



POLICY STATEMENT 21

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

POLICY DIGEST

Monitoring Unit: Graduate School
Initially Issued: January 30, 2004
Last Revised: September 9, 2021

I. PURPOSE

The primary mission of the LSU Graduate School is to promote excellence in graduate education. Part of this responsibility mandates that the Graduate School develop policies governing the appointment and evaluation of Graduate Assistants (GAs) and monitor their implementation by the units supporting the students. These policies include setting minimum academic qualifications for holding GA appointments, establishing appointment and renewal procedures, setting average workloads, and reviewing stipend levels and ranges. This policy statement outlines procedures and guidelines affecting the graduate assistantship program. For special policies on the preparation of teaching assistants for instructional duties in classrooms and laboratories, see PS 85, "Preparation of Teaching Assistants." This policy does not govern work performed outside of the University.

II. DEFINITIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Graduate Assistants (GA) are graduate students who fulfill additional assigned duties for the term of service as stated in the offer letter and who are entitled to a stipend within the range established by the University. Ideally, the graduate assistantship should support the educational experience of the GA and should be related to the student's graduate program. Faculty and staff who supervise GAs need to clearly articulate the expectations about those additional GA responsibilities.

All graduate students have responsibilities to complete class work and theses, dissertations, and/or dissertation projects. These general graduate student responsibilities are outside of the scope of this policy statement.

During the Fall and Spring Semesters, GAs must fall under one of the following categories. For detailed descriptions of the levels (1, 2, or 3) for each category, please see Appendix A.

Teaching Assistant 1, 2, and 3 (TA1, TA2, TA3): GAs supported under this category work in support of instructional programs.

Research Assistant 1, 2, and 3 (RA1, RA2, RA3): GAs supported under this category will assist in conducting research.

Administrative/Service Assistant 1, 2, 3 (SA1, SA2, SA3): GA supported under this category will support administrative functions of the Department, College, School or University.

Residential Life Assistant (LA1 and LA2): GAs supported under this category assist in the Residential Halls.

During the Summer Term, GAs may be appointed in one of the categories above or on a Summer Allowance Plan. Only GAs who meet the academic standard and performance standard may be appointed on the Summer Allowance Plan (See Section III.E below). If a GA does not meet the academic or performance standard at the end of a Spring Semester, the only possibility of summer work is as a GA for which an exception must be requested by the Department and approved by the Graduate School. That student may not be appointed on a Summer Allowance Plan.

III. PROCEDURES

A. Unit Responsibility

In units offering course work for graduate credit and supporting GAs, the unit head or an associate or full member of the graduate faculty (usually this is the Director of Graduate Studies or the Graduate Advisor) must be assigned responsibility for the graduate assistantship program in all of its dimensions, including appointments, stipend amounts, work assignments, job descriptions, and overseeing evaluations. In non-academic units, the unit supervisor or designated representative is responsible for all aspects of the graduate assistantship program.

B. Stipend Levels

The minimum award for a graduate assistantship at the 50% effort will be equal to \$10,800 for an academic year, \$2,650 for a summer, and \$13,450 for a fiscal year. The minimum award for a graduate assistantship at 25% effort will be equal to \$5,400 for an academic year, \$1,325 for a summer, and \$6725 for a fiscal year. Appointments for a single regular semester, fall or spring, must also be at a minimum of 25% effort at a minimum stipend equal to \$2,700 for the semester. The amount of the calculated minimum awards will be reviewed on a periodic basis. Any exception to these stipulations requires special justification and the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School. Stipend levels within units may vary, however, any differences among GA stipends must be based upon clearly written guidelines established for the various stipend levels. Differences in pay rates should be based on:

1. the qualifications of the individual appointed;
2. the amount and/or scope of the work required;
3. satisfactory progress toward degree (see Eligibility section for details)

C. Residency Status

Graduate Assistants are considered residents for tuition and fee purposes only and only for the period of their appointment. Residency status is determined by the University in accordance with state statutes and policies and procedures of the Board of Supervisors (PM 31). To receive this consideration, GAs must meet eligibility requirements (see Sec. III. F. *Eligibility*) and must be appointed no later than October 1, for fall semester; March 1, for spring semester; and by the first day of classes for Session C during the summer semester. Graduate assistants whose appointments are terminated for any reason, including if the GA resigns, and who were

considered residents for fee purposes only are liable for payment of full non-resident fees for the semester during which their appointments ended.

D. Tuition, Fees, and Payment Methods

Graduate Assistants are responsible for the payment of their tuition and fees. Graduate Assistants appointed at 50% effort are eligible for a tuition exemption.

