



Top Tier Graduate Assistantship Plan Fall 2015

Background

Transformation of our Graduate Assistantship program and GA packages are mandatory to support excellence in our graduate programs and move the institution toward top tier status. We recommend this happening through a combination of changes and innovations. More specifically, we propose changes to stipend levels by moving to discipline-specific competitive market based doctoral stipends, and changes to GA policies to support our top tier mission, as well as innovative approaches to increasing our number of GA funded doctoral students and fostering a better graduate environment in which GAs study and work.

To achieve this, the Graduate College, the GC Executive Committee, the Graduate Council, the GC Top Tier Ad-Hoc committee, and the Top Tier GA Implementation Sub-committee of the Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity Implementation Working Group, have initiated a process during the 2015-2016 academic year to determine: 1) competitive, market-based differential GA stipends to be implemented in January 2016; 2) appropriate methods for the ongoing allocation of state GA funds to Colleges; 3) recommendations for best practices related to GA packages and GA policies; and 4) recommendations to support graduate student and GA success. These groups will also generate projections for increased GAs (by level and type) needed to support our top tier mission and goals.

Where We Are Now: GA Stipend Levels & Benefits

UNLV Graduate Assistantships can be awarded for either the Fall or Spring semester, for the entire academic year (9 months), or for the entire calendar year (12 months, though is uncommon and restricted to externally funded GAs). GAs are expected to work no more than 20 hours per week. There are four minimum GA stipend levels: Masters, Ed Specialist & MFA, Doctoral Pre-ABD, and Doctoral Post-ABD (Advanced to Candidacy).

Minimum GTA/GRA Stipends: Fall 2012 - Present

Level	Fall or Spring	Fall and Spring	Entire Summer
Masters	5,000.00	10,000.00	3,333.33
Masters-MFA	6,500.00	13,000.00	4,333.33
Doctoral-Not Advanced to Candidacy	6,500.00	13,000.00	4,333.33
Doctoral-Advanced to Candidacy (ATC)	7,500.00	15,000.00	5,000.00

Beyond stipend amount it is worth noting the distribution of GA stipends. The number of paychecks that graduate assistants receive is dependent on the length of their contract and on their official start date (stated on their GA contract). Fall and Spring appointment terms have the highest number of paychecks at 9, followed by Fall only and Spring only both at 4, the entire Summer at 3, the second half of Summer at 2, and the first half of the Summer at 1.

UNLV GA benefit packages include a reduction of graduate course fees for state-funded graduate assistants who are enrolled in state-funded programs (GAs must enroll in a minimum of 6 graduate credits per semester). For state funded GAs and many externally funded GAs, current tuition is reduced to \$197.59 per credit (approx.. 75% of tuition/fee costs) and we cover up to 10 graduate credits per semester for the academic year, and 6 graduate credits in summer session. We waive out-of-state tuition for state-funded and grant-funded graduate assistants. Proof of health insurance is mandatory for UNLV graduate students; all state-funded graduate assistants and many extramurally funded graduate assistants who opt to enroll in the UNLV Student Health Insurance receive a stipend to cover a portion of the premium. This year the health insurance stipend is \$500.00 for Fall or Spring semesters alone, or \$1,000 toward the full year policy.

Comparison Information on GA Stipends, Tuition, and Benefit Packages¹

To assess the relative value and competitiveness of our GA stipends and benefit packages requires comparison across other institutions and disciplines. That said, comparing graduate assistant stipends and benefit packages is extremely challenging because there is no national database that collects these data. This is largely due to the disparities in minimum stipend amounts across disciplines within the same university, driven partly by market forces², as well as different ways of handling GA titles (GTAs, GRAs, etc.), responsibilities, and benefits (how many credits are covered and at what rate). While there are no national standards for graduate assistant stipends, institutions want to be competitive with their peers to attract the best graduate students.

