

In response to the Dean's request for the Committee's help soliciting feedback from CLAS chairs about concerns, problems, and likely impact surrounding the impending 0.5 FTE grad-student policy, members contacted chairs of all CLAS departments (with the exception of Economics) with the following background information and questions:

Background

1. Provost wants a 0.5 FTE grad-student policy for incoming students enrolling as doctoral students and supported on state-funded OPS monies
2. Dean wants feedback from units on likely impact, problems, and concerns, in order to ensure smooth transition

Questions

1. How significant a concern is this? Is it something that can be dealt with internally?
2. Would this create complications for your unit? If so, what kind?
3. What sort of policies, practices, and/or assistance would be useful to see from the College Office to ensure units have the flexibility they need for making the transition?

Summary of feedback

Committee members received input from all but one chair. Chairs generally indicated that they anticipated being able to deal with the new policy internally (and several were openly laudatory about the move), but even among these, there were plenty of questions and concerns about implementation.

Certain questions and concerns resonated in the responses of multiple chairs. Among the more frequently noted:

1. ***defining what "counts" as 0.5 FTE employment.*** In the view of some chairs, graduate students are being paid a salary to teach discussion sections or labs. Just as for faculty, it is not an hourly wage. There will be weeks when they work many more hours such as before exams or the end of the semester, and there will be weeks when the teaching load is lighter. These units do not plan to have grad students teaching additional sections with the new FTE. One unit takes the opposite approach, insisting that students do work proportional to their assignments. Other units plan, or wonder if it's possible, to define appointments more broadly, so that they can either have students on two 0.25 FTE appointments doing different tasks (eg. teaching/grant), or count mandated attendance at departmental talks, workshops, and other relevant events. Still others will need to somehow make adjustments for different types of teaching assignments (TA vs. instructor) that are now assigned different FTEs.
2. ***the level of flexibility the new policy would afford units that may want or need to raise or, in exceptional cases, lower FTEs.*** Several units regularly offer additional teaching to students either as a means of augmenting salary or accommodating increased enrollment, and wonder a) if this will still be possible at least for U.S. nationals, and b) what options they would have for foreign students, who are restricted to 0.5 FTE in any case. One unit needs senior PhDs—including international students—to take on additional duties, and wonders how augmentation

would be possible in these cases. (This same chair wonders if units could simply raise grad salaries in these cases, without increasing FTEs.) Another unit uses 0.25 FTE assignments for grads who have exhausted all funding, but need a tuition waiver in order to graduate, and wonders if this would be permissible. Yet another asks about the viability of 0.25 appointments in the summer.

3. ***the inequity, at least in the short term, the new policy would create between old and new (pre- and post-policy) grad students.*** Units are taking different approaches to address this: some are considering raising all students to 0.5 FTE; others are planning on phasing it in incrementally; still others intend to keep pre-2018 students at 0.33 to avoid the appearance students receiving the same pay for a higher FTE.
4. ***the timing and unpredictability of OPS allocations.*** Several chairs noted that not knowing their OPS budgets when making offers to grad students already makes it difficult to determine how many offers they can make, and at what rate. Requiring those offers to be uniform at 0.5 FTE further ties their hands.
5. ***the negative impact of the 0.5 policy on time-to-completion and stress levels for first-year students.***

In addition to these concerns shared by a number of chairs, several other noteworthy questions or concerns emerged in isolated instances. One chair wondered about the “policing mechanism” of the new policy; that same chair wondered if current students not on state funding would be considered “new students” if moved over to state funding, and thus be subjected to the 0.5 FTE rule. One department anticipates complications due to grad students with TA appointments outside of the department (English – UWP), and another expresses concern over the impact on MA students as a result of the increased inequity that this new policy would create between masters and doctoral students. One other chair suggests that consideration be given to at least a marginal stipend increase to current (PhD) students, at least in the interim, to help morale.

Recommendations

1. 0.5 FTE should be regarded as the new teaching norm. The college should give departments flexibility as to how this assignment is defined.
2. The college should identify a mechanism that would allow units to appeal for a temporary increase in a graduate student’s 0.5 FTE in exceptional cases necessitated by undergraduate teaching needs.
3. More generally, the college should maintain open channels of communication throughout the transition and encourage chairs to communicate with the Dean’s Office as they formulate policies and practices.