

Policy 2103
Graduate Assistantships

Date of Current Revision: September 2022
Primary Responsible Officer: Dean of The Graduate School

1. PURPOSE

Graduate assistants contribute significantly to the programs of both academic and non-academic areas of the university. Assistantships provide financial assistance to qualified students. They also offer opportunities for students to gain worthwhile teaching and other experiences relevant to their chosen disciplines. The primary purpose of a graduate assistantship is to obtain training or work experience necessary for the completion of a degree and not to provide services for the university. This policy provides for the appointment and use of graduate assistants at James Madison University.

2. AUTHORITY

The Board of Visitors has been authorized by the Commonwealth of Virginia to govern James Madison University. See Code of Virginia § 23.1-1600; § 23.1-1301. The Board has delegated the authority to manage the university to the president.

The policy is consistent with the resolutions regarding assistantships established by the Council of Graduate Schools.

3. DEFINITIONS

Doctoral Assistant:

A doctoral assistant (DA) is assigned to an academic unit to assist faculty members in their responsibilities of teaching and/or research. Students in doctoral programs may also serve as Teaching Assistants. Each doctoral assistant must be enrolled in a doctoral program at JMU. Some doctoral assistantships may cover more than the regular amount of tuition, may pay a higher stipend and may remain in effect through all or part of the summer term.

Graduate Assistant:

A graduate assistant (GA) is assigned to an academic unit, support program or administrative office to assist faculty members in preparing for instruction, leading discussion groups, grading papers, conducting research, preparing laboratories, performing departmental administrative tasks, etc.

Specific duties will vary according to the needs of the program or department.

The generic term "graduate assistant" in this policy also encompasses the more specific doctoral assistant and teaching assistant.

Stipend:

Amount paid to a graduate assistant per semester. This amount is determined by the university and applies to all graduate assistantships. Doctoral assistantships receive a higher stipend than masters and educational specialist-level assistantships. All types of assistantships pay federal and state taxes but do not pay FICA taxes. Graduate assistants are paid according to their contract dates.

Teaching Assistant (TA):

A limited number of teaching assistantships are available in academic units offering major programs of graduate study. Students awarded a teaching assistantship are assigned to an academic unit and are expected to instruct six credit hours of course work or laboratory. Students may also be awarded a teaching assistantship to assist professors within the department with grading, etc.

Any graduate student who is the instructor of record for a course must hold a master's degree in the teaching discipline or have completed 18 graduate credits in the teaching discipline. Fewer credit hours may be acceptable for the TA when they serve as in-class supervisors for supplemental sessions, i.e., labs; these justifications must be documented and provided to the academic unit head prior to final class assignments.

TAs must be directly supervised by a faculty member experienced in the discipline. TAs must participate in regular in-service training for teaching assistants conducted by their faculty, as well as undergo planned and periodic evaluations.

4. APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all students contracted into graduate assistantships at the university, regardless of type. It does not apply to student employees as defined under Policy [1334](#).

5. POLICY

5.1 Assignment of Graduate Assistants

Graduate assistants will be assigned to a unit of the university only when:

- a. The assignment of graduate assistants contributes substantially and productively to the mission of the academic unit, the program or the university.
- b. Assigned duties and responsibilities are meaningful in terms of complementing the student's formal academic work and add to the student's professional development.

5.2 Eligibility

To be eligible to receive an assistantship, each student must be unconditionally or conditionally accepted into a graduate program at JMU. A student who is provisionally accepted will not be eligible for a graduate assistantship until he or she achieves unconditional or conditional acceptance into a graduate program.

An eligible student must have transcripts on file in The Graduate School indicating completion of the baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution.

NOTE: Graduate programs have the right to impose additional criteria.

5.3 Assistantship Hours

Graduate assistants will provide an average of 20 hours of assistance each week. Graduate assistants cannot be asked to perform more than an average of 20 hours per week unless special permission is granted from The Graduate School. Visa requirements stipulate that international students may not in any circumstances work more than 20 hours per week. Students may not begin their assignment prior to completion and submission of all required forms.

5.4 Conditions of Continuation in Assistantship

Graduate assistants are required to make significant progress toward their degrees which means they must:

- a. Carry nine hours of graduate coursework each semester. Note: Underload approval is required if a graduate assistant is not registered for nine graduate hours each semester. Underloads for fewer than six graduating credits are not approved absent extenuating circumstances. Only one underload may be granted during a graduate assistant's program of study.
- b. Maintain at least a 3.0 graduate GPA in order to retain or reapply for the assistantship. Students may receive assistantships for a maximum of four semesters (fall and spring) or two academic years, except for Doctoral Assistants, students in the Masters of Fine Arts program or students seeking the Educational Specialist degree.

6. PROCEDURES

6.1 Resource Allocation

Budgeted resources are allocated annually by the appropriate vice president to colleges, departments and offices at the university for graduate assistantships. The dean of The Graduate School, in conjunction with the Associate Vice President of Resource Planning and Analysis, will oversee the allocation of the assistantships among the colleges and administrative offices in Academic Affairs.

Academic deans will determine the allocation of assistantships according to academic units within their colleges and will inform the Dean of The Graduate School.

Assistantships not filled by the beginning of classes each semester are subject to reassignment to another area or, in budget shortfall situations, may not be filled for the academic year.

6.2 Application for Assistantship

A student interested in a graduate assistantship should inform the graduate program to which he or she is applying of his or her interest in an assistantship. If there is not an assistantship available, the student may apply for a posted assistantship through another department. To apply for an assistantship in another area, a student should refer to [JobLink](#) on the Human Resources website and submit an application. Departments/programs will contact applicants for graduate assistantships directly to set up interviews.

