

EFFECTIVE Spring 2020

GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK



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I. INTRODUCTION

Graduate assistantships are available to qualified, full-time, degree-seeking graduate students. An assistantship is awarded to a student to enable him/her/they to obtain academic or research experience while making progress toward a graduate degree.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are assigned individual duties consistent with the needs of the department and the experience and qualifications of the student. GAs have a professional role (albeit of an apprentice nature) in the University, and the duties of a GA are consistent with the teaching and research missions of the University.

All domestic graduate students wishing financial support from the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships must complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form each year. More information on the FAFSA is located at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. Students should direct questions related to financial aid or scholarships to the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. Its website is <http://financialaid.umbc.edu>.

GAs should become thoroughly familiar with the academic regulations of the Graduate School published in the Graduate School Catalog (<https://catalog.umbc.edu/index.php?catoid=24>) and on the Graduate School website, <http://gradschool.umbc.edu>, and with the special requirements of their program. This Handbook is a compilation of University policies and practices governing graduate assistantships.

II. APPLICABLE USM BOARD OF REGENTS POLICY

It is UMBC's intention to be, at all times, in full compliance with the University of System of Maryland (USM) Board of Regents policy on graduate assistantships, III – 7.11. The policy is on the USM website at <http://www.usmd.edu/regents/bylaws/SectionIII/III711.pdf>. If a Graduate Assistant or any other interested party discovers a discrepancy between this Handbook and the applicable BOR policy, the Graduate School requests that they inform the Associate Dean of the Graduate School as soon as possible.

The Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC) was created in accordance with the University System of Maryland (USM) Meet and Confer policy. This policy facilitates formal discussions between Graduate Assistants (GAs) and university administration about employment issues such as compensation and benefits. At present, the GAAC functions as a standing (permanent) committee of the GSA, providing a platform specifically for GAs to voice their concerns. The GAAC strives to productively work and coordinate with administrators to continue a good work environment and bring about positive changes to GAs. The GAAC can be contacted at this link: <https://gsa.umbc.edu/contact-gaac/>.

III. QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND SELECTION

A Graduate Assistant (GA) must be a full-time graduate student, enrolled in a degree-granting program, and registered in courses that lead toward the degree. Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who appear likely to render a high quality of service to the University by their teaching, research, and other activities.

Applicants must be able to perform the essential functions of their employment with or without reasonable accommodation. Accessibility & Disability Services administers requests for work-related accommodations for graduate students with a qualifying health condition. For more information, please email slazar@umbc.edu, call (410) 455-5745 or visit:

<https://accessibility.umbc.edu/employee-accommodation-request/>.

Applications for assistantships should be made directly to the department in which the applicant desires to study. Offers of assistantships are made contingent on available funds and admission of the student to a degree-granting graduate program.

In most cases, selection of GAs is made by the chairperson of the department and/or the GPD, with the recommendation of a graduate student recruitment committee or those responsible for graduate studies in that area. Selection of Research Assistants can also be made by individual faculty members who have external research grants. GAs hired outside of their academic departments are evaluated on the basis of their qualifications for the position.

UMBC Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

The University of Maryland Baltimore County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, physical or mental disability, age, sex, gender, pregnancy, gender identity or expression, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, creed, 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 statement. The most current non-discrimination policy statement is located at <http://humanrelations.umbc.edu/non-discrimination/>.

IV. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students are subject to additional rules articulated by the federal government. Differences between international students and domestic students include tax status, duration of stay at UMBC after graduation, and the ability to have additional on-campus employment. International students are strongly advised to direct any questions they have to International Education Services (IES). Its website is <http://ies.umbc.edu/>. Where there are contradictions or differences between this Handbook and information provided by IES to international students, IES is, in all instances, the prevailing authority.

V. CATEGORIES AND DUTIES

There are six (6) categories of employment for graduate students with assistantships: Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Peacemaker Assistant, Fellow, and Grader. The category of Grader has different benefits available than other assistantships, which are articulated in Section IX. All students employed through a graduate assistantship are known as Graduate Assistants (GAs).

In addition to performing duties as a GA, students will engage in scholarly endeavors as they pursue their degrees. These endeavors may require a commitment on the part of the student of well over 20 hours per week. The duties of the graduate assistantship and the scholarly tasks performed by the student may appear indistinguishable; however, they are fundamentally different. The graduate assistantship is akin to financial aid, providing resources to allow the student to obtain a degree. The scholarly endeavors are part and parcel of the pursuit of the graduate degree. A graduate assistant is first and foremost a student, and both the student and supervisor should ensure that job duties and academics remain balanced throughout the contract term.

