Graduate Research Assistant Overview

Description

A Graduate research assistant (GRA) is considered a student and not an employee of the University. Per the U.S. Department of Labor, no employment relationship exists between a GRA and the University. GRA duties may include:

- Perform independent research under the direction of a RIT faculty member
- Engage in literature searches
- Perform data analysis
- Design an experiment
- Assist in a faculty member's laboratory
- Co-author a resulting research paper

Position requirements

1. Student is a full-time or full time equivalent graduate student at RIT's Henrietta campus
2. Student is conducting original, professional-level research which is generally associated with fulfilling the requirements of external grants
3. Student is under close supervision of RIT faculty/staff
4. The research environment is provided by RIT
5. A GRA cannot exceed 100% effort which is the equivalence of 20 hours. This time limit does not include time spent by the GRA on their own research to satisfy the requirements for an advanced degree. If a GRA is at 100% effort, they cannot hold in any other work position on campus (i.e. GTA, GA)

Student Stipends

- Students in GRA positions do not receive wages or a salary. GRA's receive a semi-monthly stipend payment. The semi-monthly schedule releases payments on the 15th and the last day of each month.
- Stipends may be calculated based on a percent effort expected from the GRA's, but stipends payments are not based on actual hours worked.
- Deductions may not be made based on a GRA's performance. If concern arises regarding satisfactory progress on research, faculty must address the concern with the student to facilitate successful progress.
- Stipend rate should fall within RIT's stipend rates for graduate students.
- GRA's are entitled to time off during break weeks between academic terms and observed University holidays. Academic terms are considered active times for research and training and requests for time off are granted at the sole discretion of the faculty advisor. Stipend payments cannot be reduced or modified for leave, vacation, or sick time.
- *Tax Treatment:* For U.S. citizens and resident aliens, stipends do not generally have tax taken out at the time of payment but may be taxable and reportable at the time of your tax return filing. For non-resident aliens Fellowship, Traineeship, and External Funding are taxed at the time of payment. The GRA will receive a Form 1099 (U.S. residents) and/or 1042S (international students). The academic department should advise the GRA of their U.S. tax reporting responsibility when the appointment is offered. More information is available here.
  - International students will receive an email from support@online-tax.net with instructions on how to retrieve it.
  - 1042-S forms will be available through the GLACIER system, https://online-tax.net/
  - Students must keep SIS up-to-date with current address information. Email accpay@rit.edu when changes are made, so they can make the update in Oracle.
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Graduate Research Assistant FAQ

FAQ

Why are GRAs and GTRNs not considered employees?
Both GRA and Graduate Trainees (GTRN) are positions held by graduate students. Activities in these roles are directly related to the student's program of study and are performed under the supervision of a faculty member who provides training on a research project, or under the close supervision of faculty/staff who provides training that would be given in an educational environment. Both positions are typically funded through external grants or contracts. GRA and GTRN positions receive a stipend and, usually, tuition remission, in support of their study and participation in the position.

The primary beneficiary of the activities in these positions is the student as their participation in the GRA or GTRN satisfies a degree requirement or they receive credit toward their degree, such as the research activities contribute to their research credits and thesis or dissertation research.

How is the GTRN different from a GRA?
These positions are more similar than different. However, GTRN activities can expand beyond research projects and may include activities related to professional development, career training, and curricular activities related to the requirements of the graduate student's degree program.

Why are payments held up?
The most common reasons a GRA payment is held up are: (1) the first payment needs to be approved in Oracle by the supervisor, (2) the student has not yet submitted direct deposit details at Supplier Payment Management, (3) student has not submitted their Glacier information (for international students), or (4) the student is not at full-time or full-time equivalent (FTE) status and need to either register for courses or complete the FTE form.

Once the issue is resolved, the student will receive the back payments.

Does a GRA receive tuition remission?
GRA's may receive tuition remission. More information about tuition remission is available here https://www.rit.edu/srs/graduate-tuition-remission-grants.

Can a graduate student be in a GRA and GTA at the same time?
Yes, a graduate student can be in a GRA, Graduate Teaching Assistant, and/or Graduate Assistantship position concurrently. The effort of all positions cannot exceed 100% or 20 hours/week during the academic year. Supervisors and students must follow the requirements, set-up, and tracking for each position. The student will receive pay and/or stipend based on how each position is managed and payments are made.

Can a student preform GRA research remotely?
Under some circumstances students can be granted permission to conduct research from a remote location. Guidelines for remote student research can be found here. Students and supervisors seeking approval must fill out the following forms for domestic or international remote GRA research.

Can a student be in a GRA position if they are in a fellowship program?
In some cases, receiving financial support from one source prohibits additional support from another. If a student is already receiving fellowship support, the Graduate Program Director should contact Sponsored Programs Accounting (SPA) before offering a graduate assistantship, especially if either the fellowship or GRA appointment are federally-funded.

Both merit-based scholarships and tuition remission are non-taxable payments made to a graduate student for qualified education expenses such as tuition and fees. Both payments are made directly to a student's account by the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. Graduate assistants (GRA, GTA, or GA) can receive both tuition remission and a merit-based scholarship.

> Definitions:
> - Merit-based scholarships are awarded based on academic merit and are not contingent on the graduate student providing services to the University.
> - Tuition remission is one component of an assistantship package awarded to students through their academic department. Student with GA or GTA positions also receive taxable wages for services through payroll. GRAs receive a taxable stipend through accounts payable.

Graduate assistantship policy requires students to be matriculated and enrolled full-time in a graduate program. What should be done when a student is completing their thesis or dissertation and no longer taking classes?
To receive tuition remission and/or a stipend/payment in a graduate assistantship position (GRA, GTA, GA), the student must be registered for the equivalent of 9 credit hours through a combination of course credit and equivalency as defined by the Registrar's Office. The academic department should send a completed Full-time Equivalency Form to the Registrar's Office.

