

# 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 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.

### Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)

Graduate Research Assistants perform duties in support of University research, which may or may not relate to the student's 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 faculty and staff 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 maintaining 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 Program section below for detailed certification requirements.

## 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.

## Appointment Process

### Minimum University Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for an assistantship a student must be admitted to a specific degree program. A student with "contingent" or "provisional" status must, within the first award enrollment period, satisfy "regular" admission requirements. An assistantship award shall be terminated if these requirements are not met. Unclassified and provisionally admitted students may be eligible and will be limited in the type of funding that can be used for an assistantship.

### Application for Graduate Assistantship

An assistantship application must be submitted to the college, department, school, or administrative unit that will provide the support. The department/unit may provide its own application form or use the Application for Graduate Assistantship. Deadlines and review procedures are established by the supporting departments/units.

### Graduate Assistantship Offer/Appointment

Individual academic and administrative departments are responsible for offering an assistantship award, establishing the amount of the stipend, designing the work schedule, and monitoring the performance of the graduate assistant's duties and responsibilities. The student must formally accept or decline the offer in accordance with guidelines outlined in the offer letter. See the Council of Graduate Schools' resolution pertaining to assistantship offers at <http://www.cgsnet.org> (<http://www.cgsnet.org/>).

## 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. Graduate assistants hired after the beginning of each semester will also be subject to prorated tuition.

## 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.

## Award Benefits

### Tuition Exemption

Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Service Assistants receive a tuition exemption of 100% 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.**

## Online Education Courses

A graduate assistant tuition award does not cover the tuition of Online Education or ESL courses when a student is enrolled in more than 9 credit hours. The tuition exemption does not cover the distance fees; 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 Online Education or ESL enrollment. The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Consequently, 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.

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## 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 insurance subsidy will be deposited into each Graduate Assistant's account in October and in February. The total health insurance subsidy is \$400 per academic year, \$200 for the fall semester and again during the spring/summer semester. 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).

## Late Start in a Semester

Students may begin a semester late at the discretion of the academic department. Stipends cannot be provided for the time the student is not on campus and enrolled in classes. Students that begin a semester late will be responsible for all tuition, fees, and insurance for the time the student is not on campus. Resident and non-resident tuition will be prorated proportionately for the time the student was not enrolled. *Students should strongly consider if starting a semester late is appropriate given the fees for which the student will be responsible.*

## 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.

Students who withdraw from their current semester will be required to pay back a prorated portion of the previously applied tuition exemption.

## Responsibilities for Maintaining a Graduate Assistantship

### Required Course Load

Graduate assistants must be full-time students (see Full-Time Course Load descriptions in the Academic Policies section of this document). The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Therefore, no course may be dropped if the resulting course load will result in the student not meeting full-time enrollment status, nor may any course in the minimum graduate course load consist of or be converted to audit status.

## Undergraduate Courses

The full-time course load may not be composed of undergraduate courses unless the course is a program prerequisite to maintain an assistantship. In such cases, only one undergraduate course will be permitted as part of the full-time load. Some international students are required by the University to

take ESL 5323 (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/archives/2023-24/search/?P=ESL%205323>) and/or ESL 5313 (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/archives/2023-24/search/?P=ESL%205313>). 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 (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/archives/2023-24/search/?P=ESL%205323>) and ESL 5313 (<http://catalog.msstate.edu/archives/2023-24/search/?P=ESL%205313>) cannot be taken concurrently.

## Course Overload

A graduate assistant wishing to schedule more than a full-time course load may, with the approval of their major professor, Department Head, Graduate Coordinator and Academic Dean, register for more than 13 hours by submitting an Overload Form to his/her major professor. The Academic 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 as defined in the Academic Probation and Academic Dismissal sections. Failure to do so shall result in termination of the assistantship. Individual programs have the right to establish their own criteria. If a student is dismissed, their 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 two components.

- Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop (both for domestic and international students)
- Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation (for GTA2/GTA3 certification)

Each of these components is held in the Fall or Spring prior to the start of the semester.

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

## Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop

The Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop, held prior to the start of the Fall and Spring semesters, 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 Workshops emphasize 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

Immediately following the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop, the Microteaching Simulation/Classroom Certification Evaluation is utilized 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) is 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 requires 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 degree 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.