

## Research assistant guidelines

### a. Purpose of Research Assistantships

RA-ships are meant to support both faculty and graduate students; faculty receive help in their research projects and graduate students receive mentorship in research activities, are paid to do interesting work, and as appropriate have opportunities to co-publish or present work from a given research project. Many RAships include administrative work, transcriptions, translation, library searches, bibliography annotation, preparing presentations of the research, facilitating roundtables and interviews, collating and submitting receipts for reimbursements, and ground work in getting research going. They should ideally include some possibility for students to think and write about the research and not be only the boring “grunt work” of academic production, particularly in the case of Tri-Council grants that emphasize student training.

When available, supervisors should share the larger context for the RAship, for example in the form of a copy of the grant proposal that won funding for the RAship. In the case of RAships funded out of start-up grants or yearly professional development funding there would not normally be a document like this to share with students.

### b. Clear description of duties with expected hours committed to each

The research assistant’s duties should be laid out in a clear description, in writing, including how many hours RAs are expected to devote to each task, expected weekly work schedule, and expected response time for emails. In turn, this description should lay out the commitment the supervisor makes to timely communication, when they will be working on the research project, and other matters that would affect their overall supervision of the RA. This description should include the expected number of hours to be worked, as well as the term of the contract - a beginning and end date, even if a grant has a five year duration. At the beginning of the RAship, the supervisor and RA should go over this description and mutually agree on the tasks, and periodically the task description should be revisited and revised as needed. All RAship descriptions should include some designated hours for the administrative work of submitting hours, reports on work accomplished, and meeting with the supervisor.

If the duties include research and writing, there should be a clear agreement about whether these would lead to co-publication or co-presentation at conferences. RA’s intellectual contributions should be acknowledged. If the RA has contributed significant research and writing they should be listed as a co-author on research output including blogs, posters, presentations and papers. In contrast, RAs would normally not be listed as co-authors if their research assistance took the form of assembling annotated bibliographies, liaising with research participants, conducting or transcribing interviews, or assembling data from public websites - in these cases supervisors often include the RA in the acknowledgements of the written or spoken work they produced based on this research assistance.

### c. Doing RA work

Research assistantships are a wage job, and RAs are responsible to do assigned work in a timely manner. This includes responding to emails from their supervisor, completing work on

time, tracking and reporting hours, submitting hourly wage forms, reaching out to the supervisor for guidance when it's needed to complete duties, attending meetings on time, and doing the work that has been agreed upon in a way that aligns with the supervisor's approach to the research. In cases where the supervisor has given a research instruction that is unclear or impossible ("summarize all the research on Atlanta accomplished to date!"), the RA should clarify with the supervisor what is actually being asked for ("Oh, do you mean the Donald Glover television show *Atlanta*, or the city in Maryland?"). RAs are also responsible to communicate as soon as possible if things are becoming difficult or challenging for them or in case they are unable to complete their duties on time.

d. Tracking work

The supervisor should communicate clearly about how payment will be organized - that is, whether the RA will submit hourly forms that the supervisor in turn submits using the Hourly Wage form to Payroll, or whether they will receive regular monthly pay without submitting hours for a particular time period. At the start of the RAship, students will need to set up a Payroll Profile and submit a form to initiate payment; failure to do this can cause significant delays in getting paid. Whether being paid hourly or by the term, RAs should keep track of the hours they work, update their supervisor on whatever schedule has been agreed to, and communicate immediately with their supervisor if they are going over hours. RAs should not be working without being paid. If the hours they need for a specified task are more than the supervisor allotted, supervisors should revise the hours allotted to a given duty or remove some of the assigned duties (perhaps assigning them to other RAs).

