

**Student Wages at The LBJ School**  
**Policy Report**  
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June 2020

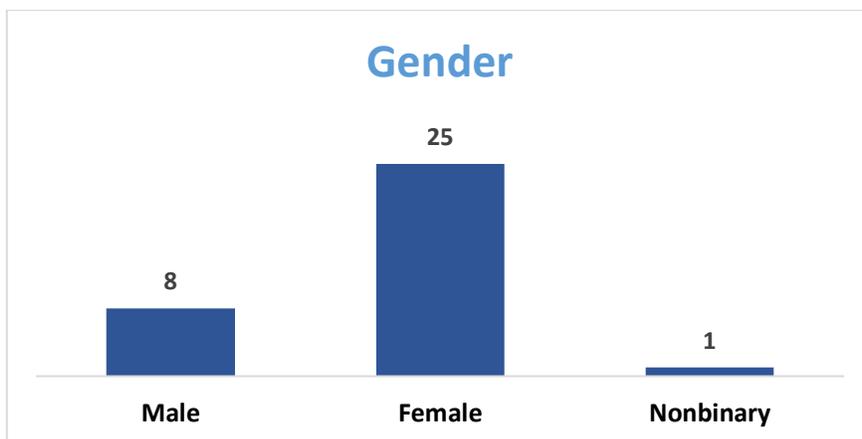
**Executive Summary**

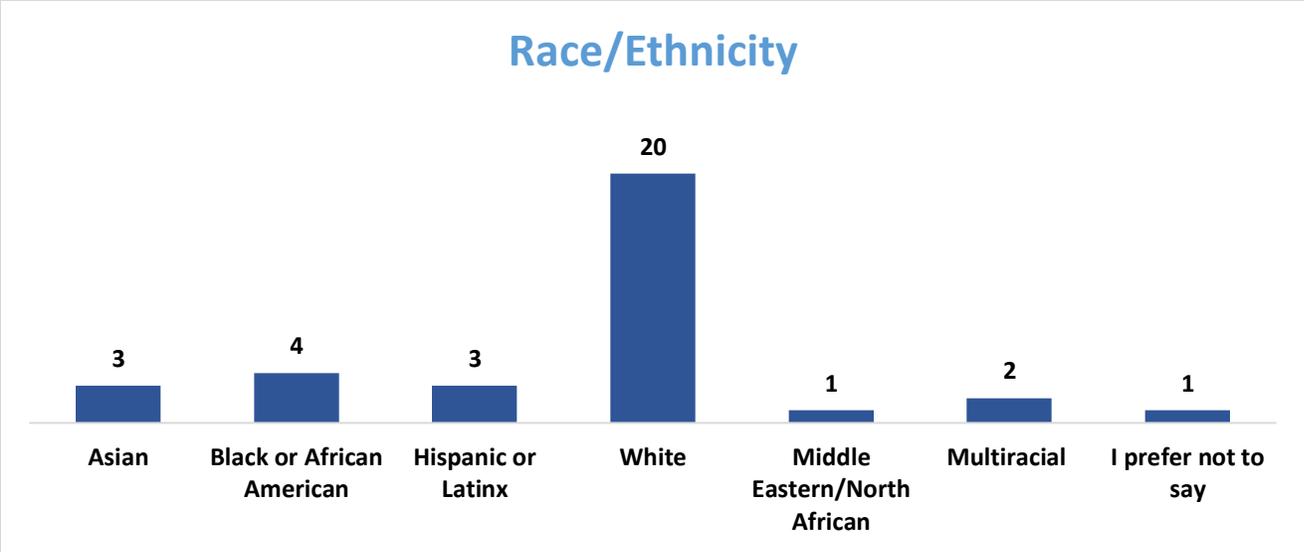
Over the past two years, student-workers (GAs, GRAs, and TAs) have expressed frustration over the uncompetitive salaries that The LBJ School has offered its student employees. In the Fall 2019 semester, student workers with 20-hour appointments in other departments made between \$2,000-4,000 more per semester and on average worked fewer hours than LBJ-employed students per week. The DEI Committee’s student representatives believe that The LBJ School’s administration should reallocate funding from the instructional budget to increase pay for student workers, on whom faculty rely heavily.

