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SIPA offers two different types of financial aid – scholarships and assistantships. This handbook will not address student loans, external awards or Work Study. For further information about those types of funding options, please contact the SIPA Office of Financial Aid (sipa_finaid@columbia.edu) or visit our website at https://sipa.columbia.edu/admissions/applying-to-sipa/financial-aid.

Sometimes the term “fellowship” is used, but this is a general term that may mean either a scholarship or assistantship, and sometimes that particular designation is used at the request of the donor. A fellowship is not a separate or different category of financial aid.

**Scholarships:**

Scholarships are awards that offer credit towards the student’s tuition and fees. The recipient only sees this funding as a transaction on their student account, typically half of the full amount of the award at the beginning of each semester. Scholarships carry no obligation of employment or similar service. A scholarship reduces the amount a student has to pay to attend SIPA.

Scholarships may be awarded for two years, one year, or one semester, depending on when it is offered to the student and availability and type of funds. No award is made retroactively for a year or semester that has already been completed. The period covered by the scholarship will be explained when the student is notified of the award.

Dollar amounts of SIPA scholarships range from $4,000 to full tuition (during the 2014/15 academic year) annually. Some scholarships are made available by donations and gifts to SIPA and are named after the donor. The SIPA Office of Development will reach out to students awarded scholarships from these funds to encourage communication between students and donors so that students can express their gratitude for donors’ support.

There are some forms of external funding, from programs such as Rangel, Fulbright, Pickering, Colfuturo and others in which admitted applicants will receive a partial match of their fellowship with additional scholarship aid from SIPA, thereby increasing the value of their award.

On rare occasions, a scholarship may be disbursed directly to the student via a check or direct deposit transaction; this is referred to as a stipend. Stipends are intended to be used for living expenses or textbooks rather than tuition, and they are potentially taxable income. Scholarships disbursed to students’ accounts and limited to tuition and fees are not taxable.

**Assistantships:**

Assistantships are awards that offer a combination of credit towards the student’s tuition and fees and a salary. There is an employment obligation to these awards. The tuition credit will appear on the student’s account at the beginning of the semester or shortly after the award has been offered, whichever is later. Salary is paid twice monthly, on or about the 15th and 30th. Students receiving
assistantships are strongly advised to set up a direct deposit account for payroll transactions; the account must be with a bank in the United States.

Assistantships are only offered to second year students. Appointments may be for one or two semesters, and in some cases a student may have two different appointments in two semesters. There are four different types of assistantships offered by SIPA, each described below.

Teaching Assistants (TA’s) support course instructors in a variety of tasks relevant to the management, organization, and presentation of course materials to students. TAs generally attend class lectures, hold office hours to address students’ questions about course material, and may assist with grading and proctoring of exams. TAs also perform other related duties as assigned by the course instructor.

A TA position pays $15,000 in tuition assistance plus a $5,000 salary per semester, and a TA must work 20 hours per week throughout the semester.

Departmental Research Assistants (DRA’s)

DRAs for Courses
In quantitative courses, DRAs are responsible for grading weekly assignments and exams as well as maintaining student records. They generally hold office hours to address questions about course material. DRAs also perform other related duties as assigned by the course instructor.

DRAs for Concentrations, Specializations, Institutes and Programs
In addition to courses, DRAs also assist Concentration, Specialization, Institute, and/or Program Directors with the management of their courses, student communications, and administrative matters. DRAs plan events, maintain communication with students, and work with the SIPA administration on concentration/specialization/institute/program-related issues. DRAs also perform other related duties as assigned by the Director.

All DRA positions pay $8,100 in tuition assistance plus a $2,400 salary per semester, and a DRA must work 15 hours per week throughout the semester.

Program assistants (PA’s) are selected by and work in the many offices of administration that carry out and support the daily functions of the school. Administrative responsibilities may vary by office and a complete list of position descriptions is provided below.

A PA position pays $8,100 in tuition assistance plus a $2,400 salary per semester, and a PA must work 15 hours per week throughout the semester.

Readers are assigned to specific instructors to help prepare course materials or to help instructors with administrative issues. Students do not apply for Reader positions. All assistantship applicants are
automatically considered for these positions. In some cases, Reader positions may not be assigned until the start of the semester.

