

Paying for Graduate School

Financial aid generally is awarded in two forms: gift aid and self-help aid. Gift aid includes grants, fellowships and scholarships (institutional or external) that do not have to be repaid or earned. Self-help aid includes loans that must be repaid, work-study funds that must be earned through work on a campus, off-campus work, and assistantships that pay professional or graduate students for their research or teaching efforts. Most students use a combination of the options below over the years or even during a single academic year.

Teaching Assistantships

Teaching assistantships are considered to be part of a student's training in many Ph.D. programs. Most programs offer a variety of teaching assistantships that range from grading papers or leading discussion sections to lecturing. The compensation for each type varies according to the workload, but most will include tuition remission and health insurance in addition to a stipend for living expenses. Teaching assistantships are competitive as the number available in each program is based on undergraduate course enrollments.

Research Assistantships

Some programs or individual faculty members offer research assistantships to their graduate students. Research assistants are members of a team conducting research on a specific topic or as part of a lab. These positions occur more commonly in the sciences than in the humanities. Compensation depends on the amount allotted for such positions in research grants.

Graduate Assistantships

These assistantships involve working in a departmental or campus office for 10-20 hours per week. Compensation varies with some providing tuition remission and others providing tuition remission and a stipend. Most still will include health insurance. Administrative assistantships often are available outside one's academic department or program, so make sure you look for postings from other campus offices.

Resident Assistantships

A resident assistant or RA will live and work in a residence hall on campus. Compensation varies but will include at a minimum room and board.

Grants and Fellowships

Grants and fellowships may be awarded by a department, program, university academic office, or outside institution. Not only do they provide money, but they are prestigious and help build impressive curriculum vitae. Awards may include fee and/or tuition remission, a stipend, and health insurance. Neither fellowships nor grants have to be paid back, although some require progress reports. If you cannot find information on the Web, you should contact the graduate secretary or Director of Graduate Studies of prospective graduate programs to find out what grants and fellowships each program offers its students.

Student Loans

Student loans can be taken out from both private (lenders such as banks) and public (the government) institutions. The amount available varies as do the interest rates and repayment terms. Full-time graduate students typically qualify for \$20,500 annually up to \$138,500 total through the Stafford Loan program. Pay attention to FAFSA deadlines and be careful. These amounts add up quickly and could take years to pay back. Plus, depending on the expense of the academic program and local living costs, \$20,500 may not cover tuition, books and supplies, room and board, and health insurance.

For more information on student loans and other funding resources, see:

- [Federal Student Aid](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education](#)
- [Council of Graduate Schools](#)