

## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Adding Students to Sponsored Research Projects

### DEFINITIONS

#### **ASSISTANTSHIPS**

**Graduate Research Assistants (GRA)** - Graduate research assistants are graduate students who are employed by the university and are supported by internal or external funding sources. Graduate research assistants are paid a monthly salary as compensation for the work they perform and/or the product they produce for the principal investigator. The work on research projects is designed to produce generalizable knowledge.

GRAs work 20 hours per week. They receive salary (see Q17 for details) and may be eligible for tuition (up to 2/3 covered by GW and/or as budgeted in the grant). GRAs are not eligible for a stipend from the same grant.

#### **FELLOWSHIPS**

**Graduate Research Fellows (GRF)** – Graduate students who are supported by internal or external funding sources and who are engaged primarily in research training activities. Graduate research fellows receive educational assistance, such as tuition fellowships and/or stipends, as appropriate, to support their training. If their educational assistance is funded by an external entity, the funding instrument must allow for training experience and not be specifically disallowed by the funding announcement, the funding agency, or any other source. As part of their education, graduate research fellows may, but will not necessarily, engage in activities that benefit a university research project.

GRFs are graduate students on a research grant. They are not working but are training. They receive a stipend/fellowship (see Q18 for details) and are eligible for tuition if allowed by the sponsor and as defined in the grant. If it is a training grant, the student should be appointed as Graduate Fellow (GF) (see below).

**Graduate Fellows (GF)** – Graduate fellows are graduate students in a pure training role. Graduate fellowships may be funded by the university or an external grant making body. Graduate fellows receive educational assistance, such as tuition fellowships and/or stipends, as appropriate, to support their training. If their educational assistance is funded by an external entity, the funding instrument should be specifically for training (i.e., a training grant). Graduate fellows are not expected to provide services to the university.

GFs are graduate students on a training grant. They receive a stipend and/or tuition fellowship if allowed by the sponsor and as budgeted in the grant.

#### **OTHER RELEVANT TERMS**

**The Office of Graduate Student Assistantships and Fellowships (GSAF)** – GSAF provides general information on fellowship opportunities for graduate students at the George Washington University on the Foggy Bottom campus. GSAF also oversees all graduate, non-sponsored project funding and directly administers special programs and endowment fellowships.

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**The Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR)** – OVPR supports the efforts of the GW community to generate and manage external awards in support of research, training, instruction and public service activities.

**Principal Investigator (PI)** – Individual responsible for the overall management of the scientific, technical, financial, compliance and administrative aspects of the sponsored research project in accordance with the relevant regulations, university policy, the Faculty Handbook and the Sponsored Projects Handbook.

**Research Assistant (RA)** – A non-student employee who provides routine to moderately complex technical support for a research lab or facility support for a sponsored research project.

**Research Aide** – An undergraduate or graduate student appointed on a temporary hourly basis (e.g., less than a semester) and/or working less than 20 hours per week to complete work related to a sponsored project.

**School Research Administrator (SRA)** – School-level administrator who assists Principal Investigators with initiating research transactions. These activities include: finance and personnel related sponsored project pre- and post-award administration activities.

**Sponsored Project Administrator I (SPA I)** – OVPR staff who supports a PI with the pre-award process. This includes but is not limited to reviewing sponsored program solicitations, preparing proposal budgets, reviewing and submitting proposal packages. SPA Is are managed by the assistant director for pre-award management.

**Sponsored Project Administrator II (SPA II)** – OVPR staff who supports PIs with the post-award process. This includes but is not limited to explain award requirements, reviewing and approving award expenditures, submitting appropriate reports, assisting in the award close out and resolving any program or close out issues including post-award audits.

**Sponsored Project Manager (SPM)** – OVPR staff who manages and oversees the SPA II for the respective Schools and Colleges.

**Sponsored Research Project** – As defined in GW's [Categorization of External Funding policy](#), a sponsored project is a specific research, training, service, or similar activity for which funding is provided by an external sponsor under an agreement with the University. [CRITERIA](#) for proposal treated as a sponsored project must be reviewed and endorsed by OVPR before submission to a sponsor.

**Stipend** – A stipend is a living allowance for degree-seeking students but does not require service. It is a form of fellowship. See the [Tax Department](#) for applicable tax information related to stipends.

**Tuition Award** – This term refers to the portion of the fellowship that is a direct credit to a student's account for courses taken, awarded either as credit hours or a dollar amount. It is a form of fellowship but does not require service.

