



UMBC

GRADUATE

ASSISTANT

HANDBOOK

GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

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Introduction

The Graduate School has compiled this handbook for the benefit of graduate students and supervisors of graduate assistants. This handbook aims to provide comprehensive information about the policies and procedures governing awarded graduate assistantship positions, in accordance with University System of Maryland (USM) Policy III-7.11. UMBC is committed to full compliance with the USM Board of Regents policy on graduate assistantships, III – 7.11, at all times. Should a Graduate Assistant or any concerned party identify a discrepancy between this Handbook and the applicable BOR policy, the Graduate School encourages them to promptly notify the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

Graduate assistantships are available to qualified, full-time, degree-seeking graduate students. Graduate assistants (GAs) are primarily graduate students dedicated to their education. The chance to collaborate closely with faculty members, staff, and undergraduate students is a vital aspect of their educational experience. An assistantship is granted to provide students with academic or research opportunities as they advance toward their graduate degree.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) should familiarize themselves with the academic regulations of the Graduate School published in the Graduate School Catalog and on the Graduate School website as well as the specific requirements of their program. This handbook consolidates University policies and practices governing graduate assistantships.

Domestic Students

All domestic graduate students seeking financial support from the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships must complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form annually. More information on the FAFSA can be found at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. For questions related to financial aid or scholarships, students should contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students are subject to additional rules articulated by the federal government. Differences between international students and domestic students include tax status, duration of stay at UMBC after graduation, and the ability to have additional on-campus employment. International students are strongly advised to direct any questions they have to [The Office of International Students and Scholars](#) (OISS). Where there are contradictions or differences between this Handbook and the information provided by OISS to international students, OISS is, in all instances, the prevailing authority.

Categories and Duties

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are assigned individual duties tailored to the needs of their department, aligned with their experience and qualifications. GAs play a professional, albeit apprentice-like, role within the University, with responsibilities that support its teaching and research missions.

There are seven (7) categories of employment for graduate students with assistantships: Teaching Assistant, Information Technology Assistant, Research Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Peaceworker Assistant, Fellow, and Grader. The category of Grader has different benefits available than other assistantships and is explained below. All students employed through a graduate assistantship are known as Graduate Assistants (GAs).

In addition to their GA duties, students engage in scholarly endeavors as part of their degree pursuit. These scholarly activities often require a commitment exceeding 20 hours per week. It's crucial to distinguish between the assistantship duties, which provide financial support, and the scholarly tasks necessary for earning the graduate degree. GAs are primarily students, and both they and their supervisors should ensure a balanced approach to academic and job responsibilities throughout the assistantship.

Teaching Assistant (TA)

The duties of a Teaching Assistant (TA) vary across departments but generally include:

- a) Teaching responsibilities for labs or discussion sections;
- b) Teaching under close supervision in multi-sectional courses;
- c) Assisting faculty with grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative tasks for courses;
- d) Supporting community programs and workshops;
- e) Assisting with departmental administrative duties.

The Graduate School strongly advises TAs to serve as the instructor-of-record only with a developed mentoring plan between the TA and supervising faculty, with guidance available from the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

Information Technology Assistant

Information Technology Assistant is a Teaching Assistant who works in the Division of IT (DoIT) student employment program. This program is aimed at graduate students whose primary focus is completing an applied technical master's program. Students selected for this program will work for DoIT either as a half-time (10 hours) or full-time (20 hours) per week basis performing information technology functions. Information Technology Assistants do not receive tuition remission nor health insurance benefit. Students interested should consult the DoIT web site at <https://doit.umbc.edu/about/jobs>.

Grader

Graders support teaching programs by grading student assignments and do not receive tuition remission.

Peaceworker Assistant

Peaceworker Assistants participate in the Shriver Center Peaceworker Program, focusing on community service addressing urban America's challenges. Supervision for these assistants is managed by the Shriver Center, accessible via <http://shrivcenter.umbc.edu>.

Research Assistant (RA)

The duties of RAs vary depending on the nature of the research project and its funding source. RAs perform these duties under the direction and supervision of a faculty member. Their research assignments may or may not directly contribute to the thesis or dissertation required for their master's or doctoral degree. It's important to note that the scholarly activities essential for completing the thesis or dissertation are distinct from the RA responsibilities and should not be conflated with the assistantship duties.

Fellowships

Fellowships are akin to RAs and enable students to fully dedicate themselves to their education. Campus departments and external fellowship sponsors may impose additional duties on Fellows, which are conducted under faculty supervision. In all cases, Fellows must adhere to the rules and responsibilities set forth by the fellowship sponsor and those outlined in this Handbook.

Administrative Assistant

A few campus offices employ GAs in administrative roles, though the Graduate School discourages this due to tax implications for students. AAs typically provide administrative support without replacing non-exempt Administrative Assistants. Contact the Assistant Dean of the Graduate School for Administration, Policy, and Compliance for guidance.

Graduate Assistants Also Serving as Part-time Adjunct Faculty

GAs can serve as part-time adjunct faculty while registered as full-time students. Approval from the Associate Dean of the Graduate School is required if their total hours (GA plus adjunct hours) exceed 20 hours per week. GAs can choose to purchase employee parking and request a waiver of the transportation student fee. Contact Student Business Services for transportation fee waivers via myUMBC Help tickets or (410) 455-2288. For employee parking inquiries, contact Parking Services at parking@umbc.edu or (410) 455-2551.

