

# HANDBOOK OF RESEARCH AND GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIPS

*Version Date: June, 2014*



## Contents

<b>Research Assistantship (RA)</b>	<b>1</b>
Assignment Process	1
Duties	2
Student's Responsibilities	2
Faculty Member's Responsibilities	2
<b>Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)</b>	<b>4</b>
Assignment Process	4
Duties	4
Professional Support	5
Lead GTA	6
<b>Conflict Situations</b>	<b>6</b>

The Faculty of Education at Western University is committed to providing support in the form of Research Assistantships (RA) or Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) for up to four years of a student's PhD program. This Handbook is meant to describe the process involved in the selection of candidates for either an RA or GTA position, and to outline potential duties that each role entails.

## Research Assistantship (RA)

A research assistantship pairs a student with a faculty member who has a research agenda for which he/she is seeking support. The RA is expected to participate in the faculty member's research to varying degrees. In some cases, the RA may be invited to participate in the dissemination of research through articles, conference presentations, or book chapters. This is especially beneficial if the student is matched with a faculty member who is conducting research in the student's area of research, thus supporting the development of the thesis topic.

Research assistantships are designed to introduce students to research under the tutelage of a faculty member. The parameters are as follows:

1. In consultation with doctoral students, the faculty has agreed that normally, all first year doctoral students will only be assigned research assistantships. Students may request a GTA assignment in a subsequent year, but assignments are dependent upon whether positions exist. By focusing on research on the first year, students will be better able to adapt to the workload and have direct experience with the process of conducting research.
2. Students may continue with an RA beyond the first year if they wish.
3. In some cases, faculty members have begun a project for which they wish to have consistency, and thus may request the continuation of a particular student as their RA. The student still has the option to remain with the faculty member, request a change of RA assignment or request a GTA.

## Assignment Process

The assigning of RAs is a multi-stage process, and is outlined below.

1. In **Spring**, continuing students are requested to submit the GTA/GSA/RA PhD Request Form (located on the Graduate Programs website on the [Forms & Guidelines](#) page), identifying what type of position they would want to hold for the upcoming Fall and Winter terms.
2. Students in their second year or beyond, eligible for support (within their 4 years of funding), who are holding an RA position in the current year may wish to continue their work with the faculty member with whom they are associated, but they may decide to request a GTA.
3. The Graduate Programs Office determines how many students have to be assigned either a GTA/RA for the upcoming year and shares this information with the three Academic and Research Clusters (ARCs): Applied Psychology; Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies; and Curriculum Studies & Studies in Applied Linguistics.
4. Where possible, and in keeping with requests for specific students, the RAs are assigned by the ARCs. Consideration is given to: the student's background, research area and experience; and the researcher's requirements and focus area.
5. In **June** the assignments are communicated with the students.
6. At the beginning of **September** the students receive their contract. (If the RA position is funded from the faculty member's research grant, the faculty member will be responsible for drawing up their own contract for the student.) The contract will include the duties to be assigned, the hours and the rate of pay.
7. **September-April** the RA conducts the work to a maximum of 10 hours per week and a maximum of 280 hours (140 hours per term).

## Duties

The duties may vary, and may include any or all of the following, or other duties related to research:

- create a bibliography, annotated or otherwise
- conduct interviews
- transcribe interviews
- create a survey instrument
- conduct a preliminary analysis of the data
- organize for interviews to take place
- write up the research
- attend or help to prepare the hosting of conferences
- edit or format papers

This is not an exhaustive list. Students and faculty members should discuss the expectations for the work to be completed, and to negotiate items if the list of duties cannot be carried out within the allotted time. Students and faculty members should also discuss and come to an agreement about:

- whether or not students will have the opportunity to co-author papers and make conference presentations based on the research project; data collected for the faculty member's project that the student may wish to use for their thesis
- the student's use of the data collected for the project but not used for the thesis
- the authorship of papers developed from the thesis.

