Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement  
2016-17 Information Sheet for Departments

The Collective Agreement is a binding contract between the Board of Governors and the Graduate Students’ Association.

If a conflict arises between the Collective Agreement and the requirements of a funding agency, the requirements of the funding agency will apply.

Departments are encouraged to contact Faculty and Staff Relations, if there are questions.

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Graduate students who have concerns or questions should contact the Graduate Students’ Association.

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The University of Alberta has a Collective Agreement governing the employment of graduate students as graduate assistants. Under the Post-Secondary Learning Act (Sect 96), the Graduate Students’ Association has the exclusive authority to negotiate an agreement with the Board regarding the employment of graduate students. The Office of the Provost Vice-President (Academic), together with the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (FGSR), are responsible for negotiating the terms of the Collective Agreement with the Graduate Students’ Association. Faculty and Staff Relations in the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) provides support in the interpretation and application of the provisions of the Collective Agreement.

Resources:

✓ Graduate Student Assistantship Collective Agreement  
http://www.hrs.ualberta.ca/MyEmployment/Agreements.aspx
✓ Semi-Monthly Pay Schedule:  
http://www.hrs.ualberta.ca/HiringandManaging/PayAdmin

TYPE OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A graduate assistantship is a form of financial assistance provided to a graduate student to enable them to gain experience in teaching and/or applying and mastering research concepts, practices, or methods of scholarship. Duties are similar to that of an apprenticeship. In view of this, functions should not include routine duties commonly associated as administrative, clerical or technical work, such as personal services for a faculty member, cleaning up after a function or research symposium, maintaining the personal equipment (e.g. computer) of a faculty member.

Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)

The duties of a GTA are primarily in support of teaching and teaching related duties. Such duties may include, but are not limited to: preparing and conducting seminars, discussion groups and laboratory sessions to supplement lectures; maintaining regular office hours to meet with students; assisting in the preparation and administration of examinations; and grading examinations, term papers and laboratory reports. The relationship between the Graduate Assistantship Supervisor and the GTA is an employment relationship.

Graduate Teaching Assistantship - Principal Instructor (GTA-PI)

GTA-PIs are appointed as GTAs but are the primary instructor for a course. Duties may include lecturing, course and lecture planning, preparing assignments and examinations, grading/marking and other related work. To reflect these responsibilities GTA-PIs are paid at a higher rate (see Appendix B).

Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)

The duties of a GRA are primarily in support of a faculty member’s academic research. Such duties may include, but are not limited to: collecting/coding/analyzing data, literature reviews, library research, writing reports, designing conference presentations, and preparing materials for submission to funding agencies. The relationship between the Graduate Assistantship Supervisor and the GRA is an employment relationship.

Graduate Research Assistantship Fellowship(GRAF) <NEW>

A GRAF is a form of financial assistance provided to graduate students to allow them to focus on their education and training, as it relates to their own thesis or directed research project. The GRAF is normally funded through restricted funds and may form part of a funding package to support the graduate student in their graduate studies. The value of the GRAF may vary by discipline and by the requirements of the restricted funds supporting the GRAF. The relationship between the Assistantship Supervisor and GRAF is not an employment relationship.

MAXIMUM HOURS OF WORK

✓ A graduate student registered full-time may hold a GTA (including a GTA-PI) for up to a maximum average of 12 hours per week. A student registered part-time may hold up to a 6 hour per week GTA.
A student registered full-time may hold a GRA for a maximum average of 12 hours per week. A student registered part-time may hold up to a 6 hour per week GRA.

There are no working hours attached to a GRAF as the fellowship is not considered employment.

The total number of hours in combined appointments including a GRA and GTA (including GTA-PI) shall normally not exceed 12 hours. Exceptions require agreement of the Graduate Assistant, the Graduate Supervisor, Appointing Officer, the GSA Vice-President Labour (when appropriate), and approval of the Provost (or designate). A graduate student can hold a GRAF and also be appointed as a GRA and/or GTA up to a maximum of 12 hours per week.

**Remuneration and Income Tax**

- For a GTA and GRA, the stipend consists of two components: 1) award; and 2) salary. The salary component is treated as employment income and is subject to Income Tax, Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance deductions. The award component is not treated as employment income and is not subject to Income Tax, Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance deductions. The stipend rates are set out in Appendix B of the Agreement.

- For a GRAF, the stipend consists of a fellowship. Since the payment is treated as a fellowship, the income is not considered employment and is not subject to Income Tax, Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance deductions.

- Graduate Assistants are paid semi-monthly (twice a month), in arrears no later than 10 days after each pay period by direct deposit. For example, Graduate Assistants being paid for the September 1–15 period, should expect to receive their direct deposit pay on September 25. Departments should inform Graduate Assistants to set up direct deposit in the Employee section of Bear Tracks.

