

# Guidelines for Awarding of Graduate Fellowships and Assistantships

August 13, 2025

These guidelines are intended to: (1) ensure that we maximize resources in order to ensure that graduate students in our program have financial support for six years, (2) ensure that all faculty have roughly equitable resources available to them to support their students, and (3) motivate students to successfully complete their program in a reasonable amount of time.

## **Block Grant Fellowships**

The department has an annual allocation from Graduate Studies for fellowship support, known as the block grant. The highest priority for block grant funds is non-resident tuition fellowships for entering PhD students and for international students in their second or third year, and for additional fellowship awards to first-year students.

A second use of the block grant is in recruitment. Each January the Vice-Chair for the Graduate Program (VCGP) will discuss with the Recruitment Committee how much funding is available for making more attractive financial offers to top candidates. The Recruitment Committee will decide how to structure the resulting offers.

Some awards each year may be reserved as merit-based awards for students with outstanding performance. Applications will be coordinated by the VCGP through an annual announcement to the faculty, who will submit each nomination with an explanation of why the student deserves fellowship support. The VCGP will also invite graduate students to self-nominate; for students who do so, the VCGP will then seek input from the research advisor. The VCGP will provide the student issues arm of the Graduate Curriculum Committee (GCC) with all the nominations, along with the students' prior funding record. The GCC will review the nominations and decide which (if any) nominees should receive fellowships for outstanding performance.

Any remaining funds will be used as fellowships for continuing students who are making good progress towards their degrees. The VCGP will solicit nominations quarterly from faculty and may query research advisors about additional students who were not nominated.

## **Named/Endowed Fellowships:**

The department has several named Fellowships that are supported by endowments to the Physics and Astronomy Department. A list is attached as an appendix. Since these funds have flexibility that other resources do not, the top priority for their use is for purposes where no other funding sources are available. Examples include tuition payments that are required by certain outside grants or fellowships but cannot be made from the block

grant, or recognition of special contributions to the department or broader community, such as highly effective committee service.

Fellowships not used for such purposes may be awarded to students selected by the GCC for outstanding performance, as described above. The named Fellowships will go preferentially to students near the beginning of their research career, subject to other restrictions on the specific Fellowship gift agreements. Students selected for outstanding performance who do not receive named Fellowships will have block grant fellowships instead.

### **Work-Study**

Graduate Studies allocates Federal Work-Study (FWS) awards to graduate programs to be used in conjunction with Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) positions. This allocation gives graduate programs additional funds for the support of U.S. Citizen or Permanent Resident students who show financial need. **Partial support as a GSR is a requirement for this program, as is having a current-year FAFSA on file.** Work-study applications will be coordinated by the VCGP through an opportunity announcement to the faculty, who will submit nominations and confirm that GSR support is available. The VCGP will select students for the work-study awards. On at least an annual basis, the VCGP will provide the Department and GCC Chair with a list of students who were nominated for and received FWS.

### **Teaching Assistantships**

Teaching assistantships will be awarded by the VCGP in consultation with the VC for the Undergraduate Program (VCUP). They are awarded based on the needs of the department for teaching and the desire to support all the students in the graduate program, if possible.

As a guideline, an advisor should not expect **more than nine quarters** of departmental support for his or her students in the third year and above in any academic year. An advisor needing support for more than three students in any quarter should provide the VCGP a written request for why the additional support is needed. The VCGP will review the request and make the decision as to whether or not to grant the extra support. Requests to take on a new student when an advisor already has three or more unfunded senior students will need particularly strong justification. On a quarterly basis the VCGP will inform the Department and GCC Chair of the requests that were made and the decision on each.

### **Summer Support**

The department typically guarantees support for the summer after the first year but not beyond that. Priority for summer TA positions will go to more junior students, international students, and effective TAs. Students not

making good progress should not expect summer funding, although they may receive TA assignments if spots are available. To be considered as making good progress, students must have a tentative research advisor by May of the second year, must attempt the Qualifying Exam by June of the third year, must advance to candidacy before the start of the fourth year, and must have a reasonable timeline for all remaining work towards the dissertation by May of the fifth year.

Some students may be awarded summer fellowships from the block grant. As with other block grant fellowships, the students must be making good progress towards their degrees. Students with research advisors outside the Physics Graduate Program will have lower priority for fellowship awards.