



UNIVERSITY OF
**CENTRAL
ARKANSAS™**

GRADUATE SCHOOL

**POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
MANUAL FOR
GRADUATE ASSISTANTS**

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REVISED SPRING 2021

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PHILOSOPHY

A University with a sound assistantship policy should be able to improve the educational experience for undergraduate and graduate students alike, as well as enhance the research potential of its graduate programs. Students, departments, and the University as a whole are beneficiaries of quality graduate assistantship programs when such programs are well-conceived and executed.

The primary goal of an assistantship is to augment the student's educational objectives and to assist in the prompt and successful completion of the student's degree program. The student and the department share a central responsibility in the student's education. The graduate assistant is clearly a student who, while making progress in the degree program, has special opportunities to receive experience in a profession under the supervision of a faculty mentor. Although such students serve the University of Central Arkansas with teaching, research, and/or administrative duties, they are considered students, and not employees, of the University, and the tasks assigned to them must be clearly and justifiably consistent with the student's educational and career objectives. It is essential that graduate assistants be given assignments and supervision in such a way that their graduate studies and assistantship responsibilities reinforce one another. The assistant/mentor relationship is vital, and the best assistantship experience will evolve from careful planning and monitoring. In this way, both the students and the University benefit from the relationship.

CATEGORIES OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Graduate Teaching Assistantship A teaching assistant may work with undergraduate students in small groups, lead group discussions, monitor examinations and grade papers, help to prepare lectures, conduct laboratory sessions, or can be responsible for selected teaching assignments under the close supervision of the faculty. The teaching assistant concurrently develops teaching skills and a deeper understanding of the discipline.

Graduate Research Assistantship A research assistant may be appointed in a department through the Graduate School budget or by the principal investigator of a funded research project. In either case, the student is assigned a range of duties such as library searches, fieldwork, laboratory experiences, and preparation of research proposals and grants so as to gain professional skills in research which complement the student's graduate education. Again, close supervision by a faculty mentor is essential to the student's development as a researcher and scholar.

Administrative Graduate Assistantship A graduate assistant performs other duties that are not primarily teaching or research. These may include clinical or administrative responsibilities which are inherently related to the student's education and professional development.

Funding Sources and Types of Assistantships

Various funding sources exist for the above types of assistantships. These sources include grants, gifts, contracts, community service agencies, the Graduate School, or various University departments, divisions, or centers.

QUALIFICATIONS OF ASSISTANTS

To qualify for an assistantship, the student should have achieved an excellent academic record and completed substantial coursework in the major field. The student must have been admitted with full

qualifications in accordance with the admission policies and procedures of the Graduate School. A Graduate Assistant (GA) is expected to maintain a cumulative and program GPA of 3.0 or higher. If a GA does not meet these conditions, the GA is allowed one semester to continue as a GA while on probation. If at the end of the additional semester the GA is still on probation, the assistantship will be terminated. Additionally, the student may have no incomplete (X) grades to qualify for an assistantship. To be appointed as a full-time Graduate Assistant (20 hours), the student must be enrolled as a full-time graduate student (minimum of 9 hours). Graduate Assistants who are in their last 12 hours have the option to take two semesters of six hours each, instead of nine hours in the first semester and three hours in the second semester. The English language proficiencies of international students must be thoroughly evaluated in relationship to the demands of the assistantship assignment prior to the start of the appointment period.

APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES

Appointments of graduate assistants will be made by the Dean of the Graduate School upon the recommendation of the department or program. Following the Dean's approval of the departmental recommendation, an offer of the assistantship is made to the applicant. Offers of assistantships to prospective students and resignations from appointments must conform to the established procedures of the Council of Graduate Schools. It is the student's responsibility to see that hiring packet forms are completed prior to the start date of the appointment. By Internal Revenue Service regulations, the Human Resources Office cannot enter the assignment into the University's payroll system until these forms have been completed by the student.

The department chairperson should prepare the Personnel Action Form (PAF) and should provide the graduate assistant with a job description detailing the specific responsibilities and specific departmental policies governing graduate assistants. The new assistant should be notified of orientation meetings and other training opportunities as soon as they are scheduled.

