



Graduate Student Assistantships

POLICY STATEMENT

Cornell University supports consistent and similar educational experiences for graduate students on assistantships, across all graduate fields and colleges.

REASON FOR POLICY

The university is committed to an equitable, supportive, and professional environment for graduate education. Assistantships help students develop academic rigor and creativity, independent judgment, intellectual honesty, and the ability to communicate their knowledge, while providing financial support. This policy is designed to promote effective communication of expectations between students on assistantships and the faculty or staff members responsible for oversight.

ENTITIES AFFECTED BY THIS POLICY

-
- All units of the university, excluding Weill Cornell Medicine.

WHO SHOULD READ THIS POLICY

-
- All graduate assistants (graduate assistants, graduate research assistants, research assistants, and teaching assistants)
 - Faculty and staff involved with graduate students on assistantships

WEB ADDRESS FOR THIS POLICY

-
- This policy: www.dfa.cornell.edu/treasurer/policyoffice/policies/volumes/academic/assistantships.cfm
 - University Policy Office: www.policy.cornell.edu

POLICY 1.3

Graduate Student Assistantships

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RELATED RESOURCES

University Policies and Documentation

[University Policy 3.13, Graduate Tuition and Other Support](#)

[University Policy 4.15, Copyright](#)

[University Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct](#)

[University Policy 4.7, Retention of University Records](#)

[University Policy 6.3, Consensual Relationships](#)

[University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct](#)

[Campus Code of Conduct](#)

[Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty](#)

[Graduate School Grievance Policy](#)

[Graduate School Website](#)

[University Budget Model Manual](#)

[External Documentation](#)

[Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986](#)

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CONTACTS

Direct any questions regarding this policy to your unit's administrative office. For questions about specific issues, contact the following offices:

Subject	Contact	Telephone	E-mail/Web Address
Policy Interpretation and Clarification	Office of the Dean of The Graduate School	(607) 255-7374	dean_gradschool@cornell.edu
Employment Limitations for Assistants and Fellows	Associate Dean for Administration, Graduate School	(607) 255-5810	gradstudserv_assoc_dean@cornell.edu
Graduate Student Grievance Procedures	Associate Dean of the Graduate School	(607) 255-7374	grad_assoc_dean@cornell.edu
Health Insurance Payments	Office of the Bursar	(607) 255-6413	uco-bursar@cornell.edu www.bursar.cornell.edu
Hourly Appointments	Office of Student Employment	(607) 255-9051	sesemp@cornell.edu
International Students	International Services, Global Learning	(607) 255-5243	isso@cornell.edu www.isso.cornell.edu
International TA Training	Center for Teaching Innovation	(607) 255-3990	itap@cornell.edu
Processing Assistantship Appointments	Workday Helpdesk	(607) 255-8828	hrpayrollsupport@cornell.edu
Sponsored awards, allowability of assistantship or fellowship support	Sponsored Financial Services	(607) 255-1482	sfs-help@cornell.edu
Taxes	Office of Tax Compliance	(607) 255-5195	tax@cornell.edu www.dfa.cornell.edu/tax/

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DEFINITIONS

These definitions apply to terms as they are used in this policy.

Assistantship	An arrangement in which financial support is given to a graduate student who engages in teaching and/or research in furtherance of the university's academic mission, as well as his or her graduate education. (See definitions of assistantship types below.) Students on full assistantships receive full tuition credit and a stipend. (See also, "Tuition Credit" definition below.) ◆ Note: Appointments that are paid on an hourly basis are not assistantships, and should not be portrayed as such.
Director of Graduate Studies	The faculty liaison between the Graduate School and a particular graduate field.
Fellowship	An arrangement in which financial support is given to a graduate student to pursue his or her degree without any obligation on the part of the student to engage in teaching and/or research in furtherance of the university's academic mission. Generally, fellowships are merit-based awards. Continued financial support is contingent upon the student maintaining satisfactory academic progress as defined by the field and the Graduate School.
General Committee	The faculty governing board of the Graduate School.
Graduate Assistantship (GA)	An academic appointment requiring 15 to 20 hours a week, averaging no more than 15 hours per week for the base stipend as established by the Board of Trustees. Graduate assistants receive full tuition credit, individual student health plan credit, and a stipend.
Graduate Faculty	Cornell faculty members elected by vote of the graduate field and approval of the General Committee. The graduate faculty has authority over all degrees beyond the first degree offered by any school or college of Cornell University, except the Weill Graduate School of Medical Sciences, and the LL.M. degree offered by the Law School.
Graduate Field	A voluntary grouping of elected members of the graduate faculty who have academic interests in common and wish to exercise shared responsibility for an area of inquiry and for the admission, education, and, as appropriate, financial support of graduate students. Fields are independent of traditional college, department, or divisions, so they may draw together faculty members from several colleges, departments, divisions, and related disciplines in accordance with scholarly interests.
Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)	An academic appointment focused on thesis or other degree-related research of a type that is required from all candidates for the degree. Because a student devotes considerable time to dissertation research, the time spent on research connected with the project is expected to be significant. GRAs are awarded full tuition credit, individual student health plan, and a stipend.
Partial Assistantship	An academic appointment (GA, GRA, RA, or TA) for less than the standard hours (see definitions of assistantship types). Stipends, student health plan credit, and tuition credit are prorated to reflect the percentage of a standard appointment. ◆ Note: Appointments that do not provide both tuition and stipends in amounts proportional to the hours expected of a regular assistant are not partial assistantships, and should not be portrayed as such. Students on such appointments should be appointed on an hourly basis for the stipend, with the payment processed through Workday.

