

**Boston University Biostatistics PhD Program**  
**Doctoral Research Assistantship Policies and Procedures**  
**(For Research Assistants)**

## **1. Background Information**

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Every full-time PhD student admitted to the Boston University Biostatistics PhD Program starting in the Fall 2013 semester is guaranteed to receive five years of full fellowship funding in the form of a Doctoral Research Assistantship, a Training Grant Fellowship or a combination thereof. This document describes guidelines related to Doctoral Research Assistantships.

Doctoral Research Assistantships provide a stipend and scholarship for exceptionally qualified students in return for research work. Obligation in this assistantship would include research duties assigned by the Research Assistantship mentor or the department for a total of up to 20 hours per week. Funding commitment is made on a 12-month basis. The scholarship would be credited directly to the student account and cover tuition costs for courses needed to fulfill degree requirements as well as all mandatory fees.

Assistantship will continue for the duration of the five-year commitment provided the student is maintaining good academic standing, making satisfactory academic progress toward the completion of the degree, and maintaining satisfactory performance of Research Assistantship duties each year. The department (or GRS) may terminate the appointment at any time for unsatisfactory progress toward the completion of the degree or ineligibility to continue to receive financial aid due to unsatisfactory/unacceptable performance in the Research Assistantship duties (see the section on RA Performance Evaluation for additional information)

## **2. Size of the Scholarship Award and Stipend Requirements**

**2.1 Mandatory fees:** Student Services fee, Health and Wellness fee

**2.2. Stipend:** \$10,250/semester for 2014/15 (salary is paid weekly on Fridays, a week after start date)

*Payment Period:* Fall (Sep-Dec); Spring (Jan-April); Summer (May-Aug)

**2.3 Medical Insurance:** University's basic student medical insurance plan.

**Note:** Students who opt to purchase the Boston University Student Plus Plan will be responsible for payment of the additional premium amount. Students also have the option to purchase Dental Care through the University, which is not included in the fellowship award. The University will not cover any medical or dental insurance costs for dependents. Family coverage is available at an additional cost to the student.

(<http://www.bu.edu/cas/students/graduate/financial-aid/aid-for-phd-students/>)

**2.4 Tuition:** Tuition costs only for courses needed to fulfill degree requirements and not exceeding 18 credits in Fall & Spring and 8 credits in Summer I & II (see below for more information)

### **2.4.1 Tuition: Fall and Spring Semesters**

Students in Coursework Phase: The scholarship includes up to full tuition coverage during any semester in which a full stipend (\$10,250 per semester for 2014/15) is paid. A student on RA tuition scholarship must register for at least 8 credit hours of allowed credits (maximum 18 cr.) each Fall and

Spring semester (typically RAs take between 8 and 12 credits per semester) to remain in good academic standing. Less than 8 credit hours is permissible only if approved by the student's advisor and co-Directors of the program. Audited ("AU") courses do not count towards the credit requirements.

For each student, the Provost's Office will provide a tuition scholarship to fully cover the required courses for the degree and any course deemed necessary for research or scholarly purposes, by approval of the Associate Provost for Graduate Affairs -- a waiver request must be sent to the GRS Dean stating that the course is required for successful completion of degree and the request must be approved. Courses that are not required for the degree program (i.e. extra electives) will not be covered by the RA tuition scholarship.

Continuing Students: PhD candidates who have completed all departmental course requirements must register each subsequent regular semester for continuing student status until all requirements for the degree have been completed. As long as the stipend in a given semester is at least half the full semester rate, then the University will also cover the cost of the continuing student fee for those students no longer taking formal coursework. At the discretion of the Dean, if additional stipend support is offered beyond the five-year commitment, the University will cover the continuing student fee, basic student health insurance and any other mandatory fees on a semester-by-semester basis.

Continuing students who are PhD candidates are entitled to officially audit one course each semester without further tuition charge. Language, physical education, and studio courses and courses with laboratories may not be audited.

#### **2.4.2 Tuition: Summer sessions I and II**

Students in Coursework Phase: If students are not taking summer courses then they do not need to receive the RA tuition scholarship over the summer. If not taking courses they can continue to work and be paid by the PI or mentor but do not have to earn the minimum RA summer requirement.

A student who is on RA tuition scholarship on a 12-months basis may register for up to 8 credits in each summer session. The scholarship will cover both summer sessions for allowed credits (maximum of 8 credits for each session). Audited ("AU") courses do not count towards the credit requirements and are not covered by the scholarship.

