

GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

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I. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Dear Graduate Assistant:

Congratulations on your appointment as a Graduate Assistant at Tennessee State University. We hope you find your Graduate Assistant responsibilities rewarding. As a Graduate Assistant, you provide an important service to the University. You will support faculty and professional staff in administrative, research, and instructional roles. In addition to strengthening your administrative, research, and teaching skills, the Graduate Assistantship is intended to help accelerate progress toward completion of your degree program.

This handbook serves as a resource for Graduate Assistants, faculty, and administrators. It provides information regarding responsibilities, privileges, rights, and the policies and procedures governing Graduate Assistantships at Tennessee State University. The purpose of this handbook is to simplify and facilitate the consistent administration of Graduate Assistantships across the University.

All Graduate Assistantships at Tennessee State University are administered through the School of Graduate & Professional Studies. If you have questions about this handbook or Graduate Assistantships in general, please contact the School of the Dean of Graduate & Professional Studies. Best wishes for a successful service and a rewarding Graduate Assistantship experience.

The Graduate School

II. DEFINITION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANT

A **Graduate Assistant** is a graduate student enrolled at Tennessee State University who is employed to provide instructional, research, or administrative assistance to faculty, administrators, and staff. In exchange for services rendered, a Graduate Assistant receives a salary/stipend and, in most cases, tuition and fee remission benefits. A Graduate Assistant is a part-time University employee.

A. Types and Responsibilities of Graduate Assistants

Tennessee State University Employs Graduate Assistants in three primary categories:

1. Teaching Assistants
 2. Research Assistants
 3. Administrative Assistants
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1. Teaching Assistant

Teaching Assistants are graduate students hired to provide instructional classroom and/or laboratory support within a specific academic department/program. Teaching Assistants with instructional duties may be assigned to teach all or part of a course.

Teaching Assistants assigned instructional responsibilities must be guided and supervised by a full-time faculty member. They must be provided office space and orientation by the hiring department/program prior to assuming instructional responsibilities.

Like faculty, Teaching Assistants must have their teaching evaluated by students. The University's faculty evaluation form or a comparable departmental form may be used.

Limitations:

- Teaching Assistants may not teach courses that carry graduate credit.
 - Teaching Assistants may not enroll in courses for which they have assigned instructional responsibilities.
 - Graduate Assistants with fewer than **18 semester hours** in their instructional fields should not be given primary teaching responsibilities. They may, however, work in laboratories and clinics.
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2. Research Assistant

Although duties of Research Assistants vary by discipline, they are typically assigned to work with faculty on research projects. Typical duties may include, but are not limited to:

- library research
- fieldwork
- laboratory experiments
- data collection and analysis

Research Assistants are typically funded through external grants and contracts.

3. Administrative Assistant

Administrative Graduate Assistants provide administrative support to a specific department or unit within the University. Major areas of responsibility include clerical and technical support functions. Duties may include, but are not limited to:

- updating unit websites
- compiling data

- library research
 - registration and advisement support
 - other similarly related administrative functions
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III. GRADUATE ASSISTANT AND SUPERVISOR RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Graduate Assistant Responsibilities

Graduate Assistants are expected to:

1. Work closely with their supervisors to carry out assigned duties while making progress toward completion of degree requirements.
 2. Adhere to University policies and regulations as published in faculty and student handbooks.
 3. Understand that failure to fulfill the conditions of employment contracts may result in an obligation to repay monies to the University.
 4. If resigning voluntarily, communicate the intent to resign in writing to the supervisor and the Graduate Dean.
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B. Graduate Assistant Supervision

Graduate Assistants must work under the supervision of an assigned graduate faculty member or, for Administrative Assistants, a professional employee/administrator.

C. Supervisor Responsibilities

Supervisors are expected to:

1. Provide a job description to Graduate Assistants with duties and assignments clearly delineated.
 2. Prepare and coordinate a work schedule that accommodates the Graduate Assistant's course schedule.
 3. Certify and approve/sign Graduate Assistant time sheets.
 4. Evaluate Graduate Assistant job performance every semester.
 5. Communicate performance expectations and improvement strategies.
 6. Monitor academic progress in the Graduate Assistant's degree program.
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IV. GRADUATE ASSISTANT APPOINTMENT

A. Appointment Procedures

Graduate Assistant appointments are recommended by departmental chairpersons and approved by the Dean of the college. Appointments are processed through the **Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research**, which has primary responsibility for coordinating Graduate Assistantships. Where possible, appointees will be placed in positions related to their academic specialties.

