

Report of the Graduate Stipend Committee

July 6, 2015

Committee Members

Nicole D'Anna, doctoral student, Sociology

Tina Dimarco, doctoral student, Psychology

Susan Gauss, Associate Professor, History

Jennifer Greiman, Associate Professor, English

Julia Hastings, Assistant Professor, Social Welfare

John Jones, Associate Professor, Economics

Alison Redlich, Associate Professor, Criminal Justice

Ryan Torn, Associate Professor, Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences

Kevin Williams, Vice Provost of Graduate Education

Sarah Zuckerman, doctoral student, Education Administration and Policy Studies

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	7
Methods & Process	8
Overview of Graduate Student Support (GSS) at UAlbany	9
Committee Findings: UAlbany Stipend Levels and Comparative Data	12
National norms	12
SUNY University Centers	14
Peer Institutions	14
Department-Identified Competitors	15
Summary of Comparative Analysis of Stipends	17
Stipend Increases for 2015-16	17
Length of Funding	18
Externally Funded Research Assistantships	19
Summer Support	20
Recommendations	21
Appendices	25

Executive Summary

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the University at Albany is having difficulty attracting top-quality graduate students across all departments. Nearly all of the doctoral programs that have undertaken Academic Program Review in the past five years have expressed concern that they are losing doctoral candidates to universities that offer higher stipends and more years of guaranteed support. These concerns have been corroborated by external reviewers who almost universally identify graduate student funding as the most pressing concern for graduate programs. The Graduate Student Association (GSA) has also voiced concerns about the level of graduate student stipends and the negative effects that low stipends have on student well being. The issue of graduate student compensation was raised in recent “town hall” meetings between student leaders and President Jones and other senior administrators. In Fall 2014, the Wages and Benefits Committee of the GSA produced a report that concluded that current funding for graduate students is insufficient and that financial stress is a significant impediment to degree progress.

In response to these concerns, President Robert J. Jones announced in Fall 2014 the formation of a blue ribbon panel to study the competitiveness of graduate student stipends at UAlbany. Interim Provost Timothy Mulcahy appointed a committee of faculty and graduate students from various departments, and charged members to evaluate the level of graduate student support provided by graduate assistantships at UAlbany and make recommendations to the Provost that will allow for competitive levels of support. This report contains the findings and recommendations of the committee.

The committee convened in January 2015 and met several times during the Spring 2015 semester. Data from several sources were obtained and used for comparison purposes. Specifically, the stipends for UAlbany doctoral programs were compared to (1) discipline-specific norms obtained from a national survey of graduate stipends published in 2013 by Oklahoma State University; (2) stipend levels offered at the other three SUNY University Centers (Stony Brook, Buffalo, and Binghamton); and (3) stipends offered at the peer institutions listed in the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding between UAlbany and SUNY. Members of the Committee also gathered data on stipends offered by peer institutions within their specific disciplines. In all cases, UAlbany stipend rates compared unfavorably against peer institutions. For the academic year 2014-15, our stipends were substantially below our peers, with the size of the discrepancy varying by discipline. It was also found that peer institutions typically guarantee funding for at least one more year than we do. The increased stipend levels for 2015-2016 announced by the Dean of Graduate Studies during Spring 2015 will reduce but do not eliminate the gap between our peers and us. Further adjustments are needed to make us competitive.

The Committee concludes that graduate student funding must become a campus priority. Even with planned raises for Fall 2015, our stipends are low relative to peers and aspirational peers. In addition, we fund students for less time than many other universities. Current levels of funding create hardships for students and delay time to degree, which are strong negative factors for prospective graduate students. Steps must be taken immediately to increase funding for graduate students so that we may attract and retain higher-quality students and make it possible for them

to graduate in a timely fashion. Accordingly, the committee makes the following specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1. Increase the number of years of guaranteed funding for doctoral students.

The length of funding for doctoral students emerged from the committee's work as a major concern among students and faculty. Current policy limits graduate assistants to 3 years of state-supported funding if they enter a doctoral program with a master's degree in the same discipline, and 4 years of funding if they enter with a bachelor's degree or without a master's in the same discipline. There is the possibility of an additional year of funding (referred to as "Extended Year" funding) for students who advance to candidacy within this time period. This extended year funding is not guaranteed and not all students who are eligible are able to receive it due to budget constraints. Several departments report losing students to other universities that guarantee funding for longer periods of time. This is particularly a problem in the humanities and social sciences, where there are fewer opportunities for students to move to faculty grants by their third or fourth year of training. The Committee recommends making one additional year of funding available to all students who demonstrate adequate progress toward their degree.

Recommendation 2. Bring all doctoral student stipends up to the market value established by our peer institutions.

Our average graduate assistant stipend is low compared both to national norms and our peer institutions. UAlbany cannot compete successfully for top students until we offer more competitive stipends. The raises that will go into effect for the 2015-2016 academic year bring us closer to national and peer norms, and for the humanities and social science disciplines bring us more in line with the 2014-15 stipends at the other three SUNY University Centers. Stipends in our STEM disciplines are still well below our University peers. In addition, it is likely that our peers will be raising their stipends. We recommend that by Fall 2016 stipends be raised to at least \$20,000 in the STEM disciplines, \$17,000-18,000 in the social science disciplines, and \$16,000-17,000 in the humanities and education disciplines.

Recommendation 3. Allow individual departments flexibility in using their graduate student support allocations.

Doctoral programs expressed different needs to the Committee. Several humanities programs, for example, believed that their stipend level is fairly competitive and would prefer longer guaranteed funding rather than higher stipends. Many STEM programs, by contrast, expressed a preference for higher stipends. These programs are able to support students on grants beyond their third year, so would prefer to convert extended year funding into higher stipends or summer support for their students. The Committee recommends that the Dean of Graduate Studies, who is responsible for allocating the graduate student support budget, work with departments to decide how increases in allocations to graduate student funding would best serve the needs of specific programs.

Recommendation 4. Develop mechanisms that encourage students to apply for external fellowships.

We have not been as successful as our peers in attracting external student fellowship awards, such as the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) or Mellon Foundation Fellowships. There should be a coordinated, cross-campus effort aimed at identifying top students who have the potential to win these awards, and providing them with the support necessary for a competitive application. For fellowships that do not provide tuition or health benefits, funds should be identified and used as cost-sharing to support the student's application. A few departments, such as the Department of Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences Department, have been quite successful recently in helping students apply for and earn external fellowships. Their methods and approaches may serve as a model for other departments.

