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Policies & Guidelines for PhD Student Assistants in Research & Teaching

2024

Graduate School

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In line with the commitment to supporting the academic and professional development of graduate students, this policy outlines the responsibilities, role requirements, and benefits associated with these positions. Offering Graduate Assistantships (GA) (i.e., Research Assistant (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA)) to **primarily international** Ph.D. students will bring benefits to Alfaisal University. Doctoral programs and GA positions will be open to both international and national student applicants. Post-doc hiring will be occurring at the same time so that they can assist the doctoral students. Assistantships will aid in increasing the number of PhD students that graduate which is one of the five initiatives to *Improve Ranking Performance to be in Top 200 Universities Globally by 2030*. RAs will also help to foster a vibrant academic environment by facilitating scholarly output, enhancing the institutions reputation as a hub of innovative thinking and cutting-edge research. Similarly, TAs will aid in maintaining high educational standards leading to better learning outcomes and, in turn, bolstering the university's standing. The Graduate School will screen applicants, but the Colleges will decide. Faculty will not need to train students on new techniques since they will be carefully selected and will have previous publishing experience. This will allow the GAs to better help faculty with their research. In the Biomedical Sciences PhD Program, for example graduate students will have two summer lab training courses in specific areas.

To be eligible for a Graduate Assistant position (i.e., Research Assistant (RA) or Teaching Assistant (TA)), doctoral students must be enrolled full-time in a doctoral program at Alfaisal University and maintain a minimum GPA of 3.5 out of 4.0. RAs are expected to contribute actively to ongoing research projects including laboratory sessions within their field of study. TAs are expected to assist faculty members in conducting tutorials, and laboratory sessions. GAs will receive a competitive monthly stipend commensurate with their level of experience and academic standing. At Alfaisal GAs are eligible for a tuition waiver covering 100% of their tuition fees as well as Visa costs. In addition, they are eligible for health insurance coverage through Alfaisal University's health plan. **The policy is chiefly targeted at attracting international doctoral students. The hiring of Research Assistants using external funding does not form part of this strategy.**

GAs will be appointed based on a 12-month contract with a 35/hour work commitment per week. They will undergo regular evaluations conducted by supervising faculty members. Graduate students who have been offered a GA position at Alfaisal University must not hold other employment commitments outside Alfaisal University.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Alfaisal University recognizes the valuable contributions made by doctoral students through their roles as Graduate Assistants (GAs). In line with the commitment to supporting the academic and professional development of graduate students, this policy outlines the responsibilities, role requirements, and benefits associated with these positions.

Graduate Assistants are full-time graduate students at the doctoral level who participate in research or teaching activities in exchange for financial support from the University. Graduate Assistants fall into two categories: Research Assistants (RAs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs). Doctoral programs and GA positions will be open to both international and national student applicants. Post-doc hiring will be occurring at the same time so that they can assist the doctoral students. **The hiring of Research Assistants using external funding does not form part of this strategy.** The Graduate School will screen applicants, but the Colleges will decide. Faculty will not need to train students on new techniques since they will be carefully selected and will have previous publishing experience. This will allow the GAs to better help faculty with their research. In the Biomedical Sciences PhD Program, for example graduate students will have two summer lab training courses in specific areas.

Assistantships may be awarded to graduate students who, based on their credentials, are deemed likely to be highly successful as students and are assessed as highly capable of contributing to research or teaching. Assistantships contribute to student professional development with the primary purpose of assisting students in the successful completion of their academic program. Activities incorporated in the work of a Graduate Assistant should therefore be relevant to the student's program of study as well as contributing to the University's research or teaching activities.