Teaching Assistant (TA)

The specific duties of a Teaching Assistant (TA) vary from one department to another, but for the majority, assignments and responsibilities will fall into the following five categories:

- a) teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion section of a course;
- b) teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the director or directors of the course;
- c) assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative duties necessary for a course or courses;
- d) assisting with the administration of community programs, workshops, etc.; or
- e) assisting with general departmental administrative duties.

The Graduate School strongly recommends that TAs only serve as the instructor-of-record for a course if a mentoring plan between the TA and a supervising faculty member has been developed. The Associate Dean of the Graduate School is available to provide guidance on best practices for mentoring plans.

Grader

A Grader provides support in a teaching program by grading student assignments. Graders do not receive tuition remission.

A **Peaceworker Assistant** is a TA who participates in the Shriver Center Peaceworker Program. Students whose primary focus is community service that addresses the economic, social and/or cultural problems confronting urban America are eligible for a Peaceworker Assistantship. Supervision for these assistantship recipients is arranged by the Shriver Center. Its website is <http://shrivercenter.umbc.edu>.

Research Assistant (RA)

The duties of RAs vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of funding. These duties are performed under the direction and supervision of a faculty member. RAs may or may not be assigned to work on research that is directly applicable to the thesis or dissertation that is part of the requirements for the master's or doctoral degree. In either case, the scholarly activities that are necessary to complete the thesis or dissertation are separate and distinct from the RA and should not be considered part of the assistantship.

Fellowships are considered RAs and allow students to dedicate their full energy toward their education. Campus departments, as well as external fellowship sponsors, may require additional duties of the Fellow. These duties are performed under the direction and supervision of a faculty member. In all instances, Fellows are required to abide by the rules and responsibilities as articulated by the sponsor of the fellowship and by the rules promulgated by this Handbook.

Administrative Assistant (AA)

A few campus offices employ GAs in administrative roles. The Grad School discourages the use of this category because it has income tax implications for the student, as discussed in the Tax Status section (page 15) of this Handbook. Responsibilities vary, as do the durations of appointments. Usually AAs with such appointments perform administrative support functions but should not perform the duties of or replace a non-exempt Administrative Assistant. Please consult with the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School for Administration, Policy and Compliance if you are considering classifying an assistantship as an AA.

Graduate Assistants Also Serving as Part-time Adjunct Faculty

GAs can serve as part-time adjunct faculty. They must be registered as full-time students. If their total hours (GA hours plus PT Adjunct hours) go above 20 hours per week, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School must approve the extra hours via the Request for

Additional Service or Employment form located on the Graduate School website. In these instances, since they are considered students and faculty, GAs can opt to purchase employee parking and request a waiver of the mandatory transportation student fee or leave the transportation charge intact and continue with a student parking pass. For questions on the transportation fee waiver GAs should contact Student Business Services by submitting a Help ticket on myUMBC or calling (410) 455- 2288. For questions regarding employee parking, GAs should contact Parking Services at parking@umbc.edu or calling (410) 455-2551.

VI. APPOINTMENT TYPES & REAPPOINTMENT

An assistantship appointment may be full-time (20 hours per week) or part-time (10 hours per week). Appointments may not be for less than part-time. One-quarter, two-thirds, three-quarter, or other fractional appointments are not permitted.

GAs are generally appointed for either a regular academic year (9.5 months) or a 12-month period. The appointment may be for a shorter period if so specified in the appointment offer, but must be for at least eight continuous weeks in duration. The academic year appointment typically begins in mid-August and may end late in the spring semester or early summer. Starting and ending dates each year are determined by the department based on the University payroll calendar. GAs may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the department. In order to allow a larger number of qualified students to benefit from these positions, some departments have limited the number of years in which a student may serve as a GA.

Each department is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with University policy, for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships. In general, reappointment is dependent upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree, and the needs of the department. As with all faculty and staff positions, appointment and reappointment are also, always, contingent on the availability of funds. The continuation of an assistantship for the next year will typically be evaluated prior to the end of current appointment period. Except under justifiable circumstances, GAs whose appointments are for more than one semester will be notified of their appointments, and of decisions not to renew appointments, at least 60 days before the beginning or renewal of the appointment.

In cases where a GA is working more hours than those committed to in their appointment letter, on a regular basis, the GA should first bring the situation to the attention of their supervisor. If no action is taken by their supervisor, GAs should contact their Graduate Program Director and subsequently, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School for assistance with the matter.

