



TOPIC: Report on the USM's Implementation of Policies to Improve the Status of Graduate Assistants and Adjunct Faculty (Information)

COMMITTEE: Committee of the Whole

DATE OF COMMITTEE MEETING: February 15, 2013

SUMMARY: As mandated by policies approved by the Board of Regents in 2010 regarding graduate assistants and the employment of adjunct faculty, this report outlines the efforts of the USM institutions to implement the policies and an accounting of the effectiveness of the policies in meeting the recommendations of the 2009 Legislative Task Force on Improving the Status of Graduate Assistants and Adjunct Faculty. The report addresses the following:

- A summary of the USM policy initiatives required by the Task Force report and undertaken by the USM since 2009;
- A description of the efforts by USM institutions to implement the key provisions of those initiatives with respect to both graduate assistants and adjunct faculty;
- A discussion of the USM's establishment of a "Meet and Confer" process intended to meet the Task Force recommendation that graduate assistants and adjunct faculty be afforded greater opportunities to voice issues of concerns with institution administration; and
- An evaluation of the effectiveness of these efforts and description of the most significant continuing challenges that the USM is facing in improving the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty.

The report concludes that the USM institutions have implemented nearly all of the policies' requirements, resulting in considerable progress in reaching the goals of the Legislative Task Force. The report also notes that establishment of ongoing opportunities, including Meet and Confer, for graduate assistants and adjunct faculty to communicate issues and concerns with campus administration provides a solid foundation for continued progress in meeting the needs of both groups.

ALTERNATIVES(S): This is an information item.

FISCAL IMPACT: The costs to the institution over two years to implement the policies and otherwise undertake measures to improve the economic status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty is estimated at \$1.7 for graduate assistants and \$2.2 million for adjunct faculty

CHANCELLOR'S RECOMMENDATION: That the Committee discuss the Report and make any recommendations for follow-up action to the Chancellor.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

BOARD ACTION:

DATE: February 15, 2013

SUBMITTED BY: William E. Kirwan, Chancellor

The University System of Maryland's Implementation of Policies to Improve the Status of Graduate Assistants and Adjunct Faculty:

January 2013 Chancellor's Report to the Board of Regents

I. LEGISLATIVE WORKGROUP ON THE STATUS OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS AND ADJUNCT FACULTY: BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Report of the Joint Chairs of the General Assembly's Budget Committees for the 2009 Session required the University System of Maryland (USM) to convene a Workgroup to address "measures to improve the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty at public higher education institutions." In November 2009, that Legislative Workgroup produced an extensive *Report of the Workgroup on the Status of Graduate Assistants and Adjunct faculty in Maryland's State Higher Education Institutions* ("the Report"). This Report made a series of recommendations and charged the governing boards of each of the Maryland's state higher education institutions, including the USM Board of Regents, to do the following:

- Adopt minimum USM policy standards for graduate assistants and adjunct faculty.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the policies in improving the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty by December 31, 2012.
- Complete an analysis of the economic benefits for graduate assistants and the compensation levels of adjunct faculty, as compared to peer institutions.
- Gather data to develop a "profile" of USM adjunct faculty.

This report provides an evaluation of the effectiveness of policies adopted by the USM to meet the recommendations outlined in the 2009 Legislative Task Force Report in improving the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty. Section II summarizes the policy initiatives required by the Task Force report and undertaken by the USM. Section III provides an accounting of the efforts by USM institutions to implement the key provisions of those initiatives with respect to graduate assistants, and Section IV similarly describes those efforts with respect to adjunct faculty. Section V addresses the USM's establishment of a "Meet and Confer" process intended specifically to meet the Task Force recommendation that graduate assistants and adjunct faculty be afforded greater opportunities to voice issues of concerns with institution administration. Finally, Section VI discusses both the effectiveness of these efforts and the continuing challenges that the USM is facing in improving the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty.

II. USM RESPONSE TO THE LEGISLATIVE WORKGROUP REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The USM has committed itself to full implementation of the Report's recommendations. In early 2010, two workgroups formed, consisting of institution provosts and administrators, graduate assistants and adjunct faculty representatives, members of the USM Council of University System Faculty (CUSF), and

USM staff. The groups developed proposed USM policies to address the specific findings and recommendations of the Report.