Steps in the Appointment Process:

The Graduate Assistant appointment process begins when the graduate student completes the [Graduate Assistant Application Form](#). The application should be submitted **one semester in advance** of the anticipated start date.

1. The graduate student submits the completed Graduate Assistant Application Form and resume to the hiring department or unit.
 2. The hiring department reviews applications and makes selection decisions. Applicants should be interviewed before the selection process is finalized.
 3. The hiring department notifies the applicant in writing of the decision to hire or not hire.
 4. The hiring department submits the Graduate Assistant Form in Dynamic Forms and, if applicable, submits the **Authorization to Credit Award to Student Account** to the Office of Graduate Studies and Research.
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B. 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 may also be approved. Fees and tuition scholarships are subject to proration if the student appointment begins after the beginning of a term. Reappointments are **not automatic**. Established hiring requirements and procedures must be followed.

V. GRADUATE ASSISTANT POLICIES

A. Eligibility Requirements

Graduate Assistant eligibility requires the following:

1. Students must be admitted unconditionally to the Graduate School. Students completing prerequisite courses are not eligible for a graduate assistantship.

2. Students must be enrolled full time (**minimum 9 credit hours**) in a specific graduate degree program and make progress toward degree completion.
3. Students must maintain good academic standing by maintaining at least a **3.00 (B)** cumulative GPA. If at any point the cumulative GPA falls below **3.00** or the number of credit hours becomes less than **9**, the Graduate Assistantship will be terminated. During the last semester of matriculation, the Graduate Assistant may enroll in fewer than the above credit hours.
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 Graduate Assistant employment without prior approval from the supervisor, department head, college dean, Dean of Graduate & Professional Studies, and the Office of Human Resources.
6. Students registered as sex offenders may not be eligible for Graduate Assistantship eligibility.

Summer Graduate Assistant eligibility requires the following:

1. Students must be admitted unconditionally to the Graduate School. Students completing prerequisite courses are not eligible for a graduate assistantship.
2. Students must be enrolled part time (minimum 1 credit hour) in a specific graduate degree program and make progress toward degree completion. Credit hour requirements may vary based on the specific grant project requirements.

3. Students who do not enroll in at least 1 credit hour will not be classified as graduate assistants and must instead complete research activities under the University Work Aid policy.
 4. Students must maintain good academic standing by maintaining at least a **3.00 (B)** cumulative GPA. If at any point the cumulative GPA falls below **3.00** or the number of credit hours becomes less than **1**, the Graduate Assistantship will be terminated.
 5. International students must meet all student visa requirements, including permission to work on campus.
 6. Students may not hold dual or other employment on campus during the period of Graduate Assistant employment without prior approval from the supervisor, department head, college dean, Dean of Graduate & Professional Studies, and the Office of Human Resources.
 7. Students registered as sex offenders may not be eligible for Graduate Assistantship eligibility.
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B. Reappointment Requirements

Reappointment to an assistantship is not automatic; however, Graduate Assistants who make progress toward degree completion will be given priority. Both appointment and reappointment decisions are based on departmental needs and available financial resources.

Reappointment is subject to the following conditions:

1. Must receive a positive evaluation on job performance from the supervisor.
2. Teaching Assistants must receive favorable student evaluations.

3. Must make satisfactory progress toward degree completion while maintaining a minimum cumulative GPA of **3.00**.
 4. Reappointment is contingent upon availability of funds.
 5. An incomplete (“I”) grade must be removed by 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.
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C. Contract

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

D. Residency Classification

All non-resident Graduate Assistants are entitled to receive out-of-state tuition waivers as long as they are employed as Graduate Assistants. Non-resident Graduate Assistants receiving 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 residency classification changes, as this may affect your financial aid award.

E. Workloads

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

Minimum Appointment:

- The minimum appointment allowed for Graduate Assistants during the fall and spring semesters is half-time (10 work hours per week).
- Half-time Graduate Assistants cannot work more than 10 hours per week.

