

## Graduate Assistantships – Frequently Asked Questions

### **What is the FLSA?**

The Fair Labor Standards Act is a federal law that establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and youth employment standards affecting employees in the private sector and in Federal, State, and local governments. Covered nonexempt workers are entitled to be paid the applicable minimum wage and overtime pay at a rate not less than one and one-half times the regular rate of pay after 40 hours of work in a workweek.

### **What does non-exempt mean?**

A nonexempt employee is paid by the hour (and covered under the FLSA). A non-exempt employee is required to maintain a record of hours worked (in the University's Kronos Time & Attendance System).

### **What does exempt mean?**

It means that the position is exempt from the FLSA. Positions that are classified as exempt must meet very specific criteria and they are not eligible for overtime pay.

### **Why are certain graduate assistant job classifications paid by the hour while others are paid a salary or a stipend?**

Graduate assistant job classifications have been established by the University in compliance with the FLSA. Refer to the [Graduate Assistants Job Classifications and Pay Rates](#) document for details.

### **I am planning to hire a Graduate Grading Assistant to assist with grading student tests and exams. Is this an exempt or non-exempt position?**

Graduate Assistants, Graduate Grading Assistants and Graduate Technical Assistants are classified as non-exempt positions. Graduate students whose appointments are in any of these classifications will be paid by the hour (for each hour worked). Refer to the [Graduate Assistants Job Classifications and Pay Rates](#) document for more information.

### **Why is a Graduate Teaching Assistant classified as an exempt employee?**

Teachers are exempt from FLSA. GTAs qualify for the teaching exemption because in addition to a variety of class-room related duties, they lead lab sections and conduct four hours of classroom instruction per week under the direction of a faculty member.

### **My Graduate Teaching Assistant will also grade papers. Does that mean he will have a split appointment (i.e., paid both as a GTA and a GGA)?**

As long as GTAs primary responsibility is classroom instruction, and grading papers is a small part of his duties, he may be hired as a GTA. However, if grading is the primary job duty (not teaching), he must be hired as a GGA and paid by the hour.

**My department offers an assistantship appointment that requires the student to spend 50% of her time as a graduate teaching assistant and the balance as a graduate research assistant. How will she be paid?**

She'll be paid a salary for her GTA responsibilities via the bi-weekly payroll process and the remaining GRA stipend amount two times per month via the accounts payable process (on the 15<sup>th</sup> and the last business day of the month).

**I'd like to hire my Graduate Teaching Assistant to teach a class in addition to her GTA responsibilities. Can I do that?**

Yes, Graduate Students may be hired and paid as Adjunct faculty but the offer must be approved by the Dean of the college prior to issuing to the Grad student. Any questions about this process should be referred to Human Resources. Students working multiple roles must still adhere to the 20 hour per week limit.

**What's the difference between a merit-based scholarship and tuition remission?**

Both merit-based scholarship and tuition remission are non-taxable payments made to a graduate student for qualified educational expenses (e.g., tuition and fees). Both types of payments are applied directly to the student's account by the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.

- A scholarship is awarded on the basis of academic merit and is not contingent upon the graduate student providing services to the University.
- Tuition remission is one component of an assistantship package awarded to graduate students by their academic department. Graduate Assistants also receive taxable wages for services through the payroll process. Graduate Research Assistants receive a taxable stipend through the accounts payable process.

**Can a Graduate Assistant receive tuition remission and a merit-based scholarship?**

Yes, it is possible for a Graduate Assistant to receive tuition remission and a merit-based scholarship. The maximum tuition remission amount is subject to the policy of the University.

**Do all graduate students receive tuition remission?**

Not all Graduate Assistants receive tuition remission as part of their compensation package. However, when they do, the amount of tuition remission is based upon the appointment level (i.e., level of effort). Refer to the [Graduate Assistant Employment Policies and Job Classifications](#) document for more information. It's important to note that students receiving tuition remission must also receive a stipend, regardless of the funding source. If the stipend and tuition remission will be charged to a sponsored project, both components must be charged to the same award and in the same proportion.

**The sponsor of my private grant is willing to pay 100% of my Graduate Assistant's tuition; why am I constrained by RIT's policy of awarding only 50% tuition waivers?**

If the sponsor willing to pay 100% of the graduate student's tuition, then request 50% tuition remission (to be in compliance with RIT's [Tuition Remission Policy](#)) and a 50% merit-based scholarship (from the sponsor). However, keep in mind that no services can be required of the Graduate Assistant for the merit-based scholarship portion.