The Workgroup's policy recommendations were then subjected to further review by CUSF, the USM's committees of provosts and vice presidents for administration and finance, the Council of University Presidents, as well as groups of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty with whom USM staff met. Final policies were adopted by the Board of Regents in December, 2010, as follows:

- Graduate Assistants: *III-7.11 Policy on Graduate Assistantships*, which replaces *VII-4.50 Policy on Employment of and Benefits for Graduate Assistants*.
- Adjunct faculty: *II-1.07 Policy on the Employment of Adjunct faculty in the University System of Maryland*.

In addition, in June 2012, the Board approved amendments to the policies to enhance the ability of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty to communicate issues of concern to institution administrators. Those amendments established a "Meet and Confer" process by which graduate assistants and adjunct faculty may choose to be represented by a labor organization in periodic meetings with administration.

Each USM institution was required to implement the policies and report their progress to the Board of Regents by November 1, 2011. In February 2012, an implementation progress report was prepared by institution and USM staff and provided to the Chancellor and the Board. At the end of 2012, each institution submitted a final report on its implementation of the graduate assistant and adjunct faculty, and these reports provide the basis for this USM report.

III. POLICY ON GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A. Policy Goals and Highlights

The Legislative Workgroup's chief findings regarding the status of graduate assistants pointed to uneven due process protections across institutions; the need for assured shared governance participation for graduate assistants; stipends at levels comparable to peer institutions; and insufficient clarity and certainty in the duties, time commitments and other expectations related to graduate assistant appointments. As such, the Report recommended the adoption of minimum USM policies dealing with:

- Due process protections, including grievance procedures.
- Economic benefits, addressing stipends, tuition assistance, and other benefits.
- Working conditions, such as appropriate workloads and supervisor/mentor expectations.
- Effective participation in institution shared governance, with periodic opportunities to meet and discuss issues of concern with faculty and administration.

The 2010 USM policy establishes standards applicable to all USM institutions for each of these recommendations, including the following key elements:

- **A focus on the importance of assistantships to students' graduate education, including the opportunities for relevant professional skill-building and financial support.** The policy's explicit goal is to establish standards for the administration of assistantships that serve the achievement of these purposes.
- **A requirement that each institution provide every graduate assistant with a handbook that sets out general policies and procedures for assistantships.** This provision will ensure that all USM graduate assistants are informed of their rights, responsibilities and benefits and the means for accessing them.
- **Timelines for the duration of assistantships, as well as decisions regarding renewals and assignments.** These timelines will decrease uncertainty and afford graduate assistants greater ability to make financial and academic plans. The timelines are subject to institutional feasibility and allow for flexibility in exigent circumstances.
- **A requirement that each graduate assistant receive a detailed appointment letter, with mandatory content.** The appointment letters must include elements such as specific start and end date expectations, specificity as to the economic benefits of the assistantship, and workload requirements. They are intended to provide clarity and a common understanding, for both the graduate student and the assistantship supervisor, of the expectations of the assistantship.
- **Mandatory grievance procedures at each institution.** These provisions will remedy the lack of formal grievance procedures for graduate assistantships at some institutions and establish core due process protections at every institution. Responding to a high priority concern voiced by graduate assistants, the policy provides redress for allegations of retaliation for the exercise of a student's due process rights.
- **A goal of compensation levels which are competitive with peer institutions.** This goal is subject to fiscal feasibility.
- **Required opportunities for graduate assistants to regularly communicate concerns to administration and participate in shared governance.** This major Report recommendation may be met through traditional shared governance channels, or through special periodic meetings with graduate student representatives. It minimally establishes twice-annual meetings between graduate assistant representatives and graduate deans and vice presidents.

In June 2012, this policy was amended to add a Meet and Confer option to enhance the last of these elements by authorizing graduate assistants to elect to have an outside labor representative participate in those meetings.

B. Implementation to Date

Across the USM, there are approximately 5,800 graduate assistants. UMCP appoints the largest number by far-- 4,081--with 612 graduate assistants at UMBC, 370 at UMB and 329 at Towson. The USM's comprehensive institutions, with the exception of UMUC and Coppin State University, each have between 29 and 110 graduate assistants. Approximately 40% of the USM's graduate assistants are research assistants, 30% are teaching assistants, and 10% provide administrative or other services.

All USM institutions with graduate assistants have implemented the policy substantially, and every institution has developed its own policies that incorporate the USM provisions most responsive to the Legislative Workgroup's chief concerns. In particular, for many institutions those measures included for the first time:

- Institution-wide standards for paid time away from duty and sick/emergency leave;
- Standard appointment letters that provide detailed expectations of the assistantship, including information as to the economic benefits of the assistantship, workload and scheduling requirements, and other commitments to which both graduate assistants and their supervisors are bound;
- Formal grievance and appeal mechanisms; and
- More favorable periods of notice of appointments, decisions regarding appointment renewals, and teaching assignments to adjunct afford graduate assistants greater ability to plan both financially and academically.

