

Report on GA Master's Working Group

Melissa and Mike
November 17, 2020

Rationale and Context

- Fee-paying students are needed
- Carnegie 1 only counts PhD and “research expenditures”
 - Money spent on GAs and tuition waivers for master’s students counts as research expenditures
- Funding formula from state: \$2,000 per Master’s/ \$4,000 per PhD per year
- Deadline is to let depts know for AY21-22 offer letters (all current commitments will be honored)
- 2 GA funded master’s students = 1 staff position
- Adjunct = \$754 per credit hour minimum

Draft recommendations, part one

- Maintain doctoral funding/keep current process of PhD GA tuition assistance and stipends
- Separate requirement of offering both tuition assistance and stipend to a master's Graduate Assistant (tax info in recommendations document)
- Adopt a minimum stipend pay rate of \$10/hour for master's students
- Continue to move funds from Master's to PhD (where one exists); encourage more PhD programs
- Encourage more doctoral programs to offer a master's on the way to the PhD

Draft recommendations, part two

- Encourage more grant funding for master's students
- Create an OIR dashboard of the percentage (%) of fee-paying master's students
- Move GA master's funding to average revenue stream (grant funded, self-funded, or donor funded, etc.)-Goal 50%-50% split (one 100% funded student needs one full fee-paying student to reach this) & 80% of students in research-oriented positions. Goal is to hit this over next three academic years.
- Acknowledge continued need for diversity, resume building; potential impact on ranked programs

Follow-up from Provost Nennon (emphasis ours)

- Multiple GA positions that are more appropriately for hourly basis (e.g. coaching undergrad students, tech support, administrative support, editing, etc.)
- **GAs should be appointed based primarily on their academic credentials and used for work directly related to their academic training**
- **We should not continue to assign GAs to work that is not directly and clearly related to their graduate education.**
- Student workers can be either undergrad or graduate students. **Some of this work is most appropriately performed by undergraduates, especially if it is clerical, but some of it is better performed by graduate students since it is more complex or requires higher-level training and skill levels and should also have a higher pay rate.**

Timeline for Work

- November 17: working group recommendations presented to FS
- November – January: FS to provide feedback/suggestions on recommendations to Melissa (mljnoske@memphis.edu) and Mike (mgekolas@memphis.edu)
- November – January: other senators working on compiling data to support feedback/suggestions (see Michael Perez, mvperez@memphis.edu)
- January 26: FS meeting; voting on a motion to support/not support recommendations in final document
- January 27: results of FS vote sent to Robin Poston and Tom Nenon

Master's Student GA Working Group

Guiding Principles and Recommendations

This is our Guiding Principles and Recommendations for Tom Nenon about how to manage Graduate Assistantships for master's students starting FY22.

