

GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

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University of Baltimore

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I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Graduate Assistantships are available to qualified, degree-seeking graduate students, or to students with a master's level degree seeking a degree-supplementing graduate certificate. An assistantship is awarded to a student primarily to enable him or her to obtain academic, professional or research experience while making progress toward a graduate degree or certificate. The award of a graduate assistantship is contingent on available funds and admission of the student to a degree-granting or certificate-granting graduate program.
- B. Graduate Assistants (GAs) are assigned individual duties consistent with the needs of the department or unit in which they are hired, however in all cases, GAs have a professional role (albeit of an apprentice nature) in the University.
- C. GAs should become thoroughly familiar with the academic regulations published in the graduate catalog and on the University website. This handbook is a compilation of University policies and practices governing graduate assistantships as required by USM policy. In addition individual schools or hiring units within the University (such as the Schaefer Center for Public Policy) will have policies uniquely pertaining to their students with respect to the responsibilities of GAs and conditions of employment.

II. QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS AND SELECTION

- A. A GA must be a registered graduate student carrying six (6) credits or more who is enrolled in a degree or certificate program and who is making satisfactory progress toward the degree or certificate. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward the degree or certificate. Satisfactory progress is defined as a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0. Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who possess particular skills related to their GA employment.
- B. Applications for assistantships can be accessed in UBworks, a job search portal accessible in MyUBalt (under Tools) and coordinated by the Career & Internship Center.
- C. Review of applications and offers of assistantships are the responsibility of the departments and units where the assistantship will be held.
- D. The University of Baltimore does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, ethnic background, genetics, disability, age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, and/or veteran status in admission to and participation in education programs and activities, or employment practices in accordance with federal laws, including, but not limited to Titles VI and VII of the Civil Right Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended, as well as state laws, and regulations. GAs are selected in compliance with this non-discrimination policy.

III. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students are subject to additional rules articulated by the federal government and are strongly advised to seek the advice and guidance of the Diversity & International Students office.

IV. CATEGORIES AND DUTIES

There are several different categories of employment for graduate students with assistantships: Research Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Fellow in the Schaefer Center, Teaching Assistant, Lab Assistant, and Professional Intern.

- A. Research Assistant – The duties of research assistants vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of funding. Generally, research assistants work under the supervision of an individual faculty member or center director. Work on research which is *directly* applicable to the student's thesis or dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's or doctoral degree is not permitted. Research assistants should also not be engaged in work unrelated to their academic program or that does not further their educational experience and objectives.
- B. Administrative Assistant – A number of campus offices employ GAs in administrative roles, where the administrative work is reasonably related to the student's academic training and expertise. Administrative Assistants with appointments to perform administrative support functions should generally be assigned specific projects and not perform the duties of or replace a non-exempt Administrative Assistant.

- C. Fellow in the Schaefer Center – The Schaefer Center is an applied research center in the College of Public Affairs. Fellows in the Center work with faculty and research staff on a wide variety of applied research and professional development projects. Typical graduate fellow assignments include primary and secondary data collection, data cleaning, field interview support, data analysis utilizing SPSS, preparation of charts and graphs, and assisting with drafting and editing client reports. Fellows also provide support for the Center's professional development and facilitation activities.
- D. Lab Assistant – Various academic programs at UB are supported by dedicated labs and may be staffed or partially staffed by graduate students with expertise in the software and hardware provided in the labs. Where such duties extend beyond mere monitoring to academic support and mentoring functions, such positions may be staffed by GAs with the requisite experience and training.
- E. Professional Intern – Some academic departments and units at UB utilize advanced graduate students to provide professional services to the university (or university community) related to their graduate studies and training. GA's appointed to such positions shall work directly under faculty supervision or the supervision similarly qualified professional staff.
- F. Teaching Assistant – Teaching assistants at UB must, according to USM regulations, meet the following requirements:
 - 1. Be able to communicate effectively in both written and spoken English;
 - 2. When teaching a course, be supervised by a faculty member of the institution who has ultimate responsibility for the course;
 - 3. Be students in good standing in a graduate program leading to a degree in the academic discipline that they are assigned to teach, or to a degree in an appropriately related discipline;
 - 4. Only provide classroom instruction in courses at a degree level lower than the one they are pursuing.

In addition, certain UBalt programs may find it desirable to employ graduate students as teaching assistants. In accordance with USM policies on graduate teaching assistants, all non-native English speakers must first pass the English fluency test. Graduate teaching assistants (GTA) may offer sections of a multi-section course, teach labs, and/or lead special seminars or workshops as directed by the dean. The graduate teaching assistant assigned to a multi-section course will work closely with the instructor of record in another section of the same multi-sectional course or will be supervised by the program director.

