

**2025-26 Compensation for Graduate Assistants****FINANCE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE****May 15, 2025****Background**

Graduate students who serve as graduate assistants while pursuing their master's or doctoral degrees provide valuable contributions to the university. Many teach undergraduate classes while others support faculty in scholarly and sponsored research activities. To be competitive in the recruitment and retention of high-quality graduate students, it is important that the university provide compensation packages that are comparable to those offered by peer institutions. The key components of the total compensation package are a stipend, stipend supplement, tuition assistance, and health insurance benefit.

**Graduate Stipends**

Across the campus, graduate assistants have a variety of responsibilities. To recognize the differences in services performed by these students, the university created a stipend scale that defines ranges of stipend amounts, providing academic and support units flexibility in compensating graduate assistants. The levels within the stipend table have been adjusted over the years to remain competitive.

To respond to increasing competition for quality graduate students among peer institutions, the university took several actions beginning in the Fall 2023 to put Virginia Tech in a competitive position relative to peers. The result of those actions was the adoption of a graduate stipend scale with 50 pay ranges (Attachment). These ranges provide flexibility in situations where a defined level of resources does not exactly match one of the existing steps and allow for an actual stipend to be established within the range of a step.

In an effort to increase minimum stipend levels, starting in 2023-24, the university restricted steps 1-11 to be used only in instances where a student was receiving a fellowship that in combination with a graduate stipend in that range would result in a total of at least the minimum stipend level of \$2,420 for Step 12. For 2024-25, the university further raised the minimum to \$2,682 for Step 14, with steps 1-13 reserved for stipend and fellowship combinations that result in total monthly support of at least the new minimum.

**Graduate Stipend Supplement**

In 2011-12, an academic year supplement was added to the graduate stipend scale to help offset university assigned costs such as the Health Services fee. As a result, the graduate assistantship stipend is currently comprised of two components: 1) a base stipend and 2) a fixed supplement. For administrative efficiency and processing, the two components are combined into the traditional stipend scale. As of Spring 2025, the current average monthly stipend for full-time graduate assistants is \$2,860 per month, which falls within step 17 of the 2024-25 stipend scale. This represents a 5.4 percent increase over the prior year.

## Tuition Assistance

The tuition remission program for graduate students on assistantship includes the remission of tuition, mandatory Educational and General (E&G) fees (excluding the state assigned Commonwealth Capital and Equipment Fee), and non-executive graduate program fees. Tuition remission benefits are provided on a per-semester basis for the duration of the contracted period. The tuition program is financed by four sources including: the General Fund appropriation for graduate student financial assistance, a tuition remission program in the university's E&G budget, tuition payments planned in the budgets of externally sponsored grants and contracts, and private funds.

In the case of an early termination of an assistantship, tuition remission benefits are prorated to align with the portion of the semester completed, as displayed on Table 1.

Table 1

<b>Number of Weeks into Semester When Assistantship is Terminated</b>	<b>Student Tuition &amp; E&amp;G Fee Obligation</b>	<b>Department Tuition &amp; E&amp;G Fee Obligation</b>
Less than Four	100%	0%
Four through less than Eight	75%	25%
Eight through less than Twelve	50%	50%
Twelve through less than Sixteen	25%	75%
Sixteen or more (full semester)	0%	100%

## Health Insurance

In 2001-02, the university implemented a health insurance program for graduate students on assistantship as a part of the Board-approved graduate student compensation package to enhance the university's competitiveness in recruiting highly qualified graduate students. The program was designed to help full-time graduate students receiving a full or partial assistantship, including graduate research assistants, graduate teaching assistants, and other graduate assistants, offset a portion of the cost of health insurance premiums. The university has worked with graduate student representatives over time to improve the overall mix and value of benefits provided through the health insurance program, including action by the Board of Visitors in 2018-19 to approve a health insurance subsidy rate of 88 percent for graduate assistants, matching the university's share of employee health insurance programs.

To qualify for the health insurance subsidy, full-time graduate students must have a 50 percent or greater appointment. Graduate students also have the option to decline coverage if they choose. In 2024-25 the university provided 88 percent of the \$3,773 annual premium cost of the plan to 3,870 graduate students. The plan provided for a \$450 in-network annual deductible, \$6,250 per-person out-of-pocket maximum, \$25 co-pay for in-network doctors' visits, and an unlimited maximum benefit. Students can obtain optional dental benefits for an additional cost.

## Recent Events

Because the university desires to ensure a competitive compensation package, the Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, at the behest of the President, convened a task force to develop proposals for improving graduate student compensation. In February 2023, this group released its *Report of the Graduate Assistantship Support Task Force* with eight recommendations designed to help graduate assistants meet the cost of living where they reside and complete their academic programs.

Based on this work, the board approved raising the minimum stipend from Step 1 to Step 12 for 2023-24, and raised the minimum stipend to Step 14 for 2024-25. Lower steps were reserved for stipend and fellowship combinations that resulted in total monthly support of at least the new minimum.

For 2025-26, the university recommends streamlining the graduate assistant compensation program by reducing the graduate assistantship stipend scale from 50 pay ranges to 11 pay ranges. (Attachment). Step 0 will be used for instances where a student receives a fellowship that, in combination with a graduate stipend, results in a total of at least the minimum Step 1 stipend level.

## Proposed Graduate Assistant Compensation Plan for 2025-26

The university proposes the following actions:

- Streamline the graduate assistant compensation program from 50 pay ranges to 11 pay ranges.
  - Step 0 will be used for instances where a student receives a fellowship that, in combination with a graduate stipend, results in a total of at least the minimum Step 1 stipend level.
- Advance the stipend scale for 2025-26 by implementing a 3.0 percent increase effective August 10, 2025, consistent with the statewide employee compensation program.
- Increase the academic year Stipend Supplement from \$458 to \$565, an increase of \$107, to help mitigate university assigned costs.
- Increase the stipend table minimum to \$2,800.
- Continue the university share of the graduate assistant health insurance coverage at 88 percent, based upon the university's current estimate the cost of graduate student insurance coverage.
- Continue the graduate tuition remission program.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

That the graduate assistant compensation program for 2025-26 be approved.

June 3, 2025

**2025-26 Full-Time Graduate Monthly Stipend Compensation**  
**Effective August 10, 2025**

<b>Step</b>	<b>Monthly</b>		<b>9 Month Equivalent</b>		<b>12 Month Equivalent</b>	
Step 0 <sup>(a)</sup>	\$1,248	\$2,799	\$11,232	\$25,191	\$14,976	\$33,588
Step 1	2,800	2,937	25,200	26,433	33,600	35,244
Step 2	2,912	3,055	26,208	27,495	34,944	36,660
Step 3	3,057	3,207	27,513	28,863	36,684	38,484
Step 4	3,209	3,368	28,881	30,312	38,508	40,416
Step 5	3,370	3,535	30,330	31,815	40,440	42,420
Step 6	3,537	3,712	31,833	33,408	42,444	44,544
Step 7	3,714	3,898	33,426	35,082	44,568	46,776
Step 8	3,899	4,091	35,091	36,819	46,788	49,092
Step 9	4,093	4,295	36,837	38,655	49,116	51,540
Step 10	4,297	4,509	38,673	40,581	51,564	54,108
Step 11 <sup>(a)</sup>	4,511	5,393	40,599	48,537	54,132	64,716

Notes

(a) Step 0 requires supplemental fellowship. Total stipend and fellowship must exceed minimum of Step 1.

(b) Step 11 is considered extraordinary and subject to approval by the Dean of Graduate Education.