VII. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT

The official letter of appointment for a graduate assistantship comes from the vice-president, dean, department chairperson, program director, or faculty member whose research project funds the assistantship. Departments must provide GAs a letter of appointment/reappointment annually. This letter will provide pertinent information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

- a) The length of the appointment;
- b) The start and end dates of the appointment;
- c) The weekly time commitment (either 10 or 20 hours);
- d) The basic responsibilities;
- e) The economic benefits (e.g., bi-weekly stipend, number of credits of tuition remission per

- semester, and health insurance);
- f) The department or office to which the GA will report and, name of supervisor.
 - g) An affirmation that the provisions of this Handbook apply to the appointment;
 - h) Any special requirements of the appointment related to leave, scheduling, or other terms;
 - i) The location at which the GA can obtain additional information on the provisions of this Handbook and means of resolving complaints¹.

The Graduate School must receive a copy of all appointment letters that have been accepted by GAs. For international students, the Director of International Education Services must also receive a copy.

Departments are required to use the appointment letter located on the Graduate School's website at: <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

Responsibilities can either be outlined in the appointment letter or an addendum (to the appointment letter) and discussed with the GA in the expectations meeting.

VIII. SALARIES AND STIPENDS

All GAs must be paid a stipend. Stipends are set by the supporting department but must be at least equal to the minimum stipend levels for Graduate Assistants published by the Graduate School. The minimum stipend levels are available on the Graduate School's website at <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/stipends/>. Regarding removal from payroll after defense, and consistent with best practices, the Graduate School recommends that departments maintain GAs on payroll for the duration of the semester in which they defend unless the student is leaving for a position elsewhere.

IX. BENEFITS AVAILABLE

Tuition Remission

Tuition remission benefits are typically based upon whether an assistantship is full-time or part-time. Although most GAs (except Graders) receive tuition remission, departments are not required to provide it. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department is providing this benefit.

- a) Full-time Assistantship (20 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that full-time GAs, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 10 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional or fewer credit hours.
- b) Part-time Assistantship (10 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that part-time GAs, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 5 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional or fewer credit hours.

For courses that are billed at a differential rate¹ (i.e., 799, 898, or 899), departments may base the tuition remission benefit on the number of credits for which the student is charged, not the number of credits in which the student is enrolled. Alternatively, tuition remission for these courses can be specified in the appointment letter.

¹ Discussed in more detail in Section X.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) appointed to a 12-month assistantship may also be eligible to receive tuition remission during the Summer session², in addition to the credit hours each Fall and Spring semester. TAs supported by the Office of Summer, Winter, and Special programs are typically offered tuition remission during the Summer session.

In every Fall, Spring, or Summer in which students serve as GAs, they must sign a Statement of Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission form initiated by the funding department and signed by authorized parties at the department level (in addition to the GA). Late tuition remission forms may result in late fees on student accounts. Payment of late fees will be the student's responsibility except in instances where the department did not initiate the form on time. Tuition remission is not automatically applied to a student's account. Tuition remission will be granted only for those courses deemed necessary for the completion of the student's degree as determined by the student's mentor and Graduate Program Director. Copies of all Statement of Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission forms are kept on file at funding departments as well as at the Graduate School.

It is important to note that GAs classified as Graders must also have this form on file to ensure that they receive the benefit of in-state tuition rate billing, although they are not entitled to tuition remission. The Statement of Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission is located on the Graduate School's website at: <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

Student Fees

Payment of student fees is mandatory and is the responsibility of the GA unless payment of fees is provided as an additional benefit by the supporting department. Student fees must be paid by the bill due date to avoid late fees. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department is providing this additional benefit.

In-State Tuition Rate Billing Status

During the semesters of the performance of the assistantship, GAs are billed at the in-state rate for tuition purposes. 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 status. The in-state status residency petition is available from the Office of the Registrar at <http://registrar.umbc.edu/>.

Health Insurance

All graduate students, including GAs, are eligible to enroll in the GA health insurance program. Specific details of the health insurance plan are available on the Graduate School's website at <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>. GAs may direct questions to University Health Services; its website is <http://www.umbc.edu/uhs>. Payment for enrollment in the GA health insurance program is the responsibility of the student unless it is paid by the department. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department will be providing this benefit.

² Discussed in more detail in Section X.

Retirement, Unemployment, and Social Security

Retirement contributions are not withheld from the salaries of GAs, and GAs are not entitled to retirement benefits. FICA taxes, comprised of Social Security and Medicare, and unemployment insurance are not withheld during the academic year when a GA is registered as a full-time³ student or during the Summer sessions when a student is registered for at least three (3) credits at all times (Summer Session I and Summer Session II). Registration requirements are discussed in more detail in Section X. GAs are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

Please see Section X for FICA information pertinent to International students.

