PhD Student Handbook

SGA (Stipended Graduate Assistantship) Information

The Khoury College of Computer Sciences awards Stipended Graduate Assistantships (SGAs) to students with strong academic backgrounds, primarily in the College’s doctoral program. SGA awards typically consist of a stipend, tuition waiver, and NUSHP health insurance fee waiver.

**SGA Stipend Payment.** SGA stipends are paid twice monthly on/about the 15th and on the last day of each month during the semester(s) of appointment. Should either of these dates fall on a weekend or holiday, Human Resources/Payroll will disburse pay on the last working day prior to the regular pay date.

All SGAs must have a valid checking account and enroll in Direct Deposit via their myNortheastern account in order to receive pay. To learn more about Direct Deposit, please visit the FAQs page on the Student Financial Services website: studentfinance.northeastern.edu/billing-payments/direct-deposit.

SGAs are also required to report their Social Security Number to the Office of Student Employment, Graduate Assistantships & Fellowships located at 271 Huntington Avenue. International students who do not have a Social Security Number may follow the application instructions found on the Office of Global Services site: international.northeastern.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/08/SSN-Instructions.pdf.

If you have received an SGA but have not been paid during a given pay period or receive the incorrect amount, please contact Khoury Graduate Administration immediately.

**Tuition Remission.** The University bills all students for registered courses, including students who hold assistantships. These bills will include charges for tuition and fees. Students who hold assistantships may disregard the tuition and health insurance portion of their bill but must pay all other fees promptly.

These fees include:

- International Student Fee ($350, one time)
- Student Center Fee ($70 per semester)
- Student Recreation Fee ($60 per semester)
- Student Activities Fee ($16 per semester)
- University Health and Counselling Service Fee ($225 per year)

Tuition remission information will appear on your student account by the eighth week of each semester. Tuition remission is provided as part of an assistantship during the dates of the appointment for courses in the student’s degree program as approved by an academic adviser and by the Graduate School. If the student leaves the University or switch to another program within the University mid-semester, the student will then be responsible to pay tuition for that semester.
If after the eighth week, the tuition waiver has not been posted, please contact the Khoury Graduate School administration so that we can make sure the credit is applied to your account.

**Health Insurance (NUSHP).** SGA awards include the Northeastern University Student Health Plan (NUSHP). Like tuition, this will be paid within the first eight weeks of the semester. If after the eighth week, your health insurance has not been paid, please contact the Khoury Graduate School administration so that we can make sure the credit is applied to your account. To learn more about NUSHP, please visit their site: northeastern.edu/nushp.

**Taxes.** Assistantships do not cover state or federal taxes. U.S. citizens and permanent residents must complete Form W-4 at the Office of Student Employment, Graduate Assistantships & Fellowships. Please go here for the list of forms: studentfinance.northeastern.edu/forms. International students should contact the Office of Global Services (OGS) for information regarding taxation.

SGAs stipends are taxed as income. Tuition remission is not subject to taxation.

The Human Resources/Payroll Office deducts the federal and state taxes and credits your account with the balance. SGAs are not subject to FICA (Social Security) tax due to the student’s full-time student status. Students must remain enrolled as a full-time student throughout the duration of the appointment; failure to maintain full-time status as defined in the University Graduate Catalog may subject the student to FICA tax withholding, including back taxes and/or penalties for any semester that the student held an assistantship and did not maintain proper full-time status.

**International Student Information.** International students who do not have a Social Security Number will need to complete an SGA Social Security Number Letter Request form, which can be found on the OGS website under Employment Forms. This completed OGS approved letter must be submitted to a local Social Security Office in order to request a Social Security Number. This should be done at the beginning of the semester. The process takes 2-4 weeks on average for the Social Security Office to issue a Social Security Number once they have received the appropriate paperwork. Students are then required to report their SSN to student employment when it has been received.

If you are an international student and you entered your degree program without an SGA (and provided evidence of sponsor or personal funds on your Declaration and Certification of Finances in order to obtain an I-20), you will need to report the change in funding source by submitting a Request for SEVIS I-20/ DS-2019 form for current students. This form can be found on the OGS website’s forms and guides for current student section. OGS will issue you a new I-20 based on your new funding source (the SGA).

**Orientation Program for New Teaching Assistants.** There will be a University-Wide New PhD Student Orientation prior to the fall semester on Tuesday September 3, 2019. This orientation is intended to be an
overview for all university teaching assistants. More in-depth teaching and communications workshops for all students (including international students) are hosted by CATLR (Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning Through Research) and OGS during the Fall term.

More information will be sent to students in the weeks prior to the start of the academic term.

All Khoury SGAs who will be working as course assistants are required to attend the TA orientation prior to the start of their first term in the program.

**Course Registration**

Students receiving an SGA must be registered for a full-time course load by the end of the second week of the fall and spring semesters. Per University regulations, failure to register may result in loss of benefits. Students register through the myNortheastern web portal. Any registrations made after the second week of the semester require the approval of the Graduate School.

The Office of the Registrar keeps an updated and searchable course catalog. Please note which campus each course is offered. Some courses are only available on specific campuses, and it’s important to select the appropriate campus when registering.

You can also find the open registration date and an academic calendar at the Office of the Registrar. Please pay close attention when registration opens for new students, as well as the deadline to complete registration. Adding or dropping courses after the registration dates listed on the registrar’s website may incur fees.

You can register for courses on myNortheastern. The portal allows you to add and drop courses, confirm course registration, find room assignments, and obtain final exam schedules. The system works in real-time, so your course add/drop will be processed immediately.

Visit myNortheastern, log in with your username and password (or click “How do I get a myNortheastern username and password?” if you have never used the system before). Click on “Self-Service,” then “Course Registration,” and follow the on-screen prompts.

**GPA Requirement.** Students appointed on an SGA must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.000 or higher. Students whose GPA falls below 3.000 are placed on academic probation and risk the SGA being withdrawn.

**Readings Courses**

**Policy.** Please note that readings or project courses may not have duplicative content with paid work or research being completed under the supervision of university or college faculty members. This includes research conducted as part of a Graduate Assistantship, Fellowship, or research assistantship.
The Readings or Project course proposal should have clearly stated learning outcomes distinct from research that can be considered part of the above reference positions. Please contact your academic adviser or program administrator if you require further guideline clarification.

**Process Summary.**

1. Students will meet with their advisors before the start of the next academic term to discuss their coursework.
2. With advisors’ assistance, students will draft a readings course proposal with clearly stated learning outcomes distinct from research that can be considered part of a Graduate Assistantship, Fellowship, or research assistantship.
3. Students submitting online requests (more information here: registrar.northeastern.edu/article/individual-instruction-registration) for readings courses will include a copy of their proposal.
4. Administrators reviewing requests will keep readings course proposals in student records.

**Paper Requirement**

**Purpose/Rationale.**

The paper requirement serves two purposes:

- the student demonstrates their research potential by articulating their knowledge of research work in their area of interest and
- it is a measurable milestone for progress towards Ph.D. completion.

Thus, the paper requirement is both a research requirement as well as a writing requirement.

The PhD student submits the following to the chair of the PhD Committee:

- A paper that they have authored.
- If the paper has been accepted for publication, then the name and acceptance rate of the relevant conference or journal, and any additional information about the quality of the venues.
- A statement from their adviser clearly indicating the student’s contributions to the paper and how these contributions provide evidence of research potential.

The PhD Committee will approve the request if the following conditions are met:

- The student is a “leading student author” of the paper, and a major contributor to both the research and the writing of the paper.
- If the paper has been accepted for publication, then the venue must be well-regarded by colleagues working in the relevant research area. While acceptance rate is not the main indicator of the quality of a conference, we note that acceptance rates in good conferences in most areas of CS are below 50% (often well below 40%).
- If the paper has not yet been accepted for publication or there are some concerns about the quality of the venue, then the PhD Committee may schedule a presentation by the student, which is attended by at least two PhD Committee member, the student’s adviser, and possibly other faculty members and students. In this case, the attending PhD committee members must report that the presented work demonstrates the research potential of the student.
It is expected that the paper requirement be completed no later than the Spring Academic Review of their third year of studies.

**Policy.** To demonstrate research ability, you are required to write a research or survey paper in an area of specialty under the supervision of a faculty advisor and submit it to the PhD Committee.

Typically, the paper should not exceed 15 pages. A student is considered to have fulfilled the paper requirement if:

- The paper has been submitted to a selective conference
- The student has made substantial contribution to the paper
- The advisor has endorsed the paper with a written statement indicating the student’s contribution
- The PhD committee has voted on a positive recommendation

Upon completion of the course and research paper requirements, you are admitted to candidacy for the PhD degree. It is highly recommended that you complete the candidacy requirement by the end of your second year.

**Process Summary.**

1. Student will create a Web page that contains the following information
   a. A link to exactly one paper. We do not want a list of papers, unless you and your advisor feel that with only one paper your case is not strong enough to satisfy the paper requirement.
   b. A statement from your advisor clearly indicating your contributions to the paper and how these contributions provide evidence of research potential.
2. Allow two weeks for the PhD committee to review, discuss, vote, and communicate the outcome. Notification will come from the Director of Graduate Programs.
3. Please submit your material through phdcomm.ccs.neu.edu and follow the instructions there. Create an account if necessary.
4. After submitting your material, send an email to the chair of the PhD committee. Simply state the fact that you submitted your material. (Our system unfortunately does not generate automatic notifications.)

**FAQ’s.**

- Can a student submit a research paper that they prepared for a class?
  - Yes. Note that condition (3) above always applies.
- What happens if the student does not complete the paper requirement by the Spring academic review of their third year?
  - Unless the faculty adviser and/or other faculty members in the related area make a strong case for the student at the academic review, the student risks a rating of marginal or unsatisfactory at the review. Further delay in completing the paper requirement could adversely impact the academic standing of the student.
- These questions concern the presentation that the student may have to give if the paper has not yet been accepted at a well-regarded conference. Can this presentation be part of an internal seminar? Can the student give a presentation they have already given?
  - Yes to both questions.
Academic Review

Milestones

Coursework Completion. Once students have completed the required PhD in CS coursework, PhD in CY coursework, or PhD in PHI coursework, they should submit the PhD Coursework Completion Form. Once it has been approved, students will receive an email confirming that they have met the requirement. The form will be stored in their record and the portal will be updated to reflect that the milestone has been completed.

Paper Requirement. To demonstrate research ability, students are required to write a research or survey paper in an area of specialty under the supervision of a faculty advisor and submit it to the PhD Curriculum Committee. Typically, the paper should not exceed 15 pages. A student is considered to have fulfilled the paper requirement if:

- The paper has been submitted to a selective conference
- The student has made substantial contribution to the paper
- The advisor has endorsed the paper with a written statement indicating the student’s contribution
- The PhD committee has voted on a positive recommendation
- Upon completion of the course and research paper requirements, you are admitted to candidacy for the PhD degree. It is highly recommended that you complete the candidacy requirement by the end of your second year.

If a paper meets these criteria, then a student may submit it for review. Below are the steps:

1. Create a Web page that contains the following information:
   a. A link to exactly one paper. We do not want a list of papers, unless you and your advisor feel that with only one paper your case is not strong enough to satisfy the paper requirement.
   b. A statement from your advisor clearly indicating your contributions to the paper and how these contributions provide evidence of research potential.
2. Submit your material through phdcomm.ccs.neu.edu and follow the instructions there. You may need to create an account.
3. After submitting your material, send an email to the chair of the PhD committee. Simply state the fact that you submitted your material (our system unfortunately does not generate automatic notifications).

Allow two weeks for the PhD committee to review, discuss, vote, and communicate the outcome. Notification will come from the Director of Graduate Programs.

Candidacy. In order to be admitted to candidacy, PhD students must have submitted the PhD Coursework Completion form and have satisfied the PhD paper requirement.

The PhD Curriculum committee reviews submissions on a monthly basis during the academic year (Fall and Spring semesters). Once approved, a doctoral student is considered a doctoral candidate and eligible for an increase in their SGA stipend.
Candidacy stipend rate will be reflected in the first available pay period subsequent to the academic status being reflected on the academic record.

Students are not eligible for candidacy consideration during the summer semester.

**Comprehensive Exam.** The examination will be taken after students have achieved sufficient depth in a field of study in order to prepare a prospectus for the PhD dissertation. This process should take place no later than the fall semester of the fifth year in residence. Prior to taking the comprehensive examination, students prepare a thesis proposal for the examination. The thesis proposal should include the relevant background materials from literature and clearly specify the research problems to be attacked, the techniques to be used, and a schedule of milestones towards completion. Typically, the thesis proposal should not exceed 15 pages, excluding appendices and bibliography.

The thesis proposal must be approved by the Comprehensive Committee. It is strongly recommended that the same members should serve on both the Comprehensive and Thesis Committees. With the help of a student’s advisor, students will select the Comprehensive Committee consisting of four members to be approved by the PhD Committee. The four members must include the advisor, two other faculty members from the college, and an external examiner (optional for Comprehensive Committee). To help the PhD Committee make an informed decision, a copy of the external examiner’s resume should be submitted at the same time. Upon approval of the written proposal, students will present the proposed work orally in a public forum, followed by a closed-door oral examination from the Comprehensive Committee. The exam may be taken twice at the most.

Please note that it is the student’s responsibility to reserve a room for the comprehensive exam. This may be done by contacting the Khoury Operations Team at khoury-opsteam@northeastern.edu. Once the room has been reserved, the student will need to contact the Assistant Director of Graduate Student Services with the following information:

- Speaker:
- Date:
- Time:
- Location:
- Title:
- Abstract:
- Committee:
- Biography:

This information will then be sent to the internal PhD mailing lists as well as the professors mailing list. Ideally two announcements will be sent out to the community: one about two weeks prior to the exam and another about a day prior to the exam.

**Proposal.** The thesis proposal should include the relevant background materials from literature and clearly specify the research problems to be attacked, the techniques to be used, and a schedule of milestones towards completion. Typically, the thesis proposal should not exceed 15 pages, excluding appendices and bibliography.
**Dissertation.** Upon successful completion of the research proposed in your thesis proposal, you will prepare your dissertation for approval by the Doctoral Thesis Committee. The dissertation must contain results of extensive research and make an original contribution to the field. The work should give evidence of your ability to carry out independent research. It is expected that the dissertation should be of sufficient quality to merit publication in a reputable journal.

- **Doctoral Thesis Committee.** If the Thesis Committee is the same as the Comprehensive Committee, no further approval is needed. If the Thesis Committee is changed in its composition, approval process will follow that of the Comprehensive Committee.

- **Dissertation Defense.** The dissertation defense is held in accordance with the regulations of the University Graduate Council. You will give a lecture on the subject matter of your dissertation, followed by questions from the Doctoral Committee and others in attendance concerning the results of the dissertation as well as any related matters. The examination will be chaired by the PhD advisor.

- **Dissertation Submission.** The university requires graduate students to submit their dissertation or thesis electronically with UMI Dissertation Publishing. Whereas students previously submitted hard copies to Snell Library, it is now your responsibility to publish your dissertation using the aforementioned site as well as cover the cost of the electronic submission.

Dissertation submission should begin only after you have defended your work and have had your dissertation signed off by the Doctoral Thesis Committee, your advisor, and the Graduate School Director using the PhD Thesis Approval form. Once completed, the introductory material contained on UMI will lead you through the account creation and submission processes.

You can directly upload your dissertation as a PDF to UMI. While Khoury has no specific formatting requirements, the electronic submission must follow UMI’s guidelines.

After the dissertation is submitted electronically, it will be catalogued in NUCat, Northeastern’s library catalog, and made available in both ProQuest and the Digital Repository Service (DRS) for research purposes. If you do not wish for your dissertation or thesis to be immediately placed in DRS for any reason (for example, if you are planning a patent application or formal publication), please opt for an embargo option (from six months to two years) when you submit your paper to Proquest. The university libraries will honor the embargo request before making your paper available via DRS and the Internet.

- **Deadline.** Dissertations may be submitted at any point during the year upon completion of all degree requirements. If you would like to be cleared for a specific commencement, the dissertation must be approved two weeks before commencement. You should allow for adequate time to make any necessary corrections to your dissertation as requested by your committee.