

*Graduate Assistantships
Frequently Asked (and Answered) Questions
March 4, 2021*

When are funding offer letters sent?

Computer Sciences offers funding in the form of guaranteed assistantships and supplemental first year scholarships. This information is provided in your admissions letter. Half of the scholarship is provided to students in fall term and the other half in spring term. Guaranteed assistantships are typically offered for 4 years, 8 semesters.

How difficult is it to get a TA position if we are not guaranteed funding?

Computer Sciences offers many Teaching Assistant (TA) positions. We first place our guaranteed funded students into teaching assistantships and then give priority hire to unfunded computer science graduate students who complete the TA application. The past few years we have gotten close to offering all interested CS graduate students a TA position. Sometimes those offers come closer to the start of semester.

How common is it for students to switch from TA to RA roles?

If you are a PhD student, it is fairly common that you'll have an RA position during your academic work. If you are a Master's student, here for 2-3 years, it depends on the relationships you build with faculty members. RA positions are funded through research monies. Faculty secure those monies and recruit for RA positions. Your ability to be hired as an RA depends on your research interest areas and your relationship building with faculty members.

TOEFL Scores and Speak Test

The Graduate School collects your official TOEFL information. For more information about English Proficiency and if you are exempt from TOEFL visit:

<https://grad.wisc.edu/apply/requirements/>. The Speak Test is administered by English as a Second Language Department. You can learn more information about the speak test at:

<https://esl.wisc.edu/ita-training/speak/>

Your TA application will ask you to self-report TOEFL and future Speak test results. In August, Computer Sciences staff will email all graduate students offered a TA position and who need to complete a Speak Test, a few weeks before the start of the semester. That email will explain if you need to take the Speak Test and how that test can be scheduled. You'll complete the test, an in-person test, when you arrive to campus for the start of fall term. If you don't receive a 50 on the Speak Test, an English-Speaking course will be recommended for you. Computer Sciences expects you to enroll in that English-Speaking course during your fall semester. You will keep your TA position for fall semester and retake the Speak Test before spring semester begins.

When do I need to complete my Speak Test?

Computer Sciences will email you a few weeks before the start of the semester with information on the Speak Test. Campus only begins offering Speak Tests in mid to late August. There are no additional steps you need to take at this time.

I am very concerned about passing the Speak Test. What should I do?

You can view a sample Speak Test at the bottom of this webpage: <https://esl.wisc.edu/ita-training/speak/>. We encourage you to practice your English speaking as much as you can between now and when you take the test in mid to late August. Use family members, friends or community English speaking groups to practice your English speaking.

What are the stipends for TA and RA positions?

The graduate school funding website is a great resource (<https://grad.wisc.edu/funding/graduate-assistantships/>) sharing information on assistantships offered at UW-Madison. That website also has a link (located at the bottom of the left-hand column) that provides assistantship stipend information by department/program.

When do I need to be on campus if I'm offered a TA or RA position?

You'll need to be in Madison, Wisconsin and ready to start your TA or RA work on Monday, August 22nd.

What costs does the tuition remission pay for?

Visit the graduate school website (<https://grad.wisc.edu/funding/graduate-assistantships/>) for information on how tuition remission works and to view the expected cost of segregated fees. Students in 33.3% or higher graduate assistantship appointments (Computer Sciences TA and RA are 50% appointments) receive 100% tuition remission. All students must pay the segregated fees.

TA and RA positions over 33.3% also offer health insurance benefits.

How common is it for students to complete research while TAing within the first couple semesters?

Both a TA and RA position are employment positions. Students can also complete research for academic credit. You'll want to talk with your academic advisor about completing research for credit. Many of those conversations happen once you've gotten to UW-Madison in the Fall.

Is there a department that handles disability accommodations?

The McBurney Disability Resource Center (<https://mcburney.wisc.edu/>) provides accommodations for academic coursework. If you need accommodations in your TA or RA work, that falls under employment accommodations. You will receive an official employment letter when offered a semester TA or RA position that provides contact information to notify Human Resources of needed work accommodations. This official letter will be sent in late July/early August.

Can an RA-ship be offered through a CS-affiliate faculty member who is outside the CS department, or only by CS core faculty?

Yes. Faculty members have home departments and offer TA or RA opportunities from their home department. CS-affiliate faculty members all have a non-CS department home. You can view other departments assistantships on the UW-Madison Student Jobs website (<https://studentjobs.hr.wisc.edu/cw/en-us/filter/?job-mail-subscribe-privacy=agree&search-keyword=&work-type=uw%20graduate%20assistant>). If you are hired by another department, you'll follow that department's policies and expectations, but will be paid the CS assistantship stipend rate.

I am currently enrolled as an MS-only student but am considering continuing to PhD. Are the chances of a TA offer better if I change to PhD-track?

We do not use your program track to determine TA hiring. The TA application you complete each semester will ask questions about your prior coursework experience, skill sets and course interests. We utilize this information to complete our TA hiring and course assignments.

What is the maximum amount of credits TA can register for per semester?

Department of Computer Sciences TA are required to enroll in at least 6 credits of coursework per semester. The Graduate School considers maximum enrollment to be 15 credits taken at 300 level courses or above.

Do I get my stipend and health insurance during winter break (December -January)?

If you are employment in a Fall semester TA or RA position and will be employed in a Spring TA or RA position you will receive continuous compensation and insurance coverage during winter break. Fall semester employment ends in early January and the Spring semester employment begins the next day.