Credit Union

GAs are eligible to join the Maryland State Employees Credit Union (SECU). For more information, please visit <<http://www.secumd.org>>.

Sick Leave

If a GA becomes ill, sick leave should be supported collegially, up to 40 hours for Full Time (20 hours Part Time) GAs during the contract year (this includes summer term for GAs supported during the summer session). After four consecutive days of sick leave, the supervisor may require the GA to provide a letter from a physician or other licensed health-care professional that states (1) the nature of the illness; (2) that the GA can or cannot return to work for health reasons; and, (3) the duration of the required sick leave. This letter can be submitted upon the GA's return to work.

Parental Leave Fellowships

In recognition of the challenges of balancing the demands of a graduate assistantship and parenting a new child, UMBC offers Fellowships for Parental Leave to improve the environment for new parents who are Graduate Assistants (GAs). Any GA is eligible to receive a Fellowship for: (1) the birth of a child; (2) the recent adoption of a child under the age of six; or (3) the assumption of other parenting responsibilities (e.g., foster parenting, legal guardianship) of a child under the age of six. Except for birth mothers as described below, the period of the Fellowship is six weeks⁴. During the Fellowship period, the GA retains her/his/their full stipend and benefits, provides no service to the University, and maintains enrollment as a full-time (9 credits) student⁵.

The University recognizes the need of birth mothers to respond to or to recover from the effects of pregnancy and/or the delivery of a child. If a birth mother believes that she requires a Fellowship period of more than six weeks, she must obtain a letter from her physician or other licensed health-care professional that provides (1) the nature of the need; (2) a statement that the GA cannot return to her duties for health reasons arising from the pregnancy and/or delivery; and (3) the duration of required absence beyond the initial six weeks.

Parental leave fellowships are only available during a time when a student is supported on a Graduate Assistantship. Students must have a Graduate Assistantship in the summer to be eligible for a parental leave fellowship in the summer.

³ FICA exempt status requires that a student be registered half-time, but a half-time student is not eligible to be a Graduate Assistant. Hourly workers may be registered half-time and still retain FICA exemption.

⁴ The Associate Dean may approve a Fellowship for a shorter period of time.

⁵ Applicable to fall and spring semesters only. See Section X for summer information.

In all instances, the GA should discuss his/her/their Fellowship plans with his/her/their Graduate Program Director (GPD) and/or supervisor as soon as possible to allow for maximum collegial support. All Fellowship requests must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and the GA's supervisor. Upon request, the Graduate School will reimburse the cost of the GA's stipend to the supporting department.

The Graduate School recommends that international students consult in advance with the Office of International Education Services before their period of parental leave.

Please access the Parental Leave Fellowship form here:

<https://umbc.app.box.com/s/zn8xru850da381trn10cbkb8zxd91usm>

Vacation

All GAs with part-time or full-time, 12-month appointments will be allowed paid time away from their duties during the course of the appointment. A full-time assistantship over a 12-month period carries with it the expectation that the student will be allowed 40 hours of paid leave. For part-time assistantships over a 12-month period, 20 hours of paid leave will be granted. This time away from duties must be taken during the current appointment and may not be accumulated or transferred, nor does it include time when the University is closed. It may be taken following reasonable prior notification and with the approval of the student's supervisor. Excess leave, unused at the end of the contractual appointment, will not be "paid-out" or financially compensated, but instead will be forfeited by the GA.

GAs with academic year (9.5-month) appointments (both part- and full-time) are not eligible to take vacation. If unusual circumstances arise, time away from duties for academic year GAs will be at the discretion of the department.

For GAs who are appointed to separate assistantships, neither of which is 12-months itself but whose durations sum to 12 months or more, the following procedures are to be used by the graduate community. If the second assistantship is an extension or logical derivation of the first, then the supporting department(s) must develop an agreement that grants the GA 40 (or 20 for part-time GAs) hours of paid vacation leave. However, if the assistantships are unrelated, then the GA is not entitled to paid vacation. The Associate Dean of the Graduate School is the final authority on which scenario is applicable in each case.

Other Long-Term Leave

Other long-term leave that is not discussed here will be handled on an individual basis. All leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

University Holidays and Closures

When the University is closed for a recognized holiday, due to inclement weather, or for any other reason, GAs will not be required to come to work. GAs who would normally work those days will receive their normal bi-weekly compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed with increased hours on other days. Holidays, inclement weather days, and other campus closures do not excuse GAs from completing work on-time. For example, homework assignments must be graded by the previously agreed-upon date. Further, to ensure instructional continuity, Teaching Assistants are expected to be available via e-mail or Blackboard. Under certain circumstances, selected GAs can be classified as essential personnel through the regular University process to maintain sensitive equipment and laboratory animals.

