

ICAR Procedures and Policy for Providing Support to Graduate Students

Each year in March, the ICAR Student Aid Committee invites applications for graduate research assistant (GRA) positions for the upcoming academic year. ICAR's criteria for GRA decisions is based on considerations of merit and need. A policy of fairness, equity and diversity is employed in all decisions.

Application Process

The application consists of the student submitting a one page letter to the current Chair of the Student Aid Committee. The letter should include the following information.

- Research area or areas of most interest to you. If previous research has been done in this area, or relevant courses taken, or any other experience obtained in this area, please explain. (Previous experience is not a requirement, but it may assist in determining appointments.)
- Indicate any funding sources received for the current year. These can include government fellowships, private organizations, NGOs, international organizations, or other institutions. In addition, please indicate if other funding sources are being sought, apart from your GRA application.
- Doctoral students should include the date they plan to sit for the comprehensive exam. Masters students should include the date they anticipate graduating.

GRA Compensation

ICAR GRA compensation consists of a stipend for the academic year, paid over nine months, in addition to a tuition waiver. Both the compensation and tuition amounts vary from year to year, based on available funds.

Restrictions on Appointments

- Funding priority is given to Doctoral students, however, Masters students are eligible for GRA positions.
- ICAR's policy, approved by the faculty board, institutes a two year limit on GRA appointments. In the event a faculty wishes to maintain a GRA beyond a two year period, the faculty member is encouraged to seek grant funding to support the position.
- The number of GRA positions to be filled each academic year varies, based on available funding.

Funding Alternatives

ICAR does not have funding to meet the needs of all who apply. Students are encouraged to contact faculty members with similar research interests to develop grant proposals that would include a graduate research position.

International Students

The Office of International Programs and Services provides the following information for international students:

1. F-1 and J-1 students are required by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take a full course load each fall and spring semester (excluding summer term). A full course load for graduate students is 9 credit hours per semester; **however, DMS has declared that students who are assigned teaching or research responsibilities pursuant to the terms of a scholarship, fellowship, or assistantship may carry a reduced course load.**
 - For international students with teaching or research assistantships of 20 hours per week, full time is defined as a minimum of 6 credit hours per semester. See the Graduate Assistant Full-Time Status Form, posted at <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/provost/geninfo.htm>.
 - Part-time assistantships requiring only 10 hours of work per week do not allow a student to reduce his or her course load.
 - Students who require fewer than 9 credits to complete their course requirements may take only the required credits in their final semester, but still need to have OIPS approve the reduced course load.
2. F-1 and J-1 students who are maintaining their status are limited to **20 hours** of work per week during semesters, and may work full time during breaks.
3. F-1 and J-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for "duration of status," that is, to complete an educational program. If a student must remain in an educational program beyond the date originally estimated for completion of the program (as stated on Form I-20 or Form DS-2019), the student must comply with DHS or Department of State (DOS) procedures for a program extension. Delay caused by academic probation or suspension is not an acceptable reason for a program extension. The Office of International Programs and Services projects that the normal period of time required to complete a master's degree is 2 1/2 years; the normal period required to complete a Ph.D. degree is five years.
4. Students may use stipends as proof of financial support for issuance of their I-20/DS-2019. A copy of GRA/GTA offer letters **must** be sent to OIPS indicating **stipend amount and specific tuition benefit**. If the student's financial support is based on a GRA or GT A, it is assumed that the same level of financial support will be renewed in subsequent years. U.S. law requires the Designated School Official to verify source of financial support for all years of study prior to issuing an I-20 or DS-2019. In some cases, the stipend will not cover all of the student's educational and living expenses and may need to be supplemented with personal or family funds or sponsorship by an outside organization. Immigration forms will not be issued until all financial support documents have been submitted and have met estimated expense requirements: tuition (variable), plus living expenses for a calendar year (\$12,600), plus the mandatory health insurance fee (approximately \$1,095).
5. I-9 forms for all employees in nonimmigrant status must be completed at the **Office of International Programs and Services by the employee. In addition, all employees in nonimmigrant status must complete a Foreign National Information Form and federal and state withholding forms and review them in an interview with the OIPS International Tax Coordinator at the time they are first hired. The Foreign National**

Information Form needs to be updated when any information thereon changes. These forms can be obtained from OIPS. F-1 and J-1 students must bring proof of identity and evidence of their eligibility to work at George Mason University for purposes of completing Form 1-9. In addition, J-1 students require written permission from OIPS for all employment.

6. International students on nonimmigrant visas are required to provide hiring departments with verified copies of the 1-9 for the original appointment and all reappointments before they are entered into the Banner HR system.
7. International students who have completed their program of study are no longer eligible for student-based employment. They may be eligible to work based on Optional Practical Training or Academic Training, but this eligibility should be confirmed with OIPS before a job offer is extended.

NOTE: OIPS must verify, in person, the immigration documents of any GRA/GTA who has a temporary, nonimmigrant visa. OIPS must receive copies of the offer letter and signed acceptance form. OIPS will work with the student to complete the 1-9 and necessary tax forms.