

Ph.D. Stipends, Minimum Wage, and Postdoc Health Coverage

July 15, 2016

From: "Provost" <Provost@columbia.edu>
Date: Jul 15, 2016 11:40 AM
Subject: Ph.D. Stipends, Minimum Wage, and Postdoc Health Coverage
To: "columbiacommunity@lists.columbia.edu" <columbiacommunity@lists.columbia.edu>
Cc:

Dear fellow members of the Columbia community,

I am pleased to announce enhancements to stipends and benefits for Ph.D. students, part-time hourly student workers, and postdoctoral fellows throughout the University. These changes are the result of ongoing collaboration and dialogue with student organizations, the Research Officers Committee of the University Senate, and the deans. Beginning in fall 2016, the following improvements will be implemented across all schools:

Ph.D. student stipend increases. Effective September 1, 2016, the annual base stipend for all Ph.D. students who are eligible for funding will increase by at least 3.75 percent in the Arts and Sciences departments and all of the Morningside professional schools. Further, these departments and schools anticipate increasing stipends by at least 3 percent in each of the subsequent three years (2017-18, 2018-19, and 2019-20). While each school is the steward of its own resources, each, in its own budget planning processes, has arrived at these increases. These changes are the result of discussions with the Graduate Student Advisory Council and other student groups who highlighted the importance of advance notice of stipend levels to assist students in financial planning and budgeting. Stipends in the four Medical Center schools will increase at rates determined by each school based on rates set by NIH guidelines.

\$15 minimum wage for student workers. Earlier this year, it was announced that the pay rate for all part-time hourly student workers and other casual employees would be raised to \$15 per hour over the next three years. I am now pleased to provide details on the timeline for implementation. The minimum pay rate will rise to \$12.00 per hour effective September 6, 2016; then to \$13.50 effective September 5, 2017; and finally to \$15.00 effective September 4, 2018. This commitment reaches the \$15 per hour minimum for all such workers more quickly than the timetable specified in the recent law passed by the State of New York. This University commitment occurs in the context of a national discussion about income inequality and economic fairness. We recognize the high cost of living and studying in New York City, and appreciate the student advocates who helped place this issue on the agenda.

Postdoctoral fellow health insurance coverage. The Office of the Provost is finalizing a new policy that will ensure that postdoctoral fellows have access

to affordable health care through the University. This policy will be implemented during the open enrollment period in October 2016, and take effect on January 1, 2017. When the policy becomes effective, full-time Postdoctoral Fellows will be required to carry health insurance, either through the University or through an external plan. Full-time postdoctoral fellows will now have the opportunity to enroll in the University's UHC POS80 health care plan at a single, employer-subsidized premium rate, thereby significantly reducing their health care insurance costs. Under the new policy, the cost of the plan, minus the low monthly premium from the postdoctoral fellow, will be covered through the fellow's fellowship allowance or training grant expense account, or through departmental or other unrestricted funds available to the Principal Investigator (PI).

We look forward to continuing these collaborative efforts to make sure Columbia is a place where our students, faculty, and staff can achieve the highest levels of both intellectual accomplishment and personal fulfillment.

Sincerely,

John H. Coatsworth
Provost