

2.AA-2023: Research Assistant Policy

1. PURPOSE

Undergraduate students, graduate students, alumni, and students from partner institutions may be employed as Research Assistants (RAs) to perform research activities. St. Mary's University (University) is committed to providing meaningful opportunities for research-related employment on campus and adhering to Alberta Employment Standards.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to any University Principal Investigator (PI) who hires a RA as a part of their funded research program.

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 Director of Research (DoR):** Manager of research-related activities and initiatives at the University. Reports to the Vice President Academic.
- 3.2 External Academic Research Funding:** funding obtained via application to Sponsor that is destined to support research or scholarly purposes.
- 3.3 Principal Investigator (PI):** the researcher taking overall responsibility for the research project/grant and the main point of contact.
- 3.4 Research:** an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation.
- 3.5 Research Assistant (RA):** hired by a member of faculty to work casually on specific research project who typically is a student hired (enrolled in at least 1 credit course at a University), but may not be a non-student who meets the minimum education requirements.

Approval Authority	Responsible Office	Effective Date	Date Last Revisited	Review Frequency
Academic Council	Academic	September 25, 2023		Every 5 years

3.6 Student: any individual currently enrolled in an accredited university degree program. If a Student has recently graduated this definition applies up until the end of the academic year for which they have paid student fees. For University students this is August 31.

3.7 Supervisor: a University faculty member who supervises the research activities of an RA.

4. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Research Assistants (RAs) will:

4.1 Observe and abide by all University research-related policies, including the *Integrity in Research and Scholarship policy (2020)* and the *Research Ethics Board policy (2021)*.

4.2 Respond to their Supervisor in a prompt and professional manner.

4.3 Work under the direction of their Supervisor. Hours of work per week will be agreed upon prior to the onset of the position and will be defined in the employment contract. Aligned with the current Collective Agreement, working hours will typically be considered 08:30 to 17:30, Monday through Friday, unless otherwise agreed.

4.4 If a full-time student, will not work more than 20 hours per week during either the Fall or Winter academic terms.

4.5 Upon agreement with their Supervisor prior to the onset of the position, work in one or more locations which will be defined by the needs of the research project.

4.6 Not hold more than two RA positions at any one time.

4.7 Declare, in writing, any conflict of interest, before the initiation of their employment contract. This must be communicated to the Supervisor. If the Supervisor is not the PI then the conflict must be reported to the PI, otherwise to the appropriate Dean.

4.8 Immediately report to the Dean of the faculty in which they are appointed, in writing with evidence, any Supervisor or PI behavior that is unethical or inappropriate.

4.9 Immediately report to the Supervisor and/or PI, in writing with evidence, of any RA behavior that is unethical or inappropriate.

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- 4.10 Maintain the highest levels of privacy and confidentiality with respect to the data entrusted to them and the knowledge generated during the course of their duties, understanding that all data are the property of the PI unless otherwise indicated.
- 4.11 Attend all relevant workplace safety and research training, as directed by their Supervisor, at no cost to themselves.

Supervisors will:

- 4.12 Normally be full-time tenured/tenure track faculty. Adjunct faculty may supervise RA's provided they have been granted authorization from the DoR.
- 4.13 Observe and abide by all research-related University policies, including the *Integrity in Research and Scholarship Policy (2020)* and the *Research Ethics Board Policy (2021)*, or risk facing disciplinary action.
- 4.14 Provide clear guidance and regular communication to the RA to assess progress and provide direction about their assigned duties in relation to the research project.
- 4.15 Behave in a professional and respectful manner to the RA at all times.
- 4.16 Write to the Director of Research requesting termination of an RA's contract should there be evidence of one or more of the following:
 - 4.16.1 violations of any University policy
 - 4.16.2 a reasonable pattern of unjustified absences that place the research at risk
 - 4.16.3 a reasonable pattern of failure to follow the Supervisor's directions
 - 4.16.4 unwillingness to engage in, complete or comply with workplace safety and research training
 - 4.16.5 abusive behavior.

5. COMPENSATION

- 5.1 PIs hire RAs based on specific qualifications or expertise and/or for their suitability to a specific research project. Given the unique nature of RA work, the PI will use their discretion to ensure a competitive hourly wage for an RA. This hourly wage must be no lower than those published in the *Student Wage Policy (2019)*. In addition to wages, RAs will also receive vacation pay (4%) and other mandatory benefits as required by statute. These must be accounted for

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- by the PI in any costing models related to External Academic Research Funding (e.g., grant applications).
- 5.2 The hourly rate set by a PI for an RA position must not exceed the amount stipulated in the grant application.
- 5.3 RAs will be compensated for any hours worked over 8 hours in one day or 40 hours in one week at a rate of 1.5 times their regular hourly rate.
- 5.4 As employees, RAs will be provided with access to a personalized and confidential profile within the University's electronic employee self-serve payroll system. RAs will be required to enter their time on a daily basis for their supervisors approval. Compensation for hours of work will be directed to the RA's bank account on regularly scheduled payroll dates on the 15th and final day of the month. Electronic paystubs and T4 Statement of Earnings, are available within the University's electronic payroll system.

6. AUTHORITIES AND OFFICERS

Approving Authority: Academic Council

Designated Executive Authorities: Vice-President Academic, Director of Research

Procedural Authority: Director of Research

7. RELATED POLICIES AND DOCUMENTS

Integrity in Research and Scholarship policy (2020)

Responsible Use of Research Funds policy (2023)

St. Mary's University Expense Reimbursement Handbook (n.d.)

Student Wage policy (2019)