Graduate Assistants are responsible for the payment of all fees, except for the non-resident fee (See Residency Status). If the appointment of the GA is not effective from the beginning of the appointment period or if the termination of the GA appointment is effective prior to the completion of the appointment period, then the GA will be responsible for payment of the FULL tuition and the FULL non-resident fees, if applicable. Three methods of paying fees are available:

through payment in full during registration,
through deferred payment, or
through payroll deduction via on-line registration.

Any graduate student using the payroll deduction or deferred payment who resigns the assistantship during the semester will be responsible for any unpaid balance.

E. Summer Allowance Plan

An optional means of appointing a GA over the summer is the *Summer Allowance Plan*. If the GA is in good standing, was appointed on a nine-month appointment, will not be taking any milestone examinations, and will not be graduating over the summer, the GA may be appointed on a Summer Allowance Plan that does not require that the GA register for courses. GAs appointed on a twelve-month basis cannot be appointed on a Summer Allowance Plan, must be appointed as GAs, and must register for courses. GAs who plan to take General Exams or graduate in the summer must register for courses as stated in the Graduate Catalog.

F. Eligibility

A department can offer an assistantship to an applicant at the same time as the department offers admission into a degree program as a full-time student. Both the departmental admission and the assistantship are contingent upon final admission by the Graduate School, however. To be considered full-time, students must maintain registration in a minimum of nine semester hours in the fall and in the spring semester (a minimum of six hours for graduate credit). During the summer term, if students are appointed formally as a GA (and not appointed on a Summer Allowance Plan), then the student must register for a minimum of six semester hours (a minimum of three hours for graduate credit). Non-matriculating students and students enrolled in LSU Online programs are not eligible for graduate assistantships.

A graduate student may retain an assistantship only if the student's cumulative LSU grade point average is at least a 3.0 and only if the student has not earned a grade of Unsatisfactory in research. An exception to hold an assistantship may be allowed when a student fails to maintain a 3.0 cumulative LSU grade point average or earns a grade of "U" in research. The Dean of the Graduate School must approve the exception. For consideration, the required

documentation includes an academic plan for the student and a description of the academic support that will be provided to the student by the Department. If the Department is not the student's academic department, then both the unit supporting the student (where the GA responsibilities lie) and the student's academic unit must agree to the proposed academic plan and support. A GA who does not meet the academic standard may not be appointed on the Summer Allowance Plan and must be appointed as a GA and must register for courses.

Assistantships should not serve as impediments to the progress of graduate students toward their degrees. Funding on assistantships is temporary, subject to limitations as established by the units supporting the graduate students. These units must set forth their limitations on length of GA service clearly in letters of appointment.

Graduate Assistants who serve as Instructors of Record (see Appendix A) must have earned at least 18 hours of graduate credit hours in their teaching discipline prior to their appointment. For further requirements on the preparation of GAs for teaching assignments, see PS 85, "Preparation of Teaching Assistants."

International students whose native language is not English and who are holding teaching assistantships at Level 2 and Level 3 (TA-2 and TA-3) must meet all current language requirements for international students (please refer to the English as a Second Language¹ website for details).

G. Workload

Graduate Assistants are students first; their graduate assistantships are not meant to be an impediment to the student's progress toward degree. Thus, a graduate assistantship may not exceed 50% of a full-time equivalent effort without the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School². The percentage of a full-time equivalent effort recorded when GAs are appointed must be in writing and should correspond with their assigned duties provided in the description of their responsibilities. (See Appendix B for examples of appointment periods, number of weeks, and the hours equivalent of a 50% appointment). A written copy of these responsibilities must be provided to each GA.

International Graduate Assistants are subjected to Federal regulations that have an exact definition of workload and are limited to responsibilities that strictly do NOT exceed 20 hours per week, rather than averaged over the term.

Graduate Assistants who serve as TAs are typically assigned to no more than six credit hours of instructional duties per week. Loads higher than six credit hours per week must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Additional compensation is available to GAs only under limited circumstances, recognizing GAs as students who should devote full time to their graduate studies and to the responsibilities of their primary graduate assistantships. A GA must have prior approval from the chair or graduate advisor of the student's department and the Dean of the Graduate School before accepting additional responsibilities at LSU or within the LSU system for

¹ The name of the program that manages language requirement is currently the "English as a Second Language" program

² The percent effort at which GAs are appointed should be calculated based on 100% equaling 40 hours of work per week (760 hours over 19-week appointment period in the Fall and the Spring Semesters and 600 hours over the 13-week appointment period of the Summer Term).

additional compensation. Approval for additional compensations is based on an assessment of the scope and duration of the additional responsibilities. Additional compensation is limited to five hours per week. International students who hold a 20-hour graduate assistantships may NOT receive additional compensation.

