

## **RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON THE MANAGEMENT OF GRADUATE ASSISTANSHIPS AND TUITION REMISSION**

**WHEREAS**, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) is classified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education as a doctoral university: very high research activity whose graduate instructional program is research doctoral: comprehensive programs with medical/veterinary school; and

**WHEREAS**, Virginia Tech is committed to continued excellence in instruction, training, scholarship, and research opportunities for graduate and professional students; and

**WHEREAS**, graduate assistantships are a unique form of university appointment that allow many graduate students to gain valuable training and professional experience in teaching, research, or administration while providing service that is central to the success of the university; and

**WHEREAS**, in the fall of 2018, the university enrolled 2,956 students pursuing a doctoral degree and 3,414 students pursuing a master's degree, 58 percent of whom held an assistantship appointment; and

**WHEREAS**, the various existing policies and procedures regulating the management of graduate assistantships are best integrated into a comprehensive, transparent policy; and

**WHEREAS**, periodically, the university reviews and updates policies and standards that require approval by the Board of Visitors; now

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Board of Visitors approve the attached policy No. 6210: Management of Graduate Assistantships and Tuition Remission that establishes standards and policies for assistantships of the following types: graduate assistant, graduate teaching assistant, and graduate research assistant.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That the Board of Visitors approve policy No. 6210: Management of Graduate Assistantships and Tuition Remission.

August 26, 2019



## Management of Graduate Assistantships and Tuition Remission

### No. 6210

#### Policy Effective Date:

**Policy Owner:**  
Karen DePauw

**Policy Author:**  
(Contact Person)  
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**Affected Parties:**  
Undergraduate  
Graduate  
Faculty  
Staff

**1.0 Purpose**  
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### 1.0 Purpose

This policy establishes standards for the management of graduate assistantships and associated benefits including tuition remission. Graduate assistantships are a unique form of university appointment that allow graduate students to gain valuable training and professional experience in teaching, research or administration while providing service to the university.

### 2.0 Policy

The Graduate School is responsible for administering this policy. The Graduate School also maintains detailed information and procedures for managing assistantships in accordance with university, state, and federal requirements.

Any changes proposed to the policy must be approved by the Finance and Resource Management Committee of the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors.

### 2.1 Types of Graduate Assistantships

A full assistantship (1 FTE) equals 20 hours of work per week on average for the duration of a semester or academic year. There are three types of graduate assistantships:

**Graduate Assistant (GA):** GAs provide academic and program support to faculty or departments. GA responsibilities may be administrative in nature and consist of duties unrelated directly to teaching or research (such as academic advising, program planning, advising student groups, and assisting with the administration of student services offices). GA responsibilities also may be academic in nature and include grading examinations, problem sets, and/or lab assignments, setting up displays for lectures or laboratory sections, and preparing or maintaining equipment used in laboratory sections.

**Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA):** GTAs assist faculty in the teaching mission, with assignments including laboratory teaching, grading of examinations, problem sets and/or lab assignments, setting up displays for lectures and laboratory sections, and preparing or maintaining equipment used in laboratory sections. GTAs must have 18 credit hours of graduate-level course work in their teaching discipline to be assigned full responsibility for teaching an undergraduate course. GTAs lacking this training may be assigned to work under the supervision of a faculty member who will be the instructor of record for the course. Graduate students may assist faculty in teaching graduate courses but may not be the instructor of record for the course. GTAs are required to attend and be enrolled in the GTA Workshop (GRAD 5004, 1 cr., P/F) in the first semester of their teaching appointment at Virginia Tech.



**Graduate Research Assistant (GRA):** GRAs conduct research under the direction of a faculty member who is typically a principal investigator on an external grant or contract that funds the GRA and determines the nature of research work required for the assistantship. The research work required for the GRA is determined by the funding source and is typically beyond research done for academic credit toward the student's degree.

## 2.2 Eligibility to Hold Graduate Assistantship

In order to hold a graduate assistantship appointment, students must meet the following requirements. Exceptions may be granted by the Graduate School based on a request from the hiring department.