- The University will automatically deduct up to 80% of any outstanding tuition and non-instructional fees owing from a graduate assistant's stipend. This includes any International Differential Fees.

- Annual tax slips (e.g. T4 or T4A slip) are available electronically via Bear Tracks in February of the year following employment. It is important to remind new students holding assistantships to complete the Tax Slip Consent through Bear Tracks. Consent is only required once. HRS will send out an email to all staff when the current tax slip is available for viewing and printing.

**Annual Performance Increase**

A student appointed as a GTA, GTA-PI, or GRA in a subsequent academic year in the same department, whose work was satisfactory in the previous academic year, must be provided a 5% performance increase to the salary component of the graduate assistantship stipend, regardless whether the student is already being paid above the minimum salary rate. This is in addition to the annual negotiated increase.

**Vacation**

A graduate assistant will be provided with one week of vacation leave without a reduction in pay for each four month University term. Vacation leave is in addition to days when the University is closed. There is no vacation pay at the end of a contract or termination in lieu of vacation time not taken. Graduate Assistants may not carry forward unused vacation time from one four month University term to another, without the advance written consent of the Appointing Officer, the Graduate Supervisor and all relevant Graduate Assistantship Supervisors. In some cases, vacation carry forward may not be allowed based on the funding source.

**Department Responsibilities**

- Prepare Letter of Appointment
  The Department must prepare a Letter of Appointment as set out in Appendix A. The Letter of Appointment must be signed by the Appointing Officer (Dean/Chair/Assoc Chair) and must be acknowledged and signed by the graduate student. If a student is
being appointed as a GRA/GRAF and supported from restricted funds, the Letter of Appointment must also be signed by the faculty member holding the funds. **The Appointment Letter must be attached to the HR Smart Form.**

- **Confirm Valid Study Permit (and Work Permit if applicable)**
  Departments must ensure that international graduate students have a valid permit to work in Canada. Students who are registered full-time in a graduate program and holding a valid Study Permit are eligible to work on campus. Students who are registered part-time must hold a valid Study Permit and Work Permit to work on campus.

- **Initiate Payment**
  Departments must submit an HR Smart Form to Human Resource Services by the scheduled payroll deadlines. For international graduate students, a copy of the Study Permit/Work Permit (if applicable) must be attached to the HR Smart Form. **Payroll Operations will not process a payment without a copy of the Appointment Letter and appropriate Study/Work Permit.**

- **Confirm Social Insurance Number (SIN)**
  All students who wish to work in Canada need to obtain a Social Insurance Number. Departments must require students to inform them of their SIN within three business days of when they start work. A non-Canadian or Permanent Resident will have a SIN number that begins with the number “9”.

- **Establish Time Use Guidelines**
  At the beginning of each University term, the Assistantship Supervisor and the GTA, GTA-PI or GRA must meet and complete an Assistantship Time Use Guideline as set out in Appendix C. The Time Use Guideline ensures that both parties are in agreement with the assistantship responsibilities and expectations. It is recommended that academic supervisors discuss expected tasks for each term with a GRAF.

Departments must ensure GTAs/GRAs are trained for the duties to be performed and must include training as part of the assistantship. The Assistantship Supervisor must ensure that the GTA/GRA receives appropriate supervision over the term of the assistantship. A copy of the completed Time Use Guideline (Appendix C) will be held in the student's personnel file.

**AMENDMENTS TO TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

Any subsequent amendments to the Letter of Appointment must be made in writing and signed by the Appointing Officer, Assistantship Supervisor (if applicable), and the graduate assistant. Any changes to duties and responsibilities must be made no later than the end of the first week of the term and agreed to by the graduate student.

**TERMINATION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP**

A graduate assistantship cannot be terminated without just cause and written justification. In cases where the graduate assistantship can no longer be funded through restricted funds, the Department will be responsible for providing funding to the graduate assistant at a level equivalent to the original graduate assistantship appointment.

**PAID MATERNITY AND PARENTAL LEAVE BENEFITS**

Students who have held a graduate assistantship for one four-month University term are entitled to six weeks of maternity leave at 100% of stipend and 10 weeks of parental leave at 75% of stipend. Students not eligible for maternity leave may take up to 16 weeks of parental leave at 75% of stipend. The leave is normally paid by the same funding source paying the assistantship stipend. To activate the leave from the assistantship, the student must complete a Paid Maternity and/or Parental Leave and/or Deferral of Assistantship Form which can be downloaded from the HRS website. The department must complete an HR Smart Form to decrease the student's stipend to 75% while on paid parental leave. Students appointed as a GRA/GTA for three hours or less a week are not eligible for paid maternity and parental leave benefits.

**Example 1:** a student was offered a one year assistantship (Sept 1/14 to Aug 31/15). The student held an assistantship during the fall term, commenced a paid maternity/
parental leave from Jan 1/15 to April 24/15, and then took a leave without pay from April 25/15 to Dec 31/15. Upon return, the student was appointed to a 4 month assistantship which made up for the unpaid portion of their leave (May 1/15 to Aug 31/15).

