

Financial Support of Graduate Students (Pre-2010)

[n.b. This policy applies to graduate students entering before 2010. A new policy for financial support of graduate students entering in 2010 or later was passed by Department Council on February 12, 2010. This note was revised on February 12, 2010]

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. Additional details can be found in the booklet entitled *Funding of Graduate Students*, published by the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR). This book serves as a framework for and has precedence over departmental guidelines. 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, funded by the Faculty of Arts, are assigned to provide assistance or instruction in courses taught by faculty members or sessional instructors. Research assistantships come from two sources. Research assistantships from FGSR 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 doctoral 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 funds from FGSR 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.

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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 Admissions 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 four years of departmental support. If for any reason, the student intends only to complete a Master's degree and not to enroll in the PhD program, he or she is normally eligible for a maximum of two years of support. Students who receive a Master's degree elsewhere and enter the Department initially as a provisional PhD student normally are eligible to receive three years of departmental support.

One exception to these normal years of eligible funding involves the appointment of a student as a graduate intern within the Department. This appointment extends the time lines of eligibility for students entering after a baccalaureate and for students entering after a Master's degree to five and four years, respectively. Detailed regulations governing academic internships are available from FGSR.

If sufficient funding from the University is available, the Step levels for students normally should reflect students' "year in program," as intended in program design and as outlined in Table 1 of the departmental document [Student Evaluation Procedures](#). Thus, for example, students entering with a Master's degree in Psychology (or equivalent) normally would be assigned a Step level equivalent to students who entered the PhD program following a baccalaureate and who were beginning the third year of their PhD program. Similarly, students supported for a period of their program by major scholarships from a federal granting council and who may be entitled to and require additional departmental support, as outlined in this document, normally will be appointed to a Step level reflecting their year in program as reflected in Table 1 of the student evaluation progress grid.

For students who receive major scholarships (e.g., an NSERC scholarship or a Province of Alberta Award), the first two years of scholarship support are not counted as years of eligible funding, but subsequent years of scholarship support are counted. Similarly, for students who are supported at the level equivalent to a full-time assistantship with funds from research grants or other sources administered by individual faculty members, the first two years of such support are not counted as years of eligible funding, but subsequent years of such support are counted. Normally, various forms of partial support will also be credited on a prorated basis when this support is a form of blended funding intended to provide students with the equivalent of a full-time work load. Support that is supplemental to full-time assistantships, regardless of the source, is

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not counted. (See the discussion below on supplemental assistantships.) This policy and Item 3 above enable outstanding students and their supervisory committees to make suitable tradeoffs between rate of progress in the program and the broader range of experiences represented by indices of professional development.

Priorities

The Department allocates assistantship funds according to the following priorities:

- The first priority is to provide the equivalent of full-time assistantships to all continuing students who have not exhausted their years of eligible funding, 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.
- The second priority 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 quality of applicants and is determined by the Chair of the Department, in consultation with the Graduate Admissions Committee.
- The third priority is to assign supplemental assistantships (see “Supplemental Assistantships” below) in cases where students, already supported by scholarships or grants, have expertise to provide teaching assistance in particular classes.
- The fourth priority is to assign supplemental assistantships (see “Supplemental Assistantships” below) in cases where students are already supported by scholarships or grants but for whom the case can be made that the assistantship experience is critical to their professional development as effective teachers.
- The fifth priority is to provide support for PhD students who need all or part of a year beyond the normal years of eligible funding to complete their degree work. If assistantship funds are not available, these students will have first priority for reader-marker funds, budget permitting.
- The sixth priority is to provide other supplemental assistantships and/or to support 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 priority support for departmental assistantships beyond the six-year time limit currently set for completion of the doctoral degree by FGSR.

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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 fall within the guidelines, policies, and regulations imposed by FGSR.

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 trust funds.

Supplemental assistantships are not considered when computing years of departmental support (Item 1).

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 criterion in Item 2 or credited as in Item 5. Students should be notified prior to beginning their regular status in the program.

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

Support for Scholarly and Professional Development through Teaching

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.

Students may be granted the opportunity for sessional teaching in order to enhance their scholarly and professional development. The term of appointment for sessional teaching will not be counted when computing years of departmental support for up to the equivalent of two courses. The term of appointment for a winter session course

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is four months and an intersession course is one month. The term is prorated for team-taught courses.

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. Normally, the latter opportunities will only be granted to students who have completed their second-year research project. Although there are always exceptions, 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 Administrative Professional Officer, 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.

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.

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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.

Interim Interpretations

The following motions, passed by Departmental Council April 27, 2007, can be used in interpreting the present guidelines until such time as a more complete revision of the procedures has been completed:

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 APO, 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.

Program Distinctions. In the course of interpreting the existing funding policy in light of the current graduate program structure, the Department should not make funding distinctions between students enrolled in the Master's program and those enrolled in the 4-year PhD program at a comparable level of progress.

Five Years of Funding. The Department recognizes that students entering with a bachelor's degree often take five years to complete their program and students entering with a Master's degree often take four years to complete their program. Consistent with the Principles for Financial Support, the Department will endeavour, within the financial constraints of the Departmental budget, to ensure that students have funding available for that period of time.

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Revision History

Approved January 20, 1997

Editorial Revision December, 2003

“External Employment” section added April 19, 2004

Revised June 5, 2007 on basis of motions in Council April 27, 2007

Editorial Revision November 2008