Financial Awards for Graduate Students

Financial awards are determined by the graduate program and college dean following the policies and guidelines described below. For specific qualifications, conditions, amounts, length and types of awards, contact the appropriate graduate program director.

Graduate Assistantships

A. Nature of the Graduate Assistantship

The graduate assistant is expected to participate directly in either instructional, research, or administrative duties in support of the ongoing activities of the University’s academic, research, and service units.

It is the University’s intention to make the assistantship an integral and valuable part of the student’s graduate education. It should be viewed as an apprenticeship in teaching, research, or administrative service.

B. Categories of Graduate Assistants

1. Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) - participates directly in teaching activities, such as the teaching of a course, holds responsibility for a laboratory section, or is assigned to specific instructional support or related activities. The University recognizes two levels of graduate teaching assistant responsibilities and activities, i.e., the Instructor Level GTA and the Assistant Level GTA.
   - GTA Instructors directly communicate and interact with students in ways that lead to the conveyance of knowledge or skills required to successfully complete the course. Included in this category are graduate students who serve as instructors, laboratory supervisors, recitation leaders, and tutors.
   - GTA Assistants do not directly instruct students in the knowledge or skills imparted by the laboratory experience, instead, TA Assistants serve as graders, help the instructor research articles and materials to be used by the instructor in preparing lectures or handouts, or as laboratory assistants who prepare equipment solutions, etc.

2. Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) - participates directly in research or support activities conducted by faculty members or administrators. There are three sources of funding for GRAs: those funded through Commonwealth sources, those funded by local funds, and those whose stipends are paid by the Old Dominion University Research Foundation (ODURF) from grants and contracts.

3. Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA) - participates directly in the support of the activities of a University administrative unit (e.g. student services or athletics).

C. Graduate Teaching Assistant Instructor Institute (GTAI Institute) Requirement

1. All GTA-Instructors will be required to successfully pass the GTAI Institute in order to receive a GTA stipend. GTA Assistants are not required to pass the GTAI Institute but must be approved and supervised by the appropriate faculty instructor.

2. The Institute is offered twice a year during the week before fall and spring classes begin. All graduate assistants, including those who have research and/or other non-instructional assignments, are encouraged to participate in the Institute in anticipation of future teaching assignments. The institute is comprised of the University portion and the college portion. Students are required to attend both portions to pass the Institute. Departments are encouraged to develop their own on-going programs for training graduate teaching assistants. Such programs should be tailored to the specific needs of the discipline and department policies.

D. Application

Application forms for graduate assistantship stipends paid by the University (GTAs, GRAs, and GAAs) are available from the Office of Admissions or from the University’s web page. The completed form, together with a brief essay by the applicant discussing academic interests and career objectives, must be submitted to the appropriate graduate program director or office making the appointment, as soon as possible for fullest consideration. Applications for GRA positions funded through ODURF are made through the faculty member who is the principal investigator, the department chair, or graduate program director.

E. Eligibility

1. Only students admitted to graduate degree programs in regular or provisional status on the basis of complete and fully evaluated credentials and in good academic standing are eligible for appointment to a graduate assistantship. Additional criteria apply for appointment as a graduate teaching assistant (GTA) (see section on appointments).

2. All students appointed to a graduate assistantship are required to verify their identity and employment eligibility and complete an I-9 Form, according to University procedures, prior to commencing their duties. This requirement is established in order to comply with the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. Students are also required to complete the Child Support Disclosure and Authorization Form, the Commonwealth of Virginia’s Policy on Alcohol and Other Drugs Form, ODU Use of Electronic Communications and Social Media Form, the Commonwealth of Virginia Selective Service Form, and the Employee Payroll Direct Deposit Authorization Form.

3. Students who are not in good academic standing are ineligible to hold an assistantship. Assistantship appointments will be terminated for any student whose GPA is less than 3.0.

F. Enrollment Requirements

There are two categories of enrollment requirements:

1. Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Administrative Assistants are required to be enrolled each fall and spring semesters of their appointment and must register for and complete a minimum of nine hours of graduate course work per semester and three hours in the summer.

2. Graduate Research Assistants are required to be enrolled each fall and spring semesters of their appointment and must register for and complete a minimum of six hours of graduate course work per semester and three hours in the summer.

For administrative purposes, Graduate Research Assistants will be paid from non-S5 funds. Graduate Teaching Assistantships and fellowships paid from University accounts other than Ledger 1 accounts must register for and complete a minimum of six hours of graduate course work per semester and three hours in the summer.

All doctoral students (regardless of their funding source) who have successfully advanced to candidacy and only need to complete the dissertation must register for at least one hour of graduate credit every semester until graduation (see Continuous Enrollment Policy in this Catalog.) Students who have advanced to candidacy and are enrolled for one credit are eligible for full tuition exemption. The graduate form, Doctoral Candidates 1-Hour Full-Time Notification, must be completed and forwarded to Student Employment in the Office of Finance. Master’s students holding graduate teaching, research, or administrative assistantships who are in their final semester and who are within six hours of completing their degree requirements may register for six or fewer graduate credit hours needed for the completion of their degree. Those who are completing a Master’s Thesis or Master’s Project but have not yet defended it may register for one hour of graduate credit in their final semester. Such students will be considered full-time. Master’s students are eligible for reduced enrollment requirement for no more than one semester.

