

Graduate Assistantships & Fellowships

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Tuition Waiver

Non-Alabama resident graduate assistants may receive a waiver of the out-of-state portion of their tuition if they are on at least a 25 percent graduate assistantship (new appointments beginning in Fall 2013 must be at 33 percent) and are paid a minimum monthly stipend set each year by the provost. Such graduate assistants who have been on assistantship for consecutive fall and spring semesters are eligible to have the out-of-state portion of their tuition waived for the summer semester whether or not they are on assistantship that semester. Students will need to contact the Graduate School to have this waiver applied.

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistant appointments are temporary. Continuation depends upon availability of funds, level of enrollment, research needs, and satisfactory performance. Salaries are paid in accordance with the budget policies and payroll procedures of the university. The Board of Trustees is obligated to pay certain fixed charges against the institution and thereafter pay salaries in full insofar as funds are available. If for any reason beyond the control of the Board of Trustees funds are not available, salaries will be prorated.

Each graduate assistant must be in a degree-seeking program and registered in the classification of MST, EDS, PHD, or GPR. The student also must be registered for at least one course (during each academic term of the assistantship), must satisfy the minimum course load specifications of the individual departments and must be making satisfactory progress toward the degree.

Workloads for graduate assistants are defined on the basis of a normal teaching load or the equivalent time in other duties as determined by each department head and the dean of the school or college in which the assistant is employed. For example, a one-third workload is one-third of a normal teaching load. Graduate students may hold multiple assistantships and the assistantships may come from different units on campus, but together they cannot add up to more than a 0.50 FTE (20 hours per week) appointment. Maximum course loads for graduate assistants are determined by individual departments. It is recommended that graduate students working more than half-time not carry a full academic load.

Requirements that graduate students register for hours not included in the plan of study as a condition of employment or to enhance credit hour production for administrative purposes are inappropriate. Similarly, requiring hours on the plan of study beyond the degree requirements established by the Graduate Faculty for such administrative purposes is also inappropriate unless the additional requirements are required by university policy.

International graduate students on F1 visas cannot hold a greater than 50 percent work appointment. International graduate students on F2 visas cannot hold a work appointment. Multiple assistantships for international graduate students cannot add up to more than a 50 percent work appointment.

All international graduate teaching assistants who are assigned to scheduled lecture or laboratory sections must be certified in spoken English proficiency. Evidence of satisfactory speaking skills can be demonstrated with a score of 23 or higher on the Speaking Section of the Internet-based TOEFL (iBT), or a score of 7 on the Speaking section of the IELTS, or a score of 4.4 and above in the Speaking section of the iTEP (which replaced the SPEAK test), which is administered at Auburn University prior to the start of classes. Applicants who hold a baccalaureate degree from an accredited institution whose instruction is in English may be exempted from this requirement. A student may be asked to enroll in a course designed to improve the oral communication skills of international teaching assistants. Hiring units are responsible for making sure that international Graduate Teaching Assistants meet the minimum requirements for employment, including but not limited to a satisfactory background check and proficiency in English. For each international Graduate Teaching Assistant, hiring units are required to submit the International Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification of Eligibility for Employment form and supporting documentation.

Types of Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

A Graduate Teaching Assistant must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member. The GTA's primary responsibility is to support the instructional mission of the University. For a student to be classified as a GTA, at least 50% of the student's responsibility as a teaching assistant must be devoted to the direct instruction of students, typically in a classroom or laboratory setting.* The GTA's responsibilities may also include, for example: advising or mentoring of students; proctoring exams; grading papers, homework, and/or projects; preparing instructional materials; or providing other general assistance in the instructional process. GTAs may not be given duties to support faculty research or duties primarily clerical in nature. Whatever their instructional responsibilities, GTAs must be supervised by a faculty member who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating their performance at least on an annual basis. GTAs who have no prior teaching experience must be given some form of training before being allowed to teach. Any GTA with primary responsibility for a course must have a minimum of 18 semester hours of graduate course credit in that field of instruction.

*GTAs are not permitted to serve as instructor of record for courses numbered 6000 or above, although they may assist with laboratories for such courses. Additionally, they may not teach or assist with a course in which they are enrolled.

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs)

A Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member. The GRA's primary duty is to engage in original, professional-level research under a faculty member's supervision in the course of obtaining a graduate degree. The faculty supervisor determines the students' specific duties and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the GRA's performance at least on an annual basis.

