guidelines for 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

The College of Earth and Mineral Sciences strives to support all graduate assistants at a minimum Grade 14. 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. Increasing the standards of assistantship support above the Required Minimum Stipend Grade (Grade 12) 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.

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~~.~~

* ¼ (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.
* ½ (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.
* ¾ (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.

# Funding source

Possible funding sources for graduate assistantships include but may not be limited to the following:

* *Sponsored research projects*. When budgeting for graduate student salary on sponsored projects, PIs should allocate reasonable compensation for work performed by graduate research assistants. If a graduate research assistant is contributing effort to multiple sponsored awards, 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);
* *GA allocation from the general funds managed by the Office of the Associate Dean for Graduate Education and Research* (ADGER) to departments and institutes;
* *Department/institute general funds*;
* *Gift or endowment funds*, as long as those allow for student support;
* *A combination of sponsored research and general funds* (or gift/endowment fundswhich allow for student support), as long as the graduate student is putting forth research effort on that sponsored project commensurate to the funding support, and 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). Tuition remission can be paid in full from general funds or gift/endowment funds.

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.

Split graduate assistantships, where a graduate student is funded through both teaching (TA) and research (RA) duties, require careful workload management to ensure the student can balance responsibilities while making progress toward their degree. The combined workload should not exceed the standard graduate assistantship hours by type (quarter-time, half-time, or three-quarter-time). For example, if a half-time assistantship is 20 hours/week, this time should be split between teaching and research (e.g., 10 hours for teaching, 10 hours for research). This allows the student to balance academic responsibilities while progressing in their degree program.

Regardless of the mechanism used to provide total funding packages, attention should be paid to avoid potential negative impact on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minority, or otherwise non-traditional graduate students. Questions pertaining to graduate assistant workload, exceptions on level of support, and appropriate mechanisms of funding can be directed to the associate dean for graduate education and research.

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