



UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT
GRADUATE STUDENT SENATE

What Our Students Asked Us to Share

Presented by:

The Graduate Student Senate

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In the words of graduate students from across UVM's programs

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This year, the Graduate Student Senate included an open-ended question on our annual survey: *what would you like university leadership to understand about your graduate student experience?* Dozens of graduate students answered, and Every substantive response was read in full.

This short report is organized into two parts. The first gathers **the concerns raised most often**, the themes where many different students said something similar, in their own words. The second lifts up **specific suggestions and concerns** raised by individual students: smaller in number, but concrete enough that we felt they deserved direct attention, stated as the students themselves framed them.

We have done our best to let students' own language carry the report. We are grateful for the trust students placed in us when they wrote, and grateful for the time you are giving to read what they asked us to share.

With gratitude and respect,
The Graduate Student Senate

Summary

Across the responses to our survey, six themes emerged most consistently, drawn from the voices of many students across programs:

1. **Stipends, wages, and the cost of living in Burlington** (the most frequently raised theme).
2. **Housing affordability and lease flexibility.**
3. **Health insurance, particularly vision and dental coverage.**
4. **The graduate student union contract.**
5. **Support for international graduate students.**
6. **Recognition of graduate students** as contributors to UVM's research and teaching mission, and as adults with lives beyond their programs.

Alongside these broad themes, individual students raised a number of more specific issues that felt distinct enough to highlight on their own. These appear in Section 2.

Students also took time to name the programs that are working for them. The Elevate grant, Graduate College funding, and opportunities to serve on governance committees through the GSS were all mentioned with genuine appreciation.

One student expressed what several others also said, in different words:

"I don't need more help, I need less precarity."

Section 1: Concerns Raised by Many Students

This section presents the themes that many students raised independently. For each, we share two or three short quotations chosen to convey what students said, along with supporting context from the broader survey where relevant.

Stipends, Wages, and the Cost of Living

This was the most frequently raised theme in the survey, across programs and student types. Students described a sustained gap between graduate compensation and the cost of living in the Burlington area, and often linked that gap to outside employment, stress, and reduced focus on research and teaching.

Cost of living is increasing. Our pay should reflect this.

I have to work an additional 30 hours a week to make ends meet with the skyrocketing cost of living. . . . I wish I could pour all my energy and efforts into my degree to benefit both myself and UVM, but I cannot survive off the stipend we are given.

I would not be able to afford my program if I wasn't working as full-time staff.

Wages are not enough to cover the cost of living in Burlington. Also, the wage difference between departments is unfair.

Students also connected low stipends to UVM's ability to recruit graduate students. One wrote simply: "Need higher stipends to live in Burlington. I have heard this turns away good potential graduate students."

Housing Affordability and Flexibility

Housing was the second-most raised theme and the broader survey data reinforces its weight. Of the 198 respondents who answered the housing satisfaction question, **118 (about 60%) reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied** with their current housing. Of 158 students who identified any housing challenge, **136 named cost**, **61 named lease dates or inflexibility**, and **56 named distance from campus**. The average reported monthly housing cost among respondents was **\$1,286**, with a median of \$1,176.

This is a fun town to be a graduate student but it is competitive to find housing and maintain a graduate student budget.

The cost of housing is too high and housing availability in Burlington is not sufficient. My current stipend barely covers my costs and I have fears of costly medical bills.

Students recognized Catamount Run as a meaningful effort by the University. At the same time, many shared that its current pricing and lease structure place it out of reach, or are difficult to align with graduate assistantship timelines. Specific operational adjustments students raised include: July lease start dates, a later renewal deadline, and a shuttle to campus.

Health Insurance: Vision and Dental

Few requests in the survey were as consistent, or as narrow and specific, as the request for vision and dental coverage.

We need vision and dental insurance.

One area that could be improved is student health insurance. GSS could advocate for more comprehensive coverage, particularly by including vision and dental benefits.

Many students have health issues that go unattended for years because they cannot afford it.

We recognize that student health insurance involves a complex market and that premium pressures are real. Students framed this request as a specific gap in routine care, rather than as a request to redesign the plan.

The Graduate Student Union Contract

The unresolved union contract came up frequently in the survey, and with genuine feeling. Several students named reaching a contract as central to their sense of stability and wellbeing. We recognize that bargaining is a formal process that unfolds on its own timeline, and we bring these voices forward simply so that leadership can see how students are experiencing the wait.

Prioritizing a GSU contract is my top priority for my and others' well-being.

We need a union contract, a living wage, and protections for international students.

I think it's not right that the university has yet to sign a contract with the union, ... I share this status with prospective students and job candidates.

International Graduate Students

Both international and domestic respondents raised the situation of International students with care. Concerns centered on visa-related logistics and on a desire for clear institutional communication during a difficult federal moment.

I would like to see increased support of international grad students. For example, helping with visa appointments and fees; several of my lab colleagues have to travel to Boston to deal with visas.

I think the focus should be more on international students instead of Vermont based students like myself.

Recognition of Graduate Students

A quieter but persistent theme underneath many responses: students want to be recognized for the work they already do (teaching, research, mentoring) and to be understood as adults with lives outside their programs.

Graduate student labor makes this university run.

The program is very busy and very stressful, but I am also an adult with a lot of other responsibilities. It's important that we are seen that way.

