

Report on Service Work Distribution and Compensation Among Graduate Students

MAP

MINORITIES AND PHILOSOPHY

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October 2019

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1. Introduction

MAP's mission is to examine and address issues of minority participation in academic philosophy. A concern that MAP representatives have often brought to the central organizers has been distribution and compensation of service work. Based on anecdotal evidence and first-hand experience, we hypothesized that graduate students from marginalized groups are burdened with under-recognized and under-compensated service work in their departments, including but not limited to work related to making the discipline more inclusive.

¹ The four authors conceived of the project after the MAP group session at the 2019 Eastern APA, and designed the survey in a meeting. Carolina Flores coordinated the project. The four authors circulated the survey in MAP networks, as well as compiled and interpreted the results. Carolina Flores further drafted the introduction and discussion sections, and edited the manuscript. Elise Woodard further assisted in coordinating the report, created the graphs, and made substantive edits to the discussion section. Jingyi Wu further conducted literature research, compiled references, and edited the manuscript.

We thank Angela Sun and Milana Kostic, who came in as MAP organizers while we were working on the project and contributed valuable input. We thank the audience at the MAP session at the 2019 Eastern APA for helpful discussion that sparked this report, and survey participants for their input. Finally, we thank Alex Guerrero, Yarran Hominh, Cameron Domenico Kirk-Giannini, Meena Krishnamurthy, and Lisa Miracchi for comments on previous drafts of this report.

This fits with findings in other domains.² Most notably, it fits with patterns at the faculty level, where it is widely recognized that members of marginalized groups do more than their fair share of service work, often with deleterious effects on their research and publication record.³ It would be surprising if this pattern emerged at the faculty level with no precursor in graduate school. This phenomenon holds outside academia too. For example, a 2005 Columbia Business School study found that [women in the workplace give more help to co-workers than men, but receive less credit for it](#); more generally, it has been found time and again that [women tend to take up more tasks that don't lead to promotions in a range of fields of work](#). We wanted to find out whether this pattern also holds for graduate students in philosophy.

To investigate this hypothesis, we ran a survey on the topic of graduate student service work recognition and compensation. Our goal was to identify trends across a wide range of departments, and to gather some more details on running models of service work distribution and compensation.

What we found strongly supported the claim that graduate students from marginalized groups are shouldering a heavy load of under-recognized and uncompensated service work. In most departments that we surveyed, service work is unpaid and not even informally recognized, and graduate students from minority groups do much more than their fair share.

The Importance of Service Work Distribution and Compensation

There are reasons to think that this seriously affects these students and the culture of our profession at large. First, service work takes time away from research and teaching, which are recognized both during graduate school and on the job market in a much clearer way than service work. This is aggravated when this work includes supporting colleagues emotionally and striving to improve departmental climate, which can be demanding and distracting. In such cases, the overall size of the task, including the emotional demands it makes might be far larger than its conventional size, i.e. how much it takes to do the task itself.⁴ This means that graduate students from marginalized groups spend a considerable amount of time in graduate school doing important work that is poorly recognized. It is often said that although graduate students may not see the tangible benefits of service work in graduate school, taking on more service roles will make them more hireable when they go on the job market. But even if hiring departments take into account service work when making hiring decisions, the extent to which service works impacts these decisions is unclear, and the benefits conferred by taking on considerable service work are unlikely to offset the costs of time taken away from research that would have led to publications.

Second, having one's work uncompensated and un-recognized is an alienating experience. Feelings of invisibility, not belonging, not being valued by others, are already common for students from under-represented groups, who are targets of harassment and explicit and implicit bias,⁵ have their academic work under-recognized, struggle to find mentors, and have poor mental health outcomes.⁶ The lack of recognition for their community-oriented work is likely to factor into the alienation many graduate students from marginalized groups experience, and one which has been insufficiently discussed.

² See, for example, [“For Women and Minorities to Get Ahead, Managers Must Assign Work Fairly,”](#) [“Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?”](#) [“The Ivory Ceiling of Service Work,”](#) [“The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments,”](#) and [“Relying on Women, Not Rewarding Them.”](#)

³ Ibid.

