

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY

**GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP
POLICY GUIDELINES**

GRADUATE STUDY and LIFELONG LEARNING

Updated 2016-17

For Graduate Assistants Contract starting Fall 2016

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Graduate Assistantship Policy: an Overview

The Oakland University Graduate Assistantship program provides students with a means of financial support while pursuing a graduate degree, an opportunity to gain experience in teaching or research, and the occasion to provide more individual instruction to undergraduate students, especially in laboratory courses.

Oakland University budgets financial resources for a number of graduate assistantships that are made available to students pursuing graduate degrees. The OU Graduate Assistantship Package program is administered by Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning. The OU Graduate Research Assistantship program is administered by the Office of Research Administration.

All graduate assistantships have a service obligation for which the student receives a stipend. Stipends vary according to program level (doctoral and masters) and discipline. The stipends shall be at the same level for all semesters (Fall, Winter, Summer). An accompanying tuition reduction, which has no service obligation, is awarded to the student for graduate course work.

OU Graduate Assistantship Program packages, administered by Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning are available for Fall and Winter semesters during the academic year. Units will be responsible for funding graduate assistantships during Summer. Unallocated OGS stipends and tuition reduction dollars remaining in the unit from Fall or Winter may NOT be reallocated for usage during summer without approval from Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning.

Graduate Assistantship Structure

- Graduate assistantship funds are used to support full-time degree seeking graduate students
- All graduate assistantships have a service obligation for which the student receives a stipend
- Stipends vary according to program AND level (doctoral and masters)
- Full appointments (.50 FTE) require 20 hours of service per week from the student
- Half appointments (.25 FTE) require 10 hours of service per week from the student
- An accompanying tuition reduction, which has no service obligation, is awarded to the student for graduate coursework
- Students with assistantships are expected to maintain full-time enrollment at Oakland University during the semester(s) for which they are appointed.
- OU Graduate Assistantship packages (administered by Graduate Study) are limited to

two years for master's degree students and four-years for doctoral students

Graduate Assistantship Categories and Descriptions

Graduate assistants are expected to perform research and/or teaching and/or other services that are relevant to their academic program of study during the term of their appointment. The academic unit or department to which a Graduate Assistant is assigned must identify and assign service level consistent with the following guidelines:

Graduate Teaching Assistant

Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) have a primary responsibility in an instructional capacity. They provide approximately 20 hours of instructional service per week over the course of a semester. Services provided by a graduate teaching assistant may include lecturing in undergraduate level courses, leading discussion groups, serving as assistants to laboratory classes, grading tests and papers, scheduling professor time, lesson planning, answering student questions, or making a syllabus. A TA can perform any ancillary duty that would otherwise fall to the professor.

Graduate Research Assistants

Graduate Research Assistants (RAs) are selected for excellence in scholarship and potential as researchers. Graduate Research Assistants provide approximately 20 hours of service per week, over the course of a semester and under the supervision of faculty members. Research activities should relate directly to the student's degree requirements and should be reasonably expected to contribute to the student's academic program. You should *not* consider that all Research is done in a lab.

The department or academic unit is responsible for ensuring that the work assigned is academically appropriate and meets maximum hour guidelines. Oakland reserves the right to change any teaching and/or research assignment at any time and for any reason.

Graduate Administrative Assistants

Graduate Administrative Assistants (GAs) provide approximately 20 hours of service per week, over the course of a semester that are purely administrative duties.

The department or academic unit is responsible for ensuring that the work assigned is academically appropriate and meets maximum hour guidelines. Oakland reserves the right to change any teaching and/or research assignment at any time and for any

reason.

Requirement for Graduate Assistants appointed in Non-Academic Units

All departments and non-academic units must comply with the policies published in the Graduate Assistantship Policy Guidelines. Graduate assistant appointments in non-academic units must be approved by and the GA Agreement signed by the graduate student's faculty advisor.

Academic Requirements and Expectations

- Graduate Assistants must be enrolled as a **full-time** student (8 credits minimum) during each semester of their appointment AND maintain a full-time status for the entire semester.
- Graduate Assistants, who have applied to graduate, may be approved to enroll less than the full-time requirement during that semester.
- Assistantship agreements are subject to cancellation if the student does not meet the minimum enrollment requirement.
- Graduate course work or research must contribute directly to the satisfaction of degree requirements.
- Graduate Assistants must maintain at least an overall 3.0 grade point average.
- Graduate Assistants must satisfy academic progress, general degree and other program requirements established by Oakland and the graduate program as published in the Graduate Catalog or program handbook.
- All teaching and research graduate assistants are considered non-employees for purposes of, or exempt from, the federal Fair Labor Standards Act.
- A full-time graduate assistant may **NOT** work for or be paid by Oakland in any other employment classification during the same month in which they either worked or were paid as a graduate assistant.

