

American University of Beirut

Policy on Graduate Fellowship and Assistantship Program (GFAP)

Consultations/Approval History:

- June 6, 2018: Approved by the Senate
- April 19, 2018: Approved by the Board of Deans (BOD)
- April 16, 2018: Approved by the Policies and Procedures Review Committee (PPRC)
- March 23, 2018: Final consultation meeting with SRC/USFC graduate representatives
- March 22, 2018: Final consultation meeting with the Board of Graduate Studies (BGS)
- March 1-27, 2018: Consultations with all Faculty Graduate Studies Committees (FGSCs)
- October 2017 – February 2018: Meetings and consultations with various stakeholders (students, Senate, chairs of FGSCs, BGS, BOD, HR, Financial Aid, Financial Planning, etc.)

Policy on Graduate Fellowship and Assistantship Program

Guiding Principles

The Graduate Fellowship and Assistantship Program (GFAP) at the American University of Beirut aims at advancing graduate studies by attracting outstanding and motivated students to master's degree programs, who are expected to contribute to the university's academic mission and research ascendancy. It also aims at enriching the students' educational and professional experience by enhancing their skills and competencies through involvement in teaching, research, communications, development, administrative and/or leadership activities.

The GFAP includes fellowship support composed of partial or full tuition coverage for students at the master's level towards the fulfillment of their degree requirements. Awards are allocated on a competitive basis based on merit and qualifications, departmental needs, and availability of funds.

Modes and Duties

Graduate Fellow (GF): A Graduate Fellow (GF) is a master's student who benefits from the GFAP. GFs may be assigned certain developmental, training and/or support duties related to research, teaching and/or administrative activities, to be determined according to the needs of their department, in order to enhance their educational and professional experience. Any assigned duties should be limited to a maximum of eight hours per week during the term regardless of the level of tuition coverage, and should abide by any complementary guidelines set by the faculty/school. GFs must not be asked or permitted to provide any personal services.

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA): A Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a GF who is assigned teaching duties in an academic department with a stipend covered by the department's or faculty/school's operating budget. GTA duties may include giving recitations, serving as assistants in labs/studios or clinical preceptors, tutoring or advising students, grading, preparing course materials, proctoring exams, and/or providing other forms of teaching support under the direct supervision of a faculty or staff member. The duties should be assigned by the department based on academic needs and each student's experience and qualifications.

Graduate Research Assistant (GRA): A Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) is a GF who is assigned duties in a research or creative work project with a stipend typically covered from a grant; a GRA stipend can also be covered from available faculty/school research funds. GRA duties include involvement in research activities and providing various forms of research-related support under the direct supervision of a faculty member. The duties vary depending on the nature of the project and the research grant's source of funding.

GRA duties can overlap with work related to the student's thesis; in such cases, it is natural for both to overlap and for the overall effort to be more than the hours covered per week by the GRA stipend.

Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA): A Graduate Administrative Assistant (GAA) is a GF who is assigned duties in an academic or administrative unit to contribute in various forms of administrative support in a capacity that relates to the student's educational and/or professional background and experience, with a stipend typically covered from the unit. GAAs normally work under the supervision of the heads of academic or administrative units.

Eligibility and Allocation

The general eligibility criteria for a student to benefit from the GFAP are the following:

1. The student must be admitted to or enrolled in a master's degree program, normally as a full-time student.
2. The student must be in good standing.
3. The student must not be "special not working for a degree".

Applicants to graduate programs can request consideration for the GFAP by filling appropriate information in the admissions application.

Renewal for continuing students should be managed through their department or faculty/school in line with existing faculty/school guidelines.

The allocation of GFs can be managed either at the level of the department or faculty/school and requires the approval of the dean.

The allocation of a GF can be coupled with a GTA, in order to meet the department's teaching support needs.

GTA, GRA and GAA allocations require the approval of the student's department chairperson. A student can have multiple types of duties at the same time, inside or outside their faculty/school, while abiding by the total load limit of 20 hours per week.

Each faculty/school should notify the Graduate Council of all approved GF and GTA/GRA/GAA allocations at the beginning of every term.

Tuition Waiver, Load and Stipends

GFs benefit from partial or full tuition waiver for courses registered towards the fulfillment of graduate master's degree requirements; tuition cannot be waived for remedial undergraduate courses that do not count towards the degree.

The duties of students who benefit from the GFAP with/without GTA/GRA/GAA should be explicit and clear. The maximum load is subject to a total limit of 20 hours per week during the term.

