

Standards for Psychology Department Graduate Research Assistantships

Students who are funded on a graduate research assistantship (GRA) are tasked with supporting faculty research endeavors and their laboratory, while gaining a professionally rich experience. They are supervised by the faculty member of the assigned laboratory. GRAs may be assigned at half-time (10 hours) or full-time (20 hours) placements.

GRA should track their hours and tasks completed during those hours. If a GRA notices they are consistently under or over their hours, they should notify the supervising faculty member immediately. There are two basic rules that govern GRAs:

1. GRAs may not exceed the total hours they are assigned over the course of the semester (although they may work over their weekly assignment in some weeks).
2. GRAs should not work significantly fewer hours than their assigned hours over the course of the semester (although they may work notably fewer hours in some weeks than the hourly assignment).

Faculty Member Responsibilities

1. Orient GRA(s) to your laboratory environment and culture.
2. Train GRA(s) so that they may effectively and efficiently complete the assigned tasks. This includes [human](#) and [animal](#) regulatory processes, how to handle and manage data, how to interface with lab mates and participants, and relevant lab protocols. If GRA(s) are to do work off campus, data protection protocols need to be established prior to commencing off-site work.
3. Communicate expectations clearly and consistently.
4. Communicate with assigned GRA(s) regularly.
5. Treat GRA(s) with respect, like a member of the research team.
6. Monitor GRA(s) effort.
7. Understand that GRA(s) have many other responsibilities.
8. Evaluate GRA(s) according to department standards, where applicable. This includes an end-of-term evaluation.

GRA Responsibilities

1. Prioritize your research assignment appropriately. You are an important member of the research team and your help is needed.
2. Represent yourself, the assigned faculty supervisor, department, and university professionally.
3. Do high-quality work and use the hours you are working on your assistantship efficiently (for example: if you have finished your assignments early, tell your supervisor).
4. Work the assigned hours every week they are needed.

5. Communicate with assigned faculty member regularly. You should respond to emails in a timely manner (e.g., within 24 hours, except weekends and holidays). If that is not possible for some reason, you should notify the faculty member.
6. Notify the faculty member, prior to any period of unavailability during the semester.
7. If you are unable to complete your hours for an extended period of time during a semester where you will be unavailable, you should notify the faculty member prior to the beginning of the assistantship.
8. Understand that research supervisors have many other responsibilities.
9. Evaluate your experience in the GRA position at the end-of-term, according to department standards.

It is expected that the supervisor of your GRAship will orient you to their laboratory environment and culture, but we urge you to take a proactive approach to understanding any work dynamics. For example, if you are new to the laboratory you may be seen as a junior member who is responsible for reporting to a more senior student who acts as a laboratory manager. In this scenario, while you both may be students, there may be an established hierarchy that helps the laboratory function while providing supervisory experiences to more senior students. In addition, you may become friends with people who work in the laboratory, which introduces dual or multiple relationships with a single person. APA provides ethical principles (see [Ethical Standard 3.05](#)) that should guide your behavior in this situation. While we hope that you experience many meaningful friendships during graduate school, we urge you to recognize that this is a job/professional environment first and foremost. Thus, we expect you to approach your colleagues in a respectful manner with clear boundaries.

In the above scenario, it was suggested that you might enter the laboratory as a junior colleague. It is possible that the laboratory includes undergraduate or post-baccalaureate scholars who have junior rank to you. In this example, you would be the senior lab member. Whether your colleagues are junior or senior to you, we encourage you to refer to Ethical Standard 3.05 about how to effectively manage multiple relationships.

Authorship

Throughout your GRA, it is possible that your contributions could lend themselves to authorship on presentations or papers. While we hope the faculty member initiates conversations about authorship, we want you to feel empowered to broach this topic early and often as an exercise in professional development. Ideally, authorship conversations start early and continue throughout the project. For example, there may be an initial conversation about authorship when your GRA starts and this conversation may be revisited prior to a submission of a presentation or paper. Please see APA's website on responsible practice in [authorship](#).

Best Practices for a Successful Graduate Assistant

The best practices listed below are designed to facilitate an educational and rich experience for the faculty member and the graduate research assistant.

1. **Discuss Expectations & Context:** Set up a time to meet before the first day of the semester—either in person or via video conferencing—to communicate between faculty member and GRA. Faculty members should consider a written set of guidelines and expectations (see template, below); these should be tuned to laboratory needs:
 - a. Expectations related to laboratory etiquette
 - b. Expectations related to the expected flow of work during the semester, including known deadlines
 - c. Expectations related to when the GRA should be in the lab.
 - d. Expectations related to required lab experiences
2. **Meet/Communicate:** Regular meetings throughout the semester (Meet face to face via video conference, or via email every other week (at least) to check in: what/how is the workload? what has changed? Good communication is very important. If you anticipate not being able to communicate regularly during the semester for some reason, discuss prior to that period of time.
3. **Train/Provide Feedback:** GRAs should be trained to do their work. Over time, Graduate GRAs should become more independent.

TEMPLATE FOR GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT WORKPLAN AGREEMENT

Term:

FACULTY MENTOR:

Graduate Teaching Assistant:

Task:

- OUTLINE TASKS AS THEY ARE RELEVANT TO THIS GRA EXPERIENCE