



CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

Title: Graduate Research Assistant Policy

Date approved by President: Dec 1, 2025

Effective date: Dec 1, 2025

Responsible Official: Provost or Provost's Designee

Responsible University Office or Division: Office of the Provost

Related legislation and University policies: School of Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures ([here](#))

Review Period: 5 Years

Relates to: Faculty, staff, students

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance for supervisors and graduate students regarding appointments as Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs).

Background

Graduate students at Case Western Reserve University may receive financial support through various mechanisms, including tuition credit, tuition remission, teaching assistantships, research assistantships, administrative assistantships, and part-time student employment. This policy specifically addresses graduate research assistantships.

Appointment as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) supports a student's primary objective of obtaining a graduate degree by providing research training and financial support. This training complements other learning objectives through enhanced knowledge and hands-on skills in the general field of interest including experimental, analytical, and/or creative activities that develop project management skills, data acquisition and analysis, writing and publication skills, presentation skills, content knowledge, time management proficiency, and other ways of advancing experience and knowledge in their field or related field of study.

The general principle is that GRAs should be assigned activities that provide useful and meaningful experience in their major field or a related field, and/or in areas relevant to their

future career goals. If the assistantship is funded through a sponsored agreement, the graduate student must conduct activities necessary to that agreement, as directed by the principal investigator or designee. Research activities may form part of the faculty member's research project and may also support the student's dissertation research or preparation for such research. This work may also contribute to the university's broader research and discovery mission. GRAs supported by fellowships or institutional training grants/contracts are subject to the expectations and requirements of the funding agency, in addition to all university policies.

Eligibility for Appointment

To be eligible for a GRA appointment, graduate students must be enrolled in a degree program, maintain satisfactory progress toward their degree, and fulfill the research and/or training obligations of their appointment. Appointments are also contingent on the availability of funds and may be modified to respond to funding adjustments, and renewals are not guaranteed.

Period of Appointment

GRA appointments typically span one semester, 9-month, or 12-month periods, depending on the program and funding source. For one-semester and 9-month appointments, GRA duties typically begin around the first day of classes, as defined by the academic calendar. For 12-month appointments, duties commence as specified in the appointment letter. GRA appointments should be for no less than a full semester, unless prior written approval is granted by the dean of the academic unit making the appointment.

GRA Time Commitment

A full-time GRA appointment is considered a 50% appointment, equating to an average of 20 hours of GRA activities per week. A GRA's workload may vary weekly, depending on the specific tasks and responsibilities required, acknowledging the inherent fluctuations in research activities. Often a GRA's appointment duties may overlap with research for their own dissertation, especially in cases where their research is dually fulfilling the aims of a grant. Distinctions should be made in expectations associated with the GRA appointment versus expectations associated with the student's effort toward completion of a dissertation or master's thesis. It is the responsibility of the supervising faculty member and/or grant principal investigator (PI) to clarify expectations, including policies related to publication and other components of intellectual property.

If a GRA has a dispute or concern regarding assistantship requirements or distinctions with their academic progress, they should discuss solutions with their supervising faculty member or department chair (or dean if the unit does not have department chairs). If resolution is not achieved at the department level, the student may escalate their concern to the Dean of the School/College.

Additional Guidance

GRAs should consult the School of Graduate Studies Policies and Procedures (available [here](#)) and their program guidelines for policies and practices regarding university holidays and closings and leave of absence (e.g., parental and sick leave), as adherence to these policies is expected. Individual research projects and specific GRA responsibilities are determined at the discretion of the School/College, Department, and the faculty member designated as the Advisor/Principal Investigator. Examples of some typical GRA duties are described in the Graduate Research Assistant Policy Appendix.

GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT POLICY APPENDIX

Typical GRA duties may include (but are not limited to):

1. Conducting field or laboratory experiments and/or projects to expand knowledge and understanding in a given field(s)
2. Conducting literature reviews or library research
3. Collecting, coding, or analyzing data
4. Preparing materials for Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), or Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) review
5. Developing computer programs for process automation
6. Mentoring others on a research team as determined by the advisor
7. Brainstorming approaches for a research problem or application
8. Preparing journal articles, manuscripts, reports or conference presentations; as well as responding to reviews prior to publication
9. Carrying out projects at affiliated institutions (e.g., Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, hospitals)