

## Guidelines for Financial Support of Graduate Students

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### **Guidelines for Assigning Graduate Student Assistantships**

Described in these guidelines is information about (a) the types of assistantships available, (b) eligibility requirements and priorities, (c) supplemental assistantships, (d) special cases, (e) support for scholarly and professional development through teaching, and (f) the manner in which assistantships are assigned. Department policies concerning financial support are designed to be consistent with the Department's Principles for Financial Support of Graduate Students and the Collective Agreement between the University's Graduate Students' Association and the Governors ([AEGS Agreement](#)). Any questions about assistantships should be directed to the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies or to any member of the Department's Graduate Assistantships Committee. In these guidelines, "departmental support" refers to assistantships funded by the University and administered by the Department.

#### *Types of Assistantships*

Graduate appointments are available in two forms: teaching assistantships and research assistantships. Teaching assistantships, funded by the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Science, are assigned to provide assistance or instruction in courses taught by faculty members or sessional instructors. Research assistantships come from two sources: department and trust accounts. Department-funded research assistantships are assigned to enable graduate students to work on research projects with faculty members that will be beneficial to the students' professional development and progress toward their degrees. These assistantships usually are reserved for the third term (May-August) but also may be assigned to new students during the first two terms (September-December and January-April) if funds are available. Other research assistantships are available from trust accounts that enable students to work with faculty members on research supported by research grants. The work load for a full-time assistantship is equivalent to an average of 12 hours/week for any four-month term, but partial assistantships may be awarded as well (e.g., a half-time assistantship for an average of 6 hours/week).

In any given term, and over the course of earning a graduate degree, full-time assistantships may involve blended funding. Blended funding involves support from more than one of these sources or from these sources in combination with a scholarship(s). For example, a student might be supported from September to December as a research assistant on a trust account, serve as a teaching assistant from January to April, and be supported as a research assistant with departmental funds from May to August. Alternatively, a student might be supported within any term part-time as a teaching assistant and for the remainder of the time as a research assistant, averaging a total of 12 hours/week from both sources. In any term, a faculty member may use a trust account to buy a student out of teaching assistant duties in favor of securing the student as a research assistant. Budget permitting, the Department offers the option in fall or

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winter terms of contributing half the cost of supporting the student as a research assistant, with the other half covered by the faculty member's trust account.

*Eligibility*

All graduate students are eligible to apply for assistantships. However, the priority with which a student is considered depends primarily on the number of years of assistantship support already received by the student. Relevant in special cases is the priority for funding assigned to each student by the Graduate Assistantships Committee upon entry (discussed below).

If sufficient funding from the University is available, graduate students who seek to complete their PhD degrees in the department after completing a baccalaureate or its equivalent normally are eligible to receive a maximum of two years or 24 months of departmental support to complete the Master's degree or Second-Year Research Project (i.e., successful oral defense by August 31 of the second year in program), and a maximum of three additional years or 36 months to complete the PhD, starting with their first registration in the graduate program. In the event that the student misses the August 31 deadline for oral defense of the Master's or Second-Year Research Project, funding will be withdrawn as of September 1 of the third year in program. It may be reinstated upon admittance into the PhD program but only up to the student's original end date for departmental support. Reinstatement of funding will occur only on September 1, January 1, or May 1. Students who receive a Master's degree elsewhere and enter the Department initially as a provisional PhD student normally are eligible to receive a maximum of four years or 48 months of departmental support to complete the PhD, starting with their first registration in the graduate program.

Students are required to apply for major scholarships for which they are eligible (e.g., CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC) as recommended by the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies.

*Priorities*

The Department allocates assistantship funds according to the following priorities:

- *Priority 1* is to provide the equivalent of full-time assistantships to all continuing students up to the end date for eligible funding (see *Eligibility* above), including students who hold scholarships whose value is less than that of a full-time assistantship. Budget permitting, the Department supports all students who meet this criterion.
- *Priority 2* is to use assistantship funds to ensure that an optimal number of new graduate students enter the program each year. This number depends on the

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quality of applicants and is determined by the Chair of the Department, in consultation with the Graduate Selection Committee.

- *Priority 3* is to assign supplemental assistantships (see “Supplemental Assistantships” below) in cases where students, already supported by scholarships or grants, and who are still eligible for funding (see *Eligibility* above) have expertise to provide teaching assistance in particular classes, budget permitting.
- *Priority 4* is to assign supplemental assistantships (see “Supplemental Assistantships” below) in cases where students are already supported by scholarships or grants and who have not reached their end date (see *Eligibility* above) but for whom the case can be made that the assistantship experience is critical to their professional development as effective teachers, budget permitting.
- *Priority 5* is to provide support for PhD students who need all or part of a year beyond the end date (see *Eligibility* above) to complete their degree work (i.e., support in Year 6 for students entering with a baccalaureate and in Year 5 for students entering with a Master’s). If assistantship funds are not available, these students will have first priority for reader-marker funds, budget permitting.
- *Priority 6* is to provide other supplemental assistantships and/or to support PhD students who otherwise would not be funded. If assistantship funds are not available, these students will be considered second priority for reader-marker funds, budget permitting.

Students are not eligible for departmental-funded assistantships beyond six years from the start of first registration in the program if entering with a baccalaureate and five years if entering with a Master’s.