- Be a degree seeking graduate student in regular (GPA of 3.0 or greater) or provisional (GPA of 2.75-2.99) status. Departmental GPA requirements may be higher. Maintain satisfactory progress toward attainment of a graduate degree.
- Enroll in a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester (fall and spring). Audited courses do not qualify in satisfying this minimum. Graduate students holding assistantships during the academic year and/or in the summer are not required to enroll during summer sessions unless they are taking a preliminary or final examination.
- Meet employment eligibility requirements to work in the United States.
- Five-year bachelor's/master's students may hold an assistantship in the last semester of their bachelor's study and receive a scholarship for in-state tuition only.

## 2.3 Standard Assistantship Compensation and Benefits

Assistantships are the primary source of university funding for graduate students. Assistantship compensation is designed to enable students on full assistantship appointments to pursue their graduate degree program. Hiring departments must provide an assistantship compensation package that includes the following components:

- A monthly stipend at a rate that falls within the assistantship stipend table approved by the Board of Visitors.
- In-state tuition and mandatory Education and General (E&G) fees remission in proportion to the assistantship FTE for fall and spring semesters (summer and winter tuition payment are not included, unless specified in the assistantship contract). This includes program-specific fees (e.g. Engineering, Architecture and Design, MSBA-BA, MSBA-HTM, etc.), and excludes executive and professional program fees and the nonresident Commonwealth Facility and Equipment Fee. Exceptions may be approved by the Graduate School when students are awarded supplemental tuition assistance from external funding agencies and depending on the definition and priority of authorized payers.
- Waiver of the Out-of-State Tuition Differential (if eligibility requirements are met).
- Health insurance subsidy (if eligibility requirements are met) at the rate approved by the Board of Visitors. Eligibility requirements and subsidy rate are posted on the Graduate School's website (<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding/types-of-funding/assistantships/benefits.html>).
- Taxation of assistantship compensation and benefits is required by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service as determined by enrollment, residency, and various tax treaties.

### 2.3.1. Summer Assistantships

Enrollment in the summer is not required of students in order to meet assistantship eligibility requirements. Tuition remission for the in-state tuition, allowable program fees, technology fee, and library fee is not provided in the



summer terms unless specified in the assistantship contract. Students on summer assistantship may qualify for a waiver of the Out-of-State Tuition Differential if they meet eligibility requirements as outlined in 2.7.

## 2.4 Additional Employment for Students Holding Graduate Assistantships

Graduate students on assistantships are not prohibited from seeking additional employment (restrictions may apply to international students based on their visa status). Students should consult with their academic advisor and/or assistantship supervisor as applicable regarding the fulfillment of their assistantship and graduate study responsibilities. Students must notify the Graduate School about any additional employment, including the period of employment, name and contact of employer, and job title or short description of duties using the mechanism provided by the Graduate School.

Graduate students who work more than 40 hours in a work week on an assistantship and university wage appointment combined may be eligible for over-time pay. Graduate students are responsible for disclosing to their wage department their assistantship obligations.

## 2.5 Assistantship Management

Hiring departments create and manage their assistantship positions according to Graduate School and Human Resources policies and procedures:

- Graduate assistantship contracts must be issued through the university-approved Graduate Contract System. The timely issuance of contracts ensures that associated benefits are available to students and supports a positive graduate student experience with more efficient administrative operations in the areas of payroll, student medical insurance, student accounts, scholarship and financial aid. Assistantship contract start dates may not be more than 30 days prior to the creation of the contract(s).
- The contract must be signed (electronically approved) by an authorized representative of the hiring department and the student before an appointment can be made.
- Electronic personnel action and tuition remission may be entered after an assistantship contract has been signed by all parties.
- Assistantship eligibility requirements are jointly monitored and enforced by hiring departments and the Graduate School.
- Assistantship benefit eligibility requirements are jointly monitored by the Bursar's Office, the Graduate School, and the Student Medical Insurance Office.
- Whenever possible, assistantship appointments should span a full semester (9 pay periods) or academic year (18 pay periods), and be no less than 0.25 FTE.

