

1 **ATTACHMENT B**

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3 **Associated Student Government**  
4 University of Arkansas



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7 *ASG Joint Resolution 2*  
8 *2016-2017*  
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10 **RESOLUTION TO REQUEST UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS GRADUATE COUNCIL**  
11 **AND FACULTY SENATE SUPPORT IN ESTABLISHING A LIFE EVENT AND**  
12 **MEDICAL LEAVE FOR UNIVERSITY-FUNDED STUDENTS**

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14 Bohlen

15 Sponsors: GSC Marketing and External Relations Co-Director Rachel Gerner  
16

17 WHEREAS, Individuals who are able to balance parental/familial and academic roles have  
18 positive work outcomes and their children are also happy emotionally, physically  
19 and academically (Comer and Stites-Doe 2006).; and

20 WHEREAS, The University of Arkansas has put in place on behalf of faculty and staff the  
21 institutional supports that facilitate the desired balance between multiple life roles  
22 through a number of family-friendly policies, including paid vacations, sick leave,  
23 and access to childcare;<sup>1</sup> and

24 WHEREAS, Graduate and Professional Students are the future academic faculty, and like  
25 faculty, they have to balance multiple duties related to research, teaching, service,  
26 taking classes, and, in many cases, parenting and/or providing care for an ill or  
27 disabled family member; and

28 WHEREAS, Undergraduate Students on university-funded fellowships and scholarships have  
29 many of these same responsibilities, including serving as Student Instructional  
30 Leaders; and

31 WHEREAS Graduate assistants are the group of graduate and professional students who are  
32 most likely to juggle additional work assignments/jobs due to the fact that their  
33 stipends are insufficient to support themselves and their families; and

34 WHEREAS Graduate assistants who are the sole income-earners of their households, such as  
35 single parents or international graduate and professional students, are especially

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the University is compelled to comply with the Family Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA). As such employees who have worked 1,250 hours during the previous 12 months are qualified to take a 12-week unpaid leave during which their jobs are protected. However, graduate assistants with a 50% work appointment do not fall under the purview of FMLA as their typical work hours are 1,040 per year and thus, 200 hours short of qualifying for FMLA benefits. Time spent on doing dissertation/thesis research and time spent on service activities (e.g. Graduate Student Congress) are not included in the paid work hours for graduate assistants.

36 overwhelmed by competing work demands. All their duties combined can amount  
37 to more than 90-hour work weeks;<sup>2</sup> and

38 WHEREAS, Data from the University of Arkansas Graduate Student survey reveals that 16% of  
39 respondent Graduate Students at the University of Arkansas have children, 3% of  
40 respondent Graduate Students provide care for an elderly or sick family member;<sup>3</sup>  
41 and

42 WHEREAS, Unlike the full-time employees at the University of Arkansas who benefit from  
43 several family-friendly policies, the administration has not afforded university-  
44 funded students the basic protections<sup>4</sup>; and

45 WHEREAS, The University of Arkansas administration has set up a number of goals that are  
46 part of the broader plan for the university to become one of the Top Public Research  
47 Universities in the nation, and one of those goals is to “provide highly competitive  
48 compensation packages for the purpose of recruiting and retaining the very best  
49 faculty, staff and graduate students.”<sup>5</sup> (p. 3); and

50 WHEREAS, The best way to attract and retain the best students at this university would be to  
51 offer them benefits that would help them balance work and family responsibilities.

52 **THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that, as representatives of the Graduate and Professional  
53 Student body, the Graduate Student Congress requests that the Graduate Council of the  
54 University of Arkansas look into the feasibility of implementing a Life Event and Medical leave  
55 policy that is more responsive to the above-mentioned needs of university-funded students and  
56 that includes the following criteria:

57 1. The Life Event and Medical leave policy will apply to all university-funded students at  
58 the university.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Data from a survey with more than 8 thousand doctoral students indeed reveals that while “women and men without children spend approximately 75 hours/week on PhD work, employment, housework, and caregiving, mothers log a crushing hundred-plus hours/week in these activities (and fathers 90 hours)” (Mason, Goulden and Frasch 2009, p. 4). Taking into consideration all these competing work responsibilities, it is very difficult for graduate assistants who are also parents/caregivers to devote the necessary time to nurse a sick child, parent, or spouse, while maintaining attention to their academic pursuits.

<sup>3</sup> Research shows that graduate students, in particular doctoral students, often express dissatisfaction with the departmental support for “career-life balance and time for themselves” (Mason, Goulden and Frasch 2009, p. 3).

