

Guidance on Graduate Student Academic Appointments
Office of the Provost – Graduate Studies
June 10, 2020

It is essential to ensure that graduate students are being appointed in accordance with University of Pittsburgh policies. The following guidance and [FAQs](#) are being provided to assist school administrators with graduate student academic appointments. Attention to this guidance will ensure that students' appointments reflect their true duties and that appointment data is accurate.

This guidance should be used for all fall 2019 appointments and beyond. If a student's appointment needs to be changed, a new appointment letter will need to be generated to maintain consistency.

Initially this guidance and the FAQs were provided as a draft, and the Office of the Provost – Graduate Studies continues to welcome your feedback. Where there are gaps in these policies and their implementation, we understand that schools have adopted their own standards. If you have any questions about where the guidance differs from your current practices, please reach out to Stephanie Hoogendoorn, Office of the Provost, at hoogen@pitt.edu or at 412-624-9246. As needed, this guidance and the FAQs can be updated.

Important Reminders about Academic Appointments

Graduate student academic appointments are a part of a student's educational training and serve to further educational objectives. Individuals appointed on a graduate student academic appointment must be enrolled in a graduate degree program and should be making satisfactory academic progress. Staff members, faculty members, undergraduate students, and non-degree students cannot be appointed on a graduate student academic appointment.

Assignments related to a student's appointment should not exceed an average of 20 hours per week for any full appointment, including time for adequate preparation time for teaching assignments. Students will likely need to devote additional time to make progress on academic degree requirements.

Graduate students are not permitted to hold more than the equivalent of one full appointment within the University at a time. Normally, graduate students will find this to be a full-time demand. In rare exceptions, additional appointments must be approved by the department chair and the dean.

Stipend rates are posted here: <http://www.gradstudents.pitt.edu/stipend-rates>. The stipends listed are base amounts; schools may choose to provide higher stipends up to the GSR maximum without approval. When students are reappointed, their stipends should be increased by at least the amount of the annual increase.

In response to questions, the Office of International Services has provided [Guidelines on Working Hours for F1/J-1 Visa Holders](#).

I. Academic - Graduate Student - Assistant (GSA)

Policy: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/TATFGSAPolicyStatement.pdf>

Description: A graduate student who performs duties to assist in the educational or research mission of the University, but does not teach a class, recitation, or laboratory.

Examples of Duties: administration of an academic journal or a conference, categorizing a collection of papers or archives, and providing administrative assistance to a unit. Often, but not always, field knowledge is essential.

Additional Norms:

- GSA should report to a faculty member or an administrator.
- GSA support does not preclude a student's participation in funded research.

II. Academic - Graduate Student - Teaching Assistant (TA)

Policy: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/TATFGSAPolicyStatement.pdf>

Description: A graduate student who holds a teaching or teaching-related appointment.

Examples of Duties: teaching a class, leading a recitation or a laboratory, grading assignments or exams, and holding office hours.

Additional Norms:

- One or more faculty members shall work closely with the TA to assist in carrying out assignments and to facilitate professional development.
- TAs should not teach post-baccalaureate courses but may grade or lead recitations for post-baccalaureate courses.
- TAs who teach classes or lead a lab or recitation need to be in compliance with our English language proficiency requirements.
- TA support does not preclude a student's participation in funded research.

III. Academic - Graduate Student - Teaching Fellow (TF)

Academic - Graduate Student - Senior Teaching Fellow (not typically used but available)

Policy: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/TATFGSAPolicyStatement.pdf>

Description: The same as a Teaching Assistant except that the Teaching Fellow is more educationally advanced or experienced. A TF typically holds the equivalent of a master's degree.

Additional Norms:

- One or more faculty members shall work closely with the TF to assist in carrying out assignments and to facilitate professional development.
- TFs should not teach graduate courses. Exceptions may be made only in rare cases where the individual shows clear evidence of outstanding skills in specialized areas and when the individual is directly supervised by a member of the graduate faculty and efforts are in place to minimize a TF teaching their peers.
- An appointment to a TF is intended to recognize educational attainment and is independent from a specific teaching assignment of course as an instructor. That is, a TF cannot later be appointed as a TA.
- TF support does not preclude a student's participation in funded research.

