

2021-2023 Biennium Internal Budget Proposal Narrative

Division: Academic Affairs

Evaluation Criteria: Proposals will be evaluated on every aspect of this template. It is highly recommended that the narrative portion touch on each area. Proposals forwarded to UPRC by unit leaders will be discussed at UPRC and authors are encouraged to attend so that they may answer questions and provide clarification.

Fair and Competitive Graduate TA Stipends

- This is a revised version of a previously submitted budget proposal.
If box is checked please briefly outline any significant changes and/or indicate why it is being resubmitted.

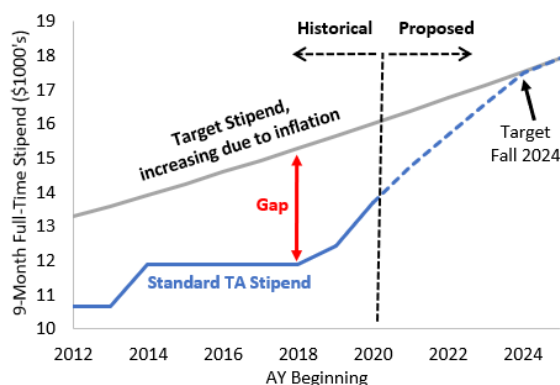
Aspects of this proposal were previously included in a decision package proposal submitted in FY20.

Statement of Purpose: *(What is the challenge or opportunity being addressed? How does the proposal address this challenge or opportunity? Limit response to 1 page – please link to any existing reports, data, supplemental materials, etc.)*

This proposal requests \$210k/yr in permanent new funding each year of the biennium to provide fair and competitive graduate teaching assistant stipends.

In the decade prior to AY19-20, TA stipends were increased only once, in 2014, and prior to that, sporadically. Adjusted for inflation, TA stipends today are only slightly above where they were in 1990, a time when the competitive environment for Graduate programs, the cost of living in Bellingham, and the diversity of students seeking a Western Graduate education were all very different than they are now. Years of deferred increases to TA stipend levels produced a gap between the full-time 9-month Graduate School target stipend of \$16,000 and the actual stipend level, currently \$13,650. The target stipend reflects a variety of factors including the local cost of living and stipend levels at peer institutions and competitors.

Two years ago, Western began working to bridge the gap by investing \$100k/yr in new base funding in FY20 and about \$250k/yr in FY21. In a [decision package](#) submitted last year, the Graduate School proposed a pathway to reach the target by Fall of 2024 through three continuing allocations of about \$200k/yr. Elements of that proposal were included in [Western's budget request](#), combined with other measures in a student success initiative now being considered by the State Legislature. This Internal Budget Proposal would be withdrawn were the legislature to fund that request. It reiterates the need to continue making progress by requesting \$192k/yr in additional funding for graduate TA stipends in each of the next two years, putting stipends on track to close the compensation gap in about three years.



Anticipated Outcome(s):

Low compensation of Graduate Teaching Assistants is problematic on many levels: it poses financial hardships for students, it makes it difficult to recruit and retain students in competitive fields, and it has led to concerns over fairness and equity as a result of applying different compensation levels within the University, depending on the discipline. These and other burdens are borne most painfully by students with families, and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Low stipends create a headwind impeding progress toward almost every other strategic goal of the Graduate School.

Anticipated outcomes include increased access to graduate education for a more diverse cohort of prospective students, particularly economically disadvantaged students, increased competitiveness in recruiting students who often receive higher offers elsewhere, and improved educational outcomes as TAs are able to focus more on their studies and less on worries about making ends meet.

Metrics: *(How will outcomes be measured? Please include current data points and goals. If this proposal will have any impact on the [Overall Metrics](#) included in the university's strategic plan, please indicate which specific ones here.)*

Enrollment yield (the percentage of admission offers accepted), participation rates among students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, self-reported student debt levels at graduation and measures of student satisfaction are all linked to TA stipend levels. Average credit load and time-to-degree may also be affected by lessening the need for students to work a second job.

How does this proposal align with your departmental/divisional strategic priorities? *(Please reference specific items from the recently completed departmental/divisional strategic plan and attach a copy.)*

Fair and competitive TA stipend are the highest budget priority of the Graduate School. Progress toward many other Graduate School goals – overall graduate enrollment, student diversity, fostering an equitable and inclusive graduate community, student engagement in scholarly/creative activities, degree completion rates, and more – all depend on making continued progress toward offering a fair and competitive stipend to our graduate instructors.

By becoming an institution that offers equitable pay to graduate instructors, Western affirms core tenets of the university's mission and values, as well as those of the Graduate School.

How does this proposal support the University Mission and Strategic Objectives? *(Please refer to the [2018-2025 Strategic Plan](#) and indicate which core theme(s) this proposal will help achieve.)*

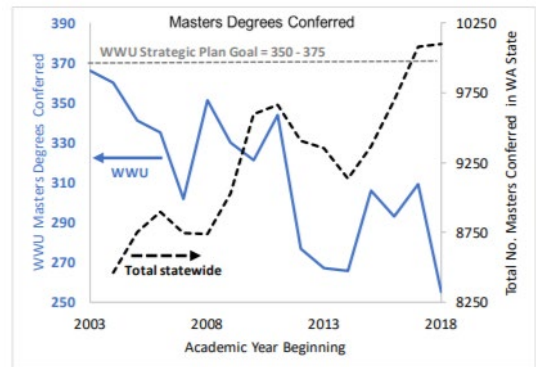
The proposal directly or indirectly impacts progress toward several strategic plan metrics:

- (3.a.1) Graduate degrees awarded
- (1.b.3) Percent of enrolled students of color
- (2.b.1) Percentage of Masters degree recipients co-authoring a paper in a refereed journal
- (2.b.1) Percentage of Masters degree recipients presenting at a conference or seminar

What are the consequences of not funding this proposal?

Rarely in Western's history has the graduate student community faced a more challenging set of obstacles than today. Many of those are tied directly or indirectly to the cost of attendance and the ability to pay for it. Western has been losing ground against other institutions in our ability to recruit, retain, and serve the needs of those seeking graduate-level education. If the proposal is not funded those trends are more likely to continue.

Unlike other employee categories at Western, there is no other process outside of this budget process to advocate for TA compensation.



What alternatives were explored?

There don't appear to be viable alternatives.

Which units (departments, colleges, etc.) will be involved?

All programs that employ graduate TAs will be affected.

Equipment needed:

None.

Human Resources (Complete the table below adding additional rows if necessary):

<i>Position Title</i>	<i>Total Headcount</i>	<i>Total FTE</i>	<i>Salary and Benefits per FTE</i>	<i>Total Cost</i>
<i>TA Stipend Increase (FY22)</i>	<i>220</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>\$14,433</i>	<i>\$191,469</i>
<i>TA Stipend Increase (Incremental, FY23)</i>	<i>220</i>	<i>11.4</i>	<i>\$15,216</i>	<i>\$201,643</i>

Table above should match data on budget spreadsheets submitted with this proposal. Complete the spreadsheet to get salary, benefit, and total cost amounts. Contact your division budget officer with questions.

Operating & Maintenance Costs (include service contracts, installation costs, etc.):

None.

Space Requirements:

What type of space is needed for this proposal? (e.g., private office, lab space, group work/study space, etc.)

None.

What features must this space have? (e.g., fume hoods, plumbing, 3-phase power, etc.)

None.

What needs can be accommodated within your existing space?

None.

How much new space will be required?

None.