

# Policy Statement

## For

### Graduate Student Researchers

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#### 1. DEFINITION

GSRs at the University of Pittsburgh are graduate students who are receiving financial support from research funds in return for duties performed to meet the goals for which the funds were awarded. The research performed is also normally an integral part of the student's research practicum experience, thesis or dissertation. A primary goal of the appointment, from the point of view of both the University and the student, is to provide financial support to the graduate student.

#### 2. APPOINTMENT

Appointments of GSRs may be on a full time or fractional basis. The duties and compensations for appointments that are less than full-time are in proportion to the fraction of a full-time appointment. A range of full-time base salaries is recommended annually by the Provost based on the range of compensation for Graduate Student Assistants, Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows (for current stipend rates, see <http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/stipends.html>). The base salary for a GSR is set by the faculty member who administers the research grants or contract; each year the level of compensation will be reconsidered and adjustments made when appropriate. Full-time base salaries below the recommended minimum are not permitted; salaries above the recommended maximum must be approved by the dean.

The GSR must receive a letter from the department, school or research center, co-signed by the principal investigator, that states the general conditions of the appointment, specifies the salary, general types of duties, duration, benefits, and any other pertinent terms of appointment, includes a copy of this GSR Policy Statement, and states that this policy governs the appointment. Duration of the appointment may be for one, two, or three terms. Students may receive an appointment for the full summer term, or for summer session I or II.

A GSR assignment is normally an integral part of a student's practicum experience, research project, thesis or dissertation research. The hours required are those necessary to make satisfactory progress toward completing the degree, normally a full time effort. In cases where the GSR appointment is not an integral part of the student's own work, a GSR appointment requires 20 hours per week; a fractional appointment requires the corresponding fraction.

GSRs who receive full-time appointments in the fall and/or spring terms shall register for at least 9 credits in the term of appointment; those with fractional appointments shall register for at least the following number of credits; 3/4 appointment, 9 credits; 1/2 appointment, 6 credits; 1/4 appointment, 3 credits. However, any full-time or fractional GSR who has completed all credit requirements for the doctoral degree, including any minimum dissertation credit requirements, and is working full time on a dissertation may register for Full Time Dissertation Study (FTDS). In the summer term or sessions, a GSR must register for at least 3 credits or FTDS.

When a student accepts an appointment in writing, the terms shall be binding on both the student and the principal investigator. In accordance with the policy of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States, however, a newly-admitted student, after accepting an initial appointment beginning in September, may resign in writing before April 15 of that year. A department may, during the appointment term, transfer a student, after consultation with the student, from a GSR appointment to a teaching appointment or to another appropriate assignment that provides for essentially equal financial benefits and professional responsibilities.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act requires employers to institute procedures for verifying that a job applicant is authorized to be employed in the United States. Each new employee of the University is required to verify that he or she is either a US citizen or authorized to be employed in this country. A graduate student appointed as a GSR is required to produce the necessary documentation as a condition of the appointment.

### **3. REAPPOINTMENT**

Although appointment as a GSR may be made for no more than one year, a student may be reappointed. Graduate students should be cognizant of the fact that the funds for most GSRs come from grants and contracts with a limited duration.

To the extent that reappointment is possible, priority should be given to those with superior academic qualifications and research performance. The same regulations that pertain to original appointments apply to reappointment, with the following amplification:

1. A reappointment should be made at the same or higher salary.
2. Written notice of reappointment for the fall term should be given to the graduate student by June 1, or as soon thereafter as possible. Extended delay should be only with the mutual agreement of the department and the student for specific reasons made clear to the student.
3. Reappointment requires satisfactory academic achievement as determined by the dean or director. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance could be a QPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive departmental examinations as specified, or inadequate research progress.

#### **4. RESPONSIBILITIES**

4a. Department: The final responsibility for all research performed at the University rests with the faculty and the appropriate department.

The department is responsible for providing a working environment that is consistent with the research to be performed and for providing education about research integrity.

The department, school or research center is responsible for generating the GSR appointment letters and ensuring that the terms and conditions of the contracts are upheld.

4b. Research Advisor: It is the research advisor's responsibility to define the terms of the research assignment and to convey them to the graduate student prior to the signing of the appointment letter. These terms should include an understanding of the extent of between-term and holiday leaves, observance of religious holidays and personal leaves, since there is no uniform University policy on holidays. The research advisor should explain the department's and the research advisor's co-authorship policy. Once each year the research advisor should provide a written evaluation of the graduate student's performance to the student and to the department. The research advisor is responsible for providing training to use the equipment and perform the duties for which the GSR is responsible.

Students shall not be exploited or their education compromised in the service of sponsored research or the financial gain of the supervisor. Employment of students or fellows by companies in which their faculty supervisor has economic interest must be disclosed on Part II of the Conflict of Interest Policy Disclosure Form by the student's academic supervisor. Faculty shall take all precautions necessary to ensure that their

students' progress and academic standing are not jeopardized by violations of any professional norms in projects in which they participate, or by students' naivete as to the circumstances surrounding industrially sponsored research.

The research advisor should strive to maintain continuous support for the student, provided the student is making satisfactory progress, and within the limitations of available funds. The students should be advised of the termination of such funds as far in advance as is possible.

4c. Student: Graduate student researchers are expected to carry out their assigned duties satisfactorily and to participate in departmental orientation and training programs. They are expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance.