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DEFINITIONS, CONTINUED

	The tuition payment, if any, should be processed directly as a credit on the Student Financial System.
Professional Degree	<p>An advanced degree that prepares a student to practice his or her profession, teach the subject matter of the profession, or pursue original investigations into its functions, administration, history, and progress. Award of a degree is contingent upon mastery of the chosen field, and, where appropriate, upon completion of a thesis or other independent project. Students who are enrolled in professional degree programs are ineligible for assistantships outside of their graduate field of study, unless the director of graduate studies for the student's program requests an exception based on the student gaining experience directly supporting the student's ability to teach the subject matter of the profession. Requests for exceptions must be approved by both the dean of the Graduate School and the dean of the college in which the professional degree program is housed. The college that administers the professional degree in which the student is enrolled is responsible for payment of the tuition. Professional degree students may be appointed as Graduate Teaching/Research Specialists.</p> <p>Professional degrees administered by the Cornell Graduate School are defined in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty. (See Related Resources.) The professional degrees of D.V.M., J.D., LL.M., and M.B.A. are administered by the appropriate school or college. Degrees delegated by the Graduate School to a college include M.Arch., M.Eng., M.M.H., M.P.S. in Management.</p>
Research Assistantship (RA)	An academic appointment for research that is not directly thesis-related, 15 to 20 hours per week, averaging no more than 15 hours per week for the base stipend as established by the Board of Trustees. RAs are awarded full tuition credit, individual student health plan, and a stipend.
Research Degree	A degree that is contingent upon the completion of a research project report, thesis, or dissertation constituting an original contribution to knowledge. The Cornell graduate research degrees are defined in the Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty. (See Related Resources.)
Special Committee	A small group (usually three to four) of graduate faculty members, selected by a student in a research degree program, to guide his or her academic program. The special committee has primary responsibility for developing the student's independence in scholarship.
Stipend	Financial support for a registered graduate student's living expenses, paid either semi-monthly (as in the case of an assistantship) or as a lump sum at the beginning of the semester (as in the case of a fellowship). The base assistantship stipend assumes responsibilities requiring at least 15 hours per week. Stipend support may be supplemented for additional responsibilities or special competency. The minimum academic-year stipend is set by the Board of Trustees.
Teaching Assistantship (TA)	An academic appointment in support of the teaching of a course of 15 to 20 hours per week, averaging no more than 15 hours per week for the base stipend as established by the Board of Trustees. The assignment is usually in the student's major field or a closely related one. TAs are awarded full tuition credit, individual student health plan, and a stipend. (See also, "Tuition Credit" definition below.)

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DEFINITIONS, CONTINUED

Tuition Credit

A credit posted to a student's bursar account and applied toward the student's tuition charge. The tuition credit is at the research tuition rate regardless of the student's degree program.

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RESPONSIBILITIES

Dean of the Graduate School	Respond to student grievances. Provide policy clarification.
Director of Graduate Studies	When appropriate, conduct telephone or interactive visual computer interviews with foreign applicants. Act as liaison between the Graduate School and the field. Consult and communicate with students regarding their graduate study and field requirements. Oversee field admission process.
Faculty Member	Provide appropriate assistantship training, oversight, and feedback for graduate students appointed on assistantships. Provide routine performance reviews for students on assistantships as part of the general learning experience. Provide supervision, holiday time, and vacation time as outlined in this policy. When assigning assistantship duties, abide by this policy's provisions on maximum time limitations for weekly duties and per-week average over the appointment period.
Field and/or Department	Consider difficulty of assignments, curricular background, and course responsibilities when making student assistantship assignments. Make appropriate assistantship assignments, as outlined in this document. Communicate with faculty and graduate students this policy's expectations regarding time devoted to assistantships and time limitations on additional paid positions. Require teaching according to this document.
Student	Register as a graduate student for each semester of assistantship. Make satisfactory progress in meeting academic requirements and in fulfilling assistantship responsibilities.
Unit	Write appointment letters, timely distribute appointment letters to graduate students appointed on assistantships, and retain records thereof. Ensure that students are registered. Make appropriate assistantship assignments, as outlined in this document.
University	Support consistent and similar educational experiences for graduate students on assistantships, across fields and colleges, as outlined in University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships.

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PRINCIPLES

Introduction

A significant number of Cornell University's graduate students are supported on assistantships each year. Recognizing the special role that assistantships play in students' academic development, assistantship opportunities are limited based on the student's program of study.