Guiding Principles

- Tuition is a real cost and we are not funded by the state per credit hour. Fee-paying students are needed. Less than 25% of UofM revenue today is funded by the state and 0% of GA stipend funds come from the state. The only UofM revenue funded by the state comes from the funding formula which pays out each time a student graduates and only if the student graduates. The amount we receive averages out to \$2,000 per master's student per year (same amount as for undergrads) and pays out \$4,000 per doctoral student per year.
- Carnegie 1 doesn't count master's students, but it does count PhD production and research support and expenditures. Note that PhD programs are not up for debate, given they support the Carnegie 1 mission. Money spent on GAs and tuition waivers for MA/MS students assigned research positions count as research expenditures. Such funding also supports the Carnegie 1 mission.
- Benefits of master's level GAs: need to have a graduate level program, helps students with the cost, helps us attract and retain faculty. In competitive markets, GA support or something comparable to it helps to successfully recruit our best students. Better students encourage better research productivity and better retention of faculty "all stars."
- Can funds be redirected? And redirected to research? To cover healthcare for students, move the funds to PhD level, move to tenure track lines to keep our faculty strong?
- Deadline is for announcing budgets to departments for GA dollars for their AY21-22 offer letters. We will honor all current commitments as it is not right to do otherwise. Departments are currently recruiting so the sooner a decision is made, the better.
- Whatever model we move to these students need to be eligible for work study. If students are working then they can qualify for work study. Federal work study can be provided to any student who is on a GA regardless of that student getting tuition only or stipend only.
- We need to consider effects on diversity and on the ability to attract high-quality students for any proposals made.
- In programs with no PhD, master's student help with research.
- Hourly wage contracts, tuition only scholarships, AND tuition assistance scholarships all need to offer in-state equivalent rates – we can encourage that these are used strategically to target increasing diversity and attract high-quality students.
- With hourly wage contracts will need to show and differentiate how the work is relevant to degree programs. For those in research-oriented positions master's students should have faculty mentors with a focused research agenda where students sign on with a mentor and are expected to supplement their efforts.
- Current spend on master's GAs: from Fall 2018 to Fall 2019 down -7% tuition assistance and -5% stipend, from Fall 2019 (tuition \$2,320,598; stipend \$2,009,657) to Fall 2020 (tuition \$1,985,711; stipend \$1,511,971) down -14% tuition and -25% stipend.

- Total numbers of master's GAs: Fall 2018 (673) to Fall 2019 (617) down -8% and to Fall 2020 (433) down -30% from prior year.
- While the cost of Masters GAs varies across departments, about 2 GA funded master's student (at \$16k per Fall/Spring each) equal 1 staff member in salary. A combination of staff and GAs is beneficial. Staff add some stability and will be more focused on the job.
- What does it cost to hire an adjunct to teach a course?
 - According to Faculty Admin. Services: The hiring minimum for part-time faculty (adjunct) is \$754 per credit hour. Depending on what the college/school is offering, but the minimum is \$754. There are some schools (Nursing Law, Engineering, Architecture) that regularly pay higher adjunct rates due to the specialized nature of those disciplines.
- Consider setting a minimum for GA stipend pay since the University has indicated a desire to achieve that goal for its workers.
- Per THEC all master's programs need to have an average of 5 graduates across a 5-year period. Consider how GA positions in MA/MS programs are important to insuring this average and external support sought if needed. THEC monitors all programs that fail to meet the threshold (10 graduates for undergraduate programs, 5 graduates for master's programs, and 3 graduates for doctoral programs over a 5-year period). This is for the major and not a concentration.
- We endorse the need to continue to find a way to provide healthcare to our students, possibly in a phased approach, and if needed starting with our doctoral students.

DRAFT Recommendations

Assuming we are honoring all offer letters and current contracts, we propose:

1. Maintain doctoral funding and the process of GA tuition assistance and stipends the same as currently utilized to attract and retain high-quality doctoral students.
 - a. Rationale: this directly supports our Carnegie One mission.
2. Separate the requirement of offering both tuition assistance and stipend to a master's Graduate Assistant. Tuition assistance could be offered for as many hours needed with no stipend coverage depending on what's needed to attract the student to UofM (**Graduate Tuition Scholarship**) or a stipend for 5 to 20 hours of work paid hourly or monthly could be offered (**Graduate Student Worker**) or both at whatever level is needed to attract the student to UofM. Tuition assistance could require weekly service component based on needs of the department.
 - a. Rationale: this allows for the flexibility to offer truly outstanding students both stipend and tuition assistance while conserving funding to lesser amounts when not needed. Funding for some master's students is needed to have graduate level programs, help students with the cost, recruit the best students to UofM in a competitive field, and help us attract and retain faculty. Allows us to attract more student who pay for part of their tuition and fees.
 - b. Answer from Scholarship Office: **Graduate Tuition Scholarship** could be structured similar to our academic scholarships offered to first-time freshmen with Service Hour Component. We would need to work out logistics of collecting the data to be centralized within the Graduate School and communicated to the Scholarship Office. We would standardize framework and process were possible.

