10.2.1 Graduate Student Assistantships

Last updated on:
09/04/2015

Formerly Known As Policy Number:
24.2

This Guide Memo summarizes the regulations regarding Graduate Student Assistantship appointments at Stanford University. Definition of the Graduate Student Assistantship is followed by the criteria for eligibility to hold an assistantship, a brief description of each type of assistantship, the rules governing Tuition Allowance, and other policy matters. For questions regarding this subject, please call the Financial Aid Office [1].

Authority:
Approved by the Vice Provost for Graduate Education.

Applicability:
Applies to the appointment of graduate students to Graduate Student Assistantships.

1. Definitions and Distinctions

a. **Graduate Student Assistantships** are a form of student employment, earning a compensation package including both salary and tuition allowance (TAL) for the performance of research or teaching services to the University as part of the student's academic and professional training and development.

Distinctions from Assistantships:

- **Fellowships**
  Fellowship stipends are financial aid, not salary. No service is expected in return for a fellowship; it is awarded on a merit basis to assist a student in the pursuit of a degree.

- **Hourly Employment through Payroll**
  Graduate students may be employed and paid for work unrelated to the student's academic and professional training as described in Administrative Guide 10.2.2 [2]: Graduate Student Hourly Employment. Such employment is not considered an assistantship appointment, does not generate tuition, and is not processed in GFS.

b. **The Graduate Financial Support (GFS) system** is the online application used to enter all
graduate student research and teaching assistantship appointments and fellowships. Although they are not matriculated Stanford graduate students, Postdoctoral Scholars’ appointments also are entered in GFS. GFS also handles financial support for other non-matriculated graduate students, e.g., Visiting Student Researchers. Non-matriculated students are, however, in general not eligible for assistantships.

2. Assistantship Eligibility Criteria

a. Matriculation at Stanford with an active authorization to enroll and an active graduate degree program, or, for Research Assistantships only, enrollment in non-matriculated graduate status as a Student of New Faculty. Coterminal students in both a Bachelor’s and Master’s degree program are eligible for assistantships after completion of 12 quarters or, upon request, after completion of 180 units of undergraduate work.

b. Enrollment
All students holding assistantships must be enrolled in each quarter in which the assistantship appointment is held. For autumn, winter and spring quarters, unless the student is on TGR status, the student must be enrolled for 8-9-10 units. Except for Terminal Graduate Registration (TGR) students, the GFS System will not allow payment of TAL unless the graduate student is enrolled full-time during autumn, winter and spring quarters. Exceptions to this enrollment requirement are allowed for Honor Co-op students, for students with disabilities, and for a childbirth accommodation.

c. Relevancy
The service performed (teaching or research) must be related to the student's academic program in order to qualify for the assistantship appointment.

Note: Entering and approving the assistantship appointment in Graduate Financial Support (GFS)/Worklist Manager constitutes a statement that the work involved is relevant to the student's academic program.

d. English proficiency for teaching assistantships
All international students must be approved for English proficiency before being appointed to any teaching position.

- The department that plans to appoint an international student as a TA/CA must have the student contact the Language Center at amkopp@stanford.edu [3] or (650)725-5378 [4] to arrange an appointment for a TA screening. Note: Whenever possible, the TA screening should occur at least one full quarter in advance of the assistantship appointment. This allows the student time to take any required or recommended classes to improved communication skills.
- Upon successful completion of the TA screen and/or required classes, EFS enters the approval of English proficiency (TA OK) in the GFS system, after which the assistantship appointment can be processed.

e. I-9 eligibility to work in the U.S.A.
By federal regulation, all individuals receiving salary through Payroll must demonstrate eligibility to work in the U.S.A. by filing Federal Form I-9. Departments must forward necessary paperwork to
Payroll in advance of the student's first paycheck. For more information, see Student Specific Payroll Administration [5].

f. Social Security Number must be on file with Payroll.

g. Alternatives
In the case where no matriculated graduate student is available to fill a need for a Research or Teaching Assistantship, an undergraduate or non-matriculated person may be hired in the categories of Teaching Aide or Research Aide. These are hourly-paid positions, processed through the Human Resources Management System (HRMS), not the GFS system. Individuals appointed to these positions are never eligible for a Tuition Allowance. The appropriate department chair (or program director) and school dean's office should confirm that no matriculated graduate student is available before these alternative appointments are processed.

