

PROPOSAL: 1) Clarify policy regarding time commitments; and 2) Adopt a policy in regards to the prohibition of “volunteer” assistantships.

Policies for Graduate Assistantships

III. Duties and Time Commitments

The assigned duties of a Graduate Assistant are consistent with the objectives of the teaching and research missions of the university, including the objective that assistantships are to be educationally productive for graduate students. Workload expectations of the department, and of the student's advisor/supervisor, should be explicit and clear. The appointment may be full-time (20 hours per week) or half-time (10 hours per week).

Departments are to provide work assignments that GAs receiving full stipends can satisfactorily complete in no more than a 20-hour average work week, and are to ensure that GAs spend no more than 20 hours per week on average throughout the term of appointment on work unrelated to their research. The actual number of hours required to complete assignments in any given week may vary.

Graduate Teaching Assistants

The specific duties of Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) vary across disciplines and departments. For the majority of teaching assistants, however, assignments and responsibilities fall into four categories:

- Assuming teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion session of a course;
- Assuming teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the director(s) of the course;
- Assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, and administrative duties necessary for a course(s);
- Assisting in general departmental administrative duties, such as advising or the administration of community programs, workshops, etc.

Within a department, the particular assignment depends on the department's needs and the experience and academic qualifications of the TA. All graduate TAs serving in any capacity are under the direction and close supervision of a member of the faculty. **Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty member and the TA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a Statement of Mutual Expectations for Teaching Assistants can be found on the Graduate School website.**

Time Commitment: For TAs, the 20-hour average should include the time spent in faculty lectures, class preparation, classroom or laboratory teaching, reading and commenting on student papers or examinations, office consultation, and other duties required to carry out the teaching role. **Although it is understood that weekly workload will fluctuate during the term of appointment, a Teaching Assistant with a full-time appointment shall be required to work no more than an average of twenty hours per week during the term of appointment on specifically assigned duties related to his/her appointment, excluding non-TA-related activities associated with academic progress toward the degree. A Teaching Assistant with less than a full-time appointment shall work a prorated portion of a full-time appointment on specifically assigned duties related to his/her appointment, excluding non-TA-related activities associated with academic progress toward the degree.**

The time that TAs devote to their assignments varies. The proportion of hours spent in preparation, classroom or laboratory time, and grading, for example, differs from one discipline to another. In some disciplines, a new TA may find that a task such as grading initially requires more time than the usual 20-hour weekly average allows. **In determining the amount of time expected for a teaching assignment, consideration shall be given to such factors as type of instruction, number of students instructed, and all other factors, including those specific to the course or group of courses to which the instructional duty expectations apply.**

TAs may be required to come to campus prior to the actual beginning of classes to participate in orientation and class-preparation duties. TAs usually complete their formal duties when examinations have been graded.

Graduate Research Assistants

The specific duties of Graduate Research Assistants (RAs) vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of the funding. RAs may occasionally be asked to conduct some work at home or to do their research at times when classes are not officially in session. The duties of RAs are also performed under the close direction and supervision of a member of the faculty. **Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty member and the RA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a Statement of Mutual Expectations for Research Assistants can be found on the Graduate School website.**

Time Commitment: For RAs, the 20-hour average should include the time spent in library and/or laboratory, and on all other research tasks providing assistance to the assigned project. Graduate students working on research projects funded by grants are often also working on material directly related to their theses or dissertations. It is not unusual in such cases for grant work and personal work to merge and for the work time to consume far more than the usual 20-hour weekly average.

Graduate RAs usually follow the project director's instructions regarding work when classes are not in session.

Graduate Administrative Assistants

A number of academic and non-academic units employ Graduate Administrative Assistants (AAs), generally to perform administrative support functions in an office setting. Such positions are expected to have a research or professional development component. Some administrative appointments are for less than one academic year. **Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty or staff member and the AA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a Statement of Mutual Expectations for Administrative Assistants can be found on the Graduate School website.**

Time Commitment: For AAs, the 20-hour weekly average should include all time spent on assigned duties, including mandatory training sessions. Unless explicitly stated in writing, AAs are expected to work no more than the 20-hour average work week. If greater amounts of time are periodically required, the unit must provide the AA with an offer letter that includes a statement of expected duties, approximate dates when extra hours might be necessary, and maximum work hours required. If the AA is required to work more than 20 hours in a given week, the time should be deducted from another week.

Just as the unit may require the AA to work more than 20 hours in a given week to meet peak work periods, the AA may request that he or she be allowed to reduce time in a given week to finish a paper or study for an exam and make up the hours later. Such arrangements are allowed and encouraged and should be made between the student and the student's supervisor within the unit.

AAs follow the staff holiday and vacation schedule. Consequently, if the campus is closed (for any reason) for regular staff, AAs who normally would work those days will receive the appropriate compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed.