To address this void we have collected data from several “very high research activity” (Tier 1) institutions: University of Colorado Boulder, University of Oregon, University of Utah, Arizona State University, University of New Mexico (Main Campus), University of Washington (Seattle Campus), University of Arizona, University of Central Florida, and University of Houston. Data have also been gathered from the University of Nevada Reno, classified as “high research activity,” and the University of San Diego. All information was collected from the

¹ See Appendix A.

² Patel, Vimal. (2014). To Improve Equity, Focus on Stipends, Graduate Students Say. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 17 February.

³ Smallwood, Scott. (2001). Stipends are Key in Competition to Land Top Graduate Students. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 28 September.

⁴ Patel, Vimal. (2014). To Improve Equity, Focus on Stipends, Graduate Students Say. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 17 February.

⁵ Patel, Vimal. (2014). To Improve Equity, Focus on Stipends, Graduate Students Say. The Chronicle of Higher Education, 17 February.

⁶ University of Oregon descriptions for Graduate Teaching Fellowship (GTF). GTF 1: Regularly enrolled graduate students

universities' Graduate School/ Graduate College and/or Office of Financial Aid websites, and is included here in Appendix A.

All information provided herein (and in Appendix A) is based on 20 hour per week graduate assistantships, so that comparisons with graduate assistantship stipends at UNLV could be made. Many of these universities, however, also allow students to work fewer than 20 hours per week depending on the program, type of assistantship, and term (i.e. halftime or .25 FTE Graduate Assistantships). Furthermore, only the minimum GA stipend amounts were gathered. For several of the universities (see Appendix A, Table 1: GA Minimum Stipends), this was not possible since the amount was determined solely at the department level. In general, these data demonstrate that current minimum stipend levels at UNLV are below both "high research activity" and "very high research activity" institutions.

Stipends are one of several factors that prospective students consider when making their decision to attend a university. Since the stipend at UNLV is not competitive with our peer universities, this could result in a failure to recruit high quality graduate students³. Other universities are similarly concerned. For example, Ohio State University recently made a decision to raise its minimum nine-month, 20 hour a week stipend. Over the last 3 years, it has increased by 50% to \$13,500⁴. The desire to provide competitive stipends is also the focus behind a recent controversial plan at the John Hopkins University's Krieger School of Arts and Sciences. Administrators there proposed a 19% decrease in the total number of accepted graduate students within the school so that the minimum stipend can be raised from roughly \$23,000 to \$30,000. This new stipend amount would be on par with GAs in the sciences⁵.

Other benefits, including health insurance and tuition reductions, are also significant factors for students when considering which graduate program to attend. While UNLV covers a large portion of both the health insurance premium and tuition, many of the other universities cover both in their entirety. Thus, graduate students at UNLV have to use their stipend, which is already below the majority of these institutions, to cover the remaining tuition and premium costs.

Appendix B is a report on 2014-2015 GA Stipends produced and sold by institutional analysis and planning at Oklahoma State University. It provides average GA stipend data for every graduate program by CIP code from a large sample of our peer and peer plus institutions. This is the single best resource comparing national GA stipend data that is available, and it is included for your easy reference. It has also been provided to every Dean, Associate Dean, Chair and Graduate Coordinator in support of the departmental R2PC & GA Planning process.

³ Smallwood, Scott. (2001). Stipends are Key in Competition to Land Top Graduate Students. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 28 September.

⁴ Patel, Vimal. (2014). To Improve Equity, Focus on Stipends, Graduate Students Say. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 February.

⁵ Patel, Vimal. (2014). To Improve Equity, Focus on Stipends, Graduate Students Say. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 17 February.

Top Tier GA Investment: Proposal for \$2m in FY 16

We have a \$2m increase to base state GA funding earmarked to begin increasing our GA stipend levels immediately in FY16. Taking into account the information above and in the appendices, and in order to use these funds to strategically support our top tier efforts, we propose the following:

