

Faculty of Education Handbook for Research Assistants and Supervisors

Updated January 2024



Faculty of Education
Brock University
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1

Brock
University

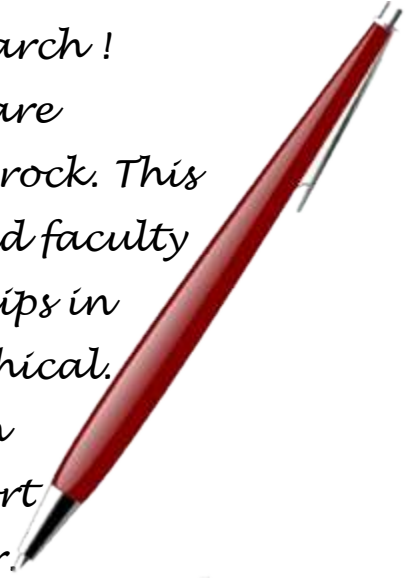


Brock University's motto since its inception in 1964 has been surgite. The English translation of this Latin verb is "push on."

This document remains true to this message by promoting advances in research and continued development as researchers, with a clear commitment to establishing and maintaining ethical practices and respectful partnerships. In particular, this handbook is intended to honour the voices of students and faculty members who engage in research assistantships within the Faculty of Education. Consistent with Brock's motto, these individuals demonstrate that the philosophy of perseverance and moving forward is evident in the Spirit of Brock University researchers today . . .

WELCOME TO BROCK UNIVERSITY

*Welcome to the midst of educational research !
Research assistantships and relationships are
important to the Faculty of Education at Brock. This
handbook is designed to assist students and faculty
members to engage in research assistantships in
ways that are equitable, educative, and ethical.
The Faculty of Education Office of Research
looks forward to working with you to support
your research and your life as a researcher.*



If you have any questions please contact:

Claire Matthews

Research Project Facilitator, Faculty of Education
WH 107

T 905 688 5550 x4793

E cmatthews2@brocku.ca

W <https://brocku.ca/education/faculty-and-research/office-of-research/>



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Research Assistantships



In order to keep pursuing unanswered questions and generating new knowledge, researchers must continue to “push on.” Through the collective eyes of a university, such as Brock, the goal is to attract, educate, and motivate current and future researchers.

Therefore, universities must not only welcome all potential researchers to their research community, but also provide the necessary tools to guide, prepare, and inspire groundbreaking research and the next generation of world-leading inquirers who will shape the future.

“Involving graduate students in meaningful research practices can translate into productive research training for potential researchers and future colleagues.”

(Research Supervisor)



Many positive outcomes can arise when students and faculty members work together on research activities or projects that are led by the faculty partner, but the full potential of these relationships is not always realized. This handbook evolved from the Faculty of Education’s commitment to research and researchers. Our handbook development team sought to define the roles and responsibilities of research assistants and research supervisors, as well as understand the roles and responsibilities of universities and research funding agencies. We also looked for evidence regarding initiatives and strategies to achieve enhanced potential within

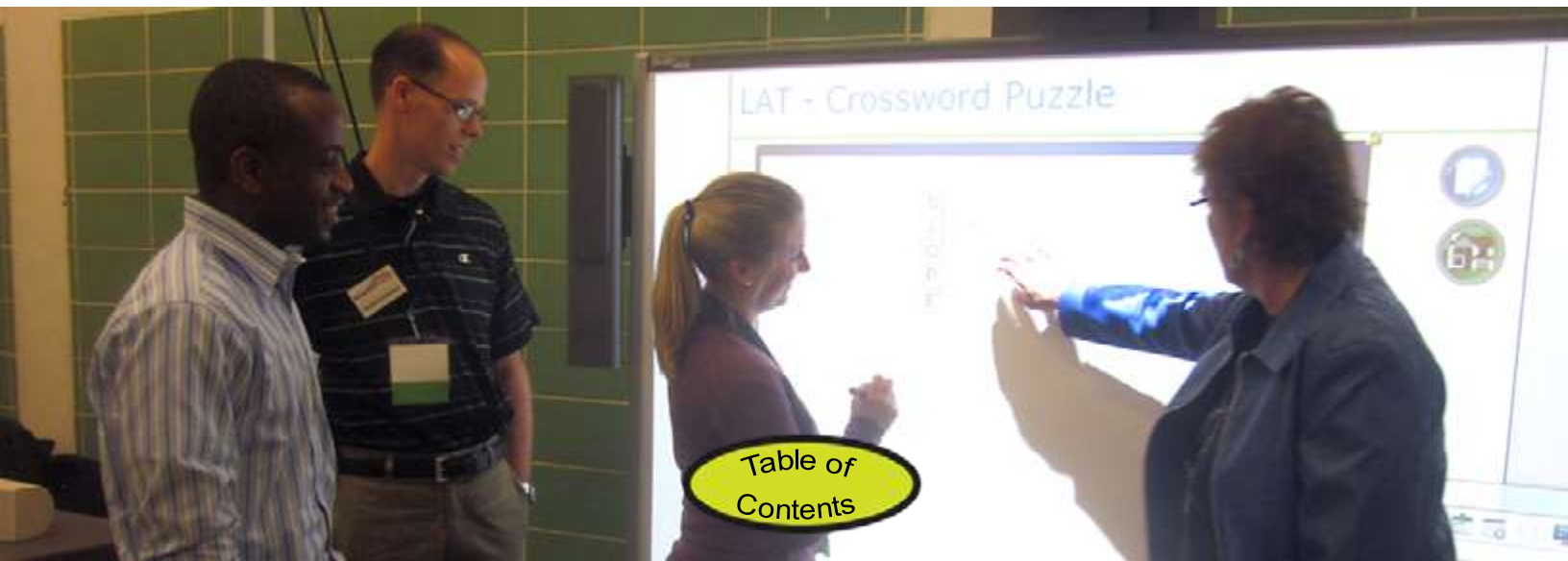
research assistantships. We traversed the Ontario university landscape seeking guidance but this trek revealed sparse development in this area. This handbook is intended as a resource to support research assistants and research supervisors to work together in ways that are equitable, educative, and ethical. This document is derived from (a) a web search of Ontario universities, (b) a literature review of major educational databases and higher education journals to identify published studies about research assistantships, and (c) our personal experiences related to research assistantships.