HOURLY EMPLOYMENT

A graduate student whose primary responsibility is to assist with the administrative and support functions within the needs of a department or University office may be paid as an hourly employee. An hourly employee may work a maximum of 20 hours per week. An hourly employee is not a GA and is not entitled to any of the benefits provided for GAs. For further guidance on graduate students who are hourly employees, please consult the [Graduate School](#).

QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND SELECTION

Qualifications

A Graduate Assistant (GA) must be a full-time graduate student, enrolled in a degree-granting program, and registered in courses that lead toward the degree. Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who appear likely to render a high quality of service to the University by their teaching, research, and other activities.

An undergraduate student enrolled in classes as part of an accelerated bachelor's/master's program is not considered a graduate student and therefore cannot serve as a graduate assistant.

Applicants must be able to perform the essential functions of their employment with or without reasonable accommodation. Accessibility & Disability Services administers requests for work-related accommodations for graduate students with a qualifying health condition. For more information, please email slazar@umbc.edu, call (410) 455-5745, or visit <https://accessibility.umbc.edu/employee-accommodation-request/>.

Applications

Assistantship positions are available through individual departments based on their specific needs and funding availability. Students are advised to consult with their respective programs of study for additional opportunities.

Offers of assistantships are contingent upon the availability of funds and the student's admission to a degree-granting graduate program. Please adhere to the application requirements and deadlines specified by the department.

For additional assistantship opportunities, students can also explore listings on Handshake. To apply, visit [Handshake](#) and search for "graduate assistantships" in the search bar.

Selection

In most cases, the selection of GAs is made by the chairperson of the department and/or the GPD, with the recommendation of a graduate student recruitment committee or those responsible for graduate studies in that area. Selection of Research Assistants can also be made by individual faculty members who have external research grants. GAs hired outside of their academic departments are evaluated on the basis of their qualifications for the position.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP

The GA works directly under the supervision of the department that offers the appointment. The department determines the assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for reappointment. The department is the primary source of information about any of the details of the assistantship. The department chair or program director determines the responsibility for the GA's work, any duly-appointed executive committees and assistants to the chair, and/or the faculty member assigned to supervise a particular course, laboratory session, or research project; or any administrator of a non-academic unit.

UMBC Non-Discrimination Policy Statement

The University of Maryland Baltimore County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, ancestry, genetic information, physical or mental disability, age, sex, gender, pregnancy, gender identity or expression, marital status, sexual orientation, religion, creed, and/or veteran status in admission to and participation in education programs and activities, or employment practices in accordance with federal laws, including, but not limited to Titles VI and VII of the Civil Right Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended, as well as state laws, and regulations. GAs are selected in compliance with this non-discrimination policy statement. The most current non-discrimination policy statement is located at <https://ecr.umbc.edu>.

APPOINTMENT TYPES & REAPPOINTMENT

Appointment Types

An assistantship appointment may be full-time (20 hours per week) or part-time (10 hours per week). Appointments may not be for less than part-time (10 hours per week).

GAs are generally appointed for either a regular academic year (9.5 months) or a 12-month period. The appointment may be for a shorter period if so specified in the appointment offer, but must be for at least eight continuous weeks in duration. The academic year appointment typically begins in mid-August and may end late in the

spring semester or early summer. Starting and ending dates each year are determined by the department based on the University payroll calendar.

Each department is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with University policy, for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships.

In cases where a GA is working more hours than those committed to in their appointment letter, on a regular basis, the GA should first bring the situation to the attention of their supervisor. If no action is taken by their supervisor, GAs should contact their Graduate Program Director and subsequently, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School for assistance with the matter.

Reappointment

GAs may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the department. In order to allow a larger number of qualified students to benefit from these positions, some departments have limited the number of years in which a student may serve as a GA.

In general, reappointment depends upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree, and the department's needs. As with all faculty and staff positions, appointment and reappointment are always contingent on the availability of funds. The continuation of an assistantship for the next year will typically be evaluated before the end of the current appointment period. Except under justifiable circumstances, GAs whose appointments are for more than one semester will be notified of their appointments, and of decisions not to renew appointments, at least 60 days before the beginning or renewal of the appointment.

Appointment Letter

The official appointment letter for a graduate assistantship comes from the vice-president, dean, department chairperson, program director, or faculty member whose research project funds the assistantship. Departments must provide all GAs with a letter of appointment/reappointment annually. This letter will provide pertinent information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

- The length of the appointment;
- The start and end dates of the appointment;
- The weekly time commitment (either 10 or 20 hours);
- A clear job description as an addendum to the appointment letter is a great practice to ensure expectations are well-defined from the start. It helps in setting a clear framework for the role and responsibilities in the expectations meeting.
- The economic benefits (e.g., bi-weekly stipend, number of credits of tuition remission per semester, and health insurance);

- Responsibilities can either be outlined in the appointment letter or an addendum (to the appointment letter) and discussed with the GA in the expectations meeting.
- The department or office to which the GA will report and, name of supervisor.
- An affirmation that the provisions of this Handbook apply to the appointment;
- Any special requirements of the appointment related to leave, scheduling, or other terms;
- The location at which the GA can obtain additional information on the provisions of this Handbook and means of resolving complaints

The Graduate School must receive a copy of all appointment letters that have been accepted by GAs. For international students, the Director of The Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) must also receive a copy.