Students are required to complete all of the credit hours as listed in the individual department sections necessary for the degree. Undergraduate prerequisite courses and courses taken for audit are not normally counted.

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toward the enrollment requirement, except upon the recommendation of the program director, department/school chair, and the dean of the appropriate academic college.

- Graduate assistants normally may not enroll for more than nine credit hours per semester. Enrollment for 10 to 12 credit hours requires the approval of the appropriate program director. No graduate assistant will be permitted to enroll for more than 12 credit hours in any semester an appointment is held.
- The Board of Visitors has authorized the president or his or her designee, to consider waivers related to the minimum enrollment requirements specified above.

G. Appointment Process

1. Assistantships in Departments/Schools
   The dean or other appropriate administrators notifies the individual departments/schools or units of their allocation of assistantships for the upcoming year.
   a. The department/school recommends candidates for the assistantships to the appropriate academic dean. Candidates should be interviewed before final recommendations are made for appointment. Particular care should be taken in the consideration of applicants to determine the adequacy of academic preparation and language skills. A completed E-1S form or ODURF Form 108 for all graduate assistant appointments will accompany the candidate’s nomination to the dean or administrator. All completed E-1S forms with award letters, acceptance forms and job descriptions are to be sent to the Office of EIS Processing for processing. ODURF 108 forms are to be sent to the Old Dominion University Research Foundation. Prior to submission of a nomination, the department/school should determine whether the student has been nominated for or accepted another graduate assistantship.
   b. Nominations are reviewed and approved by the dean of the academic college or his/her designee to assure that applicants meet the eligibility criteria for appointment, such as admission to a degree program, English language proficiency requirements, good academic standing, and enrollment, and that the appointment is in compliance with applicable University and college policy.
   c. Applicants for GTA appointments must demonstrate written and oral fluency in the English language. For international students, a good command of written English will be evidenced by acceptable TOEFL scores and required entrance essays. Oral proficiency in English will be determined through the SPEAK test administered by Old Dominion University’s English Language Center personnel. A passing score on the SPEAK test is 50. Students who marginally fail the SPEAK test with a score of 45 will be offered the opportunity to participate in a re-test as a part of the GTAI Institute to determine if face-to-face communication is sufficient for holding a teaching assistantship.

2. Assistantships in Non-Departmental Units
   a. Each non-departmental unit, e.g., Career Management Center, Athletics, Registrar, submits to the Office of Graduate Studies a position description for each Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA) position available within their unit. Along with the position description the unit will provide a list of those graduate programs in which students have or are proposed to have the interest and skills required. The position must require and provide an academically and programatically appropriate level of intellectual and professional activity. If the position description is approved, the department chair and graduate program director will coordinate with the non-departmental unit the selection of academically qualified and highly ranked students from their current or to-be recruited graduate students. The appointment of the GAA is made jointly by the academic and non-departmental administrative departments.
   b. Determination of the number and the availability of funds must be done as early as possible in order to facilitate offering these GAA positions to the top ranked applicants/students in the appropriate graduate programs. As part of the December - January budget submission process, non-departmental units must submit a justification for continued and increased support of GAA's, i.e., stipends and tuition waiver.
   c. Each semester, the GAA’s immediate, non-departmental supervisor will evaluate the performance of the student and make recommendations for continuance or termination. This written evaluation will be reviewed by the graduate student and his/her GPD or academic advisor and a final set of recommendations made regarding continued awarding of the assistantship.

H. Appointment Workload

Graduate assistantships require 20 hours per week of service and are generally made for a period of one academic year with a nine-month performance period. For a GTA (instructors and administrative assistants), the work load should include no more than six hours of classroom teaching or nine contact hours of laboratory supervision per semester, plus normal preparation time.

Nominations should be submitted at least 30 days before the semester of employment in order to assure adequate time for processing. A graduate assistant funded through a grant or contract may be appointed for shorter periods if required by the conditions of the grant or contract.

An assistantship workload (20 hours per week) may be divided between teaching and research duties with the approval of the dean of the appropriate academic college. A graduate assistant appointment may be renewed upon nomination, review of qualifications, and satisfactory previous performance.

I. Additional Employment

Full-time (20 hours per week) graduate assistants are not permitted to accept additional on-campus employment during the period of their assistantship. In particular, graduate assistants (graduate teaching assistants, graduate research assistants, and graduate administrative assistants) may not be paid for part-time teaching or other campus employment for the University in addition to their normal responsibilities. Exceptions to this policy may only be made under unusual circumstances and only with the approval of the dean of the appropriate college or equivalent administrator upon the written recommendation of the graduate program director and the department/school chair. Any outside employment (i.e., off-campus) should be undertaken with caution and in consultation with the GPD. It should in no way adversely affect academic performance or assistantship duties and responsibilities.

