

**POLICY AND PROCEDURE FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA**

FOREWORD

The duties and responsibilities of the graduate assistants are carried out directly under the supervision of members of the Graduate Faculty. It is incumbent upon all graduate assistants to become familiar with the rules and regulations of the Graduate School and of the specific program in which they are enrolled.

I **DEFINITION**-A graduate assistantship is an award made on a competitive basis to graduate students (degree seeking only) at the University of South Alabama. Graduate assistants receive a stipend as determined by the department in consultation with the Graduate Dean. A tuition remission pays the cost of a maximum of ten semester credit hours per term. The tuition remission does not include any university, college, or course fees. No tuition will be paid for courses audited or courses not a part of the degree program. Graduate students are assigned duties related to their program of study. Graduate assistants may hold any of three types of Graduate Assistantships: *Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)*, *Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)*, or *Graduate Assistantship (GA)*.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships require special qualifications as detailed in section XII of this document. GTA's are permitted to have duties including primary responsibility for teaching appropriate classes as well as other duties in support of instruction.

Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA) are associated with an expectation that the primary duty will be concerned with research.

Graduate Assistantships (GA) are associated with general duties per the needs of the particular department. Duties may involve various tasks in assisting instructors, assisting in research or scholarly activities, or other support duties assigned by the particular department.

The Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) is divided into two roles: **GRA I** and **GRA II**:

Graduate Research Assistant I - research_students for whom the program requires conduct of research involving field work, clinical work, or otherwise places the student in an environment that exposes them to substantial health hazards. Beginning spring 2022, all **GRA I** students enrolled in the Ph.D. and M.S. in Marine Sciences, and the Ph.D. in Clinical and Counseling Psychology will be required to provide proof of health insurance. Faculty supporting a **GRA I** student on a grant, must include health insurance in the budget if allowed by the

funding agency. If no other funds are available, the Graduate School will cover the cost of health insurance for **GRA I** student if available. Insurance received will be considered taxable income.

Graduate Research Assistant II - all other research doctoral or masters students.

The Graduate Assistant (GA) is divided into two roles: **GA I** and **GA II**:

Graduate Assistant I - work duties are greater than 50% devoted to research and teaching activities (research and teaching activities can include assisting in grading papers, lab work, etc. or assisting a faculty member with research or time spent involved with thesis and dissertation research). Graduate Assistant I tuition remission will **not** be taxed due to federal government regulations.

Graduate Assistant II - work duties are less than 50% devoted to research and teaching. Graduate Assistant II work duties may include clerical, administrative, and other appropriate duties so long as these occupy the minority of the student's work assignment. Graduate Assistant II tuition remission **will** be taxed due to federal government regulations.

II QUALIFICATIONS-Selection of students for graduate assistantships is based on academic performance, letters of recommendation and, in some cases, standardized test scores. Graduate School funded Graduate Assistants must be enrolled for at least six hours per semester, unless the graduate assistant is either in the final stages of their program or it is the summer semester, and a reduced load is justified. When a student has met the minimum program requirements for thesis or dissertation credit hours, the student should only be enrolled in one credit hour of thesis or dissertation; the department must request an exception for a reduced credit hour load. Graduate Assistants who receive this exception will be reviewed by the Graduate School for funding eligibility on a semester-by-semester basis. A program completion plan may be required by the Dean of the Graduate School to receive this exception. Graduate Assistantships funded by external sources must comply with the conditions of the award.

Note: Federal guidelines define part-time as less than 3 credit hours. Failure to enroll in at least 3 credit hours may affect deferment of student loan payments and be subject to FICA withholding.

In addition to above, only those graduate students meeting the following criteria will be eligible to apply for Graduate School Tuition remission:

Recipient of (or applicant for) a USA Graduate Assistantship, funded by the Graduate School allocation to the department or program.

Recipient of (or applicant for) a Graduate Research Assistantship funded by an

extramural grant or contract.