The Western University Policy and Procedures, Section 7.0 has guidelines that should be followed. The Policy can be found at [www.uwo.ca/univsec/mapp/section7/mapp70.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/mapp/section7/mapp70.pdf). Where appropriate, the agreement on authorship and data usage should be part of the contract signed by the faculty member and the research assistant.

## Student's Responsibilities

Students are expected to:

1. Complete the work assigned.
2. Discuss with the faculty member which skills and knowledge that they lack to complete the tasks, and to determine how these skills and knowledge will be acquired.
3. Complete the number of hours for which they are contracted. If they do not fulfill this obligation, the RA may be terminated.
4. Negotiate with the faculty member alternate times if the study-load or other issues cause an interruption of the assigned RA work.

## Faculty Member's Responsibilities

- To provide sufficient preparation and support so that the student understands and can complete the work in a satisfactory and timely fashion.

- To supervise the student to ensure that the work is completed satisfactorily. If the work is not completed satisfactorily, the faculty member must discuss with the student any problems with the work and provide suggestions for its improvement.
- To discuss the list of tasks if the assigned work takes more time than anticipated and cannot be completed within the time allotted. If necessary, the tasks may have to be renegotiated.
- To apprise the Graduate Program Office if problems with the quality of the RA's work and time to completion continue.
- To help students to manage their time such that the research work does not interfere with their studies.

## Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)

A Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) permits a student to become involved in the instruction of undergraduate courses, or in the very rare case a course offered, at the master's level. The duties associated with being a GTA may involve planning, instruction, and assessment of a course. Normally, the student begins as an assistant with an experienced faculty member, and may be given responsibility for his/her own class in a subsequent year, as long as there is class availability. A Graduate Teaching Assistantship provides teaching experience at the university level.

Employment of registered graduate students as graduate teaching assistants is governed by the provisions of The Collective Agreement between The University of Western Ontario and the Public Service Alliance of Canada, which can be found at [http://uwo.ca/hr/form\\_doc/employee\\_agreements/gta.pdf](http://uwo.ca/hr/form_doc/employee_agreements/gta.pdf).

Graduate Teaching Assistantships provide students with the opportunity to experience university teaching and to do so under the guidance of experienced faculty members. The parameters governing the GTAs are as follows:

1. Each year, we determine how many students are continuing as GTAs and are thus guaranteed a GTA if they so wish. This is governed by the Collective Agreement for Graduate Teaching Assistantships.
2. Whenever possible we try to satisfy the requests of students requesting a GTA for the first time, but we may not be able to do so. This will depend on the availability of positions in the preservice and undergraduate programs, and the match between the courses and the students.

## Assignment Process

Described below is the normal process we follow when setting up GTA positions.

1. In Spring, continuing students are requested to submit the GTA/GSA/RA PhD Request Form (located on the Graduate Programs website on the [Forms & Guidelines](#) page), identifying what type of position they would want to hold for the upcoming Fall and Winter terms.
2. Students in their second year or beyond, eligible for support (within their 4 years of funding), may request a GTA. Students who have a GTA must be given a GTA, if they decide to continue with one (as per the [Collective Agreement](#) - September 1, 2012) but only as long as they are still eligible for funding.
3. The Graduate Programs Office determine how many students have to be assigned either a GTA/RA for the upcoming year and shares this information with the three Academic and Research Clusters (ARCs): Applied Psychology; Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies; and Curriculum Studies & Studies in Applied Linguistics.
4. Where possible, and in keeping with requests for specific students, the GTAs are assigned by the ARCs.
5. The assignments are communicated in June to students.
6. At the beginning of September the students receive their contract with their assignment made in consultation with the supervising faculty member. The contracts specify the duties, the hours and the rate of pay.
7. **September-April** the GTA conducts the work to a maximum of 10 hours per week and a maximum of 280 hours (140 hours per term).

