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# Doctoral Research Assistantship Policies and Procedures

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## **Biostatistics PhD Program**

2021-2022

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## **1. Background Information**

Every full-time PhD student admitted to the Boston University Biostatistics PhD Program since Fall 2013 is guaranteed to receive 5 years of full fellowship funding in the form of a Doctoral Research Assistantship, a Training Grant Fellowship, or a combination thereof, provided they remain in good standing. Doctoral Research Assistantships provide a stipend and scholarship for exceptionally qualified students in return for research work. Funding commitments are made on a 12-month basis, termination or changes to an RA assignment prior to the 12 month period require approval of the program co-directors. This document describes expectations and guidelines related to Doctoral Research Assistantships in Biostatistics.

## **2. RA Workload**

Students receiving financial aid in the form of a Research Assistantship are expected to work no more than 20 hours per week during any academic period (fall semester, spring semester, and summer term) in which they are classified as full-time students. During official University break periods, such as intersession and spring break, or during any academic period in which these students are not classified as full-time, they may work up to 40 hours per week.

## **3. Time Off from RA Duties**

### **3.1 Sick time**

Per University policy and federal regulations, doctoral Research Assistants are not eligible to accrue sick time. The RA and supervisor will work together to develop their own procedure for requesting and making up sick time.

If an RA requires a lengthy period of sick time due to significant injury or illness, he or she must work with the RA mentor, the Biostatistics Department, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences to make those accommodations. Policies and procedures for extended sick time are determined on a case-by-case basis by GRS.

### **3.2 Vacation policy**

BU policy is that all students receiving a stipend are entitled to paid vacation time. Students are entitled to two weeks of vacation per the policy found [here](#). This is in addition to BU holidays. Students are expected to coordinate with their RA mentor about their vacation plans.

### **3.3 Holidays**

Research Assistants are entitled to time off from their regular duties during all University holidays. Time off during University holidays does not need to be made up and RAs will be paid at their usual rate on all official University holidays.

### 3.4 Parental Leave

The GRS policy on parental leave for RAs is available [here](#) and provides up to 60 days of paid leave from RA responsibilities while caring for an infant or newly adopted child.

### 3.5 Summer internships

PhD students who wish to do an outside internship over the summer must complete the following steps:

1. Discuss the internship with your advisors, including your RA advisor & your dissertation advisor (if you haven't identified your dissertation advisor yet, discuss with your academic advisor).
  - The internship should be relevant to your dissertation research &/or dissertation preparation.
  - *International student must demonstrate that the internship is integral to their dissertation; see step 4 below.*
2. Obtain your RA advisor's approval to pause your RA work for the duration of the internship.
3. Complete the attached **Biostatistics Summer Internship Proposal Form** (see Kelly Connors to obtain the form).
  - Obtain signatures from 1) your RA or TG advisor & 2) your dissertation advisor (if applicable).
  - Submit the form to Kelly for the Biostats PhD Co-Directors to review & approve.
4. International Students: Work with ISSO to complete your CPT paperwork.
  - Review the [ISSO's directions online to apply for Curricular Practical Training \(CPT\)](#).
  - Complete the [CPT Form & Acknowledgement](#)
    - Item 4: Curricular Requirement
      - Choose **C: Required for thesis/dissertation completion**
    - Obtain an **approval letter** from your dissertation advisor, as described in the bullet points under *C: Required for thesis/dissertation completion*
      - This letter must be signed by 1) your dissertation advisor & 2) one of the Biostats PhD Co-Directors.
    - Item 5: Course Information
      - Course #: GRS XL988
      - Title: Summer Research
      - Credits: 0
      - This course is: Elective

- Name of instructor or BU advisor: This will be your academic advisor, your RA advisor, or your dissertation advisor – whomever you are working most closely with in regard to why this internship furthers your studies & your dissertation work. This advisor will also sign section 6.

#### **4. RA Responsibilities**

4.1 Set 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; 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, and on confidentiality and research data protection; parameters for sick and vacation absences; and the specific criteria that will be used for performance evaluation.

4.2 Academic performance. Students are expected to maintain satisfactory academic progress throughout the duration of their RAship. See section 7.1 for information on what constitutes satisfactory academic progress. If any student fails to make satisfactory academic progress in any semester, the Co-Directors will notify that student's RA mentor so that a plan can be put in place to support the student's academic performance. Failure to remain in good academic standing and to make satisfactory academic progress may have repercussions for student funding, RAship, and status in the doctoral program.

4.3 RA performance. RAs are required to perform the work agreed to and specified by their mentors for up to 20 hours a week. Students are expected to work hard, respond to feedback, and be responsible in performing the duties of their RAship.

