



**VCU**

L. Douglas Wilder School of  
Government and Public Affairs

# **Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant Program Policy Manual**

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**Academic Advising & Student Services Office**  
L. Douglas Wilder School of Government & Public Affairs  
Virginia Commonwealth University

Raleigh Building | 1001 W. Franklin Street | First Floor  
P.O. Box 842028  
Richmond, Virginia 23284-2028

(804) 828-6837 | [wsadvisor@vcu.edu](mailto:wsadvisor@vcu.edu)

## Graduate Teaching and Research Assistant Program Policy Manual

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs  
Virginia Commonwealth University

There are a limited number of one-year assistantships available for full-time graduate students each academic year. Renewal and rehire are possible based on the availability of funds, program need, and student performance and are limited to two years, for a total possible appointment period of three years. Metrics used to determine reappointments are included in this manual.

### Appointments

Students holding Graduate Assistant appointments will be expected to balance their approximately 20 hour a week work assignment with course requirements while maintaining an acceptable GPA. In addition, doctoral students are required to attend the doctoral student professional development sessions. First year students must achieve a minimum program GPA of a 3.3 at the end of their first semester and earn a minimum program cumulative GPA of a 3.5 upon completion of their second semester. After the first year, students must maintain a 3.5 GPA in the program for the duration of their assignment. In addition, doctoral students are required to be in compliance with the comprehensive examination requirements during the appointment period in order to retain their award.

All students selected as a Graduate Assistant will be notified in writing as to the terms of their appointment with beginning and end dates. The students will receive their specific supervisor assignment(s) via email, prior to the start date. However, the assignment is subject to change. Occasionally, changes in specific assignments may need to be made in order to accommodate changes in teaching schedules, to fill vacancies, and to ensure there is some degree of comparability in workloads across assistantships.

A Graduate Assistant appointment includes a stipend plus tuition (for a basic load). Students with 9-month appointments will receive tuition funding for 9 – 15 credit hours per semester (3 -5 classes) in the fall and spring semesters. **Students are responsible for paying fees and for paying tuition beyond the hours listed above. Students must be registered as a full-time student during the duration of the appointment for the fall and spring semesters (9 - 15 credit hours) to receive tuition and stipend.**

### Types of Graduate Assistant Activities

Graduate assistants provide support in one or more of the following areas: teaching, research, and central office support.

**Teaching**

GTAs providing teaching support will work with one or more faculty providing support to either undergraduate or graduate courses. Example duties involved with this type of assignment may include:

- Assisting the professor in development the course syllabus and/or Blackboard site
- Grading
- Guest lecturing
- Serving as a course liaison
- Meeting with students to provide guidance, answer questions, and tutor as needed
- Proctoring exams
- Creating or editing presentations for class
- Assisting the professor in the development of teaching materials and learning resources
- Providing support associated with instruction during class meetings
- Providing general assistance to support the teaching, research, and/or service roles of the faculty member

**Research**

GRAs providing research support will work with one or more faculty. Example duties involved with this type of assignment may include:

- Locating relevant articles, books, etc.
- Assessing the quality of current research
- Writing literature reviews
- Transcription work, editing documents, citation formatting
- Assisting with inputting, organizing, and/or coding data
- Assisting with research design development
- Assisting with the development of data collection tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups)
- Assisting with quantitative or qualitative data analysis
- Assisting with grant proposal development and submission
- Assisting with dissemination of research findings for conferences and/or professional meetings
- Providing general assistance to support the teaching, research and/or service roles of the faculty member

**Central office support**

Graduate Assistants providing central office support may work with a program chair, student service unit, communications, development or in the dean's office. Example duties involved with this type of assignment may include:

- Assisting with program assessment and accreditation
- Planning special events and activities
- Reviewing/updating documents, handbooks, etc.
- Developing/writing program guidelines

- Compiling and presenting program-related data (applications received, enrollment, alumni employment, etc.)
- Providing assistance to students within that program or office
- Providing general assistance to support the work of the program or office
- Assisting on special projects or research that advance a unit and the mission of the school

