

GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK



**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND RESEARCH**

**TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE**

2014-2015

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WELCOME

Dear Graduate Assistant:

Congratulations on your appointment as a Graduate Assistant at Tennessee State University. We hope you will find your graduate assistant assignments rewarding. As a graduate assistant, you provide a valuable service to the University. You will assist faculty and professional staff in administrative, research and instructional areas. In addition to strengthening your administrative, research or teaching skills, the graduate assistantship is intended to accelerate progression and completion of your degree program.

This handbook serves as a resource for graduate assistants, faculty, and administrators. It provides information pertaining to the responsibilities, privileges, rights, policies and procedures governing graduate assistantships at Tennessee State University. It is intended to simplify and facilitate the administration of graduate assistantship in the University.

All graduate assistantships in the University are administered through the Office of Graduate Studies & Research regardless of the source of funding. Should you have questions about this handbook or graduate assistantships in general, please feel free to contact the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

Best wishes for a successful service and a rewarding graduate assistantship experience.

Graduate School

I. DEFINITION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANT

A graduate assistant is a student enrolled in graduate studies at the University and is employed to provide instructional, research or administrative assistance to faculty, administrators and staff. In exchange for services rendered, a graduate assistant is awarded a stipend/salary and in most cases receive full or partial tuition and fees remission benefit. A graduate assistant is a part-time University employee.

II. TYPES OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

There are three types of graduate assistants at Tennessee State University: teaching assistants, research assistants, and administrative assistants.

Teaching Assistants

Teaching Assistants are graduate students hired to provide instructional classroom or/and laboratory support in a specific academic department. Teaching Assistants with instructional duties may be assigned to teach all or parts of a course. Teaching Assistants assigned instructional responsibilities must be guided and supervised by a full-time faculty. They must be provided office space and given orientation by the hiring department prior to assuming their instructional responsibilities.

Like faculty, Teaching Assistants must have their teaching evaluated by students. The University faculty evaluation form or a similar form developed by the department may be used for evaluating Teaching Assistants.

Teaching Assistants may not teach courses which carry graduate credit. Further, they may not enroll in courses for which they have assigned responsibilities.

Graduate Assistants who have accumulated fewer than 18 semester hours of course work in their instructional fields should not be given primary teaching responsibilities. They may however work in laboratories and clinics.

Research Assistants

Although the duties of Research Assistants vary by discipline, they are typically assigned to work with faculty on research projects. Typical duties of Research Assistants include but are not limited to library research, fieldwork, laboratory experiments, and data collection and analysis. Research assistants are typically funded through external grants and contracts.

Administrative Graduate Assistants

Administrative Graduate Assistants provide administrative support to a specific department or unit within the University. Major areas of responsibilities include clerical and technical support functions. Their specific duties include but not limited to updating unit website, compiling data, library research, registration and advisement support, and other similarly related administrative functions.

III. GRADUATE ASSISTANT AND SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Graduate Assistants' Responsibilities

1. Graduate Assistants are to work closely with their supervisors in the discharge of assigned duties while at the same time making progress toward the completion of their degree programs;
2. Graduate Assistants are expected to adhere to the policies and regulations of the university as published in the faculty and student handbooks;
3. Graduate Assistants are advised that should they not fulfill conditions of their employment contracts, they may be obligated to repay monies to the university; and
4. Graduate Assistants who voluntarily resign their positions should communicate their intent in writing to the supervisor and the Graduate Dean.

Graduate Assistant Supervision

Graduate assistants must work under the supervision of an assigned graduate faculty member or a professional employee/administrator (in the case of administrative assistants).

Supervisor Responsibilities

1. Provides job description to Graduate Assistants with duties and assignments clearly delineated;
2. Prepares and coordinates work schedule for Graduate Assistants which accommodates their course schedules;
3. Certifies and approves/signs Graduate Assistants time-sheets.
4. Evaluates Graduate Assistants job performance annually;
5. Communicates performance expectations and ways for improvement to Graduate Assistant; and
6. Monitors academic progress of Graduate Assistants in degree program.

IV. GRADUATE ASSISTANT APPOINTMENT

Appointment Procedures

Appointments of graduate assistants will be recommended by departmental chairpersons and approved by the Dean of the college. Appointments will be processed through the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research who has primary responsibility for the coordination of graduate assistantships.

