

The State News

Weekend

MSU does not keep track of TAs who teach classes, do research; some students want more from education



JOSH RADTKE/THE STATE NEWS

ISB 201 lab teaching assistant Emily Campbell points out different parts of a Madagascar hissing cockroach to education freshman Holly Alleman, left and communication sophomore Ragen Wingate, right, Thursday morning in North Kedzie Hall. The lab is taught solely by Campbell, a graduate student in the Department of Entomology.

Untracked teaching assistants

By Heather Guenther
THE STATE NEWS

They know your name, and, in an increasing number of MSU classes, they control your education. MSU graduate teaching assistant positions increased from 1,075 to 1,174 between 2003 and 2008, according to data provided by the Office of Planning and Budgets. But how many of those TAs find themselves alone in the classroom with a group of students each semester? Senior Associate Provost June Youatt doesn't know. And she's not alone.

No one at the university is tracking overall TA involvement in courses, officials said. "If they lecture three days a week or lead a recitation section, we don't have that information centrally and

there is no reason for us to have it because every individual (TA) assignment is determined at the department level," Youatt said. "It's always been organized that way."

As tuition at MSU continues to increase — \$2,000 more since 2005-06 for undergraduates taking 15 credits per semester for one academic year — some students question if their money is giving them a quality education.

Amanda Gross, a human biology sophomore, said she doesn't believe a TA is an adequate substitution for an established MSU professor and her

money could be better spent. "If I'm paying \$300 a credit, I'd like to have a professor teach it," Gross said. "TAs are helpful as far as supplementary education, but I prefer a professor be the main instructor."

Organizational confusion
Graduate School Dean Karen Klomparens said various professional training sessions and constant communication with a TA's faculty mentor minimize the need for a central tracking system of the university's TAs. "Do you think TAs want to report everything they do in a

classroom to some central database? Does someone centrally want to track this? For what purpose?" Klomparens wrote in an e-mail. "I don't think it would be useful. I trust the faculty and the employing units to tell each TA what his or her responsibilities are in the classroom, to provide evaluation at the end of every semester so that the TA can improve (and) to have the undergrads use SIRS or (a) similar format to comment on the instruction."

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Ⓜ To see a video of a teaching assistant explaining why the job is important, visit stateneews.com/multimedia.

MICHIGAN

Granholm to veto Promise elimination, fight for education funding

By Marissa Cumbers
THE STATE NEWS

Gov. Jennifer Granholm vowed Thursday to veto any state budget agreement that eliminates the Michigan Promise Scholarship and deep cuts to spending for schools and public safety after legislators missed the Oct. 1 deadline to settle the budget.

The state House and Senate failed to settle the state's \$2.8-billion deficit Wednesday and the state shut down for two hours Thursday. As a compromise, the Legislature and governor agreed on a 30-day budget released by

the Senate. The temporary budget will continue state spending at last year's rates with some additional cuts giving legislators one month to agree on how to balance the \$40 billion budget.

Granholm said in a press conference Thursday the additional 30 days will allow her to carefully examine all of the budget bills. The goal is to create a balanced budget that keeps police officers and fire fighters employed, creates new jobs and helps residents afford college, she said.

"The budget the Legislature has passed failed to do all of these essential things," Granholm

said. "That's why I will continue to fight for the right budget for Michigan."

Throughout the day Thursday, the House and the Senate were back in session working toward a budget for the governor to sign.

"Well, we are bouncing things back and forth between the House and the Senate right now," State Rep. Rick Jones, R-Grand Ledge, said. "We have just seen a report that the governor already doesn't like some of it and has threatened to veto some of our work."

Prior to passing the temporary budget bill, both the House and the Senate approved a higher edu-

cation budget that cuts the Michigan Promise Scholarship and eliminates \$60 million in financial aid. Cutting the scholarship saves about \$140 million.

A bill introduced by the state House last week could restore \$120 million to the scholarship, but there is no way to fund it at this point, said state Rep. Joan Bauer, D-Lansing. Possible sources of revenue could include a tax on pop and water bottles.

"I am still working really hard to be sure that we get the supplemental funded to be sure we can live up to that promise," Bauer said.

State Rep. Mark Meadows, D-East Lansing, who voted to cut the Promise, was unable to be reached for comment.

Experts have said reinstatement of the Promise by the Republican-led Senate is unlikely, leaving 50,000 Michigan college students hanging in the balance.

"I said I would use every tool at my power including veto to keep the Promise," Granholm said. Last year, MSU received about \$41 million from the state to distribute in financial aid, said Val Meyers, associate director of the MSU Office of Financial Aid. MSU Trustee Donald Nagent

said not knowing where the university stands with the state budget is frustrating, because the university needs to know how it will proceed with finances.

"Just not knowing — not having a set plan to work by — is very difficult," he said.

For some students, the main frustration revolves around the uncertainty of the Promise funding.

"It's the Michigan Promise. They promised students they could have these scholarships; they should keep it," elementary education senior Rachael Kime said.