

Lehigh COE GA/RA Policy (Adopted: March 11, 2022)**Graduate Student Assistantships**

This document summarizes policies regarding Graduate Student Assistantship appointments in the College of Education at Lehigh University. Definition of the Graduate Student Assistantship is followed by the criteria for eligibility to hold an assistantship, a brief description of each type of assistantship, and other policy matters (e.g., expectations for professional conduct, supervisor responsibilities).

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1. Definitions and Distinctions

a. Graduate Assistantships (GA)

- An academic appointment requiring 10 to 20 hours a week as assigned by the COE and supported by COE funds or by another university office (e.g., Office of Student Disabilities). GAs are assigned to COE faculty members by the Education and Human Services (EHS) department chair in consultation with academic program directors. GA responsibilities are defined by the supervising faculty member(s) and, for example, could include administrative and/or research-related assignments and duties. In most cases, COE-funded GAs receive partial or full tuition credit and a stipend that meets designated COE stipend levels. Note that some college fellowships (e.g., Shupe fellowship) are considered assistantships wherein research or related academic activity is required.

b. Research Assistantships (RA)

- A Research Assistant (RA) assists in conducting research of a scholarly nature, typically under faculty supervision. RAs are supported by internal or external grant funds. The work of a Research Assistant can include, but is not limited to, the gathering and analyses of data; the development of theoretical analyses and models; the production or publication of scholarly journals and research reports for the benefit of the college, faculty or academic staff supervisor, or granting agency. RA appointments typically require 10 to 20 hours per week with specific duties assigned by the lead faculty investigator. In most cases, RAs receive partial or full tuition support and a stipend that meets designated COE stipend levels.

- **Distinctions from Assistantships:**

- a. Fellowships**

- i. Presidential and University Fellowship stipends are financial aid, not salary. These are funded by the university research office. Similarly, some college fellowships (e.g., Thomas/Brucker Endowed Minority Doctoral Scholarship) are considered financial aid, not salary. No service is expected in return for a fellowship; it is awarded on a merit basis to assist a student in the pursuit of a degree.

- b. Hourly Employment through Payroll**

- i. Graduate students may be employed on an hourly basis and paid for work unrelated to the student's academic and professional training (e.g., data collection on funded research projects). Such employment typically is temporary and is not considered an assistantship appointment and is not associated with remission of tuition credits.

2. Assistantship Eligibility Criteria

- c. **Matriculation at Lehigh** with an active authorization to enroll in a COE graduate degree program
 - d. **Enrollment**
 - All students holding assistantships **must be enrolled as full-time students in each academic year semester (i.e., summer enrollment not required)** in which the assistantship appointment is held.
 - e. **I-9 eligibility to work in the U.S.A.**
 - By federal regulation, all individuals receiving salary through Payroll must demonstrate eligibility to work in the U.S.A. by filing Federal Form I-9. Departments must forward necessary paperwork to Payroll in advance of the student's first paycheck. Students should contact human resources (inl-9@lehigh.edu) to schedule an I-9 appointment. The I-9 must be completed within 3 days of the first day of work.
 - f. **Social Security Number** must be on file with Payroll.
- 3. Period of Appointment**
- a. Most commonly, GAs are appointed from September through May (i.e., academic year). GAs may also be appointed for as long as 12 months from June through May (or September through August). RAs typically are appointed for 12 months with start and end dates variable as a function of the specific grant award.
 - b. A GA may be re-appointed and serve for a second, a third, or even a fourth year. RA re-appointments are subject to the specific length of the grant award. All GA and RA appointments shall automatically terminate at the end of the specified appointment period. No appointment or reappointment of a graduate student to an assistantship position commits the college (in the case of GAs) or principal investigator (in the case of RAs) to reappoint that same student at some later time.
- 4. Workload**
- a. University regulations impose a maximum of 20 hours per week that a full-time graduate student may work for compensation on the campus. This includes the total from all job types, including assistantships, hourly work, etc. A full-time graduate student can petition (by completing a work overload petition form) to work up to 25 hours per week subject to approval by their academic adviser, GA/RA faculty supervisor, and COE associate dean for graduate studies.
 - b. Note that international students with F1 or J1 Visas may not work more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session, as this would be a violation of their visa requirements. This includes both on- and off-campus employment. They may work more than 20 hours during summer and winter breaks. Also, F-1 students need OISS authorization to work off-campus for both paid and unpaid positions, including practicum and externships (<https://global.lehigh.edu/oiss/current-students/employment>).
- 5. Stipend Support**
- a. Lehigh University COE establishes annually the minimum stipend amounts for COE GA and RA positions.

