

A resolution of the Graduate and Professional Student Government supporting the recognition and formal implementation of the current holiday policy for Doctoral research assistants at Duke University

Author:

GPSG Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee

Whereas, the Duke University Graduate School PhD Research Assistant Vacation Policy, found in the Graduate Student Handbook, states “Graduate students who are funded by research projects on a twelve-month stipend schedule are allowed a minimum two weeks (ten academic days) of vacation each academic year. Students who wish to take vacation must apprise their advisor of their intentions at least two weeks before the planned absence.”ⁱ

Whereas, the policy also states “University observed holidays...shall not count against vacation. PhD Research Assistant holidays will follow the Holiday Schedule for University Staff.”ⁱ

Whereas, the policy also states “students who wish to observe religious holidays must inform their advisor in advance, must plan to make up any missed assignments or training and cannot be required to take the religious holiday as vacation.”ⁱ

Whereas, Post-Doctoral scholars are formally designated as staff in the university and therefore have the same Holiday Schedule as University Staff.

Recognizing, the current vacation policy inequitably harms international students, who don’t get enough time off from research to visit their homes and families.

Recognizing, this policy is not widely known nor implemented across programs, departments, and schools.

Recognizing, holiday leave is generally agreed upon between students and principal investigators (PI), in many cases must be approved by the PI, and in some cases counts against students’ 10 mandated vacation days.

Recognizing, there is a mental health crisis occurring worldwide which graduate students are highly susceptible to.^{ii, iii, iv}

Recognizing, graduate students, who are prone to working long hours and prioritizing work at the expense of their health due to the pressures of academia, are highly susceptible to burnout, with 1 in 3 students developing a mental health disorder, especially depression, during their graduate careers.^{iii, iv}

Recognizing, the power imbalance between student and PI has notoriously been exploited, particularly in STEM fields, such that Doctoral research assistants and Post-Doctoral scholars can be made to work during holidays and weekends.^v

Recognizing, restorative rest results in more effective work than overwork, meaning students who get restful time off will ultimately be more successful and mentally healthy.^{vi}

Now, therefore it be resolved by the GPSG that the graduate and professional student body of Duke University:

States, Doctoral Research Assistants, according to the Duke Graduate Student Handbook, as well as Post-Doctoral scholars, have legally mandated holidays. Including on the following days in 2022:

New Year's Holiday, 3-Jan-22

Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday, 17-Jan-22

Memorial Day, 30-May-22

Juneteenth, 20-Jun-22

Independence Day, 4-Jul-22

Labor Day, 5-Sep-22

Thanksgiving Day, 24-Nov-22

Friday After Thanksgiving, 25-Nov-22

Christmas Eve, 23-Dec-22

Christmas Day, 26-Dec-22

New Year's Eve, 30-Dec-22^{vii}

Calls, for the *immediate* implementation of this policy in all departments wherein Doctoral students act as research assistants.

Calls, for the holiday policy to include Doctoral Teaching Assistants.

Calls, for faculty to be made aware of this existing policy and to formally adopt this policy for their Doctoral Research Assistants and Post-Doctoral scholars.

Calls, for a student referendum on this resolution across all nine Graduate and Professional Schools at Duke.

References:

ⁱ https://gradschool.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/policy_phd_student_vacation_grant-supported.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01751-z>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2018/11/anxiety-depression-mental-health-graduate-school/576769/>

^{iv} <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/03/06/new-study-says-graduate-students-mental-health-crisis>

^v <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-021-04905-1>

^{vi} <https://betterhumans.pub/rest-is-productive-1348b2b7eeb0>

^{vii} <https://hr.duke.edu/benefits/time-away/university/2022>