4.4 Feedback. The department will conduct an annual evaluation of RAships that will be sent to student RAs and mentors separately. Students are encouraged to provide candid feedback at that time. If problems arise at any point in the year, students should work with their RA mentors to resolve the problem; students and mentors are welcome to consult the program Co-Directors for guidance as needed. See section 12 for further information on troubleshooting within RAships.

#### **5. Mentor Responsibilities**

5.1 Set 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; 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, and on confidentiality and research data protection; parameters for sick and vacation absences; *and the specific criteria that will be used for performance evaluation.*

5.2 Support student's academic progress. The program Co-Directors will monitor doctoral student academic progress each semester. If any student fails to make satisfactory academic

progress in any semester, that student's RA mentor will be notified and a plan will be developed between the Co-Directors, student, and RA mentor to address the issue. RA mentors are expected to cooperate with the plan that is put in place.

5.3 Performance evaluations. There must be an ongoing communication between the RA and the RA mentor with feedback on a regular basis about the RA's performance. Any concerns related to the RA performance must be discussed with the RA as soon as possible, and the mentor should report those concerns to the Co-Directors. Additionally, every spring the department will send out a RA evaluation form for both the mentor and RA, allowing each to provide feedback on their experience.

## **6. Duration of Research Assistantship**

Assistantships 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).

If a student receives another source of funding, such as an external fellowship or appointment to the training grant, then the student must work with the Program co-directors and their RA mentor to ensure a smooth transition from the RA.

## **7. RA Reappointment**

To be eligible for reappointment as a Doctoral Research Assistant, the student must have a full-time status (register for a minimum of 12 credit hours of coursework during regular semesters or work full-time on dissertation); maintain satisfactory academic progress (see below); and maintain satisfactory RA. 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.

7.1 Satisfactory academic progress: The GRS and departmental 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.

## **8. RA Stipend Amount and Payment Information**

GRS provides information [here](#) about stipend amounts, payment dates, taxes, mandatory fees, and mandatory health for doctoral Research Assistants.

## **9. Tuition and Registration Policies for RAs.**

Review GRS registration information and documents [here](#).

**9.1 Students in Coursework Phase.** The scholarship includes up to full tuition coverage for all courses required for the degree during any semester in which a full stipend is paid. Courses that are not required for the degree program will not be covered by the RA tuition scholarship unless they have been pre-approved by the department program co-directors and GRS. A student on RA tuition scholarship must register for between 8 and 18 credits each fall and spring semester to maintain good academic standing. Typically RAs take between 8 and 12 credits per semester. Less than 8 credit hours in fall or spring 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.

**9.1.1 During the summer,** doctoral students in coursework phase who are funded by Research Assistantships will continue their RA work and may register for up to 8 credits, but summer course registration is not required. Students not taking courses over the summer should register for certified full-time status instead. Summer registration forms and information can be found [here](#).

**9.2 Continuing Students (dissertation phase).** PhD candidates who have completed all departmental course requirements must register each subsequent fall and spring 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.

**9.2.1 During the summer,** doctoral students in dissertation phase will continue their RA work and funding. Students not taking courses over the summer should submit the PhD Summer Registration Form. Summer registration forms and information can be found [here](#). A student must submit the Summer Registration Form even if he or she plans to complete all degree requirements during the summer and will not be registering for the following fall.

## **10. Other useful academic information**

Please refer to the following links to find GRS policies on [course withdrawals](#), [minimum grade requirements](#), and [leaves of absence](#) from the university.

## **11. Troubleshooting**

**11.1 Change in Mentor.** There are several reasons why a change in Doctoral Research Assistant mentor may occur, including loss of funding by the original RA mentor, the student or mentor seeking a better “fit”, or the mentor being dissatisfied with the work of the RA and already having gone through the resolution of dissatisfaction process described below. If either the mentor or the RA would like to request a change in mentor, that request should be made first to the Biostatistics Program Co-Directors.

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

1. If a sponsor/mentor is dissatisfied with the work being done by a RA student, the mentor should inform the student *in writing* and meet with the student to try and resolve the issue
2. If the issue is not resolved, then the mentor should contact Laura White (lfwhite@bu.edu) to discuss the specific areas of concern.
3. The Biostatistics Program Co-Directors (Drs. White and Lunetta) will meet with the student and then with the student and the mentor 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 mentor, and Co-Directors.
4. The mentor and the student will meet with the Co-Directors on a regular basis (weekly or biweekly depending on the length of the suggested timeline) to discuss whether the remediation plan is progressing satisfactorily.
5. 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.
6. 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.

## **12. Termination of RAship**

Termination of RAship may result in the student losing the Doctoral Research Assistant scholarship. The program Co-Directors, in consultation with the program committee, will determine whether there is reason to begin a case for dismissal of the student.



## **Contacts**

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