George Mason University

Graduate Assistantship Policy Handbook

This handbook was developed within the College of Health and Human Services to provide information about the privileges, protocols, and procedures related to Graduate Assistantships at George Mason University.
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Graduate Council Policy Statement

As a matter of general principle, teaching by graduate students should be at the undergraduate level. In unusual circumstances, graduate students who have completed all coursework and examinations toward the doctorate and who have been advanced to candidacy may teach a lower level graduate course. Graduate students who have teaching appointments should not teach graduate courses that enroll students in the same program or programs in which the teaching assistant or graduate lecturer will take courses. (Graduate Council Motion #188.8, adopted March 28, 1990.)
Types of Assistantships

Graduate assistants are graduate students who receive a stipend and work assignment within the College of Health and Human Services. Assistantships should help students prepare for a professional or academic research career. Assignments can be research, teaching assistantships, educational programs or community outreach initiatives.

Graduate assistantships fulfill a number of different roles at Mason, as described below. All forms of assistantship are intended to contribute to the graduate student’s educational experience. Therefore, they may not be assigned to perform secretarial or clerical duties.

**Graduate Teaching Assistants**
GTAs are Mason graduate students who participate directly in instructional activities under faculty supervision for not more than 15 hours per week. GTAs may not teach more than two lower-division lecture courses, six semester hours of recitation sections, or nine semester hours of laboratory. Students hired as GTAs to teach a class must have at least 18 hours of graduate work in the field in which he or she is to teach.

**Graduate Research Assistants**
GRAs are Mason graduate students who participate directly in research or research support activities under faculty supervision for not more than 15 hours per week.
Appointment Periods and Dates of Service

Fall Semester - August 25 to January 9
Spring Semester - January 10 to May 24
Summer Session - Dates of service are for three months extending from May 25 to August 24

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Eligibility

Students must be admitted to graduate study at George Mason University. Eligibility may further be limited to students in degree programs.

A student hired as a graduate teaching assistant or graduate lecturer to teach a class must have at least 18 hours of graduate work in the field in which he or she is to teach. A transcript or transcripts documenting the required number of graduate hours must accompany the hiring documentation when the student is hired (even if this is the student’s second appointment). Students who conduct labs, grade papers, or perform other teaching support services are not required to have 18 hours of graduate work in the pertinent field.

Students must be in good academic standing; that is, the student must have a minimum 3.0 GPA and may not have any recent unsatisfactory grades.
Enrollment Requirements

Academic Year

With certain exceptions noted below, all full-time (15 hrs/wk) graduate assistants must be enrolled for at least 9 hours of graduate work during the fall and/or spring semesters during which they are employed. Each academic unit will monitor enrollment at the end of the schedule adjustment/registration period. However, the student is ultimately responsible for notifying the department when enrollment status has changed. A graduate assistant not enrolled for the minimum hours of coursework must relinquish his or her assistantship.

Exceptions to the 9-hour enrollment required are only considered for students who need fewer than 9 hours to complete their degree and graduate. If the student falls into this category, the student's graduate coordinator must forward a written request to carry a reduced load to the unit by the latest Schedule Adjustment Date. This request should include the student's status in his or her program and the number of remaining hours and specific courses that remain. If all dissertation or thesis hours have been expended, the student must still register for one credit of dissertation or thesis work per semester.

Summer

Students who receive graduate assistantship appointments for the summer do not have to enroll in classes and are permitted to work up to 40 hours per week. Students who have recently graduated or who are newly accepted into the program and have not begun their degree program are ineligible to work as GAs during the summer.
Restrictions on Appointments

Graduate students will normally be limited to the equivalent of one 15-hour per week assistantship or lectureship. Students may (under exceptional circumstances) be appointed for more than a total of 15 hours per week, but under no circumstances may students be appointed for more than 30 hours per week. Exceptional circumstances must be approved by the dean of the academic home of the student in question. This policy applies whether the student is appointed in a single unit or in multiple units across campus. **F-1 or J-1 international students may not work more than 20 hours per week during the fall or spring semester.**

If the student is hired by another unit, perhaps jointly, the home unit of the student must approve the appointment and the conditions attached.

