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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

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What is the Graduate Assistantship?

The graduate assistantship (GA) is designed to provide support to a student for full-time graduate study. Technically, the assistantship is a “workshop” (a scholarship for which service is required). The assistantship provides an opportunity for a graduate student to serve in a professional role and to establish a professional relationship with faculty and/or administrators. However, the *primary role* of the graduate assistant is that of graduate student. i.e., the student has responsibility to his or her program of study *first*, with secondary responsibility to the specific functions of the job description. Guiding language for this position is reflected in a policy statement of the Council of Graduate Schools¹:

These individuals perform invaluable services...However, they are still fundamentally graduate students, and as such their assistantship awards must be considered primarily as a form of financial aid to help them complete graduate school [emphasis added], rather than as simple employment. (p. 15)

This dual role of being both a student and an employee requires that the graduate student exhibit a high level of maturity in addition to being a superior time manager.

Three types of GA positions exist at Southeast Missouri State University: (a) teaching, (b) research, and (c) administrative. Each provides a standard stipend and a waiver of fees for coursework related to a student’s “approved

¹ Council of Graduate Schools. (1990). *Organization and administration of graduate education*. Washington, DC: Author.

program of study” for the period of appointment. The nature of each type of assistantship is described below.

What is the Teaching Assistantship?

The graduate teaching assistant (TA) is expected to participate directly in the teaching of a course or to fulfill duties pertaining to specific teaching support or related activities. It is expected that the assistantship will (a) be a learning experience that facilitates completion of degree requirements, and (b) help the student prepare for a professional career. The University's intention is to make the teaching assistantship a valuable and integral part of the student's graduate education.

What is the Research Assistantship?

The graduate research assistant (RA) is expected to participate in research as directed by a University graduate faculty member. The appointment is *primarily a learning experience*. The RA should be given the opportunity to develop broad research competencies (i.e., design, data gathering and treatment, interpretation, reporting, and other research-related tasks), versus developing isolated competencies in a particular research phase. *The RA should not be used as merely a clerical assistant.*

What is an Administrative Assistantship?

The graduate administrative assistant (AA) is expected to develop competencies in and assist in the daily operations of an appropriate University unit where the student is assigned. It is expected that such appointment is *primarily a learning experience that should be related to the student's program of study*. The AA appointment should *not* be viewed as (a) the equivalent to a staff level appointment with its related responsibilities, or (b) inexpensive labor.

The AA should be given the opportunity to learn the functions of the office as well as educational management procedures. Each AA should be provided with a job description that clearly defines essential job functions the student is expected to perform. If a job description is not provided, the student should request that one be provided. If a unit does not have a current job description available that complies with standards set by the Office of Human Resources, efforts should be made to develop such a job description with input from the Director of Human Resources and the AA's supervisor. The unit administrator assumes a “teaching” responsibility both for explaining the operations of the office and for teaching administrative procedures.

It is expected that such an AA appointment provides more than routine student clerical support that would typically be performed by student workers on campus.

What is the Role of the School of Graduate Studies and Research in GA Supervision?

The School of Graduate Studies and Research assumes an active role in establishing policies that govern graduate assistant allocations at the University. Policies articulated in this document cover stipend levels, reasonable workloads, minimum academic qualifications, appointment and renewal guidelines, and resolution of grievances.

The School of Graduate Studies and Research also serves as an advocate for graduate assistants, ensuring that they are treated fairly and that their assistantship duties do not interfere unduly with their academic studies, but rather contribute to them. Supports are also provided to assist students with professional development.

OPERATING POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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Appointment Process

Appointment recommendations are initiated in the department/unit and require the approval of the College Dean and the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. Once approved, an *Appointment Memorandum* is issued by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. The contract should be returned, along with the W-4, MO-W4, I-9, and Personnel Data forms by the specified date to the School of Graduate Studies and Research, Memorial Hall 106. Appointments may be for one or two semesters with the terms stipulated in the contract. When the contract is signed, a waiver of fees for approved coursework during the contractual period is automatically issued. The fee waiver applies to approved courses listed in the *Initial Study Plan* for first year students (with the approval of the student's advisor), and to courses specified in the *Application of Candidacy* for students having completed approximately one-half of their coursework.

