

Graduate Assistantships Handbook

DRAFT

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Graduate Assistantships

Definition

Graduate Assistantships (GAs) provide degree-related, experiential learning and knowledge discovery to qualified students admitted to or enrolled in doctoral, master's, and graduate certificate programs at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Graduate assistantships provide stipend (salary) for students to support the teaching and research mission of the University, thereby creating synergy between the student's education and University's mission of teaching and scholarship. This synergy separates a GA from other types of employment on campus and must exist for the role to be considered an assistantship.

UNC Charlotte adheres to definitions and policies established by the UNC system (Policy Manual 400.3.5), by SACSCOC for accreditation, relevant federal labor laws (FLSA overtime pay rules), and Department of Homeland Security employment requirements for international students enrolled on F-1 visas.

Eligibility

- GAs must be graduate students in good standing in their programs (UNC Policy Manual section 400.3.5) and hold at least a 3.0 GPA, or a 3.0 GPA if newly admitted.
- GAs must enroll full-time (9 hours, 3 hours GRAD 9800/7800, or 1 hour GRAD 9999/7999), unless the student is in the last semester of enrollment and has applied to graduate.
- GAs report to a supervisor with faculty status who guides the teaching, research and/or creative activity that contributes to the educational progression of the student (U.S. Department of Labor FLSA Fact Sheet 17S federal guidelines, pages 3-4: Student-Employees).

Workload

- GAs will work no more than 20 hours per week on average in the assistantship and any other employment (especially important for students on an F-1 Visa) during the fall and spring semesters, and 40 hours per week in the summer if a student is not enrolled in classes. Continuing graduate students are not required to enroll in credit in the summer to hold a GA, but new students must enroll full time in 6 hours (Academic Load/Time Status for Graduate Students).
- TA positions should begin and end according to the academic calendar for the semester or part-of-term of the course/s being taught, beginning on the first day of class or earlier, and ending on the deadline for grade submission. TA appointments in the summer should also

encompass the entire term (or part-of-term, in which case the workload should be commensurate with the duration of the course). RA appointments may begin and end throughout a semester, as needed.

- GAs will be supervised by a faculty member who will directly oversee the responsibilities of the graduate assistantship as outlined in the Graduate Appointment Agreement. The supervisor is responsible for training and mentoring the GA, as well as evaluating the graduate assistant for effectiveness in carrying out the assigned duties and responsibilities as measured against the performance expectations for the appointment (UNC Policy Manual 400.3.5)

Graduate Teaching Assistantships

Definitions

Graduate Teaching Assistants provide support to the teaching mission of the University by extending faculty resources to help promote student understanding of an academic discipline. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) may be assigned a variety of instructional responsibilities depending upon their educational background and experience, and are compensated accordingly with a stipend (salary). As students with exempt employment status under the Fair Labor Standards Act, GTAs must have a primary duty of teaching to impart knowledge. Those duties include:

- **GTA** is responsible for grading and/or other instructional efforts related to a specific course, including course/lab set-up and in- and/or out-of-class assistance. Effort may also include work in a tutoring or writing center or similar unit that provides direct educational support to students. AND/OR:
- **GTA** is responsible for teaching a course section. Teaching includes facilitating a recitation or course section, grading student assignments, and potentially holding office hours. AND/OR:
- **Instructor of Record (GTA, IOR)**: a GTA in this role may be responsible for overall design of the course, and does not have direct supervision of a faculty member.

Eligibility

- A GTA *Instructor of Record* must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training, and be evaluated regularly ([SACSCOC Standard 6.2.a](#) and UNC Policy Manual section [400.3.5: Training, Monitoring and Evaluation of Graduate Teaching Assistants](#)).
- Students for whom English is a second language may be appointed as a GTA Instructor of Record only after the English Language Training Institute (ELTI) certifies the student's

proficiency in oral and written communication is sufficient (UNC Policy Manual section 400.3.5).

Workload

- One (1) credit hour taught is equivalent to 3 hours of effort, therefore a GTA, IOR may teach a maximum of 6 credit hours for a 20-hour/week assistantship.
- GTAs who are not the IOR, but are responsible for a course section, may be assigned to teach a maximum of 2 sections for a 20-hour/week assistantship.

Graduate Research Assistantships

Definition

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) perform independent research or creative activities under the supervision of a faculty member that directly contributes to the student's education and to the faculty member's research or creative scholarship.

Eligibility

Consistent with the Fair Labor Standards Act (see [U.S. Department of Labor FLSA Fact Sheet 17S](#) for federal guidelines, pages 3-4: Student-Employees), the primary role of Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) is as students, with the GRA secondary. Therefore, Graduate Research Assistantships are primarily provided as a mechanism to support the student's educational relationship rather than as an employment relationship.

Workload

Work expectations must be consistent with the number of hours in the contract and the roles and responsibilities of the graduate assistantship as detailed in the GA Contract. Efforts may include:

- Perform independent research under the direction of a faculty member
- Perform data analysis
- Experimental design and execution
- Literature review and synthesis
- Co-author research articles
- Assist in a faculty member's laboratory
- Mentor undergraduate researchers

Graduate Fellows

Graduate Fellows are students who obtain their own external fellowship or are supported on a training grant, and hold an appointment that matches the definition of GRA. The fellowship or training grant may provide research, stipend, or other educational support.

Any stipend support should be routed through Grants and Contracts to provide a fund number and method to subsequently provide the stipend via eGA and payroll. These fellowships may also require that the money be provided tax-free via a student's university account. Graduate Fellows may be eligible for GASP (as long as otherwise eligible) when the stipend is paid via eGA.

Administrative Student Employment

Human Resources, in consultation with Legal Affairs, implemented the U.S. Department of Labor changes to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), effective July 1st, 2020. Accordingly, students may be hired with a stipend, non-hourly salary, under the following conditions (see [Fact Sheet #17S](#)):

- In a primary role as a teacher (GTA)
- As a student doing research toward their degree (GRA)

Student employees with roles other than the two above are protected under the FLSA, eligible for overtime pay, and therefore must be hired hourly as a Student Temporary Employee through the Office of Human Resources rather than as a graduate assistant with a stipend salary.