Library Privileges

Graduate Assistants are granted faculty-level library privileges at the Albin O.Kuhn Library and

Gallery. Additional information can be found at: <https://library.umbc.edu/circulation#borrow>

X. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Academic Year

Graduate Assistants (GAs) must be registered as full-time students whether they hold a full-time appointment or a part-time appointment. To be considered full-time, a student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credits in each Fall and Spring semester. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward his/her/their degree. GAs are not required to enroll in classes in the summer but they may choose to do so. Not enrolling during the Summer affects FICA exemption as detailed below.

In addition to courses leading toward the degree, GAs have the option to register for one of two graduate assistantship courses. These courses are GRAD 600 and GRAD 601.

- a) Full-time GAs, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- b) Part-time GAs in two different departments, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- c) Part-time GAs, whose total commitment is 10 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 600. GRAD 600 is fixed at three (3) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of six (6) credits in addition to this course.

Summer Session

In order to retain FICA-exemption during the summer, **domestic** GAs must be registered for at least three (3) credits at all times (Summer Session I and Summer Session II). It is important to note that most research and independent study courses are for the entire Summer; students should register for these at the start of the 12-week Summer Session I and thus do not need to register for Summer Session II.

Departments should take steps to ensure that appropriate sections of research and independent study courses are available for students to enroll in during Summer.

GRAD 603 provides two (2) credits towards the three (3) credit requirement at no charge. GAs can opt to pay for the additional one credit needed to be FICA exempt or have FICA withheld from their paychecks (FICA will also be charged to the supporting department or grant).

International students on GAs are not required to enroll in courses over the summer. International students who are considered Non-Resident Aliens (NRA) for tax purposes are not subject to FICA withholding. However, generally after five years in the US, international students are considered "residents for tax purposes," at which point they are subject to FICA withholding. International GAs are provided with tax software through IES to assist them in establishing their tax status (NRA or resident for tax purposes) and to complete any necessary tax forms. For more information on FICA, international GAs should consult:

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/foreign-student-liability-for-social-security-and-medicare-taxes>

<https://www.irs.gov/government-entities/federal-state-local-governments/student-fica-exception>

For more information on summer registration, please visit:

<https://umbc.app.box.com/s/2gh6oou1rdop030fi54ld29mfifpi96f>.

Notes Applicable to Fall, Spring, and Summer

- a) GAs are not billed tuition or fees for GRAD 600, GRAD 601, or GRAD 603;
- b) GAs receive credit towards full-time status from GRAD 600 and GRAD 601;
- c) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 are not eligible for financial aid, nor are they considered when determining financial aid eligibility;
- d) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 do not appear on transcripts.
- e) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 will appear at registration to be for 0 credits. However, GAs are receiving the proper number of credits (3, 5, and 2, respectively).
- f) GRAD 600, GRAD 601 and GRAD 603 are optional (not required).

Master's thesis research (799) is a variable (2-9) credit course (billed at 1/2 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Pre-candidacy doctoral dissertation research (898) (for students who have not reached the doctoral candidacy stage) is a variable (3-9) credit course (billed at 1/3 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Doctoral dissertation research (899) (for students who have reached the doctoral candidacy) is a fixed (9) credit course (billed at 2/9 rate).

Special Note: Ph.D. students seeking to be FICA exempt for summer, and who have reached candidacy, may use 898 (pre-candidacy doctoral dissertation research) towards enrolling in 3 credits.

Students signing up for either 898 or 899 for FICA exemption during summer are not required to also sign up for GRAD 603. If using 898, the minimum enrollment of 3 credits (billed at one credit) will satisfy FICA exemption requirement. If using 899, the minimum enrollment of 9 credits (billed at two credits) will satisfy FICA exemption requirement.

Graduate Assistants Enrolled in Undergraduate Courses

At times, there may be a need for graduate students to enroll in undergraduate courses to ensure success in graduate programs. Graduate students are billed for all courses (graduate and undergraduate) at the graduate tuition and fee rate. In-state and out-of-state GAs will be charged in-state graduate tuition and fee rates for undergraduate courses.

XI. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP

The GA works directly under the supervision of the department that offers the appointment. The department determines the assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for reappointment. The department 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 department chair or program director, any duly-appointed executive committees and assistants to the chair, and/or the faculty member assigned to supervise a particular course, laboratory session, or research project; or any administrator of a non-academic unit.