To the extent possible, appointees will be placed in positions related to their academic specialties.

Steps

1. The Graduate Assistant appointment process begins by graduate student filing the “Graduate Assistant Application form (Appendix A). This form is available online at www.tnstate.edu/grad (listed under Forms and Publications). It should be filed one semester in advance of the anticipated start date;
2. Upon filling the form, graduate student submits it to the hiring department or unit;
3. Upon receipt of applications, the hiring department reviews them and makes selection decisions. Applicants should be interviewed for the positions;
4. Hiring department notifies in writing decision to hire or not to hire; and
5. Hiring department submits Graduate Assistant Form in **PeopleAdmin** and if applicable the **Authorization to Credit Award to Student (Appendix C)** to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research.

Duration of Appointment

Graduate Assistants must be appointed for a minimum of one semester. Typical Graduate Assistant appointments cover one academic year (fall and spring). Calendar year (twelve months) or summer (three months) appointments are acceptable. Fees and tuition scholarships are subject to proration if student appointment occurs after the beginning of a term.

Reappointments are not automatic. The establish requirements and procedures should be followed.

V. GRADUATE ASSISTANT POLICIES

Eligibility Requirements

1. Students must be admitted unconditionally to the Graduate School (pre-requisite course conditions do not apply).
2. Students must enrolled full time (9-12 credit hours) in a specific graduate degree program and make progress toward degree completion.
3. Students must be in good academic standing by maintaining at least a 3.00 (B) cumulative grade point average (GPA) to retain their assistantships. If at any point the cumulative average falls below 3.00 or the number of credit hours becomes less than nine (9), the graduate assistantship will be terminated. During the last semester of matriculation, the Graduate Assistant may enroll in less than the above credit load.
4. International students must meet all student visa requirements including permission to work on campus.
5. Students may not hold dual or other employment on campus during the period of employment as a graduate assistant without prior approval by his/her Supervisor, Department Head, College Dean and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.
6. Students registered as sex offenders may not be eligible for graduate assistantship (see Appendix D: **TBR Policy 5:02:05:00**).

Reappointment Requirements

Reappointment to an assistantship is not automatic; however, those graduate assistants who make progress toward degree completion will be given priority. Both appointment and reappointment decisions are based upon departmental needs and availability of financial resources.

Reappointment of a Graduate Assistant is subject to the following conditions:

1. Must receive positive evaluation on their job performance by their supervisors
2. Teaching Assistants must receive favorable student evaluations.
3. Make satisfactory progress towards degree completion while maintaining a minimum cumulative GPA of a 3.00
4. Reappointment contingent upon availability of funds.
5. An incomplete "I" grade must be removed the following semester in which the "I" was recorded otherwise the student must relinquish the assistantship.
6. May not withdraw from class without extenuating circumstances.

Contract

Graduate Assistants should not begin work until the Office Human Resources (HR) has received and processed appointment paperwork. Work should begin once a graduate assistant has signed a contract in the Office of Human Resources.

Residency Classification

All non-resident Graduate Assistants are entitled to receive out of state tuition waivers as long as there are employed as a Graduate Assistant. All non-resident Graduate Assistants who receive out-of-state tuition waivers will have their financial aid budget adjusted to an in-state budget. Please notify The Office of Financial Aid when your residency classification changes as this may affect your financial aid award.

Workloads

Graduate assistants are limited to a maximum of 20 work hours per week for the duration of the appointment. Graduate assistants on a full-time contract (20 work hours per week) may not hold other employment on campus.

The minimum appointment allowed for graduate assistants is half-graduate assistantship (10 work hours per week). Graduate assistants on half-time appointment cannot work more than 10 hours per week.

TSU Graduate Assistant workload requirements for full-time Graduate Assistants are consistent with established Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) guidelines and are as follows (**Appendix E**):

- i. Six (6) contact hours per week in classroom or laboratory instruction;
- ii. Eight (8) contact hours per week in laboratory supervision;
- iii. Twenty (20) clock hours per week in supervised activities in the department of their employment; or
- vi. A combination of the above.

Course Loads

All graduate assistants must enroll in a minimum of nine (9) credit hours per semester. Graduate assistants may not register in more than 12 credit hours per semester without prior approval by their academic advisor and the Graduate Dean. The nine (9) semester hour minimum requirement is waived when the student is enrolled in the last semester of completing degree requirements or enrolled in thesis/dissertation continuation credits.