Footnote:

1 Coterminal students in the Bachelor/Master program who have completed 180 units of undergraduate work are eligible for appointments in assistantship categories.

3. Types of Assistantship Appointments: Teaching

Graduate student teaching responsibilities are categorized into the following four appointment levels.

Stanford University establishes annually a minimum salary rate for each of these levels. (Mentor Teaching Affiliate and Graduate Teaching Affiliate positions have the same minimum salary.)

Note: No student may be appointed to any of the following positions for a course in which the student is simultaneously enrolled.

a. Course Assistant
Assists a faculty member who has primary responsibility for a course. Duties vary but do not include classroom teaching. Duties may include:

- Assisting in the preparation of lecture materials and running laboratory sessions.
- Conducting review sessions and grading exams.
- Holding office hours.
- Monitoring or maintaining existing course web sites.

b. Teaching Assistant
Has significantly more independence than a Course Assistant. The Teaching Assistant works with a faculty member who has primary responsibility for a course, or assists a group of students in several courses. Duties vary and may include:
• Preparing for class sections and/or laboratories where new material may be presented.
• Presenting material in classroom or lab setting.
• Marking and/or grading some portion or all of the exams or papers (but not independently assigning the final grade).
• Holding regular office hours.

c. Graduate Teaching Affiliate
This teaching appointment is limited to graduate students who have had substantial teaching experience. The Graduate Teaching Affiliate will typically be identified as the Instructor in Stanford publications, and will have primary charge and responsibility for the course (with the mentorship of a faculty member). Responsibilities for the class typically include:

• Preparation, teaching, grading, holding regular office hours, etc., in keeping with the established practices of the department.
• In some cases Graduate Teaching Affiliates have full responsibility for a course where the content is defined by a faculty coordinator. In other cases, they will develop course materials independently with the guidance of a faculty mentor for a course that has been approved by the department/program in which it is offered.

d. Mentor Teaching Assistant
This teaching appointment is limited to graduate students who have had substantial teaching experience. In addition to the responsibilities of a Teaching Assistant, this student:

• Serves as a head Teaching Assistant to coordinate the training and guidance of Teaching Assistants in a given course or set of courses.
• Develops complex materials (including web-based) in support of a course or group of courses.

4. Types of Assistantship Appointments: Research

The following research appointments are listed in ascending order of qualifications, responsibility, and compensation.

a. Research Assistant
Works on a research project under the supervision of a faculty member.

b. Predoctoral Research Affiliate
An advanced Ph.D. student in one of these appointment categories:

(1) Engineering and Natural Sciences
• Performs research or administrative tasks beyond the scope of a typical graduate research assistant's work.
• This category should not be used to fill a regular staff position.

(2) Humanities and Social Sciences
Is engaged in research under the supervision of a faculty member.
Makes an original contribution to a research effort that serves the common professional objectives of the student and supervisor.

5. Percentage and Period of Assistantship Appointments

a. Full-quarter Appointments
Assistantship appointments are made for a full quarter (3 months of either teaching or research work). Standard appointment periods are: October 1–December 31, January 1–March 31, April 1–June 30, and July 1–September 30. An alternate quarter schedule is available for students whose work begins before the start of a standard quarter. Students on an alternate schedule must remain on that schedule throughout the academic year.

b. Autumn, Winter and Spring Assistantship Appointments
(1) The minimum assistantship is 10% time. Percentage of appointments must be in increments of 5% time.

(2) 50% Maximum — The typical assistantship appointment is for a maximum of 50% time, to allow students to make expeditious progress toward their degree. Assistantships totaling more than 50% can impede that progress.

(3) An appointment of 40% must be combined with a 10% appointment to total 50%. Appointments of 45% are not allowed.