The University Budget Office has specific deadlines which must be met for the processing of the PAF. Failure to meet these deadlines in processing the PAF, W-4, and I-9 will delay the issuance of the first paycheck.

LENGTH OF APPOINTMENT

Graduate assistants on Graduate School sponsored appointments may be appointed for up to 12 months per contract period. Nine-month appointments would generally correspond to thirty-six (36) weeks of service (18 semi-monthly pay periods). Twelve-month appointments would generally correspond to fifty-two (52) weeks of service (24 semi-monthly pay periods). The start and end dates of all appointments must be within the University's fiscal year, July 1 to June 30.

Some graduate assistantship appointments receive their funding from external sources (i.e., Federal grants, community agencies) although the student is paid through the University's payroll system. These appointments will generally carry appointment periods reflecting the funding period of the external source. For example, a student on an assistantship funded by an Office of Education grant might have an appointment for the period September 1 through August 30.

GOOD ACADEMIC STANDING

The student must have been admitted with full qualifications in accordance with the admission policies and procedures of the Graduate School and the selected department, as outlined in the Graduate Bulletin. A Graduate Assistant (GA) is expected to maintain a cumulative and program GPA of 3.0 or higher. If a GA does not meet these conditions, the GA is allowed one semester to continue as a GA while on probation. If at the end of the additional semester the GA is still on probation, the assistantship will be terminated.

CONDITIONS OF REAPPOINTMENT

Graduate assistants who are performing satisfactorily in their studies and duties are eligible for annual reappointments. Academic and professional performance and progress are measured by the following criteria: (1) grade-point average, cumulative and over the past academic year, of at least 3.0; (2) student academic record with no incomplete grades; (3) report of the academic advisor; (4) length of time holding the assistantship; and, (5) length of time in the degree program.

Typically, the maximum number of years that a graduate student may hold an assistantship is two years while pursuing a Master's degree and four years in a Doctoral program. In the case of a student pursuing the Master's and Doctoral degree in the same major field, eligibility for funding is for not more than five years. Requests for exceptions to this policy must be made in writing by the department chair and approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

If the department has a rotational plan for assistantships, graduate assistants may not necessarily be reappointed. It is important that the student is notified of this fact at the time of the original appointment.

BENEFITS FOR ASSISTANTS

Since graduate assistants are not employees of the University, they enjoy all the rights and privileges of other graduate students. The privileges and benefits of assistantships are variable across and within departments of the University and are based on the responsibilities assigned.

Out of State Fee Waiver Only full-time graduate assistants (students working 20 hours per week) are eligible for a waiver of out-of-state tuition fees. Graduate assistants working less than 20 hours per week are not eligible for the waiver.

Tuition Scholarship Graduate assistants will receive a salary and a limited number of assistants may also be awarded a tuition scholarship. Tuition scholarship hours may be used for tuition and course-related fee charges. Each department should specify a maximum tuition award amount to be awarded per term. Tuition award will not exceed actual costs, and students will receive no reimbursement of an unused tuition award.

Tuition scholarship hours awarded in conjunction with a graduate assistantship cannot be moved from one semester to another without the written approval of the department chair or program director and the Dean of the Graduate School. Tuition scholarship hours cannot be transferred from one fiscal year to the next. Any unused scholarship hours will not be reimbursed as a cash award to the student. If a graduate assistant resigns or is terminated during the semester of assignment and has received a tuition scholarship, the assistant will be required to pay a prorated portion of the tuition and fees represented

by the part of the semester remaining after the resignation or termination.

Scholarship hours awarded in conjunction with a graduate appointment can only be awarded during the period of appointment. For example, a student awarded an assistantship for fall and spring cannot use the accompanying tuition scholarship during the Summer Session prior to or following the award period.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF ASSISTANTS

A graduate assistant is expected to make steady progress toward the degree while effectively performing assigned duties. The course load and assistantship responsibilities should form a program that facilitates the student's progress.