Graduate Extension Assistants (GEAs)

A Graduate Extension Assistant must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member or extension agent. GEAs are responsible for various kinds of extension work and interaction with the public. The various branches of the Extension Service award these assistantships. A faculty member or extension agent should be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the performance of GEAs at least on an annual basis.

Graduate Assistants (GAs)

Graduate Assistants must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by a faculty member, administrator, or other appropriate university employee. GAs are responsible for duties other than teaching, research, or extension. These responsibilities can be varied and could include performing administrative duties not related to the GA's field of study or the instructional or research missions of the university. Whatever their responsibilities, GAs should be supervised by a faculty member, administrator, or other appropriate university employee who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating their performance at least on an annual basis.

*Tuition waivers for graduate assistants not engaged in teaching, research, or extension are subject to taxation and income tax withholding.

Policy on Paid Leave for Graduate Assistants (GAs)

Graduate Assistants are non-exempt employees and are generally paid for hours worked. However, it is Auburn University policy that hourly-paid Graduate Assistants be paid during official university holidays and breaks, including Fall Break, Spring Break, and/or official University closures.

Annual Evaluation of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Doctoral Students

Policy: Effective beginning Fall 2014, the Graduate School will require that each department conduct—at least on an annual basis—an evaluation of the progress of each Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and each graduate student enrolled in a doctoral program. Continuation is contingent upon satisfactory performance.

Reporting: Annually, each department will report to the Graduate School, confirming that the evaluation of all GTAs and doctoral students has been completed. In addition, the department will provide the Graduate School with a summary report of all instances in which a GTA or doctoral student has received an unsatisfactory review.

Expectations: Each department will be responsible for developing procedures (if not already in place) for the annual evaluation of the progress of GTAs and doctoral students. Following guidelines for best practices, the review should include at least the following:

- A student self-report and assessment of academic progress; teaching (if applicable); and research (if applicable) [prepared in advance of the review conference];

- A report prepared by the student's advisor (and preferably at least one other faculty member, e.g., a member of the student's advisory committee) that assesses the student's academic progress, teaching (if applicable), and research (if applicable) that identifies strengths and weaknesses, and establishes expectations for the next year. The report may be augmented by reports from teaching supervisors or other members of the student's advisory committee.
- An opportunity for the student to discuss the report in person.
- A signed copy of the written assessment should be placed in the student's file and a copy given to the student.

Background Check Policy

The Graduate School requires that all graduate student employees (including hourly paid) have an approved consumer report and/or investigative consumer report (background check) as a condition for appointment. The information contained in these reports may be used to deny an individual employment or continued employment with Auburn University. The background report and its contents are deemed private and confidential and shall be disclosed only for the purposes described in "Procedures for Securing Background Reports for Graduate Students Before Hiring" to those University employees who have a need to know, or as otherwise required or permitted by law. This policy is effective for all graduate student employees whose new appointments begin on or after January 1, 2014.

Graduate Fellowships

Auburn University provides in-state tuition fellowships to most of its students holding graduate assistantships. Though administered through the Graduate School, applicants should contact the specific academic departments concerning eligibility and availability.

Graduate Assistantship Workload Policy

Graduate students may not normally hold an appointment of more than 50 percent, whether the appointment is from a single unit or multiple units. This policy also applies to internship appointments (whether called an internship or externship). Graduate students may hold multiple assistantships (assistantships and/or hourly employment) from one or more units on campus, but the cumulative appointments cannot add up to more than a 0.50 FTE (20 hours per week) appointment. This allows the students the time needed to devote to their academic programs. An exception is automatically allowed in the special case of a graduate assistant assigned to teach one four credit course and one three/four credit course. In such cases, appointments will be made at 0.58/0.67 FTE, respectively. Other exceptions may be requested, with compelling academic justification, in writing to the Provost by the dean. For multiple assistantships from different units, coordinating approval memos from the home unit and the hiring units are required. Please note that federal regulations limit the cumulative appointment for international graduate students to no more than a 0.50 FTE (20 hours per week) appointment.