Continuing Students: PhD candidates who have completed all departmental course requirements must register each subsequent regular semester for continuing student status until all requirements for the degree have been completed. A student who is on RA tuition scholarship on 8 or 12-months basis is eligible for a scholarship to cover the Continuing Study Fee or 2 credits of tuition in either summer session but not both. These students must also fill out a Continuing Student form for the summer. A student needs to register for Continuing Study Fees during the summer if he/she completes all degree requirements during the summer and will not be registering for the following fall.

#### **2.4.3 Other information (IMPORTANT!)**

*Financial and academic implications of dropping or withdrawing from a course:* A course dropped during the first five weeks of class will not appear on the student's permanent record. After the first

five weeks, a dropped course will appear on the student's record with a grade of W and will be viewed as a failing grade when the student's progress is reviewed in the program. No course may be dropped after the eighth week of class. Students who register for any course are responsible for its completion unless they officially withdraw by the deadline date or change to the status of auditor within the first five weeks of class.

For PhD students, tuition for an audited course will be covered by scholarship if the course is approved by the Director of Graduate Studies. This course must be related to the dissertation research, or be considered as background or preparation for the dissertation research or topic. See <http://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/adding-or-dropping-a-course/>, <http://www.bu.edu/academics/grs/policies/registration/> for more information.

*Minimum Grade:* if a student does not earn the minimum grade (at least a B-) for a course, the student may jeopardize scholarship funding for future semesters.

*Leave of Absence (Students admitted starting Fall2013):* Students who are officially granted a leave of absence for up to one year will not receive tuition and stipend support for the time they are on leave, but will not lose the commitment of five total years of support (if admitted with five year funding commitment). Students who are granted leaves longer than one year will lose the funding commitment, but may petition the Dean for continued support upon return.

*Leave of Absence (Students admitted before Fall2013):* Students who are officially granted a leave of absence will lose the funding commitment, but may petition the co-directors of the program for support upon return.

### **3. Doctoral Research Assistantship Mentoring Arrangement & Work Requirements**

The primary function of the RAship is to support graduate education and research. The research assistantships should support both the students and the faculty member. The work done as a research assistantship is viewed as an essential part of academic training and the RA supervisor is expected to have a mentoring attitude toward the student.

The RA mentor may or may not be the student's academic advisor. Either way the RA mentor should be aware of the academic progress of their research assistant including knowing if they are doing well in their courses, allowing adjustment to their work schedule around exams, finals and qualifying exams. Both the mentor and students must be aware that if a minimum grade of at least B- is not received for a course then it may jeopardize future scholarship funding. Hence, if a student starts to fall behind in a course, the RA mentor, academic advisor and Biostatistics Program Co-Directors should all be made aware of this situation. In advising a student, the mentor, academic advisor, or program Co-Directors can restrict the number of courses a student takes.

A PI has the obligation to utilize their grant dollars in best way possible to carry out the aims of the grant. If the student is not performing adequately as a research assistant, they may be terminated from the position at any time as outlined in section 4.

### **3.1 Research Assistantship Workload**

Students receiving financial aid in the form of Research Assistantship are expected to work the equivalent of 50% effort (or 20 hours per week) and *are not allowed to work more than 20 hours per week during the regular semesters (Fall & Spring)*. Students are entitled to time off during the week between Christmas and New Year's Day (intersession). Other time off is at the discretion of the investigator/mentor.

#### *Research Assistantship during the summer*

Students admitted starting Fall 2013 are not permitted to work more than 20 hours during the summer unless a waiver request is approved. Students who feel they need to work more than 20 hours per week during the summer must discuss with the Co-Directors of the program.

Students admitted before Fall 2013 may be able to work more hours over the summer, and summer employment needs to be negotiated on individual basis with each student and each Mentor. International students are allowed to work 40 hours during the summer and during winter and spring break and may work over 40 hours as long as they are compensated with time and a half salary.

**3.2 Establishing Project/Position-Specific Expectations:** At the beginning of each semester, the mentor and the RA must discuss and document expectations. This may include short and long-term project goals and specific duties and responsibilities of the RA; criteria/policies on using research done through the RAship for inclusion in the assistant's dissertation; on collaboration & publication; on confidentiality and research data protection; *and about the specific criteria that will be used for performance evaluation.*

### **3.3 Change in Mentor**

There are multiple reasons why a change in Doctoral Research Assistant mentor may occur: Loss of funding by the original RA mentor; Student or mentor is seeking a better "fit"; The mentor is dissatisfied with the work of the research assistantship and has gone through the resolution of dissatisfaction process described below.