Earlier in the year, it was brought to students’ attention that The LBJ School was considering reducing Teaching Assistantships and awarding more jobs as "graders" in order to reduce the number of 20- hour appointments, and ultimately the number of students to whom they grant tuition and health insurance benefits. This undermines the work that students do and the contributions they make in the classroom, and contradicts the values that The LBJ School aims to represent. As the following data will show, the majority of student workers are women and disproportionately people of color, making this a DEI issue. The purpose of this policy report is to demonstrate the differences in student salaries between the LBJ School and other UT departments, provide data on student’s minimum monthly expenses, and share qualitative data on the impact these salaries have on the student experience.

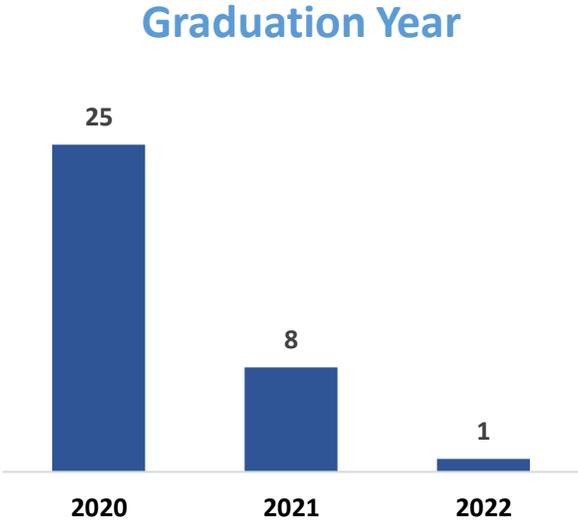
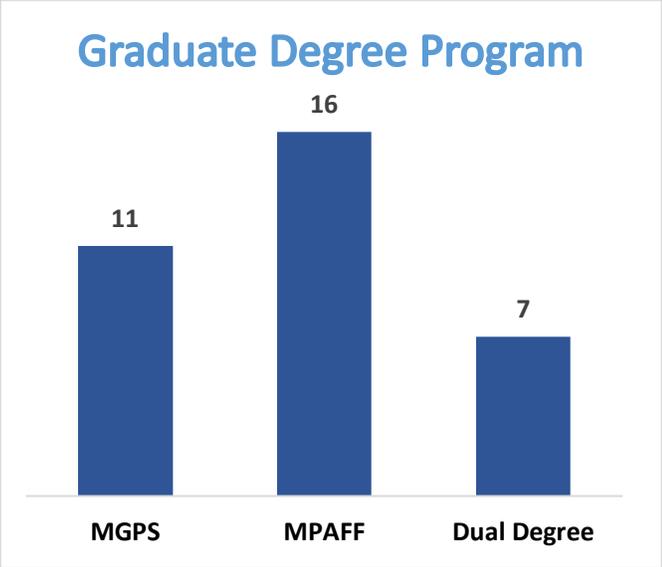
**Demographics of Survey Respondents**

In January 2020, DEI student representatives developed an online survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data from LBJ students employed at the University of Texas at Austin. Out of the \_\_\_ LBJ/UT-employed students in the Fall 2019 semester, 34 LBJ students completed the *Student Wage Survey*. The following is the demographic breakdown of the students who completed the survey.