A reader position pays $4,700 in tuition assistance plus a $1,300 salary per semester, and a reader must work 5 hours per week throughout the semester.

**Note:** No student can receive any form of funding from SIPA while attending a school other than SIPA. Dual degree students are fully eligible for all types of aid offered by SIPA, but if they are offered a scholarship or assistantship position and then decide to attend the other Columbia school during one or both terms, the aid is forfeited for semesters not in attendance at SIPA. Students can reapply for funding for those terms in which they will enroll at SIPA. There are no exceptions to this policy.
Application Process

Scholarships:

First year: All students who are offered admission to SIPA are automatically considered for all applicable scholarships; no separate or additional application form or procedure is required, but the application for admission must be complete, including all supporting materials (transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc.). The Office of Admissions may set an earlier application deadline for scholarship consideration. If that is the case, this deadline will be communicated to all prospective applicants and will appear on the SIPA Admissions website. Students applying after this deadline but before the final application deadline can be considered for admission but not for funding.

SIPA may also set a slightly earlier response deadline for admitted applicants who are offered funding than the May 1 deadline for unfunded students. If that is the case, it will be communicated in the initial notification of the funding offer.

On some occasions, a scholarship may be available to prospective students during the admissions process that does require a separate application. If so, the Admissions Office will notify all potentially eligible applicants and provide instructions for applying for the funding.

Second year: Many scholarships offered by SIPA at the time of admission are for two years, so long as the student maintains a certain GPA level as specified at the time of the scholarship offer. But there are other scholarships that become available to students in their second year of study, regardless of their scholarship status during their first year.

Some students who apply for an assistantship for their second year but are not selected for one, and whose aggregate grade point averages exceed the minimum required for assistantship appointments, will be offered some scholarship funding. Such funding is not guaranteed to all students who meet the GPA standards, and would only be offered to those non-selected applicants with the highest GPA’s.

There may be occasions in which a scholarship becomes available during the academic year and will be available to first and/or second year students that requires a separate application and/or various other documents. These could be available at SIPA or University-wide. When these are available, announcements will be made via email to all potentially eligible SIPA students from the Financial Aid Office and may also be announced via SIPA’s social media outlets.

Yellow Ribbon Program: SIPA also offers the Yellow Ribbon Program Scholarship for eligible veterans of the US Armed Forces who qualify for the Post-9/11 GI Bill. A separate application is required for initial consideration, and if awarded in the student’s first year of study, will be renewed without a reapplication so long as the student meets SIPA’s standards for academic progress. Dollar amounts of individual awards are determined annually based on availability of funds and the number of eligible applicants. While SIPA cannot guarantee this funding for all eligible applicants, every attempt will be
made to distribute available funding to all who qualify. The Yellow Ribbon application is typically available late in the spring semester and must be submitted in June for the following academic year.

**Assistantships:**

Assistantships are only available to second year students. The application process begins early in the spring semester, closely following an information session given by the Offices of Student Affairs and Financial Aid. The application itself is online and must be completed by all interested applicants, including those who were granted an assistantship for their second year at the time of admission (this is to give those students the opportunity to apply for specific positions). Only SIPA students are able to access the application, which requires logging in with a valid UNI.

Applicants selected for an assistantship may be offered a position for one or both semesters, although the two semesters may be at two different positions. In some cases, a student may be selected for more than one concurrent position. Under no circumstances can a student hold more than one assistantship position at SIPA at a time; students offered more than one positions must select one. If a student is offered scholarship funding because they were not originally offered an assistantship but were among the leading qualifiers for a position based on their GPA, and then are later offered an assistantship, they must choose one or the other.
Eligibility

Scholarships

All scholarships awarded by SIPA are merit-based; financial need is not a factor. All those who apply for admission by the deadline designated for funding consideration and are admitted are automatically considered for scholarship aid. Awards are selective, and typically, no more than one-third of admitted applicants will be offered funding.

The merit-based criteria taken into consideration for first year scholarships mirror those used by the Admission Committee: the applicant’s academic record (including transcripts and test scores); professional, internship or volunteer experience (or a combination thereof) that demonstrates a commitment to public service and the community; a clearly stated understanding by the applicant of how their academic and professional goals will be furthered by the educational opportunities SIPA offers; and the overall contribution the student’s skills and background will bring to SIPA. No one criteria, such as college GPA, test scores, years of experience or other characteristic automatically results in or guarantees funding.