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## FAQS

### **GRADUATE STUDENT APPOINTMENTS**

#### **1. What appointment categories should be used for graduate students on sponsored research projects?**

Graduate students on sponsored research projects can be GRAs, GRFs, GFs or Research Aides. A graduate student working fewer than 20 hours a week should be hired as a Research Aide.

#### **2. What do I need to know about summer appointments?**

- a) For current graduate students, you can appoint a GRA, GRF or GF for the summer, assuming that the student is enrolled for the prior semester, upcoming semester, or summer.
- b) Incoming international students appointed as a GRA, GRF or GF must be admitted to a graduate degree program and enrolled for the summer session.
- c) Students can also be hired as temporary wage employees. If the student is enrolled at the time, they are hired under 51229, as a Research Aide. If the individual has not matriculated, they can be hired on hourly wage employee (i.e., Research Assistant) using account 51226. For assistance with international students, consult the International Services Office (ISO).
- d) GRAs, GRFs and GFs who were appointed for the academic year or for the spring semester can be continuous for the summer.

#### **3. Can GRAs be regular part-time or full-time or wage employees at the same time?**

No.

#### **4. May a student be hired as a GRA (on salary) and appointed as a GRF/GF (on stipend) on the same sponsored research project during the same time period? What about on different sponsored research projects?**

- a) No, during the same time period, a graduate student **may not hold** two separate appointments on the same project.
- b) Yes, he/she **may hold** a GRA appointment and GRF/GF appointment on two different projects. He/she **may hold** two GRF/GF appointments on two different projects. The student **may not hold** two GRA appointments at the same time.
- c) Note that you cannot split the GRA hours. For example 10 hours to one project and 10 to another – GRA appointments are always 20 hours on a single project.

#### **5. May a student be a GA in one semester and a GRA or Fellow (GRF or GF) in another semester?**

Yes. The total salary or salary/fellowship combination for the academic year should be within the pre-determined ranges.

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### **6. What is the difference between a GRF and a GF?**

The terms of the sponsored project determines whether a student should be a GRF or GF. If it is a formal training grant, the classification of GF should be used. GFs are graduate students in a pure training role on a training grant. GRFs are graduate students in a training role on non-training grants.

### **7. Must a GRA/GRF/GF be a full-time student?**

Yes, or certified as a full-time student.

### **8. What would I do if I want to hire a part-time student?**

You can appoint a part-time student as a Research Aide.

### **9. May a GRA be hired in a position that is not in his/her field of study?**

Yes, as long as the GRA's work on the sponsored project is related to his/her field of study. For example, a statistics graduate student can be hired as a GRA to work on an engineering sponsored project if the student is applying his/her statistical background.

### **10. May an assistantship or fellowship start at any time? Can a GRA, GRF or GF start in any month?**

GRAs, GRFs and GFs can start on any first day of the month in the calendar year (their effective date will always be the first of the month).

### **11. If a sponsored project start date is mid-semester, can a GRA, GRF or GF be awarded tuition for that semester?**

Typically, tuition cannot be awarded for a GRA, GRF or GF starting mid-semester since tuition is billed at the start of the semester (when the award has not yet started). However, if the sponsored project allows pre-award spending, it may be allowable. If the PI knows he/she will receive the award and the award falls under expanded authorities, the PI can accrue charges before the award start date, but only charges that are within 90 days of the start date. For example, if the effective date of the award is April 1, charges may be made against the grant if they occur within 90 days of April 1 (January 1 or later), if the award falls under expanded authorities. In this case, tuition for that semester may be permissible.

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### **12. Are GRA, GRF, GF appointments renewable?**

Assistantships and fellowships are term appointments and graduate students should not assume he/she will be reappointed.

Reappointments are contingent upon availability of funds, satisfactory performance/progress of the assistantship/fellowship recipient, relevant departmental policies, and continued academic eligibility.

### **13. What can I write under the duties for a GRA?**

The duties of graduate research assistants vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of the funding. GRAs work on a specific sponsored project that is designed to produce generalizable knowledge. In general, GRAs help faculty members on a specific project and perform such research and related duties that include participating in the conceptual aspects of the particular research process and utilizing techniques and procedures to obtain original data. The GRA shall, as appropriate, utilize the computer and related data-processing equipment in the treatment of research data, utilize statistical techniques related to research, assist in the preparation of reports and papers for in-house seminars and conferences as well as those destined for publication or presentation at national meetings.

These duties are performed under the direction and supervision of a member of the faculty.