	GA	RA
AY 21-22	2,000/month	2,000/month
AY 22-23	2,250/month	2,000/month
AY 23-24	2,500/month	2,250/month
AY 24-25	2,500/month	2,500/month

b. Source of Funding

- Stipends for RAs typically are paid by an external/sponsored source of funds, internal research grant funds, or faculty funds (e.g., research incentive funds, start-up accounts).
- Stipends for GAs typically are paid by the college or another university office.

6. Tuition Scholarship Support

- a. COE GA and RA positions typically are accompanied by partial or full academic year tuition support. Some RA positions also may include summer tuition support. Tuition support is provided by either the COE, an external grant award, or both.

7. Expectations for Professional Conduct

GAs and RAs are expected to comply with the Lehigh University Student Code of Conduct (see <https://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/content/code-conduct>). Additional expectations for professional conduct include:

- a. **Dress code in the community:** Some GA and RA positions involve work in the community (e.g., data collection in schools or community agencies). Students are representatives of Lehigh University and therefore are expected to adhere to a professional standard of attire and appearance. This includes wearing name badges or stickers as requested by community partners. RAs and GAs should check with faculty supervisors for dress code standards before the first day of the assignment. Faculty supervisors should be aware that community dress code expectations have historically been subject to racist, classist, and sexist standards; thus, requirements for GA/RA dress should be non-discriminatory to avoid inappropriate expectations.
- b. **Personal cell phone use in the community:** Personal cell phones are to be silenced or turned off while working in the community. Use of cell phones for personal texts, social media messages, and telephone calls should be kept to a minimum, and should be restricted in length.
- c. **Conduct and professional behavior:** In their interactions with students, faculty, and all other members of the university and broader communities, GAs and RAs are expected to conduct themselves with the same sensitivity and thoughtfulness that they expect to receive from others. GA and RA research and related activities are subject to the ethical precepts and codes of the relevant academic profession (e.g., American Psychological Association), to the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and to University policies governing institutional obligations. Violation of any of these regulations constitutes a basis for disciplinary action in accordance with procedures set forth in the University's policies. When GAs or RAs are in authority positions relative to fellow students

(e.g., research project coordinator), supervising GAs/RAs need to ensure that fellow students are not taken advantage of (e.g., pressured into working more than assigned hours). Lehigh University affirms its commitment to a policy of eliminating discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, personal appearance, age, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, or on the basis of the exercise of rights secured by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. These values apply equally to GAs, RAs and their faculty supervisors.

8. Supervisor Responsibilities

- a. **Supervisor Requirements:** Faculty supervisors of GAs and RAs should define assistantship work responsibilities as clearly and specifically as possible. Supervisors should be aware of the policies and procedures governing GAs and RAs. Supervisors should ensure appropriate documentation of leaves (that supervisors have approved) and provide regular performance reviews. Supervisors and GA/RAs should communicate regularly regarding GA/RA academic requirements and should ensure that work demands are respectful of both academic requirements (e.g., counseling or school-based practicum placements) and GA/RA work assignments.
- b. **Assistantship assignment:** GAs and RAs should be asked to perform only duties that are directly related to the university's academic mission. Assistants are not to be asked or permitted to provide personal services, such as childcare or pet care as part of their responsibilities. In general, assistantship assignments should be equitable. Special care should be given to the allocation of responsibilities among assistants within a specific research team. All faculty members responsible for oversight are encouraged to be alert to possible unequal assignments and guard against them.
- c. **Assistantship Offer Letters:** GA offer letters are prepared by the department (see Appendix for examples). RA offer letters are prepared by the supervising faculty member. Offer letters should include specifics regarding source of support (e.g., college, external, or internal research grant), financial support (i.e., stipend and tuition), time period of assignment, and specific responsibilities of the assignment. Signed offer letters should be sent to the COE Business Manager for payment processing.
- d. **Contract:** A written contract between the faculty supervisor and GA/RA is required if assistants are to be paid bi-weekly. Contract content could include (a) assistantship structure (e.g., start/end date, distribution of assistantship hours across days of the week, preferred method of communication, vacation time); (b) GA/RA responsibilities and expectations (e.g., activities, duties, performance standards); (c) faculty supervisor responsibilities and expectations (e.g., clarity of job performance feedback, frequency of supervision meetings); (d) how and when GA/RA performance will be evaluated; and (e) stipulation that should concerns arise during the assistantship, it is the responsibility of both parties to discuss issues promptly so they can be resolved in a timely manner. A copy of the COE GA/RA policy should also be provided to the student.

