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GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Overview

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 employing units. 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.

Definitions

(1) Graduate assistants are primarily students, not employees. Nevertheless, graduate assistant appointments are part-time employee-employer contracts between full-time graduate students and the University. As a result, the GA is obligated to fulfill assigned duties for the specified amount of time and is entitled to compensation within the range established by the University.

(2) Graduate assistants must fall under one of the following categories:

Teaching Assistant 1 (TA1) GA duties do not include contact with students in scheduled meetings of classes and laboratories. GAs working under this category work in support of instructional programs, including such tasks as preparing examinations, grading papers, assisting in preparation of lectures, maintaining class records, and tutoring students outside of formal class and laboratory settings.

Teaching Assistant 2 (TA2) GA duties comprise all of those listed under TA1 but may also include such assignments as making presentations in laboratories or classrooms, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups provided that the GA is neither the instructor of record nor has primary responsibility for assigning grades.

Teaching Assistant 3 (TA3) GA duties comprise all of those listed under TA1 and TA2 but also include teaching classes for credit as the instructor of record and/or as the person with primary responsibility for assigning course grades.

Research Assistant (RA) GAs working under this category will assist in conducting research.

Service Assistant (SA) GA duties will include, but are not limited to, assisting scholarly journals housed at LSU, conducting data analysis, assisting in library services, and other academic/professional assignments.

(3) In units offering course work for graduate credit and employing graduate assistants, an associate or full member of the graduate faculty or the unit head must be assigned responsibility for the graduate assistantship program in all of its dimensions, including appointments, stipend amounts, work assignments, job descriptions, and evaluations. In non-academic units the unit supervisor or designated representative is responsible for all aspects of the GA program.

(4) The minimum award for a graduate assistantship will be equal to \$5400 for an academic year, \$1325 for a summer, and \$6725 for a fiscal year, all at a minimum appointment of 25% effort. Appointments for a single regular semester, fall or spring, must also be at a minimum of 25% effort at a minimum stipend equal to \$2700 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 stipend rates must be based upon clearly written guidelines established for the various stipend levels. Differences in pay rates should be based on:

- (a) the qualifications of the individual appointed;
- (b) the amount and/or scope of the work required.

(5) Graduate assistants are considered residents, for fee purposes only, and only for the period of their appointment. To receive this consideration, GAs must be appointed by October 1, for fall semester; March 1, for spring semester; July 1, for summer semester. Graduate assistants will be responsible for the payment of their tuition and all non-instructional fees. Three methods of paying resident fees are available:

- (a) payment in full during registration,
- (b) deferred payment, or
- (c) through payroll deduction. Students choosing payroll deduction must sign an authorization (available in the Office of the Treasurer) to withhold the required amount.

Any graduate assistant using the payroll deduction or deferred payment who resigns the assistantship during the semester will be responsible for any unpaid balance. Graduate assistants whose appointments are terminated for any reason and who were considered non-residents for fee purposes only may be liable for payment of full non-resident fees for the semester during which their appointments ended.

Qualifications

(6) Only graduate students with acceptable academic records may be appointed to assistantships. Before an appointment can be considered in effect, a student must be

admitted to the Graduate School and be registered as a full-time graduate student. To be considered full-time, students must maintain registration in a minimum of 9 semester hours in the fall or spring semester (a minimum of six hours for graduate credit), or a minimum of 6 semester hours in the summer term (a minimum of 3 hours for graduate credit). Students admitted on probation may be appointed as GAs once they have completed 9 hours of graduate-level graded courses with at least a 3.0 average, except under circumstances described below.

(7) A graduate student who enters the Graduate School on probation, or who is placed on semester academic probation during an appointment period, may be awarded or permitted to retain the assistantship only if the student's department can justify the retention to the Dean of the Graduate School and only if the student's cumulative grade point average is at least a 3.0. A student who enters the Graduate School on probation, or who is placed on semester academic probation either for failure to earn a 3.0 semester average or for making a "U" in research but who has a cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 may be appointed to, or retained on, a graduate assistantship while on semester probation only once during the period of appointment. Failure to resolve the probation in the next semester or in the first semester of appointment for new students (i.e., earning a 3.0 GPA or better in 9 hours of graded graduate level coursework), will result in termination of the assistantship appointment.

(8) Assistantships should not serve as impediments to the progress of graduate students toward their degrees. Likewise, GAs should not think of assistantships as providing semi-permanent employment. Accordingly, graduate assistantships are subject to limitations on funding as established by the employing units. Employing units must set forth their limitations on length of GA service clearly in letters of appointment.