The pay rate of GTA stipends will be pre-set to a fixed amount per hour at the university level. The pay rate of GRA and GAA stipends will be pre-set per hour according to the type and complexity of the duties and the student's performance and qualifications, based on existing university and faculty/school guidelines.

Renewal Letter, Fellowship and Assistantship Letter, and Performance Evaluation

Students who benefit from the GFAP should initially receive a letter that specifies the terms and conditions for the renewal of their fellowship during their graduate studies. This renewal letter can specify details such as, but not limited to, the following: total duration in number of terms in which a student can benefit from the GFAP; total number of credits that can be covered during the total duration; minimum number of credits that should be registered per term; any GTA requirements; any special rules for thesis registration; and any other conditions to renew the support from term to term. The renewal letter serves as a plan with terms and conditions and, thus, it is not a binding letter; its content can be changed with a written justification and approval by the dean.

The total duration is typically set to the standard length of time needed, in number of terms with or without summers, for a full-time student to complete the degree requirements in their program of study. The total duration should normally be up to two years; this aims at incentivizing students to graduate on schedule and allowing a larger pool of qualified students to benefit from the GFAP.

The total number of credits covered during the total duration can be set to any percentage of the total number of required credits for the degree.

The total duration should be extended under special circumstances such as maternity related, serious health issues, or on humanitarian grounds. Moreover, any required developmental duties should be waived under such circumstances.

Students who benefit from the GFAP should sign a Fellowship and Assistantship Letter every term specifying duties and responsibilities, tuition coverage, stipend, confidentiality and non-disclosure clause, and other relevant information, as applicable, in line with this policy and any complementary faculty/school guidelines. Renewals should be made in line with the terms and conditions listed in the renewal letter, and are contingent upon departmental needs, prior performance in allocated duties, satisfactory academic progress towards degree completion and/or the availability of funds.

Students who benefit from the GFAP should report on their activities and effort to their supervisors. Supervisors and students should complete an evaluation form at the end of the term and submit it to the department chairperson. The chairperson should evaluate the students and provide feedback on their overall performance, which should be also shared with the dean and the Graduate Council.

Each faculty/school is responsible for developing and disseminating complementary guidelines, as needed, in line with this policy and other applicable university policies. For example, the guidelines can cover aspects such as fellowship allocations and renewals, assistantship allocations and renewals, standards and process for performance evaluation, procedures and timelines, duties and responsibilities, total duration for the support, minimum course load per term, etc. The Board of Deans will review any faculty/school complementary guidelines for coherence with this policy, and the Graduate Council will oversee the implementation at the level of the university.

Termination

In exceptional cases, a GF allocation may be terminated during the term with a four-week written notice if the student clearly demonstrated unsatisfactory performance in any assigned GTA duties. In such cases, the supervisor and the department chairperson should first advise the student, orally and in writing, to try to improve her/his performance before proceeding with the termination.

A GF allocation may be terminated immediately for academic misconduct. In such cases, the student may be suspended from responsibilities pending the outcome of an investigation.

The reasons for termination should be documented in writing by the department chairperson; the termination should be approved by the dean and shared with the Graduate Council. Within 10 days of the receipt of the notice of termination, the student may appeal the decision.

A GRA, GTA, or GAA may be terminated by the supervisor with a four-week written notice due to performance related reasons or funding constraints, without affecting the tuition waiver as per the Fellowship and Assistantship Letter.

Students can terminate their GF allocation by sending a letter to the department chairperson stating the reasons with a four-week notice. Students who terminate their GF allocation or withdraw from the university after the drop and add period will be required to reimburse the university for the covered tuition prorated based on the time during the term, except if they secure a pre-approval based on justified reasons.

Financial Aid Support and Work Inside/Outside the University

Students who have partial tuition coverage via the GFAP and are in financial need can apply to and possibly benefit from the university's Financial Aid Program.

Students who benefit from the GFAP are not restricted from employment inside or outside the university, unless otherwise indicated based on existing faculty/school guidelines for students having GTA/GRA/GAA. In case of any perceived conflict of interest in relation to research, teaching and/or administrative duties at the university, the student should submit promptly a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form to the direct supervisor and the department chairperson.

It is normally expected that the combined responsibilities of graduate education and research in addition to any graduate assistantship duties will occupy most of the student's time during the term. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the students to determine how much time, if any, they can dedicate to work inside/outside the university while maintaining good academic standing and high quality performance.

Grievance Process

Students who benefit from the GFAP may file grievance on related issues following the procedures established by the university in "Grievance Policy and Procedures – Procedure for Students Filing Grievances". It is recommended to resolve any disputes or matters internally with the direct supervisor and department chairperson before filing a formal grievance.