- e. **Mentoring:** Faculty supervisors should provide appropriate training for assistantship duties, observe the student when conducting assistantship duties, and provide regular and constructive feedback to assistants as part of the general mentoring experience.
 - f. **Faculty Leaves:** If the supervising faculty goes on leave for family or medical reasons, the GA/RA should be provided with an alternative assignment so that stipend support continues during the faculty leave period. If the supervising faculty goes on academic leave *and is unable to supervise the GA/RA*, the GA/RA should be provided with an alternative assignment so that stipend support continues during the faculty leave period.
 - g. **Authorship:** Faculty supervisors should be clear about opportunities for GAs and RAs to serve as co-authors and/or co-presenters based on student work on faculty-led projects. These discussions should occur early in project development, ideally before any substantive research has been conducted. In particular, faculty supervisors should be clear regarding expectations for students to serve as an author or presenter including conceptual contributions to the research (see American Psychological Association (2019) Style Manual for discussion of authorship expectations).
<https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper>
- 9. Work in Addition to Assistantship Appointment**
- a. Although the college and university does not limit outside employment, GAs and RAs must coordinate additional off-campus hourly employment with the assistantship supervisor and with their academic obligations, including course load, number of credits, the academic expectations of their program, and GA/RA requirements. RA supervisors and funding sources may also impose employment limitations. As noted previously, there are restrictions on total employment hours for international graduate students.
- 10. Cancellation or Modification of Assistantship Appointments**
- a. **Cancellation as of the Start Date of the Assistantship**
 - If an appointment is canceled on or before the start date of the assistantship:
 - (1) No stipend is paid.
 - (2) No Tuition Scholarship is provided.
 - (3) The student is responsible for any tuition charges for the semester.
 - b. **Cancellation of Appointment During the Semester of the Assistantship**
 - If the COE or RA supervisor terminates the assistantship for any reason (other than cause) during the contracted time frame for the assistantship, whenever possible, the faculty supervisor should make arrangements for the RA to receive the full stipend as per the original contract.
 - If a graduate student voluntarily terminates an assistantship appointment or is removed for cause during the semester, stipend support ends.

- Stipend support ends and tuition scholarship support will be applied as needed to pay the student's bill for the semester when an assistantship appointment is terminated because a student has:
 - Formally withdrawn from a degree program and leaves the University, or
 - Taken an approved Leave of Absence from the University (for emergency/medical needs).
- c. **Delay in Funding:** If sponsored funding for the RA position is delayed, the faculty supervisor should make arrangements for the RA to receive alternative funding until such time as sponsored funding is available.

11. Conflict Resolution

When a faculty or staff member responsible for oversight is dissatisfied with a GA's or RA's performance, the following steps should be taken: (a) The supervising faculty member should, in the course of routine mentoring, discuss the shortcomings of the GA's or RA's performance, making specific recommendations for changes; (b) If improvement is not made, the supervising faculty member must advise the GA/RA in writing of their concerns, and allow sufficient time for the GA/RA to address the performance issues raised by the faculty supervisor; (c) Specific recommendations for changes in performance should be provided again. A copy of this letter must be sent to the director of the student's academic program; and (d) The assistantship may be terminated if sufficient improvement is not made in a timely manner. The faculty supervisor must provide notification of such a termination in writing.

When a GA or RA experiences difficulties with an assistantship (e.g., assigned unfair or inappropriate activities, problematic interactions with faculty supervisor), the following steps should be taken: (a) discuss the difficulties with the faculty supervisor to identify how the situation can be resolved, (b) if resolution is unsuccessful, discuss the difficulties with the department chairperson, and (c) follow the "Redress of Non-course-related Grievances" procedures from the COE Graduate Student Handbook

[<https://ed.lehigh.edu/insidecoe/handbooks/graduate-student/grievances-procedures>]

12. Benefits

a. Time Off

- Assistantship appointments do not accrue vacation leave; however, supervisors should inform GAs and RAs of any time periods where assistantship-related activity will be on hiatus (e.g., during holiday break at the end of the calendar year). Students holding 12-month, 20-hour per week GA or RA positions should be provided with appropriate vacation time (i.e., 2 weeks), with timing negotiated by supervisor and GA/RA. The number of vacation days should be prorated for different appointment types (i.e., hours per week) and periods (i.e., 9- vs. 12-month appointments). For example, a 10-hour per week, 12-month RA would be entitled to one week (5 days) vacation.
- Per the Provost's office family leave policy, students are provided paid leave for 5 weeks.
- Arrangements for any variations in work hours, including time off for vacation, religious holidays and cultural celebrations, jury duty,

personal time, or illness should be made individually with the faculty supervisor. Requests should be made at least 4 weeks in advance, whenever possible. Also, to the extent possible, students are encouraged to make arrangements outside of their working hours and faculty supervisors are encouraged to offer flexibility in work hours.