- Begin discipline-specific competitive market doctoral GA stipend increases in January 2016 using \$1m of these funds (so that next academic year the increases will spend the full \$2m across the fall & spring semesters).
- Fall 2015: every graduate program is preparing a department R2PC (Graduate Recruitment, Retention, Progression & Completion) Plan, including a plan that outlines what appropriate, competitive market-based GA stipends are in their discipline. We provided a day-long workshop with Noel Levitz consultants on R2PC and the linkage to stipends on 10/9/15 to support this departmental planning process. These department plans will route to College Deans for their review and comment, and then forwarded to the Graduate College by 12/11/15. The department GA stipend recommendations will provide the basis for our January change to discipline-specific, competitive market based stipends. See Appendix C for R2PC & GA Plan template and directions.
- Winter break 2015: the Graduate College, the 2015-2016 Ad Hoc Top Tier Graduate committee, and the Research, Scholarship & Creative Activity Implementation Sub-Committee on Top Tier Graduate Education will review all department R2PC and GA plans. We will assess the empirical evidence supporting each departmental differential stipend request, and generate a spreadsheet of verified differential market based stipend amounts by department for the entire campus.
- We will then implement our approximately \$1m increase toward differential market based doctoral stipends for state funded GAs by distributing it X% toward the departments' stipend goals in Spring 2016 (depending on the GA stipend requests received and approved in the planning process outlined above, and based on recommendations of the committees named above). The entire \$2m will be used to maintain these differential market based stipends beginning July 1st, 2016 (FY17).
- Non-academic units and externally funded GAs (i.e. those funded on grants & contracts) would also increase in Spring 2016. We will work with David Paul in OSP, VP Piechota, and College Deans to assess whether faculty/units are able to cover the increase immediately this spring. If not, we will use department or College overhead, or these one-time funds (from the remaining \$1m) for Spring '16 "gap" coverage of this doctoral stipend increase.

Moving forward, in Spring 2016 we will generate and distribute a campus GA plan showing the costs associated with realizing the campus' full doctoral GA stipend goals (differential by discipline based on market rates), as well as the costs of adding new GA positions in the future. We will also report on the costs to cover full GA tuition and health insurance. Future new GA funds should likely be applied toward some

combination of increasing stipends to reach department goals, new GA positions to support our increase of doctoral students, and enhanced tuition/benefits packages.

This information has been shared, and the proposal has been discussed, with a wide array of groups to garner their input, including but not limited to: the Graduate Council, the GCEC, the Ad-Hoc Top Tier Graduate Education committee, the RSCA Implementation sub-committee on graduate R2PC and GAs, the approximately 70 faculty participating in the 10/9/15 Noel Levitz Graduate Enrollment Management workshop, the Western Association of Graduate Schools executive board, Graduate Deans at other institutions through the Council of Graduate Schools, the GPSA E-board (and with the GPSA Council coming up on December 1st), the Deans Council, the Nov. 12th Research Council and Associate Deans for Research meetings, and soon thereafter the Division of Research leadership meeting. The proposal has gone over well and been consistently supported, with the possible exception of graduate students. They have been supportive of the plan, but would also like to see Masters GA stipends increase to competitive market rates, too.

With this plan, we have \$1m of one-time funds (because the stipend increases will kick-in for the spring semester only, so the funding for those increases from Fall '15 are left unspent this one time. We propose to use these one-time funds to support our top tier metrics and goals. Specifically, we will use these funds to build infrastructure for graduate students and GAs. Appendix D contains the detailed breakdown of one-time spending.

Specifically, the GC Ad-hoc Top Tier committee, the RSCA Implementation sub-committee on GAs, and the Graduate College, with input and consultation from Gina Strelbel and Provost Rapoport, recommend that the one-time \$1m be used to cover four broad areas of top tier support. Specifically, we propose investing these funds in the following top tier initiatives:

- Our data management systems for enhanced student services and tracking, and our Salesforce-based Grad Rebel Gateway system which provides a personalized user portal environment for students and extensive data and tracking capabilities for departments, as well as streamlined, state-of-the-art recruitment and admissions processes.
- "Stage 2" of the Grad Rebel Gateway to support current students from first enrollment through alumni status, online e-forms, graduate faculty mentorship tracking, GA workload, and campus-wide graduate RPC data and reporting.
- Graduate recruitment infrastructure: we are behind the curve on organized and strategic graduate recruitment, and there are a number of hard and soft cost investments this spring which would help move departments significantly forward toward achieving their recruitment goals as outlined in the Fall 2015 Grad R2PC plans, including but not limited to: providing campus tours for graduate student visits so they don't have to take the undergrad tour; creating branded templates for paper and e-fliers, brochures, posters, ads and related recruitment materials; generating a graduate look book and related materials for our new admissions packets to help improve admissions yields; purchase of targeted GRE names for strategic grad recruitment.

