

V: Financial Aid Available within the Department

1. How the System Works

Unfortunately, our Department does not have sufficient funds to support all of our graduate students. Nevertheless, we try to devise principles of fairness and support as many of our graduate students as possible. Some offers are issued at the time of acceptance, as part of a recruiting package, but many others only become available as a new semester is about to start and Departmental needs and resources are clarified.

All funding awards are based on the assumption that four courses per semester is a full-time load (abbreviated FTE for “full time equivalent”). (NB – We don’t endorse this as an actual course load for either an instructor or a student – it is simply the basis on which the UM system calculates graduate awards!)

With reference to the notion of FTE just explained, graduate support is awarded on either a quarter-time (.25 FTE) or a half-time (.5FTE) basis. Assisting, teaching, or grading for one course or section constitutes a .25FTE appointment; assisting, teaching, or grading for two courses or sections counts as a .5FTE appointment. The current payment schedule provides students with \$1250 per course. In addition, .5FTE appointments carry full tuition remission for the semester in which they’re given.

Students holding .5FTE appointments must take at least two classes (6 credit hours) during the semester of their award; those holding .25FTE appointments must take at least one class (3 credit hours). A maximum of three classes (9 credit hours) is possible in either case.

A .25FTE award provides a special benefit to out-of-state students. Although it doesn’t carry full tuition remission, it entitles them to pay the considerably lower in-state tuition for the semester in which they hold the appointment.

The policies just outlined are those in place for AY 06/07. They are always subject to discussion and review by the Graduate School.

2. Telecourse and Webcourse TAs

The Department is obliged to teach 2 telecourses – Significant Figures in Philosophy and The Humanities through the Arts – each and every semester. These allow students to enjoy ‘distance’ learning. Rather than attend classes on campus, they view instructional videos. The videos for the Significant Figures class were recorded by our Department’s own Andrew Black; those for the Humanities class were produced by a community college in California. They’re narrated by poet Maya Angelou and there’s an accompanying textbook. Duties for telecourse TAs include setting the calendar for the semester, establishing due dates, grading papers and exams, and being available to answer student questions both online and in person.

A few of our other standard courses are being taught in web versions as well as the usual classroom format. These include formal logic, philosophy of science, and business ethics. We have begun turning over sections of the web business ethics course to graduate student TAs. This course was developed by David Griesedieck, and the teaching duties are the same as those just listed for the telecourses. David is available to advise and mentor the TAs. On occasion, suitably skilled graduate students are given responsibility for teaching the web version of our formal logic course, Phil 3360.

3. Lecture/Breakout Section Courses

One model for using TAs is to divide large lecture courses into smaller breakout/discussion sections run by graduate students. The sections can meet regularly, say once a week, or at intervals as specified by the instructor. For the past several years we have taught a course in the Pierre Laclède Honors College – Critical Analysis – in this manner. And we are doing it for the first time this Fall with one of our own courses, Philosophy 1160: Logic and Language. TAs have responsibility for leading the discussion sections, grading the assignments, papers, and tests of their students in those sections, and being available to offer extra help as needed. If the Logic and Language venture seems successful, we will look for ways to use this format in other large intro-level courses.

4. Grading Positions

Some TA appointments are for grading only and don't require any contact hours with students. In such cases, the instructor of a (large!) course will generally work with the TA to set out the expectations for each piece being graded.

5. Full responsibility for a course

We have started a tradition of offering some of our most advanced students full responsibility for teaching an undergraduate course. Most often, these are courses in the Evening College, where class size remains quite low. Syllabi and book choices from previous versions of the courses are available as models.

6. Research Positions

Occasionally faculty members who receive outside grants and awards will have written in a budget line for a research assistant. In such happy cases, this would provide us yet another way to support one of our graduate students.