

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** ALCON

**From:** Peter Fisher

**Subject:** TA Allocations in the Physics Department

**Date:** October 30, 2018

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The main philosophy of the graduate program in the Physics Department is that MIT is a research university and we want graduate students to engage in research with our faculty starting the day they arrive. Many graduate students never TA at all. Owing to lower funding levels and less travel, our theory students TA more than our experimental students. Also, the Department relies on the faculty for most of its classroom teaching and most TA positions involve grading, holding office hours, making up exams and problem sets, and supporting the faculty in other ways. Most TAs do not teach. The Department has need of about 34 Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) each term.

Each Division has an allocation of TA positions for each term. A few weeks into the previous term, the faculty have been asked to provide the names of students wishing to TA that term. If there are more requests than the Division's TA allocation, the Division Head chooses the students who will TA in the next term. The list from each Division goes to the Academic Programs Officer who works with the faculty member charged with making TA assignments to staff our subjects.

TAs support students while they transition from one group to another and, in rare instances, support students long term when their PI has lost support. In recent years, more PIs have requested TAs to bridge shortfalls in support, both temporary and long term. This means that TA positions represent a research resource they did not represent a few years ago, and the Department is responsible for making sure that resource is equitably distributed.

Starting Spring 2019, the faculty will be asked to provide more information about each student requesting a TA position:

1. The student's name
2. The research advisor's name
3. Other terms and subjects the student has TAed for
4. Why the TA is being requested for this student

The Division head will then rank their entire list of students and send it to the APO, who will make up the TA list. The ranking should follow:

1. Students who need transitional TAs because they are changing groups
2. Students whose faculty advisors lack the funds to support them

3. Students wishing to TA to get teaching experience
4. Students of faculty who are relieving grants, with priority to junior faculty and early career senior faculty.

Faculty whose students fall into category **2** are saying they cannot support their student and, as a result, should not advocate for fellowships or RAs to work with them during the admissions process.

Requests in category **3** will be prioritized first by the number of TA's the faculty has requested for reasons **1** and **2**, with preference to those who have received fewer TAs and a second consideration to career stage.

The APO will make the initial assignments respecting the Divisional allocations. If there are more TAs needed, assignment will be made from the remaining pool according to criteria given above.

The list of students holding TA positions each term will be posted in the same place as the faculty teaching assignments.