Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research (OSCAR)

Federal Work-Study Research Assistantships

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Congratulations on being involved in the Federal Work-Study Research Assistantship! I am very proud that OSCAR is able to support this program. Last year’s students were very successful, and their mentors were enthusiastic about participating. Work-study is an important program to give students financial support while enhancing their education experience and keeping them engaged at Mason.

Students, we hope that this job gives you an opportunity to get involved in the exciting research environment at Mason, and you gain insight into the process of research. You’ll learn skills here that will make you more successful as a student, and later as a professional. Take advantage of this opportunity—attend meetings, ask questions, volunteer to try new things. This research assistant position may be one of the most valuable and memorable aspects of your Mason experience!

Faculty, our goal is for you to get valuable support on a project while also giving your research assistant a rich Mason Learning Experience. Integrating your research assistant into your team and holding weekly meetings are good ways to help your student understand the larger context of her/his tasks.

OSCAR is here to support both the students and the faculty, so please feel free to contact us with any questions or suggestions. We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,
Bethany M. Usher

Director of the Students as Scholars initiative
Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research
What is OSCAR?

OSCAR is the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, and Research, the home of the Students as Scholars initiative. George Mason University chose “Fostering a Culture of Student Scholarship” as the topic of our 2011 Quality Enhancement Plan, a requirement for SACS reaccreditation that fit with campus goals, mission, and values. Since then, over 35000 undergraduates have participated in at least one OSCAR activity, and over 1200 have conducted original scholarly work.

Where is OSCAR?

The Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, & Research (OSCAR), is located in Johnson Center room 228, adjacent to the Office of Admissions.

What programs does OSCAR offer?

The Students as Scholars initiative supports individual research opportunity, curricular integration of research skills, and celebrations of undergraduate research. Individual research opportunities include this Federal Work-Study Research Assistantship, the Undergraduate Research Scholars Program, and credit-bearing individualized research courses. Innovative curricular programs include Research and Scholarship (RS) courses, as well as Scholarship Development Grants to departments to support curricular innovation. We help recognize student scholarship through the annual Celebration of Student Scholarship and other campus showcases. OSCAR also supports students traveling to report on their research or creative projects at conferences and other scholarly events through the Undergraduate Student Travel Fund. See OSCAR.gmu.edu for more information on all of these programs.

What is an OSCAR RA?

OSCAR collaborates with the Office of Student Financial Aid to allow students to use federal work-study funds as to support undergraduate research assistants for Mason faculty. OSCAR RAs are assigned to a specific faculty member to help work on a research project. While much of the work may be basic (entering and coding data, collecting specimens, conducting literature searches, communicating with participants), the goal is for the student to make a meaningful contribution to the project while learning about the process of research or scholarship in the field. We expect for OSCAR RAs to be fully integrated in research teams or discussions. OSCAR RAs can also take on additional responsibility for projects as they gain experience.

*Students cannot concurrently participate in this program and any other OSCAR funded programs.*
Federal Work-Study Guidelines

What is Federal Work-Study?

Federal Work-Study (FWS) is a program which provides part-time employment opportunities to eligible students to help meet the costs of post-secondary education. Based on the results of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), eligible students are awarded an allotment which may be earned through part time employment in FWS approved positions either on or off campus. The program is designed to provide students with an opportunity for employment arranged around class schedules. Students must be enrolled at least half-time (six credit hours per semester) to be eligible for this program. If you wish to be considered for this program, you should indicate this preference on the FAFSA or, if not awarded FWS in your initial award package, you should contact your financial aid counselor.

How do I apply for Federal Work-Study?

Federal Work-Study eligibility is based on demonstrated financial need. To be considered for a Federal Work-Study award at George Mason University, you should complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Since work-study funds are limited, you should file the FAFSA as early as possible. If you are not awarded Federal Work-Study as part of your initial award package, you should contact Lady Ramirez (lramiez@gmu.edu) who will place you on the waiting list. If you are subsequently awarded a Federal Work-Study award, you will receive a revised Award Notification.

