



## **Graduate Research Assistants Academic Regulations**

### **Definition**

Graduate Research Assistants (“GRAs”) at the University of Vermont are graduate students who are receiving financial support from external or internal research funds while they are full-time students working toward their degree. The research performed is an integral part of the student’s training, thesis, and/or dissertation. The goal of the Academic Appointment as a GRA, 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. GRA status is dependent upon being enrolled at the University as a graduate student.

### **Appointment Guidelines**

Each GRA shall receive an appointment letter from the responsible department, college/school, or research center/institute, co-signed by the research advisor. The letter must state the general conditions of the appointment and specify the stipend, general expectations for the research, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. The letter will also include a reference to this Academic Regulation 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 GRA assignment is an integral part of a student’s training, research project, thesis, and/or dissertation. The hours required are those necessary to make satisfactory progress toward completing the degree. When the GRA appointment involves research that is not directly integrated with the student’s thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student’s academic training, the GRA 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 GRA-related effort.

The nature and schedule of the research that GRAs engage in varies widely across disciplines. However, in order to safeguard the mental and physical health of students, GRAs should not be expected to engage in research 7 days a week or on University holidays on which the University is closed (see [Calendars](#)). In addition to University holidays on which the University is closed, GRAs with 12-month 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. GRAs on fractional appointments should receive the equivalent fraction of “break” days without research expectations.

GRAs 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 GRA 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 GRA is authorized to receive a stipend in the United States. Each new GRA of 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 GRA is required to produce the necessary documentation to the University.

### **Reappointment Guidelines**

Although GRA appointments may not be made for more than one year (3 terms), a student may be reappointed. Graduate students should be cognizant of the fact that the funds for most GRAs come from grants and contracts with a limited duration.

To the extent that reappointment is possible, priority should be given to those with superior academic and research 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 their degree, and the quality of research 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.

### **Responsibilities**

#### **Department and Program**

The ultimate responsibility for all research performed at the University rests with the faculty and the appropriate department or program. The department or program should make application and appointment procedures available to all graduate students.

The department or program is responsible for providing an academic environment that is consistent with the research to be conducted and for providing education about research integrity.

The department, program, college/school, or University unit is responsible for generating the GRA appointment letters based on authorized templates provided by the Graduate College, and for ensuring that the terms are being followed.

## **Research Advisor**

It is the research advisor's responsibility to define the terms of the research assignment and to convey them to the graduate student in writing in the appointment letter. If the student is expected to engage in essential research on university holidays when the university is closed (such as time-sensitive experiments or animal care), the details of this expectation must be explained in the appointment letter, including how the student will be provided with alternative, equivalent breaks from their research to ensure that students have time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, if the nature of the research constrains the timing or number of consecutive days the student can be away from research, these details must be explained in the appointment letter.

The research advisor is responsible for providing the GRA with the training needed to use equipment and perform the research necessary for the GRA's professional development and academic progress. The research advisor should explain the department's and/or program's and the research advisor's co-authorship policy.

To ensure adequate progress and, if necessary and appropriate, to provide additional supports, the research advisor should provide the GRA with feedback on the quality of their research activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Such feedback should be provided at least once per academic year, with a written record of the feedback to be shared with the student and saved by the program and department.

The research advisor should strive to maintain continuous financial support for the student, provided the student is making satisfactory progress, and within the limitations of available funds. In the event that a student's funding ends, they should be advised as far in advance as possible.

Students shall not be exploited, or their education compromised, in the service of sponsored research or the financial gain of research advisors. Research advisors shall take the necessary precautions to ensure that their students' academic progress and standing are not jeopardized by violations of any professional norms in projects in which they participate, or by students' naivete as to the circumstances surrounding industry-sponsored research.

## **Student**

GRAs are expected to effectively carry out their research and participate in orientation and training programs.

GRAs 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 research 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 GRA appointments are discouraged from employment outside the university.

The University is committed to protecting academic freedom to preserve and advance the educational mission of the University. Therefore, the university has created the [Intellectual Property](#) policy governing ownership of intellectual property (IP). GRAs are covered persons as defined in the university's [Intellectual Property](#) policy. As described in that policy, intellectual property created by GRAs using significant university resources or in connection with university external relations such as sponsored research is owned by the University. Copyrightable or copyrighted works of authorship or art are generally owned by the creator of those works unless otherwise provided in policy or by specific agreement.

### **Research Integrity**

The University of Vermont is committed to fostering an environment in which the highest ethical standards in the conduct of research are followed. The primary responsibility for maintaining such standards of honesty in the pursuit and dissemination of knowledge rests with the faculty, their collaborating staff members, and students. An individual engaged in research is prohibited from engaging in Research Misconduct. GRAs are required to comply with the University's [Misconduct of Research Policy](#). Research Misconduct means fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research Misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.

### **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 GRAs 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**

GRAs 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 GRA needs an adjustment to the expectations of their appointment due to a serious illness or physical incapacitation, the GRA 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 GRA 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 Policy](#).

### **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 GRA may have their appointment terminated before its previously scheduled end date. Early termination or an interim suspension may only be initiated if the GRA 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 GRA 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 GRA 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 Policy \[under review fall 2023\]](#)

[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](#)