

Graduate Student Funding Task Force Report



The Graduate Student Funding Task Force was established by Dean Tom Reynolds in fall 2017 to examine the state of graduate student funding at UNC Charlotte. It was also tasked to make recommendations on how the university might better ensure sustainable and scalable funding for graduate students and make more effective and efficient use of institutional and extramural resources.

During the 2017-18 academic year, the Task Force met regularly and collected, reviewed and synthesized relevant data to assess the nature and scope of current graduate student funding at the university. It also reviewed best practices and supporting data, and conducted a series of open forums to hear concerns and solicit ideas and feedback from UNC Charlotte students, faculty and staff. The Task Force's effort was conducted within the context of a mutually agreed upon set of goals and principles to guide its work and discussions.

Three critical themes prevailed throughout the effort. First is that graduate student support should be comprehensive. It should include compensation packages that consist of a graduate assistantship stipend as well as tuition and fee support; transparency and consistency of work expectations and supervision; and opportunities for professional development. Second is that such overall support should be extended to both masters and doctoral students. Third is that compensation packages should, at a minimum, help ensure graduate student well-being and productivity by being set at thresholds that approximate a living wage in the context of Mecklenburg County. Key findings related to assistantship stipends and workload, tuition support, and the research agenda drove the creation of interconnected recommendations to help build a new model of graduate student funding at the University that should be both sustainable and scalable for the foreseeable future.

While we recognize that the various components of graduate student support are interrelated, for the sake of clarity we provide below an overview of our key findings and overarching recommendations grouped into two primary categories: Graduate Assistantships and Tuition and Fee Support. Details of these and other findings, and of our specific recommendations, follow in the body of the report along with supporting evidence and commentary.

Graduate Assistantships (GAs)

Key Findings:

1. Management of institutionally-funded GAs is decentralized, resulting in a diversity of funding models and differential policies governing student eligibility, duration of support, stipend levels, and workload.
2. Most graduate assistantships are funded with institutional dollars.
3. The relative contribution of extramural funds to graduate student support has declined in recent years, even within the context of increased research dollars.
4. GA stipends are far below national averages, and stipends for many students are below the poverty line; nearly all programs fail to provide stipends that are above a living wage.

5. Lack of competitive stipends makes it difficult for programs to attract and retain exemplary students.

Key Recommendations:

1. Institutionally-funded GAs should be created and managed as “positions” so that objective elements, such as the following, can be identified: stipend (compensation) and fringe benefits (health insurance, fees, resident tuition, non-resident tuition differential); the nature, scope, and level of duties and responsibilities; the relationship of the position to other positions in a department/college; and the supervisor of record.
2. Stipends for new and existing GA positions should be managed by the colleges/administrative units, regardless of the funding source.
3. Establish a shared Graduate Assistant workload policy common across colleges/administrative units.
4. Establish a GA baseline compensation of \$18K per academic year for both PhD and Master’s students, for 20 hours of work per week, for a nine month salary.
5. Benchmark the baseline GA stipend annually against national data and against competitive stipends as is appropriate per program.

Tuition and Fee Support

Key Findings:

1. Enrollment growth and the addition of new graduate programs has strained the resources available to support students in existing programs, particularly at the master’s level.
2. GASP funds have not increased proportionally with increases in graduate enrollment or tuition.
3. Student stipends have not kept up with increases in the estimated cost of attendance, especially fees and health insurance and program-specific tuition increments.
4. Proportion of GASP funds awarded to non-resident students has increased substantially.
5. The policy that faculty include resident tuition, health insurance, and fees to support graduate assistants in grant applications complicates and, in some cases, disincentivizes extramural granting.

Key Recommendations:

1. New graduate programs should be launched only after adequate and appropriate funding and resources to support students in those programs have been identified.
2. All institutionally funded, full-time GA positions must include resident tuition + health insurance + fee coverage in addition to the stipend for both master’s and doctoral students.
3. Central funds will provide full tuition, health insurance, and fees for all extramurally funded full-time GA positions.
4. Budgets to support increases in stipend, tuition and fees must be appropriated annually to support increases in costs and additional enrollments.

Pivotal to sustaining the effort of the Graduate Student Funding Task Force is the creation of a Graduate Council Subcommittee on Funding and Fellowships that will guide, analyze, oversee and communicate policies and procedures that support graduate student funding. This is an important next step irrespective of which recommendations from this report are adopted or tabled. Also critical is the engagement of the broader University community to support the professional development of graduate

students. Continued progress towards effectively supporting high quality graduate programs at UNC Charlotte and meeting the University's goal to be North Carolina's Urban Research University relies on the collaboration and transparency of all parties involved in graduate education.

TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP

Co-Chairs

Rick Tankersley, College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Johnna Watson, Graduate School

Members

Jack Cathey, Belk College of Business
Claudia Flowers, College of Education
Benjamin Gordon, Student Representative, Biology, PhD Program
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Richard Leeman, Faculty Council Chair
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FUNDING TASK FORCE AND REPORT

As a result of growing concern that UNC Charlotte could not effectively recruit and retain exemplary graduate students with insufficient financial support, in 2003 the University convened its initial Task Force on Graduate Student Support. The resulting report, *A Strategic Plan for Developing a Competitive Model of Graduate Student Funding Support*, laid a foundation for UNC Charlotte's current structure and approach to graduate student funding. Most notably, it led to the establishment of the Graduate Assistant Support Plan (GASP), which was implemented in 2005. Since that time, the University has committed substantial resources to recruit and retain the best and brightest students to our graduate programs. Over the last decade as UNC Charlotte has emerged as North Carolina's Urban Research University, graduate education has grown steadily at both the master's and doctoral levels. However, enrollment growth and the addition of new graduate programs has strained the resources available to support students in existing programs, particularly at the master's level. In order to preserve and enhance the quality of our graduate student body, and to continue to increase its size and diversity, we must strive to improve and expand support for graduate study.

Given the dramatic change in landscape since the original Graduate Student Funding Task Force provided its recommendations, a second Graduate Student Funding Task Force was established by Dean Tom Reynolds in fall 2017. This group was charged to examine the state of graduate student funding at the University and to make recommendations surrounding two critical aspects graduate student support:

1. Secure sustainable and scalable funding for graduate students.
2. Make the most effective and efficient use of institutional and extramural resources.

Throughout the 2017-2018 academic year, the Graduate Student Funding Task Force had a regular bi-monthly meeting schedule, with additional ad hoc meetings scheduled as needed to address particular issues in depth. The group collected information necessary to document, analyze and understand program-specific approaches to funding students, as well as centralized Graduate School funding approaches. Best practices in graduate student funding with an emphasis on sustaining growth were also reviewed. Additionally, two forums for students and three forums for faculty and staff were held in the 2017 fall semester to better assess the nature and scope of funding at the University, and to hear concerns and collect feedback from faculty, staff and students. These forums were essential in helping the Task Force meet its objective of identifying priorities and options for addressing areas of need and key issues of concern.

In the report that follows, we begin with an overview of the current state of Graduate Student Funding at UNC Charlotte and an outline of the goals and principles the Graduate Student Funding Task Force used to guide its work. Next is a discussion of best practices in Graduate Student Support as determined from a review of funding models and recommendations for establishing robust and sustainable graduate student support from peer institutions, professional societies, and national organizations, including the Council of Graduate Schools, the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals, and the National Science Foundation. Findings, associated recommendations, and supporting evidence follow as subsections focusing on:

- A. Graduate Assistantships from Institutional Funds
- B. Graduate Assistantships from Extramural Funds
- C. Stipend Levels and Duration of Support
- D. Cost of Education
- E. New Programs and Philanthropic Support

FUNDING: A CURRENT STATE ANALYSIS

Since the inception of the GASP funding model, graduate programs have been added to UNC Charlotte's portfolio and the needs for professionals with advanced skills have evolved. Simultaneously, the economy has ebbed and rebounded while business, industry and educational needs have grown

and contributed to a rise in the University's graduate populations. Certainly, this growth has supported UNC Charlotte's mission to "offer internationally competitive programs of research and creative activity" and maintain "a particular commitment to addressing the cultural, economic, educational, environmental, health, and social needs of the greater Charlotte region" and beyond by responsively adapting the academic program inventory to be North Carolina's urban research university. The University has committed substantial resources over the past decade to support and grow graduate education, both at the doctoral and master's levels, and to preserve and enhance the quality of our graduate student body, and to increase its size and diversity. As both enrollment and the landscape of graduate education continue to evolve, UNC Charlotte must continue to both understand and improve the support provided for graduate students.

New professional and research doctoral programs, in addition to the 2005 Graduate Assistant Support Program (GASP), helped boost doctoral enrollments almost 32% (247 students) over the last decade, with a record high 1,019 students enrolled in fall 2018 (see Figure 1 below). Notably, however, 64% of the University's graduate enrollment in fall 2018 was in a master's program, compared to 57% in fall 2009. With few exceptions, enrollment in master's programs at UNC Charlotte has continued to grow, with more than a 12% (368 students) increase over the last ten years. Beginning fall 2011, post-recession, enrollments in graduate certificate programs began to decline (41% since fall 2009), most notably in the Graduate Certificate in Teaching. With an enrollment high of 828 students in fall 2010, 568 students pursued solely a certificate in fall 2018.