Time Commitment

TAs are expected to provide the equivalent of six credit hours of instruction per semester. RAs and AAs provide the *equivalent of half-time work*. However, to ensure that GAs have "appropriate learning opportunities," variability may exist across programs with regard to reasonable expectations of half-time work. In instances where students are *routinely* requested to work beyond the equivalent of half-time work, additional compensation should be provided by the department or unit. In no instance should workload related to the job expectations interfere with the GA's program of study (e.g., time away from class, missing examinations).

Appropriate Supervision

All GAs must be directly supervised by a graduate faculty member within an academic department, or by a designated professional staff member within a non-academic unit. The person responsible for the supervision must be indicated on the job description provided to the GA when the appointment is initiated. Supervision of GAs must adhere to any existing accreditation guidelines that are applicable to academic programs to which GAs are assigned. Supervisors have responsibility for evaluating each new GA after their first semester of service, and submit the written evaluations to the School of Graduate Studies and Research (see [“Appendix C”](#)). Ongoing evaluations of each GA are encouraged by all departments to ensure that feedback is routinely provided to students for professional growth. Additionally, each GA *is required to annually evaluate* his or her appointment experience (see [“Appendix D”](#)).

GA Privileges

When the contract is signed, a special graduate assistant I.D. card is issued by the School of Graduate Studies and Research. This card authorizes the Department of Public Safety to issue a parking permit. Beginning Fall 2002, all GAs will be responsible for paying for their own parking permits. The card is also used for access to the Student Recreation Center and to receive the faculty/staff discount at Books n' Things. A regular University I.D. is also needed to access essential campus services (e.g., the library).

Enrollment

GAs are required to enroll for and complete a minimum of six (6) hours of graduate level work per semester. The fee waiver included in the assistantship covers up to nine (9) hours of coursework for the Fall and Spring semesters, and up to six (6) hours of coursework in the Summer (Note: This enables a student to complete up to 24 hours of coursework per year.) Enrollment in *excess of nine hours* requires the specific approval of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. In general, approval for excess hours will be given only when the student has established a record at the graduate level that is clearly above average (3.5 or better).

Academic Standard

Since the assistantship is essentially a scholarship, GAs are expected to maintain a satisfactory academic record. At all times, the GA must maintain a 3.0 g.p.a. In addition, a GA is allowed only one grade of 'C' during their program of study regardless of the overall g.p.a. A grade below 'C' is unacceptable. Failure to exhibit appropriate academic performance results in automatic termination of the assistantship.

Outside Employment

University policy allows outside employment by GAs *only with the specific approval* of the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research along with a recommendation of the GA's supervisor.

Resignation/Termination

If for adequate cause a GA finds it necessary to resign his/her position prior to the end of the contractual period, a letter of resignation must be sent to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research with a copy to the student's supervisor. In the unlikely event that the resignation occurs during a semester, the GA may be liable for the incidental fees for that semester. An assistantship may be terminated by the supervisor for failure to perform assigned duties specified in the job description adequately, or by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research for failure to complete six hours of graduate work each semester with a satisfactory g.p.a. (Some exceptions to the completion policy are made for students at the end of their programs who are enrolled for thesis.) As the assistantship is a service scholarship, students who resign or are terminated are not eligible for unemployment compensation.

Job Descriptions

Departments/units are required to clearly communicate to the GA who his or her supervisor will be during the appointment and provide the GA with a written description of his/her responsibilities. For teaching assistants the description should specify details (e.g., supervisor, office hours, attendance at faculty meetings, lines of authority). Departments/units should make sure that the *essential functions* of the assistantship are clearly stated in the job description. The Office of Human Resources should be consulted in developing appropriate job descriptions.

Payroll

The amount of a GA stipend is \$6,100 per academic year. Payroll checks are delivered to the departments/units on a bi-weekly basis. GAs who will be leaving the campus prior to the final bi-weekly pay period should leave a self-addressed stamped envelope with the department/unit office so that the final check can be forwarded.