## Metrics for Graduate Assistant Performance

1. While appointments are made yearly, students who perform well in the first year may have an opportunity for re-appointment for up to two more years (doctoral students) or one more year (master's students). Acceptable performance during the first year requires:
  - a. A cumulative grade point average of not less than 3.5
  - b. Demonstrating high quality performance as a Graduate Assistant as noted in the Graduate Assistant performance evaluations (see Appendix C and Appendix D). This includes not simply performance but professional interactions, proactive communication with faculty or supervisors, and availability to meet the needs of the faculty or unit to which the student is assigned
  - c. Working the requisite number of hours and be present, on campus, when requested
  - d. Proactive and consistent communication with supervisor(s)
  - e. Attendance of all doctoral student professional development sessions (mandatory for doctoral Graduate Assistants; master's students are welcome but not required to attend)
  - f. Enrolling in nine credit hours per semester for Fall and Spring, and 3 credit hours in the Summer if the student has received a 12-month appointment

Note: Doctoral and master's students earning less than a grade of "B" or an Incomplete in any semester may not be eligible for Graduate Assistant appointment the following academic year.

2. Graduate Assistant appointments in second year of study: Re-appointment is based on work quality; students are expected to perform at a high level. At a minimum, high quality performance includes:
  - a. A cumulative grade point average of not less than 3.5
  - b. Demonstrating high quality performance as a Graduate Assistant, as noted in the performance evaluation. This includes not simply performance but professional interactions, proactive communication with faculty or supervisors and availability to meet the needs of the faculty or unit to which the student is assigned
  - c. Working the requisite number of hours and be present, on campus, when requested
  - d. Proactive and consistent communication with supervisor(s)

- e. Attending Wilder School doctoral student professional development sessions (mandatory for doctoral Graduate Assistants; master's students are welcome but not required to attend)
- f. Enrolling in nine credit hours per semester for Fall and Spring

Note: Doctoral and master's students earning less than a grade of "B" or an Incomplete in any semester may not be eligible for Graduate Assistant appointment the following academic year.

3. Doctoral students may be eligible for a third year of Graduate Assistant appointment. Metrics for Graduate Assistant appointments in third year of doctoral study: Re-appointment is based on work quality; doctoral students are expected to perform at a high level. The following merit re-appointment for doctoral students seeking appointment for a third year:

- a. Maintaining a cumulative GPA of not less than 3.5
- b. Making acceptable progress in the program (this may include coursework and dissertation progress)
- g. Demonstrating high quality performance as a Graduate Assistant, as noted in the Graduate Assistant performance evaluations. This includes not simply performance but professional interactions, proactive communication with faculty or supervisors and availability to meet the needs of the faculty or unit to which the student is assigned
- c. Working the requisite number of hours and be present, on campus, when requested
- d. Attending Wilder School doctoral professional development sessions
- e. Enrolling in nine credit hours per semester for Fall and Spring

Note: Doctoral students earning less than a grade of "B" or an Incomplete in any semester may not be eligible for Graduate Assistant appointment the following academic year.

## Graduate Assistant Supervisors

Faculty and staff who supervise Graduate Assistants must be familiar with Wilder School and VCU policies and procedures for graduate assistants. Each supervisor will have access to the Wilder School Graduate Assistant Policy Manual and to the [VCU Policies and Procedures on graduate assistantships](#).

Supervisors are to review the terms of the assistantship with their Graduate Assistant, to provide guidance and feedback of the Graduate Assistant's work, and to verify that the Graduate Assistant completes the required number of hours for each term. Supervisors should also be sure to provide documentation, such as performance expectations, required tasks, and evaluations, to their Graduate Assistants in writing.

## Evaluation

The performance of Graduate Assistants is expected to be of the highest quality throughout the term of their appointment. Each faculty supervisor is required to provide their expectations of performance and a description of duties for their Graduate Assistant(s) in writing (see Appendix B) at the beginning of each semester. These expectations and duties will be signed by the supervisor(s) and the Graduate Assistant. The expectations and duties will be submitted to the Academic Advising & Student Services (AA&SS) Office. The position description forms a contract for future reference. ***If these initial duties and expectations change during the course of the semester, the faculty supervisor must notify the AA&SS Office in writing (email) so the changes may be made to the student's record.***

A 60-day evaluation of the Graduate Assistant (to be completed by the faculty) will take place each semester. A copy of all evaluations will be submitted to the AA&SS Office.