Recipient of (or applicant for) a Graduate Assistantship funded by a budgeted position in a college, department or program, specifically designated as a "graduate assistantship."

III APPOINTMENT OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS-Applications for graduate assistantships are available online at:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/GSForm12GradAssistanship.pdf> .

Deadlines for application may be specified by individual departments. Applications to the Graduate School for assistantships must be received by the deadline posted each term. To allow time for preparation and processing, each department should be consulted for earlier departmental deadlines.

Every student appointed as a graduate assistant will be given an official letter of appointment which will state the terms of the appointment. This statement will include:

- The stipend
- The maximum tuition remission available
- The dates of appointment
- An acceptance deadline date

For students who are graduating, the appointment end date may not extend beyond the Saturday following the final exam period per the Academic Calendar.

For detailed information on **Graduate Assistant employment**, please go to <http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/gradstudentemppolicy.pdf>

A graduate assistantship may be canceled due to budgetary consideration.

Graduate Assistants teaching in an unsupervised environment, such as a lab or tutoring center, with undergraduate students are required to complete a **background check** for any criminal history, to verify social security validity, and to check the National Sex Offender Registry. Information obtained is kept strictly confidential.

IV DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES-The duties and responsibilities of graduate assistants will vary from program to program.

Graduate assistants will serve under the direction and supervision of regularly appointed members of the Graduate Faculty.

Graduate assistants are obligated to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity and to keep informed of and follow program, departmental,

college, and University rules and regulations.

Graduate assistants are not permitted to enroll in any course for which they are assigned assistantship responsibilities.

A graduate assistant who drops a course, withdraws from the University, or resigns an assistantship before the end of the semester will be required to reimburse the University for courses paid by the tuition remission on a prorated basis.

A student appointed to a 0.5 FTE Graduate Assistantship may not hold an additional job or appointment at the University during the GA appointment period.

- V TIME COMMITMENT**-The time commitment for an assistantship can be either 0.25 FTE or 0.5 FTE. An 0.25 FTE appointment requires an average of 10 hours per week during the appointment period. An 0.5 FTE appointment requires an average of 20 hours per week during the appointment period. The number of hours worked in a given week may vary based on the student's work assignments and time commitments. This time includes hours spent in preparation or in supporting work outside the classroom or laboratory. This work load is not to interfere with academic responsibilities. ***The pay calendar for appointment dates is set by the Graduate School each academic year.***

Appointment of an 0.25 FTE graduate assistantship requires prior written approval of the Graduate School Dean. Graduate Research Assistant I appointments must be 0.5 FTE.

Assistantship funds provided by the Graduate School may not be used for work assigned outside of the designated assistantship work period.

The work commitment is included in a semester work schedule to be established at the initiation of work assignments. If unable to perform any duties, the assistant will notify their respective supervisors of the circumstances as soon as possible.

During periods of limited or modified hours of business operation on the USA campus, such as during a pandemic, work assignments requiring physical campus presence will be modified to comply with campus operating guidelines for USA students. Work assignments funded by sources external to the institution will be modified to comply with operating guidelines provided by the Office of Research and Economic Development. Grievances regarding work assignments during limited or modified hours of business operation will be resolved using the Procedures for Resolving Complaints in section IX.

- VI FORMAL EVALUATIONS**-Prior to the end of each academic year, a graduate assistant will receive a performance evaluation. The evaluation must be signed by the student and the student's supervisor. The graduate assistant will receive a copy and a copy will

be housed in the Graduate School. In addition, Graduate Teaching Assistants will be evaluated using the Part-time Faculty Teaching Evaluation Form. The form can be found on the Academic Affairs website.

VII REAPPOINTMENT OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS-Reappointment will be considered for those assistants who are making satisfactory progress toward completion of their degree program, have been performing well in their assistantships based on formal evaluations, and the length of time they have held their assistantships.