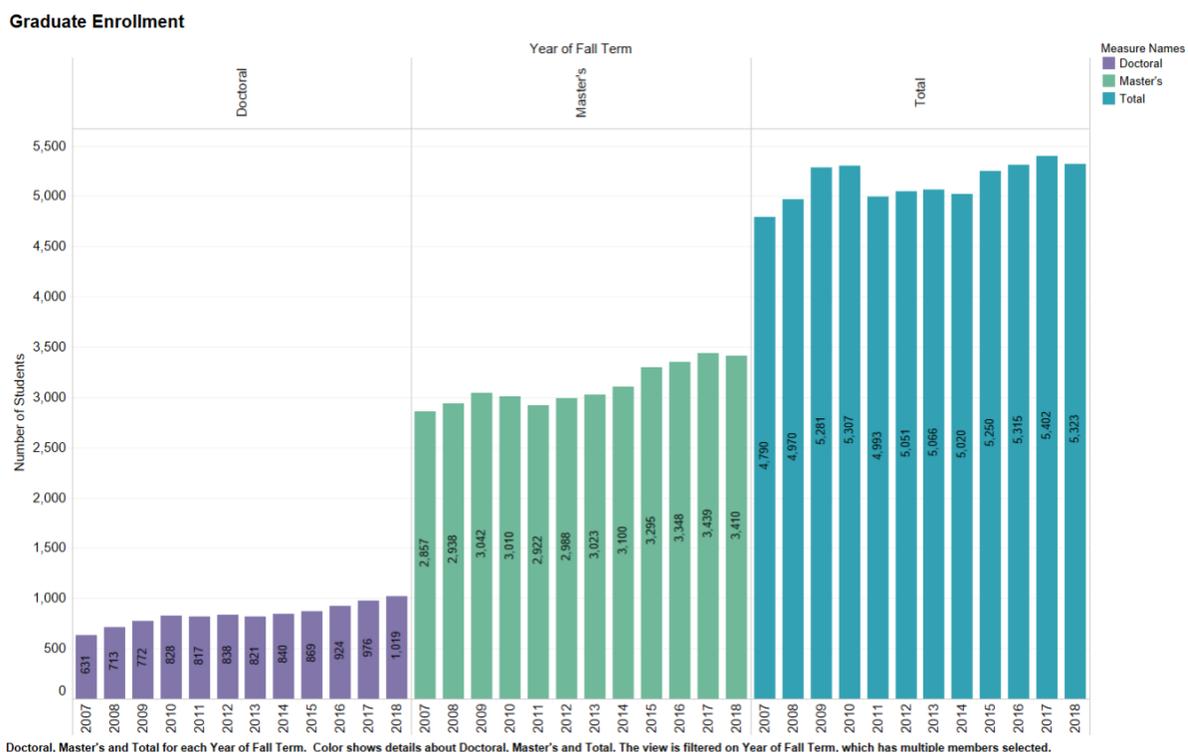
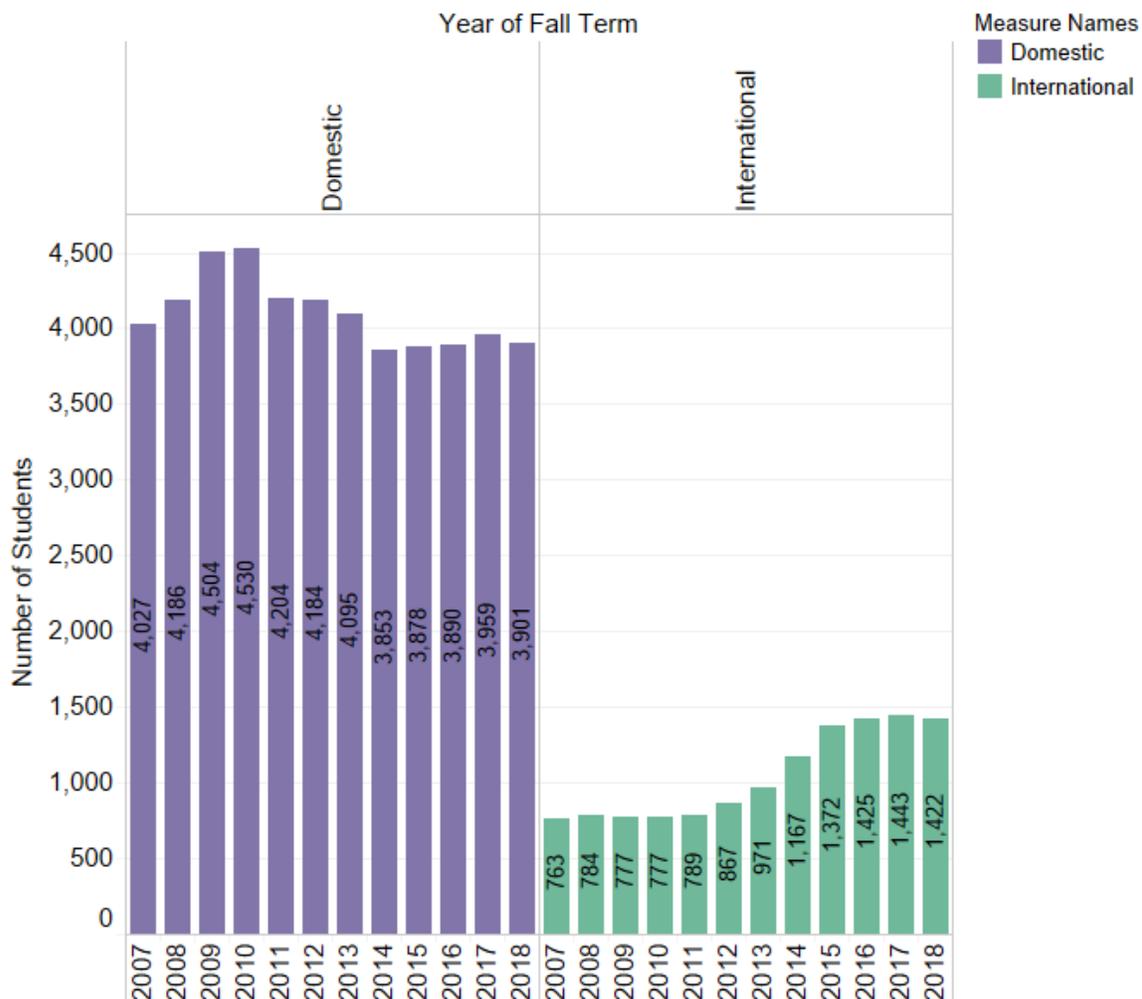


Figure 1: Graduate Enrollments by Level (note: the figures for total graduate enrollments include non-degree, post-bac and certificate programs).

Certainly, the change in domestic and international enrollments since 2010, with more than an 85% increase in international enrollment since 2010 and almost a 13% decline overall in domestic

enrollment, is significant in many ways. Given the University's investment to pay resident tuition, the non-resident tuition differential, and health insurance for foreign PhD students on the Graduate Assistant Support Plan (GASP), as well as the tuition dollars generated by full-tuition paying foreign graduate students, careful management of projected enrollments for international students is critical.

Graduate Enrollment



Domestic and International for each Year of Fall Term. Color shows details about Domestic and International. The view is filtered on Year of Fall Term, which keeps 12 of 19 members.

Figure 2: Domestic and International Graduate Enrollments 2007-2017.

Despite the increasing number of graduate programs, growing enrollment and rising international student representation, UNC Charlotte graduate student funding remains bound by the model developed from the recommendations of the 2003 Task Force. Their specific charge was “to conduct an in-depth study of graduate student financial support on our campus, to make specific recommendations about using existing funds more effectively and to secure additional funding, and to examine

comparable levels of support provided to students in different graduate programs.” The resulting 33 recommendations were broadly organized into four categories: (1) Financial Support including Tuition; (2) Training Grants and Individual Fellowships; (3) Fundraising, and (4) Multiyear Packages and yielded different funding approaches for doctoral versus masters students.

Doctoral Student Funding

The Graduate Assistant Support Plan (GASP), was developed to both improve UNC Charlotte’s competitiveness for the best graduate students and to capture through formal registration the full scope of faculty instruction and student learning in the graduate curricula of the University by requiring students to register for 9 credit hours each semester.

Additionally, GASP was designed to help advance the research mission of the University and grow extramural funding by providing tuition support for research doctoral students. This tuition support was intended to help bring in extramural research dollars as well as grow the numbers of PhD graduates as UNC Charlotte aspired to upgrade its Carnegie classification. Consequently, the availability of GASP support contributed to a nearly three fold increase in the number of doctoral degrees awarded between 2008 and 2018 and contributed to the University’s advancement to a Carnegie R2 (Higher Research Activity) classification in 2016.

Doctoral Graduates over Ten Years

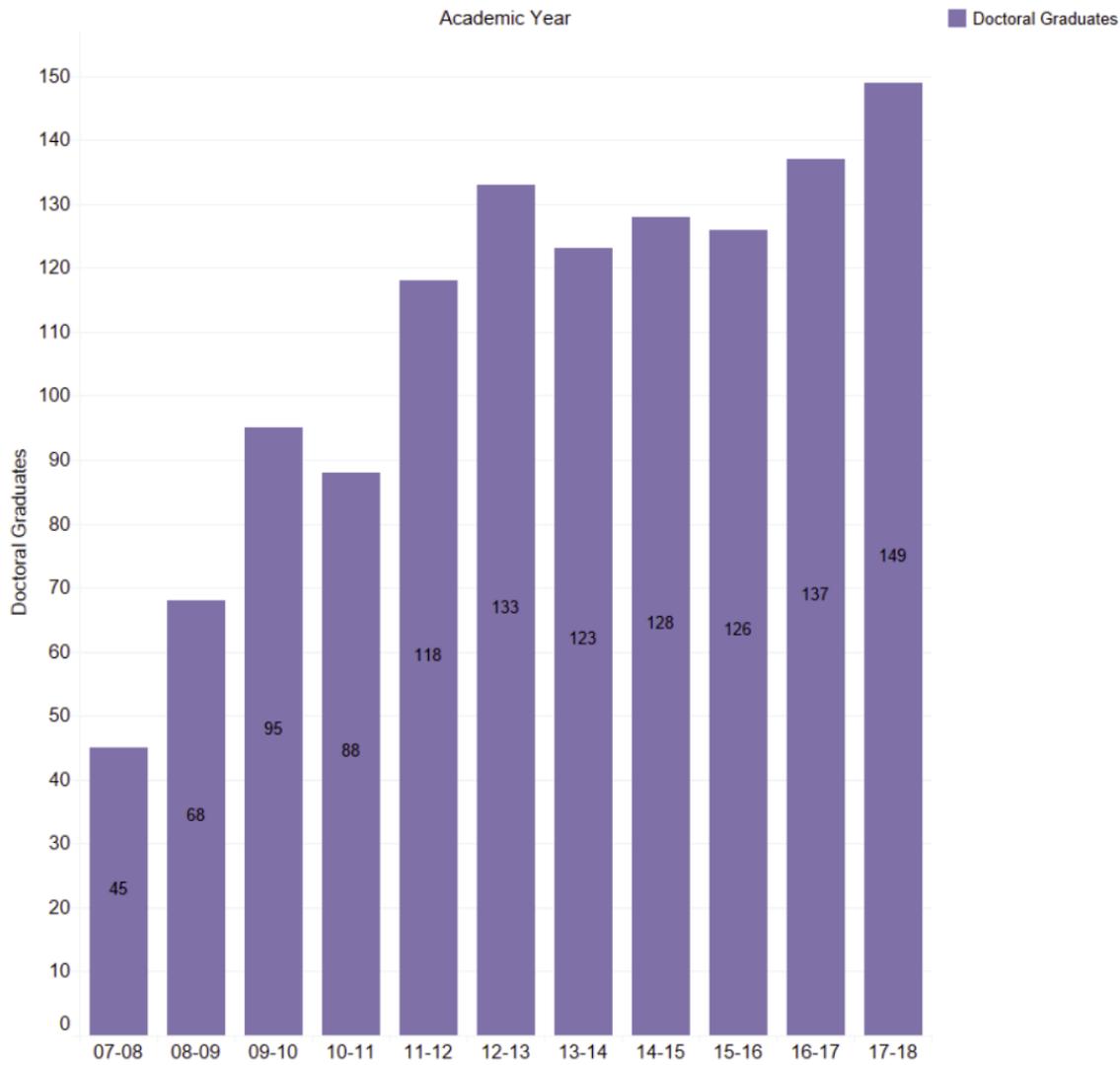


Figure 3: Doctoral Degrees Awarded Over Ten Years Support Change in Carnegie Classification.

Currently, the Graduate Assistant Support Plan is only available to doctoral students who hold a Graduate Assistantship (research assistantship, teaching assistantship, or administrative assistantship) that pays at minimum a stipend of at least \$3,500/semester (\$7000/academic year). There is no minimum workload or work hour requirement but students are not allowed to work more than 20 hours per week.

GASP awards vary depending upon whether the stipend support is derived from intramural (institutional) or extramural funds (grants and contracts), which provide the following:

- GASP for Institutional GAs: Resident tuition (\$4,337 per year), health insurance (\$2,587.76) and, if needed, a non-resident tuition differential (\$13,434/yr)

- GASP for Extramural GAs: Non-resident tuition differential only (\$13,434 year) for students with a \$7,000/AY (minimum of \$3,500 per semester) assistantship paid from extramural funds (see [Policy 50.5 Tuition Remission for Graduate Students Supported by Sponsored Awards](#))

Doctoral students are limited to 10 semesters of GASP support, regardless of whether it is funded in association with support from institutional or extramural funds. Doctoral students who hold Graduate Assistantships that do not meet the above eligibility requirements for GASP may be awarded smaller Graduate School Grants of \$2,000 per academic year; domestic students may also be considered for Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG) of \$2,000 per academic year based on financial need.