⁴ For the emotional vs. conventional size of a task distinction, see Miracchi, [‘Wellness Advising in Difficult Spaces’](#)

⁵ See, for example, [“Implicit Bias and Gender \(and Other Sorts of\) Diversity in Philosophy and the Academy in the Context of the Corporatized University,”](#) and [“Implicit Bias, Stereotype Threat, and Women in Philosophy.”](#)

⁶ See [‘Mental Health Crisis for Grad Students’](#) (and the Nature Biotechnology study cited there) for evidence that graduate students who are members of marginalized groups have worse mental health outcomes.

Third, service work is often a mix of bureaucratic/organizational work (scheduling events, booking rooms, arranging catering, seeking reimbursements, etc.) and caring/activist work (advising undergraduates, supporting other graduate students, seeking change in department policies). These are the kinds of labor that are culturally strongly associated with women and people of color.⁷ The devaluing of these kinds of work is of a piece with the devaluing of similar kinds of labor in our society at large. Feminist and critical race scholarship shows that this treatment of feminized and racialized labor is a way of devaluing the skills and contributions of members of those groups. We have reason to think, then, that the devaluing of service work contributes to a more general devaluing of the contributions of women and people of color to the profession.

There are thus many reasons to be worried about unfair distribution and insufficient compensation of service work. We will canvass some solutions in the ‘Recommendations’ section. First, though, we will go through the methodology and results of our survey, which provide evidence that service work is in fact unfairly distributed and under-compensated, in a way that is particularly damaging to members of marginalized groups.

This was a small-scale survey, with limitations we note below. As such, we enthusiastically welcome further research on this topic by institutions with the resources to do so. Our main goal with this report is to put on the diversity and inclusion agenda the topic of service work distribution and recognition at the graduate student level. We also recognize that designing better models within the constraints of department policy and budget is challenging, and are not in a position to propose detailed models. Instead, we hope this report serves as a springboard for designing, discussing, and eventually trying out fairer distribution and compensation models.

2. Methodology

Total number of respondents: 61

Number of universities we gathered information on: 40 (plus 7 responses from unknown departments)

Number of universities with only MA programs: 3

We ran the survey using Google Forms. You can view it [here](#). Participants had the option of remaining anonymous, or providing us with information about their departmental affiliation, or additionally providing their name and email (if they were interested in being contacted about the results). Target participants were graduate students in Philosophy with some involvement in diversity and inclusion work. 92% of respondents identified as members of underrepresented groups in philosophy.

The survey was short, with 6 multiple choice questions and 6 optional open-ended questions. In total, it took 3-10 minutes to complete. We collected answers between March 2nd 2019 and April 5th. To recruit respondents, we used 3 methods:

- 2 emails to the MAP Chapter representatives listserv (which includes all MAP Chapter representatives, across 132 chapters at the time).
- 2 posts on the MAP facebook page
- 1 twitter status via @mapcosmopolitan
- Sent to the APA Graduate Student Council to post to APA

⁷ See, for example, [“For Women and Minorities to Get Ahead, Managers Must Assign Work Fairly,”](#) [“Women of Color Get Asked to Do More “Office Housework.” Here’s How They Can Say No,”](#) [“Faculty Service Loads and Gender: Are Women Taking Care of the Academic Family?,”](#) [“Relying on Women, Not Rewarding Them,”](#) and [“The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments.”](#)

Our social media posts did not provide a link to the survey; instead, interested parties were asked to email MAP requesting the link. This was meant to ensure that only graduate students in philosophy took the survey, thereby ensuring the reliability of the information collected.

The survey results are only indicative. First, only a few graduate students - all of which were involved in diversity and inclusion work as MAP representatives - took the survey in each department, with voluntary participation, and some of the questions asked about their perception of service work distribution in the department. This leaves open the risk of skewed perspectives, lack of relevant information about departmental policy or what others in the department do, or other kinds of biases influencing results. Second, we did not have access to official department information. Third, we did not collect information on every philosophy graduate program in the US (much less globally).

