

# Graduate Student Researchers

## Academic Regulations

June 1, 2022

### Definition

Graduate Student Researchers (“GSRs”) at the University of Pittsburgh are graduate students who are receiving financial support from external or internal research funds while they are full-time students working toward their degree. The research performed is an integral part of the student’s training, thesis and/or dissertation. The goal of the appointment, from the point of view of both the University and the student, is for students to make steady progress toward an advanced degree, become a valuable member of the academic community, develop the skills necessary to complete their academic program, and gain valuable professional experience. GSR status is dependent upon being enrolled at the University as a graduate student.

### Appointment Guidelines

Each GSR shall receive an appointment letter from the department, school or research center, co-signed by the research advisor that states the general conditions of the appointment and that specifies the stipend, general expectations for the research, duration of the appointment, other benefits, and any other pertinent terms. The letter will also include a reference to this Academic Regulation and state 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. The letter of appointment should be sent to the student. If the student accepts the appointment, they must return a signed copy to the designated University unit or administrator.

A GSR assignment is an integral part of a student’s training, research project, thesis or dissertation. The hours required are those necessary to make satisfactory progress toward completing the degree, taking into account the time necessary for the student to complete degree coursework when applicable. When the GSR appointment involves research that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation, although still an integral part of the student's academic training, the GSR appointment typically involves an expectation of 20 hours of research per week on average; a fractional appointment involves the corresponding fraction.

The nature and schedule of the research that GSRs engage in varies widely across disciplines. However, except as noted below under “Responsibilities of the Research Advisor,” GSRs should not be expected to engage in research 7 days a week or on University holidays on which the University is closed (see [Calendars](#)) in order to safeguard the mental and physical health of students. In addition to University holidays on which the University is closed, GSRs with 12-month appointments must be given at least 10 additional days per calendar year as breaks from their research to provide students with time away from academic training and other expectations

for their mental and physical well-being. GSRs on fractional appointments should receive the equivalent fraction of “break” days without research expectations.

GSRs who receive appointments in the fall and/or spring terms are expected to complete at least 9 credits or the Full-Time Dissertation Study option in the terms of appointment; those with fractional appointments are expected to register for at least the following number of credits or the Full-Time Dissertation Study option: 3/4 appointment, 9 credits; 1/2 appointment, 6 credits; 1/4 appointment, 3 credits. GSRs who receive appointments in the summer term or in a summer session do not need to be registered for credits or FTDS if their summer appointment is part of an 8- or 12-month appointment. However, if the student’s summer appointment is for 4 months or less, students must register for at least 1 credit or for the Full-Time Dissertation Study option in the summer term or session. International students who begin their graduate programs in the spring preceding a summer appointment should contact Office of International Services (OIS) to determine whether or not they must register for credits or FTDS if they receive a summer appointment.

All appointments are conditioned on students continuing to make satisfactory academic progress towards completing their degree. When a student accepts an appointment in writing, both the student and the designated faculty advisor are expected to comply with the terms of the appointment. 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 support and academic and professional training.

The Immigration Reform and Control Act requires the University to verify that a GSR is authorized to receive a stipend in the United States. Each new GSR of the University is required to verify that they are either a U.S. citizen or authorized to receive stipend funding in this country. In order to receive financial support, a GSR is required to produce the necessary documentation to the University.

### **Reappointment Guidelines**

Although GSR appointments may not be made for 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 and research qualifications. A reappointment should be made at the same level or higher stipend level.

The criteria for reappointment include satisfactory academic performance, satisfactory progress toward their degree and the quality of research activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements. Examples of unsatisfactory academic performance would be a GPA below 3.0, completion of fewer than six credits of graduate work per term, or failure to pass preliminary or comprehensive examinations as specified.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Department and Program**

The ultimate responsibility for all research performed at the University rests with the faculty and the appropriate department or program.

The department or program should make application and appointment procedures available to all graduate students.

The department or program is responsible for providing an academic environment that is consistent with the research to be conducted and for providing education about research integrity.

The department, program, school or research center is responsible for generating the GSR appointment letters and ensuring that the terms are being followed.

### **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 in writing in the appointment letter. If the student is expected to engage in essential research on University holidays when the University is closed (such as time-sensitive experiments or animal care), the details of this expectation must be explained in the appointment letter, including how the student will be provided with alternative, equivalent breaks from their research to ensure that students have time away from academic training and other expectations for their mental and physical well-being. Additionally, if the nature of the research constrains the timing of or number of consecutive days the student can be away from research, these details must be explained in the appointment letter.

The research advisor is responsible for providing the GSR with the training needed to use equipment and perform the research necessary for the GSR's professional development and academic progress. The research advisor should explain the department's and the research advisor's co-authorship policy.

To ensure adequate progress and provide additional supports, if necessary, the research advisor should provide the GSR with feedback on the quality of their research activities necessary to complete their academic and professional training and degree requirements at least once per year with a written record of the feedback shared with the student and saved by the department and program.

The research advisor should strive to maintain continuous financial support for the student, provided the student is making satisfactory progress, and within the limitations of available funds. In the event that a student's funding ends, they should be advised as far in advance as possible.

Students shall not be exploited or their education compromised in the service of sponsored research or the financial gain of research advisor. Research advisors shall take the necessary precautions to ensure that their students' academic progress and 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 industry-sponsored research.

## **Student**

GSRs are expected to effectively carry out their research and participate in orientation and training programs. GSRs are also expected to meet enrollment requirements and to maintain satisfactory academic performance.

