

October 26, 2022

MEMO:

From: Jim Spencer, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School
Roy Haggerty, Provost
To: Faculty and Graduate Students
Cc: Graduate Assistantship Management Implementation Working Group

Re: Institutional Graduate Assistantship Allocations Plan for LSU

In the Fall of 2021, Interim Provost and Interim CFO asked Jim Spencer to Chair a newly-formed LSU Graduate Assistant Management (GAM) Committee – additionally comprised of 2 College Deans, 2 Associate Deans (1 of an academic college and 1 of the Graduate School) and representatives of Office of Sponsored Projects, Human Resources Management, Budget and Planning, Accounting Services, and Information Technology Services - to assess institutional data and outline a new fiscal management system for the allocation of Graduate Assistants supported on unrestricted funds. The GAM Committee met throughout the academic year and submitted an outline of recommendations in March 2022.

At the beginning of the 2022-23 academic year, Provost Haggerty made the decision that the plan should be operationalized along a timeline to be implemented for Fiscal Year 2024, which begins July 1, 2023. Though much of the plan will come go in to effect on July 1, some parts of the plan will take a small number of years to be phased in.

The Broader Vision of Deliberate Investment in Graduate Education at LSU

Overall, we envision a more deliberate model for doctoral education (i.e., PhD and other terminal degrees such as the MFA) at LSU. Among the rationales for a stronger and more predictable capacity to allocate graduate resources strategically are the following:

- LSU's academic reputation will rise or fall based on its results in doctoral education and the related research, scholarship, and creative activity associated with it;
- LSU currently spends substantial financial resources on graduate assistantships (~\$40 million annually in unrestricted institutional funding), but is doing so without intentional deliberations on the extent to which these annual investments are advancing the institutional goals of LSU;
- To attract the best graduate students, LSU should have a standard baseline financial package for graduate stipends that is livable and competitive with our graduate peer institutions;
- Increasing the total financial support for doctoral education can be a focus once we have a system in place that incentivizes scholarly excellence and other strategic goals and a system that can track effectiveness at achieving these goals;
- An essential part of achieving this level of strategic investment in doctoral education will require periodic review of outcomes related to the allocation of Graduate Assistantships.

Goals of the Recommendations Submitted by the GAM Committee

The recommendations defined below achieve the following:

- Setting the goal that LSU will offer the most competitive minimum guaranteed stipends in the SEC, even after accounting for cost-of-living adjustments.
- It will create a standard expectation of 4 years fully funded assistantships (57% of maximum duration).
- It will more seamlessly integrate LSU's financial investments in doctoral education with the growth of undergraduate teaching responsibilities.
- It will provide a tracking mechanism to ensure that institutional funding for doctoral education is protected and allocated correctly – a system that currently does not exist at LSU;
- It will incentivize faculty external awards that support GAs transitioning off of unrestricted funds.

GAM Committee Recommendations for Graduate Finance at LSU

According to data estimates collected by the GAM Committee, in FY 2020-2021 LSU invested a total of \$42.2 million in about 1,750 (headcount) Graduate Assistant stipends (\$24.3M) and waivers (\$17.9M) on institutional unrestricted funds. Including only the fall headcount for academic colleges, in Fall 2020, LSU supported 1,207 GAs on institutional unrestricted funds, compared to 1,350 in Fall 2016. To model out a system moving forward we prioritized keeping total cost under the current \$40 million level, and to achieve that we use a working average of 1,150 Fall GA positions supported on unrestricted funds, so that our proposed following actions are roughly budget-neutral compared to FY21. These recommendations are for illustration purposes only, and a more detailed accounting should be conducted separately as a model to begin FY23 budgeting.

- 1) Number of GA Positions: **Eliminate Service Assistant GA positions on institutional unrestricted funds (183 in Fall 2020)**, which frees up both stipends and tuition waivers, thereby freeing up about \$2 million in tuition waivers, and at least \$1.98 million in stipend amounts (this is based on minimum stipend amounts of \$10,800, so it is a conservative figure).
- 2) Stipends: Establish a **minimum stipend amount for GAs at \$23,000** for 9 month, 20 hr/wk positions (this includes a base of \$20,500 for work related payments and \$2,500 for student potential health insurance expenses). If a student does not need to purchase health insurance (e.g., they are included on their parent's plan) the minimum stipend would still be \$23,000.
- 3) Aggregate Stipend Cost: 1,150 GA positions at \$23,000 requires a minimum of \$26.5 million in stipends, and in FY 21, LSU paid approximately \$24.3 million in GA stipends on unrestricted funds, **so taking these actions will not cost the university money in**

stipends. It will, however, **require reducing the total number of GA positions by 260** from its Fall 2016-2020 average or approximately 150 from the Fall 2020 count.

