

**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 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.

This category (GA) is divided into two roles: **Graduate Assistant I** and **Graduate Assistant 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 funding 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 majority of the student's work assignment. Graduate Assistant II tuition funding **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. The student must be enrolled for at least six hours per semester, unless the graduate assistant is involved in their thesis or dissertation preparation. Some departments require a higher course load.

***Note that failure to enroll for a full (6hr) load will result in classification as a part-time student and will affect deferment of student loan payments. Students enrolled for less than 3 hours will be subject to FICA withholding. The ONLY exception to the 6 hour full load requirement is if the student is in the final stages of their program and a reduced load is justified. For more information see section 4 of the Graduate Student Employment Policy.***

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

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> .

In addition to the application, a candidate must submit three letters of recommendation, standardized test scores if specified by the department, and transcripts of all previous college level work. 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 fellowship available

The dates of appointment.

An acceptance deadline date.

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.

#### **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 or fellow (tuition) 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 fellowship.

A student may hold only one assistantship at a time.

- V TIME COMMITMENT**-The time commitment for an assistantship is twenty hours per week devoted to assigned duties at the University. 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 work period is set by the Graduate School office each academic year.***

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.

- VI FORMAL EVALUATIONS**-Prior to the end of each academic year, the department will evaluate the performance of all graduate assistants. The graduate assistant will be given a written evaluation; a copy shall be kept on file in the department office for the duration of the appointment. The original evaluations shall be forwarded to the Graduate Dean's office to be filed in permanent archive records.

- 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 FELLOWSHIP**-Graduate assistants receive a stipend as determined by the department in consultation with the Graduate Dean. An additional tuition fellowship will pay course fees for a maximum of ten semester hours per term, but only for courses that are essential to the degree program. The International Fee is covered by the tuition fellowship, however, no other fees will be paid. No tuition will be paid for courses audited or courses not a part of the degree program.

Assistants are considered residents of the state for tuition purposes. 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; hours worked detail is required, the submission of a timesheet indicates that the graduate assistant is consistently performing his/her assistantship duties. If a timesheet is not submitted, a check will not be available to the student for that pay period. Checks are direct deposited.

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 COMPLAINTS**-This process is not the same as the Graduate Student Academic Misconduct Policy or Final Grade Grievance Procedure. Consult "The Lowdown" (student handbook) for either of these policies and procedures.

**INFORMAL DISCUSSION**-The graduate assistant should make every effort to resolve a complaint with the graduate supervisor. If this form of negotiation does not result in an acceptable agreement, the following steps shall be taken.

**REQUEST FOR MEDIATION**-The graduate assistant shall prepare and submit a written grievance to the Department Chair, or to the appropriate Dean if the Department Chair is party to the dispute, or if there is no Department Chair or Acting Chair. A copy of the grievance shall be sent to the appropriate Dean to whom the Chair reports. For following references to "Chair" read also "or appropriate Dean."

**MEDIATION AND RESOLUTION**-The person grieved against may submit a written response to the Chair before the meeting with the Chair occurs. The Chair acts as a mediator to attempt to resolve the complaint. If the difficulty cannot be resolved, the written complaint, a written response from the other party, and a recommendation from the Department Chair are submitted for resolution to the Director of Graduate Studies who will consider the complaint and make a decision.

**APPEALS**-Either party involved in the complaint may appeal the decision to the Graduate Dean whose ruling will be final.

**X TERMINATION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANT OR TUITION FELLOW 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 Chair forwards a recommendation for termination of appointment to the 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 assistants' 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.

Beginning **Fall 2014**, all Graduate Teaching Assistants are required to submit to 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.

**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.