

Department of Sociology Fact Sheet on Graduate Assistantships

Types of Graduate Assistants

MSU classifies graduate assistantships according to “function” or major assignment:

- a *Graduate Teaching Assistant (TA)*—included in the Graduate Employees Union (GEU)—teaches or assists in the teaching of a course via such activities as preparing handouts, monitoring exams, grading assignments, and other instructional duties in the classroom and/or in office hours;
- a *Graduate Research Assistant (RA)*—excluded from the GEU—assists in the management of a research project and conducts various research duties as directed by a faculty supervisor; and
- a *Teaching-Excluded Graduate Assistant (TE)*—excluded from the GEU—either:
 - serves specifically as a grader, advisor, or consultant with no direct classroom responsibilities and/or instructional contact with students in posted office hours;
 - supervises and evaluates other graduate TAs on behalf of an instructor of record; or
 - serves as a tutor broadly without being assigned specifically to students enrolled in a given course.

Hiring Details

Employing units make Graduate Assistant appointments for one complete semester only. The semester start and end dates are as follows:

- fall semester: August 16 to December 31
- spring semester: January 1 to May 15
- summer semester: May 16 to August 15

Employing units hire Graduate Assistants with one of the following appointments:

- 1/4 time appointment is an average of 10 hours per week for the semester;
- 1/2 time appointment is an average of 20 hours per week for the semester; and
- 3/4 time appointment is an average of 30 hours per week for the semester.

Compensation and Benefits

The compensation package for each Graduate Assistant position includes two main components:

- a bi-weekly stipend (i.e., salary); and
- a Specific Identification (SI) charge (i.e., benefits)—which includes a tuition and matriculation fee waiver and health insurance.

Because the lengths of MSU semesters vary, the number of bi-weekly pay periods also varies:

- 9.857143 bi-weekly pay periods in the fall semester;
- 9.714286 bi-weekly pay periods in the spring semester; and
- 6.571429 bi-weekly pay periods in the summer semester.

Graduate Assistants’ health insurance covers the following dates, depending on their appointment timing:

- with a fall *and* spring appointment, coverage spans from August 16 to August 15 of the next year;
- with a fall appointment *only*, coverage spans from August 16 to February 15 of the next year;
- with a spring appointment *only*, coverage spans from January 1 to August 15; and
- with a summer appointment *only*, coverage spans from May 16 to August 15.

Graduate Assistant Levels

MSU Human Resources identifies three “levels” of Graduate Assistantships that generally align with degree acquisition, matriculation, and work experience.¹

A graduate student may earn a **Level 1** TA, RA, or TE Graduate Assistantship only by meeting *each* of the following criteria:

- be an admitted MSU graduate student;
- have a bachelor’s degree; and
- have less than two semesters of experience as a Graduate Assistant.

A graduate student may earn a **Level 2** TA, RA, or TE Graduate Assistantship only by meeting *each* of the following criteria:

- be an admitted MSU graduate student;
- have a master’s degree OR have completed their Qualifying Paper requirement OR have earned 30+ graduate credits OR have at least two semesters of experience as a Graduate Assistant; and
- have not met the all of the criteria required for Level 3.

A graduate student may earn a **Level 3** TA Graduate Assistantship only by meeting *each* of the following criteria:

- be an admitted MSU graduate student;
- have a master’s degree OR have completed their Qualifying Paper requirement OR have earned 30+ graduate credits; and
- have at least six semesters of experience as a Graduate Assistant in the employing unit or in a department considered relevant by the chairperson.

A graduate student may earn a **Level 3** RA or TE Graduate Assistantship only by meeting *each* of the following criteria:

- be an admitted MSU graduate student;
- have successfully completed their comprehensive exam, as defined by the department in which the student is enrolled; and
- have at least six semesters of experience as an RA or TE Graduate Assistant or equivalent² in the employing unit or in a department considered relevant by the chairperson.

¹ See “How is the level determined?” in <https://hr.msu.edu/employment/graduate-assistants/faqs.html>. In counting the number of semesters for Graduate Assistant experience, summer semesters count the same as fall and spring semesters.

² The definition of equivalence is left to the discretion of the Chairperson of the appointing unit, but it is expected that only experience in research-oriented assignments count toward the six semesters of experience as an RA.

**Schedule of Minimum Bi-weekly Stipends for TA Graduate Assistants per the MSU-GEU
Collectively Bargained Agreement, 2019-2023**

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Level 1, 1/4 Time	415	436	458	469
Level 1, 1/2 Time	830	872	916	938
Level 1, 3/4 Time	1245	1308	1374	1407
Level 2, 1/4 Time	459	482	506	519
Level 2, 1/2 Time	918	964	1012	1038
Level 2, 3/4 Time	1377	1446	1518	1557
Level 3, 1/4 Time	479	503	528	541
Level 3, 1/2 Time	958	1006	1056	1082
Level 3, 3/4 Time	1437	1509	1584	1623

**MSU's Minimum Bi-weekly Stipends for TA, RA, and TE Graduate Assistants in Fall 2019 and
Spring 2020**

	Teaching Assistant (TA)	Research Assistant (RA)	Teaching Excluded (TE) Graduate Assistant
Level 1, 1/4 Time	415	362	362
Level 1, 1/2 Time	830	724	724
Level 1, 3/4 Time	1245	1086	1086
Level 2, 1/4 Time	459	401	401
Level 2, 1/2 Time	918	802	802
Level 2, 3/4 Time	1377	1203	1203
Level 3, 1/4 Time	479	417	417
Level 3, 1/2 Time	958	834	834
Level 3, 3/4 Time	1437	1251	1251

**Schedule of SOC's Actual Bi-weekly Stipends for TA Graduate Assistants
(6% greater than the MSU minimums in the first table above)**

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
Level 1, 1/4 Time	440	462	485	497
Level 1, 1/2 Time	880	924	971	994
Level 1, 3/4 Time	1320	1386	1456	1491
Level 2, 1/4 Time	487	511	536	550
Level 2, 1/2 Time	973	1022	1073	1100
Level 2, 3/4 Time	1460	1533	1609	1650
Level 3, 1/4 Time	508	533	560	573
Level 3, 1/2 Time	1015	1066	1119	1147
Level 3, 3/4 Time	1523	1600	1679	1720