

Graduate Research Assistant Overview

Description

A Graduate research assistant (GRA) conducts original, professional-level research in their field of study, which is primarily for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements for an advanced degree.

Tasks for this role could 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

Details:

- This is a student, non-employee position; no employment relationship exists between the student and the University. Since no employment relationship exists, the student is not subject to Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) or New York labor law.
- Student receives a stipend or subsistence allowance paid bi-weekly
- A GRA cannot exceed 100% effort, which is the equivalent of 20 hours per week. This time limit does not include time spent by the GRA on their own research to satisfy the requirements for an advanced degree.
- Students in this role may receive tuition remission. Tuition remission is uncommon for master's students and is dependent on available funding. More information about tuition remission is available [here](#).

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 the close supervision of RIT faculty/staff
4. The research environment is provided by RIT
5. If a GRA is at 100% effort, which is the equivalent of 20 hours per week, they cannot hold a work position on campus (i.e., GTA, GA, GTRN)

Student Stipends

- Students in GRA positions do not receive wages or a salary. GRAs receive a bi-weekly stipend payment.
- Stipends may be calculated based on a percentage effort expected from the GRAs, but stipend payments are not based on actual hours worked.
- Deductions to stipends may not be made based on a GRA's performance or hours worked. If concern arises regarding satisfactory progress on research, the faculty must address the concern with the student to facilitate successful progress.
- Stipend rates should fall within RIT's stipend rates for graduate students defined in the Graduate Assistant Payrates document posted on the student employment website under [Graduate Assistant Guides](#). The ranges have been developed so that colleges and graduate programs can provide competitive support to graduate assistants within their discipline.
- 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 Award, and GEM Fellowship programs.

- 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/>

Student Actions for a GRA position

The approximate set-up and approval 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 before its start. Students will need to take the following actions for a GRA position.

1. Confirm you are enrolled fulltime or full-time equivalent for the term
2. Ensure your current address in SIS is up to date and a U.S. address. Students must keep their SIS information up to date with their current address.
3. Complete all steps in your task list in Workday, including setting up direct deposit.
4. Complete any Glacier paperwork (international students)
5. Accept the GRA position

Questions and Contacts

- For questions about a student's GRA position or payment, contact studentemployment@rit.edu
- For questions about the GRA position or expectations, contact your faculty advisor
- Guidelines and forms for GRA supervisors are available at <https://www.rit.edu/careerservices/employers/on-campus-supervisors>
- On campus employment information for students <https://www.rit.edu/careerservices/students/on-campus-employment>

Graduate Research Assistant 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 provide 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. This is often because the research activities of the GRA 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 position is still going through approvals, you can track its progress in Workday, (2) the student has not yet accepted the offer letter in workday, (3) the student has not completed all tasks for the position in Workday, including setting up direct deposit, (4) all tasks were not completed before to the first pay period end date, (5) student has not submitted their Glacier information (for international students), or (6) the student is not at full-time or full-time equivalent (FTE) status and needs 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?

Students in this role may receive tuition remission. Tuition remission is uncommon for master's students and is dependent on the funding source. More information about tuition remission is available [here](#).

Can a graduate student be a GRA and GTA at the same time?

Yes, a graduate student can hold a GRA, Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), and/or Graduate Assistant (GA) position concurrently. The effort of all positions cannot exceed 100% or 20 hours per week during the academic year. Supervisors and students must follow the requirements, set-up, and tracking for each position. The student will receive a salary and/or a stipend based on each position.

Can a student perform 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 is 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, GTRN, GTA, or GA) can receive both tuition remission and a merit-based scholarship.

Graduate assistantships require 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?

During the academic year, 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 to receive tuition remission and/or a wage or stipend in a graduate assistantship position (GRA, GTRN, GTA, GA). 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 an [FTE form](#) to demonstrate full-time equivalency for the student in the summer if the student is in a continuation of thesis or research course. If the student is not in a research or continuation of research course enrollment in the summer, approval for a summer GRA must be granted by the Dean of the Graduate School through the Workday approval process.

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>.

Can GRA students perform research activities related to the appointment during breaks?

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.

Since GRA's are academic appointments, the appointment follows the academic calendar (including the indicated breaks). GRAs are not work or hourly work appointments, "breaks or time off" should be discussed with the faculty advisor. Some advisors allow students to do GRA research on a day when the university is open with no classes and may allow the student to take time away from GRA responsibilities at a different time during the term. Students should not be performing any GRA duties while the university is closed or between academic terms/appointments. The effort for 100% GRA should not exceed 20 hours per week.

Students may have research expectations for their degree (that could align with GRA duties). The research toward a degree (thesis or dissertation) will have additional expectations outside of the GRA. Students may work on research related to their degree at times outside of the academic calendar, to continue progress or catch up. These expectations should be discussed with the advisor. We encourage advisors and students to have open communication about these expectations.

What if I receive a GRA offer that I don't want to accept, or I have questions about the offer letter?

Students should go to the person on the offer letter and discuss any questions, revisions, or if they would like to decline the position.