2. BENEFITS & SCOPE

Offering Graduate Assistantships to Ph.D. students brings benefits to Alfaisal University:

- It will aid in graduating PhD students which is one of the major initiatives to *Improve Ranking Performance to be in Top 200 Universities Globally by 2030*
- It fosters a vibrant academic environment by facilitating scholarly output, enhancing its reputation as a hub of innovative thinking and cutting-edge research. Similarly, teaching assistantships maintain high educational standards leading to better learning outcomes and, in turn, bolstering the university's standing.
- Top-tier international graduate students will be attracted due to financial support allowing the institution to select from a diverse pool of exceptionally qualified individuals. This in turn elevates the overall quality of research and teaching within the university.
- Research assistantships enable faculty members to involve students in their research projects, fostering mentorship and encouraging collaborative inquiry. Teaching assistantships allow faculty to delegate responsibilities, thereby providing mentorship opportunities for the next generation of educators.
- Ph.D. students who receive support and guidance during their studies are more likely to complete their programs successfully. This increases the number of

qualified graduates, adding to Alfaisal University's alumni network and enhancing its reputation in academic and professional circles.

- Post-doc hiring will be occurring at the same time so that they can assist the doctoral students.
- By nurturing and supporting Ph.D. students, the University will play a vital role in shaping the future, both academically and societally, thereby helping to fulfil the institutions mission as a center of knowledge, performance, and innovation.

Skills learned in assistantships prepare students not only for the academic success, but also for corporate, government, and nonprofit organizations. Assistantships also provide graduate students with the financial resources necessary to pursue their degrees. This financial support in the form of stipends, tuition remission, and benefits, is part of Alfaisal University's commitment to the success of graduate students.

3. ELIGIBILITY

Suitability was benchmarked with a regional university (Table 1). Doctoral programs and Graduate Assistant (GA) positions will be open to both international and national student applicants. **The policy however is chiefly targeted at attracting international students.** To be eligible for a GA position, doctoral students must:

- Be enrolled full-time in a doctoral program at Alfaisal University.
- Maintain a minimum GPA of 3.5 out of 4.0.
- Demonstrate expertise and competence in their respective fields.
- For TA – applicants must possess effective communication and interpersonal skills.
- For RA – applicants must possess skills and qualifications relevant to research.

The hiring of Research Assistants using external funding does not form part of this strategy.

Table 1. Benchmarking of Graduate Assistantships with Regional Universities

United Arab Emirates University (UAEU)	Eligibility for and requirements of Graduate Assistantships: (i) Candidates who are first-time graduate students should have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 on a scale of 4.0 or equivalent, in the bachelor's degree. (ii) Other candidates should carry a minimum of 6 earned graduate credits and must have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 (on a scale of 4.0) or equivalent in their graduate studies.
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4. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

4.1. Research Assistants

PhD student Research Assistants (RAs) will help faculty with their investigations. Post-doc hiring will be occurring at the same time so that they can assist the doctoral students. Research Assistants will be appointed based on a 12-month contract with a 35/hour work commitment per week. They will undergo regular evaluations conducted by supervising faculty members. Graduate students who have been offered such a position must not hold any other employment commitments outside Alfaisal University. RAs are expected to:

- Contribute actively to ongoing research projects including laboratory sessions within their field of study.

- Conduct literature reviews, collect and analyze data, and assist faculty members in research-related tasks.
- Collaborate with research teams and participate in academic discussions.
- Assist in writing research papers, reports, and articles based on the findings of the research.
- Be involved in the submission process to conferences and journals.
- Assist in preparing grant and/or patent applications.
- Maintain highest standards of confidentiality and integrity in all research-related activities and abide by Alfaisal University rules and regulations.
- Have no other employment inside or outside Alfaisal University
- Work 35 hours per week, consisting of 20 hours committed to research-related tasks of faculty & 15 hours for the student's graduate research.
- Register for credit hours per planned curriculum per semester.
- Maintain good academic standing.

Table 2. Benchmarking of GA and RA Workloads and Duties

Qatar University	GA workload	RA: 35 hours per week with 20 hours committed to research related tasks that support the research output of faculty & 15 hours reserved for student's graduate research
Univ of Maryland	GA workload	Time Commitment: For RAs, the 20-hour average should include the time spent in library and/or laboratory, and on all other research tasks helping the assigned project
UIC – University of Illinois Chicago	RA duties	Duties may include – but are not limited to, the following examples of applying and mastering research concepts, practices, or methods of scholarship: conducting experiments; organizing and analyzing data; presenting findings; collaborating with other in preparing publications.
University of Maryland	RA duties	The specific duties of Graduate Research Assistants (RAs) vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of the funding. RAs may occasionally be asked to conduct some work at home or to do their research at times when classes are not officially in session.

