

## Statler College of Engineering and Mineral Resources

### Graduate Wage/Service Stipend Policy Guidance

Graduate education is fundamental to West Virginia University and the Statler College research and educational missions. Vibrant and high quality graduate programs are vital to our competitiveness with peer institutions in scholarly publications, external research sponsorship, and national rankings. The recruitment of quality graduate students is critical to meet these missions and will positively impact our graduate programs and the success of our students. To ensure this success the Statler College treats graduate students as junior colleagues and provides them a competitive wage/stipend and expects them to be responsible and professional as well.

Generally, the College accepts students as unfunded, on partial or full tuition waivers, on graduate teaching or graduate research wage/service stipends, on fellowships or a combination of wage/service stipend and fellowship supplements.

- a. **Graduate Research Assistants (GRA)** are appointed to assist faculty, 20 hours per week on research projects funded by grants, contracts and/or industry. GRA appointments are to provide research support on these projects. That research activity normally culminates in a thesis or problem report (MS) or dissertation (PhD). If the project activity supporting the GRA appointment is not suitable or sufficient for the thesis or problem report or dissertation, the student is still expected to be conducting research toward their thesis or problem report or dissertation. Graduate research assistants are appointed with stipends on a twelve month basis, and as long as they are making good progress toward their degree, are covered until the degree is completed. GRA appointments are not provided to coursework only MS students.
- b. **Graduate Teaching Assistants** are appointed to assist faculty, 20 hours per week in their teaching related responsibilities such as lab and recitation sessions, grading and tutoring. GTA are typically appointed for this assignment on a nine month basis for the fall and spring academic semesters although summer appointments are not uncommon. Graduate students on a GTA appointment must also do research year round on a project that culminates in a thesis or problem report (MS) or dissertation (PhD). Therefore the College expectation is that students who receive a 9 month GTA appointment during the academic year also be funded for 3 months over the summer to do research using faculty research funding and/or other departmental funds. GTA appointments are not provided normally to coursework only MS students.
- c. **Graduate Service Assistants** are normally appointed to assist in non-teaching or non-research related assignments. GSA appointments are made at the stipend level of the college where they are graduate students. GSA appointments are typically made on a nine month basis and if continued for a twelve month basis, require additional funding paid at the same stipend level. GSA appointments may be made to coursework only MS students and may be made on a semester basis.
- d. **Graduate Fellowships** are becoming more available from internal and external sources of funding. These awards are made competitively to exceptional PhD students who are being recruited or who are demonstrating outstanding performance during their doctoral studies. Fellowships receive higher twelve month stipends and awards often carry additional support incentives for research activities. Fellows are expected to maintain high academic standards in their graduate programs in both coursework and research to retain the fellowship. Only in rare circumstances would a fellowship be awarded to a MS student.

All departments in the Statler College are committed to the ideal of providing meaningful graduate opportunities to their students. This includes providing competitive twelve month graduate stipends as long as good progress is being made by the student toward their degree goal. Normally,

graduate student stipend support is provided for a total of 18-24 months toward a MS degree, 4-5 years toward a PhD degree beyond the BS degree or 2-3 years beyond the MS degree.

The Statler College has established minimum stipend levels for its graduate students. These are reviewed annually and increases for future years are established for use on grant proposals and budget planning. Approved departmental written policies define the amount of tuition waiver, wage/service stipend, or fellowship that graduate students can receive. These amounts vary depending on discipline, but must be consistent within a discipline.

All students, except for coursework only options, are expected to complete research toward the problem report or thesis options for the MS degree and a dissertation proposal for the PhD degree, in a timely manner, based on an approved plan of study. The research effort expended by students on wage/service stipends is independent of their academic responsibilities. Normally, graduate students are expected to be registered for graduate research credit toward their thesis or dissertation on a regular basis.

The College encourages doctoral candidates to seek opportunities to teach or perform teaching assistant duties for at least one semester during the course of their studies in order to be better prepared for a career in academia.

### 1. College Wage/Service Stipend Policy

The college minimum wage/service stipend in effect for those departments without an approved policy will be set annually for M.S. and Ph.D. graduate students. The allowable range in entry level wage/service stipends in effect for those departments without an approved policy is 30% and its use must be based on item 4 of this policy guidance "Establishing an Initial Wage/Service Stipend Level".

