Dear Marquette University graduate and professional students:

As we begin the fall semester, I want to provide you with an update on our progress on the Graduate/Professional Student Task Force as well as help address questions you may have regarding health care options, COVID-19, and courses for this coming fall.

Update on Graduate/Professional Student Task Force: To better understand the concerns and experiences of graduate and professional students at Marquette, university leaders established a Graduate/Professional Student Task Force last fall/spring. The Task Force had 19 recommendations and we have already made progress with the first group of these recommendations. The points below outline our priorities and the progress we’ve made thus far:

- **Investing in our graduate and professional students**: Teaching, research and graduate assistants received stipend increases for this fiscal year and the Provost created 16 new teaching assistant lines for this fiscal year.

- **Graduate and professional student health care options**: The university continues to provide a voluntary health care plan through WAICU and a supplemental stipend for TAs, RAs and GAs to help cover additional expenses such as health care (see below for more information). The Graduate School is developing an educational opportunity for students to learn about signing up for health care insurance on the health care exchanges established by the Affordable Care Act.

- **Developing a comprehensive set of policies and procedures surrounding students’ efforts as TA/GA/RAs**: The Graduate School has drafted a Graduate Assistant Handbook that summarizes all policies and procedures guiding students’ appointments as TA/GA/RAs. This fall, the Graduate School will solicit feedback from the Graduate Student Organization and the University Board of Graduate Studies and roll out the policies and procedures document by the spring semester.

- **Establish a comprehensive template for the Graduate Student Handbook**: This document is currently being developed with the goal of having it finalized for spring 2021.

- **Modify the policies that currently limit employment outside the university for domestic students currently receiving assistantships**: These policy modifications have been approved and implemented: https://www.marquette.edu/grad/financial-aid-rules-assist.php.

- **Implement academic advising function for CheckMarq**: We have made progress on this issue and anticipate graduate school wide implementation starting in the spring of 2021.

The Task Force work and the current pandemic clearly reminds us of the need to make healthcare for graduate students more accessible. We want to remind you of the resources currently available to graduate/professional students.

**Health care resources** that are **currently available** for graduate students:

- **A voluntary health plan is available to all students taking six or more credit hours**: All Marquette students – undergraduate and graduate – who are enrolled in at least six credit hours can choose to utilize a voluntary health care plan as part of Marquette’s membership in the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU). Given the majority of Marquette’s graduate students are covered by their parents’ insurance, a spouse’s insurance or insurance from their own employer, partnering with other schools in the WAICU plan allows us to have a larger population of students in the plan, which makes it more affordable for the students who choose to utilize it.
• **Insurance through the health care exchanges established by the Affordable Care Act:** Students may choose to seek insurance through the health care exchanges established as part of the Affordable Care Act.

• **Supplemental stipend for health care costs:** The Graduate School provides a $750 additional stipend annually to graduate students with an assistantship, which can be used toward health care costs.

• **Access to the Marquette University Medical Clinic:** To improve access to affordable, convenient health care services, graduate students may opt to pay the student health fee of $163 per semester or on a fee-for-service basis to utilize the Marquette University Medical Clinic. Undergraduate students pay for this as part of their mandatory annual fees, which are not assessed to graduate students. The Medical Clinic provides students with core health care services, laboratory studies and reduced prices on non-core services.

• **COVID-19 testing:** All students, including graduate and professional students, will have access to free COVID-19 testing through an on-campus testing center for symptomatic students and their close contacts. If symptomatic, consult with your primary care physician, call the Marquette University Medical Clinic at (414) 288-7184 or contact Impact 211 by calling 211 or texting 898-211 to determine next steps and if COVID-19 testing is needed. In addition, most medical plans and insurers, including the WAICU plan referenced above, are covering free COVID-19 testing at this time.

• **Counseling Center:** All graduate and professional students taking seven or more credit hours have access to the Marquette Counseling Center. Our on-campus Counseling Center is committed to the mental health needs of Marquette students, employing a variety of means to improve coping, wellness and quality of life. Besides individual counseling, the Counseling Center also offers group counseling, crisis intervention, consultation and prevention/outreach programming and psychiatric services. The Counseling Center is expanding its services to provide more care during this unprecedented time.

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**Course options available this fall**

If you have courses that will be offered face-to-face or in a hybrid format, but due to health/disability-related reasons you cannot take the course in such a format, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to seek accommodations. If you do not qualify for an accommodation through ODS, please contact your Graduate Program Director and/or course instructor directly to explore whether alternative arrangements can be made within the course design.

As we begin classes next week, I recognize that this is different from what you and I had hoped for when thinking about the start of the academic year. We are dealing with an unprecedented disruption that has affected us personally, professionally, and institutionally. That said, please know that we remain committed to your success and well-being.

Sincerely,
Doug

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