The foci of research assistantships are mainly to conduct sound research and, at the same time, provide professional development opportunities for students and faculty members. Students pursue research assistantships to alleviate financial stresses, create networking opportunities, and gain experience and academic currency (e.g., conference presentations and publications) in the areas of chosen study. Faculty members, on the other hand, engage in research assistantships to develop or enhance a program of research, fulfill their responsibilities for supervising students, meet their university's promotion and tenure requirements, and build a strong scholarly presence in their fields. However, research assistantships should not be considered as vehicles merely for obtaining monetary support or building strong curricula vitae (CVs) but also for attaining personal and professional growth.

"I experienced how much effort and devotion professors contribute to their research. I really appreciate that, and admire them and learn from them of their professional spirit. I truly know more about my professor's job and I know that if the professor wants to do research the school will support that."

(RA)

Universities should nurture a culture that embraces research assistantships as spaces of teaching, learning, and transforming. Research assistantships have the potential to transform not only the field but also learners and educators. Research supervisors or mentors must be recognized for their profound influence on research assistants' professional and personal growth and for their roles in advancing relevant policies and practices in higher education. The presence and role of research assistants must be acknowledged and supported in a respectful, systematic, and policy-regulated manner.



Building a research community involves a reciprocal relationship between research supervisors and research assistants. In this regard, universities need to provide settings that will sustain ongoing research initiatives while preparing novice researchers to play larger roles within and beyond academia. Research assistantships are intended to allow students opportunities to hone skills that will assist them not only in areas of academic study but also in their future careers. Nurturing a supportive research assistantship culture at the institutional level benefits all participants.

Research is ultimately centred on seeking answers to questions that will advance all our communities—local to global. Working together in ways that are equitable, educative, and ethical provides the foundation for a collaborative and communicative culture and contributes to ever-expanding research circles—thereby encouraging research and the researchers of tomorrow . . .



Roles, Responsibilities, and Relationships

Research Assistants (RAs) perform supportive functions to assist in the implementation of research projects conducted by experienced researchers. This handbook focuses specifically upon individuals who are engaged as RAs on a part-time, temporary basis while completing undergraduate or graduate degree requirements. These individuals develop their identities as researchers through active engagement in research assistantships as they pursue their academic studies. Involvement in hands-on activities and tasks contributes to theoretical research knowledge acquired in research methods, courses, and enhances RAs' preparation for conducting independent research (e.g., a thesis, major research paper, or dissertation). RAs carry out duties and tasks associated with a research project under the guidance of faculty members or the principal investigators of the research projects.

Students who become RAs are students first. RAships are additional learning opportunities, but they must not take priority over students' successful completion of their degree programs.

A large, light green speech bubble with a darker green outline. Inside the bubble, there is a quote in bold, italicized black text. Below the quote, the speaker is identified as '(Research Supervisor)' in a regular black font. The speech bubble has a tail pointing towards the bottom right corner of the slide.

“When I describe my annual report and the various other places where I need to document the things that I do, I list all the students for whom I am the advisor . . . as research assistants. . . . I take that seriously. That’s a commitment that [an RA is] not just here to help me get the research done.”

(Research Supervisor)

(Research Supervisor)

Faculty of Education RAs are full-time and part-time graduate and undergraduate students. RAs might also be individuals who are not Brock students, but rather students from other universities or professionals engaged in research, education, or publishing (e.g., professional transcribers, editors, or statisticians). Student RAs are domestic and international, research-based and course-based, on-campus and off-campus learners. Some of them are newcomers to Canada and others are indigenous to this land. Many Faculty of Education RAs are K–12 teachers or school administrators, and some are aspiring academics. They all come to this research community with different backgrounds, skill sets, and

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educational needs (e.g., different learning and physical abilities). It is vital, from the very beginning, to assess RAs' knowledge, skills, and expectations to provide them with the support they need to contribute to research and grow as researchers, and never to unfairly deny such opportunities. This is essential to our goal of ensuring all RAs in the Faculty of Education are equitable, educative, and ethical.

Research Supervisors are researchers who appoint RAs to support their research agendas. They may be professors of various ranks—lecturers, assistant professors, associate professors, and (full) professors—or others within or beyond the university. Research supervisors oversee the work of RAs to ensure scholarly quality and integrity. Through their interactions with RAs, they extend knowledge to the next generation of researchers, by training, guiding, and educating those who may follow in their footsteps. Research supervisors can become mentors who offer leadership and nurture RAs within and beyond their research project.

Research Assistantships

RAships

Relationships

Research Assistantships (RAships) involve relationships between RAs and research supervisors as they undertake research together. The activities associated with an RAship depend upon the contract or agreement, the project, the RA, and the research supervisor. The work may involve an individual task, such as transcribing, or a range of diverse tasks across any phase of research. It may involve an individual RA working with an individual research supervisor, or it may involve a larger team at Brock or beyond. The Faculty of Education is committed to RAships based upon equitable, educative, and ethical relationships. RAships are intended to be educational spaces that provide research opportunities and foster the continual growth of confident and competent researchers attuned to the dynamic research environment and the needs of society. Ideally, RAs and research supervisors work together in a reciprocal fashion to ensure their interactions are mutually beneficial, such that all partners learn and grow as research tasks are accomplished in collaboration. RAships may spark

mentoring relationships that are essential in graduate education. The research supervisor may become a dedicated mentor willing to invest in the RA's professional development, share resources and knowledge about life in academia, and provide valuable reference letters. Meaningful conversations with a mentor about research and other topics can maximize the RA's understandings not only about research but also about graduate work and academic life.

"[My research supervisor] really believes that an RA opportunity should be a learning opportunity and [engages in] mentoring. . . . We have a lot of conversations about how she does research and why she does it in a certain way. . . . And then we always stray off and talk about how my master's is going . . . whether I will do a PhD."

