



Frequently Asked Questions for Funding Opportunities

How competitive is it to secure an RA or TA position? What is the percentage of students receive RAs/TAs?

The RA/TA award process is very competitive, and it is getting more and more so every year. The number of applicants to our graduate program has been increasing steadily in the last three years. In the meantime, the RA and TA positions have not increased accordingly.

We do not keep track of the percentage of students who receive RAs/TAs. In general, a large portion of our PhD students and a small fraction of our MS students are funded via an RA or a TA. Many faculty members invest their research funds on students who can stay in the program for a good, solid three-to-five-year period to work on challenging research projects.

There are other opportunities that do appear. Occasionally a faculty member will receive funding that is appropriate from an MS student, e.g., a project that focuses on technology rather than research, or one of limited duration. Sometimes, unexpected funding will come in, and the faculty member needs to find a student right away. Often the faculty member will approach students who have impressed them in class. An entrepreneurial approach coupled with strong academic performance provides the best opportunity to find a funded project via this path.

I have repeatedly contacted a faculty member whose research interests me. The faculty member does not respond. What do I do?

First of all, faculty members are always keen to recruit good students. There must be a reason why they do not respond and you will need to find it out.

A faculty member may not respond to your requests for many reasons. Not all of them are as negative as “the faculty is not interested in recruiting you.” The faculty may not have a position open right now. The faculty may be waiting for his or her pending proposal to be awarded. The faculty may be waiting for all potential applicants to complete their applications in order to make his or her final decision. The faculty may feel that your past experience does not line up with his research perfectly. In all these circumstances, the faculty may not be in the best position to respond. In general, faculty members are weighing all sorts of factors in order to make a best decision. Since faculty members constantly receive multiple email inquiries about research opportunities, some faculty may simply be too overwhelmed to respond.

This is, of course, a frustrating experience for our applicants. There are, however, a couple of things that you can do. One is to visit our department after you have been admitted. The [Prospective Graduate Student Visiting Day](#) is a good event to meet

with our faculty members. If you are not able to attend that event, you might want to visit us in the Spring Quarter to meet with faculty members face-to-face. Meeting the faculty in person can give you a better feel whether or not the faculty is interested in recruiting you. Please note that you should make an appointment directly with the faculty members you want to meet, before you make a special trip to campus. The ME Office cannot guarantee availability of the faculty members on the day of your visit.

Another option is to enlarge your search and explore funding opportunities with other faculty members. For example, many ME affiliate professors, adjunct professors and research faculty members supervise graduate students and appoint research assistants. Faculty members outside ME departments have routinely hired ME graduate students as RA.

Are there any forms to fill out to apply for financial assistance?

There are no forms to fill out for financial assistance.

What are faculty members looking for, when they are recruiting a research assistant?

Good and solid academic training is only a necessary condition. Faculty members will also consider many other factors, such as a right match in research interests, prior experience in the field, level of commitment, enthusiasm, work attitude, communication skills, and personality. When faculty members recruit a research assistant, they are basically looking for a working partner.

Could I accept the admission offer first, and seek financial assistance after I enter the program?

Yes. If you choose to do so, please be aware of the risk. There is a real possibility that no RA and TA positions will be available, even after you physically arrive on our campus and enter the ME graduate program. You must be prepared to fully fund your degree if you enter the program in this way.