

University Policy: Graduate Assistant Assignment Policy

Policy Category: Academic Policies

Responsible Executive: Provost

Office Responsible for Review of this Policy: Office of the Provost

Related University Policies: Graduate Financial Aid Policy, Staff Personnel Policies Manual

I. SCOPE

This policy concerns the job duties and work hours associated with the work assignments of graduate assistants. Graduate assistant work is intended not only to benefit the university, but to bolster the education and/or professional development of the student. The first goal of this policy is to align the work experiences of graduate students supported by internal graduate financial aid (IGFA) or external funds with unit-specific goals for professional development. The second goal of this policy is to create assignments for graduate assistants that are congruent with federal or local work regulations, including but not limited to the Fair Labor Standards Act, the District of Columbia labor laws, and American University Human Resource policies.

II. DEFINITIONS

A graduate assistant (GA) is a graduate student who is awarded IGFA funds in the form of a stipend for work in a teaching or academic unit. A GA may also be a graduate student funded from external sources, if specified such as in a grant, gift, or fellowship. There are two types of GAs: teaching assistants (TAs) and research assistants (RAs). A TA is a GA whose work predominantly involves an instructional assignment. An RA is a GA whose work predominantly involves assisting a faculty member or members with academic research or scholarship.

III. POLICY

All duties assigned to GAs must be limited to tasks that benefit both the academic unit and advance the professional development of the GA. The teaching or academic unit receives assistance to support faculty research or teaching from the work of graduate students awarded GFA funding and GAs receive both supervised experience and mentoring in research or teaching activities, which are intended to facilitate their professional development.

a. Teaching Assistants

The job of a TA needs to be focused predominantly on pedagogical work associated with academic content. TAs report to a faculty member with pedagogical expertise who help mentor the TA with their assignment. TA responsibilities vary and may include, but are not limited to:

- Teaching a small section of a course
- Tutoring individual or small groups of students
- Holding office hours and meeting with students
- Assisting with the grading of homework or exams or written assignments
- Administering tests or exams
- Assisting a faculty instructor with a large lecture class by teaching students in recitation, laboratory, or discussion sessions
- Helping software users in a computer laboratory

b. Research Assistants

The job of a RA needs to be focused predominantly on the research or scholarship of a faculty member or members at American University. RAs are not independent researchers and are not directly responsible for the outcome of the research or scholarship. They report to, and are responsible to, a faculty research supervisor or principal investigator. RA responsibilities vary and may include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting literature reviews or library research
- Collecting, coding, cleaning or analyzing data
- Preparing materials for submission to funding agencies and foundations
- Preparing materials for IRB, IACUC, or IBC review
- Coding computer programs to automate processes
- Writing reports or designing conference presentations

c. Inappropriate GA Assignments

Examples of inappropriate duties for a GA may include, but are not limited to:

- Personal services for a supervisor, such as completing non-work related chores or duties
- Administrative work that does not advance the GA's professional development, such as receptionist work
- Maintaining the personal computer of a supervisor
- Cleaning up after a department functions or research colloquia
- Working for other administrative parts of the university, including academic or teaching unit administrative offices, admissions, and marketing

In the course of performing either research or teaching assistant duties, small amounts of administrative work may be necessary, such as photocopying exams or maintaining computer files. However, the primary focus of the work cannot be administrative and any administrative work needs to support the central job of teaching and/or research or scholarship. Academic units are urged to discuss whether a proposed non-traditional RA or TA role is aligned with this policy with the Vice Provost of Research and Dean of Graduate Studies (VPRDGS) or designee. If a GA has duties which do not comply with this policy, the VPRDGS reserves the right, working with the GA's academic unit, to reassign appropriate duties to the GA. The VPRDGS will also determine with the academic unit if the GA should be reassigned to another supervisor within the academic unit.

d. Combination of RA and TA duties

In general, students with RA assignments should not be responsible for any instructional duties and students with TA assignments should not be responsible for any research duties. In certain cases, a GA may be assigned both research- and teaching-related duties, but all assignments should be specified clearly at the beginning of the semester, including estimated hourly time spent in each category.

e. Limits on Weekly Hours for Campus Jobs

GAs may be hired to do additional jobs across the campus, but they are limited in the number of hours they can work. All GA assignments are 20 hours or less per week as specified in the Graduate Financial Aid Policy. Permission is needed from the VPRDGS or designee if the total hourly work from the GA assignment and the campus job exceeds 20 hours per week. The number of hours per week for a GA assignment is determined by the number of FTE assigned to the GA, where 0.5 FTE corresponds to the maximal 20 hours per week. In general, an adjunct teaching assignment for one course corresponds to 10 hours per week. Under no circumstances will a GA be allowed to work 28 or more hours per week from a combination of the GA assignment and campus jobs.

V. EFFECTIVE DATE AND REVISIONS:

This Policy is effective as of January 1, 2017.