(9) Graduate assistants who serve as instructors of record (TA3—those having primary responsibility for assigning final grades of a credit course) must have earned at least 18 hours of graduate semester hours in their teaching discipline prior to their appointment. For further requirements in connection with the preparation of GA's for teaching assignments, see PS-85.

(10) International students holding assistantships whose native language is not English must meet all current language requirements for international students.

Workload

(11) The graduate assistantship should support the educational experience of the GA and should be related to the student's graduate program. Any proposed appointment to duties unrelated to the student's academic work must be requested in writing by the chair or graduate advisor of the student's department before it will be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

(12) Graduate assistants are contractually required to devote full time to their graduate programs and to the responsibilities of their graduate assistantships. A GA may accept

additional employment only with the approval of the chair or graduate advisor of the student's department and the Dean of the Graduate School.

(13) Graduate assistants are primarily students, and their appointments may not exceed 50% of full-time effort (that is, twenty hours per week) without the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School. The percentages at which GAs are appointed should be calculated on the basis of 100% equaling 40 hours per week. Thus, a 25% appointment would entail 10 hours of work per week. The percentages recorded when GAs are appointed should correspond with the number of hours of work per week stipulated in their job descriptions. Graduate assistants may not be assigned more than six semester hours of instructional duties per week without the consent of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Appointments

(14) Appropriate unit administrators or supervisors —departmental graduate advisors or unit heads in units offering course work for graduate credit—are responsible for extending assistantship offers to eligible graduate students. The offer of appointment, once accepted, becomes a formal contract between the student and appointing unit.

(15) Appointing units must maintain current records on all GAs. Each GA file should include the following:

- a) one copy of the letter of appointment signed by the student;
- b) one copy of the job description of the position to which the assistant is being appointed, signed and dated by the student to indicate that she or he has received a copy; and
- c) one copy of a performance evaluation signed by both the student and evaluator, covering each previous period of appointment for all reappointments.

NOTE: A change in source of funds for a graduate assistant (e.g. from one grant account to another) is not considered a new appointment.

(16) A sample copy of the unit's standard letter of appointment and job description must be sent to the Graduate School. In cases where a unit has more than one type of appointment letter and/or job description, one copy of each type must be sent to the Graduate School. These samples should be updated as necessary.

(17) Tentative offers of graduate assistantships by departmental representatives to persons who have applied to the Graduate School, but have not yet been admitted, must clearly state the tentative nature of the offer and the condition that the applicant be accepted for regular admission to the Graduate School.

(18) All offers of graduate assistantships must include the following paragraph:

Your appointment will be for a _____ month period beginning _____(date), may be renewed, and is contingent on your being a student in good standing in the Graduate School. A student on academic probation is not in good standing. While you hold a graduate assistantship or fellowship, you are expected to devote full time to your graduate program and the responsibilities of your graduate assistantship. The conditions of your employment as a graduate assistant include: (1) adequate performance of assistantship duties and (2) satisfactory progress toward your degree. The term satisfactory progress includes, but is not limited to, maintaining semester and cumulative grade point averages of at least 3.0, taking and passing examinations on schedule, and, if applicable, working on your thesis or dissertation in a manner that meets the approval of your major professor; satisfactory progress toward the degree will be evaluated by appropriate graduate faculty of the degree program in which you are enrolled. Your performance in your assistantship duties will be evaluated in the context of a written job description; the chair or head of the department in which you are employed will be the final authority for judging performance of duties.

Units employing international graduate assistants must also state in the letter of appointment that the international student must meet current language requirements by the end of the first year or risk losing the assistantship.

(19) LSU, a member of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) in the United States, must also include a copy of the following resolution with all letters of appointment:

Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants

Acceptance of an offer of financial support (such as 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 should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer.

(20) Graduate assistantships terminate when an assistant is no longer eligible to continue as a full-time student in the Graduate School. Accordingly, a GA appointed for a fiscal year who becomes ineligible to continue at the end of the spring semester must be terminated at the close of the academic year.

(21) For the procedures on processing personnel action forms for graduate assistants, see the LSU Personnel Procedures Handbook.

Evaluation

(22) Employing units are responsible for providing each GA with an annual written evaluation. This evaluation must be reviewed by the GA and one signed copy must be placed in the student's departmental file. If an evaluation form is used, a sample must be submitted to the Graduate School; when more than one evaluation form is used, copies of each type must be on file in the Graduate School.

(23) Grievances involving the employee-employer relationship of graduate assistants and the University shall be appealable through the supervisor of the employing unit (department chair, head, other unit supervisor, and, when GA funding resides above the unit level, through the dean or director) to the Dean of the Graduate School.