H. Appointments

Appropriate unit administrators or supervisors are responsible for extending assistantship offers to eligible graduate students, contingent upon acceptance for admission into the Graduate School. The offer of appointment³, once accepted, becomes a formal contract between the student and appointing unit.

Appointing units must maintain current records on all GAs in the HRM system of record⁴ including:

- a. a copy of the letter of appointment signed by the student;
- b. a description of the responsibilities of the GA that is signed and dated by the student to indicate that the student has received a copy; and
- c. a copy of performance evaluations signed by both the student and the evaluator, covering each period of appointment.

Tentative offers of graduate assistantships by departmental representatives to applicants who have applied to the Graduate School, but have not yet been admitted, must clearly state the requirement that the applicant be accepted for admission to the Graduate School.

All offers of graduate assistantships must include the following material (italicized text):

Your appointment as an xxxx% full-time equivalent graduate assistant will be for a xxxx month period beginning xxxx (date) and ending xxxx (date), may be renewed, and is contingent on your being a student in "good academic and accountability standing" in the Graduate School, a term defined in the Graduate Catalog. A student on probation (academic or disciplinary) is not in good standing. While you hold a graduate assistantship, you are expected to devote full time to your graduate studies and to fulfill the responsibilities of your graduate assistantship.

The conditions of your Graduate Assistantship include: (1) adequate performance of assistantship duties and (2) satisfactory progress toward your degree. Your performance in your assistantship duties will be evaluated in the context of a written description of your responsibilities. The term "satisfactory progress toward your degree" includes, but is not limited to, maintaining cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0, taking and passing major examinations (sometimes called "milestones") on schedule, earning satisfactory grades in Research, and working on your thesis or dissertation in a manner that meets the approval of your major professor on behalf of your committee. Satisfactory progress toward the degree will be evaluated by appropriate graduate faculty of the degree program in which you are enrolled.

The supervising unit that pays your stipend will be the final authority for judging your

³ A change in source of funds for a Graduate Assistant (e.g. from one grant account to another) is not considered a new appointment.

⁴ The current HRM system of record is Workday.

performance of your GA duties.

Units supporting international students as graduate teaching assistants must also state in the letter of appointment that *the international student must meet current language requirements.*

LSU, a member of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the United States, must also include a *copy of the CGS resolution* with all letters of appointment (See Appendix C).

I. Appointment Periods and Holidays

Most Graduate Assistants are appointed⁵ on a semester by semester basis with appointments starting one week before classes start or on the day of International Student Orientation, whichever is first, and ending before Holiday Break (Fall) or on the following Commencement (Spring and Summer). The nine- and twelve-month appointment periods follow a semester-by-semester format. Ten-month appointments start earlier and end later. Students are expected to begin their responsibilities when the appointment period begins.

All GAs are entitled to official University Holidays (i.e., when the University is closed).

GAs are students, and attendance at national and international meetings is often required for career advancement; therefore, a GA may request permission to attend a meeting in lieu of assigned responsibilities; this request shall not normally exceed one week per semester. (The supervising unit, in consultation with the GAs academic unit if necessary, approves these requests.)

J. Evaluation

a. Evaluation Process

All GAs will be evaluated each semester. The Graduate Advisor (who is an associate or full member of the graduate faculty) in the GA's academic department is responsible for overseeing an evaluation process. This process should confirm whether the GA has met academic criteria necessary for continuation in an assistantship and alert the academic department chair when the result is an unsuccessful evaluation. The supervisor is responsible for evaluating the GA on the responsibilities outlined in the description of responsibilities and for informing the GA of any change in responsibilities for the following term. If the responsibilities change significantly (for example a change from a TA to an RA, but not necessarily a change for serving as a TA for one course to serving as a TA for another course), then an updated description of responsibilities should be included. The GA will be provided the opportunity to review the evaluation and write a response if desired.

Opportunities provided GAs through graduate assistantships are critical to the growth, development, and education of graduate students. These experiences help prepare students for the workforce and to develop skills that will be vital to their success after graduation. Therefore, the evaluation process represents professional development as a continuous progression of planning, communication, evaluation, and feedback between the student and supervisor. The evaluation process affords regular occasions to review the responsibilities assigned to the GA, determine how well the student is meeting

⁵ For procedures on appointing Graduate Assistants, Student Employment Partners should consult the HRM website job aids.

expectations, and provide mentorship for professional growth.

b. Evaluation Standards

The academic standard required for an assistantship is an LSU cumulative GPA of 3.0 or higher and no grades of “U” in research. Once all grades for the semester have been recorded, the Graduate School issues letters to GAs who do not meet the academic standard and to that GA’s academic department. This information will be reviewed by the Graduate Advisor and forwarded to the supervisor if outside of the department.