Recognizing discipline differences, entry level wage/service stipends may vary by department but may not be less than the established college minimum (which may not be less than the established University minimum). Fellowships or supplemental caps should be awarded based on exceptional credentials at entry levels stipulated by the fellowship sponsor. Fellowships should be no less than the minimum GRA/GTA wage/service stipends established by the College or department.

Terms of appointment must be established in the initial appointment letter and each subsequent appointment renewal.

#### *a. Hourly work appointments*

While some Statler graduate students are not funded or are doing graduate work part time, the departments have the responsibility to ensure that reasonable progress is being made toward degree completion. It is unusual to enroll a part-time PhD student. Many students in this category are either working fulltime outside the University or are doing coursework so they can enroll in graduate programs full time. Some of these students may be paid hourly to work in the college or on campus while enrolled. This work should not be assigned at the expense of providing meaningful research and assistantship opportunities to fulltime students. All WVU guidelines for hourly work must be followed. Normally a student enrolled in classes cannot work more than 20 hours per week when classes are in session.

### 2. Department Wage/Service Stipend Policy

The College recognizes that departments need flexibility in their graduate student wage/service stipend policy. However, that flexibility must be based on and exercised within the stated rationale contained in their approved policy. The College policy must be followed unless the department has an approved wage/service stipend policy.

Wage/service stipend levels will be reviewed annually by the faculty and chair and adjusted as needed to maintain a competitive program. All departmental policy changes must be consistent with the College's Graduate Wage/service stipend Wage/service stipend Policy Guidance and approved by the Dean's office.

The University Affirmative Action Plan identifies those factors that may not be considered in employment decisions or the establishment of compensation within the University. These factors apply to graduate students as well. Citizenship may be considered in employment decisions because of funding agency restrictions that are either programmatic, security, or both. Departmental wage/service stipends policies shall be in compliance with all institutional policies and must be reviewed and approved by the Dean's office every three years.

### 3. Establishing Wage/Service Stipend Level

The wage/service stipends paid to graduate assistants in a department may all be identical or may differ based on a variety of factors which must be clearly identified in the approved policies of the department. Such factors may include:

- Educational level, work experience, specific technical or academic skill(s) or other qualifications that are aligned with the aim of the project and/or priorities of the department or unit as outlined in the approved wage/service stipend policy and/or in the published recruiting policy of the department.
- The graduate degree the student is pursuing. For example, a department may choose to provide a higher initial wage/service stipend for a doctoral student than a master's student; the assumption being a difference in past experience or completion of the MS degree.

In general, the initial wage/service stipend levels offered to GTAs or GRAs should not range by more than 30% above the minimum established by the department within the cohort seeking the same degree (MS, Ph.D.) within the same discipline based on the approved department policy.

The only exception to these guidelines would be in the following circumstances:

- When grants, fellowships, or other sources of wage/service stipends provide or require salaries that exceed departmental policy. Students selected for such should be in the highest levels of academic credentials among the admitted cohort.
- When market conditions or the opportunity to recruit candidates with exceptional skill sets require wage/service stipends that exceed normal departmental policy. These exceptions must be approved by the Dean's office.

Occasionally graduate students may be appointed to wage/service stipends by an academic or non-academic unit outside of the college. In such instances, the graduate wage/service stipend is guided by the policies of the academic or non-academic unit offering the wage/service stipend.

When the assistantship is offered in one engineering unit and the student is getting a degree in another engineering unit, the graduate wage/service stipend is guided by the policy of the unit paying the student's wage/service stipend.

A graduate student from outside Statler College may be appointed to a Graduate Research or Teaching wage/service stipend. In that case, the policies and procedures of the unit within Statler College would apply. Departments may also appoint a graduate student from outside Statler College as a Graduate Service Assistant (GSA) when the appointment doesn't involve teaching or research activity on a grant/project. In that case, the minimum wage/service stipend level would be that established for that year by the Provost's Office. A wage/service stipend level more than 30% greater than this minimum level would require permission from the Dean's Office and would depend upon the type of duties assigned to the student.

#### 4. Changing the Wage/Service Stipend Level

The increase in annual wage/service stipend levels should at least equal the dollar amount of the increase in the minimum wage/service stipend levels (to qualify for a tuition waiver), as established and mandated by the Provost's office. Such revisions will be approved by the Dean's Office and attached as amendments to the present document.

Increases in institutional minimum wage/service stipend levels will be reflected in equivalent increases in wage/service stipend levels in the College and any approved departmental policies.