- Research degree programs are designed for those who wish to obtain further education in a selected field and to develop their ability for critical inquiry, independent research, and teaching. It is important that these students gain teaching experience that will enable them to communicate knowledge in a variety of contexts. Research degree students are, therefore, eligible for any assistantship opportunity at the university.
- Professional degrees prepare students to practice their profession at an advanced level, to teach the subject matter of their profession, or to pursue original investigations into its functions, administration, history, and progress. Professional degree students are thus eligible only for assistantship opportunities within the graduate field of study to which they were admitted and are currently enrolled, unless the director of graduate studies for the student's program requests an exception based on the student gaining experience directly supporting the student's ability to teach the subject matter of the profession. Requests for exceptions must be approved by both the dean of the Graduate School and the dean of the college in which the professional degree program is housed. The college that administers the professional degree in which the student is enrolled is responsible for paying the tuition. For graduate research assistantship (GRA) appointments, tuition, because it is professional student tuition, flows to the home college for the student. The home college must provide a one-half tuition waiver as required by university policy for all sponsored GRA appointments.

This policy addresses issues of importance to both faculty and staff members responsible for oversight and graduate assistants.

This section and "Appointment Letters," and "Conflict Resolution" of Procedures are relevant to all assistantship appointments. Information specific to Teaching Assistantships (TAs), GRAs, Research Assistantships (RAs), and Graduate Assistantships (GAs) will be found in the respective sections of this document. The procedures contained in this document should be implemented consistently throughout the university.

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Graduate Student Assistantships

PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

Registration

Assistantships may be awarded only to full-time registered graduate students. Assistants must be registered as graduate students during the period of appointment (including summer). Individuals who have completed their graduate degrees or are no longer registered as graduate students may not be appointed to assistantships.

Assistantship Assignments

Student assistants should be asked to perform only duties that are directly related to the university's academic mission. Assistants are not to be asked or permitted to provide personal services, such as childcare or pet care as part of their responsibilities.

In general, assistantship assignments should be equitable. Special care should be given to the allocation of responsibilities among assistants. All faculty and staff members responsible for oversight are encouraged to be alert to possible unequal assignments and guard against them.

Admission Letters

It is very important that fields include the following statement in all admission letters that include financial support and in all assistantship appointment letters:

"Continued funding is contingent upon academic performance constituting good standing in the graduate field and satisfactory fulfillment of any teaching or research responsibilities." Fields in which funding is uncertain should include, "...and availability of funds." See the Appendix for sample Letters of Appointment.

Mentoring

Faculty and staff members responsible for oversight should provide appropriate training for assistantship duties, observe the student when conducting assistantship duties, and provide regular feedback to assistants as part of the general mentoring experience.

Appointment Period

The typical appointment periods for all types of assistantships are as follows:

Prior to Fall 2020:

- Fall: August 16 – December 31
- Spring: January 1 – May 15
- Summer: May 16 – August 15
- Academic Year: August 16 – May 15

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PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

Starting Fall 2020 and thereafter:

- Fall: August 21 – January 5
 - Spring: January 6 – May 20
 - Summer: May 21 – August 20
 - Academic Year: August 21 – May 20
- ◆ **Note:** For graduate students enrolled in Spring and/or Summer '20 who are continuing as enrolled, funded (assistantship or fellowship) students for Fall '20: Fall appointment period will be August 16, 2020 – January 5, 2021.

Graduate students are paid their assistantship stipends semimonthly, usually on the 15th day and in the last week of each month. When the appointment period begins after the start of a semimonthly period or ends before the end of a semimonthly period the stipend payment may be a partial amount rather than the full semimonthly amount.

Appointment periods for assistantships typically begin one to three weeks prior to the start of classes. Graduate students funded on assistantships should thus expect their assistantship responsibilities to begin at the start of the appointment period and should plan to make academic progress in their degree program throughout the appointment period. Because some courses may have final exam periods that extend beyond the assistantship appointment period, TAs should be informed at the time of appointment that they may be required to fulfill teaching responsibilities beyond the appointment period. The appointing department and supervising faculty should put this information in writing in the student's appointment letter. Total hours for TAs (including final exam responsibilities outside of the appointment period) should not exceed the university policy limit of an average of 15 hours/week for the number of weeks in the appointment period with no week exceeding 20 hours.

Summer Appointments

When offered, summer assistantship appointments must conform to weekly limitations on assistantship hours (for GA, RA, and TA positions), additional employment limitations, and minimum stipend rates at the equivalent of the 9-month minimum pro-rated for the weeks of summer appointment. Students who are appointed to a standard assistantship during the summer are expected to make academic progress equivalent to full-time student status. Academic expectations for students appointed to partial summer assistantships are to be adjusted proportionally.

Publications

Authorship issues for intellectual work done by the student should be resolved prior to the beginning of the research or the research proposal.

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PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

Combined Assistantships, Hourly Student Appointments, and Outside Employment

◆ **Note:** For more information, see the University Policy 4.15, Copyright.

GRAs may accept a combined total of up to eight hours per week during their GRA assignments of additional assistantship, hourly student appointment, or outside employment.

RAs, TAs, and GAs may accept a combined total of up to five hours per week during their assignments of additional assistantship, hourly student appointment, or outside employment if the combination does not exceed 20 hours per week.

Because tuition has already been covered through the initial appointment, the additional appointment may be considered a TA, RA, GRA, or GA supplement, and may be processed as an assistantship. Alternatively, if hours for the additional appointment are to be tracked, the additional work may be processed as an hourly appointment in Workday.

