

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

Graduate College

Graduate Assistant Appointments and Stipends in Fiscal Year 2020

Overview

Recruiting and retaining graduate students is a priority for Iowa State University. The full financial packages (stipends, benefits, and tuition scholarships) offered to some graduate applicants need to be competitive. Our transition in July 2019 to appointing graduate assistants (GAs) in Workday is intended to increase our competitiveness. The vast majority of GAs will be assured of full-term appointments that provide equal monthly stipend payments. Several term options with flexible start and end dates will be available through an efficient administrative appointment process. During and beyond FY20, suggestions for how we might improve our appointment procedures in student-centered ways will be welcome.

Further Detail & Frequently Asked Questions

What is a graduate assistantship?

An assistantship provides financial support to a degree-seeking graduate student. The university expects the graduate assistant (GA) to engage in designated teaching, research, or administrative-service efforts that enhance the student's education. While graduate faculty and the institution benefit from the activities of GAs, the primary purpose of an assistantship is to support student learning and development. Our appointment practices will pertain to all three types of GAs, teaching, research, and administrative assistants.

Why update the practices for appointing GAs? How will this be an improvement?

Our updated practices coincide with our transition to Workday. The updates will standardize most appointments to full terms, and can result in GAs being assured of equal monthly payments.

What is a stipend?

A stipend is "a fixed sum of money paid periodically for services or to defray expenses" (merriam-webster.com). At Iowa State, stipends are provided to recognize the accomplishments of a GA during the period of the GA appointment. Although not hourly employment, many supervisors expect half-time RAs to contribute, on average, 20 hours of effort per week. Stipend allocations will be spread evenly throughout the appointment by dividing the total stipend by the number of months represented by at least one day in the appointment.

Can I hire a graduate student as an hourly employee?

Hourly employment of graduate students is possible but is restricted to ensure that GA appointments are used when the contributions of students relate to and enhance learning and professional development in their areas of scholarship. Please see the *Graduate College Handbook*.

Am I expected to appoint a GA for a full term, using standard dates for the term?

Yes, the expectation is that the majority of GA appointments will be offered for a full academic term (Fall or Spring semester, Summer, or full calendar or academic year). Most GA appointments will adhere to term start and end date ranges that will be adjusted each year based on the university's academic calendar. Appointments for less than a full term will be permitted in FY20 due to timing of new grants or issues with student visas.

What terms are available for appointments in FY20, and what are the minimum stipends for these terms?

Numerous term options are available for FY20. Minima below apply to ½-time appointments.

ENTIRE YEAR		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
August 5 - September 15	one year minus one day from start	24,500

ACADEMIC YEAR		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
August 5 - September 15	May 8 – May 15	18,400

FALL 2019		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
August 5 - September 15	December 20 - December 31	9,200
September 16 - October 20	December 20 - December 31	7,475
October 21 - last day tuition automatically reassesses	December 20 - December 31	4,600

SPRING 2020		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
January 1 - February 2	May 8 – May 15	9,200
February 3 - March 8	May 8 – May 15	7,475
March 9 - last day tuition automatically reassesses	May 8 – May 15	4,600

SUMMER 2020 (entire)		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
May 4 - July 1	August 7 - August 15	6,100

SUMMER 2020 (monthly)		
Appointment Start	Appointment End	Minimum Stipend (\$)
May 16, June 16, July 16	June 15, July 15, August 15	2,034

* Date ranges may be affected by immigration regulations, and ranges will change annually with the academic calendar.

What if I am awarded a new grant that provides funds starting late in a term, on November 1 for example, and I want to use those funds to support a student assistant starting that day?

This will be possible. A lower minimum stipend will apply (see table above), and eligibility for a tuition scholarship should be considered (appointments of at least three months are needed to be eligible).

What are options when an international student's arrival is delayed until after the start of a semester?

The Graduate College will allow appointments with reduced minimum stipends to begin after September 15 and February 2 in Fall 2019 and Spring 2020, respectively, when it can be verified that an international student was unable to arrive earlier due to an unavoidable issue with a visa.