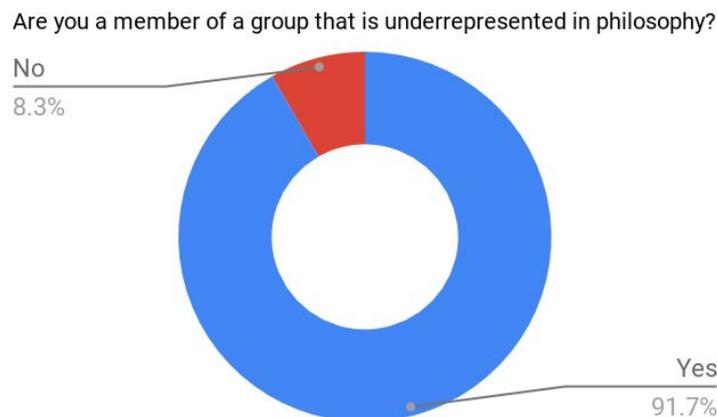
That said, the results are strikingly robust in showing a trend towards unequal distribution of service work, with special burdens placed upon students who are members of marginalized groups in the profession, and towards lack of compensation or recognition of service work. These results should be seen as a cause for concern.

At the start of the survey, we provided our definition of service work: “service work is defined broadly, including but not limited to: organizing a MAP chapter, organizing Ethics Bowl, organizing conferences, serving as graduate representative, etc.”

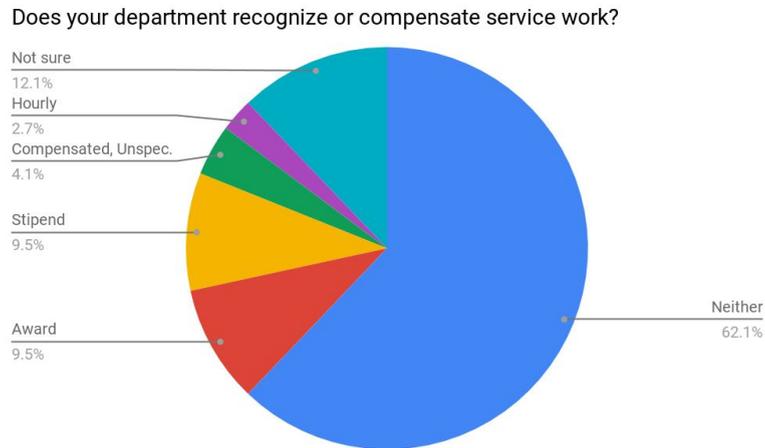
3. Results

91.7% of respondents identified as a member of an underrepresented group in philosophy. 62.1% of respondents indicated that their departments do not recognize or compensate service work.

Are you a member of a group that is underrepresented in philosophy? [60 responses]



Does your department recognize or compensate service work? [60 responses, could check multiple]



Note: many people said that some roles were compensated/recognized while others (typically most) were not.

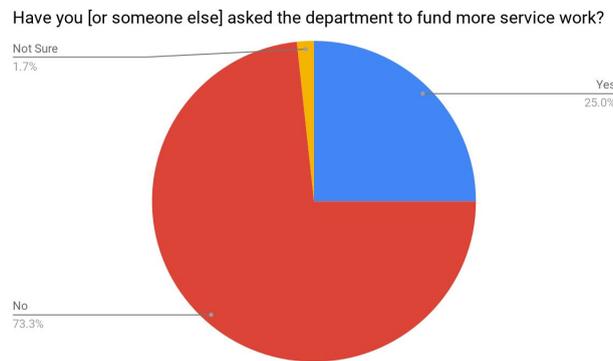
What types of service work are compensated or recognized? (If any) For example, is diversity & inclusion work recognized? Organizing conferences/workshops? [34 responses] If applicable, include details about compensation & recognition (including monetary value). [21 responses]

34 people responded to the question, “What types of service work are compensated or recognized?” We suspect that 28 respondents who left this question blank did so either because no service work is recognized or compensated or because they were unsure about the answer. Indeed, of the 34 people who answered this question, 10 explicitly said ‘none,’ and 2 people said ‘no sure.’ That leaves 24 respondents (39% of respondents) who gave details about what types of service work is recognized by their department.

Of these, the most frequently compensated service work involved activities related to prospective student visit (7) and conference & workshop organizing (9). 2 people received compensation for work related to Ethics Bowl, though only one was funded directly by the philosophy department. 2 people reported receiving compensation for their work related to MAP, though diversity and inclusion work was more likely to be funded by research assistantship lines than directly by the department according to three respondents. Additional compensated MAP-related service work included chairing a climate committee, running a climate survey, and directing or serving as a teaching assistant at a diversity institute. Other examples of jobs that were compensated included editing an undergraduate journal, catering, departmental photography, and serving in graduate student organization government roles.