**My department is planning to hire a graduate student to work on a complex project; we don't have the funds to offer tuition remission. Since the work is complex, we'd like to pay our student a salary. Which graduate assistant job classification will this position be?**

This job is a non-exempt (hourly paid), regular student position paid on object code 71250. Due to the nature of the work, you have the option of paying student wages more in line with the high skill level and complexity of the position.

**My department hires graduate students in other majors to grade papers. Should I hire them as Graduate Grading Assistants or regular students?**

If the students did not receive an assistantship for your department (tuition remission + wages), then you should hire them as regular student employees.

**My Graduate Assistants often work from home. How will they complete a timecard?**

Since your Graduate Assistants won't be near a time clock (the preferred method of recording hours worked), determine what process best suits the needs of the department. Some options are daily emails with exact time, or a paper time sheet turned into the time keeping administrator in the department.

**My Graduate Assistants have the flexibility to work whenever they have the time; quite often that's between midnight and 3:00 am. Is that a problem?**

If that type of flexibility works for your department and your students, it's not a problem. However, since hourly employees who work between midnight and 8:00 am are paid a shift differential of \$.75 per hour, this could have a detrimental impact on your operating budget. Incremental budget funds will not be made available to assist departments who find themselves in this situation.

**The salaries we offered our Graduate Assistants are lower than the amounts in the “Pay Rates” document. What should we do?**

All assistantship packages should be consistent with the University policy and reflect the appropriate job classifications, pay rates, and tuition remission amounts (based on level of effort).

**I told my Graduate Assistants in their appointment letters that they would be paid a salary. Now I’ve learned that most will be classified as non-exempt employees. Since I already made the commitment, do we have to pay them by the hour during this academic year?**

If, based upon the duties your Graduate Assistants will be performing, the job classification is non-exempt; they must be paid by the hour during this academic year. The exemptions are for Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Research Assistants.

**Why aren’t taxes being withheld from stipends paid to Graduate Research Assistants?**

Graduate Research Assistants are not considered to be employees of the University. Refer to the [Graduate Research Assistant](#) information for information about the payment method and Federal and New York State tax treatment for GRA stipends.

**May I hire a BS/MS student as a graduate assistant?**

Yes; however, BS/MS students must be classified as a graduate student (year level 6) in order to be offered a graduate assistantship appointment. Please consult the Associate Director of Financial Aid and Scholarships for Graduate Programs before hiring a BS/MS student as a Graduate Assistant and offering tuition remission, particularly on a sponsored project.

**Are Graduate Research Assistants entitled to time-off?**

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) receive a subsistence allowance in the form of a stipend and are expected to be engaged in research during their appointment period. GRAs are entitled to time-off during the break weeks between academic terms and observed University holidays. Academic terms covered by an appointment are considered active times for research and training and requests for time-off (e.g. vacation) are granted at the sole discretion of the mentor or advisor. Time-off during an academic term should only be granted if it does not have a negative impact on the research or project and is not detrimental to the GRA’s academic progress. If there is any concern that the leave would have a negative impact, the mentor or advisor should deny the

request for time-off. Because GRAs are not employees of the University and the stipend is paid as a subsistence allowance, the payment cannot be reduced or modified for any approved leave, vacation, and/or sick time. If the GRA appointment is externally-funded (e.g. federal funds) and the Graduate Research Assistant has a need for an extended leave that may have a negative impact in the completion of the project's research outcomes, please contact your Sponsored Programs Accounting representative.

**The graduate assistantship policies state that “only students matriculated and enrolled full-time in a graduate program” may be appointed to a graduate assistantship. How does the policy address PhD-level Graduate Research Assistants who are completing their dissertation (and no longer taking classes)?**

In order to receive tuition remission and a stipend, Graduate Research Assistants who are completing their dissertation (thesis for Master's level students) 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 student's Program Director should send a completed [Graduate Student Full-time Equivalency Form](#) to the Office of the Registrar.

**I've submitted the hiring paperwork for my hourly paid Graduate Assistants to the SEO. How long does it take before the GAs appear in Kronos?**

Information about new hires is transferred to Kronos, the University's Time & Attendance system each day – in most cases, if the hiring paperwork is input into the HR system by the SEO today, the student will be in Kronos tomorrow. The high volume of paperwork received by the SEO at the beginning of each academic term (especially the fall semester) could mean that several days will elapse between the time you submit your paperwork and the time it's entered into Kronos. However, during these peak periods, Payroll staff import the information into Kronos up to three times per day. If the student is working before they're actually in Kronos, they won't be able to use a timeclock to swipe in and out. Please instruct them to keep track of their hours on a paper time card so that you can enter it into Kronos prior to the end of the pay period.

- Refer to the [Payroll Schedule](#) for information about pay period end dates and payroll dates for bi-weekly employees.