- 4) Aggregate Waiver Cost: 1,150 GA positions with an average \$12,000 tuition waiver requires a minimum of \$13.8 million in tuition waivers.
- 5) Net Personnel “Cost”: in Fall 2020, there was headcount of 1,298 GAs (TA+RA+SA) supported on unrestricted funds. Under these recommendations, there is a baseline of 1,150 (9-month, 20hr/wk) GAs. Although the headcount loss is 148, the actual loss will be somewhat different from this number due to calculation errors associated with headcount versus FTE numbers, which are not directly comparable.

In sum, standardizing the minimum GA stipends at \$23,000 and eliminating or converting Service Assistants to TAs, eliminates about 150 GA positions from the Fall 2020 count and maintains the current level of TA’s and RA’s. Under this plan, LSU’s total number of Fall GAs supported on unrestricted funds would be about 1,150. The new funding model also assumes that **the minimum stipend is also the “fixed” amount of institutional spending per GA, and that departments/colleges would need to fund increases over the minimum of \$23,000 on other funds.** It will remain to be determined whether exceeding the \$23,000 figure can be achieved through cost-savings on other unrestricted expenditures (e.g., unfilled faculty positions).

Fixing the annual number of GAs funded on unrestricted funds requires clear criterion for allocating institutionally supported GAs, each of which costs a standard rate of (\$12,000+\$23,000=) \$35,000. The **Committee recommends that each budget cycle 85% of total funds are allocated to TAs, and 15% to RAs across LSU A&M,** based on the following criteria prioritized in descending order.

Eligibility and Prioritization

- 1) *Teaching Assistants (\$22.5 million in stipends and \$11.7 million in waivers; 978 TA positions) criteria in descending order:*
 - a) Eligibility
 - i) PhD or MFA (or similar terminal Master’s degree) student;
 - ii) Serves as on-campus Instructor of Record / Instructional Support in the first four years as an LSU PhD/MFA (or other eligible) student.
 - b) Teaching Priorities:
 - i) General Education courses;
 - ii) Laboratory classes
 - iii) Lower division service courses (those with significant enrollment outside the major);
 - iv) Undergraduate credit hour production associated with majors.
 - c) Incentivized, performance based criteria
 - i) Retention of graduate students through completion of degree within time limits.

- 2) Research Assistants (\$3.9 million in stipends and \$2.1 million in waivers; 172 RA positions) allocation based on criteria in descending order:
 - a) Eligibility
 - i) Startup for recruiting new faculty
 - ii) Assisting with research equipment in shared research facilities
 - b) Incentivized, performance based criteria
 - i) Departmental success in conversion rate of internal research funding to extramural/federal funding;
 - ii) Retention of graduate students through completion of degree within time limits.

Remaining Questions to be addressed by Office of Academic Affairs:

The recommendations defined above result in a number of questions that the GAM Committee was not in a position to answer, but the Committee believes they are important questions that need to be answered and steps planned out before the above reallocations can be implemented. The Committee believes that the Office of Academic Affairs is in the best position to do so.

- 1) Determine
 - a) which graduate programs are eligible for GA allocation on unrestricted funds;
 - b) which programs should be allocated a minimum number of GA positions from the pool to maintain “comprehensive university” status at the doctoral level;
 - c) policy for “Grandfathering” Existing Commitments to Current Graduate Assistants
- 2) Establish
 - a) baseline number and process for allocating free-standing tuition waivers to incentivize recruitment.
 - b) mechanism for programs to pay tuition from a range of alternative funding sources;
 - c) a process for colleges to make up for the lost Service Assistantships (n=183) regarding needed work that these GA positions provided.
 - i) According to recent numbers, this will be most important for units reporting to the Office of Academic Affairs, College of Human Sciences and Education, E.J. Ourso College of Business, and the College of Art & Design.
- 3) The Committee also recommends that:
 - a) ALL assistantships conform to the \$23,000 minimum stipend regardless of funding source, however this will require a substantial review of impact and the policies governing tuition remission recovery to external awards vetted by a different committee.
 - b) proportional tuition waivers should be explored.
 - c) A method to account for student contact hours by GAs for programs with significant U/G support not quantified by SCH should be explored;
 - d) A mechanism of RAs supporting arts infrastructure on ROI model be explored.
- 4) Communicate

a) that ineligible programs can fund graduate student stipends without tuition waivers.