Holiday and Vacation Time

As affirmed in the *Code of Legislation of the Graduate Faculty*, Section IV.G., graduate students can benefit from time devoted to rest, relaxation, and renewal. Graduate students appointed on assistantships are encouraged to take time away via university holidays and planned vacation.

Graduate students appointed on any combination of full assistantships or fellowships for spring, summer, and fall terms are entitled to two weeks (ten weekdays) of annual vacation each 12-month period (August 21 through August 20) in addition to Cornell University holidays (when the university is officially closed); vacation time will be prorated for students appointed for shorter periods of time (e.g., 4 days for a student appointed on an assistantship or fellowship for only one semester during the calendar period August 21-August 20). University holidays generally include twelve days: Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the following day, and winter break (generally six working days from December 25 through January 1). Days on which classes are not in session but the university is open (e.g., institutionally-scheduled academic breaks in Fall Semester, January intersession, Spring Semester) are not automatic vacation time nor holidays for graduate students appointed on assistantships, but graduate students appointed on assistantships may request in advance to take vacation during such periods.

A graduate student appointed on an assistantship is not required to request time off for Cornell University holidays. However, if the assistantship supervisor requires the student to perform assistantship duties (e.g., animal care, critical ongoing research projects) during one or more Cornell University holidays, that expectation must be communicated to the student in the assistantship appointment letter and provisions agreeable to the student must be made for equivalent time off on a non-holiday

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PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

weekday. Similarly, if a graduate student wishes to conduct assistantship responsibilities during a Cornell University holiday with permission from the student's supervisor, provisions should be made for alternative days away in lieu of the missed days during the Cornell University holiday.

Assistantship appointment letters are to include specific language about holiday and vacation time available to students on assistantships and should clearly specify if there are any specific dates during the appointment period when the student will not be approved for vacation time because of assistantship requirements, including the reasons why such dates will not be approved for vacation. Supervisors and special committee chairs should plan for graduate students on assistantships to have holiday and vacation time and set reasonable expectations for completing a student's responsibilities within the time remaining beyond vacation and holidays.

Vacation and holiday days must be taken during a single annual period (August 21 through August 20) and may not be rolled over or accumulated across multiple years, nor will there be any payout of unused vacation time.

Service requirements of certain assistantship appointments may constrain the number of days that can be taken consecutively as vacation, or the specific timing of vacations (e.g., multiple-day vacation for TAs may be most readily available before the start of classes, after classes end, or during institutionally-scheduled course break periods; GRA multiple-day vacation time may not be available during the time that critical lab experiments are being conducted). Academic responsibilities of the student may also constrain vacation time (e.g., requirements for courses in which the student is enrolled; thesis/dissertation research needs). Students and faculty should plan ahead and communicate with each other about expectations.

A graduate student seeking to take vacation time away from assistantship duties should make such request to the assistantship supervisor (and the student's special committee chair if different from the assistantship supervisor) with as much advance notice as possible to allow supervisors to plan for adequate coverage of responsibilities. The assistantship supervisor (and special committee chair, if applicable) should timely respond to the student's request for vacation time away with approval or suggestion for an alternative time if the requested time away interferes with substantive responsibilities. Supervisors should make efforts to accommodate the preferences and needs of the graduate student whenever possible. Approved vacation time should be recorded appropriately by the supervising faculty or staff. The university reserves the right to deny vacation requests for business reasons.

Funding types (e.g., fellowship, TA, GRA, RA, GA) and associated supervisors for graduate student appointments may vary by semester. Unless the same funding type and supervisor spans at least two consecutive terms, vacation time should be split

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PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

among the different funding types and appointment periods. Graduate students wishing to take vacation time that spans two different funding types and/or supervisors (e.g., late fall appointment period through early spring appointment period with two different supervisors) should request vacation time permission in advance from both supervisors (and the special committee chair if different).

A graduate student appointed on an assistantship who for personal reasons (e.g., religious observance, medical appointment, sickness, bereavement) needs time away from responsibilities in addition to the Cornell University holiday and vacation time provisions may arrange such time away with the approval of the special committee chair and faculty or staff member responsible for supervision of the assistantship duties. Such arrangements should create a way for the student to complete their responsibilities at a different time or in a different way. For example, students who seek time away to observe religious holidays could arrange in advance a plan to complete at another time any missed responsibilities or assignments; [Cornell United Religious Work](#) maintains a list of religious holidays. Graduate faculty are encouraged to create a climate that encourages graduate students to be forthcoming with their requests for time away for personal reasons.

Time away for reasonable and appropriate professional development activities (e.g., academic conferences, workshops, interviews, etc.) shall not count against the graduate student's vacation time. The student should discuss with the supervisor in advance how to cover or make up responsibilities missed while away on professional activities.

Students requiring or desiring extended periods of time away from their academic and assistantship responsibilities during the academic year, beyond that described above, may take personal leaves or health leaves of absence from the university, during which enrollment and funding stop. Students requiring or desiring extended periods of time away from assistantship responsibilities during the summer may request that their assistantship terms be modified accordingly, with permission of the assistantship supervisor and special committee chair.

If a graduate student appointed on an assistantship and the assistantship supervisor (and the student's special committee chair if different) are unable to reach agreement on appropriate scheduling of requested vacation time, use of Cornell University holidays, or requests for additional time away for personal reasons, the director of graduate studies in the graduate student's field should be consulted to help mediate a resolution. The Graduate School associate dean for academic and student affairs may be consulted as well.