A graduate assistant must be registered each academic semester during the appointment period, including the Summer Session, if applicable. The mentor and/or faculty advisor has a solemn responsibility to help the student monitor his/her ability to manage both the academic and assistantship roles. An assistant may perform assistantship duties for a maximum of twenty (20) hours per week. Work hours missed must be made-up the same month in which you are being paid unless other arrangements are made with your supervisor or department.

The graduate assistant should be informed of departmental, college, and university regulations and follow them consistently. Assistants are obligated to maintain standards of academic honesty and integrity.

Students appointed to a full-time assistantship may not engage in any concurrent employment without the expressed consent of the department or program and the Dean of the Graduate School. Requests for an exemption must be made in writing to the Graduate Dean. The request should include details of the time commitment (number of hours per week), the length of the commitment (dates), and a description of the opportunity and how it is a benefit to the student's professional development. Participation in any unapproved employment will result in the immediate withdrawal of the assistantship.

Fair Labor Standards Act Departments and graduate assistants should be aware of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), which does not permit an employee to be paid an hourly (non-exempt) wage and a salary (exempt) wage by the same employer for two or more distinct positions simultaneously. Teaching and Research graduate appointments at the University of Central Arkansas are considered exempt (salary) positions. Graduate assistants cannot hold, in addition to the assistantship, other jobs which are hourly paid (e.g., college work-study, student worker). Under no circumstances will a graduate assistant be allowed to hold a nonexempt (hourly) position while on an assistantship.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEPARTMENTS

The integration of the assistantship responsibilities and academic program must be carefully coordinated and monitored by a faculty mentor. Graduate assistants should be assigned space, supplies, and equipment to carry out their assignments effectively. Each department must indicate the individual who has the overall responsibility for the department's assistantship program. This may be the department chair, graduate coordinator, or another designee. Graduate School personnel will work directly with the departmental assistantship coordinator on all matters relating to graduate assistants. Departments that receive Graduate School funds for assistantships should develop assistantship manuals or supplements that include the following:

- (1) description of the responsibilities and expectations associated with each Graduate School funded assistantship;
- (2) description of orientation, training, and mentoring activities for assistants;
- (3) an evaluation of the assistant by the supervisor;
- (4) timesheet records for Administrative graduate assistants.

EVALUATION PROCEDURES

Departments are expected to design an evaluation plan consistent with Section IX, Item 3 above. Evaluation should be an ongoing process of communication between the graduate assistant and the faculty mentor. A formal evaluation should be a supportive process that helps the assistant to identify strengths and weaknesses and to plan concretely for improvement. A formal evaluation should be entered into the student's departmental record each year.

Graduate assistants will have the opportunity to evaluate the assistantship experience each year. The Dean of the Graduate School will conduct this evaluation during the spring semester each year. Assistants will be asked to describe the activities in which they have been engaged as an assistant and how they have benefited from the experiences. The faculty mentor will also describe how the assistant has contributed to the graduate program goals and objectives. This evaluation should be a supportive process which will help the department identify the strengths and weakness of its assistantship program.

The Graduate Dean will meet with the department's assistantship coordinator and chairperson to discuss the evaluation data. The Graduate Dean will then meet with the Dean of the School in which the department is located to discuss recommendations for the departmental assignment of assistantships for the next academic year.

RESIGNATION/TERMINATION

Failure to perform duties assigned in a satisfactory manner, or failure to comply with academic/university policies may result in the termination of the assistantship. Graduate assistants with an associated tuition scholarship and/or out-of-state fee waiver who do not complete a full semester will be responsible for tuition and fees on a prorated basis.

Resignation from any graduate appointment must be communicated in writing to the Graduate School and countersigned by the department or program chairperson or project director. The exact date of resignation or termination must be indicated on a Personnel Action Form (PAF).

OTHER IMPORTANT POLICIES/DOCUMENTS

It is essential that all graduate assistants familiarize themselves with Graduate School and University policies. All graduate assistants should obtain a copy of the Graduate Bulletin and the UCA Student Handbook. Graduate Assistants are expected to know and adhere to the policies outlined in both documents.