Recommendation 5. Work with faculty and departments to increase the number of students funded on research assistantships.

The Committee surveyed the number of graduate students supported by faculty research grants and other external funds. External funding supports a relatively small proportion of students, and the number of externally funded research assistantships is concentrated in a few departments. The other University Centers and our peer institutions appear to have a larger proportion of students on research assistantships. Faculty should be encouraged to put graduate students on research grants whenever appropriate. Further study of factors that inhibit and facilitate research assistantships for graduate students may also be warranted. If necessary, incentives should be provided to faculty for funding graduate students.

Recommendation 6. Develop mechanisms to provide summer funding to students on graduate assistantships.

Students are appointed to state-supported graduate and teaching assistantships for the academic year only and are not guaranteed summer support. Students rely on various sources for income during the summer. Some are put on faculty grants in research titles, while others, primarily advanced students, may teach summer courses. Many others find summer employment off campus, sometimes in positions related to their training (e.g., internships), but often in part-time positions that simply pay the bills. Doctoral students who work off campus run the risk of being disconnected from their research, which may delay progress toward their degree. Many of our peer institutions are able to offer summer support to students, in the form of research or teaching assignments. UAlbany needs to develop strategies for increasing summer support for students. One suggestion is to engage the Development Office to help build capacity within departments for summer funding for graduate students. Perhaps a development officer could be appointed to coordinate development activities with graduate directors in the academic departments offering Ph.D. programs.

Recommendation 7. Explore the possibility of a university-wide fellowship initiative that would award nationally competitive stipends to highly qualified students. Many top universities have designated fellowships or assistantships that provide highly competitive

stipends to their top students. These awards are designed to recruit the best students in the country. Such an initiative may be useful for increasing the competitiveness and reputation of our programs.

Recommendation 8. Develop a plan to provide benchmark data on graduate stipends on an ongoing basis so that stipend levels can remain competitive with our peers.

In order to ensure that our stipends remain competitive with our peers, it is critical to have a mechanism for regular monitoring the market value of graduate stipends. There is currently no such mechanism in place and conducting non-regular reviews may lead to extended periods of non-competitive stipends. Ongoing monitoring could focus on a limited number of peer and aspirational peer institutions.

Introduction

Graduate students are central to the mission of the University at Albany. They enhance undergraduate education by teaching courses, assisting faculty as teaching assistants, and serving as lab instructors. They expand and improve the university's instructional capacity, allowing the institution to meet the needs of students by providing more courses and enabling faculty to engage undergraduates in more individualized or focused learning activities, all of which are important to undergraduate satisfaction and retention. There are important synergies between graduate education and faculty scholarship. Graduate students work with faculty in research laboratories and collaborate in university workshops and colloquia, producing new knowledge that expands the frontiers of academic disciplines and improves understanding of global problems. Strong and vibrant graduate programs, composed of high quality students who are appropriately supported through degree completion, are a prerequisite to attracting and retaining high quality faculty at any research university.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the University is failing to land top-quality graduate students due to the low stipend levels. A major concern expressed by faculty and external reviewers in recent Academic Program Reviews has been the erosion of financial support for doctoral students. Nearly all of our doctoral programs report that they are losing their top doctoral applicants to universities that offer better stipends and more years of guaranteed support. Attracting top graduate students is even more important now that UAlbany's NYSUNY 2020 initiative has resulted in the hiring of many new, top-notch faculty across the university. Many of these faculty were hired to raise the research profile of the university. Return on this investment will not be realized unless they can recruit top students to work alongside them.

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) has also voiced concerns about the negative effects that low stipends have on student well being and time-to-degree. The issue of graduate student compensation has been discussed in several open forums or town hall meetings between student leaders and President Jones over the last few years. In Fall 2014, the Wages and Benefits Committee of the GSA produced a report that concluded that current funding for graduate students is insufficient and that financial stress and insecurity, as well as the need to work off-campus, are a significant impediment to degree progress. Although many doctoral students receive graduate assistantships in some form, survey results reported by the GSA found that 38% of all Ph.D. students reported relying on loans to cover at least 40% of their cost of attendance. In addition, most doctoral students faced a gap between the funding associated with their assistantship and the time it takes to complete their doctorate: the average time to completion for the doctoral degree is 6.7 years and most graduate assistantships provide funding for only 3-4 years.

In response to these concerns, President Jones announced in Fall 2014 the formation of a blue ribbon panel to study the competitiveness of graduate student stipends at UAlbany. Interim Provost Timothy Mulcahy appointed a committee of faculty and graduate students from various departments, and charged members to evaluate the level of graduate student support provided by graduate assistantships at UAlbany and make recommendations to the Provost that will allow for

competitive levels of support. This report contains the findings and recommendations of the committee.

Committee Charge

The committee was charged by Interim Provost Timothy Mulcahy to evaluate current graduate student stipends and make recommendations for competitive levels of support. The exact charge was:

Evaluate the level of graduate student support provided by graduate assistantships at UAlbany and make recommendations to the Provost that will allow for competitive levels of support.

Tasks:

- Review the current types and distribution of assistantships (research, teaching, administrative, and general assistantships) available to graduate students at UAlbany
- Review the stipends and tuition scholarships awarded to graduate students across programs within the University
- Compare UAlbany stipends and total compensation to national norms and peer institutions, particularly to the other SUNY University Centers
- Identify competitive stipend levels to optimize student experience and the institution's ability to recruit and retain students
- Recommend compensation packages that are competitive with the other University Centers
- Evaluate and recommend institutional strategies for financing graduate education

The Committee was composed of six faculty members, two doctoral students, and the Dean of Graduate Studies. Members represented the three broad disciplinary categories of arts and humanities, social sciences, and STEM. Doctoral programs at both the high and low end of the stipend range were represented. The following sections of this report: (1) describe the process of work adopted by the committee; (2) provide a brief overview of funding at UAlbany; (3) summarize the Committee's findings; and (4) offer a set of recommendations for improving graduate student support.

