Resolution 7: Urging for Graduate Teaching Assistants to Have the Right to Decide their Instruction Modality for Spring 2021

Abstract: In light of the global pandemic and Cornell University conducting instructions in a hybrid manner, graduate Teaching Assistants should be given the absolute autonomy to decide their mode of teaching instruction (online/in-person) without any form of coercion.

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Whereas, when the University decided to have a hybrid semester in the Fall of 2020 with online and in person aspect to teaching, faculty and undergraduate students were given the choice to decide their mode of instruction- online, in-person, or hybrid; and

Whereas, there were no provisions made for granting absolute autonomy to graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) to decide their mode of delivering teaching instructions; and

Whereas, graduate TAs were asked to make petitions to Student Disability Services (SDS) to ask for exemption from teaching in person in case of personal health concerns and

Whereas, this method of disclosure is invasive because individuals have to disclose health information that they probably feel uncomfortable disclosing to the SDS and their course instructor; and

Whereas, this method burdens the already overworked SDS during a pandemic; and

Whereas, graduate TAs that feel uncomfortable about their own safety and the safety of their family or people they shared regular living spaces with must attempt to reach a common resolution with their supervisor. If a resolution cannot be reached the student must now choose to escalate the issue higher up at potential personal and academic cost; and

Whereas, this method puts the burden of resolving an uncomfortable situation on the graduate TAs, whereby a faculty/lecturer decides the mode of instruction for a graduate TA against their will, causing significant psychological pressure; and

Whereas, this method discriminates against individuals of the LGBTQIA+ community who are yet to come out; and

Whereas, realizing how this method is problematic, multiple departments across colleges like Science and Technology, Entomology, Molecular Biology and Genetics, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Information Science, Computer Science, Earth and Atmospheric Sciences, etc., decided to
give grad TAs the absolute authority in determining their mode of instruction for assigned classes;
and

Whereas, the Graduate School did not formally ask departments to have an “opt-in” policy where
graduate students opt-in to the mode of instruction (online or in-person) that they feel comfortable
with;

Be it therefore resolved, that in Spring 2020 graduate TAs be able to independently choose their
mode of teaching instruction in accordance with their wishes, with the option of changing that mode
in the course of the semester; and

Be it further resolved, that the Graduate School adopt this as a matter of policy and communicate
this policy to all the departments and faculty in charge of making teaching appointments.

Respectfully Submitted,

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