slow, lengthy period of increases
- Some depts already do this, and are in a gray area
Tricks and Successes

- Working with internal surveyor meant full access to population
- OIRA ensured we asked valid questions, and performed valid analysis
- Going to more open Budget Committee forces more public statements from administration
- Finding a balance with concerns crucial
- Focus on benefits to whole university was the strongest tactic