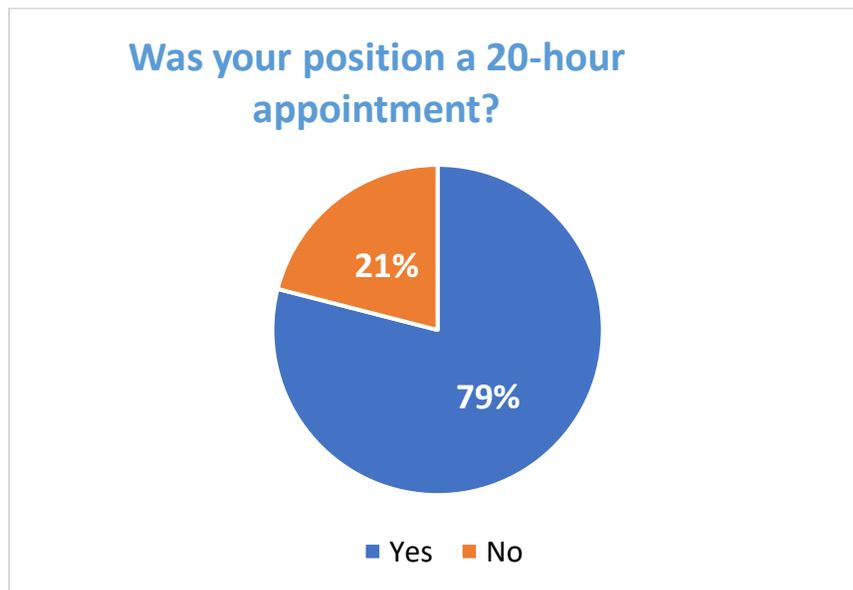
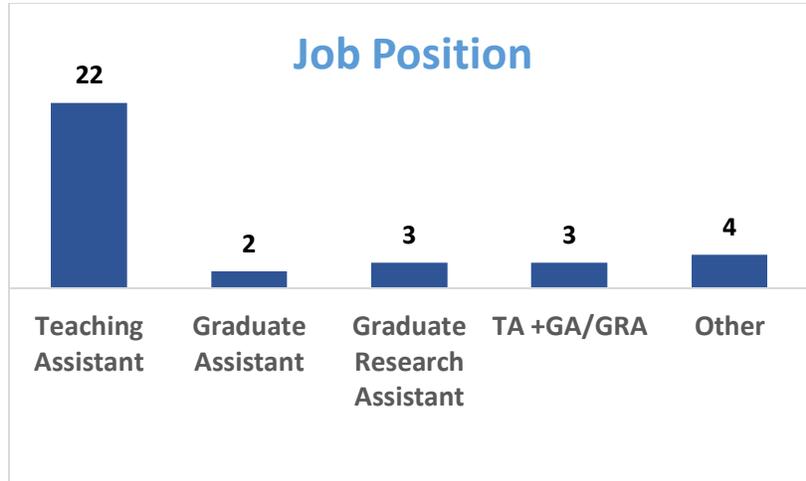
Of the survey respondents, 74% were women, 24% were men, and less than 1% identified as nonbinary. Additionally, 59% of the respondents were White, while 38% identified as people of color.



Of the survey respondents, 47% were MPAFF students, 32% were MGPS students, and 20% were dual-degree students. The majority of student employees belonged to the 2020 graduating class.

## Student employment

The following data reflects the jobs positions, appointments, and salaries of LBJ students employed by The University of Texas at Austin.



Of the survey respondents, 74% worked as Teaching Assistants. Three students held two positions as a Teaching Assistant and a Graduate Assistant/Graduate Research Assistant. Approximately 79% of students received 20-hour appointments.