In most institutions, full implementation of the policies has been ongoing for a year or more.

C. Terms, Conditions and Timing of Appointments

All institutions now have handbooks or other written guides for their graduate assistants. All utilize formal appointment letters that spell out with specificity the key economic and working condition commitments of the institution, workload, mentor expectations and other terms and conditions of the graduate assistant's service to their department or unit required by the 2010 policy. All institutions also report meeting the policy's specific requirements regarding paid time away from duty and emergency/sick leave. Although the institutions report substantial compliance with policy provisions requiring minimum notice for appointments and teaching assignments, some institutions observed that funding for graduate assistantships is sometimes not certain until weeks before the beginning of appointments, resulting in a necessary degree of last-minute appointment and assignment activity.

D. Due Process Protections

Of particular concern to the Legislative Workgroup were the lack of USM-wide minimum due process protections for graduate assistants, and the absence of any formal grievances process on some campuses. The policy addressed that issue with a set of core due process requirements which included the ability to pursue a grievance regarding inappropriate work assignments, workload volume and scheduling, termination of assistantships, and non-renewal of an assistantship for arbitrary reasons; protection against reprisals for filing a grievance; due process requirements including timelines and the student's right to present evidence; and a right of appeal to the level of the dean. All institutions report having developed, implemented, and distributed grievance processes in compliance with these standards.

E. Compensation

Although the 2010 policy does not mandate particular compensation levels or stipend increases, half of the institutions, including the four institutions who employ the largest number of graduate assistants, reported having improved economic benefits for their graduate assistants since the policy became effective. In most instances, stipends were increased through stipend structure adjustments or cost of living allowances. At one comprehensive institution, tuition waivers were increased substantially.

IV. POLICY ON THE EMPLOYMENT OF ADJUNCT FACULTY

A. Key Policy Elements

The Legislative Workgroup findings regarding adjunct faculty were complex, reflecting both the changing nature of adjunct faculty and variations in policies, practices and part-time instructional needs across institutions. Traditionally, adjunct faculty are distinguished professionals who teach occasional courses to share their specialized expertise with students. In recent years, however, a subset of adjunct faculty has emerged who rely on adjunct teaching for their livelihood by teaching multiple courses, sometimes at the entry level and sometimes at multiple institutions. Thus, a major goal of the proposed policy is to better address the needs of adjunct faculty in that category who provide high quality instructional services at USM institutions on a long term basis.

The Report recommended that the Board adopt a policy to set minimum standards for:

- Adjunct faculty compensation;
- Grievance and disciplinary procedures;
- Effective participation in shared governance with periodic opportunities for elected adjunct faculty representatives to meet and discuss issues of concern with regular faculty and administration and
- Appropriate access to office and meeting space, equipment and other supports.

The Board's policy addresses these recommendations and concerns with the following:

- **Creation of a category of adjunct faculty with a "consistent record of high quality instruction" at a particular institution, who will receive additional financial and professional consideration.** These faculty, described as "Adjunct faculty II" in the policy, will receive tangible benefits after teaching consistently and being evaluated as high-performing at a USM institution. These additional considerations will include a modest salary increase, priority consideration for future teaching assignments, and eligibility for longer term appointments than the typical single-semester adjunct faculty appointment.
- **The establishment of minimum due process rights for adjunct faculty.** These provisions will address gaps in the due process rights of adjunct faculty on some campuses by requiring minimum grievance procedures and pre-termination hearings.

- **A prohibition against retaliation for the exercise of grievance rights or participation in shared governance activities.** While the decision whether to renew an adjunct faculty member's appointment remains with the institution, the policy provides that it may not be made for retaliatory reasons. This protection was a high priority for adjunct faculty representatives.
- **Measures providing greater clarity and predictability in adjunct faculty appointments.** To lessen the uncertainty in adjunct faculty employment, these provisions require detailed appointment letters and regular performance evaluations. They also set a goal that institutions should notify adjunct faculty of teaching assignments 45 days before the class start date, to the extent feasible.
- **Partial compensation for last-minute class cancellations.** This provision will require payment of 10% of the full course compensation if the institution cancels the course within 30 days of the class start date and does not offer the faculty member re-assignment.
- **A goal of compensation levels which are competitive with peer institutions.** This goal is subject to fiscal feasibility.
- **Required opportunities for adjunct faculty to regularly communicate concerns to administration and participate in shared governance.** These provisions seek to remedy the lack of shared governance participation by adjunct faculty on most USM campuses. As in the graduate assistant policy, institutions may meet this requirement through traditional shared governance or special periodic meetings with adjunct faculty representatives. It minimally establishes twice-annual meetings, and mandates reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred by adjunct faculty for shared governance participation.

