Duke Graduate School Student Time-Off Policy

Revision Date: February 9, 2022
Effective Date: Summer Term, 2022

Purpose and Background

- Being able to take time off is an important aspect of ensuring the wellbeing and success of graduate students. To that end, this policy aims to establish clear, consistent expectations for all Ph.D. and master’s students in The Graduate School regarding time off from their responsibilities as research, teaching, or graduate assistants (RAs, TAs, or GAs).

- **The amount of time off listed in this policy is the minimum for eligible students, and supervisors have the discretion to allow longer periods.** Students who need or wish to take more time off than the minimum listed here should discuss those arrangements with their RA, TA, or GA supervisor. The Graduate School strongly encourages departments and faculty to be flexible to students’ needs in accommodating reasonable time-off requests, such as taking some additional time off during summer or winter breaks to visit families.

- This policy applies to all Ph.D. and master’s students in The Graduate School regardless of funding source. It builds on and replaces the previous Ph.D. Research Assistant Vacation Policy.

- If a student is supported via funding from an agency that has different time-off policies for assistantships, follow the policy that offers more time off.

Policy

1. **At minimum**, Ph.D. and master’s students holding appointments as RAs, TAs, or GAs can take the following amount of time off (with stipend) from their assistantship responsibilities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Appointment</th>
<th>Time Off</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full year (12 months, August–July)</td>
<td>12 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall semester (September–December)</td>
<td>4 days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spring semester (January–May)</td>
<td>5 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer (June–August)</td>
<td>3 days</td>
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</table>

The allotted time off must be used before the end of the term of the appointment. Unused days do not carry over to the next term, and no extra stipend would be given for unused days.
2. Students are expected to coordinate with their RA, TA, or GA supervisor about their requested time off as far in advance as possible.

3. Students’ time off should not interfere with their TA/RA/GA responsibilities. If necessary, the student must make sure those responsibilities are covered during their time off (departments and faculty should assist students with this). For example, if TAs are expected to be present on days when their class meets and they need to take one of those days off, they must ensure someone is covering the class.

4. Students wishing to take more time off than what is listed in Table 1—with or without stipend—must receive prior approval from their adviser. If stipend changes are necessary, the adviser will notify the department or program business office before the deadline for the affected period of any such arrangements. Approval for additional periods of time away with stipend support may be subject to funding-agency restrictions.

5. The following do not count against the allotted time off listed in Table 1: university-observed holidays (see next section), religious holidays, sick days, the accommodation period for the birth or adoption of a new child, and time away for professional activities (e.g., conferences, workshops, interviews). This is not an all-inclusive list. If there are questions about whether a situation counts as part of the allotted time off described in this policy, please contact gradacademics@duke.edu.

University Holidays

All Graduate School Ph.D. and master’s students serving as RAs, TAs, or GAs should be off from their assistantship duties on the days listed in the Holiday Schedule for University Staff, which include:

- New Year's Holiday
- Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday
- Memorial Day
- Juneteenth
- Independence Day
- Labor Day
- Thanksgiving Day
- Friday After Thanksgiving
- Christmas Eve
- Christmas Day
- New Year's Eve

- There may be certain situations where some graduate students have to perform assistantship duties on a university holiday, such as TA-ing classes or performing time-sensitive experiments that cannot be delayed. In those situations, those graduate students are entitled to take another day off in place of that holiday, and they should coordinate with their TA, RA, or GA supervisor on the timing.

- University holidays do not count against the allotted time off listed in Table 1.

- Fall break and spring break are not university holidays. They reflect time off from classes, but not from assistantship duties. Graduate students who wish to be away from their assistantship duties during those breaks should request time off, which would count against the allotted time listed in Table 1.
Religious Holidays

Graduate student TAs, RAs, and GAs can take time off from assistantship duties to observe religious holidays. They must inform their adviser in advance and plan to make up any missed assignments or training. Religious holidays do not count against the allotted time off listed in Table 1.

As an aid for planning, see this partial list of common religious holidays. NOTE: This list is neither all-inclusive nor a formal designation of religious holidays recognized by the university.

Coursework Responsibilities

Students’ time away from their TA/RA/GA responsibilities should not interfere with their coursework. Class schedules follow Duke’s academic calendar. Students must check with their course instructors on how absence from class might affect their academic progress and status.

Addressing Concerns about Taking Time Off

The Graduate School strongly supports graduate students using their allotted time off. Students who have concerns about their adviser, PI, or assistantship supervisor not being supportive in this matter should address the issue in the following sequence:

1. First raise it with their program’s director of graduate studies (DGS).
2. Escalate to the department chair if the DGS cannot address the issue satisfactorily.
3. If the concern still remains after intervention by the department chair, discuss it with the person overseeing graduate education in the school in which the program is based, if there is such a position (e.g., the Graduate Dean for Trinity College of Arts and Sciences, the associate deans who oversee Ph.D. and master’s education in the Pratt School of Engineering, etc.).
4. If the steps above do not resolve the issue, contact The Graduate School’s senior associate dean for academic affairs and senior associate dean for finance and administration (see TGS’s staff directory).

This process mirrors The Graduate School’s general student grievance procedure.