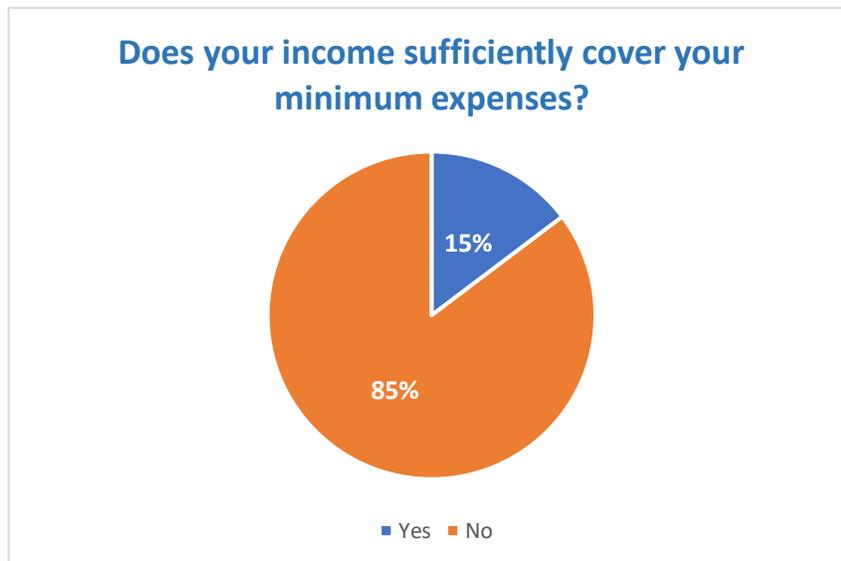
### Student Salary

Students' Monthly Median Salary	Median Salary for LBJ-employed students	Median Monthly Salary for Students Employed by other UT Departments
\$1100	\$988	\$1400

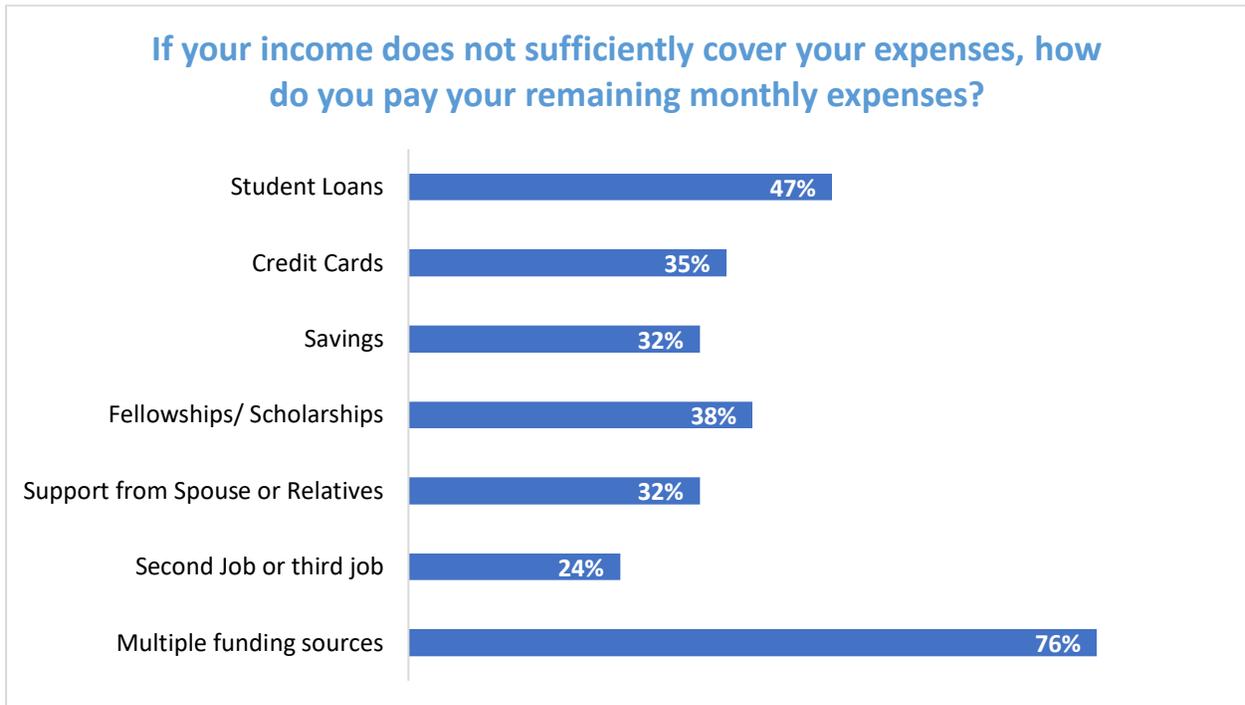
For this report, I have decided to compare median salaries and expenses because outliers in the data set create misleading averages. Student employees reported a **monthly median salary of \$1100**. However, when LBJ- employed students are separated from students employed by other departments, there is a significant wage gap. Students employed by the College of Liberal Arts, the McCombs School of Business, and the Cockrell School of Engineering reportedly made **\$412 more** per month than students employed by the LBJ School.