It should be noted that since the College of Arts + Architecture does not currently have a doctoral program, a limited number of GASP awards are given to MARCH students.

Master's Student Tuition Support

Students enrolled in master's programs at UNC Charlotte are not eligible for the Graduate Assistant Support Plan (GASP). Students who hold a qualifying Graduate Assistantship of \$7,000/year, \$3,500/semester may be eligible, however, to receive a Master's Merit Award, which provides the following:

- A maximum of four (4) semesters of support
- Partial tuition of \$4,000 per year for North Carolina residents or \$8,000 per year for non-residents students with a \$7,000 per academic year (minimum of \$3,500 per semester) assistantship paid from institutional funds.
- Many master's students and some doctoral students without Graduate Assistantships are awarded smaller Graduate School Grants of \$2,000 per academic year that may be renewable upon nomination of the Graduate Program Director and availability of funds.
- Domestic students with financial need can also be considered for Tuition Assistance Grants (TAG) of \$2,000 per academic year.

Unsustainable Funding Model

As enrollment has grown, so, too, has the need for additional funds to support doctoral and master's students with tuition, fees and health insurance. The following issues present immediate challenges to adequately funding graduate students:

1. Institutional funds have increasingly been used to create additional teaching and research assistantships despite the fact that there have been few permanent increases in the overall budget to support tuition and health insurance.
2. Extramural dollars to fund research assistantships (and pay resident tuition + health insurance and fees) have been virtually flat.
3. The increase in non-resident (international) student enrollments, which requires at least five years of GASP support (resident + NRTD + HI) at \$22,108 per year, has meant that the majority of institutional funds are used to support international students, with little left over to support domestic students, particularly at the master's level.
4. A lack of automatic funding to cover increases in tuition costs for resident awards and non-resident tuition differential (NRTD) increases (beyond the 158 that are budgeted annually) means that over time fewer students can be supported.
5. Tuition increments charged to students by academic programs in addition to the resident or non-resident tuition charged by the University exponentially decrease the value of centrally provided tuition support packages.
6. The student fees charged to all students continue to increase and are generally not funded except by extramural grants and contracts.



Figure 4:

Counts of Grants & Contracts GAs (green) Remained Flat While Institutional GAs (purple) Grew.

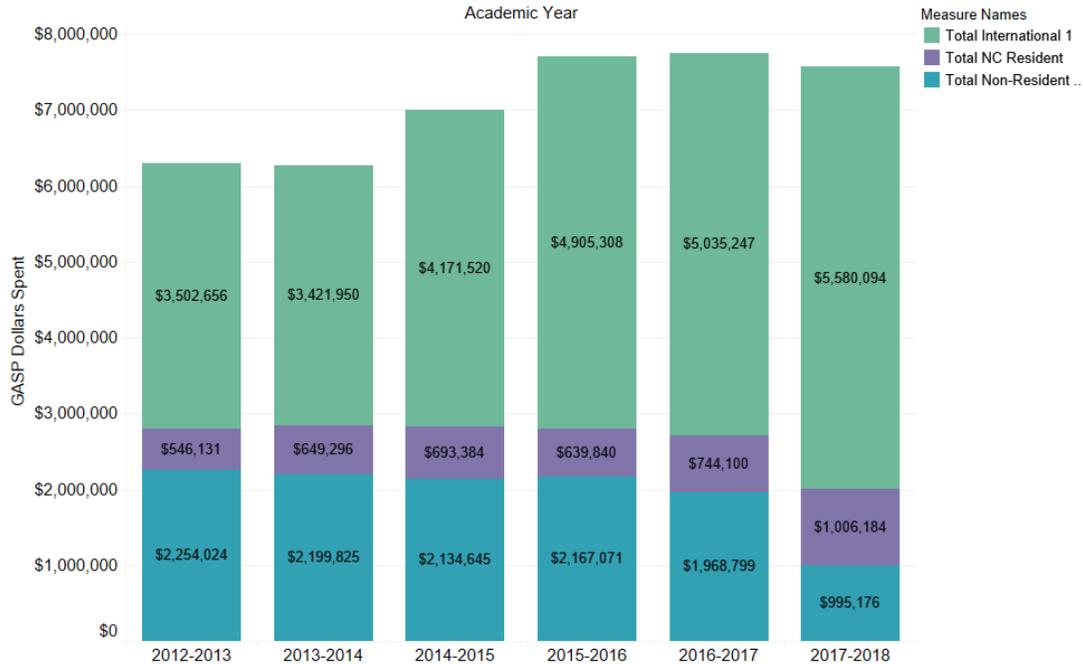


Figure 5: GASP Expenditures by Residency 2012-2017.

GOALS & GUIDING PRINCIPLES

As the current Task Force began to explore these challenges, and delve into data and issues of concern raised by faculty and students, Task Force members determined the need to establish goals and guiding principles through which to align and prioritize their practice as well as to help prioritize and structure recommendations.

GOALS

We believe that graduate student funding, including stipend, tuition support and fee coverage (including tuition increments), should be utilized to strategically support the broad mission of UNC Charlotte, specifically to:

- Recruit, retain and graduate **exemplary** master's and doctoral students of **diverse** backgrounds and experiences;
- Support the **academic success, professional development, and well-being** of graduate students;
- Support the **research mission** of the University, including funding, publications, community engagement, and other scholarly and creative outcomes;
- Enhance the undergraduate and graduate **teaching missions** of the University; and

- Maintain a broad portfolio of **productive and reputable graduate programs**.

We acknowledge that these goals are **interrelated**. Recruiting the best possible graduate students will support high-quality teaching and research. Healthy, successful students contribute to the research, scholarship, creative activities, and productivity of the University as well as to the advancement of the reputation of its academic programs and faculty. Healthy, well-regarded programs with successful students are, in turn, able to effectively recruit, retain and graduate high quality students, enrich research and teaching across campus, and contribute to the state, region, and nation.

The Graduate Student Funding Task Force believes that the following principles, best practices and recommendations will create a solid foundation to support graduate education in the foreseeable future.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Transparent: Funding policies and decisions, both at the Graduate School and within each program, should be as transparent as possible, with clear policies and guidelines for faculty and students.

Scalable and Sustainable: Policies governing graduate student support should be both scalable and sustainable. At the institutional level, this includes adjustments to funding needs based on changes in program size due to growth, graduation or attrition, the number of programs offered by the University, and institutional priority. Graduate funding policies should provide positive incentives for resource-generating programs and enterprises (e.g. encourage extramural funding) and should provide clear benchmarks by which programs and students can continue to obtain institutional support and funding.

Equitable: Funding policies for graduate students should be equitable. Equitable funding starts with a baseline stipend level for all graduate assistantships to support students at a level commensurate with the cost of living and the estimated cost of attendance (including healthcare, tuition, tuition increments, fees, housing, food, instructional materials, and other costs associated with full-time graduate study). As is appropriate per discipline and program, equitable funding above the baseline level should be established to meet the competitive market demand for high quality students. The baseline level of stipend support should be indexed and adjusted as the cost of living changes. Relevant external benchmarks should be used to adjust this level as markets change over time.

Balanced: Funding policies for graduate students should be balanced, reflecting the desire for a full complement of programs across disciplines and academic levels (master's and doctoral levels) that attract and retain graduate students from different regional and national backgrounds. Balance must be maintained as new programs are added and as existing programs move through their life cycle. The University should strive for consistency in funding to ensure balanced support provided to programs across campus, and even between students in the same program.

BEST PRACTICES FOR GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT

Task Force members collected and reviewed information on funding models and recommendations for establishing robust and sustainable graduate student support from peer institutions, professional

societies, and national organizations, including the Council of Graduate Schools, the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals, the National Science Foundation. The best practices identified by the Task Force included:

1. Multi-year support packages that include a competitive salary/stipend and full cost of education (i.e., tuition, fees, increments, health insurance, summer support) are used to attract and recruit the most talented and qualified students. Support is renewed annually based on an assessment of student performance and progress.
2. The duration of support is limited to the expected time-to-degree for the program (e.g., two years for master's, five years for doctorate, four years for advanced standing doctorate), thereby encouraging students to make timely progress through their academic program.
3. Stipend/salary levels are assessed periodically and compared to peer institutions and programs as well as national averages to calibrate levels of support and ensure competitiveness.
4. Decisions on distribution and availability of graduate student support (number of GA positions, tuition awards, etc.) are made early in the academic year, enabling programs to make timely offers to the most competitive applicants.
5. Meritorious and often prestigious graduate fellowships/assistantships are used to recruit and attract the most talented and highly qualified students.
6. Service-free summer fellowships are awarded on a competitive basis, enabling students to devote full-time effort to thesis or dissertation research.
7. The development and allocation of new GA positions are tied to undergraduate enrollment and instructional needs, including initiatives and interventions designed to promote undergraduate student success.
8. The allocation of graduate student funding, including new GA positions, stipends, and tuition awards, are linked to positive program performance metrics and student outcomes, such as productivity, persistence, time-to-degree and graduation/completion.
9. Supporting students on extramural grants and contracts is incentivized by reducing the impact on award budgets, often through institutional co-funding of tuition, fees, and health insurance or by returning additional F&A funds to PIs.
10. Programs are motivated to move students from institutionally funded positions (e.g., TAs) to ones supported with extramural funds (e.g., RAs), thereby freeing up support for other students and/or new recruits.
11. To encourage "good practices", successful and healthy programs are provided with one-year fellowships to support existing students as they approach graduation, thereby freeing up GA positions for new recruits earlier.
12. Programs and institutions are open and transparent in publicizing and communicating the full cost of attendance, time-to-degree, graduation rates, and post-graduation employment outcomes (e.g., job placement). They also communicate the program's policies regarding the availability, level, and anticipated duration of any financial support (stipend + tuition support).

FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND EVIDENCES

Here we present the Task Force's findings, associated recommendations and supporting evidence divided into subsections focused on:

- A. Graduate Assistantships from Institutional Funds
- B. Graduate Assistantships from Extramural Funds
- C. Stipend Levels, Wages and Duration of Support
- D. Cost of Education
- E. New Programs and Philanthropic Support

A. Graduate Assistantships from Institutional Funds

Findings:

- Most GA positions are funded with institutional funds. The relative contribution of extramural funds to graduate student support has declined in the past 5 years.
- Management of institutional GAs is decentralized, resulting in a diversity of funding models and policies/processes governing eligibility, duration of support, salary, and workload. In many cases, programs are not following standard or best practices.
- Institutional funds for student stipends come from a variety of sources, including general funds, tuition increments, and summer receipts. However, the relative contribution of each source varies by College.
- To reach full-time status (20 h/week) and to be eligible for tuition assistance and other centralized funding, graduate students often piece together multiple part-time assistantships, including TAs and extramurally funded RAs. This practice often inflates students' workloads and results in students reporting to multiple supervisors.
 - For example, in 2017-18, only 245 of the 661 doctoral students funded by GASP held one 20hr/w, 15 wk/semester, academic year graduate assistantship. There were 1,155 graduate assistantships for doctoral students in 2017-2018.
- Since the awarding of GA stipends is frequently separated from the tuition support provided by the Graduate School, Program Directors are unable to offer competitive support packages at the time of acceptance that include stipend, tuition, and health insurance, making it difficult to effectively recruit the most competitive applicants.
- Currently, there is no guarantee of tuition support for any master's student with a GA. Because the majority of centralized graduate student funding is spent on continuing and new doctoral students via GASP, significantly fewer dollars are available to support students in master's programs (who outnumber doctoral students).