Some of the positions listed were compensated hourly (with amounts reported between \$15-25/hour) while most were compensated by a stipend or lump payment. Compensation amounts varied widely depending on the work involved but ranged between \$50 and \$5,000, excluding fellowship and teaching assistant support. In some cases, compensation came in the form of a book credit or indirectly via additional semesters of fellowship. In addition, six respondents reported that their department offered prizes for service work---typically for one student a year. One school offered two prizes, one for work related to Diversity & Inclusion and the other for general service work, and multiple people could win each prize each year. Only two respondents reported monetary compensation being attached to the awards, with the amounts ranging from \$750 to \$2,500.

Have you [or someone else] asked the department to fund more service work? [60 responses] If so, what was the response? If not, do you plan or want to do so in the future? [33 responses]

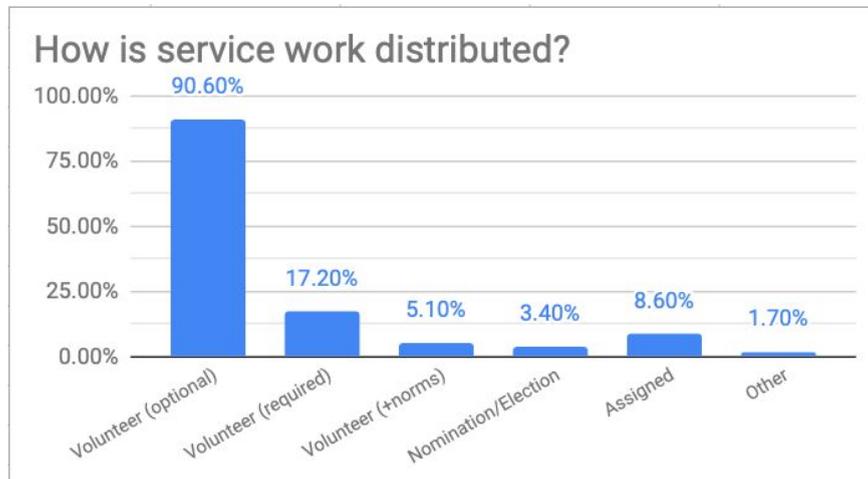


73.3% of respondents reported that neither they nor someone else had asked the department to fund more service work, while 25% reported that they had. Only 1.7% of respondents reported being unsure as to whether someone had asked the department to fund service work.

Of the 15 (of 60) of respondents who had asked their departments for more service work funding, 4 of them achieved at least partial success. In 3 of these 4 cases, at least partial funding for a particular service work task was made available, and in the fourth, more general service work prizes were created, attached with generous monetary compensation. Unfortunately, 7 of these 15 respondents were unsuccessful in their requests; the most cited reasons for refusal was that the department did not have sufficient funding available to support service work. However, in one instance, a department justified not funding service work on the grounds that other departments don't do it, and their own department has not done it in the past. In another, the cited reason was that a duty to fund service work would overgeneralize: too many people would need to be thanked for the work that they do. The remaining 4 respondents were currently in the process of trying to get service work funded or recognized and were optimistic about its prospects.

Of the remaining 45 respondents, 18 replied to the question, "*do you plan or want to do so in the future?*" 11 of these reported an interest in or desire to ask about funding in the future, while 2 hadn't previously thought about it but would consider it. Several of these respondents reported a desire to first have a few models of how service work is compensated or recognized at other departments or additional information, with a few noting that one difficulty in asking pertains to power dynamics. 5 respondents reported that they did not plan to ask for compensation or recognition in the future, with the most cited reason being that they preempted a negative response based off of available departmental funding; this makes sense given that this was indeed the most cited reason for refusing to fund service work. One student reported feeling adequately compensated for their service.