How will I know if I qualify for Federal Work-Study?

After filing the FAFSA, the Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA) will send an Award Notification to students whose applications are complete and who are eligible for need-based financial aid. This notification will describe the types and amounts of awards offered, including FWS. If this notification does not include a FWS award, you are not currently eligible to obtain a position under this program. If you are interested in FWS but are not awarded a FWS award, let Lady Ramirez (lramiez@gmu.edu) know so that you can be added to the wait list.

How much can I earn?

Your FWS salary will be at least the current federal minimum wage, but it may be higher, depending on the type of work you do and the skills required. Your total FWS award depends on when you apply, your level of financial need, and the amount of FWS funds available. The amount you earn cannot exceed your total FWS award.

What happens if my earnings reach my maximum award?
You are responsible for ensuring that you do not earn more than your FWS award total. Your department may notify you that you are approaching your limit, but you should monitor your total hours worked and total gross earnings. The department has the option of either continuing your assignment and paying 100% from their departmental budget or ending your assignment altogether.

Are Federal Work-Study wages considered taxable income?

YES. Federal Work-Study wages are taxable income. It is in your best interest to file a federal tax return with the IRS by April 15th. You will receive W-2 forms from GMU for your work-study earnings in January.

How do I learn more about Financial Aid and Federal Work-Study?

The website for the Office of Student Financial Aid (financialaid.gmu.edu) is your first stop. The website has information, and you are also welcome to visit the office on the first floor of SUB1 between 9am and 5pm, Mondays-Fridays.

**OSCAR Federal Work-Study Research Assistantship Terms and Conditions**

(as determined by the Financial Aid Office and OSCAR)

Including the requirements listed above students are required to meet the followings terms and conditions. Once a student submits a Student Employment Verification form they are accepting the following:

To be eligible for an OSCAR Federal Work-Study Research Assistantship, she or he must:

- File a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and be determined to have financial need. A new FAFSA must be submitted every year to continue to receive FWS. Check the Financial Aid website for deadlines.
- Have FWS awarded on their financial aid package.
- Be enrolled at least part-time (at least 6 units per semester; 4.5 for graduate).
- Be a U.S. Citizen or eligible non-citizen.
- Be achieving Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP); please look on the OSFA website for our SAP policy.
- Not be in default on a student loan.
- Submit all documents required by the Office of Student Financial Aid.
- Not work more than one FWS job simultaneously.
- Be supported by only OSCAR program at a time. A student may not simultaneously be supported by an OSCAR RA, Undergraduate Research Scholars Program Grant, or Scholarship Development Grant. However, all students are eligible to apply for the Undergraduate Student Travel Fund.
Additionally, students acknowledge:

- No student may earn more than his/her award per academic year.
- Any unearned funds will be forfeited. The award year starts at the beginning of July and ends by mid-June.
- George Mason University has the right to terminate any Federal Work-Study position due to changes in availability of FWS funds or due to changes in the student status that could affect continued eligibility for financial aid. Failure to abide by GMU policies and procedures, unsatisfactory performance, poor attendance, unethical work behavior or dishonesty may also result in the loss of your FWS award.
- OSCAR has the right to terminate any student from an OSCAR Federal Work-Study Research Assistantship with cause. This means that students have an obligation to fulfill the duties of the position. Willful misconduct and deliberate neglect of your duties are justifiable reasons for termination. Mentors have an obligation to discuss with students the expectations of the position, and to guide students if they are not fulfilling the duties of the position. Faculty should counsel students about corrective action before requesting that the student be terminated. Students and faculty are both welcome to contact OSCAR if they need assistance in navigating this professional relationship.
- OSCAR has the right to terminate an OSCAR Federal Work-Study position if the project ends or the faculty mentor is not fulfilling the basic obligations of the mentoring relationship.
## Important Dates

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July 1</td>
<td>Start of Federal Work-Study Fiscal Year</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last day of Fall Classes</td>
<td>Last day that Fall Graduates can work</td>
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<tr>
<td>January 15th</td>
<td>FAFSA Priority Deadline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Last day of Spring Classes</td>
<td>Last day that Spring Graduates can work</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 30</td>
<td>End of Federal Work-Study Fiscal Year</td>
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Faculty

What Does it Mean to be a Mentor?