Conflict Resolution

A GA who experiences problems related to workload should address them without delay through the process indicated in "Grievance" Section below.

IV. Compensation

Compensation and Stipends

Three categories (called Steps) are currently used for the classification of graduate assistantships. These steps, based on a student's experience and progress toward the degree, determine compensation levels. Graduate Assistants fall into one of the three steps: Step I is only for first-year GAs; Step II is for second-year GAs, as well as for those students, new or continuing, holding a master's degree; and Step III is reserved for doctoral candidates.

The Graduate School sets the minimum stipend level for Step I. Departments and programs determine their own increments for Step II and Step III within guidelines set annually by the Graduate School. All GAs working within a particular step, in a particular unit, should be paid the same assistantship stipend.

TAs must be offered a 9.5-month or 12-month assistantship due to duties and responsibilities occurring after the last day of classes.

Additional Employment: On-Campus

Graduate Assistants may be employed on campus for an additional 10 hours per week beyond their assistantship duties, with an overload approval. No individual may be employed in two capacities in the same department without an overload approval. International students may be limited to a certain number of hours of employment according to their visa status; these students should check with [International Student and Scholar Services](#).

Domestic students who are GAs and who wish to hold more than one position on campus may do so only if the second position is paid on an hourly basis with Labor & Assistants funds (subcode 2075). This policy is necessary to avoid complications concerning benefits. For such individuals, the only benefits allowed are those associated with the graduate assistantship.

Additional Employment: Off-Campus

It is expected that the combined responsibilities of graduate studies and assistantship duties will fully occupy a student during the academic year. The University, however, does not prohibit Graduate Assistants from accepting outside employment in addition to their assistantship appointment. It is up to the GA to determine how much time, if any, he or she can devote to additional activities while still maintaining satisfactory progress toward the degree and satisfactory fulfillment of the assistantship responsibilities. Departments and programs have the discretionary right, however, to make appointments to students whose commitment suggests that they are most likely to attain their educational goals and maintain their assistantship responsibilities expeditiously and effectively.

Overload Payments for Graduate Students

Overload requests are for temporary, short-term arrangements only. They must be limited to one semester per request and must be received and approved prior to the beginning of the appointment. No graduate student may be employed in two capacities within the same department without an overload approval.

9.5-month Appointments

A full-time GA (20 hours per week) on a 9.5-month appointment must have an overload approval for any on-campus employment above the assistantship assignment while classes are in session for the Fall and Spring semesters.

An overload request must be submitted for Winter Term *only* if the student is teaching a Winter Term course, as a TA or lecturer, in addition to his or her normal assistantship assignment.

An overload request must be submitted for Summer terms *only* if a student (a) is paid in the home unit over four equal pays for summer *or* is paid hourly for 20 hours per week *and* (b) also will be paid in a second unit or in Summer Programs. (The overload form should be completed for the second unit or Summer Programs.)

Graduate Assistants in a 12-week program must submit an overload request for each 12-week term.

12-month Appointments - Semester Term Programs

A full-time GA (20 hours per week) on a 12-month appointment must have an overload approval for any employment above the assistantship assignment when classes are in session during Fall and Spring semesters.

During Winter Term and Summer terms, an overload request must be submitted *only* if the student is teaching a class, either as a TA or lecturer, in addition to the assistantship appointment.

12-month Appointments - 12-Week Term Programs

An overload request must always be submitted for each 12-week term.

International Students

Federal Law prohibits international students from working more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session; international students holding full-time assistantships (20 hours) are

therefore ineligible for overload assignments during the Fall and Spring semesters or during a 12-week term.

Sources of Funding

GAs may not be employed in more than one position eligible for benefits; their percentage on payroll may not exceed 50%. Hours over and above the assistantship must be paid with Labor & Assistants funds (subcode 2075).

Retirement and Social Security (FICA)

Retirement benefits are not withheld from the salaries of Graduate Assistants. GAs are exempt from Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) taxes provided that they maintain enrollment and are registered with at least half-time status in the term (Semester or 12-week) they are holding an assistantship.

Tax Status

Pursuant to U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987, all graduate students are liable to pay income tax on compensation received for Graduate Assistantships. The amount remitted for tuition is a benefit and is not taxed. A GA with questions about tax obligations should consult a tax counsel or the Internal Revenue Service (1-800-829-1040).

Volunteer Graduate Assistant

Under no circumstances should graduate students serve as volunteer graduate assistants where they are expected to provide service with no stipend, at a stipend not commensurate with the expected load, or without appropriate payment of tuition and fees. Course credit cannot be awarded to a student performing in the role of a graduate assistant in lieu of a stipend. Circumstances that may warrant an exception to this policy must be approved in advance by the Graduate School on a case-by-case basis.