Department of Mathematics
Simon Fraser University

Graduate Student Funding Policy

Approved on April 14, 2015

The Department of Mathematics is committed to providing financial support to all of its MSc and PhD graduate students. The funding package that the Department provides to graduate students may consist of a Research Assistantship (RA) (which typically comes from the senior supervisor and derives from external funding sources such as NSERC, Mitacs, etc.), Teaching Assistantship (TA), Graduate Fellowship (GF) (which for the purposes of this policy also includes the President’s PhD Scholarship), or a combination of the above.

The following funding policy will be applied to all new graduate students admitted during or after Fall 2015 semester. The Department will also strive to apply the GF and TA support level as specified below to current MSc and PhD students. There is no change in the RA support for existing MSc and PhD students as specified in their admission letters.

1. For each new graduate student, at the time of admission, the Department will commit the following funding amounts:

   **For MSc students**: $18,000 per year for two years, subject to satisfactory performance. This funding is based on a minimum RA or GF support of $6,500/year, plus TA support of approximately $11,500/year from the Department, provided that the student meets the Department’s GF and TA criteria and maintains a satisfactory performance in their TA and RA duties. A typical funding package from the Department over two years includes one full GF (currently valued at $6,250) and 4 semesterly TA appointments.

   **For PhD students**: $20,000 per year for four years, subject to satisfactory performance. This funding includes a minimum RA or GF support of $6,500/year, plus TA support of $13,500/year from the Department, provided that the student meets the Department’s GF and TA criteria and maintains a satisfactory performance in their TA and RA duties. A typical funding package from the Department over four years includes 2 GFs (currently valued at $6,250 each) and 8 semesterly TA appointments.

   In exceptional circumstances, funding may vary slightly from the promised amounts in any given academic year as long as the yearly average is at least equal to the promised minimum funding level.

   In order to receive the above-specified TA and GF support, MSc and PhD students must apply for the TA and GF whenever they are eligible. A typical semester’s workload for a full TA appointment (corresponding to approximately 5.17 base units) is 205 hours over 14 weeks, with each base unit corresponding at present to a total salary amount of $1,107 for an MSc student or $1,312 for a PhD student.

2. If the graduate student TA receives an unsatisfactory TA evaluation from either the class instructor or students enrolled in the class, then the TA portion of the Department’s support may be reduced until the underlying performance issues are addressed.

3. Faculty members are encouraged to promise a higher RA portion to the student if sufficient research grant funds are available. However, the guaranteed TA support from the Department will remain the same.

4. If a graduate student receives more than the promised TA amount from the Department in any given academic year ([$11,500 for MSc, $13,500 for PhD]) then the senior supervisor should still ensure that the amount provided from RA and GF is at least equal to the minimum level specified above. On the other hand, students are expected to devote sufficient time for their research and so taking on an excessively high TA load is discouraged; to this end, the senior supervisor’s approval is required for the student’s TA assignment each semester.

5. If a graduate student is awarded a major domestic or international scholarship with an annual value of $14,000 or above (such as an NSERC Postgraduate Scholarship or SFU Major Entrance Scholarship)
then the guaranteed amounts from the Department may be reduced for the duration of the scholarship, as long as the total of the major scholarship and Department funds are at least as much as the minimum amounts specified under Article 1. Such students may be eligible for other university scholarships such as the Provost Prize of Distinction or the Provost International Fellowship (currently $5,000 each). The supervisor is still encouraged to top up the scholarship with RA support if possible (keeping in mind that NSERC Discovery Grant funds cannot be used to supplement NSERC scholarships). Students with major scholarships have lower priority for TA and GF funding administered by the Department; however, once the major scholarship expires the student’s priority returns to normal.

6. The Department of Mathematics does not typically admit graduate students who are either self-funded or full-time employees of external organizations, save in exceptional circumstances. Any external employment (part-time or full-time) must be declared to both the senior supervisor and the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC). Because TA and RA positions both come with expectations in terms of hours dedicated to these activities, the guaranteed support levels may be reduced for those students with external employment.

7. Owing to current university policy, the Department cannot provide tuition waivers as part of its admission offers, and so prospective students should keep in mind that tuition fees must be paid out of their salary.

8. If during the course of a student’s program of study the GSC approves a change of supervisor, then the student may remain in the program for up to two semesters while searching for a new supervisor. During this time, the GSC Co-chair will serve as interim supervisor. The student is still eligible for guaranteed TA support, subject to the conditions in Article 1 above. If the supervisory change is approved by GSC during a semester that the student is supported by an RA, then the student and supervisor are expected to abide by the terms of any ongoing employment contract. If an RA appointment was promised during a future period within the two-semester window and the supervisor is no longer willing to provide RA funding, then the GSC will work to secure equivalent funding from other departmental, university or grant sources. If a new supervisor is identified within two semesters, then they are not required to provide any guaranteed level of RA support although they are certainly encouraged to do so. In case the new supervisor is not able to provide funding, every effort will be made to secure an alternate source of RA funding. If, on the other hand, the student is still unable to find a new supervisor after two semesters, then they will be required to withdraw from the graduate program.

9. An RA is an employment contract between student and supervisor and is governed by SFU Policy R50.02 on “Employment of Personnel Funded from Research”.

References

Financial Support: Teaching Assistantships, Department of Mathematics, SFU. http://www.sfu.ca/math/graduate/financial-support/teachingassistantships.html

Base Unit Information, Employment: Hiring Priority, Department of Mathematics, SFU. http://www.sfu.ca/math/employment/hiring_priority.html