1. Methods & Process

The Committee was convened in the January 2015 and met several times during the spring 2015 semester. During our initial meeting we reviewed the Provost's charge and discussed our experiences and perceptions of graduate student funding at UAlbany. One of the first steps was to define the type of assistantships and stipends that would be the focus of the Committee's work. This was not a simple task because there are multiple mechanisms for funding graduate students (fellowships, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, adjunct lines, part time

teaching lines), and stipends are not always reported using the same parameters (e.g., % FTE, academic vs. calendar year). For comparison purposes, we had to identify in clear and specific terms what we were evaluating and comparing. The Committee's charge focused on the stipends attached to typical assistantship offers used to recruit and support graduate students at UAlbany. Thus, the Committee's focus was on stipends associated with:

- academic year (9 month) assistantships, awarded by doctoral programs or departments
- State or institutional funding (as opposed to grant or other external funding)
- 50% FTE work obligation (equivalent of up to 20 hours per week)
- Graduate assistantship duties assigned by the department, including teaching, administrative and/or faculty research assistance (equivalent to the titles "graduate teaching assistant," "graduate assistant," or "teaching assistant")

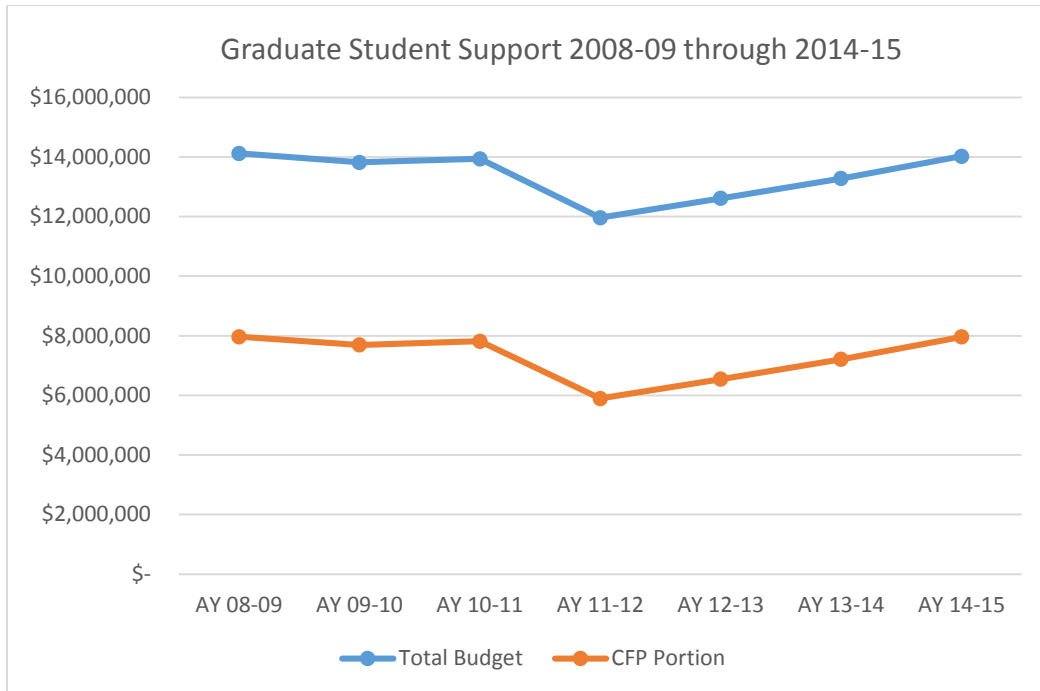
The next step was to identify data and comparison groups for the evaluation and comparative analysis of stipends. Data were collected to provide comparisons with (1) national averages, (2) the other three University Centers in the SUNY system (Binghamton, Buffalo, and Stony Brook; (3) peer institutions as defined by UAlbany's current MOU with SUNY, and (4) peer institutions identified by programs as being their major competitors. National norms were obtained from the 2012-2013 graduate student stipend survey conducted and published by Oklahoma State University. Data on stipends from the other SUNY University Centers were obtained from program websites and direct inquiries to graduate deans and department chairs. Data from UAlbany's official peer institutions were obtained from official university websites, and data from program-specific peers was gathered via surveys conducted by Committee members.

During its meetings, the Committee reviewed the data collected and reported by members and discussed their relevance and implications. The comparative analysis focused on both the amount and length of funding provided to students. For each comparison, members discussed the findings and reached consensus as to the extent and meaning of differences in funding between UAlbany programs and the comparison group(s). The last meeting of the semester was devoted to drafting recommendations for the Provost.

2. Overview of Graduate Student Support (GSS) at UAlbany

The chart below presents the annual budget for graduate student support from AY 2008-09 to AY 2014-15. From 2008-09 through 2010-11, the budget for graduate student support was approximately \$14M, with SUNY administration providing approximately \$6M and the Campus Financial Plan providing the remaining \$8M. In AY 2010-11, for example, the sources for the graduate student base funding were:

Tuition waivers (SUNY central):	\$5,055,100
Diversity funds (SUNY central):	\$849,110
GTOP (SUNY central):	\$163,000
Campus Financial Plan:	\$7,818,380



In 2011, the GSS budget was reduced by \$2.1M, all from the Campus Financial Plan (SUNY’s contribution has remained constant since 08-09). The UAlbany SUNY 2020 plan provided for a return of \$1.25M, spread over 5 years. These increases started in 2012-13 and will continue through 2016-17. The increases under the 2020 plan would still leave the GSS budget \$.85M below 2010-11 levels. The SUNY 2020 plan included tuition increases for doctoral students (30% over 5 years for in-state students and 60% over 5 years for out-of-state students). These increases need to be covered by the GSS budget. Approximately \$500K has been added to the base budget each year to cover tuition increases.¹ The GSS budget provides assistantships to approximately 500 graduate students.

2014-15 Stipend Levels

Graduate assistantship stipends at UAlbany vary by department and for the 2014-15 academic year ranged from \$13,000 to \$17,500 for full-time students. Table 1 presents the stipend level for each doctoral program. As is true at most universities, GA stipends at UAlbany vary across discipline due to differences in competition across fields and the availability of research funding. Consistent with most national surveys, graduate assistants in humanities, social sciences, and education on average receive lower stipends than those in life and physical sciences. Program strength is another factor that contributes to the variability in stipends, with stronger and nationally ranked programs having higher stipend levels.