The GTA assignments may be of two kinds:

- 1. Faculty support. The department/division/school employing the GTA will post a formal job description and assign the student to a faculty member as the instructional supervisor and course instructor of record. When the Graduate teaching assistant serves as support for the faculty, the assistant will be expected to proctor examinations, conduct workshops, assist in conferences

with students, provide tutorial services, and/or lecture in the class or lead discussions at the discretion of the assigned faculty member.

2. Class instructor. The graduate assistant who is a class instructor will be given a concomitant level of responsibility and duties to that of a UB faculty member. However, the graduate teaching assistant is not solely responsible for the evaluation and outcomes of the course. The faculty member supervising the student's teaching assignment remains responsible for course material coverage, determination of final assignment and course grades, and of resolution of any issues that may arise between the graduate teaching assistant and students in the assigned course during the semester.

To be considered for a teaching assistantship, a student must possess a master's degree in the same or a related field, must be in good academic standing as specified within their program, and must have demonstrated the ability to receive supervision from a UBalt faculty member.

The program director, associate dean or his/her designee will provide training in course and classroom management, accommodations of students with disabilities, assessment of student work, effective pedagogical strategies appropriate to the teaching assignment, and professional expectations and will serve as a mentor of the graduate teaching assistant. The graduate teaching assistant is expected to follow the instructions received from his/her supervisor and to meet with the supervisor to address any problems, issues or concerns that arise in the scope of teaching the course. The department will evaluate the performance of the graduate teaching assistant using a standard teaching evaluation or rubric. The graduate teaching assistantship may be renewed based on interest and successful completion of an initial teaching assignment.

Graduate teaching assistants will apply 50% (10 hours per week) of their full time assistantship to teaching the assigned course. The teaching load will be calculated as 10 hours per week for a three credit course. The remaining hours will be used for research assignments, departmental service and/or other duties as assigned. Graduate teaching assistants will be limited to one three-credit course per semester, which must be at a level lower than the teach assistant's current course of study.

Graduate teaching assistants are expected to comply with all UBalt and USM policies and procedures governing classroom activities, interaction with students, and professionalism as a member of the teaching staff. A graduate teaching assistant may be removed from the classroom at any time at the discretion of the dean or the school designee should the assistant's performance fall below expectations for successful teaching within the program and the course to which the assistant is assigned. (For the graduate teaching assistant contract, please click [here](#))

V. APPOINTMENT, REAPPOINTMENT AND DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT

- A. An assistantship appointment is considered full-time when the GA is assigned twenty (20) hours work per week. Appointments for less than full-time are permitted as stipulated in the GA's contract and are limited to either two-thirds time or half time appointments.
- B. GAs are generally appointed for a regular academic year (9.5 months) or for a single academic term (14 weeks or one semester). The duration of the appointment is specified in the contract.
- C. Renewal of Appointments: GAs may be re-appointed to assistantships for successive terms, but renewal is not automatic or guaranteed. Factors entering into a decision whether to reappoint a GA may include:
 - 1. Satisfactory academic performance and progress;
 - 2. Registration in appropriate courses;
 - 3. Satisfactory performance of assigned assistantship responsibilities and duties;
 - 4. Availability of funds;
 - 5. Departmental or institutional limits on the number of years for which an assistantship may be held; and
 - 6. Specific departmental needs, constraints and policies, including efforts to allow a large number of qualified students to benefit from assistantships.
- D. Notice of Appointments: Except under justifiable circumstances, GAs whose appointments are for more than one term will be notified of their appointments, and of decisions not to renew appointments, at least thirty (30) days before the date upon which the appointment is to begin.
 - 1. If a decision to renew an appointment cannot be made within that time line, the GA will be informed at least thirty (30) days in advance of the assistantship's start date of an estimated date for the renewal decision.
 - 2. Circumstances which may justify fewer than thirty (30) days notice include, but are not limited to, uncertainty in departmental funding and course enrollments.
 - 3. Nothing in this section shall prevent a department or unit from making an appointment to a GA on short notice based on changed circumstances in class enrollments, the availability of resources, or other factors.
- E. Students may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the hiring unit. In order to allow a larger number of qualified students to benefit from these positions, departments and units limit the number of years in which a student may serve as a GA.
- F. Each department and unit is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with University and USM policy, for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships. Reappointment is dependent upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree or certificate, and the needs of the

department. As with all faculty and staff positions, appointment and reappointment are contingent on the availability of funds.