(4) Approval for Exceptions — Assistantships for more than 50% time during the academic year, two concurrent assistantships totaling more than 50% time, or enrollment in more than 10 units while holding a 50% appointment, require the prior approval of the student's advisor, the Department Chair, and School Dean's office.

   • Recommendations for such assistantship appointments should indicate the academic progress of the student and the anticipated degree completion date; the student must have been admitted to candidacy.
   • Approval will be granted only where such an assistantship appointment will not interfere with progress towards the degree and normally will be granted for no more than one year.

c. Summer Assistantship Appointments
(1) Percentage of Time—In summer quarter, in addition to the standard 10-50% assistantships, appointments at 60-90% time are permitted (see section 5.d).

(2) Number of Units—In summer quarter, graduate students must be enrolled in at least one unit or TGR (Terminal Graduate Registration) to have any size assistantship appointment. Students with appointments totaling more than 50% will have their Tuition Allowance reduced proportionately (see TAL tables [6]) in order to accommodate additional employment. (For example: A student's 70% appointment(s) earns the same TAL as a 30% appointment. Appointments of 90% provide...
TAL equal to the value of 1-3 units of tuition.) Students combining an assistantship with more than 8 hours of hourly employment during the summer should reduce their enrollment in proportion to their total Summer Quarter employment. Students registered TGR must enroll in the TGR course (801 or 802).

For additional information regarding TAL in Summer, see Section 7.d(4).

d. Assistantships Totaling More Than 50%

(1) Whether approved as an exception (5.b.4 above) or permitted as summer employment, the maximum combined assistantships for any student during any quarter is 90%. Appointments totaling more than 36 hours/week may not be processed in GFS, are not considered assistantships, and do not include a tuition allowance; they should instead be processed through HRMS.

(2) Whenever possible, graduate student assistantship appointments totaling more than 50% should be established as a single appointment, rather than a combination of smaller appointments. (This allows GFS to calculate the appropriate TAL; if entered separately, administrators must determine the appropriate TAL cost and split, and coordinate adjustments to GFS.)

e. Shortened Summer Assistantships

During Summer quarter, when many courses are shorter and the between-quarters period is longer than in Autumn/Winter/Spring quarters, a teaching or research assistantship may be offered for less than the full three-month period, but must be at least two months in duration. Summer assistantships must begin on the quarterly start-date (July 1, unless the student is on the alternate calendar), but the end date may be set at two months or later, rather than the full 3-month period. This should be done only in the Summer Quarter, and only where the research or teaching effort is significantly less than expected in a normal quarter-long appointment. In these cases, the student will earn the full tuition allowance and a specific salary per pay period (often, the department’s standard semi-monthly salary). The student should be advised that the shorter work period will generate less total salary.

6. Salary

Stanford University establishes annually the minimum salary levels for Graduate Student Assistantships. No maximum salary level is specified by the University, although individual schools may do so. (The minimum salary rates for TAs, RAs, and the TAL Tables can be found at http://gfs.stanford.edu/tables [6].)

Source of Funding

a. Salary for RAs may be paid by an external/sponsored source of funds or school/ departmental funds.

b. Salary for TAs may be paid by a University budget allocation to the schools/departments or by school/departmental funds.
7. Tuition Allowance (TAL)

a. Definition
TAL represents a commitment to support a student’s educational program through the payment of a portion of the student’s tuition bill.

b. Eligibility
All eligibility requirements for assistantship appointments must be met. (See section 2.)

c. Source of Funding
The value of TAL for a 50% assistantship appointment is established as the tuition value for 8-10 units (8-9 units in the Law School, and 8 units in the MED MD program). The value of TAL for assistantship appointments of between 10% and 50% is a proportional amount defined by TAL Tables [6] published each year.

Tuition charges and TAL are based on the student’s home school tuition rate, regardless of the location of the assistantship. The school/department where the student holds the assistantship appointment is responsible for the salary, as well as the tuition based on the student’s home school tuition rate.