XII. ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR DOMESTIC STUDENTS

Fall and Spring Semesters

Full-time GAs are not eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland beyond the 20 hours per week associated with the assistantship.

Part-time GAs are not eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland for more than 10 additional hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with the assistantship.

Any exceptions must have the prior approval of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The mechanism by which to request this approval is at

<http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

NOTE: International GAs are only allowed to work additional hours in fall/spring if approved for CPT. More information on CPT can be found at <https://ies.umbc.edu/international-students-f-1/current-students-employment/working-off-campus/>

Winter and Summer Sessions

Full-time GAs (Domestic and International) are eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland up to an additional 20 hours per week beyond the 20 hours associated with their assistantship in winter and summer sessions. Part-time GAs (Domestic and International) are eligible to work up to an additional 30 hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with their assistantship. However, employment may not exceed a 40-hour work week.

NOTE: Approval from the Associate Dean is NOT needed for GAs working additional hours during summer and winter. **The Overage Form is not required.** However, an Amendment to the Appointment Letter IS required for GAs working additional hours in winter (only). The amendment is not necessary for extra hours worked in summer.

The Amendment to the Appointment Letter can be found at <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

Supporting departments may set additional prohibitions on additional employment.

XIII. COMPLETION OF ASSIGNED DUTIES

The performance of duties by a GA is a fundamental component of any graduate assistantship. The Graduate School requires each GA to affirm completion of his/her/their assigned duties on a regular basis. The Graduate School recommends that such an affirmation occur every semester using the Statement of Completion of Duties by a Graduate Assistant (Semester) available on the Graduate School's website at <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

GAs funded (fully/partially) by Federal Work Study must complete the affirmation per pay period using the Statement of Completion of Duties by a Graduate Assistant (Pay Period), which is also available on the Graduate School's website at <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/forms/>.

In all instances, the affirmations are retained in a reasonable manner, by the supporting

department, for at least three years and until audit requirements are met⁶.

Departments may, at their discretion, utilize a different process and schedule to allow GAs to affirm the completion of assigned duties. For example, a department can choose to include part or all of winter term with a fall or spring semester as opposed to treating it as an independent semester. A process or schedule created by a department must adhere to the following principles:

- GAs are not employees of UMBC; therefore, departments cannot use employee timesheets for the affirmation;
- The period of time encompassed by the affirmation must be clear;
- The affirmation may not occur less frequently than once per semester;
- The affirmation by the GA and the approval by the supervisor must be in writing; and
- The total stipend of a GA cannot be reduced because the department did not assign duties during a portion of the graduate assistantship.

XIV. PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Each department employing GAs is responsible for developing clear descriptions of the duties required of students in these positions; these descriptions should be sufficiently specific to make meaningful evaluation of performance feasible and permit external evaluation of the approximate equity of the workloads associated with the different varieties of duties assigned. Each GA should be provided with the appropriate position description prior to commencing each semester of appointment⁷, and with clear information regarding supervising authority and the criteria and structure of how performance will be evaluated.

An annual, written, performance evaluation is required for all GAs. Each department is responsible for determining and implementing procedures for review and evaluation of GAs. Therefore, the process of evaluation will vary; it may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluations. A sample GA evaluation form can be found at <https://umbc.app.box.com/s/btlkn1npff38ynak8s8yc7eaocvso9ma>.

Results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the GA. Documentation of evaluations should be maintained by departments. A memo, with names of GAs who received annual performance reviews, must be submitted to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, after evaluations are completed.

GAs are encouraged to document work-related experiences for future employment. Faculty members should agree to provide letters of reference for work done which will be included in the GAs departmental file.

⁶ The UMBC Interim Policy on Records Management, VI--6.10.01, does not provide specific retention procedures for this exact type of record. The requirement articulated here is consistent with the intention of the Policy.

⁷ 9.5 month and 12--month graduate assistantships only require annual job descriptions unless duties change during the original appointment period. Teaching Assistants require job descriptions for each course.

XV. MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

Several departments have formal or informal structures for handling complaints of GAs and graduate students. An attempt should always be made first to resolve difficulties at the departmental level.

In addition, the University has in effect procedures for orderly action on specific issues such as race discrimination, sex discrimination, academic misconduct, sexual harassment, arbitrary and capricious grading, and student academic and non-academic misconduct. Mediation of disputes between GAs and their program is handled by the mediation policy found at <https://catalog.umbc.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=716>. A summary of the major components is provided below.

Informal Consultation

GAs having unusual difficulties with their assignments, should discuss the matter with the individual faculty members who serve as their supervisors. If the problem is not resolved, GAs should bring the matter to the attention of the Graduate Program Director and/or the chairperson of the department.

