



Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School

Graduate Stipends Increase Initiation Plan

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At LSU A&M, we seek to provide stipends for terminal degree (TD) graduate students at or exceeding the cost of living. These students not only disseminate knowledge, but also *generate* new knowledge. Furthermore, these students often work for several years, sometimes supporting families in the process. Our goal is to reach stipends equivalent to a living wage, and the memo below outlines plans for the first steps to make LSU stipends for TD students the highest in the SEC.

The following Initiation plan for increasing minimum graduate stipends has been developed as the first of several institutional steps to increase the financial support that LSU provides to its Graduate Assistants¹ on unrestricted funds to improve the student quality of life, increase competitiveness of its graduate programs, support its undergraduate teaching mission, and enhance its mission to produce top-tier scholarship.

This Initiation Plan includes four items below (A-D) that narrowly address what will happen in FY24, with implications for the longer term goal of elevating all of LSU's terminal-degree-seeking Graduate Assistants to a minimum level of \$23,000 for a 9-month, 20 hour/week FTE rate.¹ It also defines a process for determining how best to support non-terminal-degree-seeking Graduate Assistants and current GAs employed for 12 months for FY25 and beyond. While this Initiation Plan only addresses what colleges need to budget for FY24, the overall goal is for LSU to fully fund "terminal degree" Graduate Students for up to 5 years, and will require multi-year planning and will involve both restricted and unrestricted funds. This Initiation Plan does not specify beyond FY24. Finally, discussions are underway, but no decision has yet been made regarding health care for Graduate Assistants; it is not intended that health insurance costs will come out of the minimum stipend, though this may be the case until a better option is developed. Additional plan details will be provided in February, 2023 so that offer letters can be provided to prospective students.

Items A and B below directly address the conditions for allocating unrestricted funds for graduate stipends to existing and incoming students. Item C addresses the plan for determining criteria on funding existing non-terminal-degree-seeking students. Item D addresses the related issue of how to plan for Graduate Assistants on external funds.

¹ To ensure that workloads and compensation rates are comparable across a wide variety of current practices, all specification of Graduate Assistant positions is based on a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) of 9 months work at 20 hours/week rate.

A. Minimum Graduate Assistant Stipends Beginning FY24 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024):

- 1) All returning Terminal Degree (TD) students paid from unrestricted funds will receive a minimum stipend of \$23,000 on unrestricted funds and retain a 20-hour per week position (FTE) for 9 months²;
- 2) Those returning TD students with documented (or substantially implied) commitments above the \$23,000 FTE rate will have their current stipend commitments grandfathered in under the unrestricted funds;
- 3) Returning Non-Terminal-Degree (NTD) students paid from unrestricted funds and who have outstanding commitments from LSU will have stipends at the FY23 amount (no increase);

B. Recruitment and Admissions for Fall 2023 and beyond:

- 1) All Fall 2023 (and beyond) TD admissions receiving an FTE Graduate Assistantship paid from unrestricted funds will receive a stipend of \$23,000;
- 2) NTD graduate students applying to programs designated as “special status” (see C.2, below) can be admitted at FY23 stipend levels, but commitments made beyond one year must be approved by the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School;
- 3) For Fall 2023, colleges and schools headed by a dean will be allocated a budget for incoming TD students based on the lower of FY19 and FY21’s number of Graduate Assistant FTEs on unrestricted funding;
- 4) Beginning Fall 2024, additional considerations for budget allocation for GAs will include at least (a) graduation rates for TD students, with higher graduation rates being more favorable; and (b) spending from LSU Foundation accounts available to support graduate assistants, with higher spending being favorable and unspent funds being unfavorable.

C. Degree Status Petitions, January 2023 – September 2023:

- 1) Programs can petition the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School and the Office of Academic Affairs to reclassify their program as a TD if it is not already in the status defined below; it is expected that such petitions will develop clear evidence for making this case, and reclassification will be limited to a very small number of programs;
- 2) Programs supporting NTD graduate assistantships on unrestricted funds can petition the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School for “special status” based on the unique role in advancing LSU’s mission that the NTD students play. It is anticipated that such petitions will need to develop clear evidence for making

² The large majority of Graduate Assistants on unrestricted funds at LSU are on 9-month assistantship, with about 200 being on 12-month assistantships. Those current 12-month assistantships currently on unrestricted funds will have the option of receiving the 9-month, 20-hour per week position at \$23,000 until a clearer policy on 12-month positions is determined. At this FTE rate, a 12-month Graduate Assistant should be paid $[(\$23,000/9)*(12)]=$ \$30,667.

this case, and may include clear plans for how unrestricted funding will leverage other resources. Special status will be granted to a very small number of programs.

D. Restricted Funds Expenditures for January 2023 and beyond:

- 1) All Graduate Assistants in TD programs budgeted on grant proposals should budget at the \$23,000 FTE rate, and anticipate an appropriate level of inflation and the potential for a required healthcare benefit paid by the grant currently estimated at \$4000 per 12-months coverage;
- 2) NTD Research Assistants budgeted on grant proposals do not need to conform to the \$23,000 FTE rate;
- 3) All current awards will have funder-approved Graduate Assistant FTE rates grandfathered in to their initially approved rates until those awards are completed;
- 4) PI's are encouraged to rebudget current awards to meet the \$23,000 FTE rate, where possible, and include the above insurance costs if possible.

N.B.:

Terminal Degrees: all research degrees, including PhD, DDes, DMA, and other "Doctoral" degrees; all Masters of Fine Arts degrees.

Data Needs: Deans and unit leaders will need to document, and confirm the following for students on Graduate Assistant stipends using unrestricted funds: 1) number of returning TD students -calculated as an FTE - for Fall 2023; 2) number of returning NTD students – calculated as an FTE - including the average FY23 stipend for its 9-month, 50% FTE. Joyce Whitfield may be able to provide estimates of these numbers to be vetted by the college deans. Based on these budgets, the Pinkie Gordon Lane Graduate School and the Office of Academic Affairs will determine the FTE Graduate Assistantship positions to allocate for covering the new costs of 1) returning GAs; and 2) newly-enrolled GAs in Fall 2023.

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