(RA)

Making It Work

- Concentrate on developing a good relationship
- Be honest and transparent
- Commit to everything you have undertaken and follow through with each task
- Track all hours and progress on tasks
- Seek assistance and guidance as needed
- Recognize that RAs who ask questions are demonstrating strength of character not limitations in their skills
- Offer assistance and guidance when appropriate
- Check in regularly to ensure everything is on track
- Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

Department members who employ and/or are appointed research assistants are expected to create scholarly environments that enhance these individuals' educational experiences and learning opportunities. (Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education, Normal Department Workload Standard 3.b.v)

Reasons to Engage in Research Assistantships



RAships are educational venues where students can apply theoretical knowledge to practice and get excited about research, and faculty researchers can further their research agendas and supervisory commitments. RAships offer a unique space that has the potential to surpass other research learning venues because of the practical component that allows for hands-on experience under the guidance of an experienced researcher. Research such as the work listed in the enclosed bibliography provides evidence that students learn best in practical environments where they can build skills by engaging in authentic tasks. We advise students to take advantage of these opportunities and invest time in becoming competent and confident research collaborators. We encourage

faculty members to appoint RAs and take pride in shaping future generations of researchers.

"I decided to engage in research assistantships because of the excellent experience, opportunities, . . . the exposure to the research going on within the department, and to become more familiar with the different faculty members and their work."

(RA)



Research and innovation are critical to the economic and social development of all countries. The research conducted at Canada's universities provides a prime source of knowledge and innovation throughout the economy. University research contributes significantly to the creation of new products and services that increase prosperity and improve the quality of life, and also plays a vital role in addressing social changes and challenges of today and tomorrow. The importance of university research to Canadian innovation is reflected in investments made by the provincial and federal governments and other external funding partners. Federal research granting agencies—the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)—provide the largest

share of external funding for university research. The three funding agencies not only support graduate students through scholarships but also allow faculty members to engage students in their research. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2012a), this funding introduces 14,000 undergraduates to hands-on research and enables 28,000 graduate students and 5,000 postdoctoral fellows to work on research projects each year.

"I learn best by doing. I knew that before I came to Brock, and I knew that I wanted to do an RAsip because I don't glean much information from my class discussions. In order to understand research, I knew I needed to start doing research activities, collaboratively in groups, and working one-on-one with people, and talking about it."

(RA)



Support for quality research, including training of the next generation of skilled researchers, helps nurture a strong research environment that allows students to acquire their skills from highly competent researchers. Confronting an increasingly globalized and digital world, federal agencies foster a new culture of innovation that calls for education enriched by research and multiple types of partnerships. A research-enriched learning environment, where students engage in and are informed by research, creates a culture of inquiry and expands students' critical and analytical skills, which are essential in a knowledge-based economy.

Reasons to *Become* a Research Assistant

- Be guided through a research project
- Learn and enhance research knowledge and skills
- Acquire transferable skills
- Familiarize yourself with the entire research process
- Create a mentoring relationship
- Participate in a research community
- Secure financial support
- Learn about a professor's research interests
- Discover and extend personal research interests to inform independent research
- Build self-confidence in conducting research
- Develop a researcher identity
- Create opportunities to display competence
- Build a research portfolio and CV
- Secure reference letters
- Learn about academic life



Reasons to *Appoint* a Research Assistant

- Share your research workload
- Balance work responsibilities by embedding supervision in a research project rather than maintaining it as a separate task
- Enhance students' skills so they are more successful in their degree programs
- Encourage and shape the future generation of researchers
- Create a mentoring relationship
- Create a legacy through trained RAs who will extend the work
- Build an evidence base to strengthen grant applications (e.g., training highly qualified personnel, mobilizing knowledge)
- Be inspired by working closely with a new generation and experiencing their excitement firsthand
- Introduce a student to research
- Provide financial and academic support to a student
- Complement your strengths by collaborating with someone with different skills



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Research Assistantships in the Faculty of Education

There are four different models for RAShips in the Faculty of Education:

1. Many RAShips involve a **contract of employment** for a specified hourly wage, number of hours, period of time, and set of tasks. This is appropriate when the relationship from RA to research supervisor is that of employee to employer, that is, the RA completes work under the specific direction of a research supervisor primarily for financial gain not to further his or her education. As per Canada Revenue Agency policy, payments to these RAs are regarded as taxable employment income. Contracts of employment are processed through the Office of People & Culture contract system either (a) as a fixed salary for the contract period or (b) by individual timesheets submitted as work is completed. Fixed salary contracts are most appropriate when work hours are similar each week whereas timesheets are most appropriate when work hours vary across weeks.

Allow time to process the paperwork for a contract of employment or a research fellowship.

2. Some RAShips are funded through a **research fellowship** from the research supervisor. This is appropriate when the relationship from RA to research supervisor is that of student to professor, which is the case when the student completes work not primarily for financial gain but because participation in it will assist the student in qualifying for a degree or other scholastic recognition in the field. The direction given by the research supervisor is usually of a general or consultative nature, and the RA will typically have more

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freedom in the project than an RA would under an employee–employer relationship. This is particularly appropriate when an RAship is in the direct area of the student’s own research focus and it may be difficult or even impossible to distinguish what work is for the RAship and what work is for the student’s thesis or similar project. In such situations, the student’s commitment to the work may exceed typical employment limits. As per Canada Revenue Agency policy, payments to these RAs are considered research training stipends or research grants not taxable employment income.

3. Some RAships may take the form of a **research internship** for course credit (e.g., Educ 5P96). Typically, such internships are arranged individually between a student and a faculty supervisor, and may involve an external internship supervisor. Research internships for course credit involve standard tuition payments as with all other courses. Assignments and grading expectations should be determined in advance.

“The money itself, okay it’s been helpful, it’s comes in handy, but the money’s not really the focus. The focus is first of all learning, and secondly getting involved in that academic side of it: the presenting at the conferences, the publication.”

