

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!

Questions

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

Results!

- 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

The Ask

\$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

Making a Case

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!

Outcome

- 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

Questions?

Questions? Comments? Discussion?