¹ Under the 2020 plan, SUNY central was not going to raise doctoral tuition, but the 4 university centers argued for the increase and pledged to cover tuition waivers out of the revenue from their 2020 plans

Several departments on campus (Chemistry, Biology, Atmospheric Sciences, Biomedical Sciences, Criminal Justice) supplement the stipend levels provided by the University, either by adding to the base stipend or providing summer salary to students. These departments have a high amount of grant activity and use a portion of their indirect cost recovery or external grants to supplement student stipends. Our analysis focused on the base level of stipends and did not include any supplements from departments.

Tuition and Benefits

Full-time graduate assistants are provided with tuition scholarships/waivers that cover the cost of tuition for full-time study. The waivers cover both in-state and out-of-state tuition. Domestic out-of-state students are required to declare New York State residency after one year, and thus their scholarships cover the cost of out-of-state tuition for one year, and in-state tuition thereafter. International students cannot declare NYS residency, and thus their scholarships cover the cost of out-of-state tuition for the duration of their study. The value of the tuition benefit varies with the number of credits required by the student's program. Full-time study for graduate assistants is defined as 9 credits per semester, although some programs require up to 12 credits per semester. For the 2014-15 academic year, the value of the typical 9-credit per semester tuition waiver was \$7,778 at the in-state rate and \$15,143 at the out-of-state rate. For students required to take 12 credits, the value of the tuition scholarships were \$10,370 and \$20,190 for in- and out-of-state, respectively.

Graduate assistants are eligible for the Student Employee Health Plan as employees represented by the Graduate Student Employees Union (GSEU). Enrollment in the health plan is voluntary for U.S. citizens and permanent residents, but required for international students.

Length of Funding

Current policy limits graduate assistants to 3 years of state-supported funding if they entered a doctoral program with a master's degree, and 4 years of funding if they entered with a bachelor's degree (or without a master's from the same discipline). There is the possibility of an additional year of funding for students who advance to candidacy within this time period (referred to as "Extended Year" funding), but it is not guaranteed at the time students enter their program and not all eligible students are able to receive it due to budget constraints.

Graduate Assistant Assignments

The department, in consultation with the dean of the school or college, determines the nature of graduate assistant assignments. Specific assignments vary within and between departments, and may include teaching, instructional support (teaching assistant, grader), administrative support (e.g., advising), or research support, or some combination of these. The work obligation is 15-20 hours per week.

Allocation methods

The allocation of graduate assistantships to programs is based on a variety of factors, including program size, the strength of program, and instructional needs of department. UAlbany's

Strategic Plan announced in October, 2010, called for the development of specific criteria to evaluate doctoral programs on an ongoing basis, and to be used as the basis for future allocation decisions. A graduate education working group identified a set of twelve metrics to be used for assessment of doctoral programs, and programs are currently being tracked on these metrics on an annual basis. A list of these metrics is contained in the Appendix.

3. Committee Findings: UAlbany Stipend Levels and Comparative Data

National norms

Table 1 lists the stipend level for each department or program along with national comparison data drawn from the 2012-2013 Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey, conducted and published by Oklahoma State University (OSU). The OSU study surveyed graduate students at 46 universities (mostly public) across the country and reported the average teaching assistantship (TA) and research assistantship (RA) stipend by academic discipline (see Appendix for list of colleges). For our comparison purposes, the average TA (rather than RA) stipend was chosen because the majority of assistantships at UAlbany are equivalent to teaching assistantships. These values are presented in the 4th column of Table 1. ²

The difference between UAlbany stipends and the OSU norms ranges from -\$9,880 (economics) to +\$4,488 (public administration). **On average, the 2014-15 UAlbany stipends were nearly \$1,900 below the OSU norms** (mean = -\$1,892). This comparison looked at absolute differences in stipend level, and did not adjust for differences in cost of living. The majority of universities in the OSU survey are in cities or towns that have a lower cost of living than Albany. Thus, the practical difference in stipends is likely to be larger than \$1,892.

The OSU report did not present institutional averages for stipends at the 46 institutions. Rather, it ranked institutions within each discipline by total financial support to students (stipend + tuition waiver). The average tuition waiver was estimated to be approximately \$7,000, which is lower than the typical tuition award at UAlbany. To estimate the relative rank of our stipends in the OSU sample, we subtracted \$7,000 from each value of the total financial support reported in the OSU survey. The 5th column of Table 1 shows UAlbany's percentile rank for stipends among the institutions in the OSU survey. Most UAlbany programs fall between the 50th and 70th percentile ranges.

² The unit of analysis was the individual respondent, not institutional program. Thus, programs with large numbers of respondents exerted greater influence on the mean.

Table 1: AY 2014-15 UAlbany Stipend Levels by Department compared with National Norms

School or College	PhD Program	UA 14-15 stipend level	OSU survey mean TA stipend	Estimated UA %tile in OSU data
Arts & Sciences	Anthropology	14,000	15,240	.65
	Art * (MFA)	10,000	11,330	
	Atmospheric Sciences	16,000	21,710	.57
	Biological Sciences	16,000	16,734	.57
	Chemistry	16,000	18,029	.57
	Communication	14,000	18,870	.53
	Economics	13,000	17,199	.57
	English	15,000	14,551	.67
	History	13,000	13,660	.60
	Spanish	13,000	18,929	.50
	Latin Am & Carib Studies	13,000	14,237	.42
	Mathematics & Stats	16,000	17,369	.59
	Philosophy	13,000	13,702	.54
	Physics	16,000	17,560	.57
	Psychology	15,000	17,296	.67
	Sociology	15,500	14,602	.67
Computing & Information	Computer Science	14,000	20,702	.59
	Informatics	13,000	18,921	.51
Criminal Justice	Criminal Justice	17,000	15,279	.62
Education	Education Admin & Policy	13,000	12,879	.71
	Counseling Psychology	13,000	11,277	.56
	Educational Psychology	13,000	16,526	.56
	School Psychology *	15,000		
	Educ. Theory & Practice	13,000	12,944	.71
	Reading	13,500		
Rockefeller	Political Science	14,000	14,405	.65
	Public Administration	16,000	11,512	.67
Public Health	Biomedical Sciences	17,500	22,637	.66
	Environmental Health Sci	17,500		
	Epidemiology & Biostat	15,000		
Social Welfare	Social Work	14,000	13,302	.63

