

Memo: Funding Policies for Students Beyond Year 5

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Overview: Graduate students in good standing are only guaranteed 5 years of funding. While the Department has routinely provided funding for students beyond year 5, academic units at MSU are expected to encourage five-year timelines. Given budget pressures, we will no longer be able to employ students in their 6th year and beyond as graduate assistants after the 2025-2026 academic year. Students needing more than 5 years of support will have to consider other pathways for funding.

Actions: Students should not delay their dissertation defense in the hopes of receiving continued funding in their 6th year. We advise all rising 6th year students to apply for a Dissertation Completion Fellowship (DCF) which, if approved by the Graduate School, provides one semester of continued support. We are unlikely to support 5th year students applying for DCF funds as they are still funded through the Department.

PLS will no longer fund 6th year students as TA/RAs. Students affected will not be formally removed from the program, provided they are in good standing. However, they will no longer receive the usual stipend, tuition credits, etc. Students can continue to be enrolled and work towards completion. As noted below, there are alternative sources of funding that the Department can help students apply for (grants, fellowships, etc.).

Alternative Pathways of Support

Self-Funding: Students who need more time to finish and defend their dissertation can enroll and pay for a single PLS 999 or 993 credit and continue. Defending a dissertation requires enrollment, not funding. This may work well for students who defend too late in the semester to make the filing deadline and so must enroll in the following semester.

Other Funding: There are many other funding sources at MSU. For example, the Graduate School offers Dissertation Completion Fellowships (DCFs) that provide about one semester's worth of support for those graduate students that need a bit more time to finish. Furthermore, other MSU departments often put out calls for TA/RAs. Students can also be funded externally through faculty/student grants and fellowships. The Department will pass along such opportunities as they arise. Students are also encouraged to seek out and discuss these opportunities with their advisors.

Teaching Positions: In some instances, the Department hires recent MSU PhDs to teach courses, particularly at the undergraduate level. These appointments are based on departmental instruction needs, which fluctuate depending on course demands and faculty availability. Similar teaching positions are also sometimes available at nearby institutions.

NOTE:

- International students must consider the visa/immigration implications of a loss of funding or shifting toward teaching. The Department will work with such students to resolve these issues as best it can.
- This is not a change in departmental policy or MSU's TA contracts. Funding beyond year 5 was always contingent on student progress and departmental funds.