

STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1719

**TITLE: Graduate, Union, and Institutional Development Enhancement (GUIDE):
Section 2, Volume II: Addressing Graduate Healthcare**

AUTHOR(S): Senator Austin Britton, Senator Cassandra Urbenz

**SPONSOR(S): Minority Party Leader Anamika Naidu, Senator Danielle Loftis,
Senator Isha Khan, Senator Anna Huber, Senator Anusha Chaudhary**

WHEREAS, the University of Florida is ranked among the top 6 public universities[1]; and,

WHEREAS, Graduate Assistants United (GAU) is the official bargaining unit for graduate assistants at the University of Florida[2]; and,

WHEREAS, graduate assistants are provided health insurance, GatorGradCare(GGC) as a result of negotiations between the UF Board of Trustees (UF BOT) and GAU[2,3]; and,

WHEREAS, GatorGradCare has been in place since at least 2007[2]; and,

WHEREAS, GatorGradCare was updated in 2021 to include pharmacy benefits[2]; and,

WHEREAS, GatorGradCare was updated in 2021 to enhance benefits for graduate assistants living off-campus in Research and Education Centers (RECs)[2]; and,

WHEREAS, despite the 2021 improvements, GatorGradCare provides limited dental coverage, restricting graduate assistants to one cleaning per year with no other dental coverage[3,4,5]; and,

WHEREAS, despite the 2021 improvements, graduate assistants in RECs still report difficulties in understanding and utilizing their healthcare, citing a lack of effective communication[2]; and,

WHEREAS, despite the 2021 improvements, graduate assistants in RECs cannot utilize dental coverage unless they travel to UF School of Dentistry locations in Gainesville, Tampa, or Miami[5]; and,

WHEREAS, GatorGradCare currently does not include vision coverage, despite an estimated 75% of adults needing some form of vision correction[7]; and,

WHEREAS, inadequate dental and vision care can result in serious long-term health issues, underscoring the need for regular cleanings and access to vision correction[8]; and,

WHEREAS, medical coverage through GatorGradCare is more expensive than faculty plans, despite graduate assistants having significantly lower incomes[2,9]; and,
WHEREAS, despite demand and need, GGC does not include adequate provisions covering mental health, LGBTQ+ healthcare needs, preventative care, and maternity and paternity care[10]; and,

WHEREAS, improved mental health coverage can lead to better academic performance, higher retention rates, and overall life satisfaction for graduate assistants[10]; and,

WHEREAS, LGBTQ+ graduate assistants face unique healthcare needs and challenges that require specialized and affirming care; and,

WHEREAS, preventive care services, including vaccinations, regular health screenings, and wellness check-ups, are essential for maintaining the overall health of graduate assistants; and,

WHEREAS, comprehensive maternity and paternity care, including prenatal and postnatal services, and family planning resources, are crucial for supporting graduate assistants who are starting families; and,

WHEREAS, improving GatorGradCare coverage aligns with broader health equity goals and enhances the University of Florida's reputation as a supportive and competitive institution; and,

WHEREAS, although during negotiations GAU has stated their goals for the future of GGC through a proposal in December 2023, the UF BOT has yet to respond[2]; and,

WHEREAS, in their proposal, GAU outlined comprehensive improvements to GGC that aim to reduce costs and increase the availability of coverage for all graduate assistants[11]; then,

THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports the negotiation and implementation of comprehensive improvements to GatorGradCare (GGC) that address the specific needs of graduate assistants; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate believes these improvements should include dental, vision, mental health, LGBTQ+ healthcare needs, preventative care, and maternity and paternity care; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate requests the UF BOT to ensure that GGC is affordable and equitable, with costs comparable to faculty plans despite the lower incomes of graduate assistants; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate encourages the UF BOT to improve communication and support for graduate assistants living in Research and Education Centers (RECs) to ensure they can fully understand and utilize their healthcare benefits; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate calls on the UF BOT to respond promptly to the GAU’s proposal submitted in December 2023, and to engage in constructive negotiations to realize these necessary improvements to GGC; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate supports the ongoing efforts of GAU in advocating for the health and well-being of all graduate assistants at the University of Florida, and we call on the UF BOT to collaborate in these efforts to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all; and,

THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED, that the University of Florida Student Senate believes improving GatorGradCare coverage aligns with broader health equity goals and enhances the University of Florida’s reputation as a supportive and competitive institution.

Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to Senior Vice President for Health Affairs David R. Nelson, UF-GAU Co-Presidents Eva Garcia-Ferres and Cassandra “Cassie” Urbenz, UFF-UF President Meera Sitharam, and Chief Bargainer Patrick Keegan.

- [1] <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities/top-public>
- [2] <https://www.ufgau.org/>
- [3] <https://gatorcare.org/gatorgradcare/>
- [4] <https://gatorcare.org/wordpress/files/2023/11/GatorGradCare-Overview.pdf>
- [5] <https://gatorcare.org/wordpress/files/2024/05/GatorGrad-Care-Dental-Benefits.pdf>
- [6] <https://www.ada.org/en/resources/ada-library/oral-health-topics/home-care>
- [7] <https://blog.eyeglasses.com/vision-magazine/glasses-statistics/>
- [8] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1071459/>
- [9] <https://gatorcare.org/uf-domestic-partners/>
- [10] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4443903/>
- [11] <https://www.ufgau.org/blog/previous/2#:~:text=On%20healthcare%2C%20GAU%20proposed%3A>


Blake Cox
Senate President

11/14/24
Date