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To: Bloomington Faculty Council

From: Indiana University Board of Trustees – W. Quinn Buckner, Chair; MaryEllen Kiley Bishop, Vice Chair; Kelsey E. Binion; Harry L. Gonso; Cindy Lucchese; Michael J. Mirro, M.D.; Jeremy A. Morris; Donna B. Spears

Date: May 31, 2022

We appreciate the thoughtful feedback we have received from so many members of the IU community in recent months regarding the student academic appointees (SAAs) at our Bloomington campus. As a university, our first priority is to our students, whether undergraduate or graduate. From what we've seen and heard from students, individual faculty members, the Bloomington Faculty Council (BFC), and in the recent all-faculty vote, it is evident that we share this unwavering commitment.

Acknowledging Concerns of Our SAAs

While it is clear that a number of issues related to the SAA student experience have developed over time, we are committed to being responsive and proactive in creating solutions to address these valid concerns.

As a Board, we are deeply appreciative of our SAAs' hard work and their contributions to the university. We want the IU community to know that faculty and SAA concerns have been heard and that we are committed to making improvements that address key concerns as well as strengthening the student experience at IU. While increases to SAA stipends by Fall 2022, among other steps, are crucial, they are the beginning—not the conclusion—of the necessary work ahead.

Listening and Establishing Process for Considering Reforms

Within the last year, the Board has hired new university administrators, most notably President Whitten and Provost Shrivastav. Both have demonstrated a strong commitment to ensuring IU is a student-centric university and one marked by its exceptional faculty. Our new administration has wasted no time in making the graduate student experience a priority and in seeking solutions to improve the environment both inside and outside the classroom. Within his first six weeks at IU, Provost Shrivastav has conducted 15 listening sessions with graduate students in every school and took swift action to improve the benefits for SAAs. Most importantly, Provost Shrivastav collaborated with the BFC to establish a committee to investigate these issues in greater depth, and to create BFC working groups to put forth recommendations that can be enacted quickly.

Our university has continually embraced a shared governance approach in developing solutions for our challenging issues, and we hope to see all members of the IU Bloomington community



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who share concerns for our graduate students participating in opportunities to improve the graduate student experience at IU.

As such, the recently assembled Task Force on the Future of Graduate Education—and its working groups—along with the BFC’s reconstituted Committee on SAAs will craft a vision for the ideal graduate student experience and recommend both short-and long-term actions to Provost Shrivastav.

Ensuring an Equitable Experience for All Students

As we focus on graduate students and SAAs, we cannot lose sight of our undergraduate students. Our SAAs serve IU by carrying forward its educational mission, which is providing access to outstanding academic and cultural programs and supportive student services. Their contributions greatly influence the personal growth and prospects of individual undergraduate students. This is vital to who we are and what a student-first philosophy should encompass. We are particularly grateful to our SAAs who ensured Spring 2022 classes were taught, exams were proctored, and grades were submitted in a timely fashion.

Going forward, we must ensure that there is no disruption to the undergraduate experience at IU, particularly given the disruption many have already experienced during the course of the pandemic. Existing, long-standing university policies that were developed through shared governance recognize this, and any member of the community—whether staff or tenured faculty or associate instructor—who fails to uphold their responsibilities in this regard will be subject to the consequences stated in these policies.

Unionization, Shared Governance and a Path Forward

In previous years, this Board has considered the topic of SAA unionization and found it incompatible with IU’s approach to shared governance. This position has been clearly and unequivocally communicated through multiple Provosts. In light of the recent all-faculty vote, we have considered this issue and concluded that the Board of Trustees will not recognize a union. We affirm that we can, and must, do better for our SAAs. From the administration’s recent actions (e.g., increasing minimum stipends) and the all-faculty vote, it is clear that there is a shared commitment to elevate the graduate student experience, and we are deeply committed to finding avenues and resources to do so. The process to enhance the experience for our graduate students is best accomplished through the existing channels of shared governance and collaboration, some new and some that have long driven IU’s progress. It is clear that there is a shared will to achieve this goal. The recent actions of the BFC and our new administrators to identify multiple opportunities for improvement have also shown there is a way forward.

This Board remains dedicated to upholding the proud shared governance traditions of IU, and providing support to all our students, our faculty, and our administrators wherever necessary to make this process successful. We look forward to reviewing the progress made by all who choose to engage on behalf of our graduate students and SAAs. We stand ready to support those efforts with action as needed.



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Finally, we want to again extend our deepest gratitude to all of our SAAs, faculty, staff, and administrators who work tirelessly to advance our educational mission, and by extension the important impact of IU on our state, nation, and world.