Within this broader theme, students named several specific, practical needs which appear individually in the next section.

Section 2: Specific Suggestions Raised by Individual Students

The items below were raised by *individual* respondents, not as a consensus of the graduate community, but as concrete observations that the GSS felt merited direct attention. Each is presented as the student themselves framed it: what they described as the problem, and what they proposed as

a possible path forward. We have preserved the specificity because, in many cases, these are exactly the kinds of issues that can be addressed with comparatively modest adjustments.

Staff tuition remission falls three credits short of a full academic year

A UVM staff member pursuing a graduate degree noted that the current tuition remission benefit covers three credits short of a full academic year. They wrote: *“I understand that tuition remission is an incredible benefit but I wonder if the BoT would approve an extra 3 credits per year? . . . It seems like low-hanging fruit to provide to personnel who are investing in their education to improve their work at UVM.”* **Proposed Consideration:** reviewing whether the benefit could be extended by three credits per year for employees pursuing UVM graduate degrees.

Unpaid practicum alongside out-of-state tuition

One student described being required to complete an unpaid practicum while also paying roughly \$40,000 per year in out-of-state tuition, noting that they are not eligible for in-state rates because their only Vermont residence has been through attending UVM. In their words: *“The fact that my practicum is unpaid and that I have to pay 40k a year for tuition makes this program financially unsustainable for me. It is also frustrating that I cannot be eligible for in-state tuition because I have only lived in Vermont while attending UVM.”*

Asynchronous options for the EdD program

A student in the EdD program noted that UVM is among very few peer institutions that does not currently offer asynchronous coursework in that program, and described the impact on working professionals and burnout. **Proposed Consideration, in the student’s words:** *“We need more asynchronous options, especially for the EdD. We are one of the only institutions who does not offer this option, and the burnout is affecting so many of us.”* (Will also follow up with the Graduate College)

“Distance commuter” parking category

A student commuting to classes at Mann Hall from a long distance identified parking as a recurring, practical barrier, and proposed a small structural solution: *“The lack of parking near Mann Hall for students commuting from long distances feels like an unnecessary and solvable micro-stressor. . . . [Consider a] ‘distance commuter parking’ permit.”* **Proposed consideration:** Exploring the possibility of creating a “distance commuter” permit category for graduate students living beyond a set distance from campus.

Support for research: library consultants and manuscript help

“We need more support to conduct research such as access to software, AI and engineering support and other resources to help produce high quality work. Even access to support to submit manuscript to a good journal to help with open access.”

Caregiving leave beyond parental leave

A student who had cared for their father during most of their studies, and who has since lost him, shared that caregiving for aging parents and other adult family members is not

clearly recognized in graduate policy: *“I feel like caregiving other than parenting doesn’t really get considered when we think about the different responsibilities that grad students balance.”*

Proposed consideration: reviewing graduate leave policy to explicitly include caregiving responsibilities beyond parental leave.

Dedicated graduate space and nursing rooms

A student wrote: *“We need a designated space on campus and in the library for graduate students. Also we need nursing cubicles for nursing mothers at the Davis Center and around campus.”* **Proposed Consideration:** identifying a dedicated graduate student space on campus (one respondent specifically suggesting the library as a possible location).

Professional development for online graduate teaching

A remote-program student reflected that online graduate teaching at UVM has not received the same instructional-design attention as in-person teaching, and proposed a narrow fix: *“I think the lecturers should receive supportive professional development in how to run a fully virtual course in an engaging way.”* **Proposed Consideration:** offering dedicated CTL professional-development support for instructors leading online graduate courses. (Will also follow up with the Graduate College).

Funding opportunities for AMP and master’s students

An Accelerated Master’s Program (AMP) student noted that AMP students are not eligible for most TA or RA opportunities, placing them at a funding disadvantage relative to other graduate students. A separate master’s student described feeling that some graduate programs are structured primarily around PhD timelines. **Proposed Consideration:** review graduate funding pathways to ensure that AMP and master’s students have access to teaching and research assistantships proportionate to their roles. (Will also follow up with the Graduate College).

What Students Said Is Already Working

It would be incomplete—and inaccurate—to close without honoring the things students named as making a real difference in their lives.

Elevate grant has literally been such a game-changer.

I am so appreciative of the funding I received from the Graduate College. The funding helped me to decide to come to UVM for graduate school.

I have had great experience on the FBI Committee and Audit Committee and I am grateful for the opportunity thanks to the GSS.

Everyone is trying their best and additional resources to make research go smoothly is appreciated.

These voices matter. They are evidence that when UVM invests specifically and concretely in graduate students, students notice, participate, and express gratitude. We take them as encouragement

for the conversation ahead.

In Closing

Our students answered a single question, openly and at length, because they trusted that their words would reach you. We are grateful to them for that trust, and to you for the time you are giving this report.

We also recognize that many of the concerns reflected here connect naturally to the values and priorities named in UVM's new strategic plan, *Green, Gold, and Bold*, particularly around student connection, access, opportunity, campus community, and institutional systems. We appreciate the incredible care and effort being invested in making UVM a stronger, more inclusive, and more supportive university for all members of the community, including graduate students.

We hope this report can serve as one student-informed contribution to that ongoing work.

Respectfully submitted,

The Graduate Student Senate