June 2012 amendments to this policy added a Meet and Confer option to enhance the last of these elements by authorizing adjunct faculty to elect an outside labor representative to participate in those meetings.

B. Implementation to Date

In the USM, approximately 7,400 adjunct faculty are employed to provide instruction, on a course-by-course basis, to undergraduate and graduate students. On average, approximately one-third of total course credit hours across the USM are taught by adjunct faculty, with a low of 5.7% credit hours at UMCP and high of 84% at UMUC. Given its unique mission in the USM to educate non-traditional students worldwide, often online, UMUC also accounts for the employment of the majority of the USM's adjunct faculty, with approximately 4,104 adjunct faculty in the last semester.

Each USM institution that employs adjunct faculty has substantially implemented the adjunct faculty policy. Particularly regarding the critical concerns of the Legislative Workgroup—compensation, due process rights, and the opportunity to communicate concerns with administration—major progress has been made.

C. Compensation

With respect to compensation, the policy required each institution to establish a promotion system with increased compensation for adjunct faculty with more than three years service and 12 courses taught (“Adjunct Faculty II”). Nine of the eleven USM institutions with paid adjunct faculty¹ reported having established the system. Promotions have already been made at those institutions, and the promotion process will be instituted at a tenth campus during the spring 2013 semester. To date, 1,385 current adjunct faculty have been promoted, serve and are compensated as Adjunct Faculty II.

It is especially noteworthy that, while the policy requires that Adjunct Faculty II be compensated at least 10% over the institution’s base for adjunct faculty, some institutions have also extended significant compensation increases to adjunct faculty who do not meet the Adjunct Faculty II promotion criteria. For example, in fall 2011, UMUC raised salaries for nearly all of its’ adjunct faculty who met the Adjunct Faculty II standard by at least 10% over current salary, increasing its total adjunct faculty compensation by \$1.7 million. Four other institutions also reported increasing compensation for all adjunct faculty through cost of living or salary structure adjustments since the implementation of the 2010 policy. All institutions that have implemented the policy’s promotion requirements have also established policies and procedures giving Adjunct Faculty II priority consideration for future teaching assignments as a means of providing a measure of stability in teaching opportunities.

As an additional means of improving adjunct faculty economic stability, the USM policy also establishes a new requirement that institutions provide adjunct faculty, hired to teach a course that is cancelled within 30 days of the start of class, with a payment equal to 10% of the salary for the course. Eight of eleven institutions with adjunct faculty report having implemented this provision. One institution will have the 10% increment in place during the current semester, and two others plan to make it operational in the fall 2013 semester.

Finally, all institutions adopted procedures to compensate adjunct faculty for costs of travel and other reasonable expenses related to their participation in shared governance, including the new Meet and Confer process.

D. Terms, Conditions and Timing of Appointments

All institutions also reported meeting minimum policy requirements for improved working conditions, including access to office and meeting space, email addresses and computer access and other administrative supports. Handbooks or other materials with all relevant adjunct faculty policies, procedures, professional development opportunities, etc. have been produced and distributed in hard copy, electronic form, or both at 10 institutions, with two institutions anticipating approval of handbooks and policies in the Spring 2013 semester.

The 2010 policy requires, for the first time, regular performance evaluations of adjunct faculty. It also set a goal that institutions should notify adjunct faculty of teaching assignments 45 days before the class start date, to the extent feasible. Adjunct faculty performance is now evaluated at all campuses by

¹ UMCES has no adjunct faculty on paid status.

some means, although some institutions indicate plans to improve upon their adjunct faculty evaluation processes during the current academic year.

All institutions report compliance with policy provisions that require detailed appointment letters providing information regarding the terms and conditions of the faculty member's teaching assignment. The institutions also described efforts to meet the policy goal of providing assignments at least 45 days before the start of class, but some noted that this practice is at times infeasible and that adherence to it can be difficult to track and maintain.