## Duties

According to the [Collective Agreement](#) between the University and Graduate Teaching Assistants, all assigned duties of an employee shall be included in the calculation of required hours of work as outlined in the Duties Specification Letter. Such duties for employees may include:

- instruction, lecturing or supervision in classes, tutorials or laboratories
- preparation of materials or set-up of required displays or apparatus for classes, tutorials or laboratories
- presence at designated lectures
- holding of office hours and meeting with students
- grading of essays, assignments, laboratory reports, tutorials and term tests
- proctoring of exams
- conducting of field trips
- employer required training, (including health and safety; Teaching Support Centre)
- employer required meetings
- reading and corresponding electronically with students relevant to the assigned course
- other teaching related duties

This list is not exhaustive, but does indicate the wide range of duties that may be assigned to a GTA. Some students may wish to volunteer for additional duties, but unless these duties are part of the contracted work, they will not be considered part of the students paid workload.

## Professional Support

GTAs have the following:

- Each GTA is assigned a supervisor who may be the faculty member with whom they are working, or who is the coordinator of the course. The supervisor will meet regularly with the GTA to discuss issues or to answer questions that the GTA may have.
- Normally, GTAs will act in a supporting role during their first year as a GTA in order to get a better sense of the courses, their organization and the techniques of university teaching. Wherever possible, GTAs are given the opportunity to teach their own course in subsequent years.
- Lead GTA is available to mentor and coach first time GTAs.
- When the classes are large and/or several sections are assigned so that the workload is expected to significantly exceed 10 hours/week, a shared GTA will be considered so that the workload better fits the 10 hour time allotment.
- The [Teaching Support Centre](#) at Western has courses and workshops designed to help GTAs to improve their instructional practice.
- The [Collective Agreement](#) describes the duties and responsibilities of GTAs and also outlines how GTAs are supported in the event of a conflict.
- As of September 2012, the collective agreement requires the course supervisor to meet with the GTA around the mid-point of the appointment to review the Duties Specification Agreement (DSA).

## Lead GTA

The Lead Graduate Teaching Assistant role is a professional development opportunity for graduate students to apply their interest, teaching experience and training beyond traditional TA duties.

Lead GTAs are outstanding TAs who serve as mentors, coaches and liaison personnel for TAs in their home department. The responsibilities of this role will include; design and facilitate discipline-specific teaching development workshops for new TAs, develop templates and web resources to facilitate marking, develop or promote curriculum innovation, host monthly discussion groups and may provide peer consultation and feedback to TAs throughout the year.

Lead GTAs are selected competitively, and receive training and resources to prepare for their role from the Teaching Support Centre.

Faculty of Education has one Lead GTA. Information about applying for the Lead GTA position is emailed to students in Spring.

## Conflict Situations

In the rare case, some difficulties arise between students and the faculty with whom they work as an RA/GTA. To avoid disagreement or conflict, we suggest that students:

- Meet with the faculty member ahead of time before a contract is signed to become familiar with each others' work and work habits.
- Discuss and clarify with the faculty member before they begin work what his/her expectations are concerning hours of work, the work to be done, meetings, and timelines.
- Negotiate with the faculty member if the work expected appears to require more than the 10 hours per week to complete. This may mean that the faculty member will need to set work priorities.
- Review their contract to ensure that it reflects the discussion with the faculty member and ask questions for clarification, if necessary.

If a disagreement occurs or a conflict situation arises, we suggest that students:

1. Attempt to resolve the issue with the faculty member by ensuring that he/she understands the concerns.
2. Negotiate a resolution of the issue with the faculty member.
3. Contact the [Graduate Program Office](#) to discuss the issue, if the issue was not resolved in discussion with the faculty member. The Manager and the Associate Dean will discuss the situation with the faculty member, and act as a mediator to resolve the issue. If the issue cannot be resolved in the case of a faculty-supported RA, the Associate Dean may reassign the student to another faculty member.