The University requires that any outside tuition support to which students have access will be used to the full extent before TAL is claimed. Acceptance of a Stanford assistantship appointment obliges a student to inform the department of any other aid received.

The cost of the TAL is shared among Stanford University funds and school, department, and/or sponsored project funds supporting the assistantship.

(1) TAL Funding for Research Assistants
TAL for Research Assistants is divided and funded as follows:

- Sponsored portion: Except for the School of Medicine, 60% of the TAL amount is charged directly to the sponsored project or other source of funds supporting the assistantship; in the School of Medicine, 81% of the TAL amount is directly charged.

- Stanford portion: 40% of the TAL amount is paid by Stanford University, or by the school in which the assistant is working; the School of Medicine pays 19% of the TAL amount. Except in the Schools Business and Medicine, University general funds are used to pay the Stanford portion of TAL for Research Assistants. The Schools of Business and Medicine cover the Stanford portion of TAL for Research Assistants from their own funds. Except in the Schools of Business and Medicine, University general funds are used to pay the Stanford portion of TAL for Research Assistants. The Schools of Business and Medicine cover the Stanford portion of TAL for Research Assistants from their own funds.

(2) TAL Funding for Teaching Assistants
- In all schools other than Schools of Business and Medicine, TAL for Teaching Assistants is funded by a University budget allocation to the schools/departments. Schools, departments or programs may also fund additional TAL for Teaching Assistants, beyond the University budget.
allocation.
- The Schools of Business and Medicine are responsible for covering the cost of TAL for Teaching Assistants working in their schools.

(3) Federal Work Study (FWS)
- FWS funds cannot be used to pay TAL.
- If a student has a research assistantship funded by FWS, the FWS funds pay the student's salary, the school/department pays the "sponsored portion," i.e., 60%, of the tuition, and the University pays the difference, i.e., 40%, from general funds.
- If a student has a teaching assistantship funded by FWS, the FWS funds pay the student's salary. TAL funding for these students is as described in Section 7.c (2) above.

(4) Students Working in Schools Other Than Where They Are Enrolled
When graduate students are appointed as Teaching or Research Assistants in a school other than the one in which they are enrolled, the school in which the student works is responsible for paying the TAL at the student's home school tuition rate. In the case of Research Assistants, splitting tuition between the sponsored source and the University (either 60%/40% or 81%/19%) is controlled by the school paying the student.

(5) Terminal Graduate Registration (TGR), Terminal Medical Registration (TMR) and Medical School Research Rate (MSRR)
- TAL cannot be carried forward to pay TGR/TMR/MSRR tuition in future quarters.
- TGR/TMR/MSRR tuition is paid in full by the associated assistantship (see below). The GFS system will not divide TGR/TMR/MSRR tuition and share the cost with university or school funds.
- For Research Assistants, TGR/TMR/MSRR tuition is charged directly to the source of funds paying the student's salary.
- For Teaching Assistants, TGR/TMR/MSRR tuition is paid in the same manner as other TAL funding for Teaching Assistants (see section 2, above).

d. Amount of TAL

(1) Percent Time
The amount of TAL earned depends on the percentage of time of the graduate student assistantship appointment(s). See the Tuition Allowance Tables [6].
- The minimum assistantship appointment is 10% and provides TAL equal to the value of two units of tuition. (Note: The minimum tuition charged by Stanford is three units, and therefore a 10% assistantship will not provide enough tuition allowance to cover Stanford's minimum unit-based tuition.)
- The maximum assistantship appointment during autumn, winter and spring quarters is 50%, and provides TAL equal to the 8-10 unit tuition charge, except in the Law School where they earn the 8-9 unit value and in the MED MD program, where they earn the value of 8 units.
- For assistantship appointments of 50-90%, the total TAL earned decreases as the percentage of time increases. (For example: A student's 70% appointment(s) earns the same TAL as a 30% appointment.) Appointments of 90% provide TAL equal to the value of 1-3 units of tuition.
For the rules governing appointments greater than 50%, see section 5.b.4 (required pre-approval for exceptions, Autumn, Winter and Spring), 5.c (summer), and 5.d. See also Tuition Allowance tables for Summer Quarter.