Recommendations:

- A1. Institutionally-funded GAs should be created and managed as “positions” with specific duties and responsibilities that require the services of the graduate student. Associated with each position should be (1) a specific level of compensation (stipend) and fringe benefits (health insurance, fees, tuition), (2) description of the nature, scope, and level of duties and responsibilities.
- A2. Stipends for new and existing GA positions should be managed by the Colleges and, when appropriate, tied to instructional needs. This includes funds for stipends currently provided by the Graduate School.
- A3. All tuition and fee support should be managed by the Graduate School. Policies governing the distribution of resident tuition awards and the non-resident tuition differentials (NRTD) should be designed to incentivize programs to develop sustainable funding models and implement best practices (See Section D).
- A4. GAs provided by programs and units should be multi-year packages for a fixed period of time (i.e., time-limited) that is consistent with the expected time-to-degree for the program. The “standard time-to-degree” should be established by programs in consultation with the Graduate School and communicated to students prior to enrollment. Annual renewal of GA support should be contingent upon the student making satisfactory academic progress and receiving satisfactory performance evaluations.
- A5. Colleges or units, not the Graduate School, are expected to fully-fund new GA positions, including positions needed to establish new graduate programs. New full-time GA positions that are funded at or above the minimum stipend level (see section C1-2) must include stipend, resident tuition, fees, and health insurance. Budgeted tuition + fees + health insurance is coupled to the position but managed by the Graduate School.
- A6. College leadership should annually anticipate and request increases to GA stipends to get them to the minimum baseline compensation and/or competitive market rate.
- A7. Any early cancellation/termination of a student’s GA should be the result of documented academic and/or work performance issues with sufficient time and mentoring provided to allow the student to improve performance, rather than the result of a need to provide the stipend funding to a different student.
- A8. The Graduate School, with the support of the faculty, should establish a University-wide GA workload policy governing all GAs. The policy is intended (1) to provide guidance to Chairs and Graduate Program Directors in making assignments and estimating staffing needs and (2) to standardize the effort, responsibilities, and workloads of students holding similar or related GA positions.
- A9. Programs and units should conduct an annual workload analysis for each position to ensure consistent and equitable workloads among GAs.
- A10. Changes in the number and stipend levels of GA positions should be communicated to Graduate Program Directors (by the Colleges) early in the fall semester so they have the information they need to manage their program and recruit a new cohort of students for the following fall semester.
- A11. Graduate Program Directors and program faculty must work together to create and sustain GA positions so that faculty and administrators are privy to the number of available GA positions, the funding in each line, and the distribution of positions to both new and continuing students.

A12. Collaboratively with the Center for Teaching and Learning, the Graduate School should establish an online performance appraisal and evaluation system for all GAs and their supervisors. The system should include a standard evaluation form, performance measures, and guidelines for delivering feedback. It should also provide a mechanism for students to provide feedback on their work experience, and this information should be provided to Department Chairs.

Supporting Evidence:

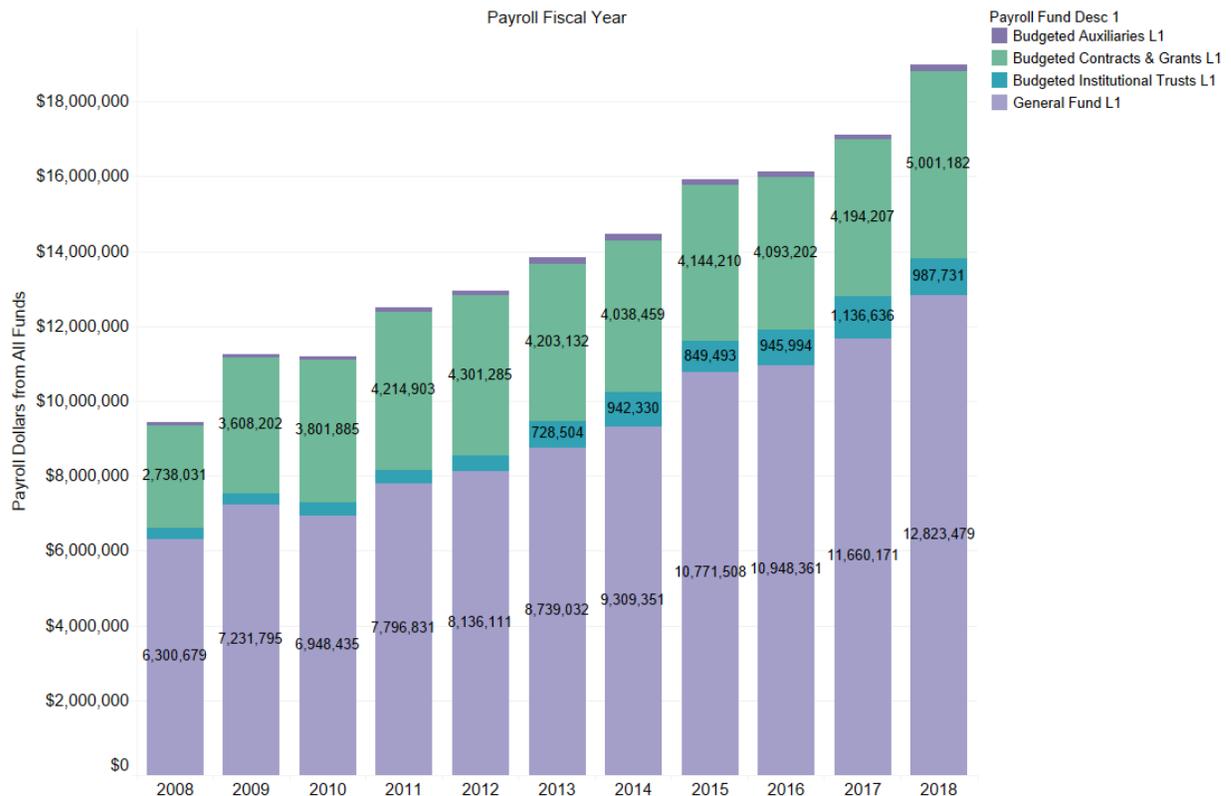


Figure 6: Stipend by Fund Source and Fiscal Year for All GAs.

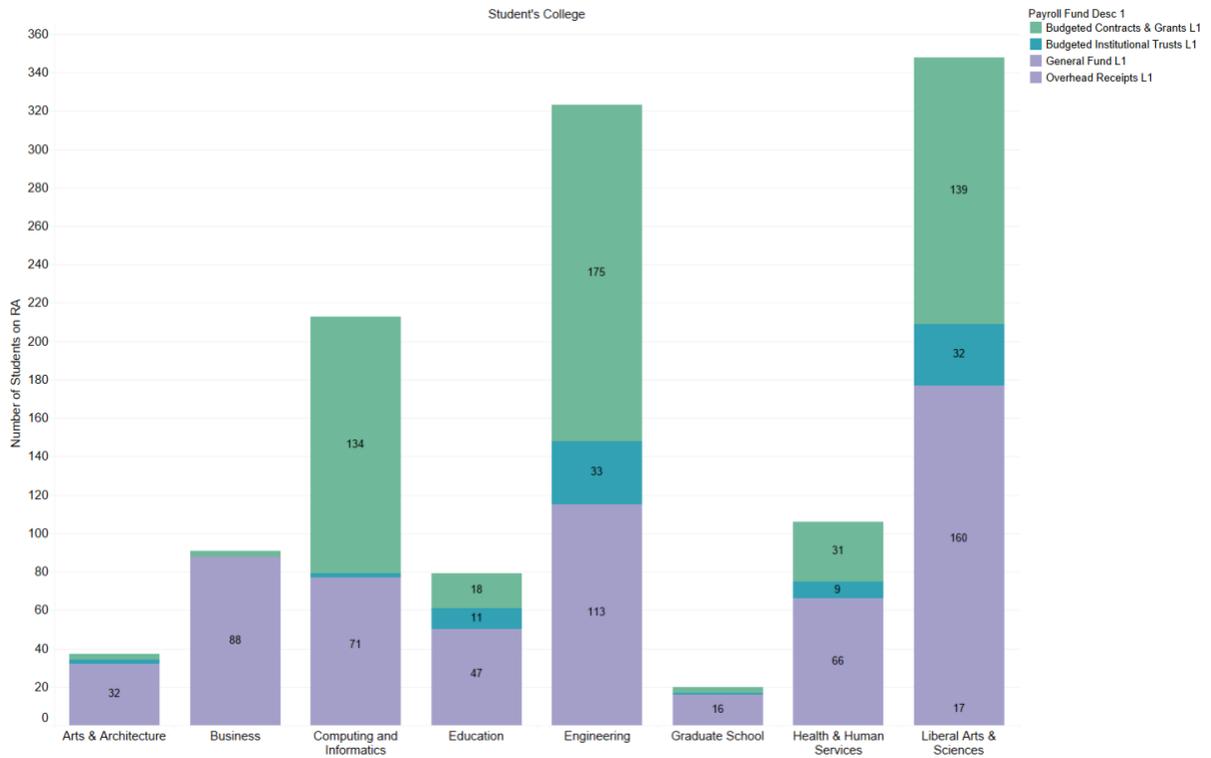


Figure 7: RA Support by Fund Type and College, Count of RAs, Fiscal Year 2018.

B. Graduate Assistantships from Extramural Funds (Grants and Contracts)

Findings:

- The number of graduate students supported on extramural grants has not increased proportionately with increases in award funding.
- Supporting a graduate student on a research grant or contract is cost-prohibitive, especially when compared to the cost of hiring other full-time personnel, including technicians or post-doctoral researchers.
- Some funders, including non-profits and industry partners, are hesitant (or unable) to cover the cost of student tuition, fees, and health insurance on awards or contracts.
- The term of an extramural grant/contract is often shorter than five years, making it difficult to guarantee doctoral students funding for the full duration of their degree program.
- The average duration of student support on extramural awards is often short (3-6 months) and concentrated during the summer months when PIs are not required to pay tuition and fees.
- PIs expressed that Policy 50.5, requiring faculty to include resident tuition and fees to grants where the funding source permitted, is a disincentive to support graduate students.
- The median length of GAs in a single program can vary widely depending on the source of funds.

Recommendations:

- B1. The University must establish policies that lower the financial burden and encourage/stimulate Principal Investigators (PIs) to support graduate students on extramural grants and contracts. Recommended approaches include:
- Reduce the overall cost of supporting a student by providing institutional funds to cover the cost of attendance (tuition, fees and health insurance), including the non-resident tuition differential for non-resident students.
 - Waive the requirement that F&A be charged on graduate assistant stipends, tuition, fees, and health insurance.
 - Colleges should waive the tuition increment or provide it to students as an educational award.
- B2. The University should establish policies that encourage PIs to provide longer-term support for graduate students funded with extramural grants and contracts. For example, provide service-free summer fellowships to students supported on grant-funded RAs during the academic year.
- B3. Each College should establish stipend levels for grant-funded RAs that are equal to or greater than those set for GAs supported with institutional funds (see section C).

- B4. The Office of Research and Economic Development should establish a bridge-funding program that provides short-term financial support to faculty to span a temporary period or gap in extramural support. Bridge awards could be requested to fund salaries for RAs during the bridge period.