### 2.5.1 Standard Assistantship Contract Start and End Dates

Standard assistantship start and end dates have been established to ensure that graduate assistants receive a semi-monthly payment during the entire period of the semester or academic year (nine paychecks a semester or 18 paychecks during the academic year). Whenever feasible, assistantship appointments should cover the entire semester or academic year.



To correspond with the billing cycle of some assistantship benefits, such as the graduate health insurance program, university subsidies are optimized for full assistantships with standard start/end dates of Aug 10-May 9, though the benefit may span a full calendar year.

Standard Graduate Assistantship Agreement Start and End Dates:

Academic Year: August 10 through May 9

Fall Semester: August 10 through December 24

Spring Semester: December 25 through May 9

Summer: May 10 through August 9 (Summer I: May 10-Jun 24; Summer II: Jun 25-Aug 9)

## 2.5.2 Allowable personal/sick leave

### Personal or Sick Leave:

Graduate students should work with their supervisors to schedule their work hours. Absences (either sick or personal) should be accommodated when possible and the work schedule adjusted to enable the graduate student to complete their academic and assistantship work commitments.

### Holidays:

Graduate students are generally not required to work when the university is officially closed, such as on a holiday, or weather-related closing, unless they are designated as essential personnel for the program.

### Graduate School Work-Life Grants:

The Work-Life Grant Program provides temporary financial assistance to departments to enable them to continue support for graduate students on assistantship during periods of pregnancy, childbirth, adoption, and medical emergency.

Departments can request financial assistance equivalent to a graduate assistantship stipend for 6 weeks (3 payroll periods). The Graduate School provides one-half of the 6-week stipend and the college/senior management area provides the other half of the 6-week stipend. These resources may be used to ensure that the research/teaching/administrative effort is not adversely impacted and the graduate student continues to be supported while on leave. The Graduate School coordinates the distribution of work-life grants.

### Jury Duty and Court Appearance:

Graduate students who are called for jury duty, subpoenaed, or summoned to appear in court, will be excused from work, except when he or she is a defendant in a criminal or civil case. The jury duty and court appearance leave should be requested before it is taken. Any time spent in court as a defendant in a criminal or civil case must be accommodated in the work week by the supervisor.

### Military Leave:

Graduate students, who are members of any reserve component of the United States Armed Forces or the National Guard and are called to active or reserve duty (including training) in the military, are granted up to 5 days of military leave each semester. To qualify for military leave, graduate students must provide a copy of their official orders or other documentation from a responsible military official to their supervisors.



Absences because of “any qualifying exigency” arising out of the fact that a spouse, son, daughter, or parent of the employee is on active duty or has been notified of an impending call to active duty should be accommodated when possible and the work schedule adjusted to enable the graduate student to complete academic and assistantship work commitments.

### **2.5.3 Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Students on graduate assistantships may request assistance or reasonable accommodations for performing their assistantship duties.

The determination of whether an accommodation is reasonable is specific to the student and the essential functions of the student’s position. It involves a legally mandated interactive process between the employee and supervisor, and must be authorized and facilitated by members of the ADA and Accessibility Services unit. As part of this process, the student may be asked to provide medical documentation concerning their disability.

## **2.6 Tuition Remission**

Tuition remission provides a mechanism for the payment of in-state tuition and mandatory E&G fees as part of the assistantship benefits package. As a benefit associated with university service, the remission of in-state tuition and mandatory E&G fees for a graduate student on assistantship is based upon the continued employment of the student for the complete academic semester of the remission. Hiring departments must provide in-state tuition and mandatory E&G fees remission in proportion to the assistantship FTE for fall and spring semesters (winter and summer not included unless specified otherwise in the assistantship contract).

Compliance with tuition remission policies and procedures is jointly managed by the Bursar’s Office, the Controller’s Office, and the Graduate School. Tuition funding rules are established by the Graduate School and the Controller’s Office.

### **2.6.1 Tuition Funding Rules**

Tuition funding rules apply to all funds, including university, federal, private, state, and sponsored funds. The rules ensure that the portion of tuition charged to the fund is aligned with the assistantship position funding.

