

# Eligibility for Graduate Assistantships and Tuition Assistance

Effective October 28, 2011

All graduate students have an academic relationship with the department. Those who accept an assistantship (either RA or TA) also have an employment relationship. This policy addresses the employment relationship only. In particular, it sets forth the guidelines and policies concerning how alleged or actual unsatisfactory performance impacts eligibility for Assistantships.

**Introduction:** The department has three classes of graduate student eligibility for assistantships: *guaranteed support*, *no guarantee of support*, and *probationary*. Each student is offered admission to the graduate program with guaranteed support or without guaranteed support. The following policy defines the procedure for transitions from one status to another and for rectification should a student feel he/she has not been treated fairly.

## **Definitions:**

1. **Faculty Supervisor** - The person (course instructor for TA's, Associate Chair for Academics for those teaching a course, and project PI for RA's) responsible for supervising a particular graduate student assistant. Duties include assigning tasks, providing guidance, and evaluating the performance of the graduate assistant in completing the assigned tasks.
2. **Summer Employment** - Many research projects offer optional full-time summer employment compensated at the prevailing departmental weekly salary rate; however, the department makes no guarantee of summer employment. Tuition assistance is not available during the summer; health insurance continues without interruption for all returning students.
3. ***Guaranteed Support Status*** - Students with this status have a departmental guarantee of an assistantship (either RA or TA) during the academic year (not to include the summer) which includes salary, health insurance, an in-state tuition grant and for non-residents, tuition remission.
4. ***No Guarantee of Support Status*** - Students with this status have no departmental guarantee of an assistantship. The student is eligible to compete for available assistantships on a semester-by-semester basis. If a

student in this status obtains an assistantship, he/she will receive salary, health insurance, and an in-state tuition grant; however, remission of out-of-state tuition is not guaranteed. The department will request tuition remission from the graduate school's supplemental allocation, but these decisions are based upon availability of funds and are not guaranteed.

5. ***Probationary Status*** - Students with this status have been determined by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), in consultation with the faculty supervisor, to have serious performance problems in their graduate assistantship and are in jeopardy of being changed to no guarantee of support status. During *probationary status*, the student retains his/her guarantee of support with no reduction in benefits.

#### **Procedures for Transitioning from one Status to Another:**

1. ***Guarantee of Support Status to Probationary Status*** - This status change can be made only by the DGS, after the faculty supervisor submits a recommendation for *probationary status* along with a written report detailing the nature of the performance issues, the attempts taken to resolve the issues, and a copy of the dated written warning to the student that failure to correct the problem could result in a change in status to probationary.

Before taking action, the DGS will make an independent assessment of the problem. The DGS may conclude

- a. the faculty supervisor's assessment is supported,
- b. the faculty supervisor's assessment is not supported, or
- c. the faculty supervisor's assessment is supported, however, the DGS determines that significant extenuating circumstances, e.g., an inter-personal problem between the faculty supervisor and the student, an unrealistic expectation from the faculty supervisor, events outside the control of the student such as illness or a familial emergency, or a change in the student's research interests, have contributed to the unsatisfactory performance.

In all cases, the DGS will first seek to resolve the perceived or actual problems in a mutually acceptable manner. If the problem is one contained under options (b) or (c) above, the resolution may be to agree upon a plan for the remainder of the semester and then allow the student to seek another assistantship without the penalty of a status change.

If the DGS determines the student's work to be unsatisfactory and no resolution is achieved, the faculty supervisor in consultation with the DGS will develop a remediation plan consisting of specific actions required within a time limit (typically the end of the semester). The DGS will place the student on *probationary status* and will notify the student in writing of this status change along with the specific actions required and the deadlines.

*Probationary status* typically begins with the Notification of Probationary Status letter from the DGS to the student, notifying him or her of the status change, and continues through the end of the semester. However, the DGS (in consultation with the faculty supervisor) may conclude that extending *probationary status* is in the best interest of both the student and the faculty supervisor. The period will never exceed one semester beyond the semester in which the performance problem occurred. In extreme cases, the DGS may recommend to the Chair or Associate Chair for Administration and Finance for immediate termination under the procedures described in paragraph #5 below.

2. ***Probationary Status to No Guarantee of Support Status*** - Upon determination by the DGS, in consultation with the faculty supervisor, that the student has not complied with the requirements set forth in the Notification of Probationary Status letter, the DGS may change a student's status to *no guarantee of support* by written notification to the student.
3. ***Guarantee of Support Status to No Guarantee of Support Status*** - This transition may occur automatically because the student has exhausted the period of his/her guarantee (for MS students four semesters and for PhD students ten semesters) or because of a determination by the faculty that the student is not making satisfactory academic progress (explained in the graduate student Academic Progress policy).
4. ***No Guarantee of Support Status to Guarantee of Support Status*** - This transition occurs after a student with no guarantee of support has passed

the PRP and has been admitted by vote of the faculty into the PhD program and is effective at the beginning of the semester immediately following their admission to the PhD program.

5. **Termination** - Students may be removed from the payroll at any point during a semester for an extreme case of non-performance, usually reserved for cases in which the student has "gone missing" and made no contact with his/her faculty supervisor, has refused to perform his/her duties (including refusal to correct problems associated with *probationary status*), or has indulged in unethical or illegal behavior. This action can be taken by the Chair or Associate Chair for Administration and Finance only with the agreement of the DGS and the faculty supervisor, consistent with applicable university employee termination policy.

The DGS, the Associate Chair for Administration and Finance, and the Chair will regularly advise the faculty in confidence of all graduate student status changes.

**Student Appeals:** If a student feels he/she is being treated unfairly by their faculty supervisor, the student may bring the matter to the DGS. The DGS will provide appropriate counsel to the student and, depending upon the nature of the issue, may discuss the matter with the faculty supervisor, may convene a joint meeting with the faculty supervisor and the student, or may seek advice and counsel from an appropriate university officer.

If a student receives a Notice of Probationary Status letter or Notice of No Guarantee of Support letter from the DGS and he/she feels the action is not warranted, the student may appeal in writing to the Department Chair.