MEMORANDUM

TO: Dr. Paul Gemperline, Dean of Graduate Studies

FROM: Dr. Paul Gemperline, Dean of Graduate Studies

DATE: June 25, 2020

SUBJECT: Guidance on Writing Graduate Assistantship Contracts and Job Duties for Fall 2020 and Onward

Background:
ECU endeavors to reopen this fall as described in Return of Pirate Nation: Guidelines for Campus Safety, a living document that will be updated as new information becomes available. The reopening will affect many graduate assistants. Return of Pirate Nation provides a set of norms, a plan for reopening, aligned and consistent with federal, North Carolina, Pitt County, Greenville, and UNC System laws, regulations, and mandates. “Face-to-face collaboration is the fundamental driver in ECU’s very positive posture when it comes to reopening our campus for fall semester 2020. We have too much teaching, research, and service that fundamentally requires us to be together, which is why it is important to return to campus in August.”

1. At Chancellor Mitchelson’s direction, ECU has protected the Graduate School’s assistantship budget and tuition remission budget in the forthcoming academic year, Fall 2020, through Summer 2021.
2. Academic units are expected to offer face-to-face classes this fall while following ECU’s safety plan. Chairs, program directors, and faculty supervisors will write job duties for teaching and research assignments as needed to meet their unit’s teaching and research workload needs.
3. Where feasible, units are expected to offer teleworking job duties this fall; however, this may not be possible in all cases. Some graduate assistant assignments will require students to be on-site. Some examples of on-site work include teaching or assisting in undergraduate face-to-face laboratory sections or conducting experimental work in a research laboratory.
4. If a graduate assistant is not comfortable with the requirements of the job, department chairs, program directors, and faculty supervisors should first attempt to address the concerns (e.g., conducting office hours online or strengthen mitigations or seek an alternative assignment, for example by moving people and assignments around). Chairs, program directors, and faculty supervisors are expected to offer flexibility to the maximum extent possible in the assignment of job duties, but students must be doing meaningful work, with an emphasis on “meaningful.”
5. In some cases, it may not be possible to find an alternative assignment. In this case, the student should seek a different assignment elsewhere in the University or off-campus employment.
6. Department chairs, program directors, and faculty advisors are encouraged to develop contingency plans (alternative work duties) in the event a resurgence of COVID-19 should require the University to close temporarily.
7. In the case of research assistants funded by grants, the job duties must be grant related. If meaningful alternative grant-related work duties cannot be found, graduate
assistant pay must be moved to a non-grant source. We are hopeful that relief will be provided at the federal level. Yesterday, June 24, 2020, a bipartisan bill was filed to authorize billions in funding to U.S. researchers who have been impacted by the pandemic. ECU logged our support for this bill, and we are watching for its final outcome.

DeGette introduces bipartisan legislation to support U.S. research community during pandemic

8. Graduate assistants will not be required to sign liability waivers for fall assistantship positions starting August 1, 2020, or later. Liability waivers were put in place during the summer to enable graduate students to conduct research while ECU’s overall public health plan was being created and implemented.