Course audit work cannot be used to meet the minimum course load. Graduate assistants must seek approval of his/her academic advisor and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research if they choose to audit a course. Students bear the tuition and fees cost for course audit since credit earned by course audit do not counts towards degree requirements.

Compensation

The compensation package of a graduate assistantship includes a salary/stipend, and in many cases a scholarship which covers full tuition and fees or tuition and fees remission. Graduate assistants supported by university/state funds receive both stipend and tuition and fees or tuition and fees remission. Graduate assistants supported by external grants receive stipends but may not received tuition and fees remission. Graduate Students cannot be awarded half assistantships without receiving remission for at least half of the in-state fees and tuition.

Salary or stipend

Graduate Assistants are part-time salaried University employees and therefore are not paid hourly rates. They are paid monthly through the University payroll system (on the last day of the month worked). The salaries/stipends of Graduate Assistants may vary by source of funding, degree type or by discipline.

Tuition and Fee Waivers and Remission

In addition to receiving a salary or a stipend, Graduate Assistants supported by university/state funds are eligible for full or partial (50 percent) tuition and fees remission for a maximum of 9 credits per semester. Graduate assistants classified as full-time (work 20 hours per week) are eligible to receive the approved full stipend and scholarship award (full tuition and fees).

Part-time v. Full-time Graduate Assistant

1. Graduate assistants classified as half-time, will receive ½ of the stipend and ½ of the tuition and fees of Full-time graduate assistants.
2. Half-time graduate assistants are responsible for paying the balance of their tuition and fees.
3. Full-time graduate assistants will receive the approved full stipend and full tuition and fees.
4. The minimum award allowed for graduate assistants is a half-graduate assistantship (10 hours/week).
5. Out-of-state fees for all graduate assistants (full time or half-time) will be waived.
6. All graduate assistants (with either full or ½ graduate assistantship) must enroll in a minimum of nine (9) credit hours per semester and make progress towards completion of their degree programs.

Out of State Tuition and Fee Waiver

Non-Resident Graduate Assistants are eligible for a waiver of the out-of-state portion of tuition and fees. A minimum of one semester appointment as a graduate assistant is required to qualify for the waiver. Nonresident graduate assistants appointed for the proceeding spring semester are eligible for in state fees and tuition whether or not the student holds an assistantship during the summer term.

All non-resident Graduate Assistants who receive out-of-state tuition waivers will have their financial aid budget adjusted to an in-state budget. Please notify The Office of Financial Aid when your residency classification changes as this may affect your financial aid award.

Academic Integrity

Graduate Assistants must understand and uphold academic integrity guidelines established by the School of Graduate Studies and Research (see current Graduate Catalog).

Restriction of Benefits

As part-time employees, Graduate Assistants are ineligible for benefits of full-time University employees. They do not accrue or earn time for holidays, vacations, sick leave, etc. Graduate Assistants do not have health benefits however they may purchase coverage on their own.

Evaluation

There will be at least one formal evaluation of the graduate assistant's work each semester. The graduate assistant supervisor should discuss and record areas of excellence as well as areas of inadequacy. Supervisors should have regular discussions with the Graduate Assistants regarding their performance. Supervisors should use the formal **Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form (Appendix E)** for evaluating the job performance of each graduate assistant.

Graduate Assistants should be notified in writing about decisions which affect their status as assistants. They should be notified about evaluation procedures. Supervisors should discuss job evaluations results with Graduate Assistants prior to submitting reappointment or termination documents.

Termination or Discharge

A graduate assistantship award is subject to revocation prior to the end of the contract for any of the following reasons:

- Unsatisfactory academic performance (academic probation or suspension)
- Unsatisfactory performance of assigned duties
- Unsatisfactory progress towards degree program
- Insubordination
- Academic misconduct or unethical conduct (see Graduate Studies Academic Integrity Statement)
- Prolonged absence due to illness or incapacitation
- Felony conviction

- Other reasons

If a graduate assistant's contract is terminated or cancelled, before the end of the semester, the salary or stipend will end immediately. Graduate Assistants who failed to fulfill conditions of their employment contracts are obligated to repay tuition and fees remission on a pro-rated basis during the semester of termination.