The Graduate Assistant must maintain a record of hours, work done each week, and discuss their progress at faculty/Graduate Assistant meetings (see Appendix A). It is important for faculty to assign work that not only helps relieve workload but also provides opportunities for development of the student. Students' primary duties should involve more than photocopying. While Graduate Assistant appointments are intended to help faculty, the primary focus for a graduate student is on completing their coursework and maintaining good standing in their program. It is important to strive for a balance between faculty and student needs in these assignments. ***Once a Graduate Assistant has been assigned to a faculty supervisor, the Graduate Assistant may not be "loaned out" to another faculty member without written approval from the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs.***

Any problems associated with faculty/student misunderstandings or conflict should first be discussed by the Graduate Assistant and their supervisor. If the student and faculty member are not able to find a solution, the issue should be immediately brought to the attention of the doctoral program director (for doctoral students) or director of graduate studies (for master's students), then the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs.

## Termination of Funding

Students are funded on a yearly basis only. The Wilder School strives to fund students (both those renewed and newly admitted) but due to financial constraints, funding can only be guaranteed in the year it is formally offered.

Graduate assistantships normally end when the period of appointment is concluded, and the term of the assistantship agreement is fulfilled. Otherwise, a graduate assistantship may be terminated for the following reasons:

- **Resignation by the student.** Resignation should be submitted in writing to the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs. Students who terminate the Graduate Assistant position prior to the conclusion of their contract are required to

repay the tuition. The repayment will be a prorated rate dependent on the end date of the Graduate Assistant position.

- **Failure of the graduate assistant to perform assigned duties adequately.** A recommendation for termination should be supported by documentation from the supervising faculty member of assignment. This recommendation should occur early in the semester to protect funding for the position and would likely be based on the 60-Day Evaluation. A recommendation based on performance (as opposed to conduct) late in the semester, unless well documented, is difficult to prove and jeopardizes funding.

This type of termination is to be supported by the student's program chair/director and forwarded to the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs. If possible, funds will be redistributed by the Wilder School.

- **Failure of the graduate assistant to remain in good academic standing or to adhere to the continuous enrollment policy of the VCU Graduate School.** New students are required to achieve a minimum GPA of 3.3 at the end of their first semester and must then maintain a minimum 3.5 cumulative GPA thereafter. Students must be registered for a minimum of nine credits for the fall and spring semesters and, if the student received a 12-month assistantship, registered for three credits in the summer. In addition, once doctoral students complete core courses, good academic standing also considers the satisfactory progress a student is making towards their comprehensive exams and/or dissertation.

Any stipend funds remaining after the termination of a graduate assistantship may be reallocated to another graduate student **if it occurs early enough in the semester**. If a student withdraws from classes or programs or reduces enrollment below full time, tuition funding and stipends may be rescinded. In this situation, the student will be responsible for returning all funds to the University. The repayment will be prorated depending on the end date of the Graduate Assistant position.

## Complaints and Appeals

Any Graduate Assistant concerns should first be addressed with the supervisor. If their concerns are not satisfied, the issue should be immediately brought to the attention of the doctoral program director and then the Senior Associate Dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs.

## Conduct and Professional Behavior

Graduate Assistants are expected to conduct themselves with the same professionalism and thoughtfulness that they would expect to receive from others in all of their interactions with members of the university community. A Graduate Assistant's actions are subject to the [university policies related to student conduct](#), as well as to the requirements set forth in this handbook and [VCU's policies and procedures on graduate assistantships](#). Violation of any of these standards constitutes the basis for disciplinary action in accordance with VCU's policies.

It is the responsibility of the Graduate Assistant to review and become familiar with these policies.

## Appendix

The forms are attached for your reference but must be completed via DocuSign. The links are provided below.

**To be completed and submitted by student:**

- Work Log: this will be submitted as an excel or word document to the supervisor for approval prior to completion of the end of the semester evaluation. This MUST be uploaded in DocuSign.