### Student Expenses

Monthly Expenses	Average \$ Amount	Median \$ Amount
<b>Rent</b>	866	813
<b>Utilities</b> (electricity, gas, water)	96	96
<b>Communications</b> (cell phone and internet)	65	50
<b>Transportation</b> (bus fare, car payment, and/or car insurance)	167	145
<b>Groceries</b>	259	200
<b>Healthcare</b>	131	0
<b>Miscellaneous</b> (gas for car, textbooks, clothing, etc.)	123	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1707</b>	<b>\$1403</b>

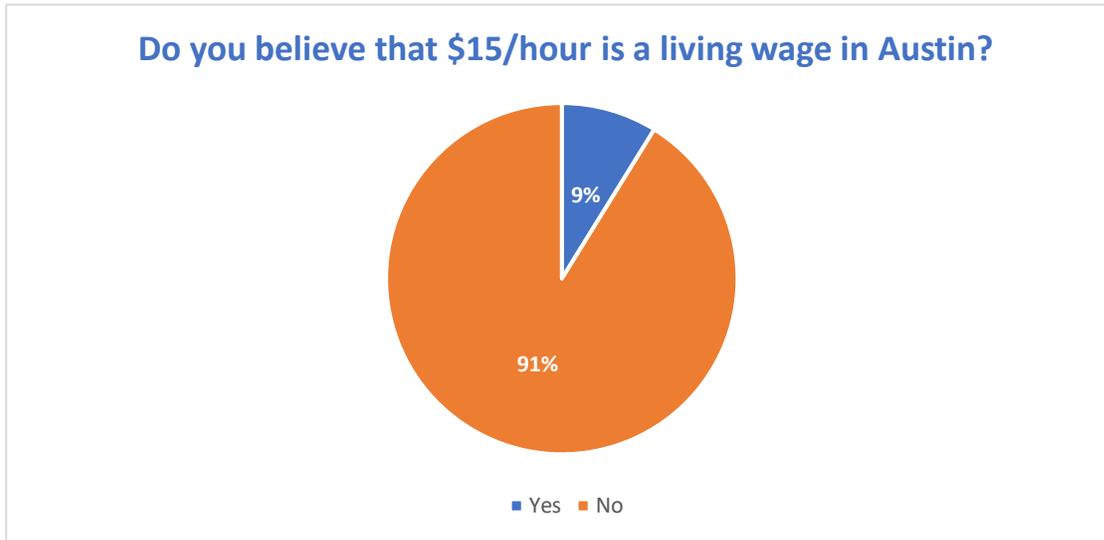


Students' monthly median expenses totaled to \$1403. These expenses include rent, utilities, transportation, communication, groceries, healthcare, and miscellaneous items, like gas for their car and textbooks for class. When asked if their monthly salary covers their *minimum* monthly expenses, **85%** of the survey respondents answered **No**.



Approximately 76% of survey respondents reported multiple funding sources to supplement their income and pay their minimum expenses. 47% of students reported taking out student loans, and nearly a quarter of the students reported that they had to take a second or third job to supplement their UT incomes. More than one-third of students reported that they receive scholarships, as well. Students acknowledge that there are other benefits that they receive with their incomes. When asked, “What is the main reason you are working at UT?” 41% of students reported income, while 50% reported that they are working to earn income and receive university benefits, like health insurance and tuition reduction.

## Student Opinion



As of the Spring 2020 semester, LBJ paid their student employees \$15 per hour. When asked if they believe \$15 per hour is a living wage in the city of Austin, **91%** of students said **No**. When asked what they believe is a living wage, students reported amounts between \$20-\$30 per hour. One student suggested matching the Engineering School's student wages, which is about \$1,000 more per month than the LBJ School's wages. When asked why they believe \$15/hour is not a living wage (or why they believe it is), students said the following:

*"No. Rent is getting more expensive and small monthly expenses that come [with] school start to add up."*

*"If you work 20 hrs/week and make \$15/hr, you only make \$1,200 a month. This isn't even enough to cover the basics - (rent, internet, utilities, and groceries) which for me costs \$1,428 a month. You literally have no extra money in case of an emergency and not even enough to cover my absolute bare minimum costs!"*