Check-Out Procedure

At the end of each semester, the School of Graduate Studies and Research provides to the Payroll Office a list of GAs who will be terminating and provides a check-out form to each assistant. The completed form must be received by the Payroll Office prior to issuance of the final check. A GA who resigns prior to the end of a semester must secure a check-out form from the School of Graduate Studies and Research.

Summer Fee Waivers

GAs who have satisfactorily completed a semester of service are eligible for a summer fee waiver for courses that are *part of the approved program of study* (i.e, courses identified in the Initial Study Plan for first-year students, or in the Application for Candidacy for students who have completed approximately half of their coursework; these courses are approved by the student's advisor). *The fee waiver process is not automatic.* Students who plan to attend classes during the summer must provide notice by May 31st to the School of Graduate Studies and Research regarding the number of hours (no more than 6 credit hours) to be taken during the summer session to ensure that a fee waiver is applied to the student's account.

Classroom Procedures

For TAs, specific departmental policies related to grading, office hours, student rights and responsibilities, and other activities should be provided to the student by the department.

Evaluation

Each GA must be evaluated by his/her immediate supervisor during the first semester of service (see “[Appendix C](#)”). The evaluation is shared with the GA and a copy forwarded to the departmental/unit office, Dean of the College, and Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. The purpose of the evaluation is to provide feedback that will support the continued development of the GA as a professional. At the end of each year of appointment **each GA must complete an evaluation of the assistantship experience** to provide constructive feedback to the University (see “[Appendix D](#)”). No exceptions will be made to this requirement for evaluation of the GA experience.

Orientation

All new GAs will be required to attend the departmentally-based workshops and a general workshop prior to the beginning of the Fall Semester. In addition, TAs are required to enroll in GR603, *Seminar in College Teaching*, during the Fall term. (Note: TAs in the Department of English enroll in the departmental courses for assistants rather than GR603.)

GA Website

The School of Graduate Studies and Research maintains a comprehensive website for its GAs at: www2.semo.edu/gradschool. GAs should refer to this website periodically to access the Graduate Bulletin and other resources.

Grievances

Whenever a concern arises regarding the GA’s program of study or the performance of responsibilities related to the assistantship, the GA has an obligation to attempt to resolve the concern with his or her supervisor *at the department/unit level*. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be achieved, the GA should then present the issue to the Chair of the department or Head of the unit where the GA is assigned. Assuming a satisfactory resolution of the concern cannot be resolved at the department level, the GA may then present the concern to the Dean of the College for resolution. If a satisfactory resolution of the GA’s concern cannot be attained at the College level, the concern may then be presented to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. For GAs assigned to non-academic units, the concern brought before the Head of a unit and unresolved may be brought directly to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.

SUPPORTS

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The primary financial aid available to graduate students is the assistantship program. If additional support is needed, students should inquire at Student Financial Services as to loan and scholarship programs. Opportunities for summer employment at student labor rates are also available. Southeast Missouri State University is unique among master's level institutions in its support of the professional/scholarly development of graduate students.

Research Fund

Support up to \$150.00 is available to help defray extraordinary research costs related to theses, graduate papers, or creative projects (e.g., mailings, special materials, test protocols). Usual costs such as typing and copy charges are not eligible for funding support. Forms for applying for research support funding are available at: http://www2.semo.edu/gradschool/download_forms_curr.html Guidelines for applying for these funds are noted in ["Appendix A"](#).

Professional Development Fund

Grants up to \$350.00 are available to support presentations at and travel to professional meetings. *Priority consideration* is given to students who have presentations accepted for professional meetings. This fund is notably popular and generally depleted by December. Students who anticipate attendance at professional meetings may encumber funds well in advance of the meeting. ["Appendix B"](#) provides guidelines for applying for these funds. Additionally, forms for applying for professional development support funding are available at: http://www2.semo.edu/gradschool/download_forms_curr.html

Workshops

Several departments have developed pre-semester workshops and/or semester long seminars as a means of providing support for TAs. Where the number of TAs is too small to support a workshop/seminar arrangement, departments have been asked to provide a faculty mentor for each assistant to serve as a resource person. In addition, the following will also prove helpful to both beginning and experienced TAs.

