

Dear all,

I hope everyone is home, safe and healthy!

I'm emailing you with a few concerns physics students have brought up to the PGC's attention over the past week that are causing serious distress in their lives. Several students in our department (both theorists and experimentalists) are facing funding uncertainty for the coming summer. This is pretty concerning, considering that it is already late April and the summer term starts early May. It is very stressful for students to face such financial uncertainty, not knowing if they will be able to pay their bills during a period of crisis that might incur extra expenses.

For that reason, **the PGC would like to request that the department confirms that it will support every single one of its students during the summer and in which form that would happen as soon as possible.** We would like you to follow up with every student who is now facing funding uncertainty to confirm how they will be supported this summer.

**It would be ideal if we could also be provided the following in the next few days:**

1. A list of experimental PIs who would be willing to support both experimental and theoretical students this summer (which at least one first-year was promised by the department administration).
2. The number of summer teaching positions that will be available and who will be given preference for those.

**Also, could we please have a Zoom meeting with you before Friday?** (I'm sincerely sorry for the short notice.)

The information written in this email comes from a survey the PGC sent out yesterday and a town hall we had this afternoon with attendance of 30 students across multiple years and fields. We would be able to elaborate more in a meeting.

First-years have been seriously affected by the current COVID-19 crisis. Some of them started talking to potential advisors after their quals, but these discussions were abruptly interrupted in March. Ever since then, some experimentalists got notified that their potential advisors would not be taking students this summer because labs are now closed. Some got responses from junior faculty that they wouldn't be able to pay students during the summer because the university froze startup funds, even though these professors had originally agreed to hire them.

While even experimentalists are having trouble finding a summer position, a couple of first-year theorists have been told to find a position in an experimental group (which seems impossible at the moment), but they don't even know who would be able to take them and are unable to meet with professors in person to pursue these positions. Also, theorists in their first and second years are unsure of whether they will receive support, especially since summer courses are all up in the air now that they will be online.

This situation would be concerning in any year, but it's especially difficult now that students have reported in a survey we sent out yesterday that they might have unusual healthcare expenses and, in the case of

students stranded in other countries because of current travel restrictions, have to pay rent for an apartment they are not living in.

We do recognize that the department might have its hands tied at the moment, and we would like to clarify that we really don't want to work against the department administration, but with it rather. **We want to get to something that would put our students and faculty members at ease at this moment of uncertainty, making sure that everyone is getting the support they were promised.** While we understand that very little is certain right now and that the department has probably been working on these issues, we think that there should be more transparency and communication with the affected graduate students throughout the process. **Many graduate students have felt their emails and requests were ignored in recent weeks.** We understand it is difficult to provide answers and solutions on a short notice, but students deserve to know that their concerns have been heard and are being addressed.

It has come to our attention, however, that students in several departments have been organizing for collective action to demand that the university supports them through this crisis with adequate payment and resources. In light of that, we feel it is imperative to have these concerns addressed immediately, even if final solutions are not yet established, so our students can make informed decisions moving forward.

Anyhow, apologies for the very long e-mail, but we would be really grateful if you could help us through this and make sure that every student in our department is being adequately supported.

I have cc'ed people that I know are either in administrative positions in our department (chair, DGS, DUS, etc), in the PGC, in the graduate committee, and a student who brought some of this information to our attention. If this would be pertinent information for someone else, please feel free to forward this email to them.

Thank you for your time!

All the best,  
Barbara (on behalf of the Physics Grad Council)