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PRINCIPLES, CONTINUED

PROCEDURES: TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP (TA) ASSIGNMENTS

Teaching Assistantship (TA) Assignments

In making a Teaching Assistantship (TA) assignment, faculty and staff members responsible for oversight should consider the difficulty of the assignment and the curricular background of the prospective TA. An appropriate amount of time needed for the TA to learn the material to be taught should be incorporated into the appointment period. Where there are disparities in the assistantship assignments from course to course, those responsible for appointments should weight the assistantship assignments to ensure a fair distribution of assignments.

Required Teaching

Teaching experience required by the field as part of academic preparation is to be completed during the first four years of a student's enrollment. Exceptions to this rule should be mutually agreed upon by the student and field, and documented in writing with the signature of the student, the special committee chair, and the director of graduate studies.

For M.S. or M.A. students, the maximum teaching requirement should be one semester. Additional experience as a TA may be beneficial depending on the student's academic and professional interests.

For M./Ph.D. or Ph.D. students, the maximum teaching requirement should be two semesters or equivalent. Additional experience as a TA may be beneficial depending on the student's academic and professional interests.

Professional master's students are exempt from a teaching requirement.

Students on external fellowships may be required to teach, but must be paid the same stipend as other assistants for performing the assignment. Whenever possible, the teaching assignment should be scheduled so that it does not occur simultaneously with the fellowship. The student may be asked by the field to defer his or her fellowship for the appropriate period of time in order to perform the required teaching.

If the fellowship agency will not permit deferral of the fellowship, then the field must notify the agency of the teaching requirement. If the agency approves, the student may receive both the assistantship and the fellowship stipends. If the agency will not permit the student to teach while receiving its funds, so that the student must relinquish the fellowship in order to fulfill the teaching requirement, the student must receive a full assistantship package of stipend, tuition, and health plan during the required teaching assignment.

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PROCEDURES: TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP (TA) ASSIGNMENTS, CONTINUED

◆ **Note:** The combination of fellowship and assistantship stipends must not exceed the current academic-year cap (for more information, contact the associate dean for administration of the Graduate School).

English Proficiency and Training for International Students Appointed as Teaching Assistants

International students are expected to demonstrate English language proficiency, as judged by the Center for Teaching Innovation before beginning a TA.

International students serving as TAs in their first semester of registration as a graduate student must participate in the mandatory summer International Teaching Assistant Program (ITAP), offered in August each year. The following are exempt from this requirement:

- Citizens and permanent residents of countries whose first language is English. This exemption does not extend to regions of countries where the official language is not English
- Students who have already been exempted by the ITAP staff based on the ITA language assessment (ILA)
- Students who have completed at least three years of undergraduate and/or graduate study at an institution where the official language of instruction is English, and in a country where English is the first language. Such students are exempt from the summer program, but are required to participate in an ILA and may be required to enroll in ALS 5780 before they can assume a TA
- Students who participate in a comparable field/department TA training program that is approved by the Center for Teaching Innovation.

The program appointing the teaching assistant has the right to rescind the automatic exemption from ITAP for any student who formally qualifies for the exemption, but who, in the judgment of the hiring program, needs ITAP.

Students who are not exempted from the ITAP summer program, and who do not successfully complete the program, are not allowed to teach. The field to which the student was admitted must provide other financial support for the student for the time period as reflected in the admissions offer letter.

International students serving as a TA in the second semester or later of their graduate degree program who have not taken the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL Internet-based Test (iBT) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), or who have received a speaking score below a 28 on the TOEFL-iBT or a speaking score below an 8.5 on the IELTS, are required to

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PROCEDURES: TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP (TA) ASSIGNMENTS, CONTINUED

participate in an ITAP Language Assessment (ILA) before beginning any TA. Students who receive a 28 or above on the TOEFL-iBT or an 8.5 or above on the IELTS are exempt from this assessment. Departments should arrange for an ILA for international TAs at least one semester before scheduled TA duties.

◆ **Note:** This exemption does not apply to the mandatory summer ITAP for incoming students who will be a TA in their first semester.

The director of graduate studies and/or admission committee members are strongly encouraged to conduct telephone or interactive visual computer interviews with international applicants who are being considered for admission with the support of a TA. Applicants whose language skills are not adequate for effective communication in the classroom should not be offered admission that depends on such support.

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PROCEDURES: GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP (GRA) ASSIGNMENTS

Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) Assignments

Students appointed as graduate research assistants receive support for thesis/dissertation or other degree-related research of a type that is required from all candidates for the degree. Because considerable time and attention is required for the thesis/dissertation research, the time devoted to the Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) assignment is expected to be significant; hours spent on assignments are not tracked.

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PROCEDURES: RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP (RA) AND GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP (GA) ASSIGNMENTS

Research Assistantship (RA) and Graduate Assistantship (GA) Assignments

Research assistants perform non-thesis research on a faculty's research project. If the Research Assistantship (RA) assignment directly relates to the student's thesis or dissertation, then the appointment should be processed as a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA).