It is understood that during their graduate program students will meet and come to know a variety of faculty members. Initiated by either the faculty member or the student there may be the desire for a student to be a research assistant with a different faculty member than who they currently work with. Changes such as this need to be carefully evaluated. Consideration must be given to the current RA mentor who may have spent considerable time mentoring the student early in their graduate career.

It is critical that any change in the RA mentor be done with clear communication among the Biostatistics Program Co-Director overseeing students aid/support (Serkalem Demissie), the Curriculum Coordinator, the original mentor, new mentor and student. Everyone should be made aware of a potential change as soon as possible.

As with all RA assignments, the new offer must come via the Biostatistics Program Directors. If a change in mentor does proceed, the timing should allow the initial mentor to identify a new research assistant if desired.

#### **4. RA Appointment/ Performance Evaluation/Reappointment/Termination**

To be eligible for appointment or reappointment as a Doctoral Research Assistant, the student must have a full-time status (register for a minimum of 8 credit hours of coursework during regular semesters or work full-time on dissertation); maintain satisfactory academic progress and good academic standing (see below for *GRS minimum standard*); and maintain satisfactory performance in scholarly work (see *Department minimum standard*). *RAship appointment (and financial aid eligibility) may be terminated at any time for unsatisfactory progress toward the completion of the degree or unacceptable performance in the RAship duties.*

- ***GRS minimum standard:*** The GRS minimum standard for satisfactory academic progress constitutes the following: Maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher; Have no more than 2 failing grades (lower than B- or an incomplete grade older than 12 months); Pass qualifying exams and other milestones on the schedule specified by the program.
- ***Department minimum standard:*** satisfy all GRS minimum requirements; maintain satisfactory performance in scholarly work as determined by RA supervisor and RAship performance evaluation report.

#### **4.1 Performance Evaluation**

There must be an ongoing communication between the RA and the RA mentor with feedback on a regular basis about the RA's performance. Additionally, advisors must conduct formal performance evaluations and keep evaluation record for each student they supervise.

- Advisor must conduct at least one formal evaluation each year using an assessment instrument provided by the department (attached) -- individual advisors may choose to conduct evaluation at the end of each semester (Fall, Spring, Summer).
- Advisor must discuss evaluation result with advisee, give written feedback, and record student's response.
- Evaluation summary must include how the student has (or has not) met the department's (and project-specific) satisfactory progress standards for reappointment. Any inadequacy in performance should be clearly noted in an RA's record.
- Mentor must return a copy of the completed evaluation to the department curriculum coordinator (Amanda Velez). The form will be part of the student's academic record.

#### **4.2 Steps for Resolution of Dissatisfaction or Termination**

- If a sponsor/mentor is dissatisfied with the work being done by a RA student, the faculty member should inform the student *in writing* and meet with the student to try and resolve the issue
- If the issue is not resolved, then the faculty member should contact Serkalem Demissie ([demissie@bu.edu](mailto:demissie@bu.edu)) to discuss the specific areas of concern.
- Co-Directors of the program (Drs. Cabral, Demissie & Doros) will first meet with the student and then with the student and the faculty advisor to develop a specific plan for remediation (in writing and including specific suggestions for improvement and a timeline for addressing these suggestions) agreed to by the student, the faculty member, and Co-Directors.
- The faculty member and the student will meet with Dr. Demissie (and/or Drs. Cabral & Doros) on a regular basis (weekly or biweekly depending on the length of the suggested timeline) to discuss if the remediation plan is progressing satisfactorily.
  - a. If the student has made good faith efforts to perform well and made adequate progress by the time allowed, the student will continue to work with the same mentor or the

department will attempt to place the student in another RA position but no guarantee can be made with the latter.

- b. If adequate progress is not made by the time allowed, the department will work with the Dean's office to terminate the RAship appointment and withdraw financial aid commitment. In the event of termination, tuition scholarship will remain in place for the semester, even if a RAship is terminated before the semester ends.
- Termination of RAship may result in the student losing the Doctoral Research Assistant scholarship and dropping out of the program or in the case of international students being required to leave the country. Because of the difficulties created when RAship is terminated prematurely, it is important that the mentor contact Dr. Demissie as soon as a concern or issue arises.