- Additional GA funding beyond the \$1m stipend increases, specifically to help cover stipend increases for non-state funded GAs (where needed), to support one-time new student funding and recruitment efforts, and to help cover tuition and health insurance overages.
- Support for new positions in the Graduate College that will be funded as of July 1st, but with these funds the positions could be filled earlier (January/February) and meet campus needs sooner. These include moving our Development Officer to full time (instead of ½ time) which would allow us to raise more funds to support GAs and graduate students via scholarships & fellowships; a Communications Director to support our GA and R2PC efforts via website management, strategic communications, an online newsletter, creation of branded materials and templates for departments to use, handling social media (including our new international media campaigns) and improving overall grad communications with various constituent groups; and a systems and data analyst to support our development, maintenance and campus services related to our online systems and graduate data. All of these would provide direct benefit to graduate programs and students.
- A budgeted line to support the possible repurposing of unused space in SEB for GA work spaces.

List of Appendices

- A. Graduate Assistant Comparison Data – Stipends & Benefits (Included below)
- B. Oklahoma State GA Stipend Report (Attached herewith)
- C. R2PC Plan Template (Attached herewith)
- D. Budgetary Breakdown of \$2m (Attached herewith)

APPENDIX A. Graduate Assistant Comparison Data – Stipends & Benefits

Table 1: GA Minimum Stipends

University	Fall or Spring	Fall and Spring	Summer
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Masters: 5,000 Masters MFA: 6,500 Doctoral: 6,500 Doctoral-ATC: 7,500	Masters: 10,000 Masters MFA: 13,000 Doctoral: 13,000 Doctoral-ATC: 15,000	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Colorado Boulder- Part-Time Instructors	10,491.68	20,983.35	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Colorado Boulder-GA, RA, and TA	8,694	17,387.99	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
*University of Oregon	1,423.78-1,698.18/month	26,151-31,191	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Utah	6,750	13,500	5,063 for entire summer
Arizona State	By department	By department	By department
University of Nevada Reno	1,550/month	1,550/month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
*University of New Mexico-TA	6,959.67-7,656.19	13,919.34-15,312.37	2,000/ 8 week session
University of New Mexico-GA	6,453.51-7,099.22	12,907.03-14,198.44	2,000/8 week session
*University of Washington	1,846-2,131/ month	1,846-2,131/ month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of San Diego	By department	By department	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Arizona	By department	By department	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Central Florida	By department and position (minimum for academic year: 6,600)	By department and position (minimum for academic year: 6,600)	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
*University of Houston	600-700/ month	600-700/ month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work

Table 2: Benefits Packages

University	Tuition Reduction	Health Insurance	Summer Tuition Waiver Offered
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University of Nevada, Las Vegas	10-20 graduate credit hours (plus 6 in summer), 75% reduction, in-state tuition waiver	\$500 per semester	Yes
University of Colorado Boulder	9-18 graduate credit hours	1,525 benefit amount per semester	Yes
University of Oregon	9-16 graduate credit hours	Covers 95% of premium	Yes
University of Utah	9-11 or 12 graduate credit hours	Covers 80% of premium	Yes
Arizona State	Tuition Covered	Covers 100% of premium	Yes
University of Nevada Reno	\$187.04/graduate credit is covered (students pay \$60.96/credit)—up to 9 credits	Covers 100% of premium	Yes
University of New Mexico	Up to 12 graduate credit hours	Covers 100% of premium	Yes
University of Washington	Up to 10 credits	Covers 100% of premium	N/Available
University of San Diego	By department	By department	By department
University of Arizona	By department	Covers 100% of premium	No
University of Central Florida	Tuition Covered	Covers 100% of premium	Yes
University of Houston	By department	N/Available	By department