Departments are required to use the [appointment letter](#) located on the Graduate School's [website](#).

Job responsibilities are required to be outlined in the appointment letter or an addendum (to the appointment letter) and discussed with the GA in the expectations meeting.

STIPENDS

All GAs must be paid a stipend. Stipends are set by the supporting department but must be at least equal to the minimum stipend levels for Graduate Assistants published by the Graduate School. The minimum stipend levels are available on the Graduate School's [website](#).

Removal from payroll after defense

The recommendation is to keep graduate assistants on the payroll until the end of the semester during which they defend their thesis or dissertation unless they secure another position elsewhere. This ensures consistency and supports best practices in managing payroll for graduate assistants.

BENEFITS AVAILABLE

Tuition Remission

Tuition remission benefits are typically based upon whether an assistantship is full-time or part-time. Although most GAs (except Graders) receive tuition remission, departments are not required to provide it. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department is providing this benefit.

- Full-time Assistantship (20 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that full-time GAs, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 10 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional or fewer credit hours.
- Part-time Assistantship (10 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that part-time GAs, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 5 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional or fewer credit hours.

For courses that are billed at a differential rate (i.e., 799, 898, or 899), departments may base the tuition remission benefit on the number of credits for which the student is charged, not the number of credits in which the student is enrolled. Alternatively, tuition remission for these courses can be specified in the appointment letter.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) appointed to a 12-month assistantship may also be eligible to receive tuition remission during the Summer session, in addition to the credit hours each Fall and Spring semester. TAs supported by the Office of Summer, Winter, and Special programs are typically offered tuition remission during the Summer session.

In every Fall, Spring, or Summer in which students serve as GAs, they must sign a Statement of [Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission form](#) initiated by the funding department and signed by authorized parties at the department level (in addition to the GA). Late tuition remission forms may result in late fees on student accounts. Payment of late fees will be the student's responsibility except in instances where the department did not initiate the form on time. Tuition remission is not automatically applied to a student's account. Tuition remission will be granted only for those courses deemed necessary for the completion of the student's degree as determined by the student's mentor and Graduate Program Director. Copies of all Statement of Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission forms are kept on file at funding departments as well as at the Graduate School.

It is important to note that GAs classified as Graders must also have this form on file to ensure that they receive the benefit of in-state tuition rate billing, although they are not entitled to tuition remission. The Statement of Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission is located on the [Graduate School Website](#).

In-State Tuition Rate Billing Status

During the semesters of the performance of the assistantship, GAs are billed at the in-state rate for tuition purposes. Upon termination of the assistantship, students revert to their original billing status unless they are granted in-state re-classification through the formal petition process for a change of residency status. The in-state status residency petition is available from the [Office of the Registrar](#).

Student Fees

Payment of student fees is mandatory and is the responsibility of the GA unless payment of fees is provided as an additional benefit by the supporting department. Student fees must be paid by the bill due date to avoid late fees. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department is providing this additional benefit.

Health Insurance

All graduate students, including GAs, are eligible to enroll in the GA health insurance program. Specific details of the health insurance plan are available on [the Graduate School's website](#). GAs may direct questions to [Retriever Integrated Health](#). Payment for enrollment in the GA health insurance program is the responsibility of the student unless it is paid by the department. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department will be providing this benefit.

Vacation

12 Month Appointments

All GAs with part-time or full-time, 12-month appointments will be allowed paid time away from their duties during the course of the appointment. A full-time assistantship over 12 months carries with it the expectation that the student will be allowed 40 hours of paid leave. For part-time assistantships over a 12-month period, 20 hours of paid leave will be granted. This time away from duties must be taken during the current appointment and may not be accumulated or transferred, nor does it include time when the University is closed. It may be taken following reasonable prior notification and with the approval of the student's supervisor. Excess leave, unused at the end of the contractual appointment, will not be "paid out" or financially compensated but instead will be forfeited by the GA.

Academic Year (9.5 months)

GAs with academic year (9.5-month) appointments (both part- and full-time) are not eligible to take vacation. If unusual circumstances arise, time away from duties for academic year GAs will be at the discretion of the department.

Dual Appointments

For GAs who are appointed to separate assistantships, neither of which is 12-months itself but whose durations sum to 12 months or more, the following procedures are to be used by the graduate community. If the second assistantship is an extension or logical derivation of the first, then the supporting department(s) must develop an agreement that grants the GA 40 (or 20 for part-time GAs) hours of paid vacation leave. However, if the assistantships are unrelated, then the GA is not entitled to paid vacation. The Associate Dean of the Graduate School is the final authority on which scenario is applicable in each case.

Sick Leave

If a GA becomes ill, sick leave should be supported collegially, up to 40 hours for full-time (20 hours part-time) GAs during the contract year (this includes summer term for GAs supported during the summer session). After four consecutive days of sick leave, the supervisor may require the GA to provide a letter from a physician or other licensed healthcare professional that states

- the nature of the illness;
- that the GA can or cannot return to work for health reasons
- the duration of the required sick leave.

This letter can be submitted upon the GA's return to work.