Graduate Assistant Performance Improvement and Administrative Action Policy

Failure to Satisfy Performance Standards

Performance Improvement Meetings — In addition to regularly scheduled performance reviews, when a supervisor determines that a graduate assistant is failing to meet satisfactory performance standards, the supervisor will meet with the assistant. Together, they will review the duties and responsibilities expected of the graduate assistant, and the supervisor will identify those areas in which the performance of those duties and responsibilities is judged to be unsatisfactory. The supervisor will then advise the graduate assistant that if his or her performance does not improve to a satisfactory level within a time period specified by the supervisor, the assistantship will be terminated. The time period established by the supervisor should provide a sufficient and reasonable time for the graduate assistant to demonstrate a satisfactory level of performance. In some instances, the graduate assistant's failure to meet satisfactory standards of performance may be disruptive of the educational process (e.g., failure to appear for a teaching assignment, or failure to grade examinations in a timely fashion). In such instances, the graduate student should be advised that any subsequent failure to meet satisfactory performance standards may result in termination of the assistantship. As soon as possible following this meeting (generally within three working days) the supervisor will provide the assistant with a written summary of the meeting, including notice of areas of unsatisfactory performance and the time period specified for improvement to a satisfactory level. A copy will be sent to the department chair for review/approval and to the dean of the Graduate School.

Termination of an Assistantship — If a graduate assistant fails to meet acceptable standards of performance as prescribed in the performance improvement meeting, the supervisor will notify the department chair. The department chair will schedule a meeting with the supervisor and graduate assistant as soon as possible, generally within three working days. At that meeting, the graduate assistant's performance will again be reviewed. If it is concluded that the graduate assistant has failed to meet acceptable performance standards, the department chair may terminate the graduate assistantship appointment. The department chair will provide a written

notice summarizing the meeting and the action taken to the supervisor, graduate assistant, the dean of the college, and the dean of the Graduate School within five working days of the meeting.

Acts of Misconduct and Unprofessionalism — Acts of misconduct or unprofessionalism may require prompt action. Such acts may include, but are not limited to:

1. Refusing to obey reasonable and necessary instructions or job assignments, insubordination, or using abusive or unprofessional language in the workplace.
2. Indulging in offensive or obscene manner.
3. Drinking intoxicants on University property, with exception of events acting in accordance with the University Campus Alcohol Policy.
4. Using illegal drugs on University property.
5. Stealing or misappropriating University property or property belonging to students or university employees.
6. Scientific misconduct

Appropriate actions include termination of an assistantship, suspension of an assistantship for a specified period, and reduction of the FTE and/or benefits associated with that assistantship. If a supervisor believes a graduate assistant has engaged in such an act of misconduct or unprofessionalism, the following steps are to be taken.

For incident(s) of unprofessional acts or behavior which violate accepted norms of professional conduct, the supervisor will provide notice of the proposed administrative action to the graduate assistant and document the situation in a written report. In such cases, the graduate assistant may be placed on immediate administrative leave with pay from the assistantship duties, at the discretion of the supervisor. The report will be provided to the department chair to whom the supervisor reports, who will schedule a meeting with the supervisor and graduate assistant as soon as possible, generally within three working days. At that meeting, the incident(s) will be reviewed, and the proposed administrative action may be affirmed, amended, or overturned by the department chair. The department chair will provide a written notice summarizing the meeting and his/her decision regarding administrative action to the supervisor, graduate assistant, the dean of the college, and the dean of the Graduate School within five working days of the meeting.

Acts of misconduct may include, but are not limited to, theft, fraud, physical altercation, and sexual harassment. Additionally, for misconduct covered by the Student Code of Conduct, Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy, and/or the Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment, the case will also be referred to the Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity – Title IX Office.

Supervisors and students should be aware that termination or reduction of the FTE of an assistantship, will have large financial impacts, which can be particularly problematic for a student if termination or FTE reduction occurs before the last class day of a semester. A description of the rules regarding graduate assistant benefits, including tuition fellowships and health insurance, can be found on the Graduate School website.

Appealing Action Regarding an Assistantship — If a graduate assistant wishes to appeal a decision of administrative action regarding an assistantship, including termination, he/she may file a written appeal within five working days of receipt of the department chair's written notice with the dean of that college. The graduate assistant will be notified in writing of the result of the appeal within five working days of the submission of the written appeal. The decision resulting from this process is final and not subject to further appeal.

Sexual and Gender Based Misconduct Policy Training for Auburn University Graduate Assistants

Title IX & Discrimination: Identifying & Responding to Sexual Misconduct Training for Auburn University Graduate Assistants

The Graduate School requires that all Graduate Assistants, including Graduate Teaching Assistants, Graduate Research Assistants, Graduate Extension Assistants, and Graduate Assistants, have approved Title IX & Discrimination: Identifying & Responding to Sexual Misconduct training as a condition for continued appointment. The specific form of the required training will be determined in consultation with the Graduate School and the Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Employment Opportunity.