Notes & Fast Facts on GA Benefits:

- UC Boulder has mandatory health insurance: the Student Gold Health Insurance Plan, which costs \$1695 per semester.
- University of Oregon does not have mandatory health insurance. The student plan costs \$1184 per semester or \$3553 for the entire academic year.
- University of Utah does not have mandatory health insurance. The student plan costs \$1740 for the entire academic year.
- Arizona State does not have mandatory health insurance. The student plan for the Fall semester, Spring semester, and Summer semester costs \$927, \$1473, and \$605 respectively.
- The cost for domestic and international student health insurance at UNR is \$1068.33 (Fall) and \$1481.11 (Spring/ Summer) and \$506.67 (Fall) and \$702.22 (Spring/ Summer) respectively.

- The cost for health insurance at UNM is \$1444 annually (Fall: \$608, Spring/Summer: \$851, Summer: \$327). There is also optional dental and vision benefits, which respectively cost \$353 and \$110 annually.
- The cost for health insurance at UW is \$330.42/ month.
- Some departments currently offer to cover part of the health insurance premium, but they are currently deciding whether to continue with this. As a result, little information is available at the moment.
- University of Arizona offers health insurance coverage. For the Fall and Spring terms, it costs \$927 and \$1473, respectively.
- UCF offers health insurance coverage, although it is mandatory for international students. Annual coverage costs \$3706 (Fall: \$1439, Spring/ Summer: \$2339, Summer: \$1098).
- Under the Graduate Catalog 2014-2015, all it states is that 'state legislation allows the University of Houston to extend to qualified students holding graduate student appointment positions the option to enroll in the university's group medical insurance programs.' It does not state whether part of the premium is paid or the full cost of the insurance. This information is also lacking on the Graduate School website and the Health Center website.

Universities Where Minimum Stipends are Broken Down By Academic Level

University	Academic Level	Fall or Spring	Fall and Spring	Summer
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Masters	5,000	10,000	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Masters-MFA	6,500	13,000	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Doctoral-Not Advanced to Candidacy	6,500	13,000	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	Doctoral-Advanced to Candidacy (ATC)	7,500	15,000	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Oregon ⁶	GTF I	1,423.78/month	26,151	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Oregon	GTF II	1,607.96/month	29,534	Varies by department, position, and length of time

⁶ University of Oregon descriptions for Graduate Teaching Fellowship (GTF). GTF 1: Regularly enrolled graduate students admitted to the graduate degree program or doctoral students who are not eligible for GTF II and GTF III appointment. GTF II: Regularly enrolled graduate students who have A) a master's degree in the same or cognate field, B) successfully completed a qualifying examination, or C) completed 45 credit hours toward a doctoral degree and have written recommendation of the head of their major department. GTF III: Regularly enrolled doctoral students who have advanced to candidacy.

				contracted to work
University of Oregon	GTF III	1,698.18/month	31,191	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of New Mexico-TA	Pre-Master	6,959.67	13,919.34	2,000/ 8 week session
University of New Mexico-TA	Post-Master	7,656.19	15,312.37	2,000/ 8 week session
University of New Mexico-GA	Pre-Master	6,453.51	12,907.03	2,000/8 week session
University of New Mexico-GA	Post-Master	7,099.22	14,198.44	2,000/ 8 week session
University of Washington- TA/RA/ Staff Assistant	Pre-Master	1,846/ month	1,846/ month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Washington- TA/RA/ Staff Assistant (Teaching or Research or Staff Assoc II)	Intermediate	1,983/month	1,983/month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Washington- TA/RA/ Staff Assistant (Teaching or Research or Staff Assoc II)	Candidate	2,131/month	2,131/month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Houston	Pursuing a Masters	600/ month	600/month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work
University of Houston	Completed a Masters program or its equivalent and are enrolled in a doctoral program	700/ month	700/ month	Varies by department, position, and length of time contracted to work