“Students report the most important aspect of their undergraduate research experience is the relationship with the mentor” (Temple, Sibley & Orr, 2010).

- Mentors are essential in ensuring the success of a student’s experience with research. For some students, they will serve as the first individual to intellectually stimulate them outside of the classroom.
- The mentor teaches a variety of applied skills, methods and techniques that fosters curiosity and allows students to ask question. They help students to develop critical thinking and analytical skills.
- Mentors provide opportunities to collaborate on research projects and publications. They provide guidance in planning professional progress and achieving necessary milestones.
- Mentors train a new generation of scholars and practitioners.

Recruiting

1. Write a Good Job Description

All positions must give the students direct experience with research or scholarship, at a level that is consistent with the student's skills and interests. These are not secretarial or other administrative support positions. We expect that you will treat the OSCAR Federal Work-Study Research Assistant as a full member of your research or creative team.

A good position description will include:

- 2-5 sentences describing the project and requirements for the position
- reasonably nontechnical and written in language geared toward undergraduate students
- include contact information, in case a student has direct questions about the position

As requested by Financial Aid, all position descriptions must be submitted using the On Campus Position Request Form (see http://oscar.gmu.edu/fac-staff/Faculty-Page-Federal-Work-Study-Assistantships.cfm for form).

Once you have completed the form please email it to oscarfws@gmu.edu. For priority consideration in a new academic year, positions need to be submitted by early August,

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although we continue to post and fill position on a rolling basis through the academic year when funding is available.

2. Post and Advertise the Position

OSCAR will post OSCAR RA positions to the Handshake website (https://careers.gmu.edu/handshake), and we’ll post the position on our student OSCAR RA website (http://oscar.gmu.edu/students/FWS.cfm). We’ll send you the Handshake position number within a week of posting. We recommend that you share this position information with your students, since they are likely to be most qualified. You can announce the position in class, and send the description through your department student listserv.

Make sure to include the Handshake position number with the description. All students must officially apply through Handshake to get hired under Federal Work-Study.

3. Hire your OSCAR RA

OSCAR will screen student applications. Once a week, OSCAR will forward appropriate student resumes to faculty members to choose their OSCAR RA, until the position is filled. While we will make every effort to match faculty projects with undergraduate students, we cannot guarantee that this will happen for every job posting. Therefore, faculty do not need to sign into the Handshake site as an employer.

Please feel free to interview all, some or none of the applications sent. These applicants have already passed the one requirement that OSCAR and the Financial Aid Office requires and that is they have been awarded Federal Work-Study funds. Any other requirements are completely up to faculty.

Once faculty have interviewed and decided on a student for their position, please send an email to Samira Lloyd at oscar@gmu.edu, who will assist the students in completing all the necessary Human Resources paperwork.

**Hours and Schedule Setting**

OSCAR RAs can be awarded up to $3000 per for the academic year through Financial Aid. As faculty make decisions on whom to employ, please have each student share with you their individual awards amounts as we do not have access to that information. Students can look up their award information by signing into their PatriotWeb account and referring to the Financial Aid tab.

Schedules should be worked out between the student and the faculty member. Please keep in mind that the OSCAR RAs cannot work more than 155 hours per semester and will be paid $10/hour. Student employees are paid every two weeks and may earn up to the amount of their total award.
If students earn more than their award, then the overage will be charged to the department that the faculty member works in. Thus, it is essential that supervisors monitor their students’ earnings. Traditionally, supervisors have required students to help them monitor the hours they work.