International Appointments

Graduate assistantship awards typically cover approximately 90% of the student's total yearly expenses. The student must present evidence of the remaining financial support. If financial documentation for the remaining funds is not provided, the Certificate of Eligibility will not be issued and the student will not be able to apply for a visa to study at Oakland University.

Student Residency Classification Policy

The Board of Trustees approved the revised policy on “Residency Classification for Admission and Tuition Purposes” dated January 1, 1999 with an effective term date of Winter, 1999. “All graduate students holding an assistantship or fellowship awarded through Oakland University will be charged in-state rates.” Graduate Assistants reappointed for the next academic year, but not holding an assistantship during summer, will be charged in-state tuition rates during the summer term.

Levels of Service Categories

The primary purpose of Oakland’s graduate assistant program is to assist students in the successful completion of their graduate degree program. Graduate assistants are expected to perform research and/or teaching and/or other services that are relevant to her/his academic program of study during the term of the appointment, as selected by Oakland in its sole and exclusive discretion, subject to the following minimum and maximum service requirements and in addition to the academic requirements

There are TWO (2) levels of service categories for graduate assistantships available for appointment:

- 1) full time appointments (50% FTE) that require up to a maximum of 20 hours of service per week as assigned by Oakland
- 2) half-time appointments (25% FTE) that require up to a maximum of 10 hours of service per week as assigned by Oakland are listed below with the accompanying stipend and credits

Full Appointment Guidelines

A student with a FULL appointment, during Fall and Winter semesters, is expected to devote, on average no more than 20 hours per week to their duties as a graduate assistant.

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GRADUATE STUDY

OU Graduate Assistantship Programs

<u>Level</u> Program	ACADEMIC YEAR					
	Full Appointment		Fall 2016		Winter 2017	
	Stipend	Credits	Stipend	Credits	Stipend	Credits
<u>Doctoral</u>						
Engineering	14,000	16	7,000	8	7,000	8
All other programs	14,000	24	7,000	12	7,000	12
<u>Master</u>						
Engineering, Math & Sciences	6,500	16	3,250	8	3,250	8
All other programs	6,414	16	3,207	8	3,207	8

Half Appointment Guidelines

A student with a HALF appointment, during Fall and Winter semesters, is expected to devote, on average no more than 10 hours per week to their duties as a graduate assistant.

<u>Level</u> Program	ACADEMIC YEAR					
	Half Appointment		Fall 2016		Winter 2017	
	Stipend	Credits	Stipend	Credits	Stipend	Credits
<u>Doctoral</u>						
Engineering	7,000	8	3,500	4	3,500	4
All other programs	7,000	12	3,500	6	3,500	6
<u>Master</u>						
Engineering, Math & Sciences	3,250	8	1,625	4	1,625	4
All other programs	3,207	8	1,603.50	4	1,603.50	4

Summer Graduate Assistantships

There is no Graduate Study (GS) graduate assistant package funding for summer appointments. Units may elect to support Graduate Assistants, during the summer

term, by funding the stipend and tuition reduction from a grant, academic unit OR department resource. Such appointments give units the option of creating 12-month assistantships by combining their own summer resources with the Graduate Study funded positions for the academic year. This is designed to make OU assistantships more competitive, particularly in the international arena and recruitment of scholars.

Graduate assistants appointed for a 12 month term:

- Are not required to be enrolled in any courses during the summer
- Graduate assistant appointments must have a service obligation, for which the student receives a stipend.
- Graduate course work and/or research must contribute directly to the satisfaction of Oakland's degree requirements.

Graduate Assistantships during the summer term must comply with all policies and qualifications stated in previous sections of these guidelines. The stipend for the Summer semester shall be at the same level as the stipends for Fall and Winter semesters.

Tuition Reduction Benefits

Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning provides a tuition reduction equal to the full amount of tuition, excluding late fees and other fees assessed by Oakland, for each semester during the term of their appointment, up to the maximum number of credits per semester identified in the signed GA Agreement.

The tuition reduction will be applied on a per semester basis to graduate credits that satisfy Oakland's degree requirements; it will not pay assessments for non-program credits, ESL courses, audited courses or courses which a student repeats. Tuition reduction benefits may not be used for undergraduate credits; except for undergraduate classes, in accordance with graduate policy and part of an approved plan of study required to satisfy graduate degree requirements.

