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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate  
 GPSS Resolution 2021-220  
 Resolution to Improve Communication to Graduate Students and Clarify Institutional  
 Role**

First Reading by GPSS:	Nov. 4th 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
Faculty Senate Review:	date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review:	date
First Reading by University Council:	date
Approved by University Council:	date
Approval by University President:	date
Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

**WHEREAS**, during the Covid-19 pandemic communication to graduate students ranged from incomplete to outright dangerous misinformation about testing eligibility, position in line for vaccines, and institutional role; and

**WHEREAS**, these gaps in communication have been a consistent problem for graduate students for at least 3 years. For example, there has been consistent confusion about what information is relevant for Graduate Teaching Assistants with faculty being notified about important changes like damages to classrooms, changes to schedule, or valuable pedagogy workshop opportunities without the teaching assistants who might be the primary instructor being notified; and

**WHEREAS**, these communication gaps stem from the ambiguous status of graduate students as sometimes students and sometimes employees depending on any given situation and often changing from day to day; and

**WHEREAS**, graduate students are officially considered students by human resources, which does not capture the full scope of their duties and as detailed later are not afforded the full protections and resources that undergraduate students have access to; and

**WHEREAS**, graduate students are a unique population who perform a wide range of campus functions and require specific attention paid to their situation as well as specific protections for their time and resources; and

**WHEREAS**, beyond communication issues, graduate students are often taken advantage of because of their nebulous status as sometimes students and sometimes employees. Furthermore, graduate students are frequently treated like students and thus not subject to state and federal worker protections that come along with being a public sector employee; and

**WHEREAS**, graduate students are oftentimes expected to work far more than the 20 hours a week they are contracted for by the university, with little to no protection that the undergraduate student employees on the same schedule receive; and

**WHEREAS**, Just as often graduate students do not have access to or have limited access to student services that undergraduates receive. For instance, graduate students are far less likely and able to utilize essential services like Cook Counseling or disability accommodations than undergraduate students--especially if the graduate students work from one of the satellite campuses--because they are designed to accommodate undergraduates primarily (See, also, GPSS Resolution 2021-2022U); and

**WHEREAS**, taken together, these issues arising from a lack of communication and ambiguous positioning at the university pose significant equity issues for graduate students and can often cause material harmas we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic when graduate students would receive unclear information or simply not receive vital information at all; and

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that graduate students be associated with the job they perform at the university when it comes to university communications. I.E. if a graduate student works as a teaching assistant or instructor of record they should be treated as faculty *in addition* to their role as graduate student for the purposes of communication; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that a joint task force be developed within six months of passing this resolution between Human Resources, the Graduate School, and graduate students (who form the stakeholder population) to address the ambiguous status of graduate students and solidify workplace protections necessary for performing the unique role that graduate students have at this institution. This should also include special considerations for the unique communication and student services needs that the satellite campuses have who often have more difficulty with these issues than Blacksburg graduate students. This task force should be taken as an opportunity to perform a holistic review of graduate student's roles and responsibilities as members of the university including, but not limited to, addressing the concerns raised by this resolution as well as GPSS 2021-2022P.