Salary levels stated in this document will be reviewed annually based on item 5 of this policy guidance "Changing the Wage/Service Stipend Level" by the College Executive Committee and adjusted as needed to maintain a competitive program. All policy changes must be consistent with the College's Graduate Wage/Service Stipend Policy Guidance and approved by the Dean's office.

Increases for students already in Statler College can be made based on a variety of reasons that must be clearly identified in the approved policies of the department. The following factors are some of the reasons that may be used to justify an annual wage/service stipend increase:

- a. Student performance has been meritorious.
  - i. Merit increases may be provided on a yearly basis, starting one year after the student's initial appointment. Merit increases should be based on a clear assessment of the student's performance in research responsibilities by the research advisor and clear documentation showing good progress toward degree completion.
  - ii. Normally, merit increases are not to exceed 15% of the previous level of compensation paid to the graduate assistant, unless justified based on the circumstances outlined in the approved departmental policy. In special circumstances an increase greater than 15% amount may be appropriate. For example, if a student has been rewarded with a fellowship rather than a wage/service stipend, a wage/service stipend increase greater than 15% might be justified.
- b. Through the course of the wage/service stipend, the graduate assistant has gained experience, which makes him/her a more valuable assistant deserving a higher level of compensation.
- c. The student has completed specific academic milestones
  - i. Progressed from a master's program to a doctoral program
  - ii. Passed preliminary doctoral examinations
  - iii. Admitted to candidacy.

The availability of increased funding from a grant or other source alone is not an appropriate reason for an increase.

A student making satisfactory progress toward a degree will continue to receive their same wage/service stipend until the end of the semester.

Termination of the grant or contract supporting the student may result in termination of the wage/service stipend not earlier than the end of the semester the student is notified. The cost of the wage/service stipend until the end of the semester shall first be the responsibility of the faculty member funding the student.

Decreases in grant or contract funding are not to impact the compensation level of a graduate assistant who is making satisfactory progress toward degree completion. Reduced salaries are not permitted.

A graduate assistant may be terminated during an academic term if necessary because of poor performance. The graduate assistant must have been provided with a written warning from the

supervisor and allowed at least 2 weeks to improve performance. Other terminations require consultation with the Office of Graduate Education and Life.

A graduate assistant may be terminated without warning for violations of professional or University standards of conduct (see the Graduate Catalog section on Academic and Professional Standards and the Board of Governors Policy 3, for example).

Graduate assistants who are terminated or who resign during an academic term may be required to refund the University for excess stipend payments and the cost of tuition waivers and health insurance. Consult with the Office of Graduate Education and Life.

#### 5. Academic Progress and Annual Performance Review

Good progress toward completing graduate degrees includes completion of coursework, doing work toward fulfillment of research requirements for the MS or PhD degree, and completing all other department and college requirements established for graduate study. Evidence toward completion of degree requirements shall be documented in the student file by the research advisor and endorsed by the research advisory committee in writing at least annually. Annual reviews are conducted by the end of each calendar year.

Graduate students not making satisfactory academic progress toward their degree can have their wage/service stipends terminated after appropriate notifications at the end of the semester in which the academic progress dropped below satisfactory. An unsatisfactory grade in research is normally not made up. If the student has been working on thesis or dissertation research, even if successful progress has not been made, a satisfactory grade in research should be given.

Graduate students not performing satisfactorily in their assigned GTA or GRA responsibilities can have their wage/service stipends terminated after notification by letter documenting the unsatisfactory performance by the faculty member through the department chair. The graduate assistant must have been provided with a written warning from the supervisor and allowed at least 2 weeks to improve performance. Other terminations require consultation with the Office of Graduate Education and Life.

Funded graduate students are expected to perform research at a rate that supports graduation in a timely fashion as defined above. Students should be engaged in doing research year round, except for normal university holidays. Students funded on external research funding normally are not entitled to additional days away from their assistantship assignments. Students working on their research projects while away from campus (for example while visiting family) should be approved to do so by the graduate research advisor before the student leaves campus.

#### 6. Appointment Letters

It is an expectation of the College that students be notified in writing about expectations and responsibilities for all types of wage/service stipends. In addition, the university and college expect that appointment letters will be provided to all students offered a wage/service stipend of any type.

Template appointment letters are provide annually by the college for use by departments in making initial offers of appointments to new GTA or GRA assistants and for re-appointment or changes in appointment status subsequent to initial appointment.

#### 7. College Policy Review

The college wage/service stipend policy will be reviewed by the college every three years.