Tuition reductions for 12-month graduate assistantships may be applied to the fall, winter and/or summer semesters; and tuition reductions for 8-month graduate assistantships may only be applied to fall and/or winter semesters

This tuition reduction is a fringe benefit granted to the student, in excess of the reasonable compensation paid as a stipend, and it cannot be converted into a cash award. Tuition reduction benefits that are offered for a particular semester, but are not used in that semester, will be forfeited.

- Tuition reduction benefits are not a specific form of payment for services rendered.

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OU Graduate Assistantship Programs

- A tuition reduction is provided for graduate courses or research that contributes directly to the satisfaction of degree requirements.
- In circumstances where undergraduate courses are substituted, on an approved plan of study, no more than 12 credits will be allowed per graduate policy.
- Each semester a tuition reduction will be credited to the student's account according to the percentage of the assistantship (full-time service = 8 credits -or- half-time service = 4 credits).
- Any tuition reduction benefits (credits), which are not used during the term in which the student holds the appointment are forfeited to Graduate Study.
- Tuition reduction benefits earned as a teaching or research graduate assistant is not taxable. Tuition reduction benefits earned as an administrative graduate assistant is taxable.

Termination

Oakland may immediately terminate a graduate assistantship appointment, without prior notice to the student, if

- (a) they do not make satisfactory academic progress (minimum GPA = 3.0), or fail to perform all assigned service responsibilities in a satisfactory manner, as determined by their advisors or program chairperson;
- (b) they fail to comply with all rules, procedures or policies applicable to students at Oakland; or
- (c) if the Funds supporting their appointment are restricted, eliminated or reduced for any reason.

Appointments terminated for any reason on or before the date set by Oakland in the applicable Schedule of Classes as the last day for “official withdrawal” for that semester, including but not limited to voluntary withdrawal from the graduate assistant program, the student will be billed for tuition and costs

- (a) on a pro-rata basis for the remainder of the semester in which the appointment was terminated based upon the residency status as a graduate assistant; and
- (b) for any future semesters based upon the residency status prior to the appointment.

Pursuant to the United States Internal Revenue Code, a portion of the tuition reduction will be considered taxable compensation and will be reported on your Form W-2 if you are not engaged in research or teaching activities for the University.

Resignation of Graduate Assistantship

A student, who resigns from their Graduate Assistantship, must provide written notice to

the academic unit or department and the Office of Graduate Study. The stipend will terminate on the day the resignation is effective. Until the Office of Graduate Study receives written notification, of the effective resignation date from the academic unit or department, the student will continue to be paid their stipend.

Students who resign on or before the date set by Oakland in the applicable Schedule of Classes as the last day for “official withdrawal” for that semester, will be billed for tuition and costs (a) on a pro-rata basis for the remainder of the semester in which your appointment is terminated based upon your residency status as a graduate assistant; and (b) for any future semesters based upon your residency status prior to your appointment.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

For F-1 international students, Oakland will not approve an application for CPT if the CPT is scheduled to begin during a semester for which the student has been appointed as a graduate assistant, even if she/he voluntarily withdraw from the graduate assistant program.

Each CPT shall start at the beginning of the semester. Graduate Assistants (GA/TA/RA) who have 8 or 12 months appointments and want to voluntarily withdraw from the graduate assistant program to do a CPT, will have to inform the Office of Graduate Study at least 15 days prior to the end of their last semester as Graduate Assistant (GA/TA/RA) about their intentions to start CPT the following semester.

Time Limits

Graduate Assistantship positions, funded by the Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning, are limited to two-years for master’s degree students and four-years for doctoral students. If units wish to continue supporting a student beyond this time, it requires position funding from the school or college. Time limits help assure units of a regular allotment of graduate assistantships for recruiting purposes.

OU subscribes to the Resolution adopted by the Council of Graduate Schools which, among other provisions, states students are under no obligation to respond to assistantship offers prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In order to accept an assistantship offer at another institution after April 15, prospective graduate assistants must first obtain a written release from any other institution to which a previous commitment has been made.