A GA appointment is appropriate when a student is receiving stipend and tuition credit (including health plan but not student activity fees) for performing certain duties, but cannot be classified appropriately as a Teaching Assistantship (TA), GRA, or an RA.

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PROCEDURES: APPOINTMENT LETTERS

An appointment letter specifically articulating each assistant's responsibilities must be provided to the student prior to the beginning of the appointment period. This letter should be written at the time the first assistantship appointment is made and rewritten every subsequent year, or every semester if the appointment changes. Appointment letters are the responsibility of the unit providing the funding and processing the appointment; thus, the assistantship appointment letter may be different from the admission offer letter. Subsequent appointment letters are the responsibility of the department funding the assistantship. All appointment letters are required to contain a reference to University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships. Units are responsible for retaining copies of appointment letters in accordance with Policy 4.7.

Required Information

Appointment letters should include, at a minimum, the following information:

Assistantship Details

- Individual responsible for oversight
- Type of assistantship
- Duration of assistantship (semester(s) and specific appointment dates), including for Teaching Assistantships additional details if duties of the assistantship extend beyond the appointment period as above
- Duties and responsibilities of the assistantship appointment
- Rights and responsibilities related to Cornell University holidays and vacation time as described above, including if applicable periods when taking vacation time will not be approved or enumerating holidays on which assistantship duties are required and provisions for taking alternate days as holidays.

Financial Details

- Pay schedule
- Stipend amount, tuition credit amount, Student Health Plan coverage, and any other provisions

Terms of Assistantship

- A statement that continued support will depend upon satisfactory academic and assistantship performance, as defined by the unit, as well as continued availability of funding (where appropriate)
- Reference to University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships

Next Steps

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POLICY 1.3

Graduate Student Assistantships

Draft Date: November 19, 2019

PROCEDURES: APPOINTMENT LETTERS, CONTINUED

- Acceptance terms

A sample letter and other suggested wording is included in the appendix.

POLICY 1.3

Graduate Student Assistantships

PROCEDURES: CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Handling Disagreements

The university has a graduate student grievance procedure to address serious disagreements between graduate students and faculty. For more information, see the “Grievances” section of the Graduate School’s policies website (see Related Resources).

Harassment

The university has clear policies on sexual and other forms of harassment. All students and faculty members should make themselves aware of the Campus Code of Conduct, University Policy 4.6, Standards of Ethical Conduct, and University Policy 6.4, Prohibited Bias, Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual and Related Misconduct. For more information, contact the Office of Workforce Policy and Labor Relations, whose staff is available for informal consultation, as well as for formal complaints.

Consensual Relationships

Graduate Assistants are subject to [University Policy 6.3](#), Consensual Relationships, which prohibits romantic or sexual relationships between students and those in positions of authority or power whenever those relationships have the potential to interfere with an individual’s right or ability to pursue academic, training, research, or professional interests.

Unsatisfactory Assistantship Performance

When a faculty or staff member responsible for oversight is dissatisfied with a student’s performance in fulfilling the responsibilities of an assistantship, the following steps should be taken.

1. The faculty or staff member responsible for oversight should, in the course of routine mentoring, discuss the shortcomings of the student’s performance, making specific recommendations for changes.
2. If improvement is not made, the faculty or staff member responsible for oversight must advise the student in writing of his/her concerns, and allow sufficient time for the student to address the performance issues raised by the faculty or staff member responsible for oversight. Specific recommendations for changes in performance should be provided again. A copy of this letter must be sent to the director of graduate studies of the student’s field.
3. The assistantship may be terminated if sufficient improvement is not made in a timely manner. The faculty or staff member responsible for oversight must provide notification of such a termination in writing. This notification must state that the student has the right to file a grievance with the Graduate School.

POLICY 1.3

Graduate Student Assistantships

PROCEDURES: CONFLICT RESOLUTION, CONTINUED

4. The Graduate School grievance policy provides a mechanism for further review if the graduate student believes the action to be unfair, and he or she is unable to resolve the matter at the field level.

◆ **Note:** An assistant who receives feedback indicating unsatisfactory performance is encouraged, at any time during this process, to confer with the director of graduate studies and the faculty or staff member responsible for oversight.

POLICY 1.3 Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTER OF APPOINTMENT for Teaching Assistants

Dear _____:

[Date of Letter]

I am pleased to tell you that you have been awarded a teaching assistantship (TA) in the department of _____ for the [academic year 20__ - 20__] [calendar year 20__] [fall semester 20__] [spring semester 20__] [summer 20__]. Your teaching assistantship will be for [Course Name and Number], with Professor _____ serving as your TA supervisor. Your appointment begins on _____, and ends on _____.

Description: Duties for this teaching assistantship typically begin at the start of the appointment period and end on the day after the deadline for completion of the final exam grades. Duties and responsibilities of this assistantship include: [attending all classes, running ___ sections, holding office hours, making weekly assignments, grading assignments, grading papers, grading midterms, grading finals, maintaining the class electronic mailing list, maintaining the class web site and providing limited administrative support to the instructor of record]. It is possible that there may be changes in assignments due to unforeseen circumstances (e.g., fluctuations in the pattern of funding and in course enrollments). You will be notified promptly of any changes.