VIII ASSISTANTSHIP STIPEND AND TUITION REMISSION-

Graduate assistants are considered residents of the state for tuition purposes. Students appointed as 0.25 FTE pay 50% of the cost of tuition at the in-state rate. International students who hold a graduate assistantship appointment are not charged the International Student Fee. Students who hold a graduate assistantship during the spring term are still considered residents for the subsequent summer term even if the student does not hold an assistantship for the summer term. This means that if such a student chooses to take and pay for courses during the summer term, the student will pay in-state tuition rates.

A biweekly timesheet must be signed by the student's graduate faculty supervisor and departmental chair and returned to the payroll department for each pay period. The biweekly timesheet documents hours worked by a Graduate Assistant per the Affordable Care Act. The hours reported on any given timesheet do NOT affect the student's pay. A Graduate Assistant who submits a 0-hour timesheet will still be paid per their appointment if signed by the supervisor. When a Graduate Assistant supervisor approves a 0-hour timesheet, the supervisor is attesting the student worked zero hours but should be paid. If a timesheet is not submitted, a check will not be available to the student for that pay period. Checks are direct deposited.

For Graduate Assistants funded on external grants or contracts, other terms may apply and should be followed per the award. For example, some contracts stipulate a billable-hours model where a student will not be paid for a 0-hour timesheet.

Income tax forms, a FICA withholding statement, and a direct deposit form must be completed and submitted to the Payroll Office. An I-9 verification form must be completed with appropriate identification documents in the Payroll Office (AD 280) before the student may begin work.

IX PROCEDURES FOR RESOLVING GRIEVANCES-Graduate assistants may use this process to seek redress of grievances arising out of terms or conditions of the graduate

assistantship appointment.

INFORMAL RESOLUTION-The graduate assistant should make every effort to resolve a grievance with the graduate supervisor. A graduate assistant who is unsatisfied with the outcome of the informal resolution may request mediation.

REQUEST FOR MEDIATION-The graduate assistant shall prepare and submit a written grievance to the Department Chair. A copy of the grievance shall be sent to the appropriate Dean to whom the Chair reports as well as the person or persons against whom the grievance is filed (Respondent). If the Department Chair is party to the grievance, or if there is no Department Chair or Acting Chair, the grievance shall be submitted to the appropriate Dean. If the graduate assistantship appointment is funded in part or in full from external sources, other parties may be involved as necessary (e.g., Institutional Research or Grants and Contracts).

MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION-Upon receipt of the grievance, the Chair shall set up a conference with the Grievant and the Respondent. The chair should schedule and hold the conference as soon as practicable, ensuring there is no delay that might unfairly penalize the graduate assistant. The Respondent may submit a written response to the Chair prior to this meeting. The Chair acts as a mediator to seek a mutually satisfactory resolution. If a mutually satisfactory resolution cannot be reached, the appropriate Dean will review the grievance and evidence presented, and decide on a resolution. A Grievant or Respondent who is unsatisfied with the Dean's resolution may appeal to the Dean of the Graduate School.

APPEAL-The Dean of the Graduate School will review the mediated resolution to ensure that proper procedure has been followed throughout the process, render a decision, and notify the Grievant and Respondent. The Dean of the Graduate School may decide to uphold the mediated resolution, revise the mediated resolution, decide on a new resolution, or dismiss the grievance. The decision of the Dean of the Graduate School is considered final and is not subject to further appeal. If the Dean of the Graduate School is party to the grievance, the appeal will be reviewed by the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

X TERMINATION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANT APPOINTMENT

Any appointment may be curtailed, diminished, or terminated at any time for lack of funds; failure of the student to maintain satisfactory student status or to make appropriate progress toward the degree; no further need for the functions to be performed; incompetence or misconduct of the graduate assistant or fellow; or failure to complete the degree requirements.