*Art and School Psychology award 1/2 (10 hour) GAs; students receive 50% of amount listed

SUNY University Centers

Table 2 presents stipend data for the other SUNY University Centers. These data were obtained from a variety of sources: program websites, department chairs, and graduate deans. The minimum stipend for all doctoral students at Stony Brook is \$17,145. Several of their programs provide higher stipends, particularly in the sciences where students in some programs received \$27,000. The stipends at Stony Brook are higher than at UAlbany for all programs, and the minimum stipend at Stony Brook is higher than all UAlbany stipends except for biomedical sciences and environmental health sciences. Stipends in the life and physical sciences at Buffalo are substantially higher than they are at UAlbany. By contrast, stipends in the humanities and social sciences are fairly similar between the two institutions. Stipends at Binghamton are typically \$1000-2000 higher than at UAlbany, depending on the discipline. All SUNY University Centers provide full tuition waivers to the vast majority of graduate assistants. The waivers cover in-state and out-of-state tuition.

Table 2 – SUNY University Center Stipend Levels 14-15

Program area	Stony Brook	Buffalo	Binghamton	Albany
Humanities	\$17,145 -20,000	\$13,500 -15,000	\$15,000	\$13,000-15,000
Social Sciences	\$17,145 -20,000	\$12,400 - 18,600	\$15,000 - 16,500	\$13,000-17,000
Life & Physical Sciences	\$17,145 -27,000	\$18,000 - 25,000	\$17,000 - 18,500	\$14,000-17,500

After reviewing the data from the other University Centers, the Committee concluded that 2014-15 stipends at UAlbany were generally lower than those offered at the other University Centers, with the exception of humanities and social science programs at Buffalo. However, it should be noted that Buffalo used external money to supplement or “top-off” a few of their assistantships in History, and perhaps other humanities and social science programs, to attract their top applicants.

Peer Institutions

Table 3 presents a summary of stipend data that were available from UAlbany’s peer institutions as articulated in the MOU with SUNY. We were not able to obtain data from all the peer institutions, nor were we successful in getting program-specific data for all institutions. Thus, we focused on the typical or average funding at the institution level, and where possible within the broad disciplinary categories of arts/humanities, social sciences, and STEM. Overall, stipends at our peer institutions exceed ours across all disciplines. Stipends at the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee are approximately \$2,000 higher for each academic disciplinary category than at Albany for 2014-15. The minimum stipend at University of Hawaii – Manoa (\$19,000) is substantially higher than all of our stipends. The minimum stipend at the University of Vermont

(\$17,500) is \$4,500 higher than our minimum and equivalent to our top stipend at for 2014-15. The University of Connecticut provides stipends that are substantially higher than ours, as well as all other of our peer institutions. Their stipends also increase as students progress toward their degrees. For pre-master’s students, the minimum stipend at UConn (\$20,965) is from \$3,465 - \$7,965 higher than ours. For students who have advanced to doctoral candidacy at UConn, their stipends are \$7,026 - \$11,526 higher than our 2014-15 levels. The stipends at University of Colorado-Boulder and University of Houston are higher than our 2014-15 stipends in STEM fields, but relatively comparable in social sciences and humanities.

Table 3. Comparison of Stipend Level at UAlbany vs. Peer Institutions

	2014-15 levels
University Wisconsin – Milwaukee	3 levels, vary by school: \$15K for arts/humanities; \$17K for social sciences; \$19K for science and engineering
University of Vermont	Minimum \$17,500; higher for some disciplines and experience
University of Connecticut	3 levels of stipends, based on progress toward the degree: Level 1 (BA degree) - \$20,965 Level 2 (Master’s degree) - \$22,060 Level 3 (PhD candidacy) - \$24,526
Hawaii-Manoa	Minimum \$19,000; higher for some disciplines
Binghamton	\$15,000 – 18,500
Houston – Univ Park	\$5,400 – 22,500
University Colorado Boulder	15,000 (Social Sciences) – 25,000 (STEM)

Department Identified Competitors

Comparisons with national norms and institutional peers are meaningful but do not present a complete picture of the competitive landscape for individual programs. Programs within the university vary in composition and strength and compete with programs at different universities for graduate students. The Chemistry Department, for example, may compete with different universities for its students than the Anthropology Department. The Committee did not have the time or resources to survey program-specific peers for all graduate programs on campus, but members did conduct such stipend surveys for select disciplines.

Economics: A member of the committee conducted a stipend survey of 16 doctoral programs in economics. Twelve graduate directors responded and provided the following data.

- Mean stipend: \$16,700
- Median stipend: \$16,000
- 25th – 75th percentile range: \$15,500 - \$17,400

All programs that responded provide tuition waivers for graduate assistants (although 1 program provides waivers for domestic tuition only). In addition, all programs provide students with summer support, with 50% being in the form of summer teaching. The 2014-15 stipend level for economics at UAlbany (\$13,000) is below the 25th percentile for this survey.

Sociology: Faculty in the Department of Sociology conducted a survey of graduate stipends at the SUNY University Centers and several of its chief competitors. Graduate stipends in Sociology compare favorably to other SUNY centers: the 2014-15 UAlbany stipend (\$15,500) is higher than the stipend at Buffalo (\$12,400) and Binghamton (\$15,000). Stony Brook offers a higher stipend (\$17,502) than UAlbany, but after adjusting for the cost of living difference (approximately \$2,500) the stipends are fairly equivalent. However, the graduate stipends in Sociology are well below peer institutions that receive similar national rankings. UAlbany's sociology program is ranked #28 by USNWR and their stipends are substantially lower than University of Maryland, College Park (#24, \$21,750), Rutgers University (#28, \$25,969), and Penn State University (#17, \$17,316). The Sociology Department reports losing students to these the institutions in large part because of the higher stipends that they offer.

English: Faculty in the English Department conducted a stipend survey that included the other three University Centers and three self-designated peers: University of Delaware, University of Maryland (College Park), and Penn State University. The '14-15 stipend at Albany (\$15,000) was slightly higher than Binghamton (\$14,500) and higher than Buffalo (\$13,500), but substantially lower than Stony Brook (\$20,000). Comparisons with self-designated peers were less favorable: Delaware offered \$17,500, Maryland \$20,000, and Penn State \$18,500-25,000. All six of the peer institutions reported funding their students for a minimum of 5 years (compared to 3 at UAlbany).