c. Could the tuition scholarship be support fully by the department or combination of department/central funding? Please refer to chart below:

Current Structure				
	Percent Covered from Central	Resident Amount	Non-Resident Amount	International Amount
Resident				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)		\$		
Non-Resident				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)			\$	
Non-Resident Tuition Differential (\$ 192 per credit hour)	100%		\$192	
International				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)				\$
International Tuition Differential (\$384 per credit hour)	100%			\$384

Brainstorming (Tiered Approach)				
	Percent Covered from Central	Resident	Non-Resident	International
Tier One				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)		\$	\$	\$
Tuition Differential (per credit hour)	100%	\$0	\$192	\$384
Tier Two				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)		\$	\$	\$
Tuition Differential (per credit hour)	75%	\$0	\$144	\$288
Tier Three				
Departmental Component (Amount determined by Department)		\$	\$	\$
Tuition Differential (per credit hour)	50%	\$0	\$96	\$192

d. Answer from UofM's Tax Accountant Ms. Laurie Whiteside: Tax implications will vary from student to student depending on their citizenship, tax treaty and type of income. Whether it is a service obligation or work obligation anything over tuition and books is subject to taxation.

There is no difference between service hours & work hours it is the benefit that is taxed not the hours, so if you increase a student's scholarship over his tuition and book (Qualified Expenses) due to the service hours it will still be eligible for taxation.

For Non-Resident Aliens. they would also be taxed at 14% for anything over tuition and books unless they fall under a tax treaty. In order to take advantage of the treaties the Non-Residents have to come to my office for treaty qualification. Resident Aliens are taxed as U. S. Citizens.

Here is the information from the IRS on what are Qualified and Unqualified Expenses:
Qualified Education Expenses for Education Credits: Qualified expenses are amounts paid for tuition, fees and other related expense for an eligible student that are required for enrollment or attendance at an eligible educational institution. You must pay the expenses for an academic period* that starts during the tax year or the first three months of the next tax year. Eligible expenses also include student activity fees you are required to pay to enroll or attend the school. For example, an activity fee that all students are required to pay to fund all on-campus student organizations and activities.

Expenses that Do Not Qualify: Even if you pay the following expenses to enroll or attend the school, the following are not qualified education expenses: Room and board, Insurance, Medical expenses (including student health fees), Transportation, Similar personal, living or family expenses. Depending on the students' tax situation after they file their taxes some of this may be refunded.

3. Adopt a minimum pay rate of \$10/hour for master's students when a stipend is involved, with a commitment to continue to increase and departments may offer more. This applies regardless of being paid monthly or hourly.
 - a. Rationale: Minimum wage is \$7.25/hour in Tennessee and graduate students have more skills and knowledge and we are hiring them because they are qualified and high performing students, thus their wage should be above minimum wage. To be more aligned the UofM minimum wage for staff on campus and revisited over time.
4. Encourage faculty and colleges/schools to elevate efforts to secure external and/or grant funding opportunities for master's students. These agreements should be arranged as needed to suit the funding sources' requirements.
 - a. Rationale: this allows departments who seek to increase their master's student funding to do so and benefits UofM with more students and more funding support for those students.
5. Related to UofM GA spending from funds provided by the Provost Office, continue the current trend to reduce spend on Master's GAs moving funds to doctoral levels in programs where doctoral degrees exist. This is in light of retaining funding for terminal master's programs.

