

College of Earth and Mineral Sciences (EMS) Guidelines – Level of Support, Workload and Funding Sources for Graduate Assistantships

Purpose: To establish guidance for academic departments in EMS pertaining to graduate assistant workload, level of support and the permissible funding sources to provide total graduate assistantship packages above the Required Minimum Stipend Grade. These guidelines do not supersede any Penn State University policies.

Background: Graduate Assistants are, first and foremost, graduate students pursuing an education. The opportunity to work closely with faculty members and undergraduate students in teaching, research, or administrative environments is an integral part of that education. Graduate students who hold assistantships benefit educationally and professionally. Assistantships also provide graduate students with the financial resources necessary to pursue their degrees.

Level of support and workload: While Grade 12 is the university Required Minimum Stipend Grade, EMS operates above that minimum to be more competitive and to improve the standard of living for our graduate students. Summer stipend is not required, but for students to be supported on an annual basis, academic departments should seek to provide additional support and/or scholarship funding during the summer that meets or exceeds the annualized grade 12 half-time minimum. A two-semester Grade 12 appointment (Fall and Spring) is typically insufficient to cover annual living expenses in the area.

Graduate assistants are expected to be involved in assistantship activities for an approximate total of 18 weeks per fall and/or spring semester, and for a period of up to 12 weeks in the summer. However, graduate assistants are paid in five monthly payments in the fall and/or spring semester, and in two monthly payments in the summer (June and July). As a result, monthly stipends in the summer months are paid at a higher rate to account for assistantship activities performed over a longer period (12 weeks from mid-May to mid-August).

Graduate assistantships (GA) may be one of three types: quarter-time, half-time, or three-quarter-time.

- $\frac{1}{4}$ (quarter) time = Graduate student normally registers for 9 to 14 credits per semester (5-7 per summer session) and is expected to provide teaching, research, or administrative assistance that, on average, consists of approximately **10 hours** of assistantship activities a week.
- $\frac{1}{2}$ (half) time = Graduate student normally registers for 9 to 12 credits per semester (4-6 per summer session) and is expected to provide teaching, research, or administrative assistance that, on average, consists of approximately **20 hours** of assistantship activities a week.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ (three-quarter) time = Graduate student normally registers for 6-8 credits per semester (3-4 per summer session) and is expected to provide teaching, research, or administrative assistance that, on average, consists of approximately **30 hours** of assistantship activities a week. Keep in mind that international students are allowed to work on-campus for no more than 20 hours per week during the fall and spring semesters.

In all cases, unpaid additional hours of time commitment related to a student's degree requirements may be necessary, such as related to a graduate student's research, depending upon the student's thesis/dissertation project. The programs supporting the graduate assistant should be providing the student with the necessary training and mentorship to perform effectively and to render the

assistantship as a positive learning opportunity and an important component of their educational experience.

For additional effort hours, not related to the assigned assistantship activities, a wage appointment should be used instead, whereas if they are related to the assigned assistantship activities, the appointment should more appropriately be changed to a 3/4-time appointment, rather than adding the additional hours as wage payroll.

Increasing the standards of assistantship support above the Required Minimum Stipend Grade boosts graduate recruitment, retention, and program competitiveness. Higher graduate stipend levels can also be used to reward individual graduate students for exceptional performance and/or successful progression through graduate degree milestones.

Funding source: Per the discussion and concurrence at the April 25, 2023 EMS Executive Council meeting, when budgeting for graduate student salary on sponsored projects, PIs should allocate reasonable compensation for work performed by graduate research assistants that meets or exceeds the annualized grade 14 half-time minimum. In addition, each department/institute is allotted a specified number of GA semesters each fiscal year from the general funds managed by the Associate Dean for Graduate Education and Research (ADGER). The ADGER allocation is provided as a lump sum dollar amount to be utilized for graduate teaching and research assistantship support. To align with university goals, department assistantship allocations are dispersed based on a combination of the number of tenure-track faculty, and a three-year running average of undergraduate student credit hours and externally sponsored graduate students (see chart). To address the critical need to improve our student's overall sense of financial security and providing more competitive offers, all programs should support graduate students at a minimum grade 13 ½-time appointment, departments and institutes may choose to provide total funding packages for full-time graduate students that exceed the grade 13 half-time graduate assistantship (Grades 14 through 26).

EMS GA Allocation

Original TTF Formula	Feedback indicated that formula does not properly account for research or teaching needs of the individual departments. Thus, updating to take these components into account should be considered.
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New Formula Considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support undergrad teaching needs while incentivizing sponsored research • Maintain faculty base and 3-yr averaging to stabilize major shifts in UG SCH and research year-over-year
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New Formula	Department Score = % TTF + %SCH*0.65 + %GSS*0.35 Allocation % = [Dept. Score] / [Sum of Dept. Scores]
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5 variants were considered around UG SCH and research expenditures. Goal is to incentive grad student research support, so GSS was chosen as the representative for research.

Departmental Fraction of EMS total	%	Reps Dept % of a given category
Tenure Track Faculty	TTF	Department Baseline
Resident Undergrad Student Credit Hours	SCH	Reps Resident Undergrad Teaching Needs
Graduate Student Salaries	GSS	Reps Sponsor supported graduate student education
65/35 Weighting		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on University 65/35 SCH/Grad Head Count ratio • Maintains emphasis on SCH, but gives recognition to research impact

- Maintains the faculty base to stabilize major shifts in SCH or research year-over-year
- Responds to annual teaching and research with the 65/35 dynamic portion of the formula

Some possible funding sources to support students at grade levels above the Penn State Required Minimum Stipend Grade (>Grade 12) include but may not be limited to the following:

- Sponsored research projects which account for graduate student support exceeding the Required Minimum Stipend Grade (>Grade 12). If multiple sponsored awards are being used to cover the assistantship, then the stipend and tuition percentages on each respective award must match (i.e. 25% stipend and 25% tuition on Award A; 75% stipend and 75% tuition on Award B).
- Supplementing sponsored research assistantships with department general funds or gift/endowment funds which allow for student support, provided that the percentage of tuition remission charged to sponsored award(s) does not exceed the percentage of stipend charged to said sponsored award(s).
- Supplementing ADGER's GA allocation with department general funds or gift/endowment funds which allow for student support.
- Supplementing ADGER's GA allocation with sponsored research funds, as long as the graduate student is putting forth research effort on that sponsored project commensurate to the funding support. An associated percentage of tuition remission need not be charged to the sponsored research in this case. For example, a Grade 12, ½-time teaching assistant may be upgraded to a Grade 15, ½-time teaching/research assistant using sponsored research funds, with tuition covered by the department offering the assistantship.
- Each department/institute allocation of graduate assistantships can also be used to support fewer students than would be supported if all were funded at Grade 13, ½-time levels.

On sponsored research, assistantship appointments should be related to the graduate student's disciplinary field and wherever possible, tied to the student's program of study so as to contribute in a relevant manner to the student's professional development.

Last revised – 1/12/24

Regardless of the mechanism used to provide total funding packages that exceed the Penn State required minimum grade 12 half-time graduate assistantship, attention should be paid to avoid potential negative impact on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority, or otherwise nontraditional graduate students. Questions pertaining to graduate assistant workload, level of support and appropriate mechanisms of funding can be directed to the Associate Dean for Graduate Education and Research.