Fellowship and assistantship/lectureship funds may be combined to create a financial aid package for an individual student. However, the maximum compensation for a given student should not exceed the levels normally prevailing in the unit(s) involved.

Assistantships and lectureships are intended to contribute to the graduate student's educational experience. Therefore, they may not be assigned to perform secretarial or clerical duties.

*Any student who holds an assistantship and engages in other employment during the semester without explicit approval of the departmental chair may be removed from the assistantship.*
International Students

The Office of International Programs and Services provides the following information for international students:

1. F-1 and J-1 students are required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take a full course load each fall and spring semester (excluding summer term). A full course load for graduate students is 9 credit hours per semester; however, DHS has declared that students who are assigned teaching or research responsibilities pursuant to the terms of a scholarship, fellowship, or assistantship may carry a reduced course load.
   - For international students with teaching or research assistantships of 20 hours per week, full time is defined as a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester. See the Graduate Assistant Full-Time Status Form, posted at [http://www.gmu.edu/departments/provost/geninfo.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/departments/provost/geninfo.htm).
   - Part-time assistantships requiring only 10 hours of work per week do not allow a student to reduce his or her course load.
   - Students who require fewer than 9 credits to complete their course requirements may take only the required credits in their final semester, but still need to have OIPS approve the reduced course load.

2. F-1 and J-1 students who are maintaining their status are limited to 20 hours of work per week during semesters, and may work full time during breaks.

3. F-1 and J-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for “duration of status,” that is, to complete an educational program. If a student must remain in an educational program beyond the date originally estimated for completion of the program (as stated on Form I-20 or Form DS-2019), the student must comply with DHS or Department of State (DOS) procedures for a program extension. Delay caused by academic probation or suspension is not an acceptable reason for a program extension. The Office of International Programs and Services projects that the normal period of time required to complete a master’s degree is 2 ½ years; the normal period required to complete a Ph.D. degree is five years.

4. Students may use stipends as proof of financial support for issuance of their I-20/DS-2019.
   A copy of GRA/GTA offer letters must be sent to OIPS indicating stipend amount and specific tuition benefit. If the student's financial support is based on a GRA or GTA, it is assumed that the same level of financial support will be renewed in subsequent years. U.S. law requires the Designated School Official to verify source of financial support for all years of study prior to issuing an I-20 or DS-2019. In some cases, the stipend will not cover all of the student’s educational and living expenses and may need to be supplemented with personal or family funds or sponsorship by an outside organization. Immigration forms will not be issued until all financial support documents have been submitted and have met estimated expense requirements.

5. I-9 forms for all employees in nonimmigrant status must be completed at the Office of International Programs and Services by the employee. In addition, all employees in nonimmigrant status must complete a Foreign National Information Form and federal and state withholding forms and review them in an interview with the OIPS International Tax Coordinator at the time they are first hired. The Foreign National Information Form needs to be updated when any information thereon changes. These forms can be obtained from OIPS. F-1 and J-1 students must bring proof of identity and evidence of their eligibility to work at George Mason University for purposes of completing Form I-9. In addition, J-1 students require written permission from OIPS for all employment.

6. International students on nonimmigrant visas are required to provide hiring departments with verified copies of the I-9 for the original appointment and all reappointments before they are entered into the Banner HR system.
7. International students who have completed their program of study are no longer eligible for student-based employment. They may be eligible to work based on Optional Practical Training or Academic Training, but this eligibility should be confirmed with OIPS before a job offer is extended.

Note: OIPS must verify, in person, the immigration documents of any GRA/GTA who has a temporary, nonimmigrant visa. OIPS must receive copies of the offer letter and signed acceptance form. OIPS will work with the student to complete the I-9 and necessary tax forms.
The Hiring Process

Graduate assistants must be selected from the available applicant pool of all students who have requested consideration. Each department or program establishes procedures to ensure that students are selected fairly and in accordance with university hiring guidelines.

