Dear Colleagues,

We recognize that many questions have arisen from the Graduate Student Funding Reform memo released on October 14, 2019. After conversation with many campus constituents an updated memo was released on November 8, 2019 and distributed to deans, department chairs, assistant deans, department business officers, and graduate coordinators.

In the coming weeks we will meet with each dean to go over the implications of the overarching vision for graduate funding. When needed we shall also meet with specific departments.

We are committed to working 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 Frequently Asked Questions

Q&A items were originally posted on October 25, 2019. Updates to original items were made and additional items were added on November 3, November 7, and December 10 2019, as noted below. We have also now organized the questions by topic. Please check back periodically for more updates and additions.

Topics

- 1 Overarching questions
- 2 Questions about tuition/fee source
- 3 Questions about 50% equivalent funding

Overarching questions

Q1.1: The memo seems to imply that all doctoral students are guaranteed five years of financial support, immediately. Is that true? (added on 11/7/19)

A1.1: No. As the opening sentence of the memo says, "We are... working toward a model (emphasis added) where all Doctoral students would be admitted with five years of guaranteed financial support." The guarantee of five years of financial support does not begin immediately. We intend to reach that goal at some point in the future and to involve academic units and Senate Leadership in planning the implementation.

Q1.2: It does not seem like we will have adequate resources to both fund current students and admit a new class. Should we be suspending admissions? (added on 11/3/19, revised 11/7/19)

A1.2: The university does not intend to reduce support for graduate student funding. The graduate student funding reforms aim to help UC San Diego programs boost cohort diversity, strength, stability, and size. Departments should continue whatever they have done historically to make determinations about the appropriate size of their incoming cohort of students.

Q1.3: I understand that there was a workgroup on how the campus allocates Block Grant and Teaching Assistant funds. What is the status? (added on 11/3/19)

A1.3: 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...
Questions about tuition/fee source

Q2.1: 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?

A2.1: Yes. The university does not intend to spend less in support of Doctoral and MFA students. Because the same funding source is used for both the TA and Block Grant tuition and fees, we intend to rebalance the budget for these two allocations. Reconciliation of these matters will happen at the program level with input from deans and departments.

Q2.2: 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 that 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?

A2.2: 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.

Questions about 50% equivalent funding

Important note (added 12/10/19):

The original October 14th memo indicated “Effective winter quarter, Doctoral and MFA students must be supported at a minimum of the equivalent of a 50% Teaching Assistantship. The minimum may be met by a combination of appointments and/or fellowships. The student’s home department is responsible for monitoring their level of support. The Graduate Dean has the authority to grant limited exceptions to this policy when deemed appropriate and in the best interest of the student.”

The November 8th update memo distributed to deans, department chairs, assistant deans, department business officers, and graduate coordinators, added an important clarification which reads, “However, at the suggestion of divisional partners, we are adding language to clarify the precise meaning of the first sentence so that it now reads, ‘Effective winter quarter, Doctoral and MFA students who were admitted with a guarantee of support must be supported at the minimum of the equivalent of a 50% Teaching Assistantship.’”

Q3.1: Our department is eager to arrive at the point where every doctoral student is admitted with a promise of 50% support for 5 years. However, we are not there yet. Some of our current students were admitted with a promise of support for fewer than 5 years. Must the department retroactively change the support packages of all existing students to be 5 years at 50%? 

A3.1: No. The reform requires that any student whom the department has committed to support during a given quarter be supported at a minimum level of 50% — and we will work with units to find ways to cover any gaps. There is no requirement to retroactively change the length of time for which a given student will be supported. Our goal is to work toward a future where every new student will be admitted with a 5-year support package.

Q3.2: Do these reform efforts imply that a Doctoral or MFA student will be guaranteed full funding past their fifth year? And do departments now have to fully fund students who have exceeded the original funding commitment they received from their departments at the time of their admission (what we call “post-admissions support commitment students”)?

A3.2: The spirit of these reforms is that the university will work over time toward a model where all Doctoral students would be admitted with five years of guaranteed graduate financial support. As has always been the case, departments are encouraged to work with post-admissions support commitment students who remain eligible for funding to identify funding opportunities.

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

Q3.3: What is the expectation/obligation (if any) to fund students for summer?

A3.3: At this time the minimum support level applies only to the academic year.

Q3.4: Does this reform now mean that a student will automatically be funded at the “50% Teaching Assistant level” even if they do not work?

A3.4: No. The intention is that students with established commitments of support 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 involve completely replacing TA appointments with fellowship funding.
Q3.5: 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?

A3.5: 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 make no change to the employment rules for TA or Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) or other employment opportunities for students.

Q3.6: 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?

A3.6: 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.

Q3.7: 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?

A3.7: 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.

Q3.8: What happens if a unit only has Teaching Assistant opportunities for their students and the student does not want to work at 50% time? (revised 11/7/19)

A3.8: 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 that the student understands the implications of not being funded at a 50% level, and that 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.

Q3.9: Item 3 of the memo says, “Effective winter quarter, Doctoral and MFA students must be supported at a minimum of the equivalent of a 50% Teaching Assistantship.” My department only has TA opportunities to offer me. I don’t want to work as a TA. Does that mean that my department must nonetheless find another way to fund me at “50% level” even if I reject the funding opportunities offered to me? (added on 11/7/19)

A3.9: No. TA opportunities are the main avenue by which many departments are able to fund graduate students. Students who are offered these opportunities may certainly choose to decline them. However, the departments are not obligated to fill a funding gap that is created when a student declines the funding opportunities extended to them.

Q3.10: What happens if a student is offered a Teaching Assistant opportunity outside of their home department and declines the opportunity? (added on 11/7/19)

A3.10: If a student elects to decline this type of support, then the student will need to explore other funding opportunities that might exist across the university and/or apply for extramural funding. The home department is not obligated to find the student other opportunities.

Q3.11: Does the minimum support level apply to students on an academic Leave of Absence or who are “In Absentia” status?

A3.11: 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.

Q3.12: Is it allowable to reduce the minimum level of support if a student is not making satisfactory progress towards their degree? (added on 11/7/19)

A3.12: No. If a student is still in the program, but having academic difficulty, the department may not reduce the minimum level of support. If a student’s lack of progress causes them to be separated from the program, support ceases at the point where the student is separated from the program.

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