Center for Scholarship on Teaching and Learning

The Center for Scholarship on Teaching and Learning (CSTL), housed in Kent Library, is eager to assist both teaching assistants and university faculty interested in instructional improvement. In addition to conducting workshops and seminars, the Center Director and staff will consult with GAs seeking help in (a) developing instructional materials, (b) improving classroom examinations, (c) conducting classroom visits, and (d) designing educational research. The Director of the CSTL has experience in working with teaching assistants and welcomes GA inquiries.

Special Workshops

There are several faculty members having reputations as excellent teachers who are willing to meet with a small group of teaching assistants to address specific types of interest. If GAs have needs that might be provided via a workshop presentation, specific requests should be directed to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research with some indication of the topic of interest and the number of interested students.

Application for Research Fund Support

This support is designed to assist graduate students engaged in research for a thesis, creative project, term paper, etc. by financially offsetting extraordinary expenses. The form is available online in two formats: .doc (may be downloaded and/or printed, then completed on typewriter or manually) and .pdf (may be completed online and printed). Forms may be accessed at: http://www2.semo.edu/gradschool/download_forms_curr.html

Eligibility

Any currently enrolled Southeast graduate student who is engaged in a valid research project is eligible to apply for assistance. Validity of the project is determined by the student's instructor, advisor, or thesis committee, who are required to signify their approval of the project on the student's written request form or by a separate cover memo.

Procedure

Each student requesting funds must present a written petition to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. The petition should include:

- 1 Explanation of the nature of the project as well as relevancy to the student's course of study.
- 2 An itemized list of estimated expenses.
- 3 Signature(s) of the instructor, advisor, or thesis committee verifying the validity of the project, to be placed on the student's written petition. If estimated expenses exceed \$150, the faculty member should include a separate cover memo evaluating and approving the project. Departments should indicate on the form whether matching funds are being provided for the student's request.

Applications should be addressed to:

Dr. Phil Parette, *Dean*
School of Graduate Studies and Research
M.S. 4400
Southeast Missouri State University
One University Plaza
Cape Girardeau, MO 63701

Allocations

The following rules will govern the allocation of Research Assistance Funds:

- 1 Normally, a student will not receive in excess of \$150 or 50% of the estimated expenses of the project, whichever is less.
- 2 No student may petition for funds more than once for the same research project.
- 3 Normally, a student will not receive in excess of \$150 in research assistance funds for the entire fiscal year, regardless of the number of research projects the student has completed that year.

Collection of Funds

Upon approval, the Dean of School of Graduate Studies and Research will authorize Student Financial Services to prepare a check and will inform the student. A minimum of 10 days is needed to process the check. All checks are distributed through Student Financial Services.

Application for Student Professional Development Fund Support

This support is designed to provide financial assistance to any graduate student planning to present at or attend a professional, educational, or otherwise academically-oriented convention, seminar, or workshop. The form is available online in two formats: .doc (may be downloaded and/or printed, then completed on typewriter or manually) and .pdf (may be completed online and printed). Forms may be accessed at: http://www2.semo.edu/gradschool/download_forms_curr.html

Eligibility

Any currently enrolled graduate student planning to attend an out-of-town convention, seminar, or workshop, that directly relates to the student's educational and professional goals is eligible to apply for assistance. Validity of the trip is determined by the student's advisor and/or department chairperson, who are required to signify their approval of the trip on the student's written request form or by a separate cover memo. Departments should indicate on the form whether matching funds are being provided for the student's request. Priority will be given to full-time students and/or students without other sources of support.

Procedure

Each student requesting travel funds must present a completed application to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. The petition should include:

- 1 A description of the event to be attended and its relevancy to the student's course of study and educational and professional goals.
- 2 If a student is to be reimbursed for travel following the trip (the preferred method), he/she should include an itemized list of actual expenses (including actual transportation costs, not mileage), supported by the appropriate receipts.
- 3 If a student finds he/she needs a cash advance to help defray expenses while actually traveling, an itemized list of estimated expenses is required. The estimation of costs should follow these guidelines:

- Only reasonable and necessary amounts are allowed for lodging and meal expenses. If the student shares a room, **only his/her portion of the lodging expense should be listed**. Three meals per day are subject to reimbursement, and amounts should not exceed:

Breakfast - \$ 6.00

Lunch - \$ 9.00

Dinner - \$15.00

These are prescribed maximums, and should not be used without regard to a reasonable estimation of the actual expenses to be incurred.

