Dear Colleagues,

We recognize that many questions have arisen from the Graduate Student Funding Reform memo that was recently distributed. Our hope is for this document to begin to answer these questions. We will continue to update it as further questions are received.

In the coming weeks we will meet with each dean to review the implications of the campus vision for graduate funding. When needed, we shall also meet with individual departments.

Our commitment is to work toward the vision outlined in the memo. In instances where departmental resources currently fall short, we will work with Deans and their departments to find a solution.

Elizabeth H. Simmons  
Executive Vice Chancellor

James Antony  
Dean, The Graduate Division

Steve Ross  
Associate Vice Chancellor, Resource Administration

Answers to the Frequently Asked Questions

Q: My department has been supporting a student as a 25% Teaching Assistant plus support from Block Grant. The Teaching Assistant tuition and fee pool has been paying all of the tuition and fee costs. Now it will be paying only a proportion. Where will the rest of the tuition and fee payments come from? Can the Teaching Assistant tuition and fee pool savings be added to the department’s Block Grant to help support the student?

A: Yes. The university does not intend to spend less in total support of Doctoral and MFA students. Because the same university funding source is used for both the TA and Block Grant tuition and fees, we intend to re-balance the budget for these two allocations. Reconciliation of these matters will happen at the program level with input from deans and departments.

Q: I understand that there was a recent Senate-Administration workgroup on how the campus allocates Block Grant and Teaching Assistant funds. What is the status?

A: The workgroup has submitted a report which is being reviewed by the Academic Senate and the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs’ Office. Stay tuned...

Q: Does the requirement that “The cost of the tuition and fee payments and other benefits will be charged proportionally across the funding sources of the student’s support” mean that if a student is supported on a 25% Teaching Assistant appointment and a 24.99% Graduate Student Research appointment, then the Teaching Assistant funding and the grant funding will each be charged approximately half the cost of the tuition and fee payments and other benefits? What if my grant cannot afford the cost?

A: The TA funding and the GSR funding would each be charged approximately half the cost of the tuition, student services fee, health insurance fees, and potentially other campus fees. Where allowable, grants should be submitted with budgets that include the proportional cost of tuition, fee payments, and other benefits. As a transition, faculty who experience budget challenges due to this change should make their department aware. We are committed to working with deans and departments to find a reasonable solution where there are gaps.

Q: Does the requirement that “Doctoral and MFA students must be supported at a minimum of the equivalent of a 50% Teaching Assistant” mean that students must be employed as a 50% Teaching Assistant?

A: No. The idea is that the total support from any and all sources should be at least equivalent to that of a 50% Teaching Assistant appointment, including the associated tuition and fee benefit, for the academic year. As of October 2019, the minimum support amount is $2,435/month for 9 months.

Q: Does this reform now mean that a student will automatically be funded at the “50% Teaching Assistant level” even if they do not work?
A: No. The intention is that every student will receive a combination of graduate financial support equivalent to that of a 50% TA appointment. The mix of all funding sources should add up to at least the equivalent of a 50% TA appointment. The reform does not mean that the university is completely replacing TA appointments with fellowship funding.

Q: Does the minimum level of support requirement mean that if a student has a 25% Teaching Assistant appointment they will be paid a stipend equivalent to what they would earn with a 50% appointment, even if they only work at the 25% level?

A: No. The percentage of effort for a given TA appointment must match the level of the appointment. Supplemental fellowship funding should not be considered part of the employment appointment. The reform efforts do not change the employment rules for TA or Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) or other employment opportunities for students.

Q: Can the requirement that "Doctoral and MFA students must be supported at a minimum of the equivalent of a 50% Teaching Assistant" be met by support from outside the campus?

A: Possibly. The Graduate Division will consider exception petitions for students who have outside support. These situations will be examined on a case-by-case basis.

Q: What happens if a unit only has Teaching Assistant opportunities for their students and the student does not want to work at 50% time?

A: Ideally, every Doctoral or MFA student should receive funding, through any combination of graduate financial support sources, at or above, the equivalent of a 50% TA appointment.

If a student does not wish to work 50% time, The Graduate Division will consider an exception petition from the student (the process for this is forthcoming), so long as it is clear the student understands the implications of not being funded at a 50% level, and doing so is in the best interests of the student.

If a unit only has TA funding and a student elects to not accept this type of funding, then the student will need to explore other funding opportunities that might exist across the university.

Q: What is the expectation/obligation (if any) to fund students for summer?

A: At this time the minimum support level applies only to the academic year.

Q: Does the minimum support level apply to students on an academic Leave of Absence or who are "In Absentia" status?

A: Students on an academic Leave of Absence are not eligible for graduate student financial support from the university. Exceptions for students who are In Absentia will be addressed on a case-by-case basis. Proposed support levels should be included with In Absentia requests using The Graduate Division’s In Absentia App in the Student Database.

Q: Do these reform efforts imply that a Doctoral or MFA student will be guaranteed full funding past their fifth year?

A: The spirit of these reforms is that the university will work toward a model where all Doctoral students would be admitted with five years of guaranteed graduate financial support. After the fifth year the guarantee does not apply. But, as has always been the case, departments are encouraged to work with post-fifth-year students who remain eligible for funding to identify funding opportunities.

The university policy on graduate student support time limits has not changed.

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