GAs hold a wide range of responsibilities based on the assignment. The supervisor will evaluate the GA on how well the GA executes their major responsibilities, as well as competencies in work related skills such as delivering results in a timely manner, problem solving, collaboration, communication, and integrity. The standard required is at minimum a satisfactory overall rating on assistantship responsibilities.

c. Inadequate Performance

In order to be renewed in a graduate assistantship, a student must meet or exceed the academic standard and must successfully complete their assigned responsibilities. Should either of these areas fall short of expectations, the student will receive an unsatisfactory evaluation and may be terminated from the assistantship.

Inadequate academic performance: If the grade point average of a GA falls below an LSU cumulative GPA of 3.0 or if a grade of “U” is earned in research, the graduate assistantship is terminated. An exception to hold an assistantship may be allowed when a student fails to maintain a cumulative LSU grade point average above 3.0 or when a student earns a grade of “U” in research. The Dean of the Graduate School must approve the exception. For consideration, the required documentation includes an academic plan for the student and a description of the academic support that will be provided to the student by the academic department. If the Department is not the student’s academic department, then both the unit supporting the student (where the GA’s responsibilities lie) and the student’s academic unit must agree to the proposed academic plan and support. Failing to meet the academic standard for a second semester (whether or not the semesters are consecutive) will result in a rating of *unsatisfactory* and termination for the assistantship. A GA who does not meet the performance standard and if the department wants them to work in the summer, they must be appointed as a GA, must register for courses, and may not be appointed on the Summer Allowance Plan.

Inadequate performance of GA responsibilities: If the supervisor’s evaluation of the assistantship responsibilities results in a *needs improvement* or *unsatisfactory* rating, the supervisor must clearly delineate the areas of concern, define behaviors necessary for a satisfactory evaluation, and work with the student to develop a plan for remediation if appropriate. Whether earned in consecutive semesters or not, a second *unsatisfactory* rating or an *unsatisfactory* rating following a *needs improvement* rating will result in termination from the assistantship. Over the summer term, GAs who do not meet the performance standard must be appointed as a GA, must register for courses, and may not be appointed on the Summer Allowance Plan.

d. Notice and Termination

For GAs who do not meet the expectations required for holding an assistantship, termination from the assistantship may occur. Students whose assistantships are terminated due to unsatisfactory performance or lacking to maintain academic standards will be notified in writing no later than one week after commencement in the semester when the unsatisfactory evaluation occurred.

K. Appeals and Grievances

- a. If a graduate student is terminated from an assistantship, the student may file an appeal using the following processes:

If the termination is due to failure to meet the academic criteria (either the grade point average or the “U” in research criteria), the student may file a grade appeal following the process outlined in the General Catalog. Alternately, the student may file a request for a one-time exception to the academic standard criteria. This appeal will be made in writing, within one week of receiving the termination notice, to the dean of the Graduate School. The appeal must include a rationale as to why the exception should be considered, a plan for academic support and/or resources to help the student improve their grades, and letters of support from the supervisor and the Graduate Advisor. The Dean of the Graduate School will consider and, after consultation with the unit leader of the student’s academic department and/or dean of the academic college, make the final decision on termination.

If the termination is due to an unsatisfactory evaluation of assistantship responsibilities, the student may file a written appeal, within one week of receiving the termination notice, to the Dean of the Graduate School. The appeal must include a rationale as to why the termination should be reconsidered, a plan to improve the unsatisfactory behaviors, and a letter of support from the supervisor and the Graduate Advisor. The dean of the Graduate School will consider and, after consultation with the unit leader of the student’s academic department and/or dean of the academic college, make the final decision on termination.

- b. For grievances seeking a solution to issues arising from working conditions or interpretation of policy and/or procedure, the student may file a grievance using the following process:

The GA must present the written grievance to the unit leader of their academic department within one week of the date of the alleged grievable act. The unit leader may meet with the GA and shall respond within one week of receipt of the grievance. If the unit leader is the person against whom the GA is filing a grievance, the GA should present the grievance to the dean of the academic college.