How is service work distributed? [58 responses - could check multiple options]

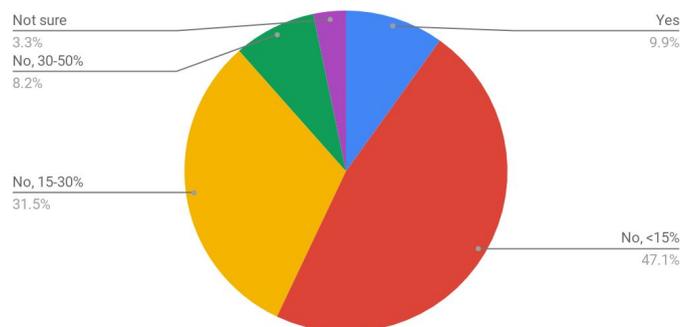


58 people replied to the question, “How is service work distributed?” For this question, respondents were able to check multiple options. The vast majority (90.6%) of service work was reported to be volunteer-based with not all people having to volunteer. 17.2% reported that everyone in the department had to volunteer for some task, and relatedly, 5.1% reported that there were norms in place that encouraged equal distribution of work. Some specific examples of such norms included that everyone should have at least one service role or that everyone is expected to volunteer for at least 3 positions during their 5 years of funding. 8.6% of roles were assigned and 3.4% were arrived at via nomination and/or election; nominations put pressure on individuals to get involved, though people could decline nominations. The ‘other’ category included self-initiated projects.

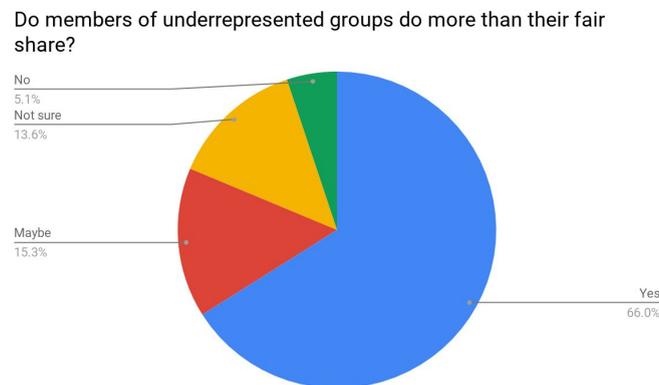
Is service work distributed evenly? [59 responses] *Do members of underrepresented groups do more than their fair share?* [59 responses]

The 59 responses to the question, “Is service work distributed evenly?” were perhaps the most dispiriting. 86.8% responded negatively. Of these, close to half (47.1%) reported that less than 15% of graduate students do most of the service work. 31.5% reported that between 15-30% of the graduate students did most of the work, 8.2% said that 30-50% did, and 3.3% were not sure. Only 9.9% of students said that service work was evenly distributed. Moreover, 66% respondents said that underrepresented groups in philosophy did more than their fair share of service work. In comments, a few students reported that 100% of women and nonbinary people were in service positions whereas between 30-60% of men were. Only 5.1% reported that underrepresented groups do not do more than their fair share; the remainder replied ‘maybe’ or ‘not sure.’

Is service work distributed evenly? If not, what percentage of people does most of the work?



Do members of underrepresented groups do more than their fair share? [59 responses]



4. Discussion

What can departments and individuals do to ensure that service work is fairly distributed and compensated? Common advice doled out to graduate students is ‘Just say ‘no’ to service work’.⁸

But this is not going to solve the problem for members of marginalized groups. The robustness of results across departments in student perceptions of service work uptake is not well explained by appealing to mere individual preferences for taking up more service work. Instead, there are structural factors in the organization and culture of academic philosophy that lead to members of marginalized groups feeling burdened by service work. Telling graduate students from marginalized groups to just say no to service work is unlikely to be a good solution. Instead, we need to address the systemic factors leading these students to take up service work in the first place.

Members of marginalized groups are often under external pressure to take up service roles.⁹ This external pressure can take different forms. Most obviously, they are more likely to be asked to take up such roles. When these requests come from faculty, who write reference letters for job applications, there is substantive pressure to accept. When roles are distributed among graduate students, there is social pressure to help the community, especially once there are previously established expectations that certain students “are good at service work.” Indeed, in both kinds of requests, members of marginalized groups can face backlash for declining.

Second, when it comes to diversity and inclusion work, members of marginalized groups often feel they have a moral duty to do it, both because they may be better placed to do such work and because they are in general more attuned to the problems faced by members of such groups. On a more pragmatic note, they may realize that, if they don’t do this work, other (non-marginalized) members of the department won’t either. This would leave them without appropriate support and community.