6.3 Award of Assistantship

After selecting a graduate assistant, the department/program will create the contract materials and forward them to The Graduate School according to the procedures detailed on [The Graduate School](#) website. The graduate assistant will sign the contract, complete the tax forms, and return them immediately to the assistantship department so information can be entered in the payroll system.

The Office of Financial Aid will process the award as part of the financial aid package for the student. All graduate assistants should be appointed and all contract materials should be submitted to The Graduate School no later than 30 days prior to the contract start date. The Dean of The Graduate School may reallocate any full academic year assistantships that remain unfilled after September 1 to other academic units or programs.

6.4 Acceptance of Graduate Assistantships

In accordance with the resolution of the Council of Graduate Schools, acceptance of an offer of financial support (such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties.

Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which a commitment has been made. Similarly, an

offer by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer. It is further agreed by the institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this [Resolution](#) or a link to the [Council of Graduate Schools](#) should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship and assistantship offer.

6.5 Obligations of Graduate Assistant

Students who accept assistantships must be available for planning, orientation, training and/or workshops approximately one week prior to the beginning of the contract period as requested by the academic units or programs granting the assistantships.

Graduate students may hold JMU employment in addition to their 20 assistantship hours provided the decision is endorsed by the student's program coordinator or core faculty and approved by the dean of The Graduate School. This decision should be carefully made taking into account the overall effect on the student's academic performance. An e-mail endorsing the employment must come from the coordinator or core faculty to the assistantship director for final approval and notification of payroll.

Students who are granted graduate assistantships are required to abide by university policy, state and federal law.

Many sections of the Faculty Handbook, such as section [III.A. - Faculty Rights and Responsibilities](#), also apply to graduate assistants. In particular, graduate teaching assistants are held to the standards and requirements regarding teaching as stated in the Faculty Handbook.

6.6 Stipends and Tuition Allocations

Stipends are paid in semi-monthly installments, and are taxable income. Stipends are not wages, and the Graduate Assistant is not primarily engaged in providing services, but instead is being provided training by the university in a work setting.

The university's Budget Office determines if the university (through The Graduate School), the hiring department or the program area will pay for tuition allocations.

- The terms for tuition allocations are as follows: In no case may an assistantship cover undergraduate hours or audited hours. Assistantships pay a minimum of nine in-state or out of state credit hours of graduate course work each semester, unless an underload is approved. Underloads are not routinely approved. However, if students are in the first or last semester of their program, or there are extenuating circumstances, approval may be requested with appropriate justification and signature of the academic advisor, department head, and TGS Assistantship Director. Only one underload approval may be granted during the GA's program of study.
- The student is responsible for payment of tuition for all additional hours taken above the designated number of hours covered by the contract.
- Some graduate assistantship positions pay out-of-state tuition: however, out-of-state tuition is not fully funded for all assistantship positions. If an out-of-state student is hired in an "in-state funded position," the student is responsible for payment of the difference between the in-state and out-of-state tuition rates. The contract will specify the tuition classification.
- Distant Learning rates will be paid up to, but not exceeding, the on-campus rate for credit hours as designated in the contract.

For new assistantship positions, The Graduate School, working with the Budget Office, will verify that funds are available and assign new position numbers.

6.7 Forfeiture of Assistantship

Students who leave the university, fail to perform the duties under their assistantships, lose their eligibility for the assistantship, or violate a university policy, or state or federal law will forfeit their graduate assistantship. The university may withdraw tuition payment and will have no further obligation to continue to pay a stipend upon a finding that the students have left the university, have failed to perform the duties of the assistantship, have lost eligibility for the assistantship or have violated university policy or state or federal law.

7. RESPONSIBILITIES

The division heads are responsible for allocation of funds within their divisions to provide for graduate assistantships and for setting the minimum stipend amount for a full assistantship.

The dean of The Graduate School is responsible for the general supervision of the assistantship program and has responsibility for:

- Overseeing tuition budget for assistantships and managing the contract and allocation process.
- Approving the appointment of graduate assistants recommended by the department or academic unit head and concurred in by the appropriate dean and vice president.
- Ensuring the teaching assistants are contracted in accordance with guidelines set forth by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

The academic unit, department or program heads have responsibilities for:

- Completing and reviewing contracts for graduate assistants;
- Budgeting for assistantship stipends and tuition allocations (unless tuition is paid by The Graduate School);
- Ensuring that position descriptions for assistantships are submitted to the Student Employment Work Center and are on file in the appropriate academic units;
- Monitoring the performance of the graduate assistants within their academic units;
- Submitting official notification to the dean of The Graduate School of each resignation or removal before the position is reassigned;
- Enforcing the rule that graduate assistants may not begin their assignments prior to completion and submission of all required forms.
- Being mindful of the average hours worked by graduate assistants in the unit.

Supervisors of students with teaching assistantships have responsibility for:

- Providing direct supervision of TAs; faculty members must be experienced in the discipline being taught.
- Conducting regular in-service training for teaching assistants
- Conducting planned and periodic evaluations of teaching assistants

Financial Aid Office is responsible for processing the graduate assistantship awards are part of the financial aid package for the student.

8. SANCTIONS

Failure to follow these procedures may result in appropriate sanctions, up to and including termination of the assistantship contract or the employment of the individual violation the policy.

9. EXCLUSIONS

This policy does not apply to full-time or part-time classified employees or members of the instructional or administrative and professional faculty. It does not apply to student employees as defined in Policy [1334](#).

10. INTERPRETATION

The authority to interpret this policy rests with the president, and is generally delegated to the dean of The Graduate School.

Previous version: January 2012

Approved by the president: January 2012