VI. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT

- A. The official letter of appointment for a graduate assistantship comes from the dean or associate dean of the school in which the GA's academic program is housed, or from the Director of the Schaefer Center in the case of Schaefer Center Fellows, or from the director of the hiring unit if the hiring unit is outside academic affairs.
- B. Upon appointment, each GA will receive an appointment letter that contains detailed information concerning the terms and expectations of the assistantship. The appointment letter shall include, at a minimum:
 - 1. The length of the appointment;
 - 2. The starting and ending dates of the appointment, including the dates during which the GA is expected to be on campus to perform the duties of the assistantship;
 - 3. The average weekly time commitment of the assistantship;
 - 4. The basic responsibilities of the assistantship;
 - 5. The economic benefits of the assistantship, including stipend and tuition waiver amounts.
 - 6. The department or office to which the student will report, including where appropriate the name of the faculty member or other individual who will supervise the assistantship;
 - 7. An affirmation that the provisions of this GA handbook apply to the assistantship;
 - 8. Any special requirements of the assistantship related to leave, scheduling, or other terms (e.g., coverage over breaks and weather emergencies) that may vary from the provisions of this handbook; and
 - 9. Contact information where the GA may obtain additional information and advice concerning the appointment, the provisions of this handbook, and the GA's grievance rights and processes.
- C. When signed by the GA, copies of the appointment letter shall be forwarded to the office of Human Resources. The GA's shall also be responsible for notifying the following persons or offices of his or her appointment: graduate program director, office of financial aid, and, if the GA is an international student, the office of International Admissions and Enrollment.
- D. To the extent feasible, GAs shall be given a written description of their teaching, research or other assignments, duties, and responsibilities at least two weeks before the beginning of the semester, and this description should be reviewed together with the GA's supervisor when the term of employment begins. However, departments retain the flexibility to adjust assignments as necessary due to loss of funding, course enrollment fluctuations, or other unanticipated events, even after the semester has begun.

VII. TUITION WAIVERS AND STIPENDS

- A. Stipends are set by the hiring department and will vary across schools and units, and in most cases, are understood to be awarded on conjunction with tuition waivers.
- B. A full-time graduate assistantship comprises eighteen (18) credits per year of tuition waiver and a minimum stipend determined by the hiring unit based on the nature of the appointment. Unless otherwise specified in the GA's contract, full-time is defined by this policy as an obligation for twenty (20) hours of work per week for thirty-seven (37) weeks. Contracts for a single semester are permitted, and the work obligation and benefits are prorated accordingly.
- C. The stipend is disbursed in equal installments for the duration of the GA contract.
- D. GAs do not record hours for pay purposes in PeopleSoft, but may be required by their supervisors to keep a log of hours worked.

VIII. OTHER BENEFITS AND OBLIGATIONS

- A. Tuition waivers are typically a significant portion of the assistantship. A graduate students who qualifies for tuition remission as a qualifying dependent or spouse of an individual entitled to tuition remission benefits in accordance with the Board of Regent's Policy VII-4.10 "University System of Maryland Policy on Tuition Remission for Faculty and Staff," and policy VII-4.20 "University System of Maryland Policy Concerning Tuition Remission for Spouses and Dependent Children of Faculty and Staff" is not disqualified a graduate assistantship at UBalt but must agree to UBalt policies and procedures for the utilization of tuition remission and tuition waivers
- B. GAs shall not use tuition waivers for courses not counting toward the completion of the student's degree or graduate certificate.
- C. Payment of student fees is mandatory and is the responsibility of the GA.
- D. For admission and tuition purposes, the University System of Maryland utilizes residency requirements. The full text of the policy can be found in VIII-2.70 POLICY ON STUDENT CLASSIFICATION at:
<http://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionVIII/VIII270.html>
- E. During the semesters of the performance of their assistantships, GAs are billed at the in-state rate for tuition in excess of the allotted waiver. Upon termination of the assistantship, students revert to their original billing status unless they are granted in-state re-classification through the formal petition process for change of residency.
- F. A UBalt student seeking to change residency classification must complete a petition and all supporting documentation and submit the completed petition and all supporting documentation to the following address (faxes are not accepted):
University Residency Committee
Academic Center 112
University of Baltimore
1420 N. Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
- G. Copies of the in-state status residency petition are available on UB's website at: http://www.ubalt.edu/downloads/residency_petition2.pdf.

- H. In accordance with federal law, UBalt provides campus security reports, which are publically available.
- I. GAs at UBalt are not eligible for any health benefits, retirement programs, or unemployment insurance and receive no paid time off.