Parental Leave Fellowships

In recognition of the challenges of balancing the demands of a graduate assistantship and parenting a new child, UMBC offers Fellowships for Parental Leave to improve the environment for new parents who are Graduate Assistants (GAs). Any GA is eligible to receive a Fellowship for:

- the birth of a child;
- the recent adoption of a child under the age of six; or
- the assumption of other parenting responsibilities (e.g., foster parenting, legal guardianship) of a child under the age of six.

Except for birth mothers as described below, the period of the Fellowship is six weeks. During the Fellowship period, the GA retains her/his/their full stipend and benefits, provides no service to the University, and maintains enrollment as a full-time (9 credits) student (applicable to fall and spring semesters only).

The University recognizes the need of birth mothers to respond to or to recover from the effects of pregnancy and/or the delivery of a child. If a birth mother believes that she requires a Fellowship period of more than six weeks, she must obtain a letter from her physician or other licensed healthcare professional that provides

- the nature of the need;
- a statement that the GA cannot return to her duties for health reasons arising from the pregnancy and/or delivery; and
- the duration of required absence beyond the initial six weeks.

Parental leave fellowships are only available during a time when a student is supported on a Graduate Assistantship. Students must have a Graduate Assistantship in the summer to be eligible for a parental leave fellowship in the summer.

In all instances, the GA should discuss his/her/their Fellowship plans with his/her/their Graduate Program Director (GPD) and/or supervisor as soon as possible to allow for maximum collegial support. All Fellowship requests must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and the GA's supervisor. Upon request, the Graduate School will reimburse the cost of the GA's stipend to the supporting department.

The Graduate School recommends that international students consult in advance with the Office of International Education Services before their period of parental leave. Please access the [Parental Leave Fellowship form](#)

Other Long-Term Leave

Other long-term leave that is not discussed here will be handled on an individual basis. All leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

Retirement, Unemployment, and Social Security

Retirement contributions are not withheld from the salaries of GAs, and GAs are not entitled to retirement benefits. Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes, comprised of Social Security and Medicare, and unemployment insurance are not withheld during the academic year when a GA is registered as a full-time student or during the Summer sessions when a student is registered for at least three (3) credits at all times (Summer Session I and Summer Session II). Registration requirements are discussed in more detail in Section X. GAs are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

Credit Union

GAs are eligible to join the Maryland State Employees Credit Union (SECU). For more information, please visit <http://www.secumd.org>.

University Holidays and Closures

When the University is closed for a recognized holiday, due to inclement weather, or for any other reason, GAs will not be required to come to work. GAs who would normally work those days will receive their normal bi-weekly compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed with increased hours on other days. Holidays, inclement weather days, and other campus closures do not excuse GAs from completing work on time. For example, homework assignments must be graded by the previously agreed-upon date. Further, to ensure instructional continuity, Teaching Assistants are expected to be available via e-mail or Blackboard. Under certain circumstances, selected GAs can be classified as essential personnel through the regular University process of maintaining sensitive equipment and laboratory animals.

Library Privileges

Graduate Assistants are granted faculty-level library privileges at the Albin O.Kuhn Library and Gallery. Additional information can be found at: <https://library.umbc.edu/circulation#borrow>

REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

Academic Year

Graduate Assistants (GAs) must be registered as full-time students whether they hold a full-time appointment or a part-time appointment. To be considered full-time, a student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credits in each Fall and Spring semester. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward his/her/their degree. GAs are not required to enroll in classes in the summer but they may choose to do so. Not enrolling during the Summer affects Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) exemption as detailed below.

In addition to courses leading toward the degree, GAs have the option to register for one of two graduate assistantship courses. These courses are GRAD 600 and GRAD 601.

- Full-time GAs, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- Part-time GAs in two different departments, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- Part-time GAs, whose total commitment is 10 hours per week, have the option to register for GRAD 600. GRAD 600 is fixed at three (3) credits, so students who register for this course must register for a minimum of six (6) credits in addition to this course.

Summer Session (Graduate Assistants who have Summer Appointments)

In order to retain FICA exemption during the summer, domestic GAs must be registered for at least three (3) credits at all times (Summer Session I and Summer Session II). It is important to note that most research and independent study courses are for the entire Summer; students should register for these at the start of the 12-week Summer Session I and thus do not need to register for Summer Session II.

Departments should take steps to ensure that appropriate sections of research and independent study courses are available for students to enroll in during Summer. GRAD 603 provides two (2) credits towards the three (3) credit requirement at no charge. GAs can opt to pay for the additional one credit needed to be FICA exempt or have FICA withheld from their paychecks (FICA will also be charged to the supporting department or grant).

International students on GAs are not required to enroll in courses over the summer. International students who are considered Non-Resident Aliens (NRA) for tax purposes are not subject to FICA withholding. However, generally after five years in the US, international students are considered “residents for tax purposes,” at which point they

are subject to FICA withholding. International GAs are provided with tax software through ISSS to assist them in establishing their tax status (NRA or resident for tax purposes) and to complete any necessary tax forms. For more information on FICA, international GAs should consult the Office of International Students & Scholars. Below you will find helpful links:

- <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/international-taxpayers/foreign-student-liability-for-social-security-and-medicare-taxes>
- <https://www.irs.gov/government-entities/federal-state-local-governments/student-fica-exception>

For more information on summer registration, please visit:

<https://gradschool.umbc.edu/funding/assistantships/registration/>

Fall, Spring, and Summer Registration of GRAD 600, 601 and 603

- GAs are not billed tuition or fees for GRAD 600, GRAD 601, or GRAD 603;
- GAs receive credit towards full-time status from GRAD 600 and GRAD 601;
- GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 are not eligible for financial aid, nor are they considered when determining financial aid eligibility;
- GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 do not appear on transcripts.
- GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 will appear at registration to be for 0 credits. However, GAs are receiving the proper number of credits (3, 5, and 2, respectively).
- GRAD 600, GRAD 601 and GRAD 603 are optional (not required).