The second year of a two-year funding offer requires that certain academic standards be met during the first year, and those will be clearly spelled out in the initial notification. Failure to meet those standards will make the student ineligible for the second year of funding.

SIPA provides partial matches to some recipients of various external funding programs. The amounts of the SIPA portion of these awards varies and is not guaranteed to all recipients.

Scholarships awarded to second year students are determined using similar criteria, but with academic performance at SIPA replacing previous academic credentials. No SIPA student will be considered for scholarships in year two with a grade point average below 3.4, but no award is determined solely on that basis; no GPA guarantees a student funding of any kind.

SIPA may receive donations designated for scholarships for students with specific credentials, experience or characteristics, including but not necessarily limited to, specific area of concentration, enrollment in a certain SIPA program, career interests and/or citizenship or residence in a specific country or region.

Assistantships

Assistantship applicants must have a grade point average of at least 3.4 in order to be considered, but academic performance and grade point average are never the sole criteria for these awards. Assistantships are jobs, and especially when filling academic appointments such as TA and DRA positions, the applicant’s demonstrated expertise in the specific subject area is of significant importance. Experience in teaching and/or research may also weigh heavily in hiring decisions.
Some faculty members may only hire students who have already taken the course with them for TA positions. Other faculty and hiring managers may require interviews, but this is not the case for all positions.

Some assistantship appointments are made prior to the submission of spring semester grades. If a student is offered such a position based on a GPA of at least 3.4 but their spring grades bring their GPA below that required level, the assistantship offer may be rescinded.
Awarding Process

Scholarships

All applicants admitted for admission are automatically considered for scholarship funding. Such funding is selective, and approximately one-third of admits will be offered scholarships ranging in amounts from approximately $5,000 per year to full tuition and fees. SIPA awards scholarships presuming that not all offers will be accepted; when an applicant admitted with funding declines his or her offer of admission, it does not make their scholarship available to other applicants.

SIPA has in the past awarded some scholarships to admitted students that are renewable and some that are not. Starting with the class admitted to begin study in the fall 2015 semester, most applicants admitted with funding will be offered a two year award. The second year of the award may be a scholarship, an assistantship, or a combination of both; the total dollar amount of the award will remain constant, with the exception of full scholarships, which will be adjusted based on the exact amount of tuition and fees each year.

Renewal of the scholarship for the second year requires an aggregate grade point average of at least 3.4. Some students who apply for assistantship funding for their second year of study and are highly qualified but are not offered such a position, will be offered a scholarship in the amount of $10,000 for their second year of study. This scholarship offer will not be made to all unsuccessful qualified applicants; the number of such awards is subject to the results of the assistantship appointments and the number of applicants. If a student who receives such a scholarship is later offered an assistantship for the same semester/s, he or she will have to choose one or the other, these scholarships and assistantships are not available simultaneously.

Assistantships

Although no applicant will be considered for an assistantship without an aggregate grade point average below a 3.4, no student is selected solely on the basis of their GPA. These are jobs, and faculty and staff making the hiring decisions will have certain skills and experience that they consider to be important factors in selecting among eligible applicants. For example, in order to be considered as a teaching assistant (TA) or departmental research assistant (DRA), an applicant will be expected to have demonstrated mastery of relevant academic material and/or excelled in the course in question.

All assistantship appointments are made by the faculty member, department or office to which the student will be assigned. Students will be selected from among those who expressed an interest in the position during the application process. Every attempt will be made to place eligible applicants in a position they prioritized as one of interest on the application. However, it cannot be guaranteed that each student with an assistantship will be assigned to their first choice.
Some applicants are admitted to SIPA with a two-year funding commitment award in which the second year award is (in whole or in part) an assistantship. Specific assignments are not made until the selection period prior to the student’s second year of study, but a position is guaranteed. These assignments are, at minimum, an award for one semester at the DRA/PA rate of compensation. If qualified, some students with such a funding commitment may be awarded either a two semester assistantship and/or a TA position with a higher rate of compensation.
Notification of Awards

Scholarships

Applicants who are offered scholarship funding upon admission are typically advised of the scholarship in a separate notification shortly following the initial admission decision. This notification comes via email from the Admissions Office. The scholarship will also appear on any award letter sent by the Financial Aid Office if the student has applied for other types of financial aid, such as student loans.