<sup>4</sup> Certainly, it is recognized that departments often do find ways to accommodate the needs of their university-funded students with respect to family caregiving responsibilities on an *ad hoc* basis. Departmental flexibility and consideration is indeed an invaluable tool in ameliorating the pressures of confronting the challenges that graduate students face. However, “without formal structures, the distribution of flexibility options will likely be inconsistent across students and departments” and thereby subject to arbitrary discretion which reduces the request of any graduate student in crisis to “asking for a favor,” rather than making use of a codified and institutionally-supported resource (Springer, Parker and Leviten-Reid 2009).

<sup>5</sup> University of Arkansas, Transparency and Accountability Report 2012, p.3. The report also mentions that the university strives to support its employees in balancing work and family responsibilities (p. 27). As mentioned above many graduate students, especially doctoral students are “non-traditional” students who have extensive family responsibilities. Many of these graduate students are, or seek to be, employed as graduate assistants.

<sup>6</sup> We recognize that the graduate student body is not monolithic. Their family lives are diverse and their needs are multiple. Not all graduate students are subject to the same University policies regarding enrollment and employment. For example, unlike graduate students who are not employed as graduate assistants at the university

- 59 2. Rather than focusing on family policies that apply to specific family-related events and  
60 caregiving duties (e.g. child birth, child care, elderly care, ill family member care,  
61 personal illness, etc.) we propose a family policy that encompasses all these family needs  
62 as well as personal medical needs.
- 63 3. Ideally, we would like to have a 6 weeks paid leave with the option to extend to 12 weeks  
64 paid leave. However, if such a policy is not possible we propose an up to 6 weeks paid  
65 leave with the option to extend to 12 weeks of unpaid leave.<sup>7</sup> During this time the  
66 university-funded should maintain “enrolled” status, thus allowing them to retain library  
67 privileges, student health insurance, and to have access to other student facilities. The  
68 most important clause in our policy is that the university funding will be retained so that  
69 the student is able to return to his/her duties after the prescribed period for life event  
70 leave has been completed.
- 71 4. In situations when the leave needs to be extended beyond 12 weeks and the payment of a  
72 salary is no longer feasible, we propose the creation of a reduced enrollment (a place-  
73 holder class) that will allow university-funded students to retain access to the university  
74 library, university e-mail address, and faculty support.<sup>8</sup> However, once the student  
75 resumes their student duties they should have the option to continue on the previously  
76 held funding line or obtain a different funding line.<sup>9</sup> Also, the leave should stop the  
77 academic degree clock.<sup>10</sup>

78  
79 **BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that in the absence of an official comprehensive Life Event  
80 and Medical leave policy for university-funded students, that the Graduate Council and Faculty  
81 Senate encourage all colleges on campus to implement a policy of accommodation for  
82 university-funded student life events.

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and who can take one credit hour per semester and still maintain active enrollment status, graduate assistants must be enrolled in at least six credit hours/semester in order to maintain their assistantships.

<sup>7</sup> University of Mississippi: a full-time graduate student may take 6 weeks’ leave with the following benefits: continued enrollment with appropriate tuition waivers and insurance subsidy along with full level of stipend support; the student also will receive a four-month extension of any graduate school and programmatic time limits.

<sup>8</sup> The university does offer a Leave of Absence which can be taken for maximum two years only by post candidacy doctoral students in case of “serious illness of the student or his/her immediate family, serious personal problems, or job-related issues.” During this time however, the doctoral candidate cannot make use of university resources like the university e-mail, the library, and faculty time, and the time towards the degree does not stop. Lack of access to these resources can hinder students’ progress with the dissertation. Also, there is no guarantee that once the Graduate Student is back from the leave there will be an assistantship.

<sup>9</sup> University of Florida: Unpaid leave—“The GA is entitled to return to the same or similar position at the conclusion of the leave.”

<sup>10</sup> *University of Kansas*: time during a leave of absence does not count against the student’s time to degree.

*University of Mississippi*: 4-month extension following leave. *University of Georgia*: the clock stops for pregnancy, childbirth, and/or adoption for a child under the age of 6. *University of Nebraska, Lincoln*: active study can be suspended for one or more semesters (up to a full academic year), during which the student would not be expected to make progress toward a degree. *University of Tennessee, Knoxville*: an approved leave of absence will not be counted toward time to degree, and milestones will be adjusted accordingly. *Texas A&M*: childbirth merits an automatic one-semester extension of departmental requirements and academic milestones.

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101 *Official Use Only*

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103 Amendments: \_\_\_\_\_

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105 Vote Count: Aye \_\_\_\_\_ Nay \_\_\_\_\_ Abstentions \_\_\_\_\_

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107 Legislation Status: Passed \_\_\_\_\_ Failed \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

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111 Will Watkins, ASG Chair of the Senate \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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115 Scout Johnson, ASG Speaker of the \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

116 Graduate Student Congress \_\_\_\_\_

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119 Connor Flocks, ASG President \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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