Departments may receive an allocation of university support (e.g. 999xxx and 997xxx funds) to be used for graduate tuition each year. These funds can be used for students who have a GA, GTA or GRA appointment provided that the student's stipend is not funded by a sponsored program fund. Tuition should be apportioned across fund sources for split appointments in the same proportion as the split of the appointment.

Exceptions may be granted by the Graduate School in some circumstances that may include GRAs being paid on sponsored program funds that do not allow tuition awards; and when a sponsored program requires cost sharing.

### **2.6.2 Tuition Obligation for Assistantships Shorter than a Semester**

The remission of in-state tuition and E&G fees shall be calculated in four-week increments, with each quarter of tuition earned by the completion of four full weeks of work and full remission earned only if the student completes



the assistantship (16 full weeks or more in a semester). Other benefits, such as health insurance subsidy and the waiver of the Out-of-State Tuition Differential, will be recalculated based on eligibility requirements.

The table below details the tuition obligations for students and departments:

NUMBER OF WEEKS WORKED IN THE SEMESTER WHEN ON ASSISTANTSHIP	STUDENT OBLIGATION* of tuition, program, and E&G fees	DEPARTMENT OBLIGATION** of tuition, program, and E&G fees
Less than four weeks (28 calendar days)	100%	0%
Four weeks through seven weeks and 6 days	75%	25%
Eight weeks through eleven weeks and 6 days	50%	50%
Twelve weeks through fifteen weeks and 6 days	25%	75%
Sixteen weeks or more (full semester)	0%	100%

The comprehensive and capital & equipment fees are non-refundable and no reduction will be made after the beginning of classes.

\*Student responsible for any amount not paid by department.

\*\*Percent of tuition paid by department of the tuition remission that is proportionate to the assistantship FTE

## 2.7 Waiver of the Out-of-State Tuition Differential

The Virginia Appropriation Act allows out-of-state graduate students to be assessed in-state tuition if they are on a graduate assistantship and earn at least \$4,000 during the academic year (between Aug 10 and May 9) on assistantship stipend. The Out-of-State Tuition Differential is the difference between in-state tuition and out-of-state tuition. The university will automatically waive the Out-of-State Tuition Differential when requirements are met. Earnings in wage positions or summer graduate assistantship appointments do not count toward meeting this requirement.

Eligibility for the waiver is based on assistantship status and earnings:

- **Fall:** Must be on a GA/GTA/GRA and earn at least \$2000 on assistantship stipend between Aug 10-Dec 24
- **Winter:** Must be on a GA/GTA/GRA and earn at least \$2000 on assistantship stipend between Aug 10-Dec 24, or \$4000 or more between Aug 10-May 9
- **Spring:** Must be on a GA/GTA/GRA and earn at least \$2000 on assistantship stipend between Dec 25-May 9
- **Summer:** Must have been on a GA/GTA/GRA in the immediate prior spring semester and earned at least \$4000 on assistantship stipend between Aug 10-May 9

For students enrolled in academic programs that have a residency-neutral graduate tuition rate, there is no out-of-state tuition differential to waive. Out-of-state tuition cannot be waived for five-year bachelor's/master's students who may hold an assistantship in the last semester of their bachelor's study.



## 3.0 Procedures

Assistantship management is a four-step process: (1) contract creation and acceptance; (2) PAF entry; (3) tuition award; and (4) tuition funding. Benefits such as the out-of-state tuition waiver or the insurance subsidy are applied after the first two steps are completed. Timely issuance of assistantship contracts and PAF entry ensure that assistantship benefits are available to students as intended.

### 3.1 Graduate Assistantships

Students offered an assistantship must accept a graduate assistantship contract issued by the hiring department in the university's Graduate Contract System. The contract stipulates the beginning and ending dates of the appointment, the type of assistantship, the amount of the monthly stipend, whether the student is expected to work during school breaks, and any other special conditions.

Once an assistantship contract is properly executed, hiring departments enter the assistantship appointment in Banner following HR procedures and deadlines for appointment entry and management.