**To be completed and submitted by supervising faculty:**

- [Description of Duties](#)
- [60 Day Evaluation](#)
- [End of Semester Evaluation](#)



## Appendix A Graduate Assistant Work Log

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Week	Date	Tasks	# Hours	Completed/Ongoing	Signature
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					

**Appendix B**  
**Graduate Assistant Description of Duties**  
 L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Program Assignment: \_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

List of tasks and, if applicable, expected due dates:

Task	Description	Expected due date

Communication expectations (frequency, method/content of communication, etc.):

Other performance expectations:

Faculty Signature\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student Signature\*: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Signatures indicate agreement with Wilder School GTA Policies and VCU policies*

## Appendix C

### Graduate Assistant 60-Day Evaluation

L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

**Student Name:**

**Faculty Name:**

Scale Value	Description	Detailed Information
1.0	Unsatisfactory	Performance was consistently below expectations in most essential areas of responsibility and/or reasonable progress toward critical goals was not made. Significant improvement is needed in one or more important areas. <b><u>A plan to correct performance must be outlined and included in the comments section below or attached as a separate document.</u></b>
2.0	Improvement Needed	Performance did not consistently meet expectations, performance failed to meet expectations in one or more essential areas of responsibility and/or one or more of the most critical goals were not met. <b><u>A plan to improve performance must be included in the comments section below or attached as a separate document.</u></b>
3.0	Meets expectations	Performance consistently met expectations in all essential areas of responsibility, at times possibly exceeding expectations and the quality of work overall was very good. The most critical goals were met.
4.0	Exceeds expectations	Performance consistently exceeded expectations in all essential areas of responsibility, and the quality of work overall was excellent. Current goals were met.
5.0	Exceptional	Performance far exceeded expectations due to exceptionally high quality of work performed in all essential areas of responsibility, resulting in an overall quality of work that was superior; and either 1) included the completion of a major goal or project, or 2) made an exceptional or unique contribution in support of the school's mission. This rating is achievable by any GA/GTA though given infrequently.

**Using the scale above, indicate your level of satisfaction with this GTA, in each of the categories**

*(Mark one answer for each category / row. Place an "X" in the appropriate box)*

Category	Exceptional 5	Exceeds expectations 4	Meets expectations 3	Improvement needed 2	Unsatisfactory 1
<b>Dependability</b>					
<b>Work Quality</b>					
<b>Cooperativeness</b>					
<b>Ability to work independently</b>					
<b>Overall rating</b>					

**Please provide comments below for any categories that received a score of 1 or 2:**

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**Graduate Assistant: Please provide comments below for any categories that received a score of 1 or 2:**

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***\*\* Please discuss the evaluation with your Graduate Assistant before submitting this form \*\****

**Faculty Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix D**  
**Graduate Assistant End-of-Semester Evaluation**  
 L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs

**Student Name:**

**Faculty Name:**

Scale Value	Description	Detailed Information
1.0	Unsatisfactory	Performance was consistently below expectations in most essential areas of responsibility and/or reasonable progress toward critical goals was not made. Significant improvement is needed in one or more important areas. <b><u>Please include comments below or as an attachment, addressing the reason for this score.</u></b>
2.0	Improvement Needed	Performance did not consistently meet expectations, performance failed to meet expectations in one or more essential areas of responsibility and/or one or more of the most critical goals were not met. <b><u>Please include comments below or as an attachment, addressing the reason for this score.</u></b>
3.0	Meets expectations	Performance consistently met expectations in all essential areas of responsibility, at times possibly exceeding expectations and the quality of work overall was very good. The most critical semester goals were met.
4.0	Exceeds expectations	Performance consistently exceeded expectations in all essential areas of responsibility and the quality of work overall was excellent. Semester goals were met.
5.0	Exceptional	Performance far exceeded expectations due to exceptionally high quality of work performed in all essential areas of responsibility, resulting in an overall quality of work that was superior; and either 1) included the completion of a major goal or project, or 2) made an exceptional or unique contribution in support of the school's mission. This rating is achievable by any graduate assistant though given infrequently.

**Using the scale above, indicate your level of satisfaction with this Graduate Assistant, in each of the categories**

*(Mark one answer for each category / row. Place an "X" in the appropriate box)*

Category	Exceptional 5	Exceeds expectations 4	Meets expectations 3	Improvement needed 2	Unsatisfactory 1
<b>Dependability</b>					
<b>Work Quality</b>					
<b>Cooperativeness</b>					
<b>Ability to work independently</b>					
<b>Overall rating</b>					

**Do you recommend this student for re-appointment as a Wilder School Graduate Assistant?**

*Please mark one answer.*

<input type="checkbox"/>	YES	Comments about re-appointment:
<input type="checkbox"/>	NO	

**Please provide comments below for any categories that received a score of 1 or 2:**

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***\*\* Please discuss the evaluation with your Graduate Assistant before submitting this form \*\****

**Faculty Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Student Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_