(RA)

4. Some individuals choose to engage in RAships on a **volunteer** basis. This involves no financial compensation or course credit, but can still be a worthwhile educational opportunity. On occasion, available funding for a particular project may run out before a project is complete. In those instances, RAs and research supervisors may decide to extend their commitment to each other on a volunteer basis so the RA’s input is not lost in a final product from the project. This is particularly common in cases where an RA’s engagement in the project has been at a level that warrants sharing scholarly credit (e.g., co-authorship on a journal manuscript, which means the RA must agree to the final manuscript and therefore may choose to continue beyond the end of the contract).



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Funding Sources for Faculty

Faculty members may secure funds for **contracts of employment** or **research fellowships** from research grants or awards distributed by the Faculty of Education, Brock University, or an external agency. Internal Faculty of Education opportunities include the *Graduate Research Assistant Development (GRAD) Fund* and the *Research and Development (R & D) Fund*. The Office of Research Services at Brock University supports several grants and awards including *Match of Minds* and *Brock Explore Grants*. External research funds may be secured from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), the Ontario Ministry of Education, or any number of other external agencies. Professional Development funds may be used for research assistant contracts, but not research fellowships.

To find out more about these and other opportunities, contact the Faculty of Education Research Project Facilitator cmatthews2@brocku.ca

<https://brocku.ca/education/faculty-and-research/office-of-research/>

Assistant Rate Schedule

RAs are not unionized at Brock. RAs and their research supervisors are obligated to follow the Brock University Research Assistant Rate Schedule when creating **contracts of employment** using internal funding. Typically, these rates are also followed when research supervisors create **contracts of employment** using funding from an external source; however, in special circumstances the research supervisor may make an argument to The Office of People & Culture to secure permission to increase these rates depending upon the requirements of the external funding source. Tasks within RAships rely upon RAs' academic education and skills; hence RAs are paid at differential rates depending upon the highest level of education completed. The following rates were in effect as of November 2023.

First or Second Year Complete Rate	\$16.55/hour
Third Year Complete Rate	\$16.70/hour
Fourth Year Complete Rate	\$22.40/hour
Master's Complete Rate	\$27.50/hour
PhD Complete	\$31.00/hour

Note: 4% vacation pay and 10% benefits will be added to the above rates.

On occasion, students may be hired on a casual basis to perform a specific task that does not require their academic skills (e.g., basic labour, web development, simple transcription). The Office of People and Culture maintains a list of casual student pay rates. You can access a copy of the current Part-time and Student Employment Rate Schedule at the following link:

[Part-Time & Student Employment Rate Schedule](#)

Employment Limits for Full-Time Students

Full-time students are expected to devote their energies to their studies, therefore limits have been set on the number of hours they should devote to paid employment. The general regulation is that full-time funded students may work no more than 10 hr/week. Students who work as teaching assistants (TAs) may already be at this maximum. Students who wish to accept contracts for more than 120 hr/term of on-campus work must first seek and receive approval from their Supervisor (if applicable), their Graduate Program Director, and the Dean of Graduate Studies. Students who hold scholarships from one of the three federal funding agencies (Canadian Institutes Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada) must devote at least 75% of their time to their studies, and are not permitted to devote more than 25% of time to RA or TA work. Students are also requested to respect these limits whether they work on or off campus.

How to Find a Research Assistantship

- Contact the Faculty of Education Research Project Facilitator
- Attend information sessions for students (e.g., M.Ed. orientation, RA and TA introductory sessions)
- Prepare a cover letter and resume that highlight any research courses or experience, as well as your future academic or professional aspirations
- Fill out the Student RA Expression of Interest form here:
secure3.ed.brocku.ca/research/
- View postings from researchers looking for RAs on the FOE database:
secure3.ed.brocku.ca/research/
- Contact a faculty member whose website listing shows you share a research interest
- Tell your instructors, program consultant, or advisor that you want to be an RA
- Monitor your student email account for possible opportunities

How to Find a Research Assistant

- Contact the Faculty of Education Research Project Facilitator
- Attend information sessions for students (e.g., M.Ed. orientation, RA and TA introductory sessions)
- Check the FOE research database for interested students: secure3.ed.brocku.ca/research/
- Post your RA opportunity on the FOE research database: secure3.ed.brocku.ca/research/
- Apply to the GRAD fund
- Tell your colleagues you are looking for an RA

The Department of Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education encourages faculty members to give priority to full-time research-based students when appointing paid RAs, providing them with funds and education that will advance their graduate studies. The needs of the project, the availability of potential RAs, and the terms and expectations of any associated funding must also be considered. Hence, part-time and course-based graduate students, as well as undergraduate students, are strongly encouraged to apply for RA positions. Always highlight special skills, intended goals, and potential constraints to minimize disappointments.



Access the various forms at the Faculty of Education Research Office website
<http://www.brocku.ca/education/research/foeofficeofresearch/fundingavailable>

Potential Tasks and Activities



RAships offer opportunities for RAs to engage in a variety of research tasks and activities. Engaging in diverse research tasks under the supervision of the research supervisor (an experienced researcher) can allow RAs to gain an understanding of the entire research cycle and the ways each task and activity fits in the context of the research process. Becoming familiar with the research process in a practical way may enable RAs to perceive research as more accessible, especially for those who feel intimidated by the complexities of research. RAships offer a unique space to practice in a safe environment and gradually become a fuller participant in the research community. Through collaborative engagement in research, RAs can learn research skills, become a part of a research community, and begin the transformation toward becoming independent researchers.

Some RAships may involve completion of basic tasks, such as data entry, organizing files, and photocopying, which may provide research skill-building opportunities, especially for RAs with limited or no research experience. Other RAships may involve more complex tasks, such as conducting interviews, preparing and presenting research, or analyzing data. Although these various tasks and activities require different skill levels, it is important to note that each task is vital in conducting quality research.

Even the most mundane tasks, such as photocopying or preparing tables are indispensable since all research components are interconnected and influence successive research steps and therefore the overall success of the study. However, it is also important to recognize that mundane tasks have limited educational potential and should not be the full extent of RAships. Participation in more varied research tasks allows RAs the best opportunities to capitalize on the research learning experience and contribute to the project.

“Photocopying: Literally 78 hours of photocopying. Time-consuming, menial—redundant. . . . It’s not something that I’m learning—it’s boring—And something that I, certainly, don’t need to be doing. I am not really using my skills or my education. All I’m doing is pressing a button.”