A termination of appointment action is initiated by the Chair of the department to which the graduate assistant is assigned. The Chair meets with the graduate assistant

and explains the causes of termination.

The Department Chair forwards a recommendation for termination of appointment to Director of Graduate Studies of the appropriate college. The letter explains the basis of the recommendation for termination. The Director of Graduate Studies reviews the recommendation for termination of appointment and may investigate the circumstances of the termination. After the review, the Director of Graduate Studies sends a recommendation regarding the termination to the Dean of the Graduate School. Only the Graduate Dean may terminate an appointment.

Grievances in regard to termination shall follow the Procedure for Resolving Complaints (See IX).

A termination for budgetary considerations is not subject to the Procedure for Resolving Complaints.

- XI** **ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**-Expenses incident to assigned duties. Graduate assistants will be reimbursed by the institution of necessary expenses and/or travel associated with assigned duties.

The graduate assistant shall secure approval from the Department Chair prior to incurring expenses.

The department or college will provide the necessary physical space and services for execution of the graduate assistant's duties.

- XII** **UNIVERSITY GUIDELINES FOR THE USE OF GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS**-The employment of graduate teaching assistantships will be carefully planned and carried out in a manner providing the greatest possible benefits to the university's students, the graduate assistants, the departments involved, and the reputation of the university.

All graduate students holding the title of Graduate Teaching Assistant must be fully qualified to the standard of having earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in their discipline. This permits students in this category to be assigned primary responsibility for teaching a suitable undergraduate course for credit and assigning final grades. SACS requires assistants with primary teaching responsibilities to have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in their teaching discipline. Assistants with primary teaching responsibility will serve under the supervision of a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training, and be evaluated regularly in accordance with department policy.

Graduate Teaching Assistants are required to complete a **background check** for any criminal history, to verify social security validity, and to check the National Sex Offender Registry. Information obtained is kept strictly confidential.

Graduate teaching responsibilities may include responsibilities for teaching one or more classes and/or other assignments such as assisting in laboratory sessions, helping prepare lectures, grading papers, keeping class records, and conducting discussing groups.

Each department employing graduate teaching assistants will establish comprehensive policies on the hiring, training, overseeing, and evaluation of the assistants. The departmental plan and evaluations will be reviewed by the appropriate college, under the authority of the college's Director of Graduate Studies.

Departmental policies supplement the following institutional guidelines:

Appointment criteria: The Applicant will meet all existing criteria for general graduate assistantships. Recommendation letters should specifically address the applicant's potential as a teacher. Graduate teaching assistants for whom English is a second language must make a satisfactory score on a test of spoken English before being given classroom assignments, or provide other reliable evidence of proficiency in written and oral communication.

Appointment process: GTA appointments require an Appointment Form, a PA (paper or electronic), a GTA Supplemental Appointment Form, and a completed file as indicated on the Supplemental Appointment Form (rec letters, transcripts, biographical data form, CV, and USA Faculty Consent Form). This process is very similar to the appointment of part-time faculty. A GTA appointment requires a background check.

Remuneration: Graduate teaching assistants receive a stipend as well as remission of 10 semester hours per term tuition. The university is committed to working toward equity with other regional graduate institutions in order to attract the best possible students to these assistantships.

Rights and responsibilities: Graduate teaching assistants will have access to such professional development activities as workshops, seminars, or other instructional resources established for faculty growth. Those graduate teaching assistants with primary responsibility in the classroom must comply with the provisions of the USA Faculty Handbook.

Evaluation and reappointment: As with all assistantships, the initial appointment is for one academic year. Teaching assistants may be reappointed for an additional year subject to satisfactory completion of teaching responsibilities, satisfactory academic performance, and timely progress toward the degree. A written evaluation of teaching performance, including input from students as well as supervisors or regular faculty members, should be submitted each semester to the student and forwarded to the Graduate School which will maintain a record of the evaluations.

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/PolicyProceduresGradAssist.pdf>