**Timesheets**

Students will be asked to set up Direct Deposit through Patriotweb. They will be required to submit timesheets on PatriotWeb every two weeks according to the Wage Employee Payroll Schedule (http://hr.gmu.edu/time/schedule/). OSCAR will be assigning students to faculty (through EPAF) and they will be responsible for approving their timesheets. Please refer to the Timesheet Approvers: Quick Reference Guide (http://hr.gmu.edu/payroll/timesheets.php) for more information on the approval process.

*Unprocessed time sheets will not be paid, and cannot be made up in the future.*

**Evaluating Students**

Faculty will be asked to assess the student’s skills, through interviews and observation, on the Students as Scholars Rubric (http://oscar.gmu.edu/upload/Students-as-Scholars-Master-Rubric-9-14.pdf) at least twice during the academic year. We will send you a link to a survey and a prompt to evaluate your students. You should review each item on the rubric soon after hiring the student to get a sense of where the student is starting, so you can gauge progress as the student works on the project.

**Discipline and Terminations**

*Faculty members have the right to terminate a student’s employment.*

1. Faculty members should make every effort to coach the OSCAR RA and offer him or her the opportunity to improve before termination of employment. However, some situations may warrant immediate termination.  
2. Faculty members are responsible for bringing your concerns about job performance to the student’s attention.  
3. Progressive discipline should be used where applicable, including verbal warning, written warning, and finally discharge.  
4. Maintain **written documentation** of each discipline situation.

*OSCAR should be notified in written form as soon as the decision to terminate is made. Student employees may write a letter of appeal to be placed in their student employment file.*
Students

What Does it Mean to Do Research?

Research is being introduced to the concept of scholarship, and to learn the research or scholarly methods in a discipline.

- Students will understand how knowledge is generated and disseminated through scholarship, and the importance of scholarship to society.
  - Distinguish between personal beliefs and evidence.
  - Understand research methods used in a discipline.
  - Understand how knowledge is transmitted within a discipline, across disciplines, and to the public.
- Students will engage in the key elements of the scholarly process and situate the concepts, practices, or results of scholarship within a broader context.

How to Apply

Obtaining a FWS position is a competitive process so an early start is essential to success. Students can start interviewing prior to the first day of classes. Being awarded FWS does not guarantee a position.

Below are instructions for students to follow in order to search for available positions:

1. Login on the Handshake website (https://careers.gmu.edu/handshake) to look for available Federal Work- Study positions (use your Mason email username and password).
2. Use the drop down box under Position Type to select Federal Work-Study. To submit an application, you must enter the FWS code (issued to you once you accept your FWS award by your Financial Aid counselor at the beginning of the academic year) on the On-Campus Job Availability Form. If you do not enter this code, your application will not be processed.
3. Once you have submitted your application, the faculty mentor will contact selected students for interviews.
4. If you are selected to be an OSCAR RA, you will be contacted by an OSCAR staff member to arrange an appointment for you to complete the required paperwork. OSCAR will assist all students in completing all the necessary Human Resources paperwork. The following forms must be completed and submitted prior to starting work:
   - Student Employment Authorization Form (completed by both student and supervisor upon hire)
   - Federal W-4 Employee Tax Withholdings
   - Virginia W-4 Employee Tax Withholdings
   - I-9 Employee Eligibility Verification, along with copies of appropriate identification
   - Direct Deposit Form
Enrollment Requirements

- Enrolled undergraduate students are eligible to work as student employees. If you have graduated, you are not considered a current student and therefore, are not eligible for student employment.
- Be enrolled at least part-time (at least 6 units per semester; 4.5 for graduate).