Formal Complaints

If a GA does not receive satisfaction at the departmental level, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The Associate Dean is available to mediate any difficulties, whether they are related to work as a GA or as a graduate student. The Dean and Associate Dean of the Graduate School are directly concerned with all academic problems of graduate students that require mediation beyond the department. As described in the Mediation Policy (<https://catalog.umbc.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=716>), the Associate Dean of the Graduate School may convene a special Mediation Committee of the Graduate Council.

XVI. CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE

In their teaching and research activities, all GAs are subject to the ethical precepts and code 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 institutional obligations. Violation of any of these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action. The minimum expectation of GAs includes behavior in compliance with the UMBC Code of Student Conduct located at <http://www.umbc.edu/sjp/pdfs/2015InterimCodeofStudentConduct.pdf>.

XVII. TERMINATION

An appointment may be terminated before expiration of the appointment specified duration under unusual and compelling conditions. Unusual and compelling conditions include voluntary mutual agreement, between the University and the GA, circumstances beyond the control of the University and GA, and behavior of the GA.

Circumstances beyond the control of the University and the GA include, but are not limited to:

- a) discontinuance of the work in which the appointment is made;
- b) discontinuance of funding or budgetary appropriations;
- c) discontinuance if either party's (i.e. University's or GA's) performance is rendered impossible, hazardous, or is otherwise prevented, impaired, or delayed due to sickness,

inability to perform, accident, interruption or failure of means of transportation, Act(s) of God, riot, strike, labor difficulty, war (including civil war), embargo, epidemic, pandemic, evacuation, fire, flood, explosion, earthquake, quarantine restriction, any act or order of any civil or military authority, acts of any government, acts of governing authority, and/or any other cause or event, similar or dissimilar, beyond that party's control ("Force Majeure Event"). If a Force Majeure event arises, then each party's obligations with respect to this appointment shall be excused, or suspended if reasonably postponed with appropriate pro rata reductions, and neither party will have any liability in connection therewith. The University reserves the right to maintain the safety of its staff and of the premises by any means, including, but not limited to, suspending or terminating this appointment. Both parties acknowledge and agree that they are entering into this appointment at a time when COVID-19 has disrupted and caused the termination or cancellation of many contracted services. The parties also acknowledge and agree that, while the COVID-19 response and evolution of impact(s) is current and ongoing, COVID-19 is a Force Majeure event, as defined above, and, with the knowledge that COVID-19 will continue to be a Force Majeure event for purposes of this appointment, notwithstanding, the parties wish to enter into this appointment with full knowledge and agreement that this Agreement may be cancelled, terminated, or suspended under the Force Majeure paragraph above. Each party agrees that the cancelling, terminating, or suspending party shall not be responsible for any damages sustained by the other party.

Behavior of the GA that may lead to termination that include, but are not limited to:

- a) incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty;
- b) misconduct that is job-related;
- c) delinquency in academic work;
- d) moral turpitude; academic misconduct;
- e) enrolling in courses unrelated to the degree being pursued;
- f) violation of the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities for Academic Integrity;
- g) violation of federal or state law;
- h) misrepresentation or false data given on graduate application material;
- i) violation of the UMBC Code of Student Conduct.

Prior to Termination, due to behavior of the GA, departments are required to take the following actions:

1. Discuss the intent to terminate the GA with the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
2. Hold a verbal counseling session with the Graduate Assistant, document the session in writing and provide a copy of the summary to the Graduate Assistant and to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
3. Except in the most egregious instances, allow a reasonable time-frame for improvement. Additional counseling, including a written warning of termination, may be issued. Improvement and counseling time-frame will be determined by the department in collaboration with Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
4. Except in the most egregious instances, the Graduate Assistant will receive written notice of termination at least two weeks prior to the effective date of termination.

The amount of the stipend and the tuition remission benefit will be prorated based on termination date.

XVIII. TAX STATUS

As a result of the U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987, all graduate students must pay income tax on stipends received for graduate assistantships.

As per Internal Revenue Service regulation IRC 127, tuition remission awarded to GAs is to be considered taxable income once the total tuition remission amount exceeds \$5,250 in a calendar year. UMBC GAs classified as Research Assistants (RAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs) are exempt from taxation of tuition remission, however, **GAs classified as Administrative Assistants (AAs) who receive tuition remission are limited to \$5,250 in tuition remission in a calendar year.**

If a GA has any questions, it is best, in every case, to consult tax counsel or the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

XIX. HOURLY EMPLOYMENT

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. An hourly employee may work a maximum of 20 hours per week. An hourly employee is not a GA and is not entitled to any of the benefits provided for GAs. For further guidance on graduate students who are hourly employees, please consult <http://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/stipends/>.