(RA)



“Data entry is very boring . . . but I did learn a lot from it because it’s so important that you pay very close attention to the detail and that you are very meticulous entering it because if you enter one wrong number . . . I mean you can skew everything.”

(RA)

Some potential tasks and activities within RAships:

- Attending research meetings
- Taking minutes at research meetings
- Searching literature databases
- Preparing literature reviews or annotated bibliographies
- Designing a research study
- Writing grant proposals
- Applying for ethics clearance
- Designing interviews or questionnaires
- Creating research instruments or experimental stimuli
- Recruiting participants
- Organizing interviews and focus groups
- Conducting interviews
- Recording observations
- Transcribing data
- Entering data
- Coding data
- Conducting qualitative analyses
- Performing statistical analyses
- Organizing documents and references
- Photocopying
- Preparing tables and charts
- Searching for references
- Presenting at conferences
- Preparing poster presentations
- Writing reports or manuscripts
- Editing or formatting papers
- Researching publication outlets
- Creating research websites
- Organizing conferences or scholarly meetings

“During my research methods courses, I had difficulties trying to comprehend how narrative analysis was performed. When I worked as a research assistant, I learned how analyzing experiences through textual analysis and interpretations could be done. It was this hands-on learning that encouraged me to use narrative analysis in my thesis work.”

(RA)

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Professional and Personal Growth for Research Assistants and Supervisors



Conducting research can take you to exciting places as you develop and extend new knowledge in your field, while at the same time learning and expanding your own research knowledge and skills. RAships can provide reciprocal benefits and learning opportunities for students and researchers, especially when they evolve into mentoring relationships. Through RAships, students can enhance their research knowledge and skills, learn about the research interests of professors, discover their own research interests, find graduate supervisors, create mentoring relationships, secure a source of funding, and acquire a wide range of transferable skills. RAs are offered opportunities to gain valuable practical experience that expands their research knowledge and skills, which may be extremely helpful in terms of students' academic courses and completion of their research exit requirements. Thus RAships may advance students' successful and timely completion of their degrees. Research supervisors provide financial and academic support to RAs and, in exchange, gain the assistance of dedicated assistants who contribute to their research output and the development of their supervisory skills.

"Collaborating with others in research provides tremendous opportunities for learning. I have learned as much from RAs as from more senior colleagues. Everyone brings a new perspective to the table."

(Research Supervisor)

"I definitely learned more about myself. I gained confidence because the word 'manuscript' seems so scary but actually being a part of that and seeing what it's like, it's not really that difficult. I know I can do it so I feel more confident."

(RA)



Some RAships offer an exceptional opportunity where a student is matched with a professor who is conducting research in the student's area of research, thus supporting the student's graduate research. Research projects that are not closely connected to students' research interests can also provide enriching research experiences that allows them to extend the breadth of their knowledge beyond their own individual field. In either case, RAs may become inspired by the research project conducted and ask the research supervisor for permission to carve out a part of a project for a research thesis or major research paper.

It is important to note that RAships provide an excellent space to form a researcher identity and to think about oneself as a professional participating in research practice. Becoming an RA often leads to higher awareness of your gifts, talents, and potential and equips you

with skills that are likely to stretch beyond academic life. In accordance, your personal identity is a sense of belonging within research communities and the interactions associated therein. Through your own participatory involvement, you are privy not only to research practices and networking but also to firsthand accounts of the ways research is enacted.

To make the most of an RAship experience, it is essential to take the time to nurture your growth and be aware of the ways you are changing and evolving. This awareness will assist you in cultivating a mindset of self-reflection, which in turn will help foster your outlook on the research project you are undertaking. Being involved in thought-provoking work and research processes will make you more critical and analytical, which can be used in every dimension of your life. The special and humanistic action of personal growth starts within you and is a natural progression.

“In the past I felt like I don’t really matter because I’m just an undergrad. Now, I’m a master’s student and an RA, which is prestigious without sounding that I’m full of myself. It is definitely an accomplishment. So I act more mature, which is kind of funny . . . so that’s how the research assistantship helped me in my personal life.”

(RA)

Personal growth is a life-long process that affects every aspect of life. It encompasses changes of perception, extension of skills and thought processes, as well as recognition of where you have been, where you are, and where you want to be in the future. This speaks to how every new experience has an individual effect, yet essentially makes you whole.

It is essential to recognize that personal growth often draws from mistakes made, thereby leading to lessons learned. Encountering conflict or making an error does not necessarily equal a negative learning experience. Everything you encounter—successes, failures, understandings and misunderstandings, even miscommunication—are all just steps on the road travelled. It is how you deal with the events and carry on that matters. Often you learn best from acknowledging mishaps and finding that you can still move forward despite stumbles along the way.