Master's thesis research (799)

Master's thesis research (799) is a variable (2-9) credit course (billed at 1/2 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Doctoral Dissertation Research 898, 899

Pre-candidacy doctoral dissertation research (898) (for students who have not reached the doctoral candidacy stage) is a variable (3-9) credit course (billed at 1/3 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Doctoral dissertation research (899) (for students who have reached the doctoral candidacy) is a fixed (9) credit course (billed at 2/9 rate).

Special Note: Ph.D. students seeking to be FICA exempt for summer, and who have reached candidacy, may use 898 (pre-candidacy doctoral dissertation research) towards enrolling in 3 credits.

Students signing up for either 898 or 899 for FICA exemption during summer are not required to also sign up for GRAD 603. If using 898, the minimum enrollment of 3

credits (billed at one credit) will satisfy FICA exemption requirement. If using 899, the minimum enrollment of 9 credits (billed at two credits) will satisfy FICA exemption requirement.

Graduate Assistants Enrolled in Undergraduate Courses

At times, there may be a need for graduate students to enroll in undergraduate courses to ensure success in graduate programs. Graduate students are billed for all courses (graduate and undergraduate) at the graduate tuition and fee rate. In-state and out-of-state GAs will be charged in-state graduate tuition and fee rates for undergraduate courses.

Request for Waiver of Full-time Enrollment for a GA in the Final Semester (Effective with the Fall 2024 semester)

The requirement that graduate assistants must be registered as full-time students can be waived for a graduate assistant who is pursuing a master's degree and is in their final semester before graduation.

- The minimum enrollment requirement is three (3) credits of coursework that count toward degree requirements. Additionally, students will need to register for GRAD 600 or 601 to retain FICA exemption; otherwise, both the student and the funding source will each be charged 7.5% in FICA taxes (applicable to domestic students and some international students).
- To apply for this waiver, the student must submit the Application for Graduation and the Request for Waiver of Full-time Enrollment for a Graduate Assistant in the Final Semester. These documents must be signed by the graduate program director (GPD) and submitted by the first day of classes for the semester.

Request for Waiver of Full-time Enrollment is located on the [Graduate School Website](#).

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT FOR DOMESTIC STUDENTS

Fall and Spring Semesters

Full-time GAs are not eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland beyond the 20 hours per week associated with the assistantship.

Part-time GAs are not eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland for more than 10 additional hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with the assistantship.

Any exceptions must have the prior approval of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and can be done by submitting [a Request for Additional Service or Employment Form](#).

NOTE: International GAs are only allowed to work additional hours in fall/spring if approved for Curricular Practical Training (CPT). Curricular Practical Training (CPT) allows F-1 international students to work off-campus in paid positions within the US. CPT requires an application completed by the student, which can be submitted via the ISSS Portal. Once approved, ISSS will add CPT work authorization to the student's immigration record, and issue a new Form I-20 noting the work authorization.

Winter and Summer Sessions

Full-time GAs (Domestic and International) are eligible to work for UMBC, the University System of Maryland, or any other agency of the State of Maryland up to an additional 20 hours per week beyond the 20 hours associated with their assistantship in winter and summer sessions. Part-time GAs (Domestic and International) are eligible to work up to an additional 30 hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with their assistantship. However, employment may not exceed a 40-hour work week.

NOTE: Approval from the Associate Dean is not required for GAs working additional hours during summer and winter. For winter extra hours only, an Amendment to the Appointment Letter is necessary, but this is not required for extra hours worked in summer.

Supporting departments may set additional prohibitions on additional employment.

COMPLETION OF ASSIGNED DUTIES

The performance of duties by a GA is a fundamental component of any graduate assistantship. The Graduate School requires each GA to affirm the completion of his/her/their assigned duties on a regular basis. The Graduate School recommends that such an affirmation occur every semester using the [Statement of Completion of Duties](#) by a Graduate Assistant (Semester) available on the Graduate School's website

GAs funded (fully/partially) by Federal Work Study must complete the affirmation per pay period using the Statement of [Completion of Duties by a Graduate Assistant](#) (Pay Period), which is also available on the Graduate School's website.

In all instances, the affirmations are retained in a reasonable manner, by the supporting department, for at least three years and until audit requirements are met. [UMBC Policy on Records Management #VI-6.10.01](#)

Departments may, at their discretion, utilize a different process and schedule to allow GAs to affirm the completion of assigned duties. For example, a department can choose to include part or all of the winter term with a fall or spring semester as opposed to

treating it as an independent semester. A process or schedule created by a department must adhere to the following principles:

- GAs are not employees of UMBC; therefore, departments cannot use employee timesheets for the affirmation;
- The period of time encompassed by the affirmation must be clear;
- The affirmation may not occur less frequently than once per semester;
- The affirmation by the GA and the approval by the supervisor must be in writing; and
- The total stipend of a GA cannot be reduced because the department did not assign duties during a portion of the graduate assistantship.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Each department employing GAs is responsible for developing clear descriptions of the duties required of students in these positions; these descriptions should be sufficiently specific to make a meaningful evaluation of performance feasible and permit external evaluation of the approximate equity of the workloads associated with the different varieties of duties assigned. Each GA should be provided with the appropriate position description before commencing each semester of appointment, and with clear information regarding supervising authority and the criteria and structure of how performance will be evaluated.