Supporting Evidence:

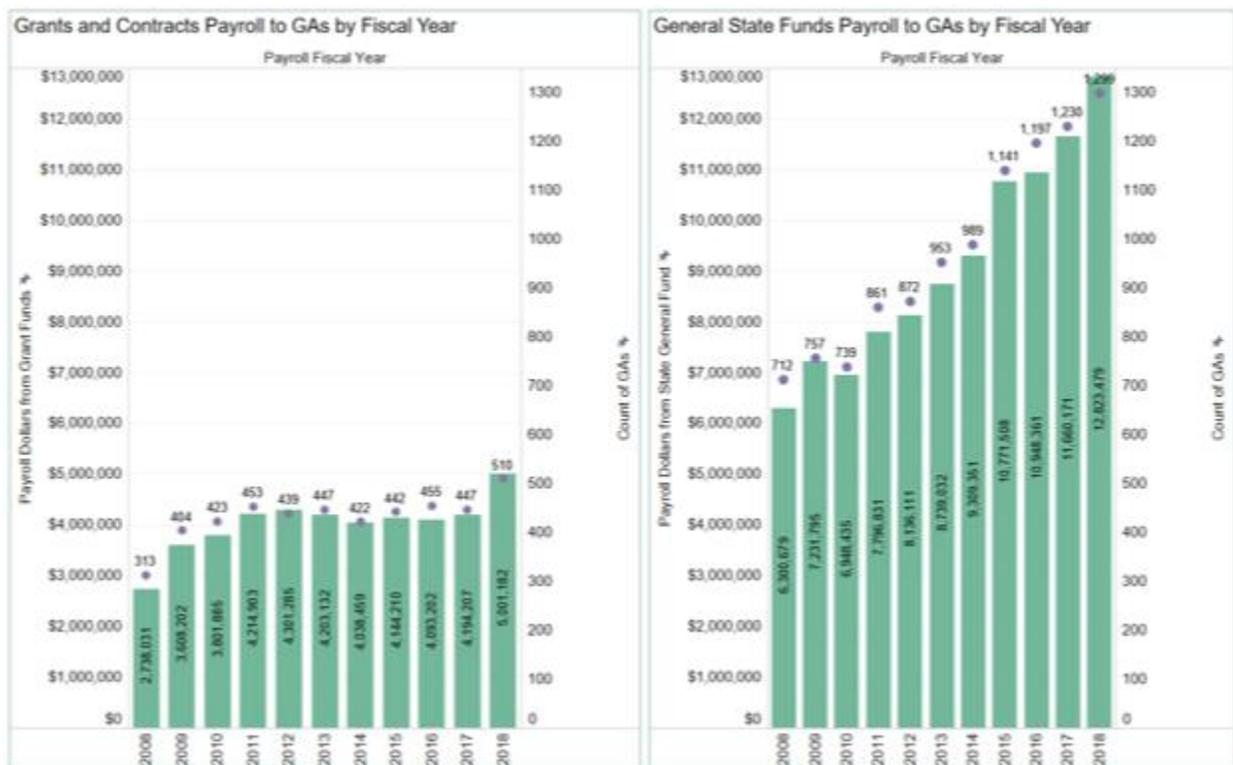


Figure 8: Graduate Assistantship Stipend Sources. Bars show the dollars spent from Grants & Contracts sources (left) or Institutional General Funds (right). Circles show distinct counts by Student ID.; students supported by both funding sources are counted twice.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----------|
| Stipend (20 hrs/wk) | \$20,000 |
| Benefits and Insurance | \$3,144 |
| Tuition and Fees (resident/in-state) | \$7,498 |
| Total Direct Cost | \$30,642 |
| Indirect Cost | \$11,803 |
| Total Cost | \$42,445 |

Figure 9: Estimated Cost of Supporting a Graduate Research Assistant on Extramural Funds.

C. Stipend Levels and Duration of Support

Findings:

- Support of graduate students on assistantships has increased significantly throughout the years, most notably via institutional funds.
- Many students bundle multiple assistantships together to work 20hrs/week and/or earn a minimum of \$7,000/AY for GASP support.
 - For example, for the 2017-2018 academic year, 661 doctoral students held 1,155 GA appointments. Of those 1,155 GAs, just 245 were 20 hours per week and two semesters in length, which is 21% of doctoral student GAs. On average during one semester, master's students worked for 11.5 hours/week, and doctoral students worked for 14.5 hours/week. The average stipends for those appointments were \$7,452 and \$15,728, respectively, for the academic year.
- Stipends for most programs are far below national averages and have not increased substantially over the past 10 years.
- Compared to 50 Universities whose stipends were ranked in the Oklahoma State Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey, UNC Charlotte's average stipend of \$11,094 for all disciplines, all ranks, places UNC Charlotte at 48 of 51.
- Stipends for many graduate programs fall below the poverty level. Nearly all programs fail to provide stipends that are above a living wage for a single adult living in Charlotte. As a result, some students must seek supplementary work off campus and/or leave their programs for jobs prior to completion of the degree.
- Stipend levels vary significantly both among and within programs and are only loosely correlated with discipline, academic program, and/or responsibilities.

- The lack of competitive stipends as well as a sufficient number of assistantships has made it difficult for programs to attract and retain the most qualified students.
- Graduate students bundle multiple appointments to earn as much stipend as possible.
 - For example, to reach an average of \$15,728 per academic year, doctoral students held an average of 1.74 assistantships. As stated above, just 21% of doctoral students held one, 9-month, 20 hour/week assistantship.
- The minimum stipend (\$7,000/AY) to be considered for tuition support is barely sufficient to cover the cost of student fees (\$3,232/AY) and tuition increments once withholdings are subtracted from earnings.
- UNC Charlotte has the highest student fees in the UNC system, and student feedback at the two Open Forums for graduate students in fall 2017 indicated that (1) students with tuition/health insurance support expected the fees to be paid centrally as part of the funding package, (2) graduate students prefer to not have to pay some of the fees that inordinately support undergraduate, not graduate, education, and (3) graduate students believe the fees are too high.

Recommendations:

- C1. Institutionally-funded GAs should be created and managed as “positions” so that objective elements, such as the following, can be identified: stipend (compensation) and fringe benefits (health insurance, fees, resident tuition, NRTS); the nature, scope and level of duties and responsibilities; the relationship of the position to other positions in a department/college and its’ relationship to specific research or teaching needs; and the supervisor of record.
- C2. The University should establish a campus-wide minimum baseline compensation for all graduate students, including students employed less than full-time (< 20 hr/week). Colleges may establish higher, program-specific stipends that are annually benchmarked against national and peer data, including the Oklahoma Study.
- C3. The minimum stipend should be indexed to the [MIT Living Wage](#), specifically the cost for one adult to live in Mecklenburg County for nine months, and periodically adjusted by the Graduate School as the Living Wage is updated. The Living Wage is defined as the monetary rate needed to cover basic expenses plus relevant taxes for one adult. Currently, a student who works a contract period 18 weeks each fall and spring semester, for a total of 36 weeks, for 20/hours per week, would earn a salary equal to \$18,115.20. Based on the current Living Wage (\$12.58/h), the Graduate Assistant Minimum hourly rate would be \$25.16/h (\$25.16 x 720 hrs/36 weeks per AY/18 weeks per semester = \$18,115.20). The effective hourly rate is the Living Wage (\$12.58) x 2 as existing policy limits students to 20 hours of work effort per week, with outside work prohibited.
- C4. Graduate Assistantships should be initiated for distinct terms based on academic year dates. Appointments that fall in more than one term should be made for multiple appointments.
- C5. All programs should strive to provide stipend levels (9-month, 0.5 FTE appointment = 20 h/week) that are at or above the average stipends for comparable programs (based on CIP code) from the Oklahoma State University’s Annual Survey of Graduate Assistant Stipends. Average stipends, including both master’s and doctoral levels, for select programs from the 2016-17 OSU Survey include:

| | | |
|------|---|----------|
| (1) | Architecture | \$11,883 |
| (2) | History | \$14,172 |
| (3) | Philosophy | \$14,728 |
| (4) | English | \$14,977 |
| (5) | Business Administration | \$15,543 |
| (6) | Public Health | \$16,579 |
| (7) | Educational Assessment, Evaluation Research | \$17,115 |
| (8) | Biological Sciences | \$17,800 |
| (9) | Computer Science | \$18,649 |
| (10) | Bioinformatics | \$18,794 |
| (11) | Engineering (General) | \$18,967 |
| (12) | Physics/Optical Science | \$19,337 |
| (13) | Health Services Administration | \$19,647 |

- C6. Colleges should standardize and manage stipend levels by establishing “pay bands” for comparable programs. Pay differences may be based on market value, discipline, academic program, degree sought, and completion of significant milestones (e.g., for PhD students advancing to candidacy).
- C7. GAs stipends should be reviewed in the fall semester by the Graduate School with the support of a Graduate Council Subcommittee (minimum GA stipend) and Colleges (program-specific GA stipends) so that any anticipated changes can be included in the Colleges’ annual budget requests.
- C8. Changes in stipend levels should be communicated to Graduate Program Directors at the beginning of the academic year so they have the information they need to effectively recruit students for the subsequent fall cohort.

Supporting Evidence:

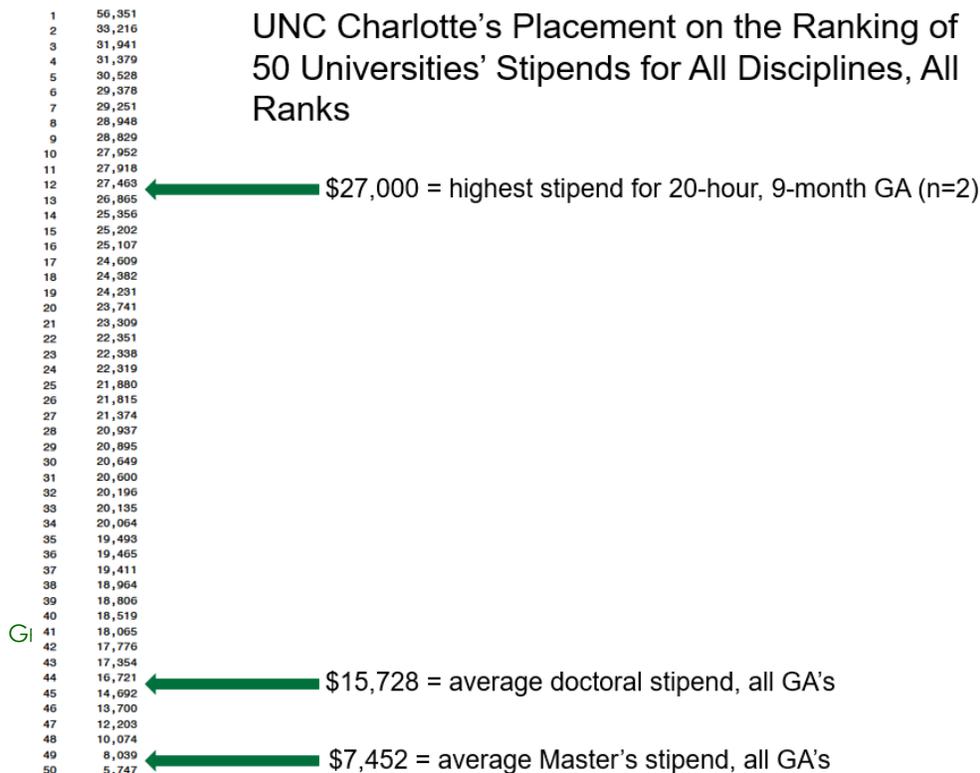


Figure 10: Stipend Averages Compared to the Rankings of the 2016-17 Oklahoma State University Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey – All Disciplines, All Ranks.