(2) Length of Assistantships
Appointments are made for a full quarter (see "Percentage and Period of Appointment," Section 5 of this document). Appointments will earn the designated amount of TAL for the full quarter in which the student is appointed.

(3) Multiple Assistantships
Students may hold multiple assistantship appointments, including both RA and TA appointments, simultaneously. At most, the 8-10 unit TAL value may be earned when combining multiple assistantships.

- **Multiple assistantships totaling 50% or less**: GFS automatically calculates the total combined percentage of the assistantships that will be the basis for the amount of TAL. For example, two 25% assistantship appointments earn a combined TAL equal to a 50% appointment: 8-10 units. (During the academic year, combined appointments should not total more than 50%; see 5.b, above).
- **Multiple assistantships totaling more than 50% (e.g. in summer)**: If entered as one appointment with multiple sources of funding, GFS correctly calculates the combined TAL as described in 5.d.1. If entered as separate appointments, GFS cannot do the calculation: administrators must determine both the reduced total TAL and the proportional cost to each appointment, then adjust each appointment's TAL in GFS.

(4) Summer Appointments

- In summer quarter, some students may enroll in fewer units than the TAL earned by their assistantship appointment(s). In such cases, the TAL for their Summer Quarter Assistantships is reduced by adjusting the TAL amount in GFS to match the actual tuition amount billed.
- Summer appointments are for three months, even though courses may be scheduled for 8 or 10 weeks. If an appointment ends before the end of the full quarter, salary can be ended on the corresponding date, but students will receive the amount of TAL associated with a full-quarter appointment.

e. Use of TAL
(1) TAL can be used only in the quarter in which it was generated by an appointment.

(2) TAL may be used only as a credit against tuition charges. It is:

- Not convertible to cash
- Not transferable to another student
- Not usable for any other charges, such as ASSU fees
- Not applicable to tuition charges for Continuing Studies Program courses

8. Work in Addition to Assistantship
Appointment

To preserve the focus on the student's academic progress, Stanford University formally limits the number of hours a student may be employed while also holding an assistantship appointment. Graduate students are expected to coordinate additional hourly employment with the assistantship appointment, and with their academic obligations, including course load, number of registered units, and the academic expectations of their program. Academic departments/programs, offices employing students, and funding sources may also impose employment limitations. Graduate student hourly employment is described in Administrative Guide Memo 10.2.2 [2]: Graduate Student Hourly Employment.

During break periods between quarters—the period between the last day of final examinations and the first day of classes the subsequent quarter—graduate students may be employed full time. Thanksgiving recess is not a break between quarters. Note: The quarter period is different from the assistantship pay periods, as the standard "start" and "stop" dates for assistantships are intended to pay the student continuously including break periods between quarters.

a. Limit on Hours for U.S. Students

During Autumn, Winter and Spring quarters, students on 50% time assistantships may not be employed more than an additional eight hours a week inside Stanford and/or outside of Stanford; those eight hours cannot be in other assistantship positions. During Summer quarter, enrolled graduate students are limited to 36 hours of student employment, combining hourly employment and assistantship appointments.

b. Limit on Hours for International Students

International students on F-1 or J-1 visas are subject to both University policies on employment and visa requirements that limit employment; in all cases, the more restrictive limitation will apply. International students are eligible for on-campus employment if they are maintaining their F-1 or J-1 status. During the academic year (Autumn, Winter and Spring quarters), students on F-1 or J-1 visas are limited to a total of 20 hours of employment per week (except the break periods between quarters), including both hourly jobs and assistantship appointments), and including any off-campus employment that they may have been authorized to perform. For further information regarding regulations for students with F-1 and J-1 visas, contact Bechtel International Center [7].