The Application Process for Graduate Assistantships

A graduate student who wishes to apply for a Graduate Assistantship Award should request an application form directly from the department or academic unit in which he or she is interested. Steps in the Graduate Assistant application process are:

- 1) The applicant must complete an application for Graduate Assistantship Award form (available on graduate study website)
- 2) The applicant must submit the application form directly to the academic unit or department in which she or he is requesting an appointment. The applicant should not submit the application form to the Office of Graduate Study.
- 3) Before an applicant can be awarded a Graduate Assistantship, the applicant must be admitted to a graduate degree program.
- 4) The letter of offer and Graduate Assistant Agreement will come directly from the academic unit or department (except with an international applicant).
- 5) To accept a Graduate Assistantship appointment, the applicant must sign, date and return the Graduate Assistant Agreement to the academic unit or department.
- 6) A student who has been awarded a Graduate Assistantship receives the award only for the duration stated in the Graduate Assistant Agreement.

Qualifications

- 1) The student must possess a bachelor's degree from a regionally accredited institution prior to admission to graduate study and to the appointment of an assistantship. Academic credentials for all international students must be evaluated by NACES (National Association of Credential Evaluation Services).
- 2) Graduate students must be admitted to a degree program, and be in good standing, to receive an assistantship.
- 3) International students must have the appropriate student status with the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service. While school is in session, international students cannot exceed the 20-hour per week maximum service level during the academic year. During summer and other school breaks there is no hour limitation.

The Selection Process

Academic units and departments are accountable for the review and selection process for graduate assistantship appointments. Each department is responsible for ensuring

that graduate students selected are qualified for the position. Graduate Assistants whose academic standing and service record have been satisfactory may, in many cases, have their appointments renewed, subject to the availability of funds and the need for service. Graduate Assistantships, regardless of the funding source, are subject to the policies and procedures included in the Graduate Assistantship Guidelines. The steps in the appointment process are:

Graduate Study releases the annual Graduate Assistantship State-Funded Packages, for the next fiscal year beginning July 1st. The Deans for the College and Schools are responsible for allocating GA packages to the departments. The Deans will be notified in writing of any increases to the number of graduate assistantship packages, differentiated as Doctoral or Master, or increases in the stipend rate.

The departments are responsible for preparing and submitting Graduate Assistantship Agreements for reappointments to Graduate Study by April 15th. It is the responsibility of the academic dean, department chair or designee to notify those students who have not been recommended for an award.

By recommending a student for a Graduate Assistantship, the academic unit or department certifies that the student meets the qualifications stated in preceding sections of this guide.

The Graduate Assistantship Agreement, initiated by the academic unit or department must indicate the award period (semester/year) and the service level (full-time or half-time).

The student must sign and return the Graduate Assistantship Agreement to the academic unit or department, as acceptance of the offer or respond in writing declining the offer.

The academic unit or department submits the signed Graduate Assistantship Agreement and specified documentation to Graduate Study. Graduate Study will process the I-9 form, manage the employment verification process, produce the payroll record (stipend) and generate the tuition reduction award.

General Counsel has prepared the Graduate Assistantship Agreement. This Agreement serves as a contract between Oakland University and the graduate assistant. The academic unit or department may NOT alter this Agreement. Please contact Graduate Study if you have any questions as to language.

Graduate Assistants must be registered full-time (8 credit minimum) to satisfy the enrollment requirement

Tuition reductions are disbursed 10 days prior to the first date of class

Graduate assistants may not begin their assignment until Graduate Study has processed the I-9 form, confirmed employment eligibility, received the signed GA Agreement and appointment forms.

The stipends paid to graduate assistants are treated as taxable income by the Internal Revenue Service and the university is therefore obligated to withhold income taxes.

OTHER SOURCES OF FUNDING

Research GReAT Program

Please contact the Office of Research Administration (in Wilson Hall, phone: (248) 370-2762 or (248) 370-4111) to receive information on the GReAT Program.

New Program Budgets

New approved graduate programs, which have included graduate assistantships in their proforma budgets are funded from their program budgets. Once the program has received a positive 5-year budget review, and has been approved as a permanent program, the graduate assistantship dollars are merged into the Graduate Assistantship funds (package created and dedicated to the appropriate program in the college or schools) to ensure stipends are indexed with faculty salary increases.

King-Chavez-Parks Future Faculty Fellowships (KCP)

The King-Chavez-Parks Future Faculty Fellowship Program is administered by Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning with the support of the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Growth, King-Chavez-Parks Initiative. Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning holds a competition for KCP awards and provides recipients with financial assistance to pursue master's and/or doctoral degrees. A master's recipient can receive a maximum stipend of \$20,000, and a doctoral fellow can receive a maximum stipend of \$35,000. Preference is given to those pursuing a doctoral degree.

The fellowship service requirement is a three-year teaching service to the State of Michigan at the post-secondary level.

All Graduate Assistantship Awards must conform to policy or exceptions be approved by Graduate Study and Lifelong Learning.