IX. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP

- A. The GA works directly under the supervision of the department or unit that offers the appointment. The department or unit determines the assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for continuation, reappointment, and promotion. The department or unit is the primary source of information about any of the details of the assistantship. The responsibility for the GA's work is determined by the individual identified in the GA appointment.
- B. With the pre-approval of their supervisors, GAs are permitted to re-arrange weekly work hours in advance to cover vacation time (such as the traditional "spring break" or days before or after official holidays) and to accommodate any unusual scheduling hours particular to their assigned unit.
- C. In the event a GA is unable to perform his or her duties due to unanticipated medical conditions or complications due to pregnancy or the care of an infant child, sudden and unanticipated changes in employment, or other exceptional circumstances, supervisors may, at their discretion, arrange for collegial coverage of the GA's duties on an informal basis, but such arrangements should not continue for more than one term. Supervisors may request additional support for such accommodations from the Provost if the student's duties include time sensitive work related to the unit's ability to fulfill its responsibilities to the University.

X. ADDITIONAL ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

- A. Graduate students awarded a full-time assistantship are not eligible to work for the University beyond the 20 hours per week associated with the assistantship unless written permission has been obtained from the dean of the school in which the GA is enrolled.
- B. Graduate students appointed to an assistantship less than full time are eligible to work for the University in an additional capacity, but for no more than 20 hours per week in combination.

XI. PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

- A. To the extent feasible, given the nature of individual GA assignments, departments and units are encouraged to provide GAs with feedback concerning their performance in the assistantship. At a minimum, such feedback shall consist of a written evaluation by the GA's immediate supervisor each academic term.
- B. Each department or unit employing GAs should endeavor to develop sufficiently clear and detailed job descriptions to make meaningful evaluation of performance feasible and provide each GA with the appropriate job description prior to

commencing each semester, and clear information regarding supervising authority and the manner of performance evaluation.

- C. The results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the GA.
- D. GAs are encouraged to document work-related experiences for future employment. Any person supervising a GA should generally be prepared to provide a letter of reference for work done suitable for inclusion in a student's departmental file.

XII. GRIEVANCE POLICY AND PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

- A. GAs are strongly encouraged by USM and UBalt policy to attempt to resolve complaints informally with their mentor(s) and/or supervisor(s). Normally this should include discussing the situation with the faculty member(s) or researcher to whom the GA is assigned, or with the director of the project to which the student has been assigned, or with the supervisor or head of the unit in which the GA is working.
- B. Complaints that cannot be resolved informally shall be directed to the grievance resolution officer of the unit employing the GA according to the procedures explained below.
- C. The dean of each school or the head of any unit employing a GA shall appoint a grievance resolution officer annually for a fixed term. The grievance resolution officer shall not supervise GA's directly during their term as the grievance resolution officer.
- D. These procedures are designed to preserve collegiality and minimize injury to student-faculty and student-mentor relationships. Left unresolved, however, grievances threaten the learning experience. GAs, faculty, and administrators share responsibility alike to deal with them promptly according to the following rules in order to promote and effect an orderly and efficient disposition of grievances or complaints. The grievance resolution officer works confidentially within the scope of the law to ensure that the GA's voice is heard and that specific grievances receive prompt and impartial attention. Except as *required* by law, the grievance resolution officer shall not disclose any information gathered as part of his or her obligations under this policy to any party not involved in the process, or for any other purpose other than seeking a resolution or remedy to a complaint or grievance. The grievance resolution officer seeks to ensure a fair process that promotes student success, UBalt's commitment to excellence and academic integrity, and the rights as well as the dignity of all parties.
- E. Procedures:
 - 1. The GA alleging a grievance under this policy shall summarize in a brief statement the nature of the grievance and the resolution or remedy he or she is seeking. The statement shall include a reasonably specific description of the facts and evidence that support the grievance and of the efforts to resolve the matter informally, if appropriate.
 - 2. The statement shall be signed and dated and delivered to the office of the grievance resolution officer within five (5) working days of the effort to resolve the grievance informally. The GA shall retain a copy.