An annual, written, performance evaluation is required for all GAs. Each department is responsible for determining and implementing procedures for review and evaluation of GAs. Therefore, the process of evaluation will vary; it may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluations.

A sample GA evaluation form can be found at
<https://umbc.app.box.com/s/btlkn1npff38ynak8s8yc7eaocvso9ma>.

Results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the GA. Documentation of evaluations should be maintained by departments. A memo, with names of GAs who received annual performance reviews, must be submitted to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School, after evaluations are completed.

GAs are encouraged to document work-related experiences for future employment. Faculty members should agree to provide letters of reference for work done which will be included in the GAs departmental file.

MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS

Several departments have formal or informal structures for handling complaints of GAs and graduate students. An attempt should always be made first to resolve difficulties at the departmental level.

In addition, the University has in effect procedures for orderly action on specific issues such as race discrimination, sex discrimination, academic misconduct, sexual harassment, arbitrary and capricious grading, and student academic and non-academic misconduct. Mediation of disputes between GAs and their program is handled by the [mediation policy](#).

A summary of the major components is provided below.

Informal Consultation

GAs having unusual difficulties with their assignments, should discuss the matter with the individual faculty members who serve as their supervisors. If the problem is not resolved, GAs should bring the matter to the attention of the Graduate Program Director and/or the chairperson of the department.

Formal Complaints

If a GA does not receive satisfaction at the departmental level, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The Associate Dean is available to mediate any difficulties, whether they are related to work as a GA or as a graduate student. The Dean and Associate Dean of the Graduate School are directly concerned with all academic problems of graduate students that require mediation beyond the department. As described in the Mediation Policy, the Associate Dean of the Graduate School may convene a special Mediation Committee of the Graduate Council.

CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE

In their teaching and research activities, all GAs are subject to the ethical precepts and code of the academic profession, to federal laws such as immigration status, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the University policies which govern their institutional obligations. Violation of any of these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action. The minimum expectation of GAs includes behavior in compliance with the UMBC [Code of Student Conduct](#).

TERMINATION

An appointment may be terminated before the expiration of the appointment's specified duration under unusual and compelling conditions. Unusual and compelling conditions include voluntary mutual agreement, between the University and the GA, circumstances beyond the control of the University and GA, and behavior of the GA.

Circumstances beyond the control of the University and the GA include, but are not limited to:

- discontinuance of the work in which the appointment is made;
- discontinuance of funding or budgetary appropriations;
- discontinuance if either party's (i.e. University's or GA's) performance is rendered impossible, hazardous, or is otherwise prevented, impaired, or delayed due to sickness, inability to perform, accident, interruption or failure of means of transportation, Act(s) of God, riot, strike, labor difficulty, war (including civil war), embargo, epidemic, pandemic, evacuation, fire, flood, explosion, earthquake, quarantine restriction, any act or order of any civil or military authority, acts of any government, acts of governing authority, and/or any other cause or event, similar or dissimilar, beyond that party's control ("Force Majeure Event"). If a Force Majeure event arises, then each party's obligations with respect to this appointment shall be excused, or suspended if reasonably postponed with appropriate pro rata reductions, and neither party will have any liability in connection therewith. The University reserves the right to maintain the safety of its staff and of the premises by any means, including, but not limited to, suspending or terminating this appointment. Both parties acknowledge and agree that they are entering into this appointment at a time when COVID-19 has disrupted and caused the termination or cancellation of many contracted services. The parties also acknowledge and agree that, while the COVID-19 response and evolution of impact(s) is current and ongoing, COVID-19 is a Force Majeure event, as defined above, and, with the knowledge that COVID-19 will continue to be a Force Majeure event for purposes of this appointment, notwithstanding, the parties wish to enter into this appointment with full knowledge and agreement that this Agreement may be cancelled, terminated, or suspended under the Force Majeure paragraph above. Each party agrees that the cancelling, terminating, or suspending party shall not be responsible for any damages sustained by the other party.

Behavior of the GA that may lead to termination that includes, but are not limited to:

- incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty;
- misconduct that is job-related;
- delinquency in academic work;
- moral turpitude; academic misconduct;
- enrolling in courses unrelated to the degree being pursued;
- violation of the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities for Academic Integrity;
- violation of federal or state law;

- misrepresentation or false data given on graduate application material;
- violation of the UMBC Code of Student Conduct.

Prior to Termination, due to the behavior of the GA, departments are required to take the following actions:

- Discuss the intent to terminate the GA with the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
- Hold a verbal counseling session with the Graduate Assistant, document the session in writing, and provide a copy of the summary to the Graduate Assistant and to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
- Except in the most egregious instances, allow a reasonable time frame for improvement. Additional counseling, including a written warning of termination, may be issued. Improvement and counseling time-frame will be determined by the department in collaboration with Associate Dean of the Graduate School.
- Except in the most egregious instances, the Graduate Assistant will receive written notice of termination at least two weeks prior to the effective date of termination.