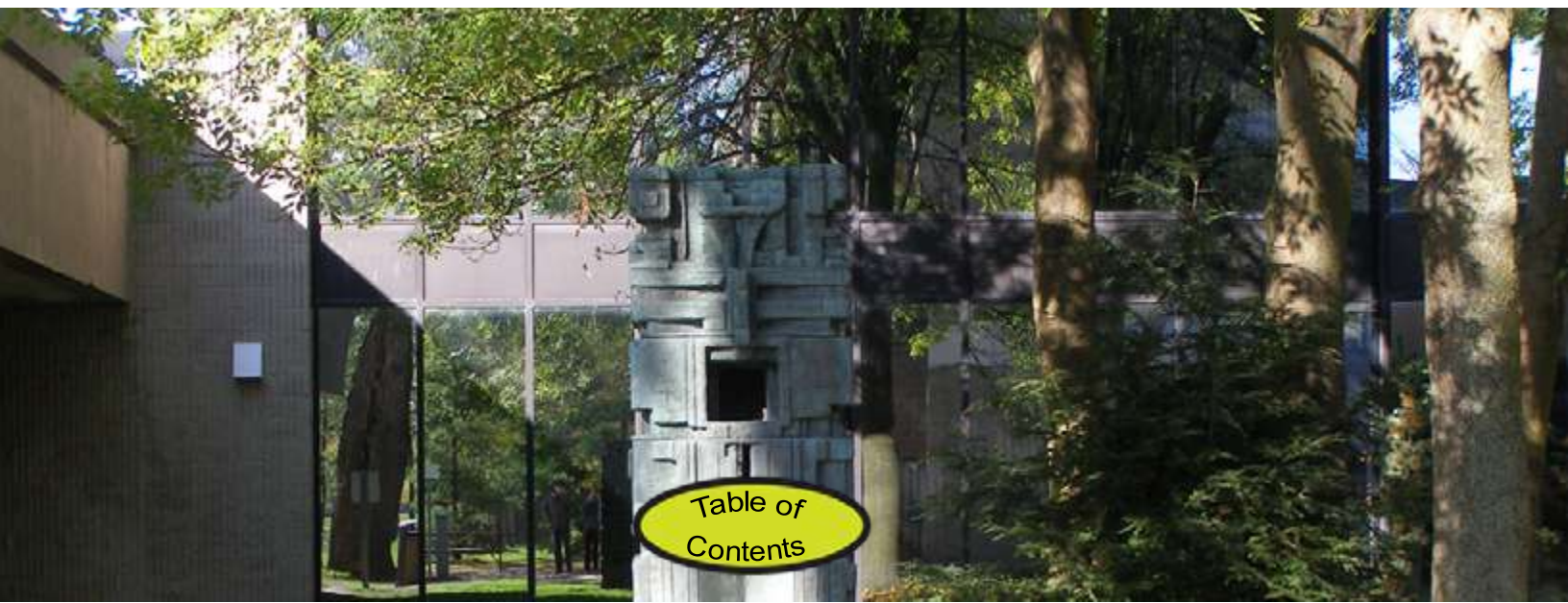


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Transferable Skills



RAships are recognized not only as powerful venues for researcher education but also as spaces where students may learn transferable skills such as how to interact with others, prioritize tasks, or negotiate conflicts. In addition, RAships provide space for building personal skills, including punctuality, independence, and attention to detail. All of these characteristics are essential in graduate programs as well as future careers.

Transferable skills are skills students acquire through diverse experiences that lead to expertise in terms of abilities and employment competencies suitable across different sectors.

While RAships are designed to do research, they also have an instrumental value in developing the kinds of transferable skills that are becoming increasingly essential to career success within and outside academia. Transferable skills developed through engagement in different tasks and activities maximize RAs' competencies and open doors to numerous career possibilities within or outside universities. Assisting professors with research projects allows for engagement in a multitude of authentic tasks. Whether it is locating and organizing information (e.g., literature reviews) or presenting research findings (e.g., conference presentations), skills acquired performing these tasks (e.g., information management, presentation, and interpersonal skills) will be vital in university and other workplace environments.

"It is essential to engage in open dialogue and establish a safe space [within RAships] to state divergent views and interact respectfully. This type of environment allows students to learn positive skills of communication and negotiation."

(RA)



Exploring skills acquired during RAships and translating their values to different contexts is a very important skill in itself. Reviewing skills developed through engagement in diverse tasks and activities has the potential to provide RAs with a deeper awareness of their capacities, increase their confidence levels, enhance their employability, and identify areas for further development. The ability to identify one's own skills and accomplishments and then highlight relevant ones on a resume or in

a job interview is essential but can be quite challenging. RAs and research supervisors can work together to enhance these skills and showcase strengths.

“[An RAship] is actually, in some ways, a training ground for, not for just doing a dissertation or a research thesis, but what you’ll eventually need to do. So, actually, they’re paying you to develop the skills that you’re going to need to have anyway. ”

(RA)

RAships may offer development of transferable skills such as:

- Communication
- Conflict negotiation
- Critical thinking
- Data management and analysis
- Event planning
- Initiative
- Leadership
- Organization
- Professionalism
- Project management
- Problem solving
- Supervision
- Team development
- Time management

Goals, Expectations, and Agreements



RAships involve collaboration between RAs and research supervisors. As with any collaboration, the individuals involved in RAships need to identify and work toward shared goals. The stated goals may be limited to the completion of some well-defined set of tasks, or they may be more wide ranging or open ended.

Ideally, the broader goals for RAships include educational goals. Student RAs are selected for their competence, yet their engagement in RAships is expected to be an educational opportunity where their research supervisors train and nurture their development as researchers. The outcomes from RAships may be research results as well as “researchers-in-the-making.”

“I had many of these moments . . . where I was unclear about the instruction but I didn’t feel comfortable going back to [my research supervisor]. And that was more because I didn’t want to look like an idiot. I wanted to look like I’m confident, I know what I am doing, and that I can handle anything. So I guess, a little bit more time was spent on figuring out what to do. I would have saved a lot of time if I would have just gone back to her and asked for clarifications or direction.”

(RA)

Given the considerable diversity in potential or desired outcomes for RAships and research supervisors, it is important for RAs and research supervisors to discuss their expectations and goals for an RAship. RAs and research supervisors should ask themselves:

- What are you expecting to do?
- What are you expecting from others in the RAship?
- What kind of commitments can you make?
- What are your aspirations for the relationship?



Working together to achieve clarity about goals and expectations increases the likelihood that partners will be satisfied with the RAship. Incompatible goals undermine the possibilities for satisfaction within RAships, which is detrimental to RAs, research supervisors, and their research projects.

RAships are not static relationships, so it is also important to remember that goals and expectations can evolve over the course of an RAship, so partners may want to revisit and reconsider their commitments at important junctures during their time together.

Beyond discussion, it is advantageous to prepare a written statement to document goals and expectations to ensure everyone is in agreement.



Some key topics to consider in your agreement include:

- Participants' roles
- Activities to be accomplished
- Confidentiality agreements
- Timelines for the work
- Decision-making approaches
- Dispute-resolution strategies
- Funding allocation and salaries
- Access to data
- Authorship credit and order
- Ownership of intellectual property
- Possibilities for academic credit
- Procedures for joining or leaving the team

"An important part was developing those principles together, because if you just impose it, here are the principles, sign here, then it's not a commitment to that nor an understanding behind each of those lines. We spent hours talking about what we believed in and how we wanted to work together and then crafted a document that did that."