Total Master's GA spend:		
Fall 2018 to Fall 2019	-7% tuition	-5% stipend

Fall 2019 (tuition \$2,320,598; stipend \$2,009,657) to Fall 2020 (tuition \$1,985,711; stipend \$1,511,971)	-14% tuition	-25% stipend
Total Numbers of Master's GAs:		
Fall 2018 (673) to Fall 2019 (617)	-8% GAs	
Fall 2019 (617) to Fall 2020 (433)	-30% GAs	
Total spend on Master's students of funds that comes from Provost Office GA funding:	\$3,497,682 of \$11,783,500 total or 30%	

- a. Rationale: this encourages the movement of funds to the doctoral level to support Carnegie One goals.
6. Encourage more doctoral programs to offer a master's on the way to the PhD. Fund students at a reduced rate during their master's coursework. If this is possible given coursework covered and if this works within the competitive landscape of that field of study.
 - a. Rationale: this encourages the movement of funds to the doctoral level to support Carnegie One goals.
 - b. *[Jennifer Beech and Mary Kyle to create a 'how to' document on this process] Question: Graduate School to help show how the process works.*
 7. Require all qualified (non-international students) graduate students offered a GA to apply for maximum financial aid by completing the FAFSA to obtain Work Study funding. Offer assistance on how to apply.
 - a. Rationale: optimize the use of federal aid in lieu of UofM funds.
 8. Related to UofM GA spending from funds provided by the Provost Office, create an OIR dashboard of the percentage (%) of fee-paying master's students in each department, percentage (%) of students in research positions, percentage (%) of students by categories illustrating how GA offers increase diversity of student population for that field. Data need to be reviewed by departments to ensure it matches reality and work with OIR if there are any inconsistencies.
 - a. Rationale: enhances visibility of data and the opportunity to discuss any data discrepancy while monitoring how programs are doing regarding meeting goals of the use of these funds.
 9. Related to UofM GA spending from funds provided by the Provost Office, establish that across departments, or college/school if no departments exist, receiving UofM GA master's funding needs to maintain an average revenue stream (grant funded, self-funded, or donor funded, etc.) from master's students with the goal of 10% within the next three academic years, working toward 50% within five year. For every 100% level of funding, one fee-paying student is needed to meet the 50% average.
 - a. Rationale: tuition is a real cost and we need fee-paying students to help us offset the costs of the university. By using a percentage-based approach, this offers units the flexibility to manage their use of UofM funds to attract outstanding students while balancing this with fee-paying students who help cover operational costs.

10. Related to UofM GA spending from funds provided by the Provost Office, maintain that across departments, or college/school if no departments exist, ensure that for the pool of students with GA allocated dollars (\$), with the goal of 50% within the next three academic years, working toward at least 80% of the students are in research-oriented positions. For graduate students to teach, encourage stipend only funding, adjunct funding, or student worker funds be used. Given there is professional value to the student teaching for 1-2 semester, then thereafter the value becomes diminishing, and thus students discontinue teaching.
 - a. Rationale: by assigning students to research roles, Carnegie One is supported via research spend.
 - b. *Question: Talk with a couple programs (e.g., English and World Lang.) on impact to offer courses*
11. Encourage departments that the work that a student is doing for their GA is related to their field of study and is a resume builder. We would encourage supervisors to monitor work hours and maintain a student work log where needed.
 - a. Rationale: need to ensure the experience is in the best interest of the student and is a productive use of UofM funds
12. Emphasize the opportunity for departments to focus on utilizing master's GA funding to enhance diversity of the student population for that field.
 - a. Rationale: this encourages departments to increase diversity across UofM supporting underrepresented populations of students.
13. Work with support units to partner with departments in order to offer service-oriented GAs to those departments would like to attract to their programs and where the student has an aptitude and interest in the work.
14. Consider moving unused funds (carry forwards) from GA balances to places needed (e.g., we have 9 doctoral students who lost their funding this year and are searching for funds to help them).
15. Ensure GAs funded in terminal master's programs either have a path to a UofM doctoral degree, are performing research-oriented work, or aligned with strategic needs of the university.
16. Acknowledge the impact of funding changes on top ranked master's programs.
17. Work with HR and Accounting to ensure all changes are in line with the Fair Labor Standards Act (<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/whd/flsa>). Logistics need to be addressed of how all these changes are implemented smoothly with sufficient lead time.