The amount of the stipend and the tuition remission benefit will be prorated based on the termination date.

TAX STATUS

As a result of the U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987, all graduate students must pay income tax on stipends received for graduate assistantships.

As per Internal Revenue Service regulation IRC 127, tuition remission awarded to GAs is to be considered taxable income once the total tuition remission amount exceeds \$5,250 in a calendar year. UMBC GAs classified as Research Assistants (RAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs) are exempt from taxation of tuition remission, however, GAs classified as Administrative Assistants (AAs) who receive tuition remission are limited to \$5,250 in tuition remission in a calendar year.

If a GA has any questions, it is best, in every case, to consult tax counsel or the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

Policies and Trainings

The Office of Equity and Civil Rights (ECR) Responsible Employee Training (Mandatory)

UMBC is dedicated to fostering an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of the campus community and is committed to maintaining a campus

environment that is free from sex discrimination, including both sexual and gender-based harassment and violence. To help meet these goals, UMBC has identified specific individuals within the campus community who have an obligation to report any information they receive that could be a violation of [UMBC's Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Sexual Harassment and Gender Discrimination](#). **Given the role of a GA within the University, each GA is designated as a Responsible Employee. UMBC requires all Responsible Employees to complete annual training.**

Title IX Training

All new GAs are required to take specific Title IX training in addition to what is generally required for all students. For more information on mandatory Title IX training for GAs, please consult with the Office of Equity and Civil Rights [website](#).

RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH TRAINING

The Office for Research Protections and Compliance (ORPC) at UMBC has stated that institutions receiving funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF) and National Institutes of Health (NIH) must have a set of established training requirements in Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR). For example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) has issued guidance that requires all principal investigators, co-principal investigators, senior personnel, undergraduates, graduate students and postdoctoral researchers who are or will be supported by NSF funds to complete Responsible and Ethical Conduct of Research (RCR) training. Completion of the online “RCR-Basic Course” through **Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)** web-based modules fulfills this training requirement (visit the ORPC website for more details: <https://research.umbc.edu/2135-2/>). The National Institutes of Health (NIH) similarly requires all trainees, fellows, participants, and scholars receiving support through any NIH training, career development award (individual or institutional), research education grant, and dissertation research grant must receive “discussion based” instruction across 11 subject areas for all RCR. In either case, faculty mentors or advisers are encouraged to be familiar with the RCR training that their students and postdoctoral researchers have taken to enhance the discussion of RCR. In the interest of maintaining a documented code of ethics, professionalism, and research integrity, The Graduate School at UMBC and the Office of Postdoctoral Affairs will be extending the RCR training requirement according to one of the options below to all graduate students and postdoctoral fellows, in all disciplines.

Post-Doctoral fellows, PhD students, and Master’s Thesis students

Documented training can take either of the following forms:

- **Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)** web-based materials. RCR training can be completed using the CITI modules, which include comprehensive web-based course materials, a series of short content exams, and a completion certificate. Detailed instructions are available on the ORPC website: <https://research.umbc.edu/2135-2/>. It is highly recommended

- that departments supplement these modules with in-person discussions addressing the disciplines' nuances. *Because this training is web-based, it is not sufficient to meet NIH criteria for “discussion-based” training.*
- An in-person or hybrid training course or series of microcredentials related to responsible conduct of research. The course/microcredential may be offered by the academic department, or other entity, so long as the training culminates with an acknowledgement of completion. The completion of training may result in either a designation on the transcript, by digital badge through UMBC Training, or by written acknowledgment of the training filed with the Graduate School. This alternative training must also be documented within the department and accessible for review by ORPC.

Each department can recommend or require that students take the training earlier, but the Graduate School will conduct a compliance check at the candidacy stage for doctoral students and prior to the thesis submission for Master's students. The Graduate School has an “RCR certification checkbox” to the “Application for Admission to Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy” form for doctoral students. For Master's students, compliance will be documented when the Master's thesis committee nomination form is completed and submitted to the Graduate School. Verification of completion beyond checkbox selection may be obtained by additional mechanisms.

Optional training for Master's students who are not completing a thesis

Training that is related to responsible professional conduct and ethics. Master's students who are not completing a thesis may be required by their respective department/program to provide proof of training in the area of professional conduct, ethics, or related area depending of the student's course of study. In many cases, a course in Professional Ethics is an appropriate substitute for this requirement. For those master's students who do not have access to an actual course (which will be designated on the transcript), an acknowledgement of completion should be filed with the department/program. An electronic copy of the certification of completion is sufficient for tracking purposes.

Other Compliance Training

Other compliance training for research activities involving animals, human subjects, biohazardous materials use or situations involving conflicts of interest or export-controlled items are required by regulations specific to the research activity. This training is separate from RCR training.

Information on compliance training at UMBC can be found here:

<https://research.umbc.edu/office-of-research-protections-and-compliance/>.

The Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Statistics

In accordance with the guidelines established by UMBC and pursuant to federal law, identified as the “Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998,” all currently enrolled students, campus employees, and all prospective students and prospective employees are entitled to request and receive a copy of the UMBC Annual Campus Security Report. The report contains crime statistics about certain specified crimes/incidents that have been reported to the UMBC Police Department and/or Campus Security Authorities over the past three years and have occurred either on-campus, in off-campus buildings or property owned or controlled by the University, or on public property adjacent to campus. The report also contains policies and practices pertaining to campus security, crime reporting, alcohol and drugs, victims’ assistance programs, student discipline, campus resources, community safety alerts, crime prevention, access to campus facilities/properties as well as personal safety tips. The report encourages the reporting of all crime occurrences. The report describes how and to whom to report crimes. Copies of this report may be obtained by calling (410) 455-5555, in person from the UMBC Police Department, or on the UMBC Police Department’s website, which is <https://police.umbc.edu/clery/>

Important Resources

Graduate Student Association (GSA)

This is an organization that represents and advocates for graduate students within the university and University systems of Maryland. GSA provides support, resources, and organizes events for graduate students. GSA plays a vital role in enhancing the graduate student experience and ensuring their voices are heard within the academic institution. Website: <https://gsa.umbc.edu/>

Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC)

The Graduate Assistant Advisory Committee (GAAC) was created in accordance with the University System of Maryland (USM) Meet and Confer policy. This policy facilitates formal discussions between Graduate Assistants (GAs) and university administration about employment issues such as compensation and benefits. At present, the GAAC functions as a standing (permanent) committee of the GSA, providing a platform specifically for GAs to voice their concerns. The GAAC strives to productively work and coordinate with administrators to continue a good work environment and bring about positive changes to GAs. The GAAC can be contacted at this link: <https://gsa.umbc.edu/contact-gaac/>.

Office of Graduate Student Life

The Office of Graduate Student Life at UMBC strives to build a strong community among UMBC graduate students. It provides resources, advocates for graduate students,

and serves as a unique hub within the graduate community. By connecting with graduate students from various programs, each with diverse experiences and interests, the office fosters a supportive environment for all.

Student Business Services

SBS is the office that bills students, collects tuition and fees and issues student refunds. We process student payments, tuition remission, military waivers and post payments to student accounts from outside agencies. <https://sbs.umbc.edu/>

Retriever Essentials

UMBC is proud to launch RETRIEVER ESSENTIALS: a faculty, staff, and student partnership to tackle food insecurity in our university community. <https://retrieveressentials.umbc.edu/>

Graduate Student and Postdoc Development (GSPD)

GSPD is the hub of professional development for all graduate students and postdocs at UMBC. We are committed to providing a community of learning and support from the moment you arrive on campus to the day you depart for the next stage of your career. Our goal is to provide you with the tools and resources you need to succeed academically and professionally. Whether you are a graduate student just starting your journey or a postdoctoral scholar looking to take the next step in your career, we are here to support you every step of the way through workshops, community building events, and one-on-one support. Under GSPD we have two particular programs of note:

PROMISE

Building on a legacy of more than 20 years, PROMISE events are organized with minoritized scholars in mind. With input from students from underrepresented backgrounds in content and design, PROMISE events build academic skills, social supports, and career networks. While there is intention in ensuring PROMISE events meet the needs of scholars from minoritized backgrounds, they are open to *all* graduate students and postdocs and PROMISE whole-heartedly welcomes participants from all backgrounds and disciplines. PROMISE at UMBC is a part of a PROMISE network across the University System of Maryland and hopes to provide a community of learning and support from the day you arrive on campus to the proud day you depart for your next career stage.

Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL)

UMBC was pleased to join the CIRTL Network in 2016. Our own graduate students and post-docs will benefit from access to workshops and courses as well as our own contributions to the network. Becoming part of the CIRTL Network has provided a common bond among our various initiatives to produce future faculty who understand

education innovations and diversity initiatives. This formalized structure to establish baseline competencies in these areas will allow members of our local “Learning Community” to become practitioners, associates, and scholars in the integration of research, teaching, and learning. CIRTL is an important part of our GSPD umbrella – which is our hub for graduate student and postdoctoral development. <https://cirtl.umbc.edu/>

Center for Global Engagement

The Center for Global Engagement (CGE) is dedicated to supporting and facilitating global academic initiatives by advancing the international exchange of students, scholars and faculty and by providing leadership in intercultural learning through study abroad. The Office for International Students and Scholars within CGE is an important resource for international GAs. <https://iss.umbc.edu/>

Retriever Integrated Health (RIH)

(RIH) brings together the former University Health Services, and the Counseling Center offices to work in a collaborative, holistic approach to support your well-being and success. Our team is committed to providing the UMBC community with high-quality services, support, and resources. RIH is an interdisciplinary team that includes our administrative staff members and a variety of healthcare professionals, representing disciplines of acupuncture, dietetics, health education, massage, nursing, medicine, psychiatry, psychology, counseling, and social work. <https://health.umbc.edu/>

Office of Student Disability Services

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County’s Office of Student Disability Services (SDS) coordinates accommodations for UMBC students with documented disabilities, as well as those with temporarily disabling conditions and injuries, who experience barriers that may require accommodations in order to have equal access and participation in the University’s classes, activities, and housing. SDS is within the Accessibility & Disability Services (ADS) unit under the Division of Academic Affairs. <https://sds.umbc.edu/>

The Graduate School CARE (Concern, Assessment, Referral and Education) Team

Members of the CARE team directly advise and support graduate students, advocate for them and liaise with their program/dept as requested, and refer/connect them to resources on campus that can assist them. <https://gradschool.umbc.edu/resources/care-team/>

Other Resources

<https://gsa.umbc.edu/resources-2/#careeradvising>

