

MSU INVESTMENT PROPOSAL FOR INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITIES

PROPOSAL OVERVIEW

Title	Assessment of Graduate Assistants at MSU: Role, Support, and Competitiveness	Request Date	January 3, 2012
Department	The Graduate School	Email	carl.fox1@montana.edu
Requestor	Carl Fox	Phone	X5555

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Core Themes and Objectives (check all that apply)

Educate Students

- Our graduates will have achieved mastery in their major disciplines
- Our graduates will become active citizens and leaders
- Our graduates will have a multicultural and global perspective
- Our graduates will understand the ways that knowledge & art are created and applied in a variety of disciplines
- Our graduates are prepared for careers in their field
- We will provide increased access to our educational programs
- Communities and external stake holders benefit from broadly defined education partnerships with MSU

Create Knowledge and Art

- Students, faculty, and staff will create knowledge and art that is communicated widely

Serve Communities

- We help meet a fundamental need of the citizens of Montana by providing degree programs for our students
- We help meet the educational needs of the citizens of Montana by providing a wide range of educational opportunities to a variety of students
- Our students, faculty, staff, and administrators reach out to engage and serve communities
- Our students, faculty, staff, and administrator reach in to build the university community

Integrate Learning, Discovery, and Engagement

- Each graduate will have had experiences that integrate learning, discovery and engagement
- Outreach activities will educate students and address the needs of the communities we serve
- Students, faculty, and staff will create knowledge and art that addresses societal needs
- MSU is a community that will be characterized by synergy within and across disciplines, roles and functions.

Stewardship

- The public trusts the institution to operate openly and use resources wisely
- The faculty and staff are well-qualified and supported
- MSU will support Native American students, programs, and communities
- MSU will be an inclusive community, supporting and encouraging diversity
- Our publicly provided resources are used efficiently and effectively
- Natural resources are used efficiently and sustainably
- MSU nurtures a culture of resource conservation and ecological literacy among students, faculty and staff
- Our physical infrastructure (e.g., building, equipment, open spaces) will be well-maintained and useful

INSITUATIONAL BENEFIT						
Campuses	x <input type="checkbox"/> Bozeman <input type="checkbox"/> Billings <input type="checkbox"/> Havre <input type="checkbox"/> Great Falls <input type="checkbox"/> FSTS <input type="checkbox"/> Extension <input type="checkbox"/> MAES					
Cross Depts	Please List: All academic departments with graduate assistants, the Office of Planning & Analysis, and the Graduate School					
TIMEFRAME						
Proposed Dates	Start: February 1, 2012			End: January 31, 2013		
COST AND REQUIREMENTS						
Funding Type	One-Time (\$)	Multi-Year (\$)			Base (\$)	FTE
		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3		
Personnel (w/benefits)	27000					
Materials & Supplies	500					
Travel	5000					
Contracted Services	15000					
Capital						
Other Operations						
TOTAL	47500					

The proposed assessment study will be lead by the Dean of the Graduate School with support from the following:

- Doctoral Graduate Research Assistant (0.5 FTE at \$21,000)
- Administrative Assistant (0.25 FTE at \$7,000)

Once the assessment study is complete, a three member expert panel (e.g., graduate deans) will review the report, spend three days on the MSU campus meeting with administrators, faculty, staff, and graduate students, and submit a report with specific comments and recommendations focused on increasing the competitiveness and strategic investment in Graduate Assistants.

- Travel for Expert Panel (\$5000)
- Honorarium for Panel Members (3 at \$5000 each; total \$15000)

Please comment, if necessary, regarding cost and requirements.

PROPOSAL SCOPE

Describe the Proposal

Graduate Assistants (Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs)) (GAs) are an important component of the fabric of any research university. MSU is no exception where masters and doctoral student GAs are a critical element of both the teaching and research missions of the University. However, it is essential to specifically define roles and responsibilities of GAs, provide competitive stipends and benefits, and offer significant numbers of assistantships to establish robust and vibrant graduate programs.

During the Fall Semester 2011 GTA and GRA numbered 308 and 260, respectively, with stipend amounts ranging from \$760 to \$3300 per month. The roles and responsibilities of GAs are generally defined by completion of the GA appointment form required by the Graduate School. However, there is considerable variability (e.g., instructor of record, recitation leader, laboratory instructor, etc.) among GAs even when appointments appear equivalent. GTA and GRA stipend amounts, and other benefits also vary greatly between departments and even within departments. GTA appointments are often limited by state funded departmental instructional budgets, whereas, GRA support is largely based on faculty secured research grant and contract funds. Thus, the ability of a department or faculty member to support a specific GA can be a function of the availability of funding and not on the specific role or responsibilities of being a GTA or GRA or the need for instruction or research assistance.

The proposed assessment study's goal is to develop a comprehensive strategy that when implemented will provide nationally competitive graduate assistantship appointments (GTAs and GRAs) in each of our graduate degree programs.