## **TERMINATION**

### **14. May the university terminate a sponsored research project funded assistantship or fellowship due to lack of funding?**

Assistantships and fellowships are binding written agreements between the university and graduate students. If due to unexpected circumstances, sufficient funds are unavailable in a sponsored research account to fulfill the agreement, it is the responsibility of the Department/PI to find an alternative funding source.

### **15. May a graduate student terminate an assistantship or fellowship?**

If a graduate student needs to terminate his/her assistantship or fellowship, it is his/her responsibility to inform the PI as quickly as possible so appropriate actions are taken. If the graduate student neglects to take the appropriate action, he/she is responsible for any payments made beyond the date when the student ceased working or serving as a fellow.

### **16. Can a PI terminate an assistantship or fellowship?**

Yes, at the PI's discretion, based on performance/academic progress of the assistantship/fellowship recipient, relevant departmental policies, and continued academic eligibility.

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### **COMPENSATION:**

#### **17. What is the payment range for a GRA?**

The academic year payment range for a doctoral student is **\$20,000-\$30,000**.

The academic year payment range for a master's student is **\$16,000-\$26,000**.

During the summer, monthly rates are pro-rated based on the academic year. For example, if a GRA was paid \$22,000/\$2,444 per month during the academic year, the GRA would continue to receive \$2,444 for each month in the summer.

#### **18. What is the average award for a GRF or GF?**

A typical fully funded award on a sponsored project for a doctoral fellow is **\$22,000-\$24,000** per academic year.

A typical fully funded award on a sponsored project for a master's fellow starts at **\$16,000** per academic year.

These rates depend on academic and other relevant qualifications.

These rates should not exceed the doctoral and Master's threshold of \$30,000 and \$26,000, respectively, without prior approval from GSAF.

#### **19. How many hours do GRAs work per week during the academic year and summer?**

GRAs work 20 hours per week during the academic year and summer. These hours cannot be split between multiple projects during the same period.

#### **20. When are graduate students paid?**

GRAs are paid the last business day of the month. GRFs and GFs receive their stipend the first business day of the month. Graduate students hired as Research Aides are paid bi-weekly on Fridays.

Payments for any late paperwork or appointment are processed by Payroll every Tuesday for payment on Thursday.

### **TUITION:**

#### **21. What is the criteria for GSAF covering 2/3 or 67% tuition for a GRA?**

When tuition is not provided by a sponsored research project, the Office of Graduate Student Assistantships and Fellowships (GSAF) will award a tuition fellowship equal to 2/3 or 67% of a

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student's tuition (up to six credits per semester for fall and/or spring) when the following conditions are met:

- The GRA is paid from a sponsored research project for at least a full semester
- The student must be fully funded (see Q17 for more details) at a minimum of \$20,000 over a 9-month period (for doctoral) or a minimum of \$16,000 over a 9-month period (for Master's students)
- Full F&A is recovered from the sponsored research project
- The GRA is enrolled in one of the following:
  - Columbian College of Arts & Sciences
  - Elliott School International Affairs
  - Graduate School of Education and Human Development
  - School of Business
  - School of Engineering & Applied Science
  - School of Nursing
  - College of Professional Studies

GRAs who do not meet these criteria might also be granted tuition fellowships by GSAF or individual schools on an ad hoc basis. For these requests, PIs should first go to their department chair to determine if funding is available.

Please note that PIs are encouraged to allocate tuition as a direct cost to a sponsored research project when allowed by a sponsor.

GSAF will not cover tuition for graduate students enrolled in the Milken Institute School of Public Health, School of Medicine and Health Sciences or the Law School. GSAF will also not cover tuition for graduate students during the summer.

### **22. Are GRAs allowed to “bank” tuition credit hours for later use?**

No

### **23. Under what circumstance is tuition formally cost-shared on a sponsored research project?**

Tuition is allowed for cost share only if it is mandatory and approved on a case by case basis by OVPR. Please work with your SPA I if you think this applies to your sponsored research project.

### **24. Does a tuition fellowship from GSAF include funds for fees such as school registration or student association?**

No.

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### **25. May tuition be paid from a sponsored research project?**

Yes, tuition may be paid from a sponsored research project as long as it is allowed under the terms and conditions of the award and by the sponsor.

### **26. May a sponsor be charged more than 18 credit hours of tuition in a given budget period if the university allows the enrollment?**

Yes, as long as the tuition cost is reasonable, allowable, and allocable under the terms and conditions of the sponsored research project.

### **27. When a GRA qualifies for a tuition fellowship through GSAF, who is responsible for the tuition difference?**

The graduate student is responsible for any tuition payments beyond the tuition fellowship award. This difference may be paid for by the sponsored research project, if the sponsor allows, or the department, college or institute. Information as to who is responsible for the tuition difference must be clearly stated in the award letter to the graduate student.