Hiring Process

- All hired work study students are required to schedule an appointment with OSCAR staff in order to complete the necessary hiring paperwork as required by GMU Human Resources
- Once added to online hiring portal by OSCAR staff each student will be emailed hiring paperwork instructions
- Paperwork must be completed in OSCAR office, using either student or one of the computers available in the office
- Hired students must provide Human Resources office with an original copy of I9 required documents as proof for work eligibility within three days of work start date

Orientation

- OSCAR will hold a Federal Work-Study student orientation in the beginning of each academic year. This orientation is mandatory for all first year students hired through the OSCAR office.

Professionalism

- OSCAR RAs are representatives of OSCAR.
  - OSCAR would like to project a professional image. Since you, as an employee, represent OSCAR, unprofessional behavior should be avoided. This includes dressing appropriately - use the appearance of others in your work environment as a guide, and if you have any questions about what is acceptable, you should ask your mentor.
- Work-Study Positions are Real Jobs
  - Your department and your supervisor are counting on you to be there when you are scheduled. It is unacceptable for you to make a habit of being late or not showing up while the rest of your team becomes frustrated with having to pick up your work. It reflects badly on you and your department. Consistent lateness or missing work is a cause for termination.
  - If you have an unexpected emergency, make sure to call and inform your supervisor so that adjustments can be made.
- Work-Study Does Not Mean Study During Work
  - During your scheduled hours you are there to work. Most Work-Study supervisors are aware that you are trying to juggle an academic schedule with a work schedule.
You and your supervisor should plan a work schedule that will best accommodate your academic hours and study time. When discussing your work schedule, be sure to leave time outside of your work hours for studying.

**Hours**

- Students **may not work more than 15 hours per week** during the fall and spring semesters and no more than 29 hours per week during winter, spring, and summer breaks.
- Students may not work more than 8 hours in one day, and must take a ½ hour break when working 6 or more hours.

**Schedule Setting**

- Students must arrange a mutually agreeable work schedule with his/her supervisor and adhere to it.
- Arrange a work schedule that does not interfere with your class schedule.
- Follow the schedule carefully once it has been established. Always, notify your supervisor if you are unable to work.
- During final exams and midterms supervisors must accommodate the student’s study/exam schedule.
- Be punctual.
- Student must provide prior notification to supervisor of inability to report for scheduled work hours.

*Students cannot be paid for hours worked when it is determined that they should have been attending class during that time.*

**Timesheets and Pay Periods**

- All timesheets must be submitted via [Patriotweb.gmu.edu](http://Patriotweb.gmu.edu) according to the Student Payroll Schedule found on [http://hr.gmu.edu/time/schedule/](http://hr.gmu.edu/time/schedule/).
- The normal day of submission is biweekly on Sunday by 9:30 a.m.
- Hours may be projected if they are to be worked after the payroll submission deadline.
- It is recommended that students keep a separate record of their hours, in case there is ever a problem with logging hours online.

**Direct Deposit**

- George Mason University requires all employees to use Direct Deposit. Students can set up Direct Deposit via [patriotweb.gmu.edu](http://patriotweb.gmu.edu) or using the Direct Deposit Authorization form found on hr.gmu.edu under Forms. Mason does not print pay stubs, therefore logging onto Patriot Web is the way to check your pay stubs and W2s as well as to update your bank information.
Resignation and Terminations

- Students should give a notification of at least two weeks if planning to resign from their FWS position.
- A student’s continued employment is contingent upon satisfactory performance as determined by their supervisor. If the supervisor decides that the student’s performance is not satisfactory, the student may be dismissed. Student employees may write a letter of appeal to be placed in their student employment file.
- If they knowingly submit fraudulent information, students will be dismissed from the program and may face legal consequences.
CONTACT US

Have questions or comments? We look forward to hearing from you.

Visit: The Students as Scholars initiative is administered through the Office of Student Scholarship, Creative Activities, & Research (OSCAR), located in Johnson Center room 228, across from the STAR Office.

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Phone: 703-993-3794

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