UVA has about 100 graduate students in physics. Our program has evolved to meet the varying pressures of graduate education, university needs for teaching assistants, and the desire to maintain high academic standards. The students take one year of core classes followed by a written qualifier exam, and then a year of elective courses before moving purely to research. During the first two years, students are supported mostly by teaching assistantships or departmental fellowships. In later years, most students are supported on grants, but with a sizable minority still on department support.

The department wrestles with several issues. One is the perennial problem of attracting good students, particularly ones with strong English skills. Recently, TA funding has tightened, as the number of undergraduate students is expanding but university support for TAs is not. Finally, we have a sense that students are not getting into research quickly enough, and have been searching for ways to improve that which are compatible with the way tuition rates are structured.