Time commitment: Your assistantship responsibilities shall not exceed 20 hours in any week with the average to be 15 hours per week counting across all weeks in the appointment period. If you are unable to complete your duties within this allotted time, you must promptly inform your supervisor.

Stipend and financial support: This assistantship includes a stipend of [\$______] [\$______ semi-monthly] for the ___ month period and support for tuition and the student health plan. You will be responsible for payment of the required graduate student activity fee. The Cornell student health plan provides coverage from August 1st, 20_ through July 31st, 20_. This coverage remains in place even if you should cease to be enrolled as a graduate student. Individuals who leave the university or are not funded by the university during an academic semester must pay the health plan premium for that period. You will be paid on a semi-monthly basis, usually on the 15th day and in the last week of each month. The first check will be available on or about _____. Your first and last stipend payments may be partial payments if they fall within (not at the start or end of) semimonthly periods. Cornell encourages students to set up direct deposit in Workday (<http://workday.cornell.edu/>). All assistantship stipends are subject to state and federal taxation. The tuition portion of the award is not taxed.

Holidays: Teaching assistants are provided all university holidays that occur during their appointment period. These include Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the following day, and Winter Break (typically six working days between December 25 through January 1). If you are required to perform assistantship duties on a university holiday you must be notified in advance and provisions must be made for you to receive equivalent time off on a non-holiday weekday. Days on which classes are not in session but the university is open (e.g., institutionally-scheduled

POLICY 1.3
Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT, CONTINUED

breaks from classes in Fall Semester, January intersession, or Spring Semester) are not automatic vacation time nor holidays for graduate students appointed on assistantships, but you may request in advance to take vacation during these times.

Vacation time: In addition to university holidays, graduate students who are on funded appointments (assistantship or fellowship) for the calendar year August 21-August 20 are eligible for up to 10 days of vacation per year, or if on funded appointments for a portion of the year vacation eligibility is prorated (e.g., Fall-only appointment is eligible for 4 days of vacation). Vacation time is intended to provide time away from assistantship and academic responsibilities. Vacation time should not interfere with completing teaching obligations, including required class time and planning meetings without agreement of the teaching assistant supervisor. It is your responsibility to coordinate such time away with approval of both your assistantship supervisor and special committee chair. You will receive instructions on how to track and record vacation time. Vacation time may not be rolled over or accumulated across multiple years, nor will there be any payout of unused vacation time.

Performance and Renewal: Assistantship support is a form of student financial support and continued funding is therefore contingent upon academic performance constituting good standing in your graduate field and satisfactory fulfillment of any teaching or research responsibilities as defined by your assistantship supervisor.

Acceptance: If you accept this appointment and its conditions (please consult University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships [and the departments TA handbook] for further detail. Please sign and return a copy of this letter no later than [date] to _____.

Assistantships uncommitted after the above date will be made to other graduate students. Please contact your assistantship supervisor as soon as possible to discuss the plans for the course so that you have a common understanding of assistantship requirements. If you have not yet completed the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 you will receive separate instructions on how to do so.

Congratulations on being selected for this assistantship. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at _____. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Chair] or [Director of Graduate Studies]

Accepted: _____

POLICY 1.3
Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT, CONTINUED

SAMPLE LETTER OF APPOINTMENT for Research Assistants / Graduate Assistant

Dear _____:

[Date of Letter]

I am pleased to tell you that you have been awarded a [research assistantship (RA) / graduate assistantship (GA)] in the department of _____ for the [academic year 20__ - 20__] [calendar year 20__] [fall semester 20__] [spring semester 20__] [summer 20__]. Your [RA/GA] will be supervised by Professor _____. Your appointment begins on _____, and ends on _____.

Description: Duties and responsibilities of this assistantship include:

_____. It is possible that there may be changes in assignments due to unforeseen circumstances. You will be notified promptly of any changes.

Time commitment: Your assistantship responsibilities shall not exceed 20 hours in any week with the average to be 15 hours per week counting across all weeks in the appointment period. If you are unable to complete your duties within this allotted time, you must promptly inform your supervisor.

Stipend and financial support: This assistantship includes a stipend of [\$ _____] [\$ _____ semi-monthly] for the ___ month period and support for tuition and student health plan. You will be responsible for payment of the required graduate student activity fee. The Cornell student health plan provides coverage from August 1st, 20__ through July 31st, 20__. This coverage remains in place even if you should cease to be enrolled as a graduate student. Individuals who leave the university or are not funded by the university during an academic semester must pay the health plan premium for that period. You will be paid on a semi-monthly basis, usually on the 15th day and in the last week of each month. The first check will be available on or about _____. Your first and last stipend payments may be partial payments if they fall within (not at the start or end of) semimonthly periods. Cornell encourages students to set up direct deposit in Workday (<http://workday.cornell.edu/>). All assistantship stipends are subject to state and federal taxation. The tuition portion of the award is not taxed.

Holidays: [Research assistants / graduate assistants] are provided all university holidays that occur during their appointment period. These include Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the following day, and Winter Break (typically six working days between December 25 through January 1). If you are required to perform assistantship duties on a university holiday

POLICY 1.3
Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT, CONTINUED

you must be notified in advance and provisions must be made for you to receive equivalent time off on a non-holiday weekday. Days on which classes are not in session but the university is open (e.g., institutionally-scheduled breaks from classes in Fall Semester, January intersession, or Spring Semester) are not automatic vacation time nor holidays for graduate students appointed on assistantships, but you may request in advance to take vacation during these times.