e. Timely payment for hours worked

If RAs are being paid by the hour rather than with a salary, RAs should send the Hourly Wage form to their supervisor (or, in cases where one RA has been designated as a Project Manager with signing authority on the grant to submit hours, to that person) on a specified date, in time for them in turn to submit it to Payroll. Supervisors should identify the payroll dates set by HR and set dates for RA hour submission that will allow them to submit forms by the bimonthly payroll deadlines. Supervisors have the responsibility to learn the (frequently complex and irritating) administrative systems involved in paying their RAs in sufficient time to get this done. RAs, in turn, have the responsibility to submit their hours well ahead of designated dates and in accordance with the work plan the supervisor has laid out; payroll dates are set by HR, not the supervisor, and so they are not negotiable.

f. Out of pocket expenses

RAs should not as a rule pay for anything related to the grant out of pocket. If research subjects require payment, or events that the grant organizes include food, etc, it is the responsibility of the supervisor and the RA to ensure that there is a process in place to ensure payment ahead of time.

If the RA prefers to purchase travel tickets and so on in order to make their own decisions about their schedules, reimbursement can be negotiated. In cases where reimbursement for travel to do research or present work for a project is mutually agreed-upon, RAs should submit receipts

promptly and supervisors or project managers should process them as soon as possible. Some supervisors set RAs to directly use the Travel and Expenses on-line system, or have them request access to a supervisor's grant in advance of submitting receipts through the FAAM tool under Carleton Central. Other supervisors set up the RA as a "delegate" and process receipts themselves.

g. Renegotiating and terminating duties

RAs and supervisors may need to renegotiate the agreed-upon duties - perhaps the direction of research has changed, or the tasks assigned have turned out to be profoundly unpalatable, or there's a global pandemic that shuts down normal research work. Ideally renegotiation would be done in a clear and direct manner, with ample time for reflection. Hiring, supervising, and (rarely) terminating RAships are all processes entirely at the supervisor's prerogative. The exception is those RAships that were offered as part of an admissions package, usually with a matching contribution from FASS and FGPA; these RAships must be offered to the full amount committed (although RAs are not obligated to accept the offered RAships). For clarifications to this process, appeal to HR and FGPA.

The guidelines below apply to RA-ships that are not part of an admission package:

In cases where a grant is coming to a normally-scheduled end, ideally supervisors should give RAs a three-month warning, or as much advance notice as possible.

There are cases in which circumstances change and the supervisor must suspend their grant activity for a year (for example, for medical leave or family leave reasons). There are other situations when supervisors may want to end the contract before the scheduled end date. In these cases, they should give as much notice as possible and follow the minimum standards of employment law in Ontario (two weeks's pay in lieu of work for jobs up to three years, and so on).

In cases where RAs want to end the research assistantship before the scheduled end date, they should give as much notice as possible.

h. Treating one another with dignity

All members of a research team should communicate with one another, about the project, with respect and care. The relationship between supervisors and RAs is power-laden, with one person employing another, and so supervisors should take extra care to mentor and respect their RAs. RAs should fulfill the terms of their job description and communicate clearly with their supervisor if they are not able to do their assigned work for any reason. The Carleton Workplace Violence Prevention and Workplace Harassment Policies apply to the RA-Supervisor relationship.

i. Wages

The department RA wage standard is toggled to the CUPE 4600 pay scale. There is no SSHRC required rate of pay and the Research Office may suggest that this rate is too high, but we

believe that RA work is as difficult and valuable as TA work and that the negotiated standard is a good beginning for a fair wage. Supervisors are able, of course, to pay their RAs above that scale, depending on the difficulty of work or needed specialized skills

j. Purchases & data

Any material purchased by the grant (e.g., transcription pedals, recorders, computers, cameras, etc) would normally be returned to the supervisor at the end of the RA contract. Consumable purchases such as photocopies, printing paper, and other supplies required for the grant normally would not be returned. Data and documentation should be protected as laid out in accordance with the Research Ethics agreement and returned at the end of the contract as well.

k. If problems arise

If problems arise between RAs and supervisors that cannot be resolved between them, the first administrative point of contact in the department is the Graduate Coordinator, and then if they were not able to help, the Chair. In cases where the Grad Coordinator or the Chair is part of a problem, the people involved could directly approach the university Ombudsperson, Equity Services, Student Affairs, HR, or University Safety, as appropriate.