Am I required to appoint a GA for the entire academic year, or can I appoint for only a term?

You may make GA appointments for only an academic term, or for the entire academic, fiscal, or calendar year.

Will I still be able to offer ¼-, ½-, or ¾-time assistantships? Yes, though as in the past, international students not on curricular practical training may be on no more than ½-time GA appointments during the academic year.

Can more than one funding source be used to create a GA position?

Yes, though please see the next question about effort reporting and certification.

Is stipend pay in compliance with effort reporting and certification?

Yes, it must be. The appointment dates specified in the GA offer will be the actual start and end dates of GA-related activity and will fall within the designated ranges. The allocation process for payments allows the stipend amount to be allocated among multiple funding sources in relation to the benefit provided to the federal award (direct or indirect). This allocation process, combined with the appointment period closely coinciding with the period of services rendered, yields a practice compliant with the Effort Reporting and Certification Policy.

May I set the work schedule for a GA?

Yes. The PI/supervisor will still set expectations, and manage the assistantship-related activities.

What are the minimum stipends for full terms for FY20?

Minimum stipend rates for FY20 are shown below. Lower minima apply to appointments that begin late in the fall or spring semester (see page 2). Departments are encouraged to utilize uniform stipend rates because this will simplify effort reporting. If individual PIs/supervisors elect to offer a stipend rate higher than the departmental standard for an individual GA, please seek guidance on effort reporting from Sponsored Programs Accounting. For GA stipends paid with federal funds, only the minimum departmental stipend amount (for the appropriate milestone, if differences based on milestones are established) can be charged to the federal project. See page 5 for additional information on stipends, tuition, and fees paid from sponsored funding.

Annual	Fall 19 or Spring 20	Summer 2020	Summer 2020 (monthly)
¼ time: \$12,250	\$4,600	\$3,050	\$1,017
½ time: \$24,500	\$9,200	\$6,100	\$2,034
¾ time: \$36,750	\$13,800	\$9,150	\$3,050

Why is the minimum stipend the same for a GA who starts in early September instead of in August for Fall?

The vast majority of GAs start appointments in August (fall) and January (spring). A GA whose appointment begins shortly later than another GA can be expected to accomplish similar outcomes during the term. Remember that the specified dollar amounts are minima; higher stipends can be provided to GAs who begin comparatively early, and hiring units may narrow the range of start dates allowed by the Graduate College.

Can a current GA accept an additional appointment, to add to a current appointment?

Yes, this is possible in many cases. For example, domestic students on a ½-time GA can be appointed for a second, ¼-time GA. The standard term dates apply to the second appointment also. International students not on curricular practical training can be appointed to appointments up to ½ time during the academic year.

What happens if the GA appointment ends early (i.e., the student completes all degree requirements or graduates before the end of the appointment)?

The stipend will end at the end of the last month of GA-related activity; the remainder of the term pay will be forfeited. If a student ends an appointment before completing three months (Fall or Spring) or four weeks (Summer), the tuition scholarship is no longer guaranteed, and the student may be billed for the difference in the resident rate and the appropriate alternative rate.

What about leave for GAs? What can I allow for absences?

The PI/supervisor will approve absences. Please see the *Graduate College Handbook*.

I have heard concerns that GAs may receive unequal deposit amounts during their appointments. Is that true, and can that be avoided?

This is true, but unequal deposits can be avoided. Equal monthly deposit amounts will result when consecutive terms do not overlap within the same month. For example, a half-time GA fall appointment for the \$9,200 minimum that starts on August 19 and ends on December 20 will lead to a deposit of \$1,840 in August, September, October, November, and December. But, if that GA were appointed in the summer term immediately before this fall appointment, and if that summer appointment ended in August, the GA would receive an August allotment for the summer appointment plus the August allotment for the fall appointment, an unusually large deposit. This can be avoided by ending the summer appointment in July rather than August, or by starting the fall appointment in September rather than August. Use of start and end dates of consecutive terms to maximize equality in deposited amounts should be feasible for all teaching assistants and administrative assistants, as well as for many research assistants. There may be some research assistants whose funding sources will necessitate, because of requirements for effort reporting, start and end dates that will result in one or more deposit amounts per year that are higher than usual. In general, longer terms (an entire year, for example) will lead to greater equality in deposited amounts than shorter, consecutive terms (semester by semester).