Vacation time: In addition to university holidays, graduate students who are on funded appointments (assistantship or fellowship) for the calendar year August 21-August 20 are eligible for up to 10 days of vacation per year, or if on funded appointments for a portion of the year vacation eligibility is prorated (e.g., Fall-only appointment is eligible for 4 days of vacation). Vacation time is intended to provide time away from assistantship and academic responsibilities. It is your responsibility to coordinate such time away with approval of both your assistantship supervisor and special committee chair. You will receive instructions on how to track and record vacation time. Vacation time may not be rolled over or accumulated across multiple years, nor will there be any payout of unused vacation time.

Performance and Renewal: Assistantship support is a form of student financial support and continued funding is therefore contingent upon academic performance constituting good standing in your graduate field and satisfactory fulfillment of any teaching or research responsibilities as defined by your assistantship supervisor.

Acceptance: If you accept this appointment and its conditions (please consult University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships for further detail. Please sign and return a copy of this letter no later than [date] to _____.

Assistantships uncommitted after the above date will be made to other graduate students. Please contact your assistantship supervisor as soon as possible to discuss the duties of this assistantship so that you have a common understanding of assistantship requirements. If you have not yet completed the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 you will receive separate instructions on how to do so.

Congratulations on being selected for this assistantship. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at _____. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Chair] or [Director of Graduate Studies]

Accepted: _____

POLICY 1.3 Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT, CONTINUED

Dear _____:

[Date of Letter]

I am pleased to tell you that you have been awarded a graduate research assistantship (GRA) in the department of _____ for the [academic year 20__ - 20__] [calendar year 20__] [fall semester 20__] [spring semester 20__] [summer 20__]. Your research assistantship will be supervised by Professor _____. Your appointment begins on _____, and ends on _____.

Description: The duties of this assistantship align with your [thesis/dissertation] research and therefore include considerable flexibility based on the nature of your research. [You are expected to _____.]

Time commitment: Because this assistantship is in support of academic requirements associated with your dissertation research, the time spent on research connected with the project and this assistantship is expected to be significant.

Stipend and financial support: This assistantship includes a stipend of [\$______] [\$_ _____ semi-monthly] for the ___ month period and support for tuition and student health plan. You will be responsible for payment of the required graduate student activity fee. The Cornell student health plan provides coverage from August 1st, 20_ through July 31st, 20_. This coverage remains in place even if you should cease to be enrolled as a graduate student. Individuals who leave the university or are not funded by the university during an academic semester must pay the student health plan premium for that period. You will be paid on a semi-monthly basis, usually on the 15th day and in the last week of each month. The first check will be available on or about _____. Your first and last stipend payments may be partial payments if they fall within (not at the start or end of) semimonthly periods. Cornell encourages students to set up direct deposit in Workday (<http://workday.cornell.edu/>). All assistantship stipends are subject to state and federal taxation. The tuition portion of the award is not taxed.

Holidays: Graduate research assistants are provided all university holidays that occur during their appointment period. These include Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving and the following day, and Winter Break (typically six working days between December 25 through January 1). If you are required to perform assistantship duties on a university holiday you must be notified in advance and provisions must be made for you to receive equivalent time off on a non-holiday weekday. Days on which classes are not in session but the university is open (e.g., institutionally-scheduled breaks from classes in Fall Semester, January intersession, or Spring Semester) are not automatic vacation time nor holidays for graduate students appointed on assistantships, but you may request in advance to take vacation during these times.

Vacation time: In addition to university holidays, graduate students who are on funded appointments (assistantship or fellowship) for the calendar year August 21-August 20 are eligible for up to 10 days of vacation per year, or if on funded appointments for a portion of the year vacation eligibility is prorated (e.g.,

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Graduate Student Assistantships

APPENDIX: SAMPLE LETTERS OF APPOINTMENT, CONTINUED

Fall-only appointment is eligible for 4 days of vacation). Vacation time is intended to provide time away from assistantship and academic responsibilities. It is your responsibility to coordinate such time away with approval of both your assistantship supervisor and special committee chair. You will receive instructions on how to track and record vacation time. Vacation time may not be rolled over or accumulated across multiple years, nor will there be any payout of unused vacation time.

Performance and Renewal: Assistantship support is a form of student financial support and continued funding is therefore contingent upon academic performance constituting good standing in your graduate field and satisfactory fulfillment of any teaching or research responsibilities as defined by your assistantship supervisor.

Acceptance: If you accept this appointment and its conditions please consult University Policy 1.3, Graduate Student Assistantships for further detail. Please sign and return a copy of this letter no later than [date] to _____.

Assistantships uncommitted after the above date will be made to other graduate students. Please contact your assistantship supervisor as soon as possible to discuss the duties of this assistantship so that you have a common understanding of assistantship requirements. If you have not yet completed the Employment Eligibility Verification Form I-9 you will receive separate instructions on how to do so. Congratulations on being selected for this assistantship. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at _____. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Chair] or [Director of Graduate Studies]

Accepted: _____

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