9. Cancellation or Modification of Assistantship Appointments

a. Cancellation as of the Start Date of the Assistantship

If an appointment is cancelled on or before the start date of the assistantship:
(1) No salary is paid.
(2) No Tuition Allowance is provided.
(3) If Tuition Allowance has been applied to the student's bill, it will be withdrawn.
(4) The student is responsible for any tuition charges for the quarter.

b. Cancellation of Appointment During the Quarter of the Assistantship
(1) If the school or department terminates the assistantship for any reason during the quarter, other than for cause, salary will end but the student will receive the full quarter TAL. This includes circumstances where sponsored funding for an assistantship ends.

(2) If a graduate student voluntarily terminates an assistantship appointment or is removed for cause during the quarter, salary ends and TAL is withdrawn for the quarter.

(3) Salary ends and TAL will be applied as needed to pay the student's bill for the quarter when an assistantship appointment is terminated because a student has:
   - Completed all of the degree requirements and leaves the University, or
   - Formally withdrawn from a degree program and leaves the University, or
   - Taken an approved Leave of Absence from the University (for emergency/medical needs).

10. Taxes and Tax Reporting
a. Salaries and Tuition Allowance
   - All salaries from assistantships awarded after August 16, 1986, are subject to federal and state income tax and tax withholding.
   - Tuition Allowance associated with assistantships for degree-seeking students is **not** subject to tax.

b. Exemption from FICA and VDI Taxes
   Enrollment and regular attendance in courses or fulfillment of other requirements associated with a degree program are required for all students in each quarter of their appointment(s), including summer, in order to qualify for exemption from FICA (Social Security) and VDI (Voluntary Disability Insurance) taxes.

11. Benefits
The graduate appointments described in this Guide Memo are designed for and available only to Stanford students.

a. Time Off
   Assistantship appointments do not accrue vacation leave.

   Students with research or teaching assistantship appointments will receive a lump sum of 24 hours of paid sick time per calendar year, which is available for use during any period of assistantship
appointment during the year. Sick time does not carry over from one calendar year to the next. Arrangements for any variations in work hours, including time off for vacation, jury duty, illness, or related use of sick time should be made individually with the faculty sponsor. To the extent possible, students are encouraged to make arrangements outside of their working hours and faculty sponsors are encouraged to offer flexibility in work hours.

Regular semi-monthly salary is paid during periods when sick time is used. When sick time is used, the student notifies Payroll using a HelpSU [8] request. Sick time accrued for an assistantship appointment is paid only when used to replace work hours during the course of employment as a research or teaching assistant. Otherwise, sick balances are not paid out. Graduate students who have student hourly employment, either concurrently or at different times of the year, will see a separate accounting of sick time accrued for the student hourly employment (see Administrative Guide Memo 10.3.1 [9]: Sick Time for Student Hourly Employees).

Students with research or teaching assistantship appointments may use sick time for themselves or a family member: for absences due to illness; for preventive care or diagnoses, care, or treatment of an existing health condition; or for purposes related to domestic violence, sexual assaults, or stalking.

b. Health Insurance
Eligibility for a health insurance benefit is determined quarterly on the basis of assistantship and fellowship appointments approved as of the payroll deadline of each quarter. Graduate students are eligible for a health insurance subsidy as long as they do not waive Cardinal Care insurance or have their insurance paid fully by an outside source of funds. The Health Insurance subsidy will be paid as follows:

- Students with assistantship appointments for 25% time or more per quarter will receive a subsidy paying approximately 50% of the cost of the single-student Cardinal Care premium.
- Students with assistantship appointments of less than 25% time per quarter will receive a subsidy paying approximately 25% of the cost of the single-student Cardinal Care premium.

12. Resources for Additional Information

- All graduate student assistantships must be entered online using the Graduate Financial Support (GFS) system in PeopleSoft.
- For policy questions, refer to the GFS Policy Website [10].
- For entry questions, contact the IT Help Desk at 5-4357 (5-HELP), or http://helpsu.stanford.edu [11].
- For graduate student health insurance, contact Vaden Health Center [12].
- Salary rates and Tuition Allowance tables: The minimum salary rates for TAs, RAs, and the TAL Tables can be found at http://gfs.stanford.edu/tables [6].

Guidelines on requesting a memo change can be found at https://adminguide.stanford.edu/change-request-guidelines