In the example above, the \$1,840 monthly deposit amount is less than the minimum monthly stipend established for FY19. Won't continuing GAs perceive a decrease?

It will be helpful to explain to GAs who were provided the minimum in FY19 and will be provided the minimum again in FY20 that the total amount they receive over the appointment period should increase in FY20 even though the monthly deposit in most months of FY20 may be less than it was in FY19. Proration accounts for this. In FY19, a fall appointment was likely to lead to smaller deposits in August and December than in September, October, and November. That's because most fall appointments in FY19 did not comprise all days of August and December, and the amount deposited was prorated by day. So, a GA might have had deposits of \$2,000 in September – November, but deposits of only \$1,500 in August and December, totaling \$9,000 for the semester. For FY20, the GA will receive \$1,840 in each of the five months, totaling \$9,200.

STIPENDS, TUITION, AND FEES ON SPONSORED FUNDING

Federal costing policies must be followed when stipends and tuition are paid from federally sourced funds. The paragraphs below provide a recap of federal regulations OMB Circular A-21 and Uniform Guidance: 2 CFR Part 200 regarding the allowability of charging graduate stipends, tuition and fees to federally sourced awards.

The general rule is that federally sourced awards can be charged no more than the Iowa State University minimum required to be provided to the graduate student for stipends, tuition, or fees in accordance with established institutional policy. Some federally sources such as USDA Hatch Act funding do not allow tuition of any amount to be charged. Therefore:

- Federal awards can be charged for 100% of the tuition scholarship for a PhD student as long as the award does not prohibit the charging of tuition.
- Federal awards can be charged for 50% of the tuition scholarship for a Master's student as long as the award does not prohibit the charging of tuition.
- To be an allowable charge to a federal award, the percentage of tuition paid from the grant should be less than or equal to the percentage of stipend paid from that grant during a qualifying consecutive appointment period (at least three months for the fall and spring semesters, and at least six weeks for the summer term).
- Federal awards can be charged for stipends at the university's minimum stipend rate amount or at the departmental minimum stipend rate amount.
- If a department has established a minimum stipend rate that is greater than the university's minimum stipend rate, federal awards can be charged the departmental minimum stipend rate (for the appropriate milestone, if differences based on milestones are established). The university's minimum is the lowest possible GA stipend rate. A department can establish a minimum stipend rate for each graduate program it manages, and these minima may exceed the university's minimum stipend rates. Departmental stipend rates are the lowest possible stipend rates for all GAs in that graduate program. Major professors/PIs and centers are not permitted to set minimum stipend rates or to charge stipends rates higher than the departmental minimum stipend rate to federal awards.
- Federal awards cannot be charged for student fees because there is no institutional policy requiring that student fees be paid.
- Certain fellowship and training grants are an exception to the above policy. Consult the award documents to determine allowable stipend, tuition, and fee payments.

If, for strategic reasons, a department wants to provide a stipend or tuition scholarship in excess of the university minimums, or wants to cover student fees, federal awards cannot be charged for the additional stipend, tuition, or fees, but other funding sources could be used such as:

- non-federal grants, as long as the award does not prohibit the charging of tuition and fees
- foundation funds, if permitted by the donor
- general university funds
- service center funds if the GA is working on the account and his/her stipend and scholarship are considered when pricing the service

Departments and colleges may have additional requirements relating to the proper costing of graduate stipends; this document only addresses university-level institutional policy.

Questions regarding the allowability of stipends, tuition, and fees on sponsored awards should be directed to the accountant in Sponsored Programs Accounting assigned to the award.