- Faculty supervisors must be clear if a GA or RA is expected to complete responsibilities during evenings and/or weekends. There need to be clear delineations between work hours and time off.
- Faculty supervisors should make GAs and RAs aware of any calendar differences with the academic year calendar (e.g., client contact for autism clinic during university breaks).

b. Health Insurance

- Information regarding graduate student health insurance can be found at this link: <https://grad.lehigh.edu/financial-support/health-insurance>. Note that this insurance does not cover dependents.
- GAs and RAs may be eligible for discounted health insurance coverage; see
- <https://grad.lehigh.edu/financial-support/health-insurance>

Appendix
Example GA Offer Letters

SAMPLE LETTER OF APPOINTMENT FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANT
(During Academic Year)

Note: Most appointments are for a semester or an academic year. Full year (September 1 – August 31) appointments are allowable. Full year appointments should not result in additional departmental expense allocation for student health insurance costs if the student's average working hours during the academic year and during the University's Affordable Care Act measurement period, with consideration of all Lehigh positions, do not exceed 25 hours per week. Annual appointments for students working in excess of 20 hours per week should be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and those in excess of 25 hours per week could result in additional expense allocations for the hiring department.

(Date)

Dear [xxxx],

On behalf of the [Dept/Center] I am pleased to offer you an appointment as a Research Assistant for the [fall/spring/academic year xxxx] under the supervision of Dr. [name]. As a condition of your graduate degree program, you are expected to proactively explore research opportunities and engage in research activities. This appointment is only for this period and continuation of this support is based upon your performance and the availability of funds.

The stipend for this position is \$[xxx.xx] per semi-monthly pay period for a total stipend of \$[x,xxx.xx], less applicable taxes. Upon submission of all required documentation, your appointment will begin [month/day/year first day of service] and end [month/day/year last day of service]. In recognition of your excellent academic accomplishments, you have been awarded a tuition scholarship of [x] credits of tuition for the [fall/spring/academic year xxxx]. There are no obligations of service associated with your scholarship.

Your responsibilities to the University as a Research Assistant will require an average of [enter up to 20, 25 allowable with approved petition] hours of service per week during the semester. In order to advance your personal educational goals, you may choose to devote additional hours to your research activities. Those hours will be counted as hours committed to your education rather than to your service appointment, and will not be compensable unless your supervisor advises the Dean's Office that he/she requires employment services beyond the required service commitment described within this letter. If your supervisor disagrees with your assessment as to whether work you conduct beyond the average weekly commitment described here is part of your educational experience, please contact your department chair, graduate director, or Dean's Office to discuss this situation.

[Include if appointment is less than 25 hours/week:] If you wish to pursue other University appointments in addition to your Research Assistant position, please understand that your total work commitment will be capped at 20 hours per week during the fall and/or spring semesters unless you secure approval from the Dean's Office by using the Graduate Student Work Limit Overload Petition Form.

Please be aware that to be eligible for this offer you must be enrolled as a full-time graduate student and maintain high performance in your academic work and service. If, at any time, you should fall below full-time status or your performance is deemed unsatisfactory by the department, the department may terminate your assistantship and scholarship. In order to be considered a full time student, you must be enrolled in nine or more credits per semester or have completed an approved full-time certification form.

Please also be aware that in order to remain eligible for this position and scholarship award, you must continue to make normal progress towards a graduate degree. The definition of normal progress may vary among departments, but the criteria for satisfactory progress are established by the departmental faculty and by the University Graduate and Research Committee.

Optional paragraph:

In addition to your support package described above, Lehigh offers a student health insurance subsidy program. For the [xxxx-xxxx] academic year, Lehigh's insurance subsidy program provides [\$xxxx], less the applicable taxes, towards the [\$xxxxx] annual insurance premium for students receiving assistantship and fellowship payments through Lehigh's Payroll Office. Eligible students will receive a subsidy payment at the end of the semester (mid-December and mid-May paychecks). NOTE: If your paychecks end before these dates, you will not be eligible to receive the subsidy. Please contact the Office of Graduate Student Life at (610) 758-3648 for more information regarding this program and the eligibility requirements.