*"I mean, yes, like you won't \*die\* but if you're expected and encouraged to attend conferences, networking events, eat healthy, look presentable, maintain a reasonable skin care routine, pay loans, etc. Then you really end up strapped for cash and the concept of affordability is actually a joke."*

*"The cost of living (including tuition) has increased every year while wages haven't."*

*"No, I struggle sometimes to make my salary work until the end of the month and I am making more than \$15/hour"*

*"The only reason why I could consider it a living wage is because I worked 20+, I also got insurance and tuition coverage. Otherwise, \$15/hour would not be enough."*

*“It’s so expensive to live close to campus if you want less than 3 roommates, and if you’re not living close you have to pay in gas to commute and that also impacts how much time you commit.”*

*“No, because Austin is becoming one of the most expensive big cities in the US with an average rent over \$1500.”*

The following are student responses to the question: **“What would you like Administrators and Faculty at The LBJ School and UT Austin to know about your financial circumstances?”**

*“Being overworked and underpaid shouldn’t be a given in academia. “What starts here changes the world” right? This seems like a great chance to make those words into a reality...”*

*“LBJ is only a graduate program, meaning that there are little in-house opportunities for TA-ships. Support your students more, even if that means advocating for them to find TAs in other departments.”*

*“I budget very carefully, and one month I was so broke that I spent \$50 on groceries for the whole month. I attended all the free food events bc otherwise I couldn’t support myself.”*

*“I do not make enough even working 20 hours a week on top of school. I have over \$15,000 in student loans, \$10,000 coming from the first semester at LBJ. Finances truly affect one’s ability to do well in school.”*

*“They should know that LBJ student employees are struggling and that students working at LBJ work more for less when compared to work at other departments.”*

*“I work 3 jobs: a TA-ship, I continued my summer internship, and am a scribe for the [removed to protect anonymity] office. Between all this, I don’t have as much time to focus on my classes as I’d like.”*

*“I should not be indebted half of 100k to get an education that will pay me likely less than half of that in the real world plus compounded interest at a whopping 7-8%, while the Law & Business School’s resources are so much deeper and more lucrative for those students now before later. It is frustrating that I had to beg departments to hire me and find the TAships alone with zero LBJ support though I have zero personal or family assets to support my education. Who are the fellowships going to if not students with no financial safety net?”*

*I have \$40,000 in loans and I cannot afford to take out more loans.*

*“Finances are a barrier to low income and diverse students entering LBJ, and if the administration is serious about improving diversity and inclusion, financial circumstances MUST be improved for students. I am relatively well off and am still taking out loans, on top of fellowships and student employment. This shouldn’t be the case.”*

*“Going to grad school has completely depleted my savings that I worked very hard to accumulate. I think grad students are not paid what they are worth and I think it is irresponsible of the university to treat grad students like they do.”*

*“Money is tight. While this was expected as a graduate student it can make covering emergency expenses painful.”*

*“I have a savings account I use to pay for my rent and I try to apply for scholarships and other fellowships to pay for school. If I didn't have a savings account, I would have to work a lot more hours, which would severely impact the quality of schoolwork I'm able to complete. My current ability to work fewer hours has allowed me to lead a more balanced life, take advantage of professional development outside of class, and maintain better mental health than when I was working a 20-hour GRA appointment. If I had to work more hours or get a second job, I think the quality of my LBJ experience and education would decrease. I am also currently still on my parents' health insurance and phone plan, which helps significantly; if I wasn't able to do this, my living situation would be much more difficult.”*

*“Graduate students are under immense financial constraints. Having to work multiple jobs to afford expenses places a lot of pressure on students who are trying to complete schoolwork and paid work effectively and on time. It impacts our mental health and there is also an opportunity cost of not being able to attend networking events and speaker events because we just do not have the time.”*

## **Data Analysis and Recommendations**

The overwhelming majority of working students are women, and a disproportionate number of student employees are people of color. The LBJ School pays its students significantly less than other departments at the University of Texas-Austin (a median wage gap of \$412 per month). Teaching Assistants at the LBJ School with 20-hour appointments made less than \$1,000 per month, but survey respondents reported that their median monthly expenses totaled to \$1403. More than three-fourths of the survey respondents stated that they have to use multiple sources of funding (e.g. student loans, credit cards, savings, a second job, support from spouse or relatives, and scholarships) to supplement their incomes.

