

University Senate of Michigan Technological University

Teaching and Graduate Assistantships: Creation, Funding, and Allocation ([Proposal 8-94](#))

Senate Policy 111.1

Funds which currently are allocated to the Graduate School to support GTAs and to pay tuition for these students should be divided into two parts.

One part should be retained by the Graduate School to be administered by the Dean of the Graduate School in consultation with the Graduate Council. Positions supported by these funds will be called graduate assistantships (GAs). The allocation of GAs will be made by the Dean of the Graduate School in consultation with the Graduate Council in such a way as to meet Graduate School and research goals. GAs will, in general, have teaching duties.

The remaining portion of the current funds should be transferred into academic departments to fund teaching assistants (TAs) as part of the normal General Fund budgeting process. The department heads will include the number of TAs needed in their yearly budget requests. This resource will be allocated by the Deans in conjunction with the Provost as part of the same process that is used to request staff and faculty. Requests for TAs will be based on instructional needs only. Since the decision of how many TAs to request will be made in concert with other instructional staffing issues, the tradeoffs should be straightforward.

The tuition for both GAs and TAs will be included in their respective budget allocations. The number of TAs allocated should be such that departments will not need to hire extra TA support to meet their teaching obligations. Departments are responsible for the tuition of any TAs paid for by individual departments above and beyond the number that are allocated during the budgetary process.

PROPOSAL BACKGROUND

Goals

Graduate School and research goals include an increase in graduate student numbers to 1700, an increase in federally funded research dollars to \$30 million, and an increase in overall proportion of graduate students at MTU to 25% by 2003.

Subcommittee Charge

The GTA Allocation Subcommittee was charged with developing a method for allocating the graduate teaching assistant (GTA) positions at Michigan Technological University. There are currently 126 GTA positions and 15 fellowships administered by the Graduate School. The subcommittee was asked to take into account the dual nature of the GTA position as a resource for both covering teaching obligations and for supporting campus-wide research via graduate student support.

Definition of Problem

The Subcommittee summarized the two roles of the GTA as follows:

1. Covering Teaching Obligations

Graduate teaching assistants are appropriately used to cover teaching obligations of the University. In this role these assistants may give lectures, supervise laboratories, grade, and hold office hours.

The GTA who is fulfilling a teaching obligation is therefore a substitute for a faculty member. The decision to cover a specific teaching obligation using a GTA is rightfully made at the department level by considering the demands of the position, faculty teaching loads, long-term versus short-term staffing needs, and teaching effectiveness.

2. Supporting Graduate Programs and Research

GTA's are necessarily graduate students and the allocation of a GTA may be made to support or strengthen a particular graduate program. In this role these assistants may also give lectures, supervise laboratories, grade, and hold office hours. GTA's justified on the basis of a department's research strength reduce the faculty teaching loads with the express purpose of supporting research.

The dual role of GTA's has partially led to the current difficulty in determining the proper allocation of these positions. There are departments with a demonstrable teaching-need for GTA's to cover laboratories or recitations. At the same time the faculty cannot grow graduate programs and meet the challenge of the new research vision for Michigan Tech without relief from instructional obligations.

A jurisdictional problem is encountered in creating an appropriate allocation scheme. This problem has come to the Graduate Council due to the consolidation of graduate teaching assistant funding in the Graduate School over the last few years. The Graduate Council is an elected body of faculty who advise the Vice Provost for Research and Dean of the Graduate School on matters pertaining to graduate study and research. Decisions concerning teaching-obligation GTA's are most appropriately addressed by Department Heads/Chairs, Deans, and the Provost since this type of staffing question involves tradeoffs between GTA's, faculty, and staff. The Graduate Council has neither information about nor experience with such tradeoffs.

Proposal Implementation

If the proposal is adopted, it will be necessary to decide how the existing GTA and tuition resources should be split between GAs and TAs. To address this question, the Subcommittee looked at the current allocation and agreed that approximately 45 to 65 of the GTA's currently allocated by the Graduate School are primarily supporting strong research programs, with the balance of 60 to 80 GTA's supporting instructional obligations. Taking into account that there is a need for an increase in research support at MTU, we selected 52 as the number of GTA positions to be converted into GAs. There are currently 15 fellowships administered by the Graduate School; the total of proposed GAs and current fellowships, 67, is currently 10% of the number of graduate students enrolled. Again considering that research support must increase if we are to meet our stated goals, the Subcommittee proposes that budget allocated to the Dean of the Graduate School for GA support should always be sufficient to cover stipends and tuition for at least 10% of the graduate student enrollment.

To arrive at an upper bound on the amount of GA support provided we propose that the Graduate School support students at a level which averages out over all programs to three to four quarters of graduate support for each Ph.D. student and half that level for masters students. This level of support will allow for a good deal of flexibility within graduate programs in the recruitment of graduate students. It will also encourage the development of outside sources of support for graduate students, without which growth in research is not possible. Using the above-proposed 4 quarters of support for each Ph.D. student as a starting place and taking 4 years as the minimum time for completion of a Ph.D. degree, we arrive at 25% as the upper bound of the number of graduate students at a given time who would be supported by the Graduate School. Since the masters degree typically takes half the time of the Ph.D., this estimate is valid for masters students as well.

Thus we have arrived at lower (10%) and upper (25%) bounds on the percentage of graduate students who will be supported as GAs in a given year. Taking into consideration the ambitious goals MTU has adopted concerning the growth of graduate and research programs, the Subcommittee proposes that 15% be adopted as the target percentage of graduate students supported by the Graduate School. Currently about 10% of graduate students are supported in this way; to increase to the 15% level the Graduate School must receive funds for stipend and tuition for 35 additional

graduate students. GAs will be awarded on the basis of research strength, but the students will, in general, have teaching duties.

Seventy four GTA positions would be converted to TA positions directly supported in departmental budgets. These are the current GTA positions which are supporting the teaching mission of departments with significant service loads. The Subcommittee proposes that 50 additional TA positions be added to this for a total of 124 TA positions to be allocated in the academic budget process. This course of action would address what the Subcommittee perceives to be a serious underfunding of TA positions in all departments.

Summary

The GTA Allocation Subcommittee proposes that the current GTA allocation dollars and the resources used to fund tuition and fees of graduate students be divided into two parts. The first part would consist of 67 graduate assistantships (GAs) administered by the Graduate School. It is proposed that 35 GAs be added to this number. The second part would consist of 74 TAs administered through the academic budget process. The subcommittee proposes that 50 TAs be added to this number. This plan addresses the current underfunding of student teaching assistantships by increasing the number of such positions by 68%. The plan also addresses the need for increased research in pursuit of graduate and research excellence by redirecting the emphasis by which 67 GA positions are allocated and by increasing the number of such positions by 52%. Enrollments are currently being managed at MTU in such a way as to decrease the undergraduate enrollment and increase the graduate enrollment. If these are the trends which are effected, the number of TAs can remain relatively stable at the levels proposed. The number of GAs, however, would need to increase with graduate enrollment in order to maintain the proposed 15% support level. We believe that this plan, while relatively modest due to budgetary constraints, addresses the important issues in graduate teaching allocations.

The plan calls for the addition of 85 new graduate support positions in the 1993/1994 school year.

Adopted by Senate: January 26, 1994

Approved by President: February 7, 1994