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UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYEE TOTAL COMPENSATION

Graduate Students Balance Academic and Employment Responsibilities

Graduate students across the University of California system often work part-time as Teaching Assistants, Readers, Tutors, or Graduate Student Researchers while pursuing their degree. To support academic progress, timely degree completion, and student well-being, UC limits graduate student employment to 25-50% time, or 10 or 20 hours per week.

A Strong Total Compensation Package

UC minimum TA and GSR wages are at or 90% of those at public institutions in the Association of American Universities (AAU). However, UC's total compensation package extends well beyond base wages. Depending on appointment type, residency status, and eligibility, total compensation may include:

- Competitive, at, or above market wages, and annual increases (see last page)
- Full tuition coverage valued at \$13,140
- Student services fee coverage valued at \$1,290
- Campus fee coverage up to \$1,242 per term, depending on the campus
- Health insurance premium coverage from \$5,002 to \$12,222
- Nonresident tuition remission valued at \$15,102
- Child care reimbursements valued at up to \$5,600



Total Compensation Examples

The following examples show the comprehensive nature of the compensation package for graduate students at UC.

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Example 1: A level 3 graduate student researcher at UC Santa Barbara working 10 hours per week, who is a non-California resident with dependents:

UCSB - GSR 3, 25% (10 hours/week)	2025-26
Wages @ 25%	\$20,868
Tuition Remission	\$13,140
Student Services Fee Remission	\$1,290
Campus Fees	\$1,390
Non-Resident Tuition Relief	\$15,102
Graduate Student Health Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$8,597
Dependent Health Care Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$8,114
Child Care Reimbursement	\$5,600
Total	\$74,101

Example 2: At UC Irvine, a level 6 Graduate Student Researcher working 20 hours per week who is a non-California resident with dependents:

UCI - GSR 6, 50% (20 hours/week)	2025-26
Wages @ 50%	\$52,212
Tuition Remission	\$13,140
Student Services Fee Remission	\$1,290
Campus Fees	\$2,128
Non-Resident Tuition Relief	\$15,102
Graduate Student Health Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$6,847
Dependent Health Care Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$6,624
Child Care Reimbursement	\$5,600
Total	\$102,943

Example 3: At UC Berkeley, a level 1 Teaching Assistant working 20 hours per week who is a California resident with dependents:

UCB - TA 1, 50% (20 hours/week)	2025-26
Wages @ 50%	\$37,960
Tuition Remission	\$13,140
Student Services Fee Remission	\$1,290
Campus Fees	\$2,484
Graduate Student Health Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$7,848
Dependent Health Care Insurance Premium Reimbursement	\$15,402
Child Care Reimbursement	\$5,575
Total	\$83,699

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Recent Salary Adjustments for Graduate Student Employees

Academic Student Employees (ASEs)

- Since 2022, ASEs have received annual increases of 7.5%, approximately 16.5%–25%, approximately 16.7%, and 4%.
- Over this period, the minimum salaried ASE rate increased by approximately 52% over three years.
- Additionally, two salary points were added to the Teaching Assistant scale, which previously had only one point.

Graduate Student Researchers (GSRs)

- Since 2022, GSRs have received annual increases of 7.5%, 6.4%, 6.4%, and 4%.
- During the same period, the minimum GSR rate increased by approximately 63% over three years through a combination of annual range increases and removal of salary points.

Experience-Based Progression

- In addition, Teaching Assistants and Graduate Student Researchers appointed at the lowest salary points became eligible for a newly created experience-based salary progression, with increases of approximately 3% per salary point for TAs and 7.75% per salary point for GSRs.

How Graduate Student Wage Increases Are Paid For

- Wage increases are funded through a mix of campus resources (ASEs) and external grants (GSRs)
- For most Graduate Student Researchers, wages are paid from grant funds, which means pay is linked to sponsor rules and award structures
- Some federal grants include caps or fixed budgets, which can affect how wage increases are implemented within existing awards
- Ongoing uncertainty in federal research funding creates planning challenges for research programs and the graduate workforce

External Funding Pressures Shaping Wage Decisions

- Federal research agencies are reducing grant funding to universities, with more NIH and NSF awards being canceled or delayed than in prior years
- Thousands of research grants are being cut or frozen, creating significant gaps in research funding across many scientific fields
- NIH competitive grants declined in 2025 by approximately 22%, and NSF new grants declined by approximately 25%

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- Federal rules now require many grants to be paid up front rather than year by year, which means fewer projects can be supported at a time
- These changes shorten project timelines and reduce funding flexibility for researchers
- Federal agencies have indicated that this upfront funding approach will continue in 2026

UC's Economic Proposal

The University's proposal restructures academic employee pay scales across titles, bringing them closer together in recognition of one of UAW's major priorities. Phased increases would begin on Oct. 1, 2026, with full implementation by Oct. 1, 2029.

- **Graduate Student Researchers** will transition to a five-point scale with 5.5% increments, achieving end-state monthly rates by Oct. 1, 2029, at 50% FTE, with rates of \$3,750, \$3,956, \$4,174, \$4,404, and \$4,646. Experience-based salary placement at point 2 after two semesters or three quarters and point 3 after four semesters or six quarters.
- **Teaching Assistants** transition to a single five-point scale with 3.5% increments and end-state monthly rates by Oct. 1, 2029, at 50% FTE of \$4,100, \$4,244, \$4,393, \$4,547 and \$4,706, with experience-based salary placement at point 2 after two semesters or three quarters and point 3 after four semesters or six quarters. TAs receive \$750 lump-sum payments in each academic year, starting 2026–27 through 2029–30.
- **Associate Instructors** move to a single seven-point scale effective Oct. 1, 2026, with a 3% increase to point 1 and 3.4% increments between the remaining points, with experience-based salary placement at point 3 after four semesters or six quarters and point 5 after six semesters or nine quarters. Associate Instructors will then receive 3% general range adjustments in 2027, 2028, and 2029.
- **Readers and Tutors** receive 3% annual increases on Oct. 1, 2026, 2027, 2028, and 2029.