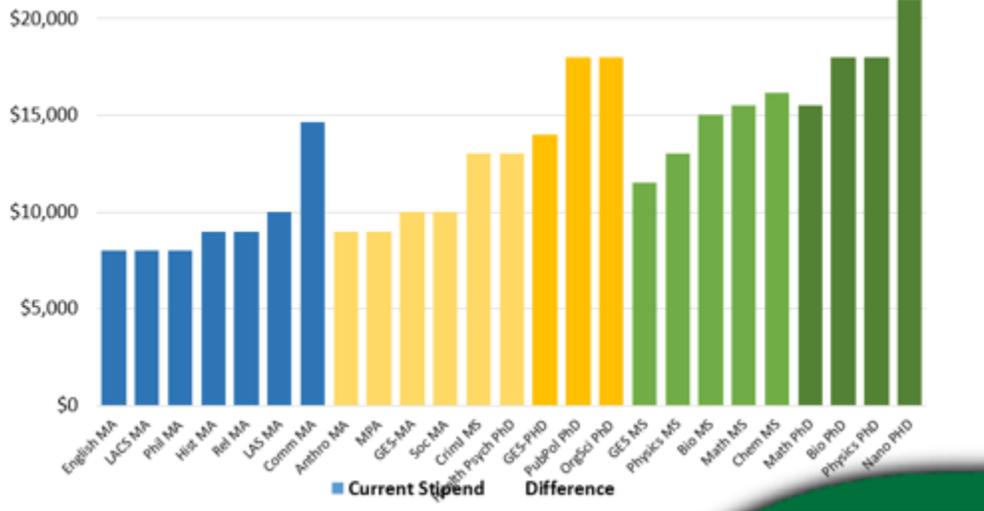


Figure 11: 2018 Living Wage for Charlotte (\$18,115) based upon the MIT Living Wage Calculator - <http://livingwage.mit.edu/> and CLAS GA Salaries.

D. Cost-of-Education: Tuition, Tuition Increments, Fees, Federal Financial Aid, and Health Insurance

Findings:

- Enrollment growth and the addition of new graduate programs, especially doctoral programs, has placed a strain on the resources available to support students in existing programs, especially master’s programs and new doctoral programs.
- Master’s students supported on GAs are not eligible for GASP support. Thus, their stipend support is often returned to the University as fees, tuition, and tuition increments.
- The majority of tuition support/health insurance provided to graduate students is via GASP, thus there are insufficient funds to provide a significant number of

awards to students in master's programs.

- GASP funds have not increased proportionally with increases in resident graduate tuition and enrollment, resulting in fewer dollars available to support an ever increasing graduate student population.
 - As illustration, in the six-year period from FY12-13 through FY17-18, in-state, *resident* full-time tuition has increased from \$3,689 per academic year to \$4,337, an increase of \$648. Unlike some of the Graduate School's non-resident differential funding, there has been no automatic funding increase for resident tuition awards during that period. The six-year increase of \$648 represents a 17.5% increase in resident tuition costs. The amounts needed in each of the six years to cover that cumulative increase (i.e. increase from 2011-12 rate) are:
 - \$432,864 needed in 2017-2018 for 668 GASP students
 - \$322,036 needed in 2016-2017 for 572 GASP students
 - \$248,913 needed in 2015-2016 for 567 GASP students
 - \$179,597 needed in 2014-2015 for 563 GASP students
 - \$163,009 needed in 2013-2014 for 511 GASP students
 - \$119,040 needed in 2012-2013 for 496 GASP students
- Permanent GASP budget increases to fund additional students, including more non-residents, and/or to help cover increases in tuition are not allocated regularly or in a scalable fashion. As a result, funds that historically supported master's students are primarily used to support doctoral students funded on GASP.
- GASP funds have not increased proportionally with increases in *non-resident* graduate tuition and enrollment, resulting in fewer dollars available to support an ever increasing non-resident student population. 158 full non-resident tuition differentials are budgeted each year (appear as "waivers" in the budget), which are designated for the GASP program. 119 are in the GASP Waivers account, and 39 are in the Science/Technology Waiver account. When the NRTD value is increased because of tuition increases, the amounts for these two accounts are automatically adjusted by the Budget Office to cover the increased costs of the 158 waivers. However, each year there are about twice as many non-resident GASP students as can be accommodated with the budgeted waivers.
 - As illustration, in the six-year period from FY12-13 through FY17-18, the non-resident differential amount has increased from \$11,537 per academic year to \$13,434, an increase of \$1,897. The six-year cumulative NRTD increase of \$1,897 represents a 16.4% increase in NRTD costs. The amounts needed for each of the six years to cover the cumulative NRTD increase are given below. The number of non-resident GASP students is the full-time equivalent number for each

year, and the amounts shown below are in addition to the automated increase for the 158 budgeted waivers.

- 2017-2018: 368 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 210 x \$1,897 cumulative increase = \$398,370
 - 2016-2017: 315 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 157 x \$1,634 cumulative increase = \$256,538
 - 2015-2016: 305 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 147 x \$1,134 cumulative increase = \$166,698
 - 2014-2015: 291 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 133 x \$750 cumulative increase = \$99,750
 - 2013-2014: 262 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 104 x \$750 cumulative increase = \$78,000
 - 2012-2013: 284 FTE non-residents – 158 budgeted waivers = 126 x \$750 cumulative increase = \$94,500
- The GASP budget was increased twice since FY12:
 - \$464,133 in FY12 using CBTI
 - \$293,382 in FY13 using CBTI
 - Fund 119977, Base Waivers, is a state-funded account budgeted each year for 124 waivers. The primary purpose of this fund at UNC Charlotte is tuition support for master's students, both resident tuition and the NRTD (the State allows transfer of funds from this account to a resident tuition award account). When needed, GASP NRTD awards are transferred from GASP sources to this account.
 - The proportion of GASP funding provided to non-resident students has increased substantially over the past 10 years, resulting in a significant increase in the dollars required to support the non-resident differential.
 - The absence of a tuition support policy, aside from a minimum \$7,000/AY stipend, has created significant inequity in the distribution of tuition support among programs.
 - Many graduate programs have tuition increments that are in addition to the regular cost of tuition, ranging in cost from \$600/yr to \$21K/yr, including some doctoral programs whose tuition support is paid by GASP. In 2017-2018, six colleges received \$7,186,257 in tuition increment revenue.
 - Students reported in the Campus Forums, via email, and via the Graduate Student Ombuds that the tuition increments present a significant expense when coupled with also having to pay \$3,232/yr in fees, living expenses, and low assistantship stipends (see Supporting Evidence below).
 - Increases in the cost-of-attendance, especially fees and health insurance, have outpaced increases in student stipends.
 - UNC Charlotte has the highest mandatory student fees in the UNC system, with Appalachian State University and NC A&T close behind, and student feedback at the two Open Forums for graduate students in fall 2017 indicated that (1) students with tuition/health insurance support expected the fees to be paid centrally as part

of the funding package, (2) graduate students prefer not to pay some of the fees that inordinately support undergraduate, not graduate, education, and (3) graduate students believe the fees are too high.

| Institution | Total General/Debt Service Fees 2018-19 |
|---------------------------------|--|
| UNC Charlotte | \$3,041.00 |
| Appalachian State University | \$2,971.00 |
| NC A&T State University | \$2,964.81 |
| UNC Asheville | \$2,880.00 |
| UNC Greensboro | \$2,796.00 |
| Western Carolina University | \$2,777.00 |
| NC Central University | \$2,569.61 |
| East Carolina University | \$2,565.00 |
| UNC Wilmington | \$2,556.74 |
| UNC Pembroke | \$2,416.27 |
| Winston-Salem State University | \$2,412.16 |
| UNC School of the Arts | \$2,364.00 |
| NC State University | \$2,359.60 |
| Fayetteville State University | \$2,267.00 |
| Elizabeth City State University | \$2,192.90 |
| UNC Chapel Hill | \$1,715.85 |

Figure 12: 2018-19 Total General Fees and Debt Service Fees by UNC Institution.

Student Blue Health Insurance costs are on the rise and increasingly covered through one time monies requests. Consider that in 2017-2018, 545 students received health insurance awards through the Graduate School (primarily through GASP) that totaled \$1,178,154. Given that the Graduate School's permanent budget for health insurance is less than \$300,000 per year, funds are regularly requested (and provided) as one time money. Following are the annual health insurance costs for UNC Charlotte students, reflecting a 276% increase since 2008:

| Academic Year | Health Insurance Cost |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 2018-19 | \$2,587 |
| 2017-18 | \$2,540 |
| 2016-17 | \$2,220 |
| 2015-16 | \$1,727 |
| 2014-15 | \$1,604 |
| 2013-14 | \$1,376 |
| 2012-13 | \$1,418 |
| 2011-12 | \$760 |
| 2010-11 | \$632 |
| 2009-10 | \$688 |
| 2008-09 | \$688 |

Figure 12: Health Insurance Costs by Academic Year.

- Many graduate students enroll on a part-time basis and are, therefore, ineligible to hold a GA. Strategic funding in the form of small tuition awards (Graduate School Grants) helps programs recruit and retain part-time students and occasionally full-time students without a GA.
- Domestic students borrow significant amounts of federal dollars to fund or offset the cost of attendance, resulting in debt levels approaching \$100,000 for some students. Nationally, 77% of graduate school costs are paid by students, and 53% of those costs are covered by student borrowing. (Sallie Mae, 2017)

| Number of Graduate Students Enrolled | Number of Students with Loans | Percent of Students with Loans | Total Loan Amount | Average Loan Amount |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| 4,912 | 1,841 | 37.48% | \$27,501,349 | \$14,938 |

Figure 13: UNC Charlotte Graduate Students Enrolled in Fall 2017 and/or Spring 2018 who are U.S. Citizens; only Federal Loans considered.

- Students in some graduate programs take on more federal loan debt than others, often with a smaller return on investment once the degree is earned. Specifically, students enrolled in the Graduate Certificate in Teaching and the master's programs in Social Work, and Counseling borrow the most money to support their educational expenses.
- UNC Charlotte graduate students who complete their programs borrow federal money and graduate with debt.

| Degree/Credential Type | Average Debt |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| All Graduate Degrees/Certificates | \$54,076 |
| Certificate | \$59,226 |
| Doctorate | \$79,328 |
| Master's | \$50,085 |

Figure 14: Average Debt Amount of UNC Charlotte Graduate Students who completed their programs in Aid Year 2017-18.

- Graduate Program Directors are challenged to manage funding for students in their programs without access to the information necessary to do so (e.g.: a system with student funding details, progress to degree information, and funding nominations et al).
 - As illustration, the only comprehensive list of funded students is available to select administrators in Banner for staff with Banner financial aid access (RPIFAWD). The development of a new funding system will be an invaluable asset to Graduate Program Directors and will provide valuable insight into how students are funded.