### **Important Dates**

May 1	Summer RA sources should be sent to Ginger for summer payment processing.
April 15	ADRs with financial aid info for International Students submitted to GRS. Note: International students cannot receive letter of acceptance until these forms are submitted. If sources are not known, forms should be submitted with TBA/Pending for source assignment.
June 15	Financial Aid forms, ADRs, or SAP for the Academic Year for domestic students and all continuing students should be submitted to GRS. If sources are not known, forms should be submitted with TBA/Pending for source assignment.
July 1	Summer Research registration forms should be submitted to ensure FICA rebate. This is for students not taking classes in the summer.

## **Contacts**

### GRS Office

705 Comm Ave. Rm 112  
Boston, MA 02215  
Phone: (617) 353-2696  
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### Ginger Quinn, Biostatistics Department/Grant Manager

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### Sponsored Programs

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***BIOSTATISTICS DOCTORAL RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP PERFORMANCE  
APPRAISAL***

*Research Assistant (Name, UID, and email):*  
*Evaluator Name (faculty Advisor/Supervisor):*  
*Evaluator contact (email, phone):*  
*Date of appraisal:*  
*Performance Evaluation Period:*

***Purpose of Performance Appraisals***

The written performance appraisal is a formal assessment of the RA's performance over a specified period of time based on performance expectations identified by the supervisor and shared with the student at the beginning of the academic year/semester

***General Performance Categories***

***Exceptional (1):*** Performance is, at all times, without exception, consistently outstanding. All assignments/responsibilities are completed beyond the level of expectation. Research study collaborators/mentors recognize the student RA as being critical to the success of research projects. RA requires little direction or supervision.

***Exceeds Expectations (2):*** Exceeds performance expectations on a regular basis in some areas and meets all other essential job requirements.

***Meets Expectations (3):*** Performance meets all essential job requirements. Accomplishments are in accordance with the standards of the position. Work regularly achieves desired or required outcome.

***Below Expectations (4):*** Performance requires some improvement to make full contribution to the program and job in order to meet the standards of the position

***Unacceptable (5):*** Performance is well below the expectation of the job. Employee requires constant supervision, and shows an indifference to job responsibilities. A specific plan of action to correct noted deficiencies is required

***Section I Goals and responsibilities***

Identify goals and responsibilities. Write each goal and responsibility and comment on the performance and results.

*Responsibilities:*

*Comments:*



**Section II Performance**

Please check only one box and include comments for each factor. Indicate specific areas of improvement (or action) needed in the comment section if the evaluation is “Below Expectations” or “Unacceptable”. Include any additional performance factors (#6 below) important to this RAship position.

**1) Job knowledge**

Understands job duties and responsibilities. Understands and adheres to the department’s and University’s policies and procedures.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Supervisor Comments:

RA Comments:

**2) Work quality/productivity/problem solving**

Produces a sufficient volume of work to meet job requirements and meets deadlines. Meets position and organizational objectives.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Demonstrates accuracy and thoroughness. Monitors own work to ensure quality. Identifies ways to improve and promote quality.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Demonstrates sound judgment in performing tasks and solving problems.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

**Applies feedback to improve performance.**

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Supervisor Comments:

RA Comments:

**3) Dependability**

Demonstrates dependability on the job and is responsive to the needs of the department and/or research project. Schedules time off in advance, begins work on time, keeps absences within guidelines. Arrives at meetings and appointments on time.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Supervisor Comments:

RA Comments:

**4) Communications**

Demonstrates competence in expressing ideas verbally and in writing. Presents information clearly and concisely and is able to communicate effectively in all situations.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

Actively listens to suggestions and feedback from others and responds appropriately.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

*Supervisor Comments:*

*RA Comments:*

**5) Interpersonal relationships**

Develops and maintains effective working relationships with superiors and where appropriate, faculty, students and external constituents. Demonstrates a professional demeanor at all times.

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

*Supervisor Comments:*

*RA Comments:*

**6) Other performance factors relevant to the RA position: (optional)**

Add any additional performance factors for the position:

**Performance factor:**

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

*Comments:*

**Section III Performance summary:**

Based on the Goals and Accomplishments (Section I) and Performance Factors (Section II) indicate the RA's overall performance.

**Overall rating:**

Exceptional Exceeds Expectations Meets Expectations Below Expectations Unacceptable

*Supervisor Comments:*

*RA's Comments:*

***Section IV Areas of development/improvement:***

Specify learning and developmental needs. Indicate areas where improvement is necessary or areas for potential growth and development.

*Supervisor Comments:*

*RA Comments:*

***Section V Goals for next year/semester: Goals for the RA during upcoming year/semester.***

*Supervisor's Signature*

*Date*

*RA's Signature*

*Date*