- Form I-9 – This form will need to be verified in person by the hiring department or Office of International Programs and Services (OIPS). On page 5, there is a list of acceptable documents that are required in order to verify employment eligibility. Copies are not allowed. If the appointment is for an international student, the student MUST go to OIPS to verify immigration documents, and to complete the I-9 and prepare tax forms. Students should take their immigration documents, passport and I-94 and other appropriate information to OIPS.
- State Tax Form
  - Virginia - VA-4
  - Maryland - MD 507
  - District of Columbia - D-4
  - Other – Please contact Payroll at 703-993-2600.
- Federal Tax Form (W-4)
- Employment Information Sheet
- Commonwealth Drug & Alcohol Policy
- Tuition Grant Authorization (if applicable)
- Selective Service (for US citizens/males only)
- Direct Deposit - Once the student has been set up in the system, they will be able to enter their direct deposit information on Patriot Web (https://patriotweb.gmu.edu/).
- Timesheet – GRAs/GTAs will not submit their hours on Patriot Web. Payment will be automatically deposited.
- GRA/GTA Contract – Once the above forms have been completed, the hiring department will prepare an offer letter for the student.

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Graduate Assistant Rules & Responsibilities

Graduate assistants are expected to perform all duties and behave in a professional manner at all times. It is important that lines of communication remain open between the graduate assistant and his/her faculty supervisor. The following are professional protocols that must be adhered to:

- **Work Schedule**: Graduate assistants must schedule his/her work hours with their supervisor. If a change in the original hours has to be made, it is the graduate assistant's responsibility to speak with his/her supervisor. Depending on the assignment, work schedules can be flexible.
- **Work Location**: Graduate assistants and their faculty supervisors will agree on the work location. For example, graduate assistants may not need to work within the academic department but may perform their duties in the library, at home, or at a community location.
- **Tardiness**: It is expected that all graduate assistants will call his/her supervisor to inform him/her of any tardiness and changes in the work schedule.
- **Timesheets**: A timesheet is given to all graduate assistants. Graduate assistants enter their hours on the time sheet. The hours are then approved by the faculty member and submitted to the Departmental Chair at the end of each semester.
- **Absences**: Graduate assistants are expected to inform the supervisor about any absence, and are responsible for completing ___ hours in the Fall Semester and ____ hours in the Spring semester. Graduate Assistants who miss a day must make up their time accordingly. This must be coordinated with the supervisor.
- **Evaluation**: Supervisors will complete an evaluation at the end of the semester (November and May) for each supervised graduate assistant. If a poor performance evaluation is given, a meeting will be held between the supervisor, graduate assistant, and Departmental Chair.
- **Continued Appointment Eligibility**: A student must enter the University in good academic standing to be considered for an appointment during the initial term. Likewise, a student must remain in good academic standing (maintain a 3.0 GPA each semester) and must have satisfactorily performed the assigned assistantship duties to be eligible for a renewal of the appointment.

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Housing

There are many housing opportunities at Mason. Students are encouraged to go to [http://housing.gmu.edu/](http://housing.gmu.edu/) for more information. Additionally, up to 70 units at Masonvale will be offered to graduate students. Mason graduate students can apply for 1, 2 or 3 bedroom units.

For more information, please visit [http://www.masonvale.com](http://www.masonvale.com), email masonvale@lincolnapts.com, or call 703-865-4870.

Mason also offers off-campus housing services. Please go to [http://och.gmu.edu/](http://och.gmu.edu/).
Tuition Waiver Benefits

Tuition benefits are awarded at the discretion of the unit. The awards will vary depending on the amount of tuition dollars allocated to the unit. Receipt of a teaching or research assistantship does not guarantee a tuition waiver. Tuition for summer is not guaranteed to students receiving waivers in the fall and spring semesters. Tuition benefits must not be used as a substitute form of compensation.

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**Sick Leave**

Graduate assistants do not have sick leave. If a graduate assistant is sick, the department must either arrange for the student to make up missed time or immediately notify HR that the student should be placed on leave without pay.
Health Insurance

Eligible graduate students can receive 100% subsidized health insurance coverage through Aetna Student Health. An eligible student meets all of the following requirements:

- A Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) or M.F.A. (Master of Fine Arts) student, and
  (For the spring online enrollment period, students must be newly admitted into their program for the current spring semester)

- A full time student in their Ph.D. or M.F.A. program as defined by the University Catalog, and

- Is supported by a tuition waiver or grant covering enough credits to support the student’s full time course load, and

- Is appointed to a full time (20 hours/week total) graduate assistantship(s) with a stipend of at least $10,000 per academic year. The assistantship(s) must cover both the fall and spring semesters.