## **HEALTH INSURANCE:**

### **28. Are GRAs eligible for health insurance related awards?**

Yes, fully funded GRAs are eligible for a health insurance related award, if enrolled in the GW student insurance plan (\$1,500 per year or \$750 per semester enrolled). If a student is a GRA for one semester, they are still eligible for the payment. For GRAs enrolled in the summer for the first time, contact GSAF at [gradfell@gwu.edu](mailto:gradfell@gwu.edu). Please note that health insurance cannot be directly charged to sponsored projects (except eligible training programs and if allowable by the sponsor).

## **TAXES**

### **29. Is the stipend received by a GRF/GF considered taxable income?**

Yes. A stipend is a form of scholarship and to the extent it is not used by a degree seeking student for tuition and required fees or books, it is considered taxable income both for federal and state income tax purposes. For students who are US citizens or treated as US tax residents, GW is not required to provide a tax form at year end reporting the stipend, so the recipient should “self-report” this income on his/her tax return.

### **30. Is a stipend received by an international GRF/GF treated differently than those paid to US students?**

Yes. Stipends received by international students are subject to federal withholding tax at 14% (assuming F or J visa and that they fall into the “nonresident alien” tax classification) absent treaty exemption. The stipend is considered taxable income both for federal and state income tax purposes. Tax treaty relief may be available for some international students. All international student stipend recipients must contact the [Tax Department](#) to determine appropriate tax

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treatment. International students in the “nonresident alien” tax classification and those receiving tax treaty benefits will receive a Form 1042-S to report the income for tax purposes.

### **31. Are international GRAs subject to different tax rules on their salary?**

Yes. Similar to the process for stipend, international students in these categories must contact the [Tax Department](#) to determine appropriate tax treatment. Tax treaty relief may be available.

## **OTHER**

### **32. Who decides whether a training component is allowable on a sponsored research proposal submission?**

OVPR makes the final determination in conjunction with the PI, based on the funding opportunity announcement and the sponsor’s terms and conditions.

### **33. May an undergraduate student be hired as a GRA?**

No, undergraduate students should be hired under the Student Research Aide classification (account 51229) as temporary wage employees.

### **34. Are GRAs included in the university’s semi-annual effort reporting?**

Yes, the PI is responsible for ensuring the GRA certifies effort worked on the sponsored research project.

### **35. How soon can a prospective GRA be offered a GRA assistantship?**

A GRA may be offered an assistantship as soon as: (1) they have been offered admission (note: the assistantship cannot begin until they are enrolled as a GW student), and (2) the grant is active, or will be active for the full time the assistantship is being offered.

### **36. May a GRA be hired for less than one semester during the academic year? For summer only?**

Yes, a GRA may be hired for one semester or less *if* they are an admitted student who is enrolled in the current or previous semester.

A graduate student who was not appointed as a GRA during the academic year and is being hired for **summer only** should be hired as a temporary wage employee.

### **37. What do I need to know when completing paperwork for GRA tuition awards**

Please refer to the [GSAF website](#) for a complete set of instructions.

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### **38. Who needs to complete an I-9 (Employment Verification Form)?**

GRAs employed for the first time at GW need to complete an I-9. This is a legal requirement for employment and must be completed within three business days of the start of employment. The I-9 form and process are available through [GW Human Resources](#).

### **39. Does the GRA need a background check?**

Yes, if the student is a new hire at GW. GSAF will initiate the background check for new GRAs.

### **40. How do I learn more about GW's online system for hiring GRAs?**

Instructions and training materials are available on the GSAF website - <http://stipends.gwu.edu>

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**HELPFUL RESOURCES**

**GSAF:** <http://stipends.gwu.edu/>

**Forms:** <http://stipends.gwu.edu/forms/forms.cfm>

**OVPR:** <https://sponsoredprojects.gwu.edu/student-assistantships-and-fellowships>

**Guidance for incorporating GRA, GRF and GF into sponsored projects  
proposals:**

<https://sponsoredprojects.gwu.edu/student-assistantships-and-fellowships>

**Sponsored Research Projects Handbook:**

<https://sponsoredprojects.gwu.edu/resources-training>

**Research and Grant Contracts**

**Definition:** <http://my.gwu.edu/files/policies/CategorizationExternalFundingFINAL.pdf>

**Tax Department:** <http://taxdepartment.gwu.edu/>

**University Policy:** <https://compliance.gwu.edu/find-policy>