Graduate students are not permitted to hold more than the equivalent of one full appointment within the University at a time. In rare circumstances, graduate students may seek additional appointments, but they must be approved by the departmental chairperson and the dean. Due to federal immigration regulations, graduate students on J-1 or F-1 visas may not be engaged in research that is not directly integrated with the student's thesis or dissertation for more than 20 hours per week on campus when school is in session during the fall and spring terms, and those on regular appointments are not eligible for additional appointments during these terms. Given the intensive and time-consuming nature of graduate studies and training, graduate students holding GSR appointments are discouraged from employment outside the University.

The University is committed to protecting academic freedom to preserve and advance the educational mission of the University. Therefore, the University has created University of Pittsburgh Policy RI-10 governing ownership of intellectual property (IP). This Policy is subject to all applicable federal and state laws, and the terms of relevant contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements may also govern. As noted in the Policy, the term University Member is used to encompass all who are subject to its terms. University Member includes students and, unless otherwise noted, this Policy applies to IP created by students. The University will not claim ownership of IP created by a student in activities undertaken in the normal course of enrollment. Generally, the University will claim ownership of IP created by students engaged in externally funded activities in which a formal written agreement (i.e., grant, contract, or cooperative agreement) is entered by the University and by a sponsor. The University may also claim ownership of IP developed through a specific allocation of University support, to which the individual agreed, or created at the direction of the University for a specific University purpose.

## **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. The University of Pittsburgh seeks excellence in the discovery and dissemination of knowledge. GSRs are expected to adhere to the highest standards of integrity in research, instruction and evaluation.

Research Misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism, in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research Misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion, or disputes over authorship or credit. Plagiarism is the unattributed copying or appropriation of another person's ideas, unique processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.

GSRs are required to comply with the University's Research Misconduct, [RI 07 Research Integrity Policy](#) (formerly University Policy 11-01-01)

### **Stipend**

A range of stipend rates is recommended annually by the Provost for Graduate Student Researchers (for current stipend rates, see [Stipends](#)). The minimum and maximum stipends for GSRs are standard throughout the University. Each year the stipend amount will be considered and adjustments made when possible by the Office of the Provost. Stipends below the recommended minimum are not permitted; stipends above the recommended maximum must be approved by the dean.

Within each school or center, the dean or center director can set a single stipend rate or range for GSRs supported through funding from that school or center, as long as the rates fall within the University's minimum and maximum stipend rates.

### **Tuition Scholarship**

In recognition of academic merit, the University offers GSRs a tuition scholarship. The tuition scholarship that will be provided in Fall and Spring terms is as follows:

Full-time appointment	9 credits*
3/4 appointment	9 credits*
1/2 appointment	6 credits
1/4 appointment	3 credits

\* Students registered for 9 or more credits are usually billed at the flat full-time rate; therefore, scholarships for students with 3/4 or full appointments in the fall and/or spring terms could cover up to 15 credits.

The prevailing Wellness, Computing and Network Services, Security and Transportation fees 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 or spring terms; the fee assessed part-time students will be included with the scholarship awarded to students holding fractional appointments.

The student is responsible for their 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 graduate student activity fee.

### **Health Insurance Coverage**

GSRs who receive full-time or fractional appointments are eligible to enroll in the graduate student health insurance plan at no cost. Students with 8- and 12-month appointments receive 12 months of individual health insurance coverage. Students on 4-month appointments receive 4 months of coverage.

## **Accommodations**

In the event a GSR needs an adjustment to the expectations of their appointment due to a serious illness or physical incapacitation, the GSR involved should receive their stipend and tuition for a length of time to be determined by the dean's office.

Students seeking disability related accommodations in their GSR appointments should contact [Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS), 140 William Pitt Union, (412) 648-7890, [drsrecep@pitt.edu](mailto:drsrecep@pitt.edu), (412) 228-5347 for P3 ASL users, as soon as possible. DRS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations as appropriate.

For students who are new parents, please see the [Graduate Student Parental Accommodation Guidelines](#).

## **Grievance Situations**

*Unfair Treatment:* The University of Pittsburgh strives to build and maintain a positive and healthy learning environment. Reporting concerns, asking questions and understanding Pitt's response to them is critical to this process. Any student who believes that they have been treated unfairly or has been denied eligibility according to these guidelines are encouraged, but not required, to first discuss the situation with their program advisor, research advisor, ombudsperson, or office of student services. Students are also encouraged to report any unfair treatment, bias or discrimination via the [Pitt Concern Connection](#). The Pitt Concern Connection enables our campus communities to elevate irregular or troublesome issues so that they can be investigated and resolved. GSRs can also seek review in accordance with the [University's Guidelines on Academic Integrity](#) as adopted by their school.

*Termination or Suspension of Appointment:* In rare cases, a GSR may have their appointment terminated before their appointment ends. Early termination or an interim suspension may only be initiated if the GSR has received an appropriate written warning or has been alleged to have violated or has been found to have violated a major canon of institutional responsibility including, but not limited to, the Student Code of Conduct, Academic Integrity, Research Integrity, or other civil right or Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion policies. The GSR must be informed in writing by the department chair of the reasons for termination or suspension. Appeals procedure (see below) must be referenced.

*Appeals Procedure:* A GSR may appeal, in writing, within ten business days after of notice of interim suspension or termination of appointment, to the dean, and the dean or their designee(s) will review the matter and make a finding of resolution on behalf of the school. In the event the dean was consulted as part of the termination or suspension process, the appeal shall be forwarded to the Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and they or their designee(s) shall review the matter and make a final determination as to the resolution of the appeal.

## **Related Links to Policies/Resources**

[Graduate and Professional Student Parental Accommodation Academic](#)

[Regulations School Ombudspersons](#)

[Student Code of Conduct](#)

[Office of International Services](#)

[Academic Integrity Guidelines](#)

[Research Integrity](#)

[Office for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion](#), including complaint/grievances

[Intellectual Property](#)

[Disability Resources and Services](#) (DRS)

[Pitt Concern Connection](#)