Resignation

A graduate Assistant who chooses to resign during the period of appointment should communicate his/her intent in writing to his/her supervisor and the Graduate Dean. A graduate assistant who tenders resignation prior to the end of his/her contract is required to refund the University on a pro-rated basis the scholarship funds credited to his/her account to cover tuition and fees.

Due Process for Graduate Assistants Terminated from University Employment

Graduate Assistants have the right to appeal termination or discharge from work. Any appeal must be in writing and must be initiated within 30 calendar days following termination. The appeal process should begin at the departmental level (Department Head), followed by the College Dean, and if necessary to the Dean of Graduate Studies. The final level of appeal is the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The decision of the Provost is final.

Appendix D: Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) Policy 5:02:05:00

Subject: Employment of Graduate Assistants

Institutions of the State University and Community College System of Tennessee may employ graduate assistants according to the following guidelines and descriptions:

I. Workload: Full-time graduate assistants will work:

- A. Six (6) contact hours per week in classroom or laboratory instruction;
- B. Eight (8) contact hours per week in laboratory supervision;
- C. Twenty (20) clock hours per week in supervised activities in the department of their employment; or
- D. A combination of the above.

II. Terms of Employment:

The specific terms of the employment may be for an academic year, quarter, semester, fiscal year, or based upon a percentage of full-time assistantship.

III. Salary Schedule:

Each institution which employs graduate assistant shall have a salary schedule which takes into account the particular needs and priorities of the institution.

IV. Eligibility:

A student must be accepted and/or enrolled in the graduate program to be eligible for appointment as a graduate assistant. On campuses that include a public school, private or parochial school, licensed day care center, other child care facility, public park, playground, recreation center or public athletic field available for use by the general public or campuses that are within one thousand feet (1000') of a public school, playground, recreation center or public athletic field available for use by the general public, no student who is registered as a sex offender pursuant to the Tennessee Sexual Offender and Violent Sexual Offender Registration, Verification, and Tracking Act of 2004 and whose victim was a minor is eligible to be an institutional employee who is compensated with taxable wages. On such campuses, a student who is a registered sex offender and whose victim was a minor, is eligible for an appointment as a graduate assistant only if he or she is not receiving any taxable wages or taxable stipends as compensation, and the monetary compensation for the student is limited to awards of non-taxable scholarship or grant funds.

V. Payment:

Salary payments should be made on a monthly basis or at a regularly scheduled time for salary payments to full-time personnel of the institution.

Source: TBR Meetings: August 17, 1973; December 12, 1980; December 2, 1988; June 29, 1990; September 21, 1990; March 28, 2008

Appendix E: Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form

GRADUATE ASSISTANT EVALUATION

Academic units should conduct a periodic review and evaluation of the services rendered by teaching assistants and must communicate the substance of such reviews to the individuals concerned



School of Graduate Studies and Research **GRADUATE ASSISTANT
EVALUATION FORM**
330 10th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37203
615-963-7371
www.tnstate.edu/graduate

Name _____ T-Number _____

Date _____

Department _____

Supervisor _____

Duties (Check one): Teaching Assistant ____ Research Assistant ____ Administrative Assistant ____

Instructions: *Please evaluate the performance of each Graduate Assistant (GA) under your supervision using the scale below. After completing the evaluation, discuss it with the Graduate Assistant and have him/her sign it. Rating of 2 or 1 in any area may result in termination or GA placement on probation. A graduate assistant must be evaluated at least once a semester.*

**SCALE: 5 = Excellent 4 = Above Average 3 = Average 2 = Below Average
1 = unsatisfactory**

_____ 1. Attendance

_____ 2. Punctuality

_____ 3. Attitude

_____ 4. Judgment

_____ 5. Reliability /Dependability

_____ 6. Quality of Work

_____ 7. Relations with others

_____ 8. Ability to accomplish assigned tasks

_____ 9. Willingness to learn new skills

_____ 10. Ability to maintain confidentiality

Total Points _____ Overall Rating _____

Has GA enrolled in at least 9 credit hours? ___ Yes ___ NO

Does GA maintain a 3.0 or higher cumulative GPA? ___ Yes ___ No

Would you recommend reappointment of GA? ___ Yes ___ No

Number of years GA awarded assistantship _____

Signature of Supervisor

Date

Signature of GA

Date

Upon completion, please return Evaluation Form to the School of Graduate Studies & Research

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330 Tenth Avenue North

Nashville, TN 37203