3. Before five (5) working days have elapsed, the grievance resolution officer shall give the GA written notice of her or his determination as to
 - a. whether the matter falls within her or his jurisdiction under this policy,
 - b. whether there has been a sufficient effort on the part of the GA to resolve the matter informally,
 - c. whether the facts and evidence alleged in support of the grievance indicate the possibility of an appropriate remedy under this policy.
4. Matters falling under the jurisdiction of this policy shall include,
 - a. Allegations of inadequate training or supervision for doing assigned tasks
 - b. Inappropriate work assignments
 - c. Unreasonable expectations for performance
 - d. Unreasonable work hours
 - e. Unsatisfactory working conditions
 - f. Unfair termination of a graduate assistantship within the term of appointment
 - g. Non-renewal of an assistantship for arbitrary or capricious reasons including reprisal for filing a grievance
5. Matters are excluded from this policy for which there are other, more appropriate policies in place. Exclusions include
 - Allegations of professional or academic misconduct
 - Allegations of unlawful conduct (e.g., acts of violence, sexual harassment)
 - Allegations of fraud or financial irregularities
1. Upon a determination to proceed by the grievance resolution officer, she or he shall, within the following five (5) working days, meet with the GA, meet with one or more of the individuals identified in (or identifiable from) the GA's statement (at least one of whom should be the GAs supervisor), and then propose to the GA a course of action for resolving the grievance.
2. If the GA agrees with the course of action, the grievance resolution officer shall attempt to effect the resolution of the grievance through consultation with the other affected parties, and if necessary, negotiation with dean or unit head to whom the supervisor(s) or mentor(s) of the GA reports.
3. If the GA refuses to agree to the course of action proposed by the grievance resolution officer, or to a modified course of action suggested by the grievance resolution officer after further consultations with the parties, the GA may appeal the grievance to the senior associate provost, or, if the senior associate provost is the original grievance resolution officer, to the provost.
4. The senior associate provost or the provost is empowered under this policy to seek an equitable remedy to the situation using any of the normal administrative tools at his or her disposal under UBalt policies and procedures. If within twenty (20) working days of the original statement of the grievance by the GA to the grievance resolution officer, the GA demonstrates with new facts and evidence that the grievance complained

of cannot be resolved or the behavior complained of in the original grievance statement continues, despite the effort to effect a resolution, the GA may request in writing to the Provost to be excused, without financial penalty, from the performance of his or her duties under the GA contract. The Provost's determination shall be final, but before the Provost makes such a determination, she or he shall personally interview both parties to the grievance and the grievance resolution officer.

5. Reprisals against GAs for filing a grievance are prohibited and shall be considered employee misconduct and subject to disciplinary action under university policies governing faculty and other employees.
6. Note: Nothing in this section is intended to replace any process or requirement described in Section 5. of this policy, "APPOINTMENT, REAPPOINTMENT, AND DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT."

XIII. ETHICAL STANDARDS AND CODE OF CONDUCT

In their research, administrative, and other activities, all GAs are subject to the ethical standards of the academic profession, to federal laws such as immigration status, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the University policies which govern their assigned duties and other institutional obligations. Violation of any of these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action, including termination. The minimum expectation of GAs includes behavior in compliance with the UBalt's Code of Student Conduct and all standards affecting other employees engaged in the type of work assigned to the GA.

XIV. TERMINATION

An appointment may be terminated before expiration of the specified time under unusual and compelling conditions that include, but are not limited to:

- incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty, including refusal to work, or discontinuance of the work for which the appointment was made;
- misconduct that is job-related, including disclosure of any confidential information related to UBalt students or UBalt faculty obtained during the course of the work associated with the assistantship;
- delinquency in academic work;
- academic misconduct;
- voluntary mutual agreement;
- insufficient budgetary appropriations;
- violation of federal or state law;
- misrepresentation or false data given on graduate application material;
- violation of UB's code of student conduct

Except in the most egregious instances the GA will receive written notice at least two weeks prior to the effective date of termination by the hiring official (see section VI. A. above).

The amount of the stipend and the tuition remission benefit will be prorated according to the termination date.

XV. TAX STATUS

As a result of the U.S. federal tax code, all graduate students must pay income tax on stipends received for graduate assistantships. Reductions in tuition received by GAs are tax-exempt provided that such reductions are not received in lieu of compensation for performance by the recipient of past, present, or future service. Questions about tax liability should be directed to a qualified tax counsel or advisor or to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

XVI. HOURLY EMPLOYMENT (GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYMENT OUTSIDE THE GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP PROGRAM)

A graduate student whose primary responsibility is to assist with the administrative and support functions within the needs of a department or University office may be paid as an hourly employee. Such employees are not GAs and are not covered by the provisions of this policy. Hourly wage rates for graduate students may vary and are determined by the Human Resources office according to the various classes of student assistants. Limitations and restrictions established by other policies, including financial aid regulations, will apply.

Approved by Graduate Council
Approved by Executive Committee
Approved by University Faculty Senate