

TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY

ADMINISTRATION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Preamble

Programs of graduate study are designed to transform the individual from student to (knowledgeable practitioner or) professional scholar. When a graduate assistantship is well conceived and executed, it should serve as an ideal instrument to help facilitate the desired transformation. The primary goal of an assistantship, then, is to facilitate progress toward the graduate degree. Rather than interfere or conflict with the student's educational objective, the assistantship is to aid in the prompt and successful completion of the degree program. While the student assistant makes progress toward an advanced degree, he or she also receives work experience in a profession under the supervision of a faculty mentor.

The graduate assistant is both student and employee. As a student, the graduate assistant is expected to perform well academically to retain the assistantship. He or she is to be counseled and evaluated regularly by a faculty mentor so as to develop professional skills. As an employee, the graduate assistant is expected to meet teaching, research, and/or administrative obligations. He or she is to work under the supervision of experienced faculty and receive in-service training. In sum, the graduate assistant receives financial support for graduate study by contributing to the teaching and/or research mission of the university. The totality of responsibility may be greater than that required of other students or staff members, but the opportunities for professional development also are greater for the graduate assistant.

- Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools

Types of Assistantships

Under the Provisions of TBR Policy 5:02:05:00, a graduate student may hold an assistantship in the following categories:

Graduate Teaching Assistant: Graduate Teaching Assistants work under the direct supervision of a regular faculty member in activities such as helping to prepare lectures, teaching or conducting discussion sections or groups, assisting in conducting laboratory exercises, grading papers and keeping class records, or teaching physical education activities. In consultation with the supervisor, the Teaching Assistant works to gain teaching skills and an increased understanding of the discipline. Appointments are normally on a one-half to full-time basis. A full-time graduate assistant may be assigned to work for up to 8 contact hours per week. If a graduate teaching assistant works only non-contact hours, such as grading papers, keeping class records, helping to prepare class lectures, then the assistant is assigned 20 clock hours a week. If a graduate teaching assistant performs contact and non-contact work, the average number of hours of work per week assigned is based on the proportion of contact and non-contact hours.

Graduate Teaching Associate: Exceptionally experienced graduate students, as explained elsewhere, may be assigned primary responsibility for teaching undergraduate courses, including the assignment of final grades. The Teaching Associate usually carries one-fourth to one-half of a normal teaching load. A full-time graduate teaching associate may be assigned to a maximum of 6 contact hours per week in classroom or laboratory instruction.

Graduate Support Assistant: Graduate Support Assistants are appointed to perform various types of duties other than those related directly to teaching or research. Most commonly, these duties relate to supervisory or administrative functions of the University. Appointments are normally on a one-half to full-time basis. A full-time Graduate Support Assistant is assigned 20 clock hours a week in the department or unit of his/her employment.

Graduate Research Assistant: Graduate research assistantships are generally financed by grant or contract funds. Students holding such appointments pursue a work and study program similar to that expected under the other types of awards. A full-time Graduate Research Assistant is assigned to 20 clock hours a week in research activities in the department or unit of hi/her employment.

Eligibility and Employment Status

A degree-seeking student must be admitted and/or enrolled in the Graduate School in full or provisional standing to be eligible for appointment as a graduate assistant.

1. As specified in the Tennessee Board of Regents' (TBR) Policy 5:01:01:00, page 1, "A student employee is one whose primary purpose for being at the institution is to be enrolled in an academic program of the institution." Thus, the first priority of all graduate assistants must be satisfactory progress in their scholastic programs. Collaborative efforts between graduate assistants and their supervisors should be focused on the goal of satisfactory performance in their academic program and assigned work. If, however, this is not possible for the student, the graduate assistantship must be relinquished.
2. Under the provisions of TBR Policy No. 5:01:04:10, graduate assistants shall be classified as in-state students for purposes of fees and tuition at the institutions where they are pursuing graduate studies. Accordingly, in order for a graduate student to be classified as a graduate assistant, the student must have a minimum 50% assistantship. A full-time graduate assistant is assigned to 20 clock hours per week, and receives a stipend and a waiver of out-of-state fees. A half-time assistant is assigned 10 hours of work per week and receives 50% stipend and pays 50% of in-state fees.
3. A graduate student may be offered a scholarship to cover fees and, if the student wishes to work, the student may be employed as a student worker. However, the scholarship and/or employment do not change the student's status from out-of-state to in-state for fee-paying purposes.
4. Graduate assistants are not eligible for employee benefits. The only deduction made from a graduate assistant's pay is the withholding tax. Graduate assistants must complete a W-4 form (Employee Withholding Exemption Certificate) which is available in the Office of Human Resource Services. FICA and Medicare tax are deducted if the student is enrolled for less than six (6) credit hours.

Qualifications of Graduate Assistants

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) specifies that Graduate Teaching Associates who have primary responsibility for teaching a course for credit and/or for assigning final grades for such a course must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in their teaching fields, be under the direct supervision of a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training, and be regularly evaluated.

The 18-hour requirement does not apply to Graduate Teaching Assistants who are engaged in assignments such as laboratory assistance, teaching physical education activities, attending or helping prepare lectures, grading papers, keeping class records, and conducting discussion groups.

The appropriate departmental chairperson has responsibility for certifying that the 18-hour requirement is met either through coursework or by documentation that the graduate assistant meets the requirement as an exception. The appropriate notation must be placed on the Personnel Action Form (PAF) and routed through the appropriate channels.

Tennessee Technological University requires all who teach to be competent in spoken English.