In some cases, scholarship decisions for early decision applicants will be delayed until the Admissions Committee has reviewed all applicants.

Notification of scholarships awarded for students’ second year will be sent by the Office of Student Affairs and will also appear on any award notifications from the Financial Aid Office. These notifications will be sent starting shortly after most assistantship appointments have been made in the spring.

In some cases, students receiving scholarships will receive notification from the Financial Aid Office that all or part of their previously announced scholarship is being funded by a specific donor or account. Such notifications may be sent at any time of the year. A follow up notification may also come from the SIPA Office of Development with additional information about the donor, and in some cases, an invitation to meet the donor.

Assistantships

Most assistantship appointments are made in two rounds, the first being in April and the second being after all grades have been submitted and reviewed in June. Selected applicants are notified by the Office of Student Affairs with details of the appointment, including the type (TA, DRA, PA or Reader), the compensation, the duration of the appointment, and the faculty member, course, department and/or office to which they have been assigned. The assistantship will also appear on any award letter sent by the Financial Aid Office if the student has applied for other types of financial aid, such as student loans.

Between the second round of appointments in June and the beginning of the spring semester the following January, additional appointments will be made on an as-needed basis to fill remaining vacancies and replace students who have declined or resigned from their positions. Selected applicants will be notified at the time of the appointment by the Office of Student Affairs and will also appear on any award notifications from the Financial Aid Office.
Recipient Responsibilities

Scholarships

Awards made as scholarships carry no responsibilities on the part of the student other than maintaining the academic performance required for renewal if applicable. Scholarships do not include an employment component.

It is expected that if a scholarship recipient is notified of the identity of the donor whose gift made his or her scholarship possible, the recipient will contact the donor and/or make every attempt to attend in-person events to express their gratitude.

Assistantships

While the compensation offered for assistantships does include a credit towards the student’s tuition, assistantships are jobs and all include an employment obligation. The student’s specific assignment will be spelled out clearly in the appointment letter. Failure to perform the work required for the position for the duration of the appointment, including working the full number of hours required, will result in the cancellation of the award, including the entire tuition credit and all remaining salary.

All assistantship recipients must also file required employment documentation in a timely manner, or it will delay their appointment and/or pay. This includes, but is not necessarily limited to, an I-9 form confirming eligibility to work in the US and the W-4 form for tax withholding. Income earned from an assistantship is potentially taxable income in both the US and New York State, and any tax return filing will be the recipient’s responsibility.
What To Do If:

Your tuition credit (from a scholarship or an assistantship) has not been posted to your student account:
- Contact the SIPA Financial Aid Office at sipa_finaid@columbia.edu

You have questions about the assistantship application or selection process:
- Contact the Office of Student Affairs at sipa_osa@columbia.edu

You have questions about available scholarships:
- Contact the SIPA Financial Aid Office at sipa_finaid@columbia.edu

You wish to resign your assistantship position or decline the appointment:
- Speak with your supervisor and contact the Office of Student Affairs at sipa_osa@columbia.edu

You have not yet been paid your assistantship salary (pay schedule is 15th and 30th of each month):
- Contact the SIPA Office of Human Resources at SipaHR@columbia.edu

You are experiencing problems with your assistantship supervisor:
- Contact the Office of Student Affairs at sipa_osa@columbia.edu

You have questions about student loans or other financing options besides scholarships and assistantships:
- Contact the SIPA Financial Aid Office at sipa_finaid@columbia.edu

You have questions about the taxability of assistantship earnings:
- Consult a tax professional or the IRS website at www.irs.gov. SIPA cannot offer any tax advice.

You have suggestions for information you would like to see added to this handbook:
Contact the SIPA Financial Aid Office at sipa_finaid@columbia.edu

Information in this document, including stated policies, award amounts, procedures and statistics, is accurate at the time of publication but subject to change based on policy, budgetary or other reasons.