IV. Academic - Graduate Student – Researcher (GSR)

Policy: <https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/GSRPolicyStatement.pdf>

Description: Graduate students who are receiving financial support from **internal or external** research funds while performing research on projects for which the funds were awarded.

Examples of Duties: designing and running experiments, analyzing data, performing literature searches, translating archives, communicating results, and etc.

Examples of GSR Funding: NIH R01, R21, P01, P30, and P50 awards, NSF awards, and start-up funds.

Additional Norms:

- Research funds are typically external but can be internal.
- Research is directly related to a student’s dissertation or other research requirements.
- Faculty mentor may or may not be the student’s dissertation advisor.
- A Dean may approve stipends above the maximum stipend rate. Please inform Vice Provost of Graduate Studies Amanda Godley at VPGraduate-Godley@pitt.edu¹ of any increases.
- GSR support does not preclude a student’s participation in teaching.

V. Certificate - Certificate - Predoctoral Fellow (PF)

Policy:

<https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Predoctoral%20Fellows%20and%20Trainees%20Policy%20Statement%20FINAL%206-1-2020.pdf>

Description: Graduate students who are receiving external or internal financial support to foster progress in their graduate programs without a specific expectation of teaching or work on otherwise funded projects. Most fellowships are awarded competitively to the student based on a proposed plan of study describing expectations for research or other scholarly activities to be undertaken during the period of the fellowship. The student may engage in academic pursuits, professional development, or degree program requirements.

Examples of Duties: collecting data, completing a dissertation, or satisfying degree program requirements, including taking classes.

Examples of Fellowship Awards: NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program (GRFP), NIH F30 or F31 awards, NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA), National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate (NDSEG), K. Leroy Irvis Fellowship, Provost Development Funds, School Awards (such as the Andrew Mellon Fellowship in the Dietrich School or Arts and Sciences), Alumni Awards, and Dean Awards.

Additional Norms:

- Funding can be either from external sources or from internal sources, including endowment funds.

¹ Updated July 1, 2020

- While fellowship students currently cannot be provided insurance as a pre-tax benefit, schools are expected to provide individual health insurance coverage to pre-doctoral fellows. Typically, schools increase the stipend so that students can purchase coverage from the graduate student UPMC plan or another plan of the student's choice. If the appointment is for two semesters, the student should receive funds to cover 12 months of individual coverage from the graduate student health insurance plan.
- Faculty mentor may or may not be the student's dissertation advisor.
- Fellowship support does not preclude a student's participation in funded research and teaching, professional development, or fulfilling degree program requirements that contribute to their educational training. In fact, these activities may be required for some fellowship holders.

VI. Certificate - Certificate – Predoctoral Trainee (PT)

Policy:

<https://www.provost.pitt.edu/sites/default/files/Predocotrinal%20Fellows%20and%20Trainees%20Policy%20Statement%20FINAL%206-1-2020.pdf>

Description: Graduate students who are receiving financial support from an institutional training grant, which is an award made to the University to support a group of graduate students. Most traineeships are awarded competitively based on an internal process and include an expectation for research or other scholarly activities. The award does not preclude a student's participation in funded research, teaching, professional development, or fulfilling degree program requirements that contribute to their educational training.

Examples of Duties: collecting data, completing a dissertation, or satisfying degree program requirements (including taking classes).

Examples of Institutional Training Grants: NIH T32, NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA), NSF Research Traineeship (NRT), and Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN)

Additional Norms:

- Funding is from an external institutional training grant awarded to a faculty member.
- Schools are responsible to provide individual health insurance coverage to trainees. Typically, schools increase the stipend so that students can purchase coverage from the graduate student UPMC plan or another plan of the student's choice. If the appointment is for two semesters, the student should receive funds to cover 12 months of individual coverage from the graduate student health insurance plan. Some schools reimburse students for their monthly premiums.
- Faculty mentor may or may not be the student's dissertation advisor.
- Trainee support does not preclude a student's participation in funded research, teaching, professional development, or fulfilling degree program requirements that contribute to their educational training.