

The University of Mississippi

## Policies and Procedures for Graduate Assistantship Administration

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

A Graduate Assistant is defined as a student enrolled in and actively pursuing a graduate degree and employed in an academic unit or academic support unit on assignments that enhance professional development.) Regardless of the source of funding for a graduate assistantship, these policies apply. Individual departments will have specific procedures and practices in accord with these general policies. Because of the variation in the duties of different types of graduate assistants and in the duties needed for different departments, only general statements and examples are given below.

Graduate assistants are considered to be both students and employees. They are important contributors to the mission of the University through the teaching of lower-division courses, laboratory and review sessions, the performance of research, and the administration of certain services. At the same time, graduate assistants are actively pursuing an advanced degree and their duties as graduate assistants should enhance their overall professional preparation.

The stipends associated with graduate assistantships provide the financial support for these individuals to attend graduate school, and, for the University, provide a means of recruiting highly qualified students into graduate programs.

In the statements below, the term graduate assistant refers to all types of assistants. Likewise, the general term, department, refers to any academic department, research institute, administrative or service office, or signatory faculty member employing a graduate assistant. When statements apply to certain types of graduate assistants or employing units, this will be indicated.

### 2.0 TYPES OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP POSITIONS

The following types of positions are available through the University for the employment of graduate students.

**2.1 Graduate Instructor:** This is an appointment to serve as the primary instructor of an undergraduate course. Such courses will generally be multi-sectional and the graduate instructor will be supervised by a permanent faculty member. As stated in section 3.0, a graduate student employed at this level must meet specific qualifications.

**2.2 Graduate Teaching Assistant:** This is an appointment to serve as a proctor for a laboratory or discussion session, or as a grader. A teaching assistant is not responsible for assignment of final grades in a course.

**2.3 Graduate Administrative Assistant:** This is an appointment to perform various types of administrative or service tasks for an academic department or university office or program.

2.4 Graduate Research Assistant: This appointment is made by an academic department, research institute, or faculty member (having a funded research project) to a student to assist in performing various types of research activities.

### 3.0 QUALIFICATIONS

3.1 Academic Qualifications: To be eligible to receive any of the above graduate assistantships, a student must be admitted as a Full-Standing or Conditional student in a graduate program within the University. The student must be enrolled, during the semesters in which the appointment is in effect, according to the schedule in section 4.2.

3.2 Graduate Instructors: Students who are appointed as Graduate Instructors must have completed a minimum of 18 hours of graduate course work (with a minimum grade point average of 3.0) in the assigned field of instruction. Exception can be made for relevant non-academic experience or the possession of specific skills. Exceptions must be approved by the Graduate Dean's office before the appointment is made.

### 4.0 PROCEDURES FOR APPOINTMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

4.1 Appointment Levels and Periods: Ordinarily, graduate assistantship appointments are made as either one-quarter or one-half time positions. This implies a 10 hour to 20 hour work effort per week. Depending on the type of assigned duties, the actual work time may vary and will be determined by the department supervisor. Occasionally, a student be employed on a basis of more than one-half time, but many not work more than 25 hours per week.

Graduate Teaching and Assistant and Graduate Instructor appointments are made for a one-semester or two-semester (academic year) period. Research Assistant and Graduate Administrative Assistant positions may be made for any duration up to a 12-month period. Students who are making good progress toward their graduate degree and who receive good evaluations will usually be considered for reappointment; reappointment to a position is not made automatically from one period to the next and depends on the needs of the department supervisor and the availability of funds (procedures for reappointment are outlined in section 6.0).

Departments may choose to establish a maximum number of semesters of support for their students.

#### 4.2 Enrollment Requirements:

- i. Students who receive a graduate assistant appointment for 10 hours per week must be enrolled for at least 9-12 graduate hours during regular (Fall or Spring) semester(s) of employment.
- ii. Students who receive a graduate assistantship appointment for 11-20 hours per week must be enrolled in 9-12 graduate hours during regular semesters of employment. Up to 9 hours can be in coursework with the remainder in thesis, dissertation or recital hours.

ii Students who receive an appointment of 21-25 hours per week cannot enroll in more than 9 hours of graduate coursework during regular semesters of employment; 6 of these can be in coursework and the remainder must be in thesis, dissertation or recital hours.

Students may hold assistantships in the summer without registering for any graduate hours.

**4.3 Appointment Procedures:** Appointments to graduate assistantships are recommended by an academic department, research institute, administrative or service office, or a funded faculty member. Appointments are made through Human Resources, contingent on the availability of funds. Personnel form #7 (e-form) is used for the appointment of Graduate Instructors and assistants. Personnel e-forms #7 are forwarded by departments to the Graduate School, where the eligibility of the student to hold an assistantship is evaluated. In the case of Graduate Instructors, the requisite 18 hours of graduate course work in the area. When an exception to the 18 hour rule is needed for the appointment of a Graduate Instructor, a department head must justify the qualifications of the candidate in a written request to the Graduate School. The Graduate School will advise the Human Resources of the eligibility of the student to be appointed to a teaching position.

**4.4 Appointment Letters:** The terms of individual appointments will vary from department to department and it is the responsibility of the administrative head of a department to state in writing the terms of appointment to new appointees or to students who are appointed to new assistantship positions. The letter should provide information regarding the following conditions, where appropriate:

- a. the title, percentage time, and period of the appointment;
- b. the stipend level for the above period and the availability of supplemental fellowships, including conditions for receiving a tuition scholarship;
- c. the minimum and maximum course enrollment during the appointment period;
- d. evaluation procedures and required grade point average and performance requirements for continued employment;
- e. procedure for reappointment;
- f. deadline for acceptance of the assistantship offer;
- g. assistantships are usually subject to taxation and must be declared as income;
- h. date on which the appointee is required to report for work duty or training.