Although students recognize that health insurance and tuition reduction benefits are costly, other departments are more likely to provide these benefits and still pay a higher wage to students than the LBJ School for less hours of work, even if it is also a 20-hour appointment. Approximately 91% of students reported that the LBJ School's hourly salary of \$15 is not a living wage. This is a major policy failure at the LBJ School, a public affairs institution that prides itself on preparing students to solve critical policy issues on a city, state, and federal level.

In order to address the inequities of the student wages at the LBJ School, I recommend the following:

### **Increase student wages to a minimum of \$20 per hour.**

As grassroots activists and political leaders lead a national movement to raise the federal minimum wage to \$15 per hour, it is unacceptable that a public policy graduate institution that prides itself on the civil rights accomplishments of President Lyndon B. Johnson pays its student employees with Bachelor's degrees and various years of professional experience \$15 per hour. Faculty and staff rely heavily on students in their course instruction and research. It has come to my attention that the University has proposed a 2% increase in student wages. However, if a Teaching Assistant's total semester salary was \$4,668, a 2% increase would only add \$93 to their semesterly salary. However, a \$5 hourly increase would increase students' semesterly incomes by at least \$1600, or \$400 each month. This would help students meet their median monthly expenses and match what other departments are paying their student employees with 20-hour appointments.

### **End 10-hour appointments for Teaching Assistantships**

The LBJ School offers few Teaching Assistantship opportunities to its students, and the majority of those opportunities are for core courses. These core courses include Writing and Communications for Global Policy Studies, Microeconomics, Analytical Methods, Public Financial Management, and Advanced Empirical Methods. The core courses are some of the most challenging courses for students studying at The LBJ School, and many students seek the assistance of TAs outside of their normal schedules. No Teaching Assistant should have to support two graduate level courses and two professors to receive a 20-hour appointment. Administrators have suggested that the appointments are based on the number of students per class. However, if the LBJ School caps an intensive writing class at 16 students because any more students would be too much work for the professor, then the same rationale should apply to his or her Teaching Assistant.

### **Advocate for students at the university-level and demand a significant increase in the LBJ School's instructional budget.**

The LBJ School should not have to choose between paying their professors a competitive salary and paying their students a living wage. The LBJ School's administrative staff should advocate for students by separating the costs of paying student workers from the costs of paying its professors. By separating these costs and providing calculations of what a living wage for students is, administrators can make a stronger argument on the reasons to increase the total instructional budget.

### **Redistribute fellowship funding more equitably to students.**

Although the topic of fellowship funding warrants its own policy report, it would be dismissive to exclude fellowships from this discussion. Only 38% of the student employees who filled out this survey reported that they are receiving fellowships or scholarships. However, those who did not receive a fellowship reported that they would like a need-based fellowship. While members of the Admissions Committee have stated that they do consider issues of equity when deciding funding packages to students, a lot of the equities occur after the original offer letter is sent. When students decline an offer, the decision to redistribute the remainder of fellowship funds to students falls on the head of the Fellowship Office, not the Admissions' Committee. If the head of the Fellowship Office is not reviewing students' applications as thoroughly as members of the Admissions Committee, then this critical financial decision for students should not fall on her.

Throughout the 50<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the LBJ School's founding, LBJ administrators have often used the phrase "In the Arena" to describe the work that is occurring at the school that will eventually prepare students for the challenges they will encounter in the policy world after they graduate. However, the various diversity, equity, and inclusion issues that are taking place at The LBJ School have revealed that "the arena" is not some abstract place in the policy world. The LBJ School is our arena, and the policies that students are proposing to make the institution more equitable and inclusive should be taken seriously. LBJ-employed students have been demanding a living wage for years, and we hope that LBJ administrators will fight as hard for us as we will for our beloved communities after graduation. In sum, we hope faculty and administrators at our institution will take this opportunity to put their stated values into practice.