Specifically, the study will address the following questions:

- Are the roles and responsibilities for GTAs and GRAs clearly defined and appropriate to each graduate degree program?
- Is the number of GTA appointments in each academic department appropriate given the importance of teaching to the graduate degree program and the instructional need defined by the curriculum?
- Are the benefits (stipends, health insurance, tuition waivers, etc.) for GTA appointments competitive for each degree program?
- Is the number of GRA appointments appropriate given the research dollars garnered by MSU faculty?
- Are the benefits (stipends, health insurance, tuition waivers, etc.) for GRA appointments competitive for each degree program?
- Is the funding portfolio to support GTAs and GRAs appropriate for each degree program?
- Are there opportunities (e.g., traineeships, fellowships, etc.) that MSU should pursue with incentives for faculty to support its graduate students?

The data will be compiled and synthesized by the Doctoral Graduate Research Assistant with support from an administrative assistant. The study will be conducted in cooperation with the Office of Planning & Analysis, the Graduate School, and the respective academic departments with graduate programs. Comparative data from other similar institutions are available (e.g., Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey 2010-11, Oklahoma State University) and will be used to establish national benchmarks. A draft report will be completed and provided for review by a three-person panel of experts (e.g., Graduate Deans from Land Grant Institutions). The expert panel will also visit the MSU campus and meet with the Graduate School and respective academic departments and administrators. The panel will provide comments on the draft report and generate a specific set of recommendations that will form the basis for a comprehensive strategy for achieving and increasing competitiveness of graduate assistantships at MSU.

PROPOSAL SCOPE

Describe the broader impacts and benefits of this proposal

MSU is well positioned to be a national and international leader in graduate education. Continued growth and expansion of graduate programs at MSU will depend, in part, on establishing a university-wide strategy to increase competitiveness for highly talented graduate students. A major driver of competitiveness is the ability to offer graduate assistantships that meet and exceed those of other exceptionally strong research institutions. Nationally competitive GAs are particularly important in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) degree fields since most graduate students enroll in these programs with the expectation that they will receive an assistantship sufficient to support their education and living expenses. Finding support at MSU to meet this expectation is especially challenging since more than 80% of the graduate programs are in STEM fields. Thus, developing an effective strategy campus-wide is important to the continued success and growth of graduate education at MSU. Such a strategy must be based on a comprehensive review of current practices as well as on national benchmarks as proposed by this study.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Implementation Plan *(Please describe with timelines)*

The proposed study will be implemented as follows:

- A specific scope of work with milestones will be drafted by the Graduate Dean and reviewed by the University Research Council. (Day 1-20)
- The doctoral graduate research assistant (GRA) and administrative assistant (AA) will be identified and appointed in association with the Graduate School and the Office of Planning & Analysis. (Day 21-36)
- The GRA and AA will begin compiling and cataloging existing data with assistance from the Graduate School, OPA, and the academic departments. (Day 37-81).
- Panel of three experts will be identified and secured. (Day 82-96).
- Data analysis and synthesis will be completed along with the establishment of national benchmarks for comparative purposes. (Day 82-126).
- A draft report will be completed for internal review followed by distribution to the Expert Panel (Day 127-166).
- Experts will independently review the draft report (Day 167-182).
- Expert panel will visit MSU and meet with academic leaders (Day 183-193).
- Expert panel will draft their report including recommendations for implementation of a GA strategy (Day 194-209).
- MSU academic leaders will review the Panel's report and adopt an implementation strategy for the campus. (Day 210-222).

Assessment Plan *(Please describe with indicators)*



The proposed study is an assessment of the status of graduate assistantships at MSU. The study will ultimately be a success if MSU can develop, adopt, and implement a comprehensive strategy to increase the competitiveness of its graduate assistantships and subsequently increase the number and quality of enrolled graduate students.

Specific indicators of this study's success include:

- A written and university-based definition of the roles and responsibilities of graduate assistants.
- National benchmarks for competitive graduate assistant benefits
- National benchmarks for competitive numbers of graduate assistants based on research volume, number of tenured or tenure-track faculty, degree program, importance of instruction to the degree program, instructional need by the university, etc.
- National benchmarks for defining an optimal funding portfolio for each graduate degree program.

If assessed objectives are not met in the timeframe outlined, what is the plan to sunset this proposal?

The approach taken by the proposed study is to bring together relevant MSU-based data, compare the MSU data to national benchmarks, facilitate an external expert review of the data, and develop a comprehensive implementation strategy to increase the competitiveness of graduate programs at MSU. Internal and external resources will be used in the study. The proposed timeline for each of the tasks is an estimate, therefore, there may be changes in the timeline as written. The success of the study depends largely on securing appropriate personnel for the study. If appropriate personnel cannot be hired for the study, a consulting firm could be hired with a significantly reduced scope of work or additional funds requested for the study.

SIGNATURES		
Department Head <i>(please print)</i>	Signature <i>(required)</i>	Date
Carl Fox		January 3, 2012
Dept Head Priority <i>(please circle one)</i> : <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very High <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> High Medium Low Very Low		
Dean/Director <i>(please print)</i>	Signature <i>(required)</i>	Date
Carl Fox		January 3, 2012
Dean/Director Priority <i>(please circle one)</i> : <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Very High High Medium Low Very Low		
Executive/VP <i>(please print)</i>	Signatures <i>(required)</i>	Date
Martha Potvin		
Executive/VP Priority <i>(please circle one)</i> : Very High High Medium Low Very Low		