The following information should also be provided, if it is applicable or known at the time the appointment is made:

- i. a description of the duties for the assistant;
- j. the name of the faculty supervisor;
- k. required training sessions;
- l. required English tests or courses for international students.

In addition, this letter may include an indication of any awards for superior performance, departmental regulations regarding the maximum length of support, and any resources which are

available to the appointee for the performance of assigned duties (i.e., the availability of office space, clerical services, computers, or teaching supplies).

In the case of international students, a copy of the appointment letter should be sent to the International Admissions Office so that immigration forms can be processed.

4.5 Conditions for Termination: The appointment of a graduate assistant may be terminated by the University, upon the recommendation of the departmental head, for the following reasons:

- a. incompetent job performance or neglect of duty;
- b. misconduct that is job-related;
- c. moral turpitude;
- d. physical or mental ailment or condition which significantly impairs or limits job performance and cannot reasonably be accommodated;
- e. financial exigency or discontinuance of the work for which the appointment is made;
- f. mutual agreement;
- g. failure to maintain a graduate grade point average of 3.0 and/or failure to maintain the minimum enrollment obligation.

For the purposes of termination, Personnel Form (eform) #3 is used.

4.6 Obligations of the Department Head to the Appointee: It is the duty of the department head to consult with the graduate assistant to attempt to resolve any problems of performance and reappointment. Except in the instance of Graduate Research Assistants, the department head is responsible for providing written correspondence to a graduate assistant regarding 1) any change in the terms of appointment, including notification of reappointment for additional periods, ii) evaluation of job performance, and iii) any complaints received by the faculty supervisor or department head concerning the student's job performance, and iii) any complaints received by the faculty supervisor or department head concerning the student's job performance.

In the case of Graduate Research Assistants who are supported by extramural funds and under the direct fiscal authority and supervision of an individual faculty member, the process may be less formalized. To every extent possible, however, the rights of the student should be protected.

4.7 Other Guidelines: Situations involving academic grade appeals or charges of academic dishonesty and involving students in classes taught by Graduate Instructors or Graduate Teaching Assistants will follow the procedures outlined in the MBook.

## 5.0 TRAINING, SUPERVISION, AND EVALUATION

5.1 Orientation Program: For Graduate Instructors and Graduate Teaching Assistants, departments will provide an orientation program for new appointees and for those for whom

teaching duties will be changed. This orientation program will differ among the departments since teaching duties vary. For Graduate Administrative Assistants and Graduate Research Assistants, training will usually be provided, as necessary, by the supervisor.

**5.2 Supervision, Evaluation, and In-service Training Workshops:** For all Graduate Instructors, Graduate Teaching Assistants, and Graduate Administrative Assistants, a faculty supervisor will be designated by the department. The supervisor is responsible for assuring the proper training of assistants and for evaluating their performance. Informal evaluations and recommendations may be provided by the supervisor to the assistants during the appointment period. At the end of the period, a written evaluation, prepared by the department head in consultation with each student's supervisor, should be provided to each Graduate Instructor and Graduate Teaching Assistant. These evaluations are used to aid the student in the development of teaching skills and for decisions regarding reappointment. In-service training workshops, in addition to the orientation program, will also be provided for Graduate Instructors and Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Graduate Instructors may also be evaluated by university-wide student-teacher evaluation surveys or by similar departmental surveys. These survey results should not substitute for the department head's evaluation.

## 6.0 REAPPOINTMENT PROCEDURES

The following criteria will determine the eligibility of Graduate Instructors, Graduate Teaching Assistants, Graduate Research Assistants, and Graduate Administrative Assistants for reappointment:

- a. evaluations of performance by the supervisor;
- b. recommendation of the student's academic advisor;
- c. a minimum graduate grade point average of 3.0 in each semester of enrollment;
- d. length of cumulative support by an assistantship and time in a degree program (optional departmental policy);
- e. availability of funding and continuance of the work for which the appointment is made;
- f. other written criteria as determined by the department making the appointment.

The degree of emphasis placed on each criterion will be determined by the department. If the above criteria are met satisfactorily, students can expect an extension of their assistantship at the original stipend level.

The actual procedure for reappointment will differ among departments. Individual departments will explain their reappointment procedure in the initial appointment letters.

## 7.0 RIGHTS AND BENEFITS

**7.1 Rights Pertaining to Assistantship Duties:** The department employing the graduate assistant has the responsibility of providing the space, materials, equipment, and services necessary to carry out assigned duties.

#### 7.2 Tuition Waivers and Scholarships:

Students who receive a minimum graduate stipend from any University assistantship, fellowship, or scholarship and who register for at least nine hours of graduate credit will be eligible to receive a partial or full tuition and non-resident fee scholarship for that semester. The Graduate School Webpage has information about the assistantship amounts that make students eligible for the tuition scholarships.

#### 7.3 Right to Written and Timely Communication Regarding Appointments:

All appointment and reappointment offers must be made in writing by the department head to the student. The appointment of new graduate assistants should be made as early as possible, preferably before June 1 for the following fall semester; however, due to uncertainty regarding the availability of funds, a department may be unable to offer such appointments until a much later date. Offers of reappointment to students should also be made as soon as is possible. For example, reappointment offers for the fall semester should be made within one month following the completion of the spring semester.

7.4 Grievance Procedure: Graduate assistants who have grievances regarding their appointment and assigned duties should follow the Graduate Assistant Grievance Procedure.

7.5 Vacation, Sick Leave, and Retirement Benefits: Because graduate assistants are temporary employees, they are not eligible to accrue any vacation, sick leave, or retirement credit, or to participate in employee insurance programs. Graduate assistants are covered under the University's Workers' Compensation program.