History: Faculty in the History Department compared their stipends to the other University Centers with PhD programs in history and 5 self-designated peers: University of North Texas, Florida State University, Penn State University, Northern Illinois University, and Kansas State University. For the 2014-15 AY, stipends at Albany (\$13,000) were \$2,000 less than Binghamton and \$4,000 less than Stony Brook. The stipend in History was also lower than all the self-designated peers except Kansas State University, where the department made the choice to lower their stipend to \$9,500 in order to fund more students. Stipends at the other institutions ranged from \$14,000 at Northern Illinois to an average of \$20,000 at Penn State.

Chemistry: The Chemistry department conducted a small survey comparing its stipends to those of the other University Centers and to University of Minnesota. Stipends were higher at each of these institutions than the \$16,000 stipend offered at UAlbany: Buffalo offers \$22,530, Binghamton \$18,000, Stony Brook \$18,000, and Minnesota \$17,438.

Atmospheric Science: The Department of Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences identified three peer institutions for comparison: Colorado State University (\$20,200 academic year stipend), University of Washington (\$16,800), and University of Wisconsin- Madison (\$15,700). The UAlbany stipend (\$16,000) is comparable to that offered at Washington and Wisconsin, but is substantially lower than that offered at Colorado State.

Summary of Comparative Analyses of Stipend Level

The Committee’s analyses revealed a considerable range of stipends across institutions and disciplines, making it difficult to define a specific standard for “competitive stipend.” When all the analyses are considered, the Committee felt that a “typical” stipend or benchmark among our peers in 2014-15 was: \$15-16K in the arts/humanities and education, \$16-17K in the social sciences, and \$19-20K for STEM disciplines.

Stipend Increases for 2015-16

The Committee’s analysis focused on a comparison of stipends in effect for the 2014-15 academic year. After the Committee was formed, the Dean of Graduate Studies announced that graduate stipends would be increased for the 2015-16 academic year. The minimum stipend was raised to \$15,000 and the top stipend to \$18,000. The 2015-16 stipend levels for each program are listed in Table 4.

Table 4 – UAlbany Stipends for 2015-16

S/C	Program	UA 15-16 stipend level
CAS	Anthropology	\$15,000
	Art	\$14,000*
	Atmospheric Sciences	\$17,500
	Biological Sciences	\$17,500
	Chemistry	\$17,500
	Communication	\$15,000
	Economics	\$15,000
	English	\$15,000
	History	\$15,000
	Lang, Lit & Cult - Spanish	\$15,000
	Latin Am & Carib Studies	\$15,000
	Mathematics & Statistics	\$17,500
	Philosophy	\$15,000
	Physics	\$17,500
	Psychology	\$16,000
	Sociology	\$16,000
CCI	Computer Science	\$15,000
	Informatics	\$15,000
CRJ	Criminal Justice	\$17,500
EDU	Educational Admin	\$15,000
	Counseling Psychology	\$15,000
	Educational Psychology	\$15,000
	School Psychology	\$15,000*

	Educational Theory & Practice	\$15,000
	Reading	\$15,000
ROCK	Political Science	\$15,000
	Public Admin	\$16,000
SPH	Biomedical Sciences	\$18,000
	Environmental Health Sciences	\$18,000
	Epidemiology & Biostatistics	\$17,500
SSW	Social Work	\$15,000

* = These programs award ½ (10-hr) assistantships, so students receive ½ the amount listed

The new stipends will close but do not eliminate the gap between UAlbany and its peers. The average shortfall compared to the national norms in the OSU survey is now \$432 in absolute dollars, and closer to \$1,800 when adjusted for cost of living. For Fall 2015, the modal stipend in the humanities and social sciences will be \$15,000, which is \$1,000-3,000 below the “typical” stipend level for our peers. The modal stipend in STEM will be \$17,500, which is \$1,500-2,500 below the “typical” level for our peers.

Length of Funding

Over the course of committee meetings, it became apparent that for several departments the length of guaranteed funding for graduate assistants was as important if not more important than stipend level. This was especially the case for humanities departments once the enhanced stipends for 2015-16 were announced. As already mentioned, graduate assistantships provide 3 to 4 years of funding, depending whether students enter with a master’s or bachelor’s degree. Yet, the median time to degree across all doctoral programs on campus is 6 years, and up to 7 years in some humanities and social science programs. Once their funding runs out, many students either teach as an adjunct instructor or seek employment off campus. Adjunct pay is quite low – as little as \$2,800 per course. In order to receive health benefits, adjuncts must teach at least two courses per semester, so students who have exhausted their assistantship funding are often forced to teach two courses per semester. This heavy teaching load takes time away from their doctoral studies and research, slowing down their progress toward their degree.

The student members of the committee felt very strongly that a 4th or 5th year of funding would accelerate progress toward the degree and greatly reduce the stress that students experience from financial strain caused by lack of funding. Their opinions were backed up by the report by the GSA’s Wages and Benefits Committee and the results of the 2014 Graduate Student Survey.

The national survey data from the OSU study did not provide information on the length of funding, but the Committee was able to survey peer institutions regarding their average length of funding for graduate students. The data collected from department-identified competition are particularly compelling in that they reveal that in every case, our peers and aspirational peers guarantee funding for more years than UAlbany. Five years of guaranteed funding was the norm across respondents, although a few schools limited students entering with a master’s degree to 4 years of funding.

The Committee surveyed directors of graduate programs regarding the sources of funding for graduate students who were no longer on assistantships. In several STEM programs (i.e., Atmospheric Sciences, Biology, Chemistry, Biomedical Sciences, and Environmental Health Sciences) most doctoral students are funded from faculty research grants by the time that their departmental funding ceases. Those not funded by research grants are typically able to get teaching assistant or instructor positions. The situation is much different in the social sciences, humanities, and remaining STEM fields. Very few students are placed on research grants and thus must rely on adjunct positions or outside employment. This informal survey revealed that a large portion of doctoral students experience either a loss of funding or large decline in funding in the 4th or 5th year of study, just as they reach the dissertation stage. Departments in the humanities and social sciences especially feel disadvantaged by our current policies because they are unable to shift students to external funding. The extended year funding initiative, whereby students who reach candidacy by their 3rd or 4th year receive an additional year of funding, helps address this problem, but there are not enough funds to cover all students who are eligible, and departments are not able to guarantee the extended year of funding when recruiting students. The Committee concluded that expanding the extended year funding initiative to guarantee a 4th or 5th year of funding (depending on whether the student enters with a bachelor's or master's degree) would greatly increase the ability to recruit top students. This investment should also decrease time to degree.