Can a GRA appointment continue into the summer semester?
Yes, students can be in GRA positions in the summer. Departments may need to complete a FTE form to demonstrate full time equivalency for the student in the summer. Summer GRA positions may be considered equivalent up to 9 units. Non-credit work on a thesis or required research project may also be considered equivalent up to 9 units.

Can an international student work another job on or off campus while in a GRA position?
International students should consult with International Student Services before participating in any form of off-campus employment. More information is available at their website: https://www.rit.edu/iss/employment.

Graduate Research Assistant Proceedures

Setting up a GRA

The approximate set-up time for a GRA is one week, though this could be extended for international students who need to complete actions in Glacier. It is recommended to begin setup for a new GRA two weeks prior to its start. For additional information, a training video for setting up a GRA payment is available here:
https://www.rit.edu/controller/TrainingVideos/Oracle/GRAResearchAndStipendPayments/GRAResearchAndStipendPayments.html

Pay Rates

- Stipend ranges are available here under: *Graduate Assistant Guides* and the link *Graduate Assistant Pay Rates*.
- The ranges have been developed so that colleges and graduate programs are able to provide competitive support to graduate assistants. The amounts of stipends a graduate assistant in any classification receives should be based on the student's qualifications and should be consistently applied across all graduate assistants in a particular department, discipline or program. The sources of funds used to pay for the appointment should not be considered when determining the stipend amount.
- Depending on how a program sets up the payments, a student may receive more or fewer payments in a particular semester. While this does not change the total stipend amount a student receives, the number of payments per semester could change the amount a student receives per payment. This should be communicated to the student. Payments can be reviewed by clicking on *Releases* when setting up or reviewing a GRA in Oracle.
- Summer stipend ranges are calculated by dividing the academic year rate by 9 months and multiplying by 3 summer months.
- The recommended compensation levels and tuition remission limitations do not apply to federal and non-federal programs that specifically support graduate and post-doctoral study and research training such as the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program, NIH National Research Service Sward, and GEM Fellowship programs.

Department Actions for Setting up GRA

1. You will need Oracle access to *RIT Research Assistant/Participant Payments*. Information on obtaining access is available here.
2. Verify GRA student's information including name, UID, citizenship, mailing and email addresses
3. In Oracle access the *RIT Research Assistant/Participant Payments* application
4. Select Onboarding
5. Use student's UID to look up student. *Note*: if anything is incorrect or missing, the student will need to update their information in SIS
6. Click Create/Confirm and update
7. Student will get an email with information about any necessary paperwork they need to complete and directions for setting up direct deposit.
8. **Wait at least 1-hour for information to update before proceeding to next step**
9. In Oracle go back into *RIT Research Assistant/Participant Payments* and select *Add Payment* from Menu
10. Search for student by last 4 digits of UID
11. GRA status should say active. *Note*: Glacier status is for International students and indicates if the international student has submitted appropriate glacier paperwork for taxability of international students.
12. Make necessary selections such as GRA or stipend payment (one time); master's or PhD; time commitment such as 100% (indicates anticipated hours devoted to GRA research each week, e.g. 100% commitment anticipates approximately 20 hours/week)

13. Set start and end dates that align with the pay period
14. Enter total amount of the payments and be sure it is between the minimum and maximum amounts in the system (these amounts are set at the University level)
15. Upload any supporting documents for the GRA or stipend such as participant agreement forms
16. Under *Accounts* list the expense accounts that will provide funding for the stipend. *Note*: if you type in part of the account number it will bring up a search. If the account is not listed, then it has not been enabled in the system. The account will need to be enabled. More information is available [here](#).
    - Object code for GRA master's stipend is 82570
    - Object code for GRA PhD stipend is 82575
17. Click *Add Row* to add accounts
18. Be sure the percents (if multiple accounts) adds to 100% and the line amount adds up to the total stipend amount
19. Check form for accuracy and click *Save* (this will take 10-30 second)
20. Click on the *Preview Release* button to view the number of payments, amount and date range for payments and verify that is correct
21. Click on the *Create Release* button to send payment details to Accounts Payable (AP) staff
22. Approvals will be sent through Oracle to all necessary approvers. Once approved the student is ready to receive stipend payments
23. If you need to edit payment details, go back into *Research and Stipend Payments Application* and select Payment Search. This will show all payments you have set up and their status. If you need to update a record, choose the *Edit* button. *Notes:*
    a) If you make edits, then the payment will need to be sent again for approvals.
    b) If the amount of the stipend is changed, the GRA needs to be canceled and then a new GRA needs to be entered with the remaining payment dates and the remaining amount to be paid on the GRA.
    c) When a GRA is canceled, it is best practice to email graforms@rit.edu to let Accounts Payable know it has been canceled.

Students Actions for a GRA position
Students will get an email with information about any necessary paperwork they need to complete and directions for setting up direct deposit. The student will need to take the following actions:
1. Confirm you are enrolled full time or full time equivalent for the term
2. Ensure your current address in SIS us up to date and a U.S. address. Students must keep SIS up to date with current address information. Email accpay@rit.edu when changes are made, so they can make the update in Oracle.
3. Complete steps for direct deposit to a U.S. bank account in. your name. Complete your bank information setup at [Supplier Payment Management](#).
4. Complete any Glacier paperwork (international students)

Questions and Contacts
For questions about student's GRA status or payment contact GRAforms@rit.edu
Find up-to-date information about GRA positions at:
https://www.rit.edu/controller/student-expense-reimbursement