Financial Support

Most full-time graduate students in Physics are supported as teaching assistant (TA) and/or research assistant (RA). There are also a number of scholarships, fellowships, and awards that provide financial support. All TAs and RAs are classified as “Academic Student Employees” (ASE). These positions provide a stipend, a tuition waiver, and health insurance benefits.

Teaching and Research Assistants

TAs are employed by the University to assist faculty in their teaching activities. TA assignments include: teaching the undergraduate labs, grade homework and exams, design learning exercises, and meet with students during office hours. Students are required to enroll in a training course for Teaching Assistants in Physics during their first year as TA. Students from non-English-speaking countries must pass the English language requirements.

RAs are employed by the Department to assist faculty with specified research projects, and are funded through the research grants held by members of the faculty. RAs are generally expected to be full-time students and to be working on individually specified research.

First-year students are often provided full TA support during their first academic year as part of their admission offer. Some entering students received RA support or a special fellowship.

The Department aims to provide financial support for all students making satisfactory progress and has been successful in this for many years, but financial support cannot be guaranteed because this is based on research grants and state funds.

Support beyond the second year is typically in the form of an RA or an RA/TA combination. It is the responsibility of the student to find a research advisor and research (RA) support.

A student beyond the 2nd year who is not actively involved in research with an identified faculty advisor, is deemed to be making unsatisfactory progress and is likely to lose TA support.

The number of TA positions is much more limited during the summer quarter than during the academic year. Therefore it is important for all students to seek Summer RA opportunities. This applies also to first-year students.

Students accepting TA or RA positions at the University are required to register as full-time graduate students (a minimum of 10 credits in the academic year, and a minimum of 2 credits in the summer quarter) and serve 20 hours per week.

Academic Student Employees (ASE)
All TAs and RAs at the university are classified as “Academic Student Employees” (ASE). Such positions are governed by a contract between the UW and the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), AFL-CIO and its Local Union 4121 (UAW). The UW/UAW contract can be reviewed at the UW Labor Relations Web site. An union representative will contact you with information about membership and fees.

Salaries and Promotions

Students entering the Physics PhD program are paid at the “Assistant” level (Teaching Assistant or Research Assistant).

Students receive a promotion to “Associate I” level (Predoctoral Teaching Associate I or Predoctoral Research Associate I) starting at the first pay period after passing the Master’s Review.

Students receive a promotion to “Associate II” level (Predoctoral Teaching Associate II or Predoctoral Research Associate II) starting at the first pay period after passing the General Examination.

Summer quarter courses run one month shorter than during the academic year. Summer TA employment is therefore also one month shorter. For this reason the salary for students serving as TA during summer quarter is increased accordingly.

For a complete PDF version of Physics Ph.D. Program Information, Policies, and Procedures

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