

# Graduate Assistantships

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Graduate Assistantships are intended to recruit quality students to graduate study at MSU and to enhance the graduate learning experience. An assistantship is a financial award to a graduate student for part-time work in teaching, research, or administration while pursuing an advanced degree.

## Types of Assistantship Appointments

Graduate research, teaching, and service assistantships are available on an annual or nine-month basis. A graduate assistant's work schedule is a maximum of 20 hours per week. The minimum stipend rate is \$600.00 per month.

### Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)

Graduate Research Assistants perform duties in support of University research, which may or may not relate to the students' thesis/dissertation. Many University academic, research, and administrative offices employ GRAs. This opportunity provides an excellent means for students to learn new techniques and methods as well as expand their knowledge by association with research-oriented responsibilities, whether employed within the student's academic discipline or in another department. Duties and stipends vary from program to program and are dependent upon the nature of assigned duties.

### Graduate Service Assistantship (GSA)

Graduate Service Assistants aid faculty and staff members with administrative functions, and GSA appointments are available in many academic and non-academic units. Duties vary, depending on administrative needs of the unit making the award, and stipends vary according to the nature of assigned duties.

### Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)

Graduate Teaching Assistants work under the direct supervision of graduate faculty members and are assigned duties related directly to instruction, such as assisting in the preparation of lectures, leading discussion sections, conducting laboratory exercises, grading papers, and keeping class records. Advanced graduate students who have completed 18 graduate credit hours in their teaching discipline (seminar and research hours excluded) may be given primary responsibility for teaching an undergraduate course, including student assessment and assignment of final grades. **GTAs cannot be assigned primary responsibilities for teaching and student assessment in courses approved for graduate credit.**

All graduate students planning to serve as Graduate Teaching Assistants must participate in the Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program prior to beginning the first teaching assignment at MSU and satisfy all program/evaluation requirements necessary to obtain the level of certification (GTA1, GTA2, GTA3) that corresponds to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. Please refer to Graduate Teaching Assistantship Certification in this publication for detailed certification requirements.

## Appointment Process

### Minimum University Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for an assistantship a student must be admitted to a specific degree program with "regular" or "contingent" status. A student with "contingent" status must, within the first award enrollment period, satisfy "regular" admission requirements, and an assistantship award will be terminated if these requirements are not met. **"Unclassified" graduate students or graduate students with "provisional" admission status to a degree program are ineligible to hold an assistantship.**

If English is not the native language of an international graduate student, the English Language Requirements for International Students apply. These requirements are found in the International Students Admission section of this publication.

### Application for Graduate Assistantship

Application for an assistantship must be submitted to the college, department, school, or support unit. The department/unit may provide its own application form or use the Application for Graduate Assistantship found on the Graduate School website ([http://www.grad.msstate.edu/forms/pdf/assistantship\\_app.PDF](http://www.grad.msstate.edu/forms/pdf/assistantship_app.PDF)). The department/unit establishes application deadlines and review procedures.

### Graduate Assistantship Offer/Appointment

Individual academic and non-academic departments are responsible for making the offer of an assistantship award, establishing the amount of the stipend and the work schedule, and monitoring the performance of the graduate assistant's duties and responsibilities.

## Accepting/Declining an Assistantship Offer

### Council of Graduate Schools

Mississippi State University is a member of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS). The University subscribes to the CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants; the resolution and a complete list of participating institutions are available at <http://www.cgsnet.org>.

The Resolution reads as follows: "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 institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer."

## Graduate Assistantship Award Benefits

### Tuition Waiver

Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Service Assistants receive a tuition exemption of approximately 71% of the assessed tuition. Graduate Research Assistants receive a tuition exemption of 100% of the assessed tuition.

**IRS Code states that the tuition remission of those Graduate Service Assistants whose course of study is specifically related to assistantship duties is not taxable. For a Graduate Service Assistant whose course of study is not specifically related to assistantship duties, tuition remission up to \$5,250.00 per calendar year is not subject to tax; however, tuition remission in excess of \$5,250.00 per calendar year is taxable.**

### Distance Education Courses

A graduate assistant tuition award does not cover the tuition of Distance Education or ESL courses when a student is enrolled in more than 9 credit hours. The tuition exemption does not cover the distance fee; only the basic tuition fee is covered. Therefore, the graduate assistant is responsible for payment of any additional per credit hour rate incurred as a result of Distance Education or ESL enrollment. The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Therefore, dropping a course is not permitted if the resulting course load is fewer than the required 9 graduate credit hours. No course in the 9-hour load can be audited or converted to audit status.