**Example 2**: a student was guaranteed a funding package for four years. In the fall term of the student's third year, they went on a paid parental leave. The student's four years of guaranteed funding includes the paid maternity/parental leave.

**Example 3**: a student was expecting a child in October. The student chose to defer the assistantship for one year. When the student returns from leave, the Department will owe the student the one year assistantship which was deferred.

**MEDICAL LEAVE**

Students holding assistantships are entitled to up to three weeks of paid medical leave at 100% of stipend. The leave is normally paid by the same funding source paying the assistantship stipend. To qualify for such leave, a graduate student must submit a medical certificate to the Assistantship Supervisor. Students whose assistantships are three hours or less a week are not eligible for paid medical leave.

**COMPASSIONATE LEAVE AND BEREAVEMENT LEAVE**

Graduate Assistants are entitled to up to three weeks paid Compassionate Leave to address an immediate family medical emergency, which places primary responsibility for care and support on the graduate assistant. Graduate Assistants are entitled to up to one week of Bereavement Leave. A combination of Compassionate Leave and Bereavement Leave will not exceed a maximum of three weeks. The Dean, FGSR, may approve a Compassionate Leave for a graduate assistant who can demonstrate that they have primary responsibility for the care and support of a person who is not a member of the Graduate Assistant’s immediate family, or Bereavement Leave following the loss of such a person. The leave is normally paid by the same funding source paying the assistantship stipend. Graduate Assistants whose appointments are three hours or less a week are not eligible for paid Compassionate and Bereavement Leave.

**JURY DUTY LEAVE**

Students holding assistantships who receive a summons to appear in court for the purpose of jury selection or jury duty will be granted leave with pay from their assistantship duties provided that upon return to work, they provide written confirmation of the date(s) and time(s) on which they appeared and/or were served by an appropriate official of the court. The leave with pay will be reduced by any amounts received by the student for Jury Duty.

**DEFERRAL OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP**

A graduate student may request a deferral of a graduate assistantship due to medical, compassionate, maternity or parental reasons by completing the Paid Maternity and/or Parental Leave and/or Deferral of Assistantship Form.

**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q.** If a student is not commencing a graduate program until September, can the Department hire them as a GRA/GTA in the prior spring/summer terms?

**A.** No, as the student will not be registered as a graduate student (thesis or course-based program) until the fall term, they are not eligible to hold a graduate assistantship prior to September 1st.

**Q.** Can I hire a graduate student as casual hourly under the GSA Collective Agreement?

**A.** There is no casual hourly category under the GSA Collective Agreement. If you want to hire a graduate student to perform one specific task, such as marking one exam or as a one-time lab demonstrator, you may hire them under the ‘short term academically-related employment’ category and provide them with a one-time payment using the hourly rates set out in Appendix E of the GSA Collective Agreement.
Can a full-time registered graduate student work as a GTA, GTA-PI, or GRA for more than 12 hours a week in the spring and summer months?

A. No, the same regulations apply whether a student is holding a GTA, GTA-PI, or GRA in the fall, winter, spring or summer terms.

Can I pay a graduate student a scholarship from my research grant?

A. No, the only time a student can be appointed on a scholarship is if there is a competition and students submit applications and these are then adjudicated and awarded. In most cases, it would be a named scholarship. If a faculty member is paying a student from their research funds to work on their program, they need to be appointed as a GRAF under the GSA Collective Agreement.

If a department is aware of a graduate student going on a leave (e.g. medical or maternity), can the graduate student be denied an assistantship for the upcoming term?

A. No, a leave cannot be used as the basis for denying an offer of a graduate assistantship for a future academic term.

If a department has guaranteed GRA funding to a graduate student for two years, is the department required to provide an annual Appointment Letter to the student?

A. No, the Appointment Letter can indicate an end date greater than one year; however the student must receive an Assistantship Time Use Guideline for each term (or annually, if applicable) to ensure that both parties are in agreement with the assistantship responsibilities and expectations. As well, if the appointment changes (e.g. hours, funding, type, etc), then the department will need to issue a revised Appointment Letter.

If a student completes the degree requirements prior to the end of a four month term, and the Department submits the Program Completion Form to FGSR, can the graduate student continue to hold a graduate assistantship to the end of the four month term?

A. If the graduate student is registered in the graduate program and paid the tuition and fees for that specific four month term, then the Department may choose to continue to employ the students as a GRA or GTA until the end of that term.

Can a department continue to pay an international graduate student who has returned to their home country?

A. If the graduate student has returned to their home country to complete the dissertation, and they let their Study Permit/Work Permit lapse, then the student cannot be paid as a University employee. Departments should contact Faculty and Staff Relations for assistance prior to the student leaving the country.