

Guidelines for Faculty on Graduate Research Assistants

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Definitions

Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)

This award funding is intended to support Graduate Students while performing research on their thesis topic.

The dollar value of these awards will vary and is usually noted on the offer of admission. Income from a GRA is NOT considered employment income.

Research Assistantship (RA)

Students may be employed to work on Professors research projects. Payment for being a Research Assistant is employment and is considered a taxable salary.

The terms and conditions of employment for TAs and RAs are governed by the collective agreement between Ontario Tech University and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC). For more information on the collective agreement, visit the Human Resources website.

Minimum Funding

Ontario Tech University is committed to providing financial support to its graduate students in research-based master's and doctoral programs. Each program has a minimum funding threshold for full-time students. These minimum levels may be met or exceeded in a given year and are typically offered for the standard length of the program.

The minimum funding may be met through various sources of funding (GRAs, TAs and/or RAs) and these sources are normally outlined in the offer of funding at the time of admission.

In order to continue to receive the minimum funding, students must continue to meet the eligibility criteria outlined in the [Graduate Student Funding Terms and Conditions publication](#), also available on the [Student Awards and Financial Aid \(SAFA\) website](#).

GRA vs RA decision chart

The following chart will assist you in deciding whether a student should be hired as a Research Assistant (RA) or funded as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA).

Key Factor	GRA (Graduate Research Assistantship)	RA (Research Assistantship)
Primary purpose	Supports student's thesis research and assists them financially. Student may be assisting directly with supervisor's research, but the GRA is primarily a scholarship to fund their studies.	Supports professors research project(s) for their own academic and professional gain.
Can it satisfy funding requirements	Yes; Typically included in admission offer	Yes; Requires hiring and payroll setup
Motivation for student	To assist in training to become an independent researcher; to assist in qualifying for their degree; financial assistance so they can focus on their studies.	Financial gain and professional work experiences beyond research required to satisfy degree requirements.
Nature of activities	Research will relate to student's own thesis or own academic pursuits (in the case of theses or projects this usually will contribute to supervisor's research); tasks will include those necessary to learn research skills and tasks expected for degree and thesis. Thesis students may receive GRA funds even when primarily involved in course work.	Not directly related to own thesis work or graduate studies; may be more basic in nature and not of assistance in developing student (e.g. data entry, reference checking etc. for professor's research). It is possible that the student will learn skills that will enhance their development and career.
Status of person	Student	Employee
Relationship	Student funding support, collaborative in nature, supervisor asks as an academic mentor for thesis completion. Independence is as much as can be expected for their level of training.	Employee-employer relationship. Low degree of independence. Takes instructions from professor and/or team.
Source of funds	Supervisor's research grants (NSERC, CIHR etc.) or industry contracts.	Professor's research grants (NSERC, CIHR etc.) or industry contracts.
Income classification	Not employment income. T4A will be issued. No source deductions.	Taxable salary. T4 will be issued. Source deductions.
Governance	Institutional award structure	Collective agreement (PSAC)

Frequently Asked Questions

How much do I pay my graduate student for thesis work?

- A student performing thesis work may be awarded a GRA at the time of admission. The amount of the GRA will vary depending on the [minimum funding amount](#) and what other type of funding (if any) is being offered to the graduate student. For further clarification, the Professor must consult with the Faculty Graduate Program Director.
- For example, at the Fall 2025 TA/RA hourly rates, a domestic student in a Master of Science in Applied Bioscience (MSc ABSC) program may be offered a full TAsip equivalent to \$11,289. Therefore, the GRA would need to be at least \$4,711 to meet the minimum funding amount.

Who do I contact about hiring an RA or offering a GRA?

- A Professor interested in hiring an RA or offering a GRA to a graduate student should contact the Office of the Dean of their Faculty.

Faculty expectations for students who receive a GRA:

- Since the appointment of a student under a GRA is not an employer/employee relationship but rather a student/mentor or advisor relationship, there should be no expectation of a set number of hours imposed on the student.
- However, it is expected that, as mentor, the faculty member will advise the student on what tasks and research the student will be required to accomplish to complete a thesis based on the standards of the Faculty or Graduate program or field of study. Students who receive a GRA to conduct research for their thesis are obliged to follow the Ontario Tech research policies on research integrity, ethics and intellectual property. See [Ontario Tech Policy Library](#).

Can I provide a GRA to a part-time student?

- Supervisors are not obligated to provide financial support to part-time students, but providing the research is towards their degree requirements, a GRA may be provided to the student.

Can I offer a GRA to a student before their program begins?

- If the financial support is intended for bridging purposes between an undergraduate degree and graduate degree, or for a student who has arrived at campus early, bridge GRA funding may be offered. These situations will need to be clearly noted to Student Awards and Financial Aid Office by email to GRA@ontariotechu.ca.

Can I offer a GRA to a visiting student?

- If the faculty member has adjunct professor status at the visiting student's home university and is a co-supervisor, the visiting student would be eligible for a GRA.

When do I need to complete the GRA request?

- Faculty members should submit their request for a GRA to be created to the individual responsible in their department prior to the start of each academic term to ensure that the student is paid in a timely manner and/or can apply those funds earned towards their tuition.
- Faculty members should consult the GRA timeline document available online.

I submitted the request, but my student says they are not receiving any funds.

- This may depend on several things, including the student's tuition balance owing. The student should contact GRA@ontariotechu.ca to inquire about the status of their funds.

How can I ensure my student applies their GRA to their tuition?

- GRAs are coordinated through Student Awards and Financial Aid. All GRA payments are paid to the student tuition accounts first. Any resulting credit balance will be automatically refunded into their bank account.

How do I make a change to an existing GRA?

- A Professor interested in making a change to an RA contract or payment of a GRA to a graduate student should contact the Office of the Dean of their Faculty.
- A change form will be required and the student will need to sign a Student copy to confirm they are aware of the change. These forms are found on [MyOntarioTech](#).

Can a GRA be reduced if the TA/RA hourly rates increase, or if additional hours are assigned in a particular term?

- No. TAs and RAs are employment and GRAs are scholarship, so there is no direct correlation between these types of funding. The only relationship is that both types of income are considered funding toward the minimum funding threshold. Increases in employment rates or hours will result in greater funding to the student above their original funding package commitment.

Can a GRA be reduced if my student receives other scholarships or awards?

- Yes. The [GS Funding Terms and Conditions document](#) allows the reduction of GRA funding if the student receives other scholarships and awards after the initial commitment.
- It is expected that the original GRA commitment will resume when the other scholarship or award expires.