Information on employment guidelines that are specific to international students may be obtained in the Office of International Student and Scholar Services.

J. Evaluation and Monitoring

All graduate assistants shall be provided with a written job description of their responsibilities, and be evaluated at least once by their supervisor(s) during the period of the award, preferably before the end of the first semester of service is completed. The evaluation shall be discussed with the assistant and a copy forwarded to the appropriate graduate program director, or chair.

K. Termination

A graduate assistantship normally ends when the period of appointment is concluded and the terms of the assistantship agreement are fulfilled. Otherwise, a graduate assistant may be terminated for the following reasons:

1. Resignation by the student. Resignation shall be in writing to the supervisor with a copy to the appropriate department chair, program director, and academic dean or equivalent administrator.
2. Failure of the student to perform his or her assigned duties adequately. Termination must be recommended by the student’s supervisor and approved by the department chair, graduate program director, and the appropriate academic dean or equivalent administrator.
3. Failure of the student to remain in good academic standing in accordance with the graduate continuance regulations.
4. Failure of the student to maintain enrollment in the requisite number of graduate credits.
5. Expiration of a grant or contract that funds the student’s stipend.
a. Any overpayment must be reimbursed to the University by the student as soon as possible after termination. Failure to repay the amount owed may result in legal action against the student for recovery.

b. If a student resigns from an assistantship or is terminated for reasons other than the completion of the appointment or expiration of the funding contract, the department chair or graduate program director should notify the appropriate academic dean or administrator as soon as possible and nominate a replacement if necessary.

c. A student who believes that he or she may have been unjustly terminated may appeal the decision. First, the student should meet with the supervisor, graduate program director, and department chair in an effort to resolve the situation. If this effort fails, the student may make an appeal in writing to the dean or administrator of the appropriate academic college. If the matter is not resolved, it will be referred to the Office of Graduate Studies and then be automatically refer the matter to the Graduate Appeals Committee for review. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final.

L. Grievance Procedure

Should a graduate assistant believe that his/her assigned duties and/or the workload required to fulfill these duties do not conform to university graduate catalog policies, he/she should first attempt to reconcile the grievance with his/her academic/nonacademic immediate supervisor. If the grievance is not resolved, the graduate assistant will ask his/her graduate program director (GPD) to mediate the grievance between him/her and the immediate supervisor. If the GPD is the student’s immediate supervisor, the GPD chair/dean’s designee will attempt to mediate. If the chair is the student’s supervisor, the GPD shall refer the case directly to the dean or the dean’s designee. If this course of action does not resolve the grievance, the GPD/chair/dean’s designee will seek mediation with the supervisor of the student’s immediate supervisor. If a resolution cannot be achieved, the chair/dean’s designee will appoint an ad hoc committee comprised of two senior faculty members from the student’s department and one senior faculty member from another department. If the student’s assistantship is a non-academic unit, the third member will be a senior level administrator from the nonacademic unit. Should the committee not resolve the grievance, it will be referred to the dean of the student’s college for a final decision. For matters involving sexual harassment and/or discrimination, please see the “Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedures” or the “Discrimination Complaint Procedure” in this catalog.

M. Recognition of Graduate Teaching Assistant Performance

Each academic year, two graduate teaching assistants will be recognized for their outstanding performance as a classroom or laboratory instructor. Recipients of the Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards will receive a $1,000 financial award to be used to support their educational expenses. A request for nominations and criteria is distributed by the Office of Graduate Studies.

Graduate Fellowships

Fellowships are awards granted for scholastic achievement and promise. Their objective is to enable full-time students to pursue graduate studies and research leading to advanced degrees without requiring them to render any service. Part-time and/or nondegree students are not eligible. Fellows are responsible for payment of their tuition, in- or out-of-state, as applicable.

University fellows are chosen by their graduate programs and are supervised by their colleges. Applicants should indicate their intent to apply for a fellowship when applying for admission. Letters of recommendation, current transcripts, and any additional evidence of scholastic achievement that would assist in an evaluation of the student should be on file in the Admissions Office.

Tuition Grants

Tuition grants may be offered to full-time regular or provisional degree-seeking graduate students. Part-time tuition grants may also be available for Virginia residents. Applicants should indicate their desire to apply for tuition grants when applying for admission. Students holding tuition grants who withdraw from courses will be held personally liable for repayment of funds utilized. Students receiving tuition grants must be registered for six graduate credits each semester and six in the summer.

Tuition Waivers

Graduate students who are awarded a fellowship or who are employed as graduate assistants may receive partial to full tuition assistance. The decision as to whether a student receives partial or full tuition is made by the students’ academic program.

Minimum Stipend Levels

In compliance with federal guidelines a graduate student must receive a minimum of $3,200 in assistantship or fellowship support for the fall and spring semesters and a minimum of $2,500 during the summer.

Supplements to the minimum stipend amount can be made based upon the availability of funds and upon approval of the appropriate dean and the funding agency. The stipend is considered to be taxable income since it is payment for services.

Return of Tuition Assistance

A student who completes less than half of the assistantship or fellowship appointment will be required to return his/her full tuition assistance award to the university.