External pressure - in the form of broader social norms around labor distribution - is likely to have been internalized by the time people are in graduate school. This means that many members of marginalized groups were brought up to find it hard to say ‘no’ to requests from others, and to derive some sense of self-worth out of doing pro-social tasks. It is unfair to expect people to be able to easily overcome these factors. It may also lead to a double

⁸ “Just say no” responses are rampant in the literature. See, for example, [“Women, Stop Volunteering for Office Housework!”](#) and [“Women of Color Get Asked to Do More “Office Housework.” Here’s How They Can Say No.”](#)

⁹ See, for example, [“For Women and Minorities to Get Ahead, Managers Must Assign Work Fairly,”](#) for evidence on external factors that pressure members of marginalized groups to take up more service work. See, for example, [“Women, Stop Volunteering for Office Housework!”](#) for gendered cultural associations with service work.

bind where students feel guilty whether they accept tasks - in which case because they are not following the 'Just say 'no'' advice meant to help them do well - or reject them - in which case they are failing to act in accordance with norms they have internalized.

Finally, the "Just say 'no'" response under-values service work. Service work is important in ensuring a lively, supportive, and engaged intellectual community in which people produce good work. In fact, it is often necessary to ensure minimally functional departmental structures. We can't and shouldn't all just say 'no' to service work. Moreover, not all service work is equal. Members of underrepresented groups often rely on organizations like MAP and departmental climate committees for personal and academic support while completing their PhDs. Doing service work in these positions can also foster a sense of community. 'Just say 'no'' thus also dismisses the genuine institutional and individual need for and benefits of service work, and it doesn't provide us with a way forward to fair and equitable distribution of labor.

This kind of individualistic advice that puts the onus on those doing a lot of service work should be abandoned. Instead, we should focus on addressing the structural factors listed above that make minorities in philosophy be saddled with more of this work, and take steps to ensure fair distribution.

Before we put forward central structural measures, we want to say a little bit about individual behavior. There is [some evidence](#) that women take up more service work because it is common ground that women are more likely to take it up than men. This common ground - and the corresponding norm on women (and, we conjecture, on members of other marginalized groups)¹⁰ - is not inevitable. Whether it is in play in part depends on how community members behave.

Correspondingly, to the extent that we are concerned with changes in individual behavior, the onus should be on members of dominant groups and on those in positions to request and distribute service work. Changes in individual behavior shape up what norms are operative. For example, members of more privileged groups can make efforts to volunteer more, and more quickly, for service tasks, and be more proactive in seeking out such tasks. And departments can do more to convey such expectations. For example, we suggest incorporating discussion of service work distribution in beginning-of-the-year orientation sessions. This should include motivating the value of service work to the community and setting clear expectations that all students will take up and do a fair amount of work.

Along similar lines, faculty should be more mindful of who they are asking to take up service roles. This is especially important given that it is often difficult for students to decline requests from people who they work with, and who will write them letters of recommendation for the job market. And all department members can and should avoid expressing to members of marginalized groups that they expect them to take up certain roles.

Additionally, individuals can place pressure on institutions to change their norms: for instance, we would be happy to see distribution and compensation of service work become something that prospective students ask about when deciding where to go for graduate school, and which is brought to their attention at prospective visits as a factor that impacts their likelihood of success in graduate school. This is still individualist advice, but it could facilitate changes of norms and expectations within departments. Even if that's too optimistic, we would like to see more privileged members of the profession receive this advice instead of marginalized ones being told to refuse such work.

The first key measure we propose is for departments to set up clear, explicit, and fair policies for the distribution of service work. As a minimal standard, pure volunteer-based allocation of these tasks won't do. Social norms make it the case that members of marginalized groups are much more likely to volunteer. Instead, departments should set rules that ensure that service work is more-or-less evenly distributed among graduate students throughout their graduate school careers. It would be helpful for departments to have a sense of how much time different roles take to perform. With that information in hand, departments would be able to allocate roles so as to

¹⁰ For discussions of the burden of invisible work for marginalized social groups other than women, see "[The Burden of Invisible Work in Academia: Social Inequalities and Time Use in Five University Departments.](#)"

ensure that graduate students have similar work burdens. A simpler heuristic that would still improve on the current *status quo* is requiring all graduate students to take up a service role every year, and forbidding graduate students to take up more than two or three per year. Importantly, this kind of change is not just at the hand of the department chair or faculty at large. In many departments, a large chunk of service work is distributed by graduate students. Correspondingly, graduate students can settle on fairer policies such as the above.