TSU Graduate Assistant workload requirements for full-time Graduate Assistants are established by the Tennessee State University Graduate School and include the following

1. Six (6) contact hours per week in classroom or laboratory instruction.
2. Eight (8) contact hours per week in laboratory supervision.
3. Twenty (20) clock hours per week in supervised activities in the department of employment.
4. A combination of the above.

F. Course Loads

All Graduate Assistants must enroll in a minimum of **9 credit hours per semester**.

Graduate Assistants may not register for more than **12 credit hours per semester** without prior approval from the academic advisor and the Graduate Dean. The 9-semester hour minimum requirement is waived when:

- the student is enrolled in the last semester of completing degree requirements, or
- the student is enrolled in thesis/dissertation continuation credits.

Course audit work cannot be used to meet the minimum course load. If you choose to audit a course, approval is required from your academic advisor and the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. Students bear the tuition and fees cost for audited courses since credit earned by course audit does not count toward degree requirements.

G. Compensation

The compensation package of a Graduate Assistantship includes a salary/stipend and, in many cases, a scholarship covering full tuition and fees or tuition and fees remission.

- Graduate Assistants supported by University/state funds receive both a stipend and tuition/fees remission.
- Graduate Assistants support by Title III may receive both a stipend and tuition/fees remissions or they may receive the stipend only.
- Graduate Assistants supported by external grants receive stipends but may not receive 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.

1. Monthly Stipend

Graduate Assistants are part-time University employees and are therefore paid hourly rates. Stipends are paid monthly through the University payroll system (on the last day of the month worked). Stipends may vary by source of funding, degree type, and discipline.

2. Tuition and Fee Waivers and Remissions

Graduate Assistants supported by University/state funds are eligible for full or partial (50%) 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).

3. Part-Time vs. Full-Time Graduate Assistant

1. Half-time Graduate Assistants receive 50% of the stipend and 50% of the tuition and fees of full-time Graduate Assistants.
 2. Half-time Graduate Assistants are responsible for paying the remaining balance of tuition and fees.
 3. Full-time Graduate Assistants receive the approved full stipend and full tuition and fees.
 4. The minimum award allowed for Graduate Assistants is a half-appointment (10 hours/week).
 5. Out-of-state fees for all Graduate Assistants (full-time or half-time) will be waived.
 6. Graduate Assistants (full-time or half-time) must enroll in a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester and make progress toward degree completion.
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4. Out-of-State Fee and Tuition 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. Non-resident Graduate Assistants appointed for the preceding 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 receiving 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 residency classification changes, as this may affect your financial aid award.

H. Academic Integrity

Graduate Assistants must understand and uphold academic integrity guidelines established by the School of Graduate & Professional Studies ([see policy in the current Graduate Catalog](#)).

I. Benefits (Restriction of Benefits)

As part-time employees, Graduate Assistants are ineligible for benefits provided to full-time University employees. Graduate Assistants do not accrue time for holidays, vacations, sick leave, etc. Graduate Assistants do not have health benefits through employment; however, they do have on demand access to [TimelyCare](#) for scheduled care from a medical provided to treat a wide range of common conditions and concerns such as: cold and flu, sinus infections, allergies, pink eye, and dermatology.

J. Evaluation

At least one formal evaluation of the Graduate Assistant's work will be conducted each semester. The Graduate Assistant supervisor should discuss and record areas of excellence as well as areas

of inadequacy. Supervisors are expected to have regular discussions with Graduate Assistants regarding performance.

Supervisors should use the formal [Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form](#) to evaluate job performance each semester.

Graduate Assistants should be notified in writing about decisions that affect their status. They should also be notified about evaluation procedures. Supervisors must discuss evaluation results with Graduate Assistants prior to submitting reappointment or termination documents.

K. Termination/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 toward the 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 canceled before the end of the semester, the salary or stipend ends immediately. Graduate Assistants who fail 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.

L. Resignation

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

M. 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 initiated within **30 calendar days** following termination.

The appeal process should begin at the departmental level (Department Head), followed by review by the College Dean, and if necessary, by the Dean of Graduate Studies. The final level of appeal is the Vice President for Academic Affairs. The decision of the Vice President is final.