Recommendations:

- D1. The Graduate School and the Colleges should work with the Bursar’s Office to develop an interactive, public website for prospective students that provides an easy to understand accounting of the full cost-of-attendance (tuition, fees, increments, health insurance, etc.) that each graduate program can link to on their website.
- D2. All tuition support (i.e., GASP) should be managed by the Graduate School and be available to both doctoral *and* master’s students who hold eligible an RA or TA.
- D3. Tuition support, like GA positions, should be limited to the expected time-to-degree for the program.
- D4. Programs are encouraged to support students on full-time GAs and ensure coordination of a robust, meaningful assistantship experience. Therefore, only students employed on one full-time GA for 20 h/week, 15 weeks/semester, for the academic year, for the minimum baseline compensation (with one or more funding source), should be eligible to receive resident tuition and fee support. Tuition support cannot be prorated, and an assistantship must be guaranteed by the GPD/program/department/college for the expected length of time to complete the program (i.e. 2-3 years for a master’s program, and 4-6 years for a PhD program) so continuity of support can be anticipated in advance by a prospective student.
- D5. GASP tuition support should be divided into three funds and managed independently: resident tuition (RT), non-resident differentials (NRTDs), and full-tuition awards for extramural RAs.

- D6. Resident tuition, health insurance and fees (9 credits/semester) should be coupled to all full-time GA positions (20 h/week, 15 week/semester for an academic year) supported with *intramural* funds. The hourly stipend level must be at or above the Graduate Student Baseline Compensation, even for part-time GAs.
- D7. Resident tuition, the NRTD (if needed), health insurance and fees should be automatically granted to all full-time GAs supported 100% on research grants and contracts (see section B) for 20hr/w, 15 w/semester, for the minimum baseline compensation as GAs funded with institutional dollars.
- D8. A limited number of *non-resident tuition differentials* to help support students paid with stipends from institutional funds should be distributed annually to programs by the Graduate School based on program performance metrics (to be determined by the Graduate Council Subcommittee on Funding and Fellowships).
- D9. The funding source of the stipend (i.e. tuition increment funds or summer receipts, et al) should pay the non-resident tuition differential for graduate assistantships paid on institutional funds (aside from the continuing and/or new non-resident tuition differentials provided annually to programs each September), if desired.
- D10. When establishing new full-time GA positions, colleges/units must budget for the cost of resident tuition, health insurance and fees (including tuition increments), in addition to the stipend. The tuition/health insurance/fees is coupled to the GA position but managed by the Graduate School.
- D11. To sustain and scale tuition support to meet future enrollment, annual increases in available GASP funds should be tied to anticipated increases in (1) tuition, (2) health insurance, (3) fees, and (4) the number of new GA positions. Thus, funds should be added annually by each funding source (see D3) to compensate for increases in resident and non-resident tuition costs, health insurance and fees.
- D12. Tuition packages (i.e., resident tuition and non-resident tuition differential awards, fees and health insurance) should be available to program directors at the beginning of the fall semester so that they can be used to retain and recruit the most competitive applicants.
- D13. Fully funded students should have their tuition increment, if one is charged, paid by the home program/college or funding source of the stipend, or waived.
- D14. Graduate Program Directors should continue to annually nominate new and continuing students for small Graduate School Grants to encourage enrollment and retention of students.
- D15. Graduate Program Directors should work with the Office of Student Financial Aid and the Graduate School annually to evaluate federal and private loan levels for students in their programs, including those who drop out, to ensure the neediest students are provided sufficient support to ensure success. The new funding system will provide access to GPDs federal financial aid information as well as scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships.
- D16. The Graduate School should develop a customized funding system to provide Graduate Program Directors with the appropriate information necessary to effectively manage their programs.
- D17. The Graduate and Professional Student Government (GPSG) and the Subcommittee on Graduate Student Funding and Fellowships should collaborate with appropriate units on campus to annually evaluate approved and recommended fees.

Supporting Evidence:

Tuition Increments by College (AY 2018-19)

College of Arts + Architecture:

Master of Architecture \$1,750/yr
Master of Urban Design \$1,750/yr

Belk College of Business:

Master of Accountancy \$6,000/yr
Master of Business Administration \$6,000/yr
Master of Economics \$6,000/yr
Master of Management \$6,000/yr
Master of Mathematical Finance \$6,000/yr
Master of Real Estate \$6,000/yr
Business Foundations Graduate Certificate \$6,000/yr
MBA Plus Certificate \$6,000/yr
Real Estate and Development Graduate Certificate \$6,000/yr
Applied Econometrics Graduate Certificate \$6,000/yr
Business Analytics Graduate Certificate \$6,000/yr
Entrepreneurship and Innovation Graduate Certificate \$6,000/yr
Doctorate of Business Administration \$21,000/yr

College of Computing and Informatics:

Master of Bioinformatics \$2,700/yr
Bioinformatics Applications Graduate Certificate \$2,700/yr
Bioinformatics Technology Graduate Certificate \$2,700/yr
Master of Computer Science \$4,000/yr
Master of Information Technology \$4,000/yr
Advanced Databases and Knowledge Discovery Graduate Certificate \$4,000/yr
Game Design and Development Graduate Certificate \$4,000/yr
Master of Cyber Security \$4,000/yr
Information Security and Privacy Graduate Certificate \$4,000/yr
Network Security Graduate Certificate \$4,000/yr
Secure Software Development Graduate Certificate \$4,000/yr

Belk College of Business Administration and College of Computing and Informatics:

Master of Data Science and Business Analytics \$7,000/yr
Data Science and Business Analytics Graduate Certificate \$7,000/yr

College of Engineering:

Master of Applied Energy and Electromechanical Systems \$1,800/yr
Master of Science in Engineering \$1,800/yr
Master of Civil Engineering \$1,800/yr
Master of Construction and Facilities Management \$1,800/yr
Master of Electrical Engineering \$1,800/yr
Master of Engineering Management \$1,800/yr
Master of Fire Protection and Administration \$1,800/yr
Master of Mechanical Engineering \$1,800/yr
PhD in Electrical and Computer Engineering \$1,800/yr
PhD in Infrastructure and Environmental Systems \$1,800/yr

| | |
|---|------------|
| PhD in Mechanical Engineering | \$1,800/yr |
| <u>College of Health and Human Services:</u> | |
| Master of Health Administration | \$2,700/yr |
| Master of Health Informatics and Analytics | \$2,700/yr |
| Health Informatics and Analytics Graduate Certificate | \$2,700/yr |
| Doctorate in Nursing Practice | \$4,800/yr |
| Master of Respiratory Care | \$1,000/yr |
| Master of Public Health | \$600/yr |
| Master of Science in Nursing | \$1,200/yr |
| PhD in Public Health Sciences | \$1,800/yr |
| Nursing Certificates | \$1,200/yr |
| <u>College of Liberal Arts and Sciences:</u> | |
| Master of Industrial Organizational Science | \$2,400/yr |

Figure 15: Tuition Increment Charge by College and Program.

E. New Program and Philanthropic Support

Findings:

- The academic planning process does not methodically allocate funds to support new student stipends and tuition support. As a result, Graduate Program Directors are often left to creatively determine how to best recruit, enroll, and retain a class with little budget to do so.
 - As illustration, the academic planning process for new programs often requires identification of budgets to support the implementation of a new master's or doctoral program. The Letter of Intent to Plan has a budget worksheet that is required for proposed doctoral programs; the Request to Establish has a required budget worksheet for all new programs; and the SACSCOC Substantive Change Prospectus for new programs requires submitters to include necessary financial support and a summary budget of estimated additional costs to support the proposed programs. However, there is no identified process attached to the new program approval process that actually allocates budget to support new faculty hires, or student stipend and tuition support.
- The GASP program is required to support additional students as new programs are brought online with no additional budget appropriated to support the increases.
- With the development of a centralized Scholarship Office to manage philanthropic awards at UNC Charlotte, and the deployment of NinerScholars to support the application, recommendation, and awarding of philanthropic awards, data is now available to track and analyze these awards. Use of NinerScholars by graduate students continues to increase, although the amount of money awarded in 2018/19 was lower by almost \$100K than in 2017-18.
- As of September 2003, a total amount of approximately \$2.3 million in *endowment*, generating approximately \$93,300 per year, was available to be awarded to exemplary

graduate students by the Graduate School. For fiscal year 2018-2019, a total amount of approximately \$3.6 million in endowment generated about \$125,250 that was available to be awarded to graduate students. These competitive awards include the Cato, Giles, Kennedy, Lucas, Zonta, Baker, deSilva, DRReaM, Brown, and Jacques Scholarships.

Recommendations:

E1. Until such time that the baseline stipend for graduate students is at or above the academic year minimum, Colleges should defer creating new degree programs that require budget to support students on assistantships with stipend/tuition/fee/health insurance support.

E2. Stipend averages for programs should be at market rate prior to a College assuming additional responsibility to support students in new programs that require funding.

E3. UNC Charlotte should develop a consistent and methodical way to assimilate new program budgetary requirements and make decisions in advance of program approval to financially support them so that Graduate Program Directors and College faculty understand the availability and amounts of funding prior to a program’s implementation.

E4. College Deans should continue to cultivate philanthropic support to seed new graduate fellowships and increase the earning power of endowed funds, particularly to support doctoral education.

E5. Annual reporting of philanthropic awards to graduate students by college and program should be made available to the University community.

Supporting Evidence:

| NinerScholars System Metrics | 2018/19 | 2017/18 | 2016/17 |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Unduplicated count of all students who accessed NinerScholars | 18,503 | 13,553 | 11,361 |
| Unduplicated count of graduate-level students who accessed NinerScholars | 2,598 | 1,634 | 548 |
| Scholarship opportunities available to all students | 91,319 | 86,962 | 65,536 |
| Scholarship opportunities available to graduate-level students | 16,629 | 17,482 | 5,655 |
| Unduplicated count of scholarship applications submitted | 33,046 | 28,119 | 27,116 |
| Unduplicated count of scholarship applications submitted by graduate-level students | 1,998 | 1,492 | 517 |

| | | | |
|--|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Unduplicated count of all scholarships awarded | 1,150 | 857 | 1,413 |
| Unduplicated count of scholarships awarded to graduate-level students* | 159 | 158 | 131 |
| Total amount of scholarship funded awarded | \$5.355 million | \$4.2 million | \$3.0 million |
| Scholarship funding awarded to graduate-level students* | \$485,546 | \$584,334 | \$510,546 |

Figure 16: Philanthropic Activity by Academic Year.

*Figures may not include all scholarship awards made to graduate-level students resulting from some Graduate School awards keyed directly to a student's financial aid account.

| College or Unit or Division | # of Awards to Graduate Students in 2018-19 |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| College of Education | 37 |
| College of Business | 31 |
| College of Arts + Architecture | 22 |
| College of Health and Human Services | 21 |
| College of Liberal Arts and Sciences | 18 |
| Graduate School | 17 |
| College of Engineering | 5 |
| International Programs | 4 |
| Student Affairs Division | 2 |
| TOTAL AWARDS | 157 |

Figure 17: Philanthropic Awards to Graduate Students for 2018-19.

A Critical Next Step

The creation of the Graduate Council Subcommittee on Student Funding will provide the necessary entity of faculty and staff to build, evaluate, advocate for, and sustain a robust infrastructure of graduate student funding in both the near and distant future. Comprised of two members of the Graduate Council, a faculty representative with experience in graduate student funding from each of the academic colleges, a representative from Research Administration, a doctoral student and a master's

student, and a Graduate School representative, the Subcommittee will be tasked with reviewing, evaluating, and implementing the Graduate Student Funding Task Force recommendations as charged by the Dean of the Graduate School. Critical to this process will be selecting a knowledgeable membership that will continually learn, engage with their colleges to solicit feedback and information from students, faculty and staff, and reciprocate that exchange of information in addition to advocating for the best interests of graduate students.