4.2. Teaching Assistants

PhD student Teaching Assistants (TAs) will help faculty with their teaching and course work duties to help lessen the workload. Post-doc hiring will be occurring at the same time so that they can assist the doctoral students as well as faculty. Teaching Assistant duties were benchmarked (Table 3). TAs are expected to:

- Assist faculty members in conducting lectures, tutorials, and laboratory sessions.
- Provide guidance and support to students, facilitate discussions, and answer queries related to the course material.
- Assist in grading assignments, quizzes, and examinations, ensuring fairness and consistency.
- Attend regular meetings with faculty to discuss teaching strategies and student progress.
- Hold office hours to provide additional help and support to students.
- Communicate course related information to students, including announcements, deadlines, and schedule changes.

- Uphold academic integrity and report any instances of plagiarism or cheating, maintaining Alfaisal University's commitment to ethical standards.

Table 3. Benchmarking of Teaching Assistant duties

UIC – University of Illinois Chicago	Duties may include – but are not limited to, duties primarily in support of instruction and educational services such as: leading discussions, leading class discussions, holding lectures; design of course material; exam preparation; proctoring and grading assignments and exams; holding office hours; and/or any other educational activity provided.
Univ of Maryland	The specific duties of Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) vary across disciplines and departments. For most teaching assistants, however, assignments and responsibilities fall into four categories: • Assuming teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion session of a course. • Assuming teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multisectional course, under the close supervision of the director(s) of the course. • Assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, and administrative duties necessary for a course(s). • Assisting in general departmental administrative duties, such as advising or the administration of community programs, workshops,

5. BENEFITS

5.1. Financial Compensation

Graduate Assistants will receive a competitive monthly stipend commensurate with their level of experience and academic standing. See benchmarking (Table 4). Stipend amounts may be subject to periodic review and adjustments with compensation consisting of:

- Basic monthly stipend
- One-month paid summer leave.
- Transportation allowance
- Housing allowance
- Payment of Visa fees for international students
- Annual round-trip ticket allowance for the GA

Table 4. Benchmarking of Financial Compensation

KAUST	Research Fellow Annual stipend of 75,000 USD, accommodation, schooling, and other benefit - plus an annual research budget of us to 45,000 USD
KFUPM	Basic salary Two-month paid summer leave. Teaching allowance of 25% of basic salary 'Dearness allowance' (from 25% to 40%) for all science, engineering, and business disciplines Transportation allowance Research compensation for participation in funded project & producing quality publication. Conference attendance funding (up to 3 conferences annually) Discounted tuition for children at KFUPM

5.2. Tuition Waivers

Benchmarking of Tuition Waivers was done with regional and international universities (Table 5). At Alfaisal GAs are eligible for a tuition waiver covering 100%

of their tuition fees. Students are responsible for any remaining tuition costs and other fees not covered by the waiver.

Table 5. Benchmarking of Tuition Waivers

Qatar University	50% of tuition fees connected to the program study plan
Univ of Maryland	Graduate Assistants on a full-time appointment (20 hours per week) are eligible for 10 credits of tuition remission in the Fall and Spring semesters and 6 credits in Winter Term. GAs on a half-time appointment (10 hours per week) are eligible for 5 credits of tuition remission in the Fall and Spring semesters and 3 credits in Winter Term. GAs on a full-time 12- month appointment are also eligible for up to 8 credits of tuition remission during Summer; and GAs on a half-time 12-month appointment are eligible for up to 4 credits during Summer

5.3. Professional Development

Graduate Assistants will have access to professional development opportunities, including workshops, seminars, and conferences relevant to their research and teaching interests.

5.4. Health Insurance & Visa Costs

GAs are eligible for health insurance coverage through Alfaisal University's health plan, and Visa costs. See benchmarking in Table 6.

