

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS ACADEMIC REGULATIONS

March 14, 2024

Definition

Graduate Assistants (“GAs”) at the University of Vermont are graduate students who are receiving financial support while they are full-time students working toward their degree.¹ Graduate Assistants are typically embedded with university units beyond their graduate program to support their mission in areas of interest to the graduate student and as an integral part of the student’s overall academic and professional development. Graduate Assistantships complement Graduate Research and Teaching Assistantships as types of academic appointments and do not principally entail instructional or instruction-related activities nor research in collaboration with a faculty Principal Investigator. The goal of the Academic Appointment as a GA, from the point of view of both the university and the student, is for students to make steady progress toward an advanced degree, become a valuable member of the academic community, develop the skills necessary to complete their academic program, and gain valuable professional experience in preparation for careers in academia, government, industry/business, or the non-profit sector. GA status is dependent upon being enrolled at the University as a graduate student.

Appointment Guidelines

Each GA shall receive an appointment letter from the university unit hosting their assistantship, co-signed by their graduate program director. The letter must state the general conditions of the appointment and specify the stipend, general expectations for the assignment, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. The letter will also include a reference to these Academic Regulations and state that this policy governs the appointment. Duration of the appointment may be for one, two, or three consecutive terms (i.e. fall, spring, and/or summer). The letter of appointment should be sent to the student. If the student accepts the appointment, they must return a signed copy to the designated academic unit or administrator.

A GA assignment is an integral part of a student’s graduate education and professional development. The hours required are those necessary to make satisfactory progress toward completing the degree. When the GA appointment involves activities that are not directly integrated with the student’s thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student’s academic training and professional development, the GA appointment typically involves an expectation of 20 hours of research per week on average; a fractional appointment involves the corresponding fraction of expected effort. Research for research credits requires effort above and beyond the GA-related effort.

The nature and schedule of the assignments that GAs engage in varies widely. However, in order to safeguard the mental and physical health of students, GAs should not be expected to engage in assignment-related activities 7 days a week or on University holidays on which the University is closed. In addition to University holidays on which the University is closed, GAs with 12-month

¹ At the University of Vermont, historically the most common instance of Graduate Assistantships (GAs) have been affiliated with the HESA M.Ed. program, with occasional additional appointments available to a wider graduate student population. In line with national best practice for universities to offer a variety of academically and professionally enhancing academic appointment types, especially to support versatile Ph.D. training in preparation for postdoctoral careers across all sectors, these academic regulations help socialize GAs more widely. These academic regulations render null and void any previously used alternative designations for Graduate Academic Appointments other than GTA, GRA, and GA, including “Graduate Administrative Assistant” and “Graduate Advisor”.

appointments must be given at least 10 additional days per calendar year as breaks from their research to provide students with time away from academic training and other expectations to support their mental and physical well-being. GAs on fractional appointments should receive the equivalent fraction of “break” days without research expectations.

GAs who receive appointments in the fall and/or spring terms are expected to complete at least 9 credits in the terms of appointment; those with fractional appointments are expected to register for at least the following number of credits or the Continuous Registration option: 1/2 appointment, 6 credits; 1/4 appointment, 3 credits.

International students who begin their graduate programs in the spring preceding a summer appointment should contact Office of International Services (OIS) to determine whether or not they must register for credits or Continuous Registration if they receive a summer appointment.

All appointments are conditioned on students continuing to make satisfactory academic progress towards completing their degree. When a student accepts an appointment in writing, both the student and the designated faculty advisor are expected to comply with the terms of the appointment. A department may, during the appointment term, transfer a student, after consultation with the student, from a GA appointment to a teaching appointment or to another appropriate assignment that provides for essentially equal financial support and academic and professional training.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act requires the University to verify that a GA is authorized to receive a stipend in the United States. Each new GA at the University is required to verify that they are either a U.S. citizen or authorized to receive stipend funding in this country. In order to receive financial support, a GAs is required to produce the necessary documentation to the University.

Reappointment Guidelines

Although GA appointments may not be made for more than one year (3 terms), a student may be reappointed. To the extent that reappointment is possible, priority should be given to those with superior academic and assignment-relevant qualifications. A reappointment should be made at the same or a higher stipend level.

The criteria for reappointment include satisfactory academic performance, satisfactory progress toward the degree, and the quality of activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance would be a GPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, or failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive examinations as specified. Specific criteria are contained in the manuals governing specific degree programs and in the Graduate Catalogue.

Responsibilities

Program and Hosting University Unit

University units seeking to host a GA are responsible for designing Graduate Assistantships with assignments that further Master’s and/or Ph.D. students’ academic and professional development. The graduate program and hosting university unit should make application and appointment procedures available to all eligible graduate students and are responsible for generating the GA appointment letters based on authorized templates provided by the Graduate College, and for ensuring that the terms are being followed.

GA Supervisor

It is the GA supervisor's responsibility to define the terms of the assignment and to convey them to the graduate student in writing in the appointment letter.

