



Graduate and Professional Student Senate
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**Graduate and Professional Student Senate
 GPSS Resolution 2021-22P
 Resolution to Clarify Working Relationship Between Graduate Students and Faculty
 Supervisors**

First Reading by GPSS:	Nov. 4th 2021
Second Reading by GPSS:	date
Staff Senate Review:	date
Faculty Senate Review:	date
Undergraduate Student Senate Review:	date
First Reading by University Council:	date
Approved by University Council:	date
Approval by University President:	date
Approved by Board of Visitors:	date
Effective:	upon approval

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech Graduate Assistantship contracts (including Teaching, Administrative, and Research Assistantships) use a template format with vague details of job duties and lack guidelines regarding specific working hours (See Appendix 1); and

WHEREAS, stated in Virginia Tech Graduate Assistantship contracts, “the amount of work-time pay may vary from week to week. Specific assignment of duties will be made at a later date,” graduate students find themselves in a subservient position to their supervisors’ wishes regarding job responsibilities and weekly work hours; and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech Graduate Assistantship contracts advise students to “check with your supervisor regarding your work schedule over University holidays” (Appendix 1, page 1), giving supervisors power to mandate students work during University holidays (e.g., fall and spring breaks, winter holidays); and

WHEREAS, researchers found graduate students experienced high rates of stress related to supervisor-supervisee and faculty member relationships, funding and debt (see Appendix 2) as well as high rates of depression, anxiety and burnout (see Appendix 3); and

WHEREAS, Rutgers University, a peer institution to Virginia Tech, mandates that Graduate Assistants work no more than an average of their weekly required hours and gives their Graduate Assistants the power to file a grievance with their Office of Academic Labor Relations when necessary (see Appendix 4); and

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech has a responsibility to foster the well-being of graduate student employees by providing clear employment guidelines and support for graduate students who

experience high rates of stress due to inappropriate work conditions (e.g. expectation to work more hours than stipulated, unclear job duties); and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Graduate Assistantships for Teaching, Administrative, and Research Assistantships, will state general job duties, mandate average weekly working hours of 20 hours or less, provide guidelines for graduate employee time-off, and state a specific grievance procedure that protects graduate students from retaliation when utilized; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED we recognize that departments need flexibility when offering assistantship contracts, so graduate assistants shall meet with their supervisors either before the semester or within the first two weeks of the semester to agree on a list of duties, to be approved by the Graduate School or department. The list shall become binding on both student and supervisor agreement, giving students a document to reference if making complaints about excessive work requirements; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Graduate School will be put in charge of maintaining compliance for this policy change and regularly evaluating best practices internally. This resolution should additionally be considered in light of GPSS 2021-2022O, should it pass, to holistically reevaluate graduate contracts as a whole and graduate students should be made the stakeholder portion of such a task force. There should also be special considerations for the ways that graduate students were especially disadvantaged by the pandemic through these institutional gaps and these should be addressed.

Appendix 1: Sample Graduate Assistantship Contract



GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP CONTRACT

CONTRACT PERIOD: [REDACTED]	IN-STATE TUITION: 100%
AWARDING DEPT/UNIT: [REDACTED]	COMPREHENSIVE FEES: 0%
CONTRACT TYPE: Graduate Research Assistantship	CFE FEES: 0%
CAMPUS LOCATION: Blacksburg	OTHER FEES: \$0.00
MONTHLY PAY: [REDACTED]	

This appointment is for 20 hours a week, which is equivalent to 100% of full-time graduate employment.

Details of Appointment: You will be paid semi-monthly. As with any professional appointment, the amount of work-time may vary from week to week. Specific assignment of duties will be made at a later date. University policy requires you to receive payment via Direct Deposit.

Evaluation/Contingencies: Evaluations of your work performance will be accomplishment based. This appointment is contingent upon satisfactory performance of assigned duties and continued academic and employment eligibility.

Tuition: For the duration of this assistantship (except in summer and winter), students will receive a tuition scholarship for the in-state tuition, program fee, technology fee, and library fee, in an amount that is at least proportional to the assistantship appointment. This benefit is not extended to professional/executive fees. Students who are paid more than the threshold amount set annually by the Graduate School may need to pay their tuition and technology and library fees from their assistantship stipends, which should be stated under Special Conditions.

Medical Insurance Benefits: Students who maintain 50-100% assistantship appointments and who purchase the university-sponsored health care plan are eligible to receive a contribution towards their health insurance premiums. Visit <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/funding/assistantships/benefits.html> for more information.

Additional Employment: Full-time graduate assistants are not prohibited from seeking additional employment (restrictions may apply to international students). Students should consult with their academic advisor and assistantship supervisor, and must notify the Graduate School of any additional employment agreements. For details refer to the Graduate Catalog.

Special Conditions: Check with your supervisor regarding your work schedule over University holidays. [REDACTED]

The parties agree that this agreement may be electronically signed. The parties agree that the electronic signatures appearing on this agreement are the same as handwritten signatures for the purposes of validity, enforceability and admissibility.

Department Head or Designee: [REDACTED] Date: [REDACTED]

Student: _____ Date: _____

Accept Decline assistantship offer. Offers not accepted by 10-Aug-2019 are no longer valid.

Appendix 2: Research on Graduate Student Stress Levels in Relation to Supervisor-Supervisee and Faculty Member Relationships, Funding and Debt

- Grady, R. K., La Touche, R., Oslawski-Lopez, J., Powers, A., & Simacek, K. (2014). Betwixt and Between: The Social Position and Stress Experiences of Graduate Students. *Teaching Sociology*, 42(1), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X13502182>
- Wilcox, M. M., Barbaro-Kukade, L., Pietrantonio, K. R., Franks, D. N., & Davis, B. L. (2019). It Takes Money to Make Money: Inequity in Psychology Graduate Student Borrowing and Financial Stressors. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, c. <https://doi.org/10.1037/tep0000294>

Appendix 3: Research on Graduate Student Rates of Depression, Anxiety, and Burnout

- Allen, H. K., Barrall, A. L., Vincent, K. B., & Arria, A. M. (2021). Stress and Burnout Among Graduate Students: Moderation by Sleep Duration and Quality. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 28(1), 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-020-09867-8>
- Barreira, Paul Basilico, Matthew Bolotnyy, V. (2018). *Lessons from American Economics Departments. Graduate Student Mental Health.*
- Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36(3), 282–284. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>

Appendix 4: Rutgers University-Graduate Assistant Contracts as a Model to Follow

- Rutgers University and the AAUP-AFT. (2019, April). *Agreement Between Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and Rutgers Council of AAU Chapters, American Association of University Professors - American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO.* AAUP-AFT Agreement. https://academiclaborrelations.rutgers.edu/sites/default/files/AAUP-AFT%20Agreement%202018-2022_Final.pdf.