Each assistant (whose competency has not already been certified) will be evaluated for oral English ability by the departmental chairperson or his/her designee prior to the start of classes. Those who have been identified as not able to communicate effectively in the English language will have their assistantship revoked or will be assigned other duties. Those who have been identified as being able to communicate effectively in the English language will be so certified by the departmental chairperson (or designee) on the Personnel Action Form.

Terms of Appointment and Reappointments

The specific terms of employment of Graduate Assistants may be for an academic year, semester, fiscal year, or based upon a percentage of full-time assistantship.

Graduate Research Assistants are typically appointed on a fiscal year basis (July-June)

Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Teaching Associates begin employment one week before the start of regularly scheduled classes and end the last day of finals week. Graduate Support Assistants begin first day of regularly scheduled classes and end last day of classes.

Graduate Support Assistants who start employment earlier than the beginning of the first day of regularly scheduled classes of the semester and/or end employment later than the last day of classes must be compensated for extra time worked at a rate equal to or more than the rate of their semester or academic year compensations. A Graduate Support Assistant will be considered as a student worker and compensated as such for work performed before the beginning of the semester or after the last day of classes. Graduate Support Assistants who work more than 280 hours per semester must receive overtime pay. Those who work more than 40 hours per week will be compensated at the rate of one and one half.

The employment and compensation of graduate assistants must conform to the applicable provisions of the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act of the US Department of Labor.

Graduate assistants who are performing satisfactorily may be reappointed, subject to available funding. The graduate student who is awarded an assistantship should ascertain from the college in which the assistantship is granted the conditions of the assistantship. The conditions may vary from college to college, or from unit to unit.

In all cases of appointment and reappointment, the funding unit is responsible for notifying the graduate assistant as early as possible. When an assistantship is not to be renewed, the graduate student should be notified in advance.

All graduate assistants/associates must sign an employment letter and have appropriate I-9 and W-4 forms on file in the Office of Human Resource Services. Under no circumstances is a graduate assistant/associate to begin work before presenting a copy of his/her signed appointment letter to his/her designated supervisor. An international student must hold and maintain a valid visa prior to the commencement of employment as a graduate assistant.

Work Assignments and Related Factors

To utilize the four categories of assistantships, the following provisions should be observed:

1. Work assignments for each type of assistantship should be as specific as possible and should be developed to reflect both the needs of the department and each graduate assistant's obligation to make satisfactory progress in his/her program. Therefore, to the extent possible, an assignment should appropriately reflect teaching hours, office hours, hours to be spent performing research or other specified tasks.

In situations where the work assignment cannot be specifically described or must be changed from an initial assignment, the graduate assistant should be clearly informed before agreeing to, or continuing in the assignment.

An important part of each graduate assistant's work assignment is the fostering of professional development. Such development, plus variations in departmental needs, may result in differences in the number of hours per week for carrying out assignments. Thus, weekly work assignments, when specified, are performed in terms of averages. For a one-half-time appointment, the graduate assistant's normal work time should not exceed 10 hours per week. For a full-time appointment, the average number of hours should not exceed 20 hours per week. The graduate assistant and the immediate supervisor should mutually understand the normal number of hours for conducting an assignment. For percentage efforts not covered by those appointments, the normal work time per week will be prorated.

Research assistants whose research is applicable to their thesis or dissertation requirement should not expect to be compensated for work beyond 20 hours. (Hours should be prorated if appointment is for less than full-time.)

2. A full-time graduate assistant in each of the four categories of assistantships normally should enroll for 6-12 semester hours of coursework. A one-half-time graduate assistant in each of the four categories of assistantships normally should take 9-14 semester hours. A student on a full assistantship who takes at least six semester hours will be considered a full-time student. During the summer term, a student on an assistantship who takes at least three semester hours will be considered a full-time student.

A student's academic home unit is responsible for implementing these policies, regardless of the assignment or responsible account. It is, therefore, essential that the home unit be notified by any other unit employing the student of any assistantship awarded at the time of its initiation or renewal.

According to INS regulations, additional employment is not permitted for international students who are employed as graduate assistants working 20 hours per week.

Evaluation/Supervision of Graduate Assistants

Supervisors of graduate assistants will conduct a periodic evaluation of each assistant. The results of the evaluation will be made available to the assistant. A copy will be placed in the student's academic file and the file of the unit employing the student. Appropriate follow-up also should occur.

The immediate supervisor for each graduate assistant should be identified when possible on the Personnel Action Form prior to the beginning of the assistantship.

The chain of responsibility within each unit should be clearly indicated to graduate assistants. Thus, each graduate assistant should know that the immediate supervisor is the person to whom first contact is to be made in job related questions/directions. Subsequent contact would be made with the unit chairperson or director, dean of the college, and the Associate Vice President for Research and Graduate Studies.

Orientation/Training of Graduate Assistants

There should be a thorough, systematic plan of orientation and training of all Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Teaching Associates. Such orientation and training may be done at the department, college, or university level. It is the responsibility of each supervisor to see that his/her graduate assistant is provided appropriate orientation/training.

Graduate assistants who work in laboratories and administrative offices may receive initial orientation, followed by work experiences which constitute training. In such instances, the training period should be clearly communicated to the student assistant.

Accepting/Declining An Assistantship

Tennessee Technological University adheres to the following for those assistantships that are for an entire year:

Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants

Acceptance of an offer of financial support (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 institution and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer.

-National Council of Graduate Schools

TENNESSEE TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY IS AN
AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

Tennessee Tech complies with Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended; the Equal Pay Act of 1963, as amended; the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, as amended; the Age Discrimination Act of 1975; the Pregnancy Discrimination Act; the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; the Vietnam Era Veterans' Readjustment Assistance Act of 1974; Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972; and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990.