

Department of Engineering Physics Graduate Assistant Rate Schedule (Updated for FY24)

Conduct of the Department's core mission of research and education relies on graduate student assistants. The multi-level stipend structure defined in this document recognizes the central role of our graduate assistants by improving transparency in their rates of pay and in the process and restrictions on adjusting rates of pay. Establishing guidelines for initial appointment levels also enhances competitiveness with peer institutions for recruiting purposes.

Rationale

- A. The Department's stipend levels for FY24 follow the College of Engineering's tiered structure.
- B. Establishing a standard entry research assistant (RA) rate that is above the University minimum, and identifying higher levels that are appropriate for top candidates, improves competitiveness with peer institutions when recruiting students.
- C. The Department recognizes the role and responsibilities of its faculty in obtaining and managing funds for research and in supervising the work of research and project assistants.
- D. Adjustment of a student's stipend rate within a multi-level structure provides a means for rewarding excellent performance. RAs in the PhD program will typically advance one level during the course of their graduate work, and exceptional students may advance more than one level. Reduction in an appointment percentage can be used to provide additional incentive when necessary.
- E. The Department recognizes the diversity in funding opportunities across the research activities conducted by its faculty. Fairness does not imply uniformity among the Department's research areas.
- F. Feedback from an advisor to a student assistant is an important component of the student's education, and it benefits career progression, independent of any level adjustment that might be proposed. The reasons for a stipend-level or appointment-percentage adjustment must be discussed with the student when providing feedback, and the advisor must document the reasons, as described below. Reasons for a level increase include (but are not limited to) publication of a peer-reviewed journal article, invitation to speak at a professional conference, demonstration of leadership within a research group, subject knowledge that supports advanced teaching capacity, receiving a teaching award, progress toward completing a thesis, and mastery of an essential technique.
- G. The role of the Department's Graduate Performance Review Committee (GPRC) is to ensure fairness and transparency in stipend-level and appointment-percentage adjustments, and it will regularly review requests for changes and the associated justifications provided by advisors.
- H. Any appointment can be supplemented with merit- or need-based fellowships and with cash awards that are based on academic achievement. The Department may also use fellowships and/or cash awards as additional incentives when recruiting.
- I. Students are encouraged to apply for external fellowships as recognition of their accomplishments and abilities. During their fellowship period, their award may exceed the CoE maximum. A student who needs additional time to complete his or her degree beyond the duration of an external fellowship may be reappointed to one of the standard RA levels, commensurate with performance documented by the student's advisor.

Procedures

The standard RA rate will be used for the majority of initial RA offers. To attract top candidates, faculty members may choose to make RA offers at one of the higher levels. In atypical circumstances, faculty may choose the probationary level for initial offers in cases where a candidate's application record would not, otherwise, merit an offer. However, in all cases where a faculty member would like to extend an RA offer at a level other than Level 1, the faculty member will first contact the department chair for his or her approval.

Only Levels 1 and 3 will be used for TA appointments. The first TA level will be used for TA offers to new graduate students and most subsequent TA appointments. In cases where the TA handles most of the responsibilities for conducting a course, the TA will be appointed at the higher TA level.

At least once per year, faculty will hold individual performance reviews with each of their graduate assistants. The faculty member will review expectations, as well as progress, and identify areas where improvements are needed. Faculty will prepare a brief written record for each student, which is satisfied when completing the College's Graduate Online Assessment and Achievement Learning System (GOAALS). In cases where performance does not meet expectations, the student will be given the opportunity to address the identified issues before a decrease in appointment percentage is recommended. If the issues are not addressed within a reasonable amount of time, the faculty member will communicate the concern to the student in writing. Faculty will submit the records that recommend an increase in level or a decrease in appointment percentage to the GPRC and to the Department's Payroll and Benefits Specialist. Students having concerns about any reduction may submit a written appeal to the GPRC.

The GPRC will meet on a biannual basis (before the end of each semester) to audit level changes and performance-review documentation. The GPRC will contact the faculty member for more information or follow-up action if an audit raises concerns with respect to fairness or transparency. The GPRC will review student appeals and make recommendations to the chair of the Department on an as-needed basis. The GPRC will also make recommendations to the chair of the Department regarding how to improve fairness across the department and competitiveness with other institutions.

The rate plan applies to all graduate assistants supported through the Department, regardless of their degree program.

Rate Plan

The Engineering Physics graduate assistantship rate structure has the following five levels.

	Rate Definition	Monthly pay 50% appointment	Annual pay 50% RA/PA appointment	Academic pay 50% TA appointment
Level 4	Research Assistant 4 (RA4)	\$3,033	\$37,000	
Level 3	Research & Teaching Assistant 3 (RA3, TA3)	\$2,875	\$34,500	\$25,875
Level 2	Research Assistant 2 (RA2)	\$2,658	\$31,900	
Level 1	Standard Research & Teaching Assistant (RA1, TA1)	\$2,583	\$31,000	\$23,250
Level 0	Probationary Research Assistant (RA0)	\$2,416	\$29,000	

The purpose of the different levels is outlined in the following:

Research Assistant Levels

- **RA0** – The RA0 level is the probationary level for research assistants. It is used for initial appointments in cases where there are questions regarding a candidate's readiness for graduate study. It is also used for experienced RAs where extra encouragement is warranted due to insufficient progress. The stipend rate is tied to the University minimum.
- **RA1** – The RA1 level is considered the standard level, and it is commensurate with historical 50% RA appointments in the Department after adjusting to improve competitiveness with respect to recruiting. Most RA candidates are recruited at RA1.
- **RA2** – The RA2 level is an incentive level, and it is commensurate with historical incentive levels in the Department. Students who continue their studies after completing terms as Wisconsin Distinguished Graduates or Advanced Opportunity Fellows will have RA2 appointments.
- **RA3** – The RA3 level is a second incentive level that is between RA2 and the College maximum.
- **RA4** – The RA4 level is the College maximum and is commensurate with the national NSF fellowship stipend.

Teaching Assistant Levels

- **TA1** – This is the standard rate for teaching assistants.
- **TA3** – In exceptional circumstances, a student may be appointed at the TA3 level. TA3 appointments come with high levels of responsibility for conducting a course. Only senior graduate students who have relevant knowledge of the course subject from their own research experience are qualified for TA3 appointments.