XX. THE CLERY DISCLOSURE OF CAMPUS SECURITY POLICY AND CAMPUS STATISTICS

In accordance with the guidelines established by UMBC and pursuant to federal law, identified as the “Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998,” all currently enrolled students, campus employees, and all prospective students and prospective employees are entitled to request and receive a copy of the UMBC Annual Campus Security Report. The report contains crime statistics about certain specified crimes/incidents that have been reported to the UMBC Police Department and/or Campus Security Authorities over the past three years and have occurred either on-campus, in off-campus buildings or property owned or controlled by the University, or on public property adjacent to campus. The report also contains policies and practices pertaining to campus security, crime reporting, alcohol and drugs, victims’ assistance programs, student discipline, campus resources, community safety alerts, crime prevention, access to campus facilities/properties as well as personal safety tips. The report encourages the reporting of all crime occurrences. The report describes how and to whom to report crimes. Copies of this report may be obtained by calling (410) 455-5555, in person from the UMBC Police Department, or on the UMBC Police Department’s website, which is <http://police.umbc.edu/>.

XXI. TITLE IX INFORMATION

All new GAs are required to take specific Title IX training in addition to what is generally required for all students.

For more information on mandatory Title IX training for GAs, please consult <https://courage.umbc.edu/training/>.

Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct:

UMBC is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of the campus community and recognizes its responsibility to maintain a campus environment which is free from Sexual Misconduct, and other Related Misconduct. UMBC’s [Policy on Prohibited Sexual Misconduct](#) expressly prohibits all forms of Discrimination and Harassment on the basis of an individual’s sex (including pregnancy), gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression in its educational programs and activities or with respect to terms and conditions of employment.

XXII. RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH TRAINING

The Office for Research Protections and Compliance (ORPC) at UMBC has stated that institutions receiving funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) must have a set of established training requirements in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). For example, NSF expects UMBC to be able to verify that graduate students and postdoctoral research associates receiving NSF funds, either in salary support or stipends to conduct research, receive RCR training. NIH requires the submission of an instructional plan addressing the responsible conduct of research for any NIH student training, career development award (individual or institutional), research education grant, and dissertation research grant. In either case, faculty mentors or advisers are encouraged to be familiar with the RCR training that their students and postdoctoral researchers have taken to enhance the discussion of RCR. In the interest of maintaining a documented code of ethics, professionalism, and research integrity, The Graduate School at UMBC and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs will be extending the RCR training requirement according to one of the options below to all graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, in all disciplines.

For Post-Doctoral fellows, PhD students, and Master's Thesis students, documented training can take either of the following forms:

- Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) web-based materials. RCR training can be completed using the CITI modules, which include comprehensive web-based course materials, a series of short content exams, and a completion certificate. Detailed instructions are available on the ORPC website: <https://research.umbc.edu/2135-2/>. It is highly recommended that departments supplement these modules with in-person discussions that address the nuances within the disciplines.
- A training course that is related to responsible research. The course may be offered by the academic department, or other entity, so long as the training culminates with an acknowledgement of completion. The completion of training may result in either a designation on the transcript or by written acknowledgment of the training filed with the Graduate School. This alternative training must also be documented within the department and accessible for review by ORPC.

Each department can recommend or require that students take the training earlier, but the Graduate School will conduct a compliance check at the candidacy stage for doctoral students and prior to the thesis submission for Master's students. The Graduate School has added an "RCR certification checkbox" to the "Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy" form for doctoral students. For Master's students, compliance will be documented when the Master's thesis committee nomination form is completed and submitted to the Graduate School.

Optional training for Master's students who are not completing a thesis:

- Training that is related to responsible professional conduct and ethics. Master's students who are not completing a thesis may be required by their respective department/program to provide proof of training in the area of professional conduct, ethics, or related area depending on the student's course of study. In many cases, a course in Professional Ethics is an appropriate substitute for this requirement. For those master's students who do not have access to an actual course (which will be designated on the transcript), an acknowledgement of completion should be filed with the department/program. An electronic copy of the certification of completion is sufficient for tracking purposes.

Other Compliance Training

Other compliance training for research activities involving animals, human subjects, biohazardous materials use or situations involving conflicts of interest or export-controlled items are required by regulations specific to the research activity. This training is separate from RCR training.

Information on compliance training at UMBC can be found here: <https://research.umbc.edu/office-of-research-protections-and-compliance/>.