- Transportation costs should be based on an estimate of actual costs (gas, airplane tickets, etc.), rather than standard mileage allowances.
- Within 10 days of completion of the trip, the student should present an actual travel expense report, supported by the appropriate receipts, to the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. Failure to file this report will result in the student being placed in “encumbered” status with the University’s Student financial Services, which designates that student as owing money to the University.
- Reimbursement of personal expenses such as personal insurance, alcoholic beverages, laundry, extra meals, tips, telephone and telegraph bills, organizational membership fees, etc. is not allowed.
- Students should anticipate needs as far in advance as possible. Requests received in the Fall for Spring Semester funding can be honored as long as funds are available.

Allocation of Funds

The following rules will govern the allocation of Non-Research Assistance Funds:

- 1 No student will receive in excess of \$350 or 50% of the expenses of the trip, whichever is less.
- 2 No student may petition for funds more than once for the same trip.
- 3 No student will receive in excess of \$350 in travel assistance funds for the entire fiscal year, regardless of the number of trips the student has completed that year.

Collection of Funds

If an advance is needed, the petition must reach the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research **no less than 14 working days prior to the trip**. Reimbursements are generally available within ten days of the receipt of the appropriate expense verifications. All checks are distributed through Student Financial Services, Academic Hall, Room 123.

APPENDIX C



Graduate Studies & Research

Department/Unit Evaluation of Graduate Assistant

Name of GA:

Department/Unit:

Date of Evaluation:

Type of Evaluation (Check one): First semester Annual

Overall Performance Observation (Narrative of strengths/contributions)

Performance Challenges (Narrative identifying areas that should be addressed prior to next evaluation)

GA's signature:

Date:

Supervisor's signature:

Date:

cc:

Dr. Fred Jancow, Dean
Dean of College
Department Chair

Annual Student Evaluation of Graduate Assistantship

Purpose: As stipulated in the *Graduate Assistant Handbook*, each graduate assistant must submit an evaluation of his or her experience during the appointment to an academic department or unit at Southeast Missouri State University. This should be submitted directly via hard copy (MS 4400) or email attachment (marant@semovm.semo.edu) to the School of Graduate Studies and Research no later than the last week before final exams during the student's final semester.

Name:

Department/Unit to which assigned:

Please answer the following questions regarding your perceived experience:

1. Has your GA experience in the past academic year been a positive one?
(please check)

YES NO Comments:

2. Have you been satisfied with the level of supervision provided to you by your department/unit where you were assigned?

YES NO Comments:

3. Have you been satisfied with the level of support (e.g., academic, financial) provided to you by your department/unit where you were assigned?

YES NO Comments:

4. Have you had opportunities for professional growth and development (e.g., travel to conferences, workshops) during your appointment?

YES NO Comments:

5. Have you been satisfied with the level of support provided by the School of Graduate Studies and Research (e.g., information, resources, support) during your appointment?

YES NO Comments:

6. Have you used the School of Graduate Studies and Research webpage resources during the past academic year? If YES, were these resources helpful?

YES NO Comments:

7. If you have had need of the staff in the School of Graduate Studies and Research, have they been helpful and responsive to your concerns.

YES NO Comments:

8. Have you developed new skills/competencies during your appointment as a GA that will help you in the future?

YES NO Comments:

Please respond to each of the following questions (as appropriate);

9. What specific benefits of your GA appointment did you experience?

10. What concerns/challenges did you encounter related to your experience as a GA?

11. What recommendations would you offer to your department/unit to improve the quality of your GA experience?

12. What recommendations would you offer to the School of Graduate Studies and Research to improve the quality of GA experiences for all students?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. Please send the completed questionnaire to: Marsha Arant, MS 4400 (marant@semo.edu)