The supervisor is responsible for providing the GA with the training needed to responsibly carry out their assignment.

To ensure adequate progress and, if necessary and appropriate, to provide additional supports, the supervisor should provide the GA with feedback on the quality of work they complete as part of their assignment. Such feedback should be provided at least once per academic year, or, for single-semester assignments, no later than the end of the semester of appointment, with a written record of the feedback to be shared with the student and saved by their program.

Students shall not be exploited, or their education compromised, in the service of the hosting unit. Supervisors shall take the necessary precautions to ensure that students' academic progress and standing are not jeopardized by violations of any professional norms in projects in which they participate.

Student

GAs are expected to effectively carry out their assignments and participate in orientation and training programs. GAs are also expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance. Graduate students are not permitted to hold more than the equivalent of one full Academic Appointment within the university at a time. In rare circumstances, graduate students may seek additional appointments, but they must be approved by the departmental chairperson and the Academic dean. As a rule, such additional appointments should be clearly time-limited, short-term, fractional (guidance is up to 6-8 hours/week), and integral to the student's professional development.

Due to federal immigration regulations, graduate students on J-1 or F-1 visas may not be engaged in compensated effort that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation for more than 20 hours per week on campus when school is in session during the fall and spring terms, and those on regular appointments are not eligible for additional appointments during these terms. Given the intensive and time-consuming nature of graduate studies and training, graduate students holding GA appointments are discouraged from employment outside the university.

Stipend

Minimum stipend rates are set annually by the University. Each year the stipend amount will be considered, and adjustments made when possible. Stipends below the adopted minimum are not permitted.

Tuition Scholarship

In recognition of academic merit, the University offers GAs a tuition scholarship. The tuition scholarship that will be provided in Fall and Spring terms is as follows:

Full-time appointment	9 credits
1/2 appointment	6 credits
1/4 appointment	3 credits

Summer tuition scholarships are provided as follows:

- 5 credits for students on 12-month, full-time academic appointments
- 5 credits for students on full-time, 3-month summer academic appointments from June 1 – August 31

Health Insurance Coverage

GAs who receive full-time or fractional appointments are eligible to enroll in the Student Health Insurance Plan. Full-time academic appointees do not pay insurance premiums associated with the plan; half-time academic appointees receive scholarship aid to cover 50% of their insurance premiums.

Students with 9- or 12-month appointments receive 12 months of individual health insurance coverage. Students on semester-long (4.5 months) appointments receive such coverage for 5 months (fall-term appointments) and 7 months (spring-term appointments), respectively.

Accommodations

In the event a GA needs an adjustment to the expectations of their appointment due to a serious illness or physical incapacitation, the GA involved should receive their stipend and tuition for the remainder of the semester during which the event occurred.

Students seeking disability-related accommodations in their GA appointments should contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) as soon as possible to verify their disability and determine reasonable accommodations as appropriate.

Graduate Academic Appointment accommodations are assessed separately from academic accommodations.

For students who are new parents, please see the [Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Academic Regulations](#).

Grievance Situations

Unfair Treatment: The University of Vermont strives to create and sustain a positive and healthy learning and training environment. Reporting concerns and understanding UVM's response to concerns is critical to this process. Any graduate student who believes that they have been treated unfairly is encouraged, but not required, to first discuss the situation with their program director, research advisor, or office of student services in their college or school and/or with the independent [Ombudsperson for Graduate Students](#).

Students are also encouraged to report any unfair treatment, bias or discrimination via the University's [Bias, Discrimination, & Harassment Reporting Form](#).

Termination or Suspension of Appointment: In rare cases, a GA may have their appointment terminated before its previously scheduled end date. Early termination or an interim suspension may only be initiated if the GA has received an appropriate prior written warning or has been alleged, or found, to have violated a major canon of institutional responsibility. This includes, but is not limited to, the Code of Conduct, Code of Academic Integrity, Misconduct of Research, or other Office of Equal Opportunity policies designed to prevent discrimination, harassment and sexual misconduct. The GA must be informed in writing by the advisor in collaboration with the Office of the Dean of the Graduate College of the reasons for termination or interim suspension. Appeals procedure (see below) must be referenced in that notification.

Appeals Procedure: A GA may appeal, in writing, within ten business days after receipt of notice of interim suspension or termination of appointment, to the Academic Unit Dean. The Dean or their designee(s) will review the matter and make a finding of resolution on behalf of the college or school.

In the event the Dean was consulted as part of the termination or suspension process, the appeal shall be forwarded to the Dean of the Graduate College and they or their designee(s) shall review the matter and make a final determination as to the resolution of the appeal.

Related Links to Policies and Resources

[Graduate Student Parental Accommodation](#)

[Ombudsperson for Graduate Students](#)

[Intellectual Property Policy](#)

[Code of Academic Integrity](#)

[Misconduct in Research Policy](#)

[Amorous Relationships with Students Policy](#)

[Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#)

[Student Accessibility Services](#)

[Office of Equal Opportunity](#)