In Summary

The Graduate Student Task Force Report proposes a model of graduate student support that will enable students to meet the University's goals of academic rigor and productivity while also providing a framework for an equitable environment that fosters student health, well being, and academic success. The fundamental principles that have shaped this report will provide a solid and sustainable infrastructure of financial support that will help enable students to enjoy a vibrant and inclusive social environment balanced with robust opportunities for professional development. The principals, goals and recommendations sponsored within this report are premised upon the idea that graduate students should be able to live above the federal threshold for the poverty level within the context of Charlotte; that disparities in pay between graduate students across campus should be minimized; and that the full costs of graduate education (including tuition, tuition increments, fees and health insurance) should be clearly communicated, stable and available over a student's expected time to degree.

As noted in the introduction, three critical themes prevailed throughout the Graduate Student Funding Task Force's efforts. Firstly, graduate student support should come in the form of comprehensive packages that consist of graduate assistantship stipends as well as tuition and fee support (including tuition increments and other college or program-based fees); transparency and consistency of work expectations and supervision; and opportunities for professional development. Secondly, such overall support should be extended to both Master's and Doctoral students; this is in recognition that UNC Charlotte is home to degree programs that terminate at the master's level and that many master's level students will go on to become doctoral candidates. Thirdly, graduate student well-being and productivity should be supported by compensation packages that approximate a living wage indexed to the cost of one adult to live in Mecklenburg County.

These three interconnected themes and the recommendations included in this report are needed in order to build a new model of graduate student funding at UNC Charlotte. Key findings related to best practices in graduate student support, assistantship stipends and workload, tuition and fee support, and the University's research mission informed the Task Force's vision of a new model of sustainable and scalable graduate support:

- Sustainable. A nationally competitive model of graduate student support will foster a robust, productive, and engaged student cohort. This, in turn, will foster extramural grant initiatives that will contribute to both the research mission of the University and the financial stability of the graduate funding models generally.

- Scalable. As new positions will be backed by new resources, which may be paired with institutional resources, faculty and programs will be incentivized to contribute to the overall growth of graduate student support.

These measures will not only benefit graduate students at UNC Charlotte but they will also help to strategically position the University within an increasingly competitive educational market. The themes described above respond to established best practices in Graduate Student Support as demonstrated by peer institutions and as supported by professional societies and national organizations, including the Council of Graduate Schools, the National Association of Graduate Admissions Professionals, and the National Science Foundation. Success in these areas will also help the University attract top-tier applicants from across the country and the globe and adequately support them to graduation.

Basics of the New Funding Model

Grant Supported GAs



Institutionally Supported GAs



Annual NRTD Awards to Programs



**Full-time GA (\$25.16/hour for 20 hours/week for minimum of 15 weeks/semester + 9 hours coursework)*

Appendices

STUDENT CAMPUS FORUMS ON FUNDING FEEDBACK

Notetakers at the campus forums for students compiled the following list of items.

- Unexpectedly high and significant cost of student fees
- Tuition increment costs that are high, recurring and 100% paid by students
- Uncompetitive stipends
- Transparency needed at time of application/admission for the total cost of attendance (over the life of the program>expected time to degree + graduation rates)
- Stipend/tuition support as a funding commitment for “x” years at the time of admission
- Students would like to see funding available for summer that isn’t in the form of a TAship, which doesn’t afford them time to attend to their research (due to having to teach the course, advise students, have office hours et al)
- Housing for graduate students to enhance a sense of community
- Balance between teaching (TA) and research (RA) responsibilities for students who hold more than one type of GA during a semester. Students report having to work so many hours, they have little time to work on their own research.
- Open to having expected performance metrics to receive continued funding.
- Need Summer Support
- Travel Support for Conferences
- Affordable on-campus housing – difficult because you have to pay all up front
- Meal Plan – challenge to pay up front
- Would like student fees waived
- 12-month stipends
- Students would be amenable to funding tied to performance
 - Progress report
- Transparency of direct costs/fees – students get surprised when fees or tuition increases, not prepared.
- More summer funding opportunities
 - More time for research in the summer with no meetings or classes
- Stipends don’t change but cost of living does
- Disparity in workloads for TA’s, no standardization of TA stipends
- Inflation of support needs to be factored in
- Who determines the TA selections?
- Who determines the amount of support given to each college?
- In the sciences, not much extra time built in when things go wrong.
- Where do increments go?
- Were you encouraged to seek out external support?
 - Can only apply for those in the 1st or 2nd year
 - What about programs that cannot get external funding?
- RA salaries – barely enough to pay rent
- The recent International student fee was unexpected.
- GASP – most PhD students take 5 years to complete, but GASP funding ends after 4 years
 - Many times, after 1-2 years, advisor changes

- Is it possible to get an extension on GASP?
- Holistic picture:
 - Stream of funds
 - Housing
 - Salary/tuition
 - Level of support/duration of support
 - Quality of life (safety)
 - Parking passes
 - Is there a way to balance what a TA instructor expects versus PI expectations?

Graduate Students provide:

- UG success
- Research initiatives
- Ties back to attracting good faculty
- In order to achieve these things, you need high quality graduate students

FACULTY CAMPUS FORUMS ON GRADUATE STUDENT FUNDING FEEDBACK

Notetakers at the campus forums for faculty and staff compiled the following list of items.

- Faculty concerned about lack of funding for master's students.
- Uncompetitive stipends to recruit/retain students, so students often get job offers and either leave the program entirely or try to complete it part time.
- Lack of guaranteed tuition support for master's students, even for those with stipends.
- Big constraint for international master's students – no funding or not much.
- Is there a new amount of monies to be infused?
- There have not been any new monies, but we need to have a mechanism in place to accommodate if changes in revenue occur or there a redistribution of existing funds.
- Question about GASP funding going mostly to international PhD students.
- One scenario – only provide revenue for in-state students, but this penalizes the programs that typically enroll mostly international students.
- 26% of the graduate school population is international students, and 54% of GASP funding goes to international students for 5 years at the non-residential rate. Central funds from the Graduate School are paying \$13-14K a year for non-resident students for the non-resident tuition differential (in addition to resident tuition) in comparison to \$4,300 per year for resident students.
- Health insurance rates continue to rise.
- Incentivize programs to recruit more domestic students.
- One example – resident tuition could be linked to a RA or TA and coupled to the GA. Then a separate fixed pot of money could be held centrally in which faculty or programs can compete for the non-resident tuition differential. Very best students would compete against each other.
- Concern over a super-short time to recruit new students and not having timely decisions on tuition support.

- Not all programs have access or success with external funding or need help from the Graduate School or the University in securing external funding.
- Faculty would like to at least stay competitive with other similar institutions in terms of recruiting.
- Would like more transparency in funding and earlier notification to recruit good students.
- Geography – concerned about the lack of transparency of support. Never know what funding they will receive. New students need to have a clear communication if they are not going to receive a tuition waiver (NRTD).
- Faculty in favor of tying performance to funding.
- Faculty in favor of setting banding or minimum levels of support. Engineering has minimum \$15,600K – master's, and \$18K - PhD .
- Challenges for other departments. whose stipends are smaller, they would have to reduce their number of new students in order to raise stipends. (Geography and Earth Sciences)
- Faculty concerned about model for time-to-degree because of the variance in programs across campus.
- Indirect costs an issue – where do these fees go?
- In supporting graduate students, you have to take into consideration tuition, fees, health insurance and stipends. It is a significant cost and students can only work 20 hours per week.
- PI – on their own, they do keep the in-directs, but have no safety net.
- Instructional Mission – If scenario has one pot of money going toward the teaching mission and another pot going for the research – there is concern.
- TA pay rates are not competitive. Salaries are a challenge.
- Should institutional funds for TA's be set aside to support the University's instructional mission?
- UG population increases require additional TA's.
- What do we do with Interdisciplinary programs? PPOL and departments still need seed money, and some programs don't have access to RA's.
- Is research tied to the mission of the university? How does that impact RA funding?
- Concern about a two-tiered model in a single department between TA's and RA's for instructional mission for students who have been removed from the teaching mission because they have one of these waivers and students who are embedded in the teaching part who can never get access to the research opportunities. It's not just for UG teaching; part of our instructional mission is to train our graduate students for professional life. At the PhD level, we are training them to be professors, public speakers and for senior level private sector positions or other professorial experiences. We are busy helping them with writing issues and/or language issues so that they can be competitive.
- Packages are just not competitive on a national scale and should include tuition and fees with competitive stipend levels.
- Coupling of tuition/fees with TA and RA support would help resolve some of these issues. Faculty in favor of this.
- Pool of monies for RA support – faculty compete for those resources.
- Tie TAs to instructional goals across the University.
- There is no formal assessment of budget needs for graduate student funding if enrollment increases or decreases, and there is a connection to the UG enrollment. We need some mechanism to monitor this process.
- How are preceptors determined? Institutional monies for preceptors (UG helps with huge classes).
- Tuition increment - Uneven across campus – A unit can decide to charge a fee for its enrolled students. Range from \$800 to \$21K across campus. To supplement financial support. Where

do those funds go? Do they go directly to the students? Not a local decision, flows to the state level for approval. Fee attached to a program. Process by which the fee is approved. Fees go back to the college. Some fees go directly to the program, but most of the time, the funds go directly to the Dean of the College. Initially, 25% was required to be used as scholarships for students. Now it goes to the Dean who decides how it is used.

EXTERNAL RESOURCES ON GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT

Oklahoma State University, [Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey](#), 2017-2018.

National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, [Graduate and Professional Loan Limits Task Force White Paper](#), August 2017

University of California, [Report of the Taskforce on Competitiveness in Academic Graduate Student Support](#), June 2012

Princeton University, [Task Force on the Future of the Graduate School](#), August 2015

Western University (Canada), [Report of the Graduate Funding Sub-Committee of the Provost's Task Force on University Budget Models](#), January 2016

UC Davis, [Prioritizing and Strengthening Graduate Education: A report by the Joint Administration / Academic Senate Special Task Force on Graduate Education](#), May 2012

Northern Arizona University, [Research and Graduate Education Task Force Report](#), April 2006

University of Houston, [Report of the Graduate Assistant Success Task Force](#), January 2014

University of Missouri, [Task Force on the Graduate Student Experience](#), December 2015

University of Minnesota, [Transforming the University - Final Recommendations of the Task Force of Graduate Reform: Student Support](#), February 2006

A best practice model for reporting graduate program performance: [Northwestern University](#)



PROPOSAL

Graduate Council Subcommittee on Funding and Fellowships

Role:

Duties include close communication and collaboration with the Graduate School and the academic colleges to recommend policies for the Graduate Council to consider, as well as monthly updates to the Council and the Graduate School Dean on the Subcommittee's work. Oversight of graduate student funding and fellowships, including the implementation of the Graduate Student Funding Task Force recommendations.

Examples:

- Recommendations to the Dean of the Graduate School on the annual award of graduate student support funds to academic programs
- Establish a Graduate Assistant workload policy
- Annual review of program performance to support decision-making
- Annual determination of baseline compensation for graduate assistantships
- Benchmark GA stipends against national data for competitive wages

Membership Composition:

Two members of the Graduate Council, elected annually by the members; one representative from each academic college; the Director of Funding and Fellowships in the Graduate School (Chair); one master's student (ex-officio); one doctoral student (ex-officio); and the Associate Dean of the Graduate School for Enrollment Management (ex-officio).

Meeting Frequency:

Monthly for two hours and electronically as needed.