E. Due Process Protections

The Legislative Workgroup expressed concerns over the unevenness of due process protections for adjunct faculty, and the 2010 policy squarely addresses those concerns. The resulting provisions have been implemented USM-wide and adjunct faculty now have the same grievance rights as all other faculty, with the exception of protections related to tenure-track rank, promotion, and tenure. Moreover, adjunct faculty are also now entitled to a pre-termination hearing if institution administrators initiate a termination during the course of a contract. These due process rights are a central element of the adjunct faculty handbooks and orientation materials.

V. MEET AND CONFER – JUNE 2012 POLICY AMENDMENTS

A final major concern of the Legislative Workgroup was the establishment of systematic opportunities for graduate assistants and adjunct faculty to express concerns directly to institution leadership, to be consulted on campus policy development, and otherwise participate in campus shared governance. The 2010 policy required that this be accomplished either by ensuring that graduate assistants and adjunct faculty are allotted positions in institution shared governance bodies, or that campus administration meet at least twice a year with elected representatives of each institution's graduate assistants.

By the end of 2011, all institutions reported that efforts were either completed or underway to form such groups. However, some graduate assistants and adjunct faculty on some campuses expressed the desire to have a union or other organization represent them in those discussions. After long deliberations, and in consultation with the Governor's Office, the USM developed a Meet and Confer process as the means for institutions to honor that request. The June 2012 amendments to the USM's graduate assistant policy established basic requirements for the institutions to create graduate assistant advisory groups who, upon election of the graduate assistant community, may be represented by a labor organization for these purposes.

At this time, graduate assistant and adjunct faculty advisory groups have formed to support the Meet and Confer process at the institutions. The advisory groups consist solely of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty for the purpose of advancing the interests of those populations. The advisory groups are either elected by all graduate assistants and adjunct faculty or—if an insufficient pool of willing candidates seeks election—composed of all individuals who volunteer to serve. These advisory groups will serve as the contact point for unions who wish to represent graduate assistants or adjunct faculty in

Meet and Confer. The groups will run Meet and Confer elections, and administration will provide logistical support upon request.

At the USM level, a USM Meet and Confer Coordinating Committee was established, consisting of representatives from each institution, as well as faculty and graduate assistant representatives. To date, the Committee has prepared Meet and Confer Guidelines that are in place at all institutions. The guidelines incorporate suggestions made by union representatives and graduate assistant student government leaders. They establish an election process for Meet and Confer decision-making with flexibility in timelines, voting methods and minimum voter participation requirements to ensure maximum participation and fair outcomes.

In addition, all institutions report that outreach to their graduate assistants and adjunct faculty communities took place over the fall 2012 semester. Graduate assistants and adjunct faculty across the USM were informed, via email and during the fall 2012 orientation sessions, of the opportunities and guidelines for engaging a labor representative in Meet and Confer, in many instances, on multiple occasions. On many campuses, special meetings also have been held specifically to explain and discuss Meet and Confer, and list serves have been created to inform graduate assistants about advisory group activities, including Meet and Confer. In addition, USM leaders have met twice, held conference calls with union representatives and have had numerous contacts with the Governor's labor liaison.

All institutions have received multiple requests for information, including names and contact information regarding their graduate assistants and adjunct faculty, from union representatives. In every instance, the institutions report that they provided the requested information, to the extent permitted by Maryland law.

A. Graduate Assistants

The institutions report that graduate assistant advisory groups are operational on nearly all campuses. On most campuses, the advisory groups are discrete committees of existing elected graduate student councils comprised solely of graduate assistants. At UMCP, where more than 4,000 graduate assistants serve, a campus-wide graduate assistant council has been elected from among all graduate assistants. Graduate assistant advisory groups have already held their first periodic meetings with administration on seven of ten campuses, and such meetings are expected to occur on two more campuses in February.

Three advisory groups have had discussions with union representatives concerning Meet and Confer, and union representatives have been present on those campuses to meet individually or in small groups with graduate assistants. Institution administrators are not aware of any other efforts by unions to meet formally or informally with advisory groups or graduate assistants. To date, no elections have yet been requested to decide on whether to engage a labor representative or who that representative may be.

B. Adjunct Faculty

With respect to adjunct faculty, advisory groups are operational on eight campuses. Initial periodic meetings between advisory groups and administration have been held at seven of those institutions. At UMUC, which employs a large majority of the USM's adjunct faculty, administrators are waiting to hear from the newly elected advisory to establish a date and time for the first meeting. Many institutions report that the formation of adjunct faculty advisory groups was frustrated by a lack of interest on the part of sufficient numbers of adjunct faculty to participate, despite extensive outreach to the adjunct

faculty community. With the exception of the elected UMUC group, the current advisory groups are composed of all adjunct faculty members who wish to participate. On two campuses, no group has been formed as yet for lack of interest and volunteer members.