If the GA is not satisfied with the decision, the GA may appeal in writing to the dean of the Graduate School within one week of receipt of the response from the unit leader. This second step appeal must state why the GA disagrees with or rejects the first decision and the unit leader shall be provided a copy of this appeal. The dean of the Graduate School or their designee will contact the GA within one week of receipt of the appeal to schedule a meeting to discuss the grievance. The dean of the Graduate

school or their designee also will meet with relevant parties such as the supervisor of the GA, unit leader of the academic department, and/or associate dean or dean of the academic college. The dean of the Graduate School or designee will notify the grievant and the grievant's department head of the decision within one week following the final meeting. This decision will be final.

Any grievance based on alleged discrimination should be reported to Human Resource Management pursuant to PS 1. Any grievance based on sexual harassment should be reported to Human Resource Management, or in the case of student to student harassment the Dean of Students, pursuant to PS 73.

Appendix A

Job Specifications

Title	Examples of Responsibilities
TA1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assists with preparing examinations 2) Assists with class lectures 3) Grades papers 4) Maintains class records 5) Tutors students outside of formally scheduled classes 6) For laboratory courses, <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Dispense supplies to laboratories, clean equipment, maintain inventory, perform assays, set up and conduct experiments b) Relevant coursework required c) Knowledge of lab equipment and procedures may be required
TA2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All TA1 duties AND • Makes presentations in laboratories or classrooms • Conducts lectures • Leads discussion groups provided that the TA is neither the instructor of record nor has primary responsibility for assigning grades
TA3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All TA2 duties AND • Teaches classes for credit as the instructor of record and/or as the person primarily responsible for assigning grades • May supervise or direct work of TA1 or TA2 graduate assistants in the same course being taught
SA1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assists with basic administrative functions of an office or facility • May answer phones, greet guests, check mail, file paperwork • Good communication and organizational skills • Some basic computer skills required • Previous work experience or course work not required
SA2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All duties of SA1 AND • Assists with special projects • May act as receptionist, bookkeeper, career advisor, communications specialists • May assist with preparation of newsletters or publications • Process/audits reports and/or documents • Previous work experience or related course work required
SA3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All duties of SA2 AND • Supervises special projects • May supervise or direct work of other graduate assistants • Requires minimal supervision and is able to make independent decisions
RA1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist staff in laboratory or fieldwork

Title	Examples of Responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispense supplies to laboratories, clean equipment, maintain inventory, perform assays, set up and conduct experiments • Relevant coursework required • Knowledge of lab equipment and procedures may be required
RA2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All duties of RA1 AND • Performs laboratory tasks without constant supervision • May act as lead person in absence of supervisor • Collects and analyzes data, makes calculations and prepares reports • Ability to make independent decisions and complete assigned projects with minimal supervision • Relevant coursework and knowledge of equipment and procedures required
RA3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All duties of RA2 AND • Performs complex laboratory and diagnostic testing with minimal supervision • Determines proper test for research work • Supervises maintenance of research facility and lab assistants • Extensive knowledge of related course material and equipment required
LA1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsible for coordinating the orientation and training for desk assistants, resident assistants, graduate staff and professional staff. • Responsible for assisting the Assistant Director for Training and Leadership in student leadership activities, planning and assessing staff development initiatives, • Establishing appropriate working relationships with other university entities
LA2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live-in graduate student who is responsible for the co-administration of a living community • Serves as a support in all aspects of building management including student staff supervision, administrative management and community development.

Appendix B

Appointment Periods, start and end dates, number of weeks, and hours

Appointment type	Starting and ending dates	Typical number of weeks	Maximum hours
Semester (Fall)	Day of international student orientation; Holiday Break	19	380
Semester (Spring)	Day of International Student Orientation; Spring Commencement	19	380
Semester (Summer)	Day of International Student Orientation; Summer Commencement	13	300
Academic year (nine months)	Day of International Student Orientation prior to the start of Fall semester; Spring Commencement	38 (should be considered similar to an appointment over a Fall and Spring semester in sequence)	760
Ten-months	August 1; May 31	40 (starts earlier than a Fall semester appointment and ends later than a Spring Semester appointment)	800
Twelve-months	Day of International Student Orientation prior to the start of a Fall semester; day before International Student Orientation for following Fall semester	51 (should be considered similar to appointments over a Fall, Spring, and Summer in sequence)	1060

Appendix C: Council of Graduate Schools Resolution

Council of Graduate Schools April 15 Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants

Acceptance of an offer of financial support⁶ (such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties.

Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which a commitment has been made. Similarly, an offer by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer. It is further agreed by the institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution or a link to the URL ([Council of Graduate School's Resolution](#)) should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer. (Renewed October 2014)

⁶ * This Resolution applies to offers of financial support only, not offers of admission