Externally Funded Research Assistantships

Graduate student funding is a mix of departmental graduate assistantships (state funded), research assistantships (external funds), external fellowships, and a few internal fellowships. Research assistantships are an important part of the funding picture for graduate students. They provide students with an intensive training experience, allowing them to develop and hone research skills. These experiences often lead to research publications and facilitate development of the student's own research portfolio. Research assistantships also allow institutions to stretch their assistantship budgets, by allowing them to fund more students or to fund at higher levels.

In Spring 2015, the number of graduate research assistantships was 143, or less than 30% the number of state-supported graduate assistantships (approximately 500). By comparison, Stony Brook reported 700 research assistants and 930 graduate/teaching assistants for Spring 2015. Buffalo reported 480 research assistants and 1,300 graduate/teaching assistants. At UAlbany, the majority of research assistantships are concentrated in a few departments and research centers (see Table 5).

Table 5. Units with Highest Number of Research Assistantships, Spring 2015

Academic Department	N	Research Center	N
Atmospheric & Environmental Sciences	22	Atmospheric Science Research Center	6
Social Welfare	13	Informatics, Logics & Security Studies	6
Chemistry	10	Hindelang Criminal Justice Research Center	4
Biology	9	Center for Women in Government	4
Computer Science	8	Center for Policy Research	3
Health Policy	8	Center for Human Services Research	3
Educational Theory & Practice	6	Center for Autism and Related Disabilities	2
Psychology	5		
Geography & Planning	4		
EOP	4		

Summer Support

At many top universities, students in science and engineering programs are supported during the summer by their academic departments with fellowships and/or research assistantships. Faculty grants and indirect cost recovery provide the sources for this funding. Students in the social sciences and humanities often receive summer research fellowships or teaching assistantships. By contrast, the majority of doctoral students at UAlbany are not guaranteed summer funding, and funding opportunities vary widely by department. Students in Biology, Chemistry, Atmospheric Sciences, Biomedical Sciences, and Environmental Health Sciences are often supported by external grants during the summer, but in most other departments students must compete for a limited number of summer teaching positions.

In programs where summer support is available at UAlbany, the level of support is lower than at peer institutions. STEM programs at Stony Brook and Buffalo are able to offer summer support to students, raising yearly compensation up to \$27K. The UAlbany Atmospheric Sciences, Biology, and Chemistry departments offer summer support to their students as part of recruiting packages, but more in the range of a \$22K annual salary.

4. Recommendations

The overarching concern behind the Committee's recommendation is to improve graduate student funding so that departments can attract top-quality students and students can complete their degrees in a timely manner.

Recommendation 1. Increase the number of years of guaranteed funding for doctoral students, to 4 years for those entering with a master's degree and 5 years for those entering with a bachelor's degree.

With the minimum stipend level being raised to \$15,000 beginning Fall 2015, the main concern that emerged from our committee work was the length of funding for students. Several departments report losing students to other programs that guarantee funding for longer periods of time than the UAlbany department. Our current policy limits graduate assistants to 3 years of state-supported funding if they entered their doctoral program with a master's degree, and 4 years of funding if they entered with a bachelor's degree (or without a master's from the same discipline). There is the possibility of an additional year of funding for students who advance to candidacy with this time period (referred to as "Extended Year" funding), but it is not guaranteed at the time students enter their program and not all eligible students receive it due to budget constraints. This is particularly a problem in the humanities and social sciences, where there are fewer or no opportunities for students to move to faculty grants in their third or fourth years of training. Being able to guarantee funding to students for 4-5 years (conditional upon adequate academic progress) will make UAlbany more competitive, especially in the humanities and social science disciplines.

The committee recommends adding one year of funding to our current policy, such that students will be eligible for 4 or 5 years of state-supported funding, depending on whether they enter their program with a master's degree in the same discipline or not. Students would have to demonstrate appropriate progress toward the doctoral degree to be eligible for the extra year of funding. The committee recommends that departments identify program-specific criteria for the extended year of funding (e.g., passing doctoral qualifying exams, dissertation prospectus approved) and submit them to the Dean of Graduate Studies for approval.

Recommendation 2. Bring all doctoral student stipends up to the market value established by our peer institutions.

The committee concludes that graduate assistant stipends at UAlbany are low compared both to national norms and our peer institutions. UAlbany cannot compete successfully for top students until we offer more competitive stipends. The raises that will go into effect for the 2015-2016 academic year bring us closer to national and peer norms, and for the humanities and social science disciplines bring us in line with the 2014-15 stipends at the other three University Centers. Stipends in our STEM disciplines still fall short of our University peers. In addition, it is likely that our peers will be raising their stipends as well.

It is important that our stipends are competitive not only with our peer institutions, but also with our aspirational peers. If our programs are to rise in the national rankings, they need to be able to

recruit the same caliber of student as top-ranked programs. It is not sufficient to simply try to match the average stipend of our immediate peers; if possible, we should offer higher stipends that will attract higher quality students. Thus, we recommend that by Fall 2016, academic year stipends be raised to at least \$20,000 in the STEM disciplines, \$17,000-18,000 in the social science disciplines, and \$16,000-17,000 in the humanities disciplines. These values are in the average to above average range for institutions in our analyses, and should allow us to compete successfully for top talent in all disciplines, providing our competitors do not raise their stipends at the same rate.

Recommendation 3. Allow individual departments flexibility in using funds from Graduate Education. Different programs expressed different needs to the committee. The humanities programs, for example, feel that their stipend level is fairly competitive and would prefer longer guaranteed funding rather than higher stipends. STEM programs, by contrast, expressed a need for higher stipends; they are able to support students on grants beyond their third year, so would prefer money allocated to stipend level than to length of state-supported funding. If programs shift advanced students to external funding, they should be able to reallocate that money to higher stipends for funded students. The Committee recommends that the Dean of Graduate Studies, who is responsible for allocating the graduate student support budget, work with departments to decide how additional allocations to graduate student funding would best serve the needs of specific programs.

