Update on “Principles and Priorities for TA/GA Allocations”

Since December 2002, the Graduate School has used the guidelines outlined in the “Principles and Priorities for TA/GA Allocations” distributed by former Dean David Payne. These guidelines were developed in consultation with the Graduate Council’s Budget Advisory Committee and the Graduate Dean’s Advisory Committee.

In the documents that accompanied TA/GA allocations for 2004-05 and 2005-06, the Graduate School specifically referred to former Dean Payne’s 12-16-02 memo, as the guidelines used.

The guidelines were also used for the allocations for 2006-07.
DATE: December 16, 2002

TO: Deans, Associate Deans, Chairs and Directors of Graduate Studies

FROM: David G. Payne, Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

SUBJECT: Principles and Priorities for TA/GA Allocations

Throughout the Fall 2003 semester the Budget Advisory Committee of the Graduate Council has considered a number of resource allocation issues that affect graduate programs at Binghamton University. Among the issues under consideration has been the allocation of TA/GA lines to academic units, and we are fortunate that the committee has given considerable thought to how best to characterize the principles and priorities that govern the allocation of these lines. I have also shared a draft version of these principles and priorities with the Graduate Dean’s Advisory Committee (GDAC) comprised of representatives of each of the schools.

The Budget Advisory Committee and the GDAC have provided useful input to the establishment of the principles and priorities described below. I want to thank these groups for their efforts.

I have outlined below the principles and priorities that I believe must drive the TA/GA allocation process and some of the critical general and specific factors that must be taken into account in making the allocation decisions. I hope that these guidelines will prove useful to you in your ongoing strategic planning to continue to strengthen and improve the quality of graduate education at Binghamton University.

Principles and Priorities

The TA/GA Allocations must be aligned with the following principles and priorities:

- TA/GA Allocations must help Binghamton University move forward toward its goals of (a) increasing the excellence of graduate programs at the University and
(b) increasing graduate enrollments. Similarly, allocations of lines, stipend support, and Graduate Scholar resources must allow academic units to recruit and enroll the strongest graduate students possible.

- TA/GA Allocations need to take into account University initiatives, including the development of new programs and increased emphasis on doctoral education.
- TA/GA Allocations must take into account factors that are specific to academic disciplines and academic programs, and the allocation decisions should not pit academic programs against one another.

Factors that Should Drive the Allocation Process

Based on the discussions within the Budget Advisory Committee and GDAC, along with my own review and analysis of allocation priorities, there are several main factors that emerge as driving the allocation process. These factors are:

- Quality and characteristics of the graduate program
- Enrollment history and projections for the future
- Instructional mission of the department/academic program
- Nature of TA/GA appointments as these relate to the University Mission
- Funding patterns (i.e., external support) within the academic unit

Within these broad categories there are a number of specific factors that must be taken into account. These include:

- Faculty size, including recent hires, recent losses
- National standards for funding graduate students in the discipline
- Graduate FTE in the program
- Undergraduate FTE in the program
- Efforts on the part of the programs to improve recruitment
- The "critical mass" needed to sustain the program
- Placements of recent graduates
- Numbers and trends in applications to the programs
- Competitiveness of the program -- what percentage of applicants is being admitted? What percentage of those admitted is accepting the offers?
- Nature of the TA/GA assignments given to students -- are these lab course, lecture courses, primarily GA, etc.?
- Level of program, i.e., Masters only, Doctoral programs
- University goals (e.g., enrollment, external funding)
- Development of new degree programs
- External funding in the program; typical levels of external funding in the discipline; percentages/numbers of students supported on external funding
- Extent to which a program is well established vs. trying to "come into its own."

Summary

There is no one simple algorithm for making TA/GA allocations, and a host of factors need to be taken into account. The data for the factors that must be considered come from a variety of sources, and there is no currently available exhaustive list of these factors, e.g., typical levels of external funding in the discipline. Furthermore, some of these factors are qualitative.
I intend to review and consult local and external selective benchmark data where these data are appropriate and available. I will use the input provided from the academic units during my meetings this fall, along with the data referred to above, in making final allocation decisions for 2003-04.

In light of current and future budgetary uncertainties, I plan to have a phased decision process for TA/GA allocations for 2003-04. I plan to provide initial allocations to academic units in early January 2003. These allocations will be guaranteed for the 2003-04 academic year and they will allow units to move forward with their recruiting goals for annual year 2003-04. As enrollment plans and budgetary conditions become clearer in the Spring I will make additional allocations to units to supplement the base allocations.

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that TA/GA allocations are intended, in part, to support graduate enrollment and program development, and that projected graduate enrollments for 2003-04 must play a role in determining the final 2003-04 TA/GA allocations. It is critically important that we maintain or increase graduate enrollment where we have the capacity to do so. Increasing graduate enrollment is a major priority at Binghamton University and I will continue to work with academic units to help achieve this goal.

DGP/alh
cc: Provost Mary Ann Swain
    Vice President Frances Carr