### Termination of Assistantship

If the assistantship is terminated prior to the specified ending date, the assistant's duties, stipend, and tuition exemption will cease. The student will be required to pay back a prorated portion of the previously applied tuition exemption.

### Stipends

Stipends are paid on the fifteenth and the last working day of each month. When employment begins during a pay period, stipends for the first pay period are calculated on a prorated basis.

### Health Insurance Supplement

The University provides a health insurance subsidy for Graduate Assistants who purchase the University-sponsored health insurance plan through the MSU Longest Student Health Center. The total health insurance subsidy is \$400 per academic year: \$200 for the fall semester and again during the spring/summer semester. The insurance subsidy will be deposited into each Graduate Assistant's account in October and in February. To access information about the University-sponsored health insurance plan, visit [http://www.health.msstate.edu/healthcenter/insurance\\_student.php](http://www.health.msstate.edu/healthcenter/insurance_student.php).

## Responsibilities for Maintaining a Graduate Assistantship

### Required Course Load

#### Fall and Spring Semesters

Graduate assistants must be full-time students (registered in at least 9 graduate credit hours) and may not enroll in more than 13 graduate credit hours. The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Therefore, no course may be dropped if the resulting course load is fewer than the required 9 graduate credit hours, nor may any course in the 9-hour load consist of or be converted to audit status.

## Full- and Half-Summer Awards

Full-summer awards require an enrollment in a minimum of 6 graduate credit hours in any combination of Maymester, 1<sup>st</sup> 5-week, 2<sup>nd</sup> 5-week, or 10-week terms. A maximum of 3 graduate credit hours is allowed for Maymester; a maximum of 13 credit hours is allowed for 1<sup>st</sup> 5-week, 2<sup>nd</sup> 5<sup>th</sup> week, or 10-week terms. Any combination of 1<sup>st</sup> 5-week, 2<sup>nd</sup> 5-week, or 10-week terms may be used for the 13-credit hour maximum; however, enrollment in either 5-week term must be a minimum of 3 graduate credit hours and a maximum of 7 credit hours. Additionally, a student holding a half-summer graduate assistantship must be registered for courses scheduled during the term of the assistantship.

## Undergraduate Courses

The full-time course load may not be composed of undergraduate courses unless the course is a program prerequisite. In such case, only one undergraduate course will be permitted as part of the full-time load (per Graduate Council, March 2001). Some international students are required by the University to take ESL 5323 and/or ESL 5313. Both are considered undergraduate courses and program prerequisites, and a graduate student is permitted to enroll in one of these courses while holding an assistantship. ESL 5323 and ESL 5313 cannot be taken concurrently.

## Course Overload

Graduate assistants wishing to schedule more than a full-time course load may, with the approval of his/her major professor, department head, graduate coordinator and dean, register for more than 13 hours by submitting an Overload Form, [http://www.provost.msstate.edu/resources/students/forms/forms/Request\\_for\\_scheduling\\_overload\\_graduate\\_students.pdf](http://www.provost.msstate.edu/resources/students/forms/forms/Request_for_scheduling_overload_graduate_students.pdf) to the major professor. The dean's office sends the approved form to the Registrar's Office. Such transmission permits application of additional tuition exemption consistent with existing policy.

## Academic Achievement

To retain an assistantship, a student must demonstrate satisfactory progress in the academic program. Failure to do so may result in termination of the assistantship. Unsatisfactory progress may be defined as the failure to maintain a B average in graduate courses attempted after being admitted to a specific program; a grade of U, D, or F in any course; more than 6 credit hours below a B; failure of the preliminary/comprehensive examination; an unsatisfactory evaluation of a thesis or dissertation; failure of a research defense; or any other failure of a required component of one's program of study. Any, or a combination of these, may constitute the basis for the termination of a student's graduate study in a degree program. Individual programs have the right to establish their own criteria. If a student is dismissed, his/her assistantship is terminated.

## Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program

The Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification (GTAC) workshop is designed to introduce first-time teaching assistants to the techniques and skills necessary to be effective instructors in a university environment and promote excellence in undergraduate education at Mississippi State University. The Teaching Assistant Certification Program consists of the following three components:

- International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Workshop for international students only
- Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop (for both US and international students)
- Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation (for GTA2/GTA3 certification).

Additional information about the Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program is available online by visiting <http://www.grad.msstate.edu/workshop>.

## International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Workshop - International Students Only

The International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Workshop provides international graduate students who plan to serve as teaching assistants with the cultural education and communications skills necessary to achieve effective performance of their duties. The workshop also serves as a tool for evaluating international students' teaching. The training, evaluation, and certification of international GTAs are essential to ensure that undergraduate students receive a high quality of instruction.

## Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop

Held semi-annually before the fall and spring semesters begin, the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop introduces students who plan to become new teaching assistants to effective teaching methods and tools and educates them about University policies and resources. The GTA/ITA Workshop emphasizes the importance of providing high-quality instruction at Mississippi State University. All first-time GTAs, both domestic and international, are required to attend the Workshop.

**Failure to complete the GTA Workshop, including partial attendance or tardiness to Workshop sessions, will render a student ineligible for the Microteaching/Classroom Certification and a teaching assistantship award.**

## Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation

Held semi-annually, immediately following the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop, the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation is the tool used to determine whether a GTA is equipped with the skills needed to deliver high-quality instruction to undergraduate students at Mississippi State University. Prospective students for GTA2/GTA3 certification prepare a 10-15 minute interactive mini-lesson to present to students as

part of an assigned course. The mini-lesson is delivered to a group of graduate faculty members who judge the level of skills using a rubric. Classroom certification is required of all teaching assistants whose responsibilities involve classroom or laboratory teaching of students. A student cannot participate in the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation component until all other Teaching Assistant Certification Programs requirements (GTA Workshop and ITA Workshop, if applicable) are completed.

## Certification Levels for Graduate Teaching Assistants

By participating in the Teaching Assistant Certification Program, graduate students can become certified at one of the three levels that correspond to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. A minimum of GTA1 certification is required for ALL graduate teaching assistantship appointments at MSU.

### Graduate Teaching Assistant 1 (GTA1)

The graduate student will assist in such tasks as preparing examinations, grading papers, preparing class lectures, maintaining class records, and tutoring students outside formal classes. This position does not require the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification component of the GTAC. A GTA who initially received assignment to a GTA1 level appointment may later complete the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation in anticipation of a change in duties/responsibilities that require classroom or laboratory teaching. A GTA who has already obtained GTA1 level certification is not required to attend the GTA Workshop again.

### Graduate Teaching Assistant 2 (GTA2)

This level requires completion of the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation of the GTAC. The graduate assistant may have some of the same duties as GTA1. Other responsibilities include making presentations in laboratories/classrooms, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups. These tasks involve classroom or laboratory teaching of students, but the graduate teaching assistant is not the instructor of record.

### Graduate Teaching Assistant 3 (GTA3)

The graduate student will teach for credit as the instructor of record and/or as the person primarily responsible for assigning grades. Mississippi State University Academic Operating Policy and Procedure (AOP) 13.09 *Credentials for Teaching*, states "Graduate teaching assistants may serve as instructors of record only for undergraduate courses. These graduate students must possess a master's in the teaching discipline and obtain classroom certification from the Graduate School. Graduate teaching assistants must receive direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the same teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned periodic evaluations. Graduate teaching assistants cannot serve as instructors of record for graduate level courses, regardless of qualifications." **Requires Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation. Additional paperwork may be required for verification of teaching credentials, including submission of transcripts from each institution attended.**

**Students must satisfy all program/evaluation requirements necessary to obtain the level of certification (GTA1, GTA2, GTA3) corresponding to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. Waivers to allow classroom/laboratory teaching (GTA2/GTA3 levels) without successful completion of all applicable Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program component requirements WILL NOT be issued.**