This appointment offer is contingent upon your providing documentation to the University that you are authorized to work in the United States, as required by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. If you have not been employed by Lehigh University within the last six months, please bring with you on your first day of employment one document from Column A, or one document from Column B and one document from Column C (see I-9 form enclosed). Please also bring with you the enclosed W-4 and Residency Certification Forms. If, at any time, your responsibilities require you to perform work on a federal contract subject to Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), Lehigh University will verify your identity and employment eligibility information through the Department of Homeland Security E-Verify system. If you are an international student, please go to the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), located in Coxe Hall at 32 Sayre Drive, to complete the necessary work authorization documentation before your first day of work.

If you have any questions about this offer, please contact [name] at [phone]. If you accept the terms of this offer, please sign the enclosed copy of this letter, retain the original for your files, and return a copy to [name and address] no later than [date].

Sincerely,

[Name and Title]

By placing my signature below, I hereby accept the appointment as a Research Assistant on the terms described above and advise my supervisor that my employment history with Lehigh University during the last twelve months is as follows:

Lehigh University Department/Center	Position Title	Start Date	End Date	Average Hrs per Week

Student Name (please print)

Student Signature

Date

**SAMPLE LETTER OF APPOINTMENT FOR SUMMER
UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT OR
RESEARCH/GRADUATE/TEACHING ASSISTANT**

Note: Summer appointment start and end dates may vary. Departments are encouraged to limit full time appointments to 2.5 months in total in order to provide students with a summer break before the start of the new academic year. Further, appointments which (1) cause the student's average weekly hours to exceed 25 during the University's Affordable Care Act measurement period; OR (2) exceed 2.5 months in duration and 25 hours per week, may result in additional departmental expense allocations for student health insurance costs. Students who are F1 visa holders may not work in excess of 20 hours per week when academic year classes are in session.

Dear [xxxx],

On behalf of the [Dept/Center] I am pleased to offer you an appointment as a summer [Graduate/Teaching/Research Assistant or Research Undergraduate] under the supervision of [name]. This appointment is only for this period and continuation of this support is based upon your performance and the availability of funds.

The stipend for this position is \$[xxx.xx] per semi-monthly pay period for a total stipend of \$[x,xxx.xx], less applicable taxes. Upon submission of all required documentation, your appointment will begin [month/day/year first day of service*] and end [month/day/year last day of service*].

Your responsibilities to the University as a [Teaching/Graduate/Research Assistant or Research Undergraduate] will require an average of [enter up to 40] hours of service per week. In order to advance your personal educational goals, you may choose to devote additional hours to activities similar to your service responsibilities. Those hours will be counted as hours committed to your education rather than to your service appointment, and will not be compensable. If your supervisor disagrees with your assessment as to whether work you conduct beyond the average weekly commitment described here is part of your educational experience, please contact your department chair, [graduate director], or Dean's Office to discuss this situation.

During the term of this position, you must advise and receive approval from your supervisor prior to participating in additional part-time work for compensation for any other department/unit of Lehigh University.

This appointment offer is contingent upon your providing documentation to the University that you are authorized to work in the United States, as required by the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. If you have not been employed by Lehigh University within the last six months, please bring with you on your first day of employment one document from Column A, or one document from Column B and one document from Column C (see I-9 form enclosed). Please also bring with you the enclosed W-4 and Residency Certification Forms. If, at any time, your responsibilities require you to perform work on a federal contract subject to Federal

Acquisition Regulations (FAR), Lehigh University will verify your identity and employment eligibility information through the Department of Homeland Security E-Verify system. If you are an international student, please go to the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS), located in Coxe Hall at 32 Sayre Drive, to complete the necessary work authorization documentation before your first day of work.

Information regarding Workers' Compensation benefits for which you may be eligible is available on the Office of Risk Management's website at www.lehigh.edu/~inrsk. To be eligible for any such benefits, the injury or illness must be sustained in the course and scope of your University employment and while engaged in employment activities for which you are receiving compensation from the University.

If you have any questions about this offer, please contact [name] at [phone]. If you accept the terms of this offer, please sign the enclosed copy of this letter, retain the original for your files, and return a copy to [name and address] no later than [date].

Sincerely,

[Name and Title]

By placing my signature below, I hereby accept the appointment as a [Teaching/Graduate/Research Assistant or Research Undergraduate] on the terms described above and advise my supervisor that my employment history with Lehigh University during the last twelve months is as follows:

Lehigh University Department/Center	Position Title	Start Date	End Date

Student Name (please print)

Student Signature

Date