Patent rights resulting from research carried on by a student in fulfillment of requirements for an academic degree are subject to the University's Patent Rights and Technology Transfer Policy. Patent rights resulting from externally sponsored research grants, contracts, or other such arrangements are also subject to the terms of those agreements. The data collected as part of the GSR's assignment or as part of the dissertation or thesis of a supported student, are the property of the University, including original research notebooks or electronic files.

Graduate students are not permitted to hold more than the equivalent of one full GSR appointment within the University at one time. Normally, graduate students will find this appointment to be a full-time demand, but in rare or minor exceptions, additional appointments must be approved by the departmental chairperson and the dean. Due to immigration regulations, graduate students on J-1 or F-1 visas may be employed to work no more than 20 hours per week on campus when school is in session during the fall and spring terms, and thus those on full-time appointments are not eligible for overload appointments during these terms.

A GSR who believes that he or she has been treated unfairly according to these guidelines should first discuss the problem with the research advisor and the departmental chairperson. If a resolution cannot be reached at the departmental level, the GSR should present the grievance to the dean for informal evaluation, adjudication, and, if necessary, advice on additional, formal grievance procedures, such as those described in *Guidelines on Academic Integrity* (<http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>).

## **5. RESEARCH INTEGRITY**

The University seeks excellence in pursuit of knowledge and requires all members of the University community including its student body to adhere to the highest standards of integrity in research. Research misconduct is defined as:

(1) fabrication, falsification, plagiarism and other practices that seriously deviate from

those that are commonly accepted in the scientific community for proposing, conducting or reporting research;

(2) material failure to comply with federal requirements for the protection of researchers, human subjects or the public or for the welfare of laboratory animals;

(3) failure to meet other material legal requirements governing research.

The University of Pittsburgh Research Integrity Policy contains the details of procedures to be followed if violation of research integrity appears to occur. The Policy also states that for students involved in alleged misconduct the matter shall be handled in accordance with the University of Pittsburgh *Guidelines on Academic Integrity* (<http://www.pitt.edu/~provost/ai1.html>) and that pertinent regulations of any sponsoring agency shall be observed.

## **6. EARLY TERMINATION**

Early termination refers to the dismissal of the GSR before the end of the contractual period of appointment. Early termination may be initiated only if the GSR has received an appropriate and timely written warning with respect to his or her performance, or has clearly violated one or more of the major canons of institutional responsibility or University Policy. The GSR must be informed in writing by the department chair of the reasons for termination, and the appeals procedure must be included.

Appeals Procedure:

1. The GSR may appeal the termination, in writing, within two weeks of notice of termination, to the dean, who will mediate the dispute and, if necessary, convene an appeals committee.
2. The dean or his or her designee will serve as chair of an appeals committee and will appoint to the committee two faculty members and two graduate students, who must be GSRs and are recommended by the school's graduate student association. No one from the involved academic department shall be on the appeals committee, and involved parties shall represent themselves before the committee.
3. Within six weeks, the appealing GSR shall be provided an appeals hearing, and he or she shall be notified of the appeals committee's recommendation and the dean's decision as soon as possible thereafter.

## **7. SCHOLARSHIPS**

In recognition of academic merit, the University offers GSRs a tuition scholarship. The maximum tuition scholarship that will be provided is as follows:

	FALL/SPRING	SUMMER
Full-time appointment	15 credits	12 credits
3/4 appointment	15 credits	9 credits
2/3 appointment	8 credits	8 credits
1/2 appointment	6 credits	6 credits
1/3 appointment	4 credits	4 credits
1/4 appointment	3 credits	3 credits

GSRs who receive full-time or fractional appointment in the summer term or in summer session I or II must register for at least three credits or FTDS in the term or session. A graduate student who registers for more will be provided a tuition scholarship up to the amount indicated in the above table.

The prevailing computing and network services fee and the safety and transportation fee will be included in this merit scholarship. The fee assessed full-time students will be included with the award of a full tuition scholarship to a GSR holding a full appointment in the fall, spring, or summer terms or in summer session I or II; the fee assessed part-time students will be included with lesser awards.

The student is responsible for his or her registration and for payment of all charges appearing on the student invoice not covered by the tuition scholarship. The tuition scholarship does not cover course-related fees and the student activity fee. In most schools, arrangements have been made for the tuition scholarship to appear on the student invoice. If a tuition scholarship is not on the invoice, the student must report to the office of the dean, where a scholarship will be issued.

## **8. HEALTH BENEFITS**

GSRs who receive full-time or fractional appointments are eligible to participate in the graduate student health insurance plan. The University will provide individual coverage at no cost. Two Person or Family coverage through the graduate student plan is available by paying the difference between the premium cost for individual coverage and the additional coverage. To enroll in either the individual, two person or family plans, GSRs must meet with the payroll administrator in their department and complete a Medical Insurance Form. All coverage terminates at the end of every August, and new forms and cards must then be submitted every year regardless of the time period of the appointment.

The prevailing student health fee per term will be included in the merit scholarship for GSRs who receive a full-time appointment in the fall and/or spring terms and are registered for at least 9 credits. If registration is for fewer than 9 credits, the student has the option of signing up for the Student Health Service and paying the fee. The University will pay the student health fee for any GSR who receives a full appointment in the summer term and/or summer sessions whether or not he or she is registered full-time.

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