September 2019 Payroll Processing For Graduate Student Employees

Post-Processing Review

Background: In September 2019, approximately 700 graduate student employees (GEs) did not receive a paycheck on the regular monthly pay day, Monday, September 30, 2019. Manual checks were processed over the course of 8 days so that all GEs were paid monies due by October 10.

The Graduate Teaching Fellows Federation filed a grievance on behalf of the impacted GEs and that grievance was sustained. In addition to providing for any late fees incurred by GEs who did not get paid on September 30, 2019, the University committed to reviewing the GE pay process.

This report outlines the findings of the University of Oregon's review of the September 2019 Graduate Student Employee pay process. The findings also discuss improvements for future processing.

Items Reviewed: GE Hire Workflow and related challenges and solutions for discussion, dates completed Form I-9s were received in the Payroll Office, processing times, and a draft Fall GE Appointment Communication and Training Plan

Process Overview: Offices involved in the process to employ and pay GEs include individual academic and research departments who employ GEs (Departments), the Graduate School, and Business Affairs – Payroll Operations (Payroll). GE paychecks are the result of a process that begins with the Department where the GE works and concludes in Payroll. The process is split into two parts, one consisting of an electronic PRF (ePRF) and another consisting of the supporting paperwork for the hire (I-9, W-4, etc.).

The ePRF begins in the Departments and is routed to the Department approver. From there the Department routes the ePRF to the Graduate School who then routes it to Payroll. It takes an average of 6 days for the ePRF to be processed, reviewed, and to end up in Payroll.

The supporting hire paperwork is generated in a Department by a graduate student coordinator, completed by the GE, and then sent to Payroll. Supporting hire paperwork includes a Form I-9, Form W-4, and direct deposit. Once in Payroll, this supporting hire paperwork is then manually matched with the completed ePRF before the ePRF information can be manually entered into the system. All paperwork must be fully completed for Payroll to enter the ePRF information into the system. A key item that Payroll requires before data entry can occur is a completed Form I-9. Reappointments do not typically require a newly-completed Form I-9.

ePRFs and completed supporting hire paperwork are not entered into the system as they arrive. Due to Payroll resources, and ongoing new-hire processes and paycheck processing throughout the summer months, these actions are saved for entry in September and October (Note: October entry is typically the result of late paperwork). This includes both reappointments and new hires.

The following data is provided to illustrate the volume and timing of various parts of the process:

- In the most recent year, Payroll processed 36 GE payroll actions in August, 1011 in September, and 474 in October.
- ePRFs were approved by the Graduate School and sent to Payroll at a rate of 68 in May, 210 in June, 595 in July, 486 in August, 135 in September, and 30 in October.

- 211 completed Form I-9s were received by Payroll in September and 40 in October (*Note: For purposes of this review we did not look at when other pieces of the supporting hire paperwork were received in Payroll*)
    - 62 completed Form I-9s were received by Payroll between September 23 and 30
    - 17 completed Form I-9s were received on September 30, which is past the point in which paychecks were processed for the month. The 40 received in October were in a similar position.
- 102 completed Form I-9s were received by Payroll before September

Payroll manual data entry for GE actions is performed by one employee.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Challenges

ePRF – Some delays can occur in the ePRF process if approvers are not available or otherwise miss an ePRF in their approval queue. Additional delays can occur if the form needs to be sent back for revision due to inaccurate or incomplete information. There is no formal system to track possible late ePRFs from Departments. The automated ePRF does not realize the full efficiency that can occur with electronic forms given that the information is manually re-entered into the system by the Payroll Office. The volume of actions processed manually is also a challenge.