Table 6. Benchmarking of Health Insurance Coverage for Graduate Assistants

KUFPM	Health Insurance: Healthcare at KFUPM clinics and hospitals
UAU	Medical insurance: The University provides medical insurance for Graduate Assistants if they do not have coverage already, and pays them a monthly stipend, which is stipulated in the award of the Assistantship.

6. DURATION OF APPOINTMENT

Graduate Assistants (GA) will be appointed based on a 12-month contract with a 35/hour work commitment per week. See benchmarking in Table 7. The maximum duration of a full-time GA appointment is limited to the normal length of time for completing the degree; in most cases, the normal length of time is not to exceed four years for a PhD student based on performance evaluations and the availability of funding.

Table 7. Benchmarking of Graduate Assistant Appointment Duration

Qatar University	Appointed as full-time employees based on a 12-month contract with a 35/hour work commitment per week. The maximum duration of a full-time Graduate Assistant appointment is limited to the normal length of time for completing the degree; in most cases, the normal length of time is not to exceed two years for a master's degree student and four years for a PhD student.
University of Maryland	Most Graduate Assistants are appointed either for a regular academic year (9.5 months) or for 12 months. Some appointments may be for a shorter period. The academic-year appointment begins in mid-August and ends in May. Students may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the department in which they serve

UAEU	Graduate Assistantships are awarded for a period of one year or less and may be renewed, provided the recipient continues to meet the eligibility criteria of the award and has received good performance appraisal from the supervisor.
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7. SUPERVISION & EVALUATION

Graduate Assistants will undergo regular evaluations conducted by supervising faculty members. See benchmarking in Table 8. Constructive feedback will be provided to help students enhance their research and teaching skills. The Graduate School is responsible for determining procedures for review and evaluation of GAs and for informing the colleges of these procedures:

- The process of evaluation must include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluations.
- Results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the Graduate School.
- The duties of GAs are performed under the close direction and supervision of a member of the faculty. Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty member and the GA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties.
- Each GA should have a specific 'Contract' and Job Description, and a clear reporting line within the college.
- The supervisor is expected to provide the GA with periodic oral and written assessment and feedback regarding performance.

Table 8. Benchmarking of Graduate Assistant (GA) Supervision and Evaluation

Qatar University	GAs	Serve under the direction and supervision of an appointed faculty member
University of Maryland	GA performance review	Each department is responsible for determining procedures for review and evaluation of Graduate Assistants and for informing GAs of these procedures. The process of evaluation will vary by departments and may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluations. The results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the GA concerned. The duties of RAs are performed under the close direction and supervision of a member of the faculty. Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty member and the RA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties
UAEU	Supervisor	Each Assistant should have a specific 'Contract' and Job Description, and a clear reporting line within the Department/Unit. The supervisor is expected to provide the Graduate Assistant with periodic oral and written assessment and feedback regarding performance.

8. MAINTAINING GRADUATE ASSISTANT POSITION

Benchmarking on maintaining a Graduate Assistant (GA) position was performed with a regional university (Table 9). Graduate students who have been offered a GA position at Alfaisal University must satisfy the following:

- Maintain a minimum GPA of 3.5 out of 4.0.
- Hold no other employment commitments outside Alfaisal University.
- Maintain positive evaluation from the supervisor in accordance with duties.

Table 9. Benchmarking on Maintaining a Graduate Assistant Position

Qatar	• Maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 • Not hold any other employment commitments • Maintain a positive evaluation from the supervisor in accordance with the GA duties assigned upon acceptance of the position
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9. APPLICATION PROCEDURES

The application procedures for a Graduate Assistantship (GA), whether for a Research Assistantship (RA) or Teaching Assistantship (TA) position, in Alfaisal University's Ph.D. programs requires the following documentation:

- Cover Letter
- Resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV)
- Transcripts
- Three (3) Letters of Recommendations
- Statement of Purpose
- Research Sample

The Graduate School will screen applicants, but the Colleges will decide. Faculty will not need to train students on new techniques since they will be carefully selected and will have previous publishing experience. This will allow the GAs to better help faculty with their research. In the Biomedical Sciences PhD Program, for example graduate students will have two summer lab training courses in specific areas.

The application should be submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies.