

Advertisement: Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) PhD Position - University of the Free State (UFS)

Call for Applications: PhD Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) 2026-2028

I. Background

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) in partnership with Mastercard Foundation, Gulu University (Uganda), Egerton University (Kenya), Africa University (Zimbabwe), University of the Free State (South Africa), Malawi University of Science and Technology (Malawi), University of Eldoret (Kenya), Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), University of Port Harcourt (Nigeria), University of Cape Coast (Ghana), University of Bamenda (Cameroon), National University of Agriculture (Benin), and Université Mohammed VI Polytechnique (Morocco) are implementing a 10-year programme (2023-2033) called Transforming African Agricultural Universities to Meaningfully Contribute to Africa's Growth and Development (TAGDev 2.0). The programme seeks to strengthen universities and TVET institutions to better serve communities by skilling and empowering Africa's young people and their institutions to drive inclusive, equitable and climate resilient transformation of agriculture and agrifood systems. The TAGDev 2.0 programme will support young African students that are economically disadvantaged but academically competent to access university education. The scholarship is open to both female and male applicants. However, females, refugees, internally displaced persons, and persons with disabilities are highly encouraged to apply.

2. Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)

The Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA) Programme contributes to one of RUFORUM's three strategic goals to "build synergy from networks of specialisation to develop quality human resources and capacity required to intensify and increase Africa's agricultural productivity and competitiveness" and its Vision 2030 Strategy that focuses on building postgraduate training and research capacity in its member universities. The GTA programme has been implemented since 2015 to: (i) improve the quality of higher education and increase the pool of PhD-level trained academic staff in African universities; (ii) provide opportunities for the doctoral research to contribute more directly to African development; (iii) strengthen inter- university collaboration in the field of higher education in Africa; and (iv) promote staff mobility among RUFORUM member universities, and across Africa.

Under the GTA arrangement:

- I. The sending universities nominate the staff to be trained and RUFORUM Secretariat helps to get them placed in receiving (host) Universities.

2. The sending universities commit to pay for travel, health insurance, upkeep and research of their staff under training.
3. The receiving/host universities waive the fees and associated costs, and provide accommodation for the admitted GTA Fellows.
4. Once admission process is completed, the sending and host universities and the nominated GTA Fellow sign a Tripartite Agreement to guide the hosting and training of the Fellow.
5. In some cases where opportunities exist, the host University may attach the GTA Fellow to the research program at the hosting university.
6. The RUFORUM Secretariat facilitates the GTA arrangement and follows up on the GTA training.

3. Eligible Program

This call for a three-year scholarship for the 2026-2028 academic year is open to applicants interested in and eligible to study a PhD at the University of the Free State, South Africa.

Program Name: PhD with specialisation in Wildlife (B4980)

Research Background/Theme: Wildlife Physiology and Conservation Biology

The Department of Animal Sciences at the University of the Free State (UFS), Bloemfontein, South Africa, in collaboration with RUFORUM, is pleased to announce a call for applications for the GTA Program. The program is seeking a highly motivated doctoral candidate from the African continent to join our research team focused on wildlife physiology and conservation biology, with a particular emphasis on giraffe ecology.

This is an excellent opportunity for a candidate with a strong teaching background in wildlife science, rangeland science, or animal physiology, who is committed to advancing conservation research and education. This fellowship provides an excellent opportunity for early-career researchers to advance their expertise and contribute to cutting-edge research aimed at revolutionizing giraffe conservation through interdisciplinary research, leveraging cutting-edge technologies, and fostering innovative communication strategies.

The successful applicant will be expected to live in Bloemfontein when not conducting fieldwork. They will undertake independent and collaborative research aligned with the Research Chair's objectives, publish high-quality research in accredited journals, and contribute to lecturing in the department, supervision and mentorship of postgraduate students.

The selected candidate will join an interdisciplinary research project, Ecological and Biological Factors Regulating Giraffes, aimed at understanding the metabolic health, reproductive success, stress physiology, and gut microbiome of giraffes within their ecosystems. Working alongside a

collaborative team spanning the fields of Zoology, Genetics, Microbiology, and Environmental Science, the doctoral candidate will contribute to both research and teaching responsibilities, with the opportunity to develop new curriculum modules related to wildlife physiology and conservation. The successful candidate will have the opportunity to access previously collected biological samples to support their fieldwork for doctoral research.

Research Chair: Professor Francois Deacon

Department: Department of Animal Sciences at the UFS

Faculty: Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences

General Admission Requirements to the University of the Free State for the above program:

1. Hold a relevant Master's degree awarded in the last four years in veterinary science, wildlife biology, conservation biology, animal physiology, or a related field, with a strong academic background and field experience.
2. Have a good background in wildlife physiology, conservation biology and ecology.
3. Have a strong publication record in accredited journals, with at least three publications.
4. Relevant teaching experience.
5. Be able to conduct independent research.
6. Be under the age of 40.

Additional Requirements Specific to this Position:

Research and Project Development

- Conduct original research on the physiological and ecological factors impacting giraffe populations, integrating field data with laboratory analyses.
- Collaborate with researchers in Chemistry, Genetics, Informatics, and Environmental Science to enrich the interdisciplinary research model.
- Participate actively in scientific publication efforts, contributing to peer-reviewed journals as part of the multi-disciplinary research team.
- Scientific Communication: Strong scientific writing skills with evidence of publication potential or prior published work; capacity to work collaboratively on scientific publications.
- Curriculum Development: Demonstrated ability to develop new educational materials and contribute to curriculum enhancement in wildlife sciences.

Sample Collection and Data Analysis

- Engage in fieldwork for sample collection (e.g., blood, tissue, fecal, and milk samples), as well as *in situ* physiological monitoring.

- Utilise laboratory methods, including metabolomics and hormone analysis, to study nutritional and stress profiles, and work to connect these findings with environmental variables.
- Apply statistical analysis techniques to manage and interpret data for publication and conservation modeling.

Teaching and Curriculum Development

- Teaching Experience: Proven experience in teaching or assisting in courses on wildlife science, rangeland science, or animal physiology.
- Teach and assist in wildlife science, rangeland science, and animal physiology, drawing on personal expertise and professional experience.
- Develop new teaching modules that reflect contemporary issues in wildlife physiology and conservation, enhancing the Department's curriculum and supporting undergraduate and graduate instruction.
- Mentor students in lab settings, supervising their hands-on training in sample dissections, physiological monitoring techniques, and data-building for conservation research.
- Proficiency in English (written and verbal)
- Research and Analytical Skills: Ability to conduct field and laboratory research, with proficiency in data analysis and interpretation

Application Process:

1. Applicants must be nominated by their sending University, a RUFORUM member University.
2. Interested candidates should submit the following documents to Professor Francois Deacon (deaconf@ufs.ac.za) and Dr Ayanda Maqhashu (maqhashua@ufs.ac.za) and Ms Selma Nghituwamhata (s.nghituwamhata@ruforum.org) with the subject line:
Application for Graduate Teaching Assistantship by 30th November 2025:
 - A detailed Curriculum Vitae (CV)
 - A cover letter outlining their research interests and suitability for the position
 - Certified copies of academic transcripts and degree certificates
 - A research proposal (maximum three pages) outlining their proposed research project
 - A list of publications
 - Two copies of academic work or publications
 - A letter of nomination from their home (sending) university.
 - Contact information for at least two academic referees
 - A Power Point (no more than 15 slides) summarizing his/her previous experience and skill set with an emphasis his/her teamwork and team player environment.
3. Shortlisted candidates will be contacted for an interview.
4. We encourage eligible candidates to apply and take advantage of this opportunity to build their academic and research careers within the RUFORUM network.

Contact Information:

For further inquiries, please contact:

Professor Francois Deacon (deaconf@ufs.ac.za), Doctor Ayanda Maqhashu (maqhashua@ufs.ac.za) and Ms Selma Nghituwamhata (s.nghituwamhata@ruforum.org).

RUFORUM Secretariat Information:

For more information on the RUFORUM GTA Programme, please visit the RUFORUM website:
<https://www.ruforum.org/gta>

University of the Free State Website: www.ufs.ac.za