Our second central recommendation is that departments should financially compensate especially onerous service work. Sometimes, certain members of the department are best placed to take up particular service roles (for example, members of marginalized groups may be best placed to run climate or diversity related initiatives). But this still comes at a cost for them. This cost should be recognized and compensated. Importantly, financially compensating service work would have significant downstream effects in the cultural and behavioral factors contributing to the current unfair distribution of service work. Compensation would motivate a wider variety of people - not just from marginalized groups - to do this work.

Different models can work here. Some departments employ fixed stipends for roles that are particularly time-consuming, while others have a fixed amount that gets distributed through service work awards. For example, one department pays \$750 per year for chairing the climate committee and \$200 for running the climate survey. Another department has preferred to recognize service work through two annual awards, one of which is compensated at up to \$2,500 and is granted at the end of the academic year. Additional forms of compensation could include reducing teaching obligations, providing additional travel funding, or providing additional semesters of fellowship funding. As these forms of recognition become more common amongst graduate programs, it will become more difficult for other departments to deny requests for recognition on the grounds that other departments do not do so.

We recognize that this leaves a lot to discuss. In particular, there is space for reasonable disagreement on which kinds of roles and tasks should be compensated, how much, and in what way. We welcome discussion of possible models here, and think that it would be positive to see different models tested.

More broadly, we think that departments should recognize the importance of service work in clearer and more explicit ways. This would encourage a wider range of people to take up such work, and not just because they are under direct or norm-based pressure to do so. To do this, departments should offer more public recognition for service work. For example, department chairs and other faculty should make sure that they thank graduate students for work they do by sending thank you emails at the end of the semester, or naming people are recognizing their work at end-of-the-semester gathering.

Hiring departments should also be clearer on the value they place on service work of different kinds. While our focus is on graduate students here, we expect these dynamics to persist among faculty. Given that high-quality service work plays an important role in maintaining a healthy intellectual community, applicants' service work track record should be taken into account on top of research and teaching, and this should be made clear to applicants. A similar point applies to faculty promotion considerations.

5. Policy Recommendations

In sum, we suggest the following measures:

Structural policies:

- **Financially compensate** (at least) especially onerous service tasks, in the form of stipends, awards, or a reduction in teaching or research assistant duties.¹¹

¹¹ This recommendation (and the remaining) should be read in conjunction with the other recommendations that we put forth, especially the structural ones. Furthermore, we do not recommend depriving minority students of service

- Institute **clear standards for what different roles demand** and accountability mechanisms to ensure that people do their fair share when it comes to shared roles.
- **Limit volunteer-based allocation** of service work: instead, make a clear list of available roles and rules for how many roles each student must and can take up over the year and over their time in graduate school.
 - Institute simple rules for distribution: e.g. every student must take up one role per year, and none can take up more than three.
 - If grad students decide on role assignment at a meeting, then encourage people to sign up for roles before and shortly after the meeting. This limits the amount of pressure on people who attend the meeting.
- Incorporate **discussion of the importance of service work** in beginning-of-the-year orientation sessions, and publicly set **clear expectations for all graduate students**.
- Be **clear about the value of service work in hiring processes**.

Individual behavior:

- Publicly acknowledge and appreciate service work, e.g. through public or personal **thank you's** from faculty for service work. Graduate students should also try to show appreciation for others' community-oriented work.
- Faculty should **be mindful of primarily asking members of marginalized groups** to take up service roles (especially ones that do not bring professional advantages), and should always check how many service roles students are already performing before asking them to take up new roles.
- All should avoid **expressing special expectations that members of marginalized groups take up service roles**.
- All should **discuss service work distribution and compensation with prospective students**, as a significant factor affecting graduate school experience.
- Members of privileged groups should seek out service work roles.

work that might benefit them. Instead, we recommend that in cases where the service work brings little professional advantage and is inadequately compensated, faculty members should be mindful of primarily asking minority students to perform these tasks.

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