(Research Supervisor)

Some sample agreements for consideration:

- Brock University Ownership of Student-Created Intellectual Property Policy
<https://brocku.ca/legal/copyright/student-work/>
- Brock University Faculty of Graduate Studies/Research Services Intellectual Property Checklist
<https://brocku.ca/graduate-studies/wp-content/uploads/sites/181/Intellectual-Property-Checklist-Updated-January-2023.pdf>



Recommendations for Action:

Communicate

Document

Revisit

Walking Together in Research



Pursuing an RAship is

a significant endeavour

within the university

culture as you carve

out new landscapes

for research and

education. RAships

lead to new

knowledge

and provide fertile

grounds to nurture

the next generation

of researchers and

academics. Walking

down this path together

is an important first step for

established academics as well as novice

researchers. The commencement of an RAship

is a particularly noteworthy move for students

who may choose to further their academic careers

in research, but is more widely valuable to all students. This initial

opportunity can open doors for these novice researchers to explore

where they want to go and how they want to further their studies,

networks, and whole selves as described throughout this handbook.

RAships also provide enriching spaces for research supervisors to

support the development of new researchers and to learn from their

experiences and contributions.

“I’m so glad [I am a research assistant]. I think being an RA really involves you in the university and the process of research. If I wasn’t an RA, I think I would feel very removed from the school because it gives you a real sense of connectedness or connection with the whole university environment.”

(RA)



RAships are exciting places for students and professors to

explore and plan future professional and personal endeavours.

Entering and negotiating research spheres greatly enhances

experiences and possibilities within a university. The next

generations of researchers and their mentors are pillars of the

university and are of the utmost importance in supporting the

mission of each university.

As a university, Brock is enthusiastic about your contributions to scholarly work. Please take the time to visit the Faculty of Education Office of Research website at

<http://www.brocku.ca/education/researchers>

for further resources, events, and workshops or just to drop a short note and connect with us.

“My Ph.D. supervisor invited me to submit a SSHRC application with her. She enhanced my professional and personal growth. As a faculty member, I want to encourage my graduate students to work with me as co-investigators on developing and submitting research grant applications.”

(Research Supervisor)

We welcome your ideas about this handbook and the ways it could be shaped and advanced to meet your needs and expectations.



Resources for Support

The Faculty of Education Office of Research is your best resource for support. See additional resources and forms on the website

<http://www.brocku.ca/education/researchers/foeofficeofresearch>

Addressing Conflicts or Challenges

Conflict is a normal part of teamwork and the creative process, so it is not surprising that conflicts sometimes arise during RAships. Establishing shared understandings about goals and expectations, and maintaining open lines of communication are your best strategies for circumventing or alleviating conflict. Work together as a team to resolve any conflicts or challenges. At times, it may also be useful to talk through an issue with someone outside your research setting. Consulting with someone who holds supervisory authority has the potential to escalate a situation, so it may be best to first consult a neutral third party, such as a colleague, another professor, or one of the resource personnel listed. Using discretion and respecting confidentiality while you are working through an issue reduces negative consequences.

Resource Personnel

Your main support people are your RAship partner(s), your colleagues, and your supervisor. A list of additional contacts are provided in the following pages.

Table of
Contents

Claire Matthews, Research Project Facilitator, Faculty of Education, facilitates the development of the research culture and capacity within the Faculty. Under the direction of the Associate Dean, Research and International Initiatives, she enhances the research of faculty members and graduate students by identifying funding opportunities, reviewing grant applications, pre-reviewing ethics applications for ethics review, broadening understandings about the administration of research at Brock, and organizing research skills workshops for faculty members and graduate students.
 WH 107
 T 905 688 5550 x 4793
 E cmatthews2@brocku.ca

Joyce Mgombelo, Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, works with the various departments and units in the Faculty, including the Office of Research, to offer faculty members and students supports to advance research, scholarship, and creative activity in Canada and abroad.
 WH
 T 905 688 5550 x
 E jmgombelo@brocku.ca

TBA, Administrative Assistant to the Associate Dean, Research and Graduate Studies, Faculty of Education, assists the Graduate and Undergraduate Studies in Education Department's faculty members in setting up RA contracts for external research awards, Brock internal research awards, and the R & D Fund.

T 905 688 5550 x
 E adfoe@brocku.ca

Zhanyldyk Dustanova, Financial Manager, Faculty of Education, assists faculty members in setting up RA contracts through the GRAD Fund.
 WH177
 T 905 688 5550 x 5547
 E jdustanova@brocku.ca

David Hutchison, Chair, Department Educational Studies, Faculty of Education, is available to meet with students to hear their comments about the program and to address their concerns.
 WH 275
 T 905 688 5550 x 3354
 E dhutchison@brocku.ca

Natalie Reynolds, Administrative Assistant, Graduate Programs, serves as the information resource contact for faculty, staff, and students.

WH 109

T 905 688 5550 x6276

E natalie.reynolds@brocku.ca

Wanda Burger, Graduate Coordinator, Faculty of Education, serves as the information resource contact for faculty, staff, and students.

WH 108

T 905 688 5550 x 5496

E wburger@brocku.ca

Lauryn Carrick, Associate Director, Graduate Education Engagement, Faculty of Graduate Studies, addresses inquiries regarding scholarships, fellowships, bursaries and professional development opportunities.

MCD 250

T 905 688 5550 x. 5197

E lcarrick@brocku.ca

Agata D’Innocenzo, Director, Office of Research Services, supports researchers at Brock. RAs can participate alongside faculty members in a comprehensive suite of information sessions, seminars, and workshops. The Office has specialists available to researchers in areas such as contract management, technology and knowledge transfer, ethics, animal care, hazardous materials, communications, and financial accountability.

MCD 267

T 905 688 5550 x 4291

E adinnocenzo@brocku.ca

Lori Walker, Manager, Research Ethics is responsible for the management of Brock University’s Research Ethics Office, staff, ethics review process, and research ethics boards; research ethics related policy development; and the development and implementation of educational strategies relating to research ethics for the university community.