### 3.2 Tuition Remission

Access to the tuition remission system in Banner is granted by the Controller's Office. The Graduate School maintains a listserv to communicate with users of the tuition remission system. Notices of award and funding deadlines, rate increases, or anything pertaining to changes in graduate assistantship management are sent to this user group by the Graduate School on a regular basis.

Tuition remission is a two-step process of (1) awarding and then (2) funding tuition for eligible students.

Detailed procedures for tuition remission are outlined on the Graduate School website (<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding.html>).

### 3.3 Waiver of the Out-of-state Tuition Differential

Waiver of the Out-of-State Tuition Differential is awarded and applied to student accounts when the following three criteria are met:

- The student's assistantship appointment (PAF) is entered in Banner by the hiring department;
- The student meets the earnings criteria described above;
- The student has enrolled for the semester.

Out-of-State Tuition Differentials/fees cannot be waived for undergraduate students. Eligibility for the Out-of-State Tuition Differential waiver is jointly monitored by the Bursar's Office and the Graduate School.

## 4.0 Definitions

**E&G:** Education and General Programs.

**FTE:** Full-time equivalent. A one FTE assistantship is equal to 20 hours per week of work for a full semester. Students may not hold more than one FTE of an assistantship.





**Out-of-State Tuition Differential Waiver:** The difference between non-resident and resident tuition for eligible students will be waived. Also referred to as UF or Unfunded Differential. This waiver is considered foregone revenue by the institution.

**Remission:** The funding of a student's in-state tuition and mandatory E&G fees by the employer (university, grantor, etc.) in recognition of the student's service.

**State Funded Graduate Fellowship:** The state appropriation to support graduate in-state tuition remission for university graduate assistants (999xxx funds). No more than fifty percent of these funds may be awarded to persons who are not eligible to be classified as Virginia domiciliary resident students. Graduate students on assistantship and earning at least \$4,000 per academic year are considered Virginia resident students for the purposes of this calculation. These funds are to be used in accordance with the relevant state laws, regulations, and Section 4-5.01b of the Appropriation Act.

**Unfunded Tuition Remission:** University funding for graduate in-state tuition remission, mandatory E&G fees, and program-specific fees for graduate students on assistantship (997xxx funds).

## 5.0 References

Faculty Handbook, Chapter 08 - Employment Policies and Procedures for Graduate Assistants  
[https://provost.vt.edu/faculty\\_affairs/faculty\\_handbook/chapter08/chapter08.html](https://provost.vt.edu/faculty_affairs/faculty_handbook/chapter08/chapter08.html)

Graduate Catalog, Graduate School Policies on Graduate Assistantships  
[https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate\\_catalog/](https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/)

Controller's Office payroll schedule  
<https://www.controller.vt.edu/resources/payroll.html>

OSP Procedure 10002, Tuition and Related Fees on Sponsored Awards  
[https://osp.vt.edu/content/dam/osp\\_vt\\_edu/policies/osp10002.pdf](https://osp.vt.edu/content/dam/osp_vt_edu/policies/osp10002.pdf)

University Accommodations of Persons with Disabilities, Policy No. 4075  
<https://policies.vt.edu/4075.pdf>

Code of Virginia, Article 2. Scholarships. §23.1-612. Unfunded Scholarships.  
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacodefull/title23.1/subtitleII/>

Guidelines on Holidays  
<http://www.policies.vt.edu/4315.pdf>

Sections 4-5.01b and 4.2.01b.6 of the Appropriation Act  
<https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/item/2017/1/HB1500/Chapter/4/4-5.01/>

Section 23.1-612 of the Code of Virginia  
<https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title23.1/chapter6/section23.1-612/>



President's Policy Memorandum No. 279: Affirmation of University Policy on Relief, Refund, and Reinstatement Guidelines for Active Duty Military Students

<https://policies.vt.edu/assets/279-affirmation-of-university-policy-on-relief%2C-refund%2C-and-reinstatement-guidelines-for-active-duty-military-students-.pdf>

Federal Register OMB Circular A-21: Cost Principles for Educational Institutions

<https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2000/08/08/00-19653/omb-circular-a-21-cost-principles-for-educational-institutions>

## 6.0 Approval and Revisions