Supporting Hire Paperwork – The lack of automatic connectivity to the ePRF process allows for a disconnect in the tracking of paperwork and forms and does not allow for efficient follow up as necessary. The communication of the importance of completed paperwork is decentralized and heavily dependent on Department staff. The Graduate School is also not involved in or aware of the status of hire paperwork which does not allow for support of Department Graduate Coordinators through specific reminders and broad follow up. Form I-9 and additional paperwork for International Students require that employees physically be present to complete the paperwork. Once in Payroll, time is taken to match the ePRF with the hire paperwork. If paperwork is not completed in a timely manner by GEs, it impacts Payroll's ability to enter the information timely.

Opportunities

Further automation of the ePRF process to eliminate manual data re-entry should be considered. This should also include the ability to check the status of ePRFs and also electronically attach hire paperwork *(underway)*

Form I-9 automation that would allow some remote completion *(Payroll goal 2020)*

Reappointment paperwork could be completed at the end of the Spring and prior to when many GEs depart campus

Graduate Coordinators and the Graduate School should reinforce and repeatedly communicate the importance of timely paperwork completion to GEs and reinforce what may occur if paperwork is not completed timely (missed pay).

Additional and ongoing communication between the Graduate Coordinators, Graduate School, and Payroll about the process, timelines, expectations, etc. This should include yearly training and

awareness sessions to ensure all members of the campus community involved in the process are prepared to execute their functions. *(see attached draft Fall GE Appointment Communication and Training Plan)*

The Graduate School and Payroll should leverage their partnership and further share data that will allow them to support each other in following up with Departments when issues with missing, incomplete, or inaccurate data and paperwork occur.

Payroll should explore beginning data entry as completed actions are received versus saving them for the month they must be entered. *(see attached draft Fall GE Appointment Communication and Training Plan)*

Payroll should explore leveraging more staff from Business Affairs / the Payroll Office to assist with entering actions in high volume months.

Payroll should coordinate with the General Counsel's office to consider whether data entry may occur prior to receipt of a completed Form I-9. Those job records with incomplete I-9s could be flagged in regular data pulls for follow up by the Graduate School and Department Graduate Coordinators.

Fall GE Appointment Communication and Training Plan

Month	Grad School	Payroll
February	• Update GE payroll contacts • Set spring and summer training dates • Feb 21 - Winter Grad Coordinator Meeting - announcements (training date and overview of process including deadlines)	• Confirm deadlines and hire doc training calendar with grad school • Monthly hire docs training
March	• Rates and forms updated in DuckDocs • Email to GE payroll contacts with dates for trainings, submissions, and deadlines	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list. • Monthly hire docs training
April	• Training session with Payroll	• Training session with GS • Monthly hire docs training
May	• Email to GE payroll contacts with reminders • May 15 - Grad Coordinator meeting (Payroll attend for questions)	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list along with most common errors and how to avoid them. • May 15 - Attend Grad Coordinator meeting • Monthly hire docs training
June	• Training session with Payroll • Email to GE payroll contacts with reminders	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list along with most common errors and how to avoid them. • Training session with GS
July	• Training session with Payroll • Email to GE payroll contacts with reminders	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list • Review hire documents and work with departments on any needed corrections.
August	• First Week – Follow up with departments – run report comparing allocation with ePRFs submitted. • Aug 7 – Grad Coordinator meeting (Payroll attend for updates/questions) • Email reminders to GE payroll contacts	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list • Aug 7 – attend Grad Coordinator meeting • Late August – provide GS update about outstanding paperwork • Review hire documents and work with departments on any needed corrections. • Work Study Payroll Specialist to begin entering reappointments into Banner.
September	• First Week - Follow up with departments – run report comparing allocation with ePRFs submitted. • Email reminders to GE payroll contacts	• Include information about GE hire timeline in payroll news list • Sep 1 - GE Payroll Specialist to begin entering new appointments into Banner.

	Week before payroll – email to students who may be affected - include Jesse Bell option	- Review hire documents and work with departments on any needed corrections. - Mid-September – provide update regarding outstanding paperwork - Week before payroll – provide update of students not entered into Banner - Deadline for payroll – provide update of students who will be paid late