MCD 350-I

T 905 688 5550x 4876

E lwalker@brocku.ca

Alison Rothwel, Accessibility and Inclusion Advisor, works with the Brock community to make the university more accessible and inclusive.

MCE 207

E arothwell@brocku.ca

Heather Bellisario, Student Ombuds, Office of the Student Ombuds, helps resolve concerns, complaints, or conflicts in an impartial, confidential, and informal way. The Student Ombuds can investigate problems, complaints, or concerns; mediate conflicts; facilitate discussions with other people or departments (only with the complainant's permission); make referrals to campus and community resources; and recommend changes in policies or procedures. The Student Ombuds does not impose solutions, but suggests options and strategies for resolution.

TH222D

E ombuds@brocku.ca

David Genkin, Manager, Computer Services, Faculty of Education, and his team provides user support for faculty members, staff, and students. This includes support for user accounts, computer labs, printing, and email, as well as faculty and staff equipment set up and software installations, and consultation advice for equipment purchases.

WH 73

T 905 688 5550 x 3015

E dgenkin@brocku.ca

Note: Office of Human Rights and Equity Services at Brock University promotes a respectful work and learning environment at Brock University that is inclusive, celebrates diversity, and provides all members of the Brock community with a work and study environment free of harassment, discrimination, and bullying. This is achieved by promoting equity and diversity and preventing harassment, discrimination, and bullying through awareness, education, and training; providing confidential one-on-one counselling and advice; reporting incidents of discrimination, harassment, and bullying, and assisting with conflict resolution.

<https://brocku.ca/human-rights/>

Professional Development Opportunities

Research Skills Workshops

Specific to the needs of researchers in Education and Social Sciences, these research skills workshops offer hands-on assistance in planning, conducting, analyzing, and presenting research. The workshops are run by the Faculty of Education Office of Research:

<https://brocku.ca/education/faculty-and-research/office-of-research/>

GRADvantage Program for Graduate Students

GRADvantage is a personal and professional development support framework that engages graduate students in all programs and streams to help create your path based on interests and goals. GRADvantage is designed to help you succeed throughout your graduate school experience and towards your future next steps. For more information about GRADvantage please visit:

<https://brocku.ca/graduate-studies/student-development/gradvantage/>



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Handbook Development Team

The initial development of this handbook brought together a team with long-term commitments to supporting and enhancing RAships. Team members variously worked as RAs, supervised RAs, taught research courses, facilitated workshops addressing research skills and effective RAships, and conducted a range of research projects focused upon RAship experiences. Our personal and professional experiences, coupled with the research evidence we have built over several years, demonstrate RAships are important venues for research and research learning, but the full educational potential of these spaces is not always realized.

In an effort to develop theoretically and empirically sound principles for RAships, this team drew from three main sources: (a) web searches of all 22 public universities in Ontario to locate existing policies, procedures, and resources pertaining to RAships; (b) an extensive literature review of major educational databases and higher education journals to identify published studies about RAships; and (c) our personal narratives of RAships. We discovered a robust body of research about research learning and researcher development, including a small number of publications specific to RAships. RAships are common occurrences, yet seldom studied. Our personal experiences mirror the published evidence, showing RAships vary along a continuum from (a) transformational pedagogical spaces for the development of research and researchers through hands-on, cooperative, and participatory research to (b) frustrating and exploitative interactions with limited educational benefit. We found no suitable existing resource that fulfilled our needs. Hence, we developed this practical handbook to support RAs and their research supervisors to ensure their interactions contribute to leading-edge research and researchers who can contribute to Canada's innovation agenda. By articulating the roles and responsibilities of RAs, research supervisors, and institutions, we hope to foster enhanced potential within these relationships.



Snežana Ratković. In the last decade I have moved from engaging in multiple research assistant positions to developing, facilitating, and organizing research skills workshops for graduate students, research assistants, and faculty members. I have always hoped that my work as a Research Officer would support, inspire, and celebrate research assistantships in the Faculty of Education and at Brock University. I am committed to projects and activities that make research assistant expertise visible, recognized, and sophisticated. This handbook is an important tool for building and sustaining equitable, educative, and ethical research assistantships in Education.

Ewelina Niemczyk.

It was a privilege for me to collaborate on and contribute to this research project. I have an ongoing research interest in research assistantships as educational spaces where students can apply their theoretical knowledge into practice and thus enhance their research knowledge and skills. Research assistantships complemented my experiences as a graduate student, allowing me to acquire skills, establish mentoring relationships, and develop my identity as a researcher. Realizing the potential of research assistantships encouraged me to explore how my experiences compared to other students and how research assistantships could be enriched to benefit the development of future researchers. Hence, in addition to this handbook, I have reviewed the literature, co-authored articles, and centred my master's thesis and doctoral dissertation on this topic.

Michelle McGinn. The summer after completing my undergraduate thesis and throughout my graduate degrees, I was privileged to work as a research assistant for several professors. These opportunities provided insight into the world of research and of academe, demonstrated various styles of collaboration and mentorship, and built my professional experiences, all of which eventually led me to an academic career in higher education and research methods. I am committed to providing educational opportunities for research assistants to learn knowledge and skills related to research, disciplinary content, and academic life. In exchange, my research and understandings are enhanced through the contributions of research assistants. I hope this handbook can support others to treat research assistantships as important teaching and learning spaces.

Lyn Trudeau.

Ojibway, Eagle Clan. I came to this project as having previous experience within the research realm but having both positive and negative experiences I thought this venture was worth pursuing.

Having new conversations that open the door for both novice and experienced researcher can only benefit all who take on their roles respectively.



Sources and Acknowledgements

The development of this handbook was supported by the Faculty of Education Office of Research, grants from the Research Fund Initiative and the Graduate Research Assistant Development program in the Faculty of Education, as well as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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This document may be cited as follows:

Ratković, S. = Niemczyk, E. K. = Trudeau, L. = McGinn, M. K. (2013). *Faculty of Education research assistantship handbook*. Brock University, St. Catharines, ON.

Layout and design by Lyn Trudeau. The four authors share responsibility for all textual content.