### *Step Levels*

If sufficient funding from the University is available, graduate assistantship salaries will be paid according to current Faculty of Science Step levels, beginning at Step 1 for students entering with a baccalaureate. Those entering with a Master’s degree will begin at Step 2. Consistent with the [AEGS Collective Agreement](#), annual step increments will only be awarded if performance of assistantship duties is satisfactory.

### *Supplemental Assistantships*

The department may provide partial assistantships, known as supplemental assistantships, to students who have major scholarships or are supported with research grants. Supplemental assistantships are often restricted by the conditions of a particular scholarship and must also be consistent with University guidelines, policies, and regulations.

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The first priority in assigning supplemental awards is to provide assistance in certain cases (e.g., some laboratory courses) where the expertise of graduate students is required. Lower priority is given to providing supplemental assistantships under other conditions.

In assigning supplemental assistantships, preference is given, where possible, to students with major scholarships on the basis of merit as evidenced by indices of scholarly and professional development.

Faculty members may offer supplemental support from their trust funds (e.g., an operating grant) for a research assistantship.

*Special Cases*

In the case of a student who has received departmental or other support during a qualifying or probationary year, the Graduate Assistantship Committee determines how much of that support, if any, is to be counted toward the end date for eligibility for departmental support. Students should be notified prior to beginning their regular status in the program.

A leave approved by FGSR normally will extend the end date of departmental support by the period of the approved leave (typically no more than one year). Normally, only one such extension to the end date will be provided. Students should be aware that their pay and benefits may be impacted by a leave period. Refer to the [AEGS Collective Agreement](#) and the agency funding any scholarships for current policies.

Recognizing that unavoidable circumstances may delay an oral defense of the Master's thesis or second-year research project beyond August 31 of the second year, the Department may award a "grace period" of one additional funded semester (to December 31 of the third year) for completion of the Master's thesis (including submission to FGSR of the final approved version of the thesis) or the second-year research project (including submission to the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies the final approved version of the research report). Unavoidable circumstances may include sudden illnesses or family emergencies experienced by the graduate student, supervisor, or a member of the supervisory committee. If a student experiences unavoidable circumstances, a request for a grace period should be made by the student, supported by the supervisor, to the Associate Chair of Graduate Studies, who will consult with the Chair and the Assistant Chair (Administration) to determine whether a grace period will be awarded. If a grace period is awarded, the end date for completion of the PhD remains the same (i.e., the grace period does not extend the period of departmental financial support at the PhD level).

In special and unusual circumstances, the Graduate Assistantship Committee may consider exceptions to these eligibility and priority guidelines on a case-by-case basis.

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*Support for Scholarly and Professional Development through Teaching*

Students may be granted the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant or a sessional instructor in order to enhance their scholarly and professional development (Priority 4 funding when the student is supported by other means, e.g., major scholarship). In exercising decisions about Priority 4 funding, special weight should be given to requests by students who have not yet had the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant or instructor and who justify their requests with arguments about their needs with respect to scholarly and professional development through teaching.

Typically, the Chair will give special weight to requests for sessional teaching opportunities for up to two individually taught or team taught courses over the period of a student's program. Such requests should be supported by the student's supervisory committee as being appropriate given the student's individual program of study. The opportunity to teach will only be granted to students who have completed their candidacy exam. These students are most likely to be at an optimal stage to profit professionally from the experience without compromising instructional quality for undergraduate students.

*External Employment*

Graduate students are expected to devote most of their working time to completion of their graduate degree. Consequently, before fully funded students accept other employment, they should first discuss this action with, and receive advice from, their supervisor and the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies to ensure that the total workload is compatible with their activities as full-time graduate students. Generally, employment that entails a significant time commitment without contributing to a student's professional development would be regarded as inappropriate.

*Assigning Assistantships*

The task of assigning assistantships is handled by the Graduate Assistantship Committee, which consists of the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, the Chair of the Department, the Assistant Chair (Administration), the Graduate Program Assistant, and two graduate students selected by their peers. Other members may be added at the discretion of the Chair.

Normally, assistantships for the first two terms are assigned in June and assistantships for the third term are assigned in March. Prior to making assignments, the Committee solicits requests and preferences from graduate students and faculty members.

Whenever possible or required, the Committee should use historical information to help ensure actual work load does not exceed the work load associated with the appointment.

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In making assignments, the Committee attempts to accommodate (a) requests from students, (b) requests from faculty members, and (c) specific departmental needs (e.g., laboratory courses that require the assistance of a graduate student). The Committee strives to assign assistantships in a way that helps to develop students' knowledge and research skills in their chosen areas of specialization.

Acknowledging the need to match expertise with course content and activities, the Committee should consider the history of students' assistantship assignments over the course of their programs of study, attempting to ensure, if possible, that no student's program is unduly compromised by a succession of "heavy" assistantship assignments.

*Financial Crises*

Under extreme circumstances, the Chair may declare a graduate funding "financial crisis" in which the usual procedures, expectations, and tradeoff among funding principles cannot be maintained. A financial crisis should only be declared after consulting with the Associate Chair for Graduate Studies, the Assistant Chair (Administration), and administrators in the faculties. Broad consultation with graduate students and faculty should take place before any steps are taken to deal with the crisis.

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