  (For the spring online enrollment period, students must have a stipend of at least $5,000 for the current spring semester and a full time assistantship(s) for the current spring semester.)

This subsidy will be available to eligible students for up to three cumulative years.
When Changes in Graduate Status Occurs

Graduate assistants and graduate lecturers who are terminated early, regardless of reason, should be compensated in direct proportion to the total time worked up to the point of termination. To avoid overpayments, faculty members need to contact the Office of Research & Program Evaluation immediately.
Early Termination

Appointment as a graduate assistant is contingent upon the satisfactory performance of assigned duties as determined by the supervisor.

The appointment of a graduate assistantship can be terminated before the expiration of the contract under certain conditions:

- Failure to perform reasonable assignments due to incompetence or neglect of duties.
- Unethical conduct (e.g., job-related misconduct).
- Failure to maintain eligibility for continuing enrollment in an academic program
- Voluntary mutual agreement between the graduate assistant, supervisor, and Office of Student Services (resignation by graduate assistant).
Contact Information

Graduate assistants are under the direct supervision of their department.

If you have questions, please contact the following people and/or departments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department of Global &amp; Community Health</th>
<th>Department of Health Administration &amp; Policy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lisa Pawloski, Chair</td>
<td>PJ Maddox, Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-4628</td>
<td>703-993-1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:lpawlosk@gmu.edu">lpawlosk@gmu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:pmaddox@gmu.edu">pmaddox@gmu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Allan Weiss</td>
<td>Adam McCutcheon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-3126</td>
<td>703-993-1929</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:aweiss2@gmu.edu">aweiss2@gmu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:amccutch@gmu.edu">amccutch@gmu.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<th>School of Nursing</th>
<th>Department of Social Work</th>
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<tr>
<td>Robin Remsburg, Chair</td>
<td>Cathleen Lewandowski, Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-1904</td>
<td>703-993-7017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:rremsbur@gmu.edu">rremsbur@gmu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:clewando@gmu.edu">clewando@gmu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan Eckis</td>
<td>Susan Pufnock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-1938</td>
<td>703-993-2030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:seckis@gmu.edu">seckis@gmu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:spufnock@gmu.edu">spufnock@gmu.edu</a></td>
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Questions about assistantship status, payment, or other administrative matters should be addressed to:

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<tr>
<th>Office of Research and Program Evaluation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Keith Howell, Associate Dean</td>
<td>Susan Pufnock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-9633</td>
<td>703-993-2030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:khowell@gmu.edu">khowell@gmu.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:spufnock@gmu.edu">spufnock@gmu.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline Valentino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703-993-9631</td>
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<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:cvalent5@gmu.edu">cvalent5@gmu.edu</a></td>
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GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

STUDENT: _________________________________________________________

IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR: _____________________________________________

PERIOD COVERED: ___________________________________________________

JOB DUTIES: (To be completed by the immediate supervisor in conference with the graduate assistant).

1. Describe clearly what is expected of the graduate assistant/fellow on a routine basis.

2. Describe special projects that you may require of the graduate assistant in the following semester.

3. PERFORMANCE: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>To what extent has the Graduate Assistant:</th>
<th>Not Required</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
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<td>demonstrated adequate skills for the job required.</td>
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<td>demonstrated adequate research skills.</td>
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<td>been available when attention to a task/project was required.</td>
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<td>completed assignments accurately.</td>
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<td>completed assignments on time.</td>
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<td>met overall expectations.</td>
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<td>communicated schedule changes, absences, and tardiness in a professional manner</td>
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4. Additional comments from supervisor: ____________________________________________

________________________________________________________

5. I recommend: ___ Continuing the student's graduate assistantship.
   ___ Discontinuing the student's graduate assistantship.

My signature acknowledges that I have read the evaluation, but does not necessarily signify agreement. I understand that any written statement I wish to make regarding this report will be attached to all copies of the evaluation.

Student Signature: ____________________________ Date: ________________

Supervisor Signature: ____________________________ Date: ________________