Institution administrators are aware of only limited contact between the adjunct faculty advisory groups and union representatives. To date, the advisory group at only one institution has met formally with union representatives, and further meetings are planned in anticipation of a Meet and Confer election during the spring 2013 semester. It is unclear that the unions have made informal contacts with adjunct faculty on many campuses. The advisory group at only one institution has held an election regarding Meet and Confer, and there, the adjunct faculty voted not to engage a labor representative.²

VI. EVALUATION OF IMPLEMENTATION TO DATE AND CHALLENGES FOR 2013

A. Graduate Assistants

In addressing the status of graduate assistants in 2013, many institutions expressed a desire to improve the economic benefits of assistantships. Multiple years of economic downturn and constraints on funding for assistantships have presented serious challenges to meeting that goal, and institutions express the hope that those limitations will ease in coming fiscal years. With respect to meeting the 2010 graduate assistant policy's substantive requirements, some institutions noted that it is often difficult to comply with the provision requiring 60-day notice of teaching assignments, since funding for graduate assistant positions is often not finalized until just weeks before assignments are scheduled to start. The institutions otherwise expressed few concerns regarding the implementation of the 2010's policy's substantive provisions.

The cost of implementing the 2010 policy requirements and increasing economic benefits for graduate assistants across the USM is estimated at approximately \$1.71 million since 2011.

B. Adjunct Faculty

With regard to adjunct faculty, many institutions noted that the costs of establishing the Adjunct Faculty II category imposed budget strains, with one institution delaying implementation of the promotion process for cost reasons. Some institutions noted that implementing the 2010 policy created significant new administrative burdens, particularly in light of the temporary, part-time nature of adjunct faculty appointments and the fact that they are often employed by individual departments in a decentralized manner. Finally, institutions observed that it is often difficult to predict at least some of the need for adjunct instructors until very shortly before the beginning of each semester, thus making the goal of appointments at least 45 days before the beginning of classes regularly unattainable. Even with these significant challenges, adherence with the policy's requirements has been nearly complete throughout the USM. With regard to the isolated instances where compliance has not been achieved, USM staff will work with the appropriate institutions to support necessary measures by the end of the Spring 2013 semester.

The cost of implementing the 2010 policy requirements and increasing adjunct faculty compensation

² Consistent with the USM Meet and Confer Guidelines, that institution is prepared to hold another election, should its advisory group and a labor organization request one.

across the USM is estimated at approximately \$2.2 million since 2011.

C. Meet and Confer

All institutions have made serious efforts to support graduate assistants and adjunct faculty in the establishment of their advisory groups and pursuit of Meet and Confer opportunities. However, numerous institutions cite the lack of interest in the new process as the greatest challenge to implementation of Meet and Confer. With respect to graduate assistants, some note that graduate assistants have participated actively in existing graduate student councils and questioned the need for additional representation. For adjunct faculty, the fact that they are not on campus regularly and often teach courses in addition to other full-time employment is cited as a major impediment to the generation of adjunct faculty interest in organizing advisory groups or pursuing Meet and Confer options.

Nonetheless, advisory groups of both graduate assistants and adjunct faculty have formed on most campuses, and administrators at most institutions have already met with those advisory groups. All institutions report that they are full prepared to provide whatever logistical support an advisory group may need whenever the group indicates that it is prepared to conduct a Meet and Confer election, and the leadership of all USM institutions have expressed the commitment to work with their advisory groups—including union representatives, if their graduate assistants and adjunct faculty elect such representation—to effectively address matters of concern.

D. Conclusion

The 2009 Legislative Task Force Report was an important first step in improving the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty in the USM. The Task Force's recommendations provided the framework for a concerted effort on the part of USM officials, in close consultation with faculty and graduate assistant representatives, to identify specific vulnerabilities in the USM's support for and communications with both groups. The adoption and widespread implementation of comprehensive policies directed at improving that support have resulted in major progress in advancing the status of graduate assistants and adjunct faculty. Furthermore, the establishment of heightened opportunities for graduate assistants and adjunct faculty to discuss issues of concern with institution administrators on a regular basis, including the option to engage a labor representative in a Meet and Confer process, holds promise to realize continuous improvement in meeting the needs of these groups at every USM institution.