Recommendation 4. Develop mechanisms that encourage students to apply for external fellowships.

UAlbany has not been as successful as its peers in attracting external student fellowship awards, such as the National Science Foundation's Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP) or Mellon Foundation Fellowships. There should be a coordinated, cross-campus effort aimed at identifying top students who have the potential to win these awards, and providing them with the support necessary for a competitive application. The Office of Graduate Education should work with the Schools/Colleges and Departments to cull together announcements for students and provide fellowship application support.

For fellowships that do not provide tuition or health benefits, funds should be identified and used as cost-sharing to support the student's application.

Some departments have had success in promoting external fellowships to their students, and could serve as a model for other departments. For example, the Department of Atmospheric and Environmental Sciences has had 3 NSF Graduate Research Fellowship recipients, 3 National Defense Science & Engineering Fellowships and 1 NASA Graduate Fellowship during the past five years. The success of DAES should be studied and the lessons learned used to help other programs.

Recommendation 5. Work with faculty and departments to increase the number of students funded on research assistantships.

The Committee surveyed the number of graduate students supported by faculty research grants and other external funds. External funding supports a relatively small proportion of students, and the number of externally funded research assistantships is concentrated in a few departments. The other University Centers and our peer institutions appear to have a larger proportion of students on research assistantships. Faculty should be encouraged to put graduate students on research grants whenever appropriate. Further study of factors that inhibit and facilitate research assistantships for graduate students may also be warranted. If necessary, incentives should be provided to faculty for funding graduate students.

Recommendation 6. Develop mechanisms to provide summer funding to students on graduate assistantships.

Students are appointed to state-supported graduate and teaching assistantships for the academic year only and are not guaranteed summer support. Students rely on various sources for income during the summer. Although many students in the STEM fields are supported on external grants for the summer, most students in the humanities and social sciences are not supported and have to find jobs on or off campus. Advanced students may have the opportunity to teach summer courses, but the number of courses available to graduate students is limited. Many students are forced to find summer employment off campus, sometimes in positions related to their training (e.g., internships), but often in part-time positions that simply pay the bills. Doctoral students who work off campus run the risk of being disconnected from their research, which may delay progress toward their degree. Students in the Humanities face an additional concern: many of them use their summer to travel to archives and other sites to conduct research. The absence of summer funding means that they must find work, which not only slows their research, but can stop it completely.

Many of our peer institutions are able to offer summer support to students, in the form of research or teaching assignments or fellowships, which allows their research to continue unimpeded. UAlbany needs to develop strategies for increasing summer support and summer research travel for students. One suggestion is to engage the Development Office to help build capacity within departments for summer funding for graduate students. Perhaps a development officer could be appointed to coordinate development activities with graduate directors in the academic departments offering Ph.D. programs. Development funds could be used to support summer research fellowships and research travel. At the institutional level, consideration should be given to a summer fellowship program that would provide students with funding to work on research or competitive projects.

Recommendation 7. Explore the possibility of a university-wide fellowship initiative that would award nationally competitive stipends highly qualified students. Many top universities have designated fellowships or assistantships that provide highly competitive stipends to their top students. These awards are designed to recruit the best students in the

country. Such an initiative may be useful for increasing the competitiveness and reputation of our programs.

Recommendation 8. Develop a plan to provide benchmark data on graduate stipends on an ongoing basis so that stipend levels can remain competitive with our peers.

In order to ensure that our stipends remain competitive with our peers, it is critical to have a mechanism for periodic monitoring the market value of graduate stipends. There is currently no such mechanism in place and conducting periodic reviews on an infrequent basis may lead to extended periods of non-competitive stipends. Ongoing monitoring could focus on a limited number of peer and aspirational peer institutions.

APPENDIX 1

List of Schools in the 2012-13 Oklahoma State University Stipend Survey

Arizona State University	University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee
Auburn University (AL)	University of Wyoming
Bowling Green State University (OH)	Utah State University
Catholic University of America (DC)	Washington State University
Central Michigan University	Wayne State University (MI)
Clemson University (SC)	West Virginia University
Florida A&M University	
Florida State University	
Kansas State University	
Kent State University (OH)	
Louisiana State University	
Mississippi State University	
Montana State University	
New Mexico State University	
North Carolina A&T State University	
North Carolina State University at Raleigh	
North Dakota State University	
Oklahoma State University	
Oregon State University	
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale	
Texas A&M University	
Texas Tech University	
University of Alabama	
University of Colorado at Denver	
University of Idaho	
University of Iowa	
University of Missouri at Kansas City	
University of Missouri at St. Louis	
University of Montana	
University of Nebraska at Lincoln	
University of Nevada at Reno	
University of North Carolina at Greensboro	
University of North Dakota	
University of North Texas	
University of Oklahoma	
University of Rhode Island	
University of South Dakota	
University of Tennessee at Knoxville	
University of Texas at Austin	
University of Utah	

APPENDIX 2

Metrics for Evaluating Doctoral Programs at UAlbany

A strategic objective of the 2010 University at Albany Strategic Plan was to “strengthen the [graduate] program evaluation process by articulating appropriate criteria and collecting relevant and accurate data.” In spring 2011, the Graduate Education Working Group recommended a set of internal and external criteria for evaluating doctoral programs in comparison to program goals and in relation to each other. The consensually derived list of metrics is presented below.

Doctoral Program Evaluation Variables

1. Faculty scholarship: publications per capita
2. Faculty external funding (\$ per capita)
3. Degree completion rate
4. Student research productivity per capita (discipline specific, tracked by department)
5. Average GRE scores – discipline specific (e.g., GRE-Q for sciences, GRE-V for humanities); Average GPA (for domestic students only)
6. Time-to-degree (median), compared to discipline norms
7. Percent of dissertations resulting in publications
8. Student placement (immediate) in context of program goals
9. Student placement 5 years post-graduation, in context of program goals
10. Three-year retention rate
11. Average time to candidacy
12. Visibility and reputation as evident in external rankings (NRC, USNWR, etc.)