PURDUE UNIVERSITY | College of Engineering

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Introduction to Funding

Graduate School is not merely a continuation of your undergraduate studies, and there are new sources of funding that were not available to you as an undergraduate. Before we begin, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Every department and school is different! Review your program's website and ask questions.
- Many times you will automatically be considered for assistantships and fellowships (described below) based upon your application for admission. However, some programs may have an additional application or request you to contact faculty directly to inquire about funding opportunities. Understand the process for your program!
- Many administrative positions are posted like a standard job opening. Pay attention to emails that may announce positions. Once you are on campus, check to see if there is a job posting board for your program.
- Apply for external fellowships (see below). These awards come with a strong financial package, the freedom to focus on your own research, and national recognition that will help advance your career. Once you are on campus, take advantage of the many workshops, sample applications, and guidance that is available from the College of Engineering to help you put together a strong application.

Don't let financial concerns prevent you from at least exploring your graduate school options.
You might find a way to get paid to go to Graduate School!

- **Graduate Staff Appointments:** considered part-time employment at the University and come with some employee benefits. For additional details, see also the Graduate School's *Graduate Student Employment Manual* at https://www.purdue.edu/gradschool/funding/.

  - Typically require 20 hours "half-time" or 10 hours "quarter-time" of work weekly.
  - Benefits include free tuition and a monthly salary. Half-time or more appointments also include a health insurance allocation.
  - Student is still responsible for some fees (usually less than $1000 per semester here at Purdue).
  - Assistantships may be combined with each other or with fellowships (e.g., two quarter-time appointments)
  - There are four main types of Graduate Staff Appointments:

    1. **Research Assistantships (RA)**
       - Employed by a professor to assist with a research project, usually related to your thesis topic.
       - Do not contact a professor about an RA position without first knowing their research and how it relates to your interests! Then, share any previous research experience and your future goals.
       - Offer letters and contracts are typically for 9 or 12 months.
       - May be renewed based on student's work performance, academic standing and degree progress.
       - Vacation time may be accrued and taken with supervisor approval.

    2. **Teaching Assistantships (TA)**
       - Employed by the school/department to teach lectures or labs, hold office hours, and/or assist with grading. Having a good grade in a similar class and any undergraduate grader experience is helpful.
       - Offer letter and contract is typically for 4½ months (1 semester) or 9 months (2 semesters).
       - May be renewed each session based on course need and your teaching and academic performance.
       - Vacation time is generally taken when classes are not in session.

3. **Graduate Assistantship - Administrative/Professional**
   - These graduate staff appointments have administrative duties that generally do not involve research or teaching. The appointment may require specific skills relevant to the position.
   - Typically these appointments are outside your admitting department and may be offered by:
     - Various administrative offices at the school, college, or university level.
     - Libraries, intercollegiate athletics, housing and food services.
   - Positions may be posted around campus or announced via email.
   - Typically require an application and interview.
   - Offer letter/contract may be for the summer, a semester, academic year or fiscal year.
   - Renewal of contract is based on work and academic performance and the needs of the hiring unit.
   - Vacation policies vary depending on the duration of the appointment.

4. **Graduate Lecturer**
   - Not available in all programs. This appointment is a more advanced teaching assistant.
   - Student must have already passed the preliminary examination, be a doctoral candidate, and have completed all coursework on the plan of study.
   - Student must have already been a teaching assistant for at least four academic sessions.

- **Fellowships:** Sometimes referred to as a "graduate scholarship," a fellowship is money for your graduate education that you typically do not have to work for or repay. Fellowships are merit-based and very competitive.
  - Fellowships may be "internal" from the university, or "external" from a business, professional organization, philanthropic group, or government agency. Many external fellowships are portable and can be used at the institution of your choice.
  - Award amounts and duration vary greatly. Large awards (such as from the NSF) cover tuition and provide a substantial salary. Smaller awards may not cover all expenses or may be for a limited duration.
  - Terms/conditions are set by the provider. For example, some fellowships may include employment or internships. Government fellowships may require the recipient to work in that country after graduation. Make sure you understand any requirements!
  - Some fellowships may be "administered as" or "combined with" an assistantship. This is sometimes done with smaller awards as a way to increase your salary and give you more benefits. When this happens, the guidelines of an assistantship apply, including any work requirements.
  - You cannot hold two full fellowships simultaneously, although many fellowships may be deferred when other funding is available.
  - Some fellowships accept student applications; others rely on nominations. Your application for admission to Purdue University will automatically be considered for several internal fellowships that are available for newly admitted students. Some fellowships require completion of the "Diversity Essay" that is part of the Purdue application, so be sure to complete that essay to be considered.
  - View a list of fellowships under "Funding Information" at https://engineering.purdue.edu/Engr/InfoFor/CurrentGraduateStudents
- **Other Considerations**
  - If you are already working full-time and considering part-time graduate study, inquire about tuition reimbursement programs at your company.
  - U.S. Citizens, complete the FAFSA to be eligible for student loans. Even if you don't think you will need to take out loans, it is helpful to have this completed in case you change your mind later. Plus, some need-based fellowships rely on the FAFSA to determine eligibility. Before actually taking out any loans, make sure you understand the financial implications, including the impact of any compounding interest.
  - When weighing financial offers from different institutions, consider the cost-of-living for each area. Also, make sure you clearly understand the offer and what you will need to pay out of pocket (tuition, fees, health insurance, etc.). Do not be afraid to ask for clarification.