

# Graduate Assistant Handbook 2011-2012

## Overview

The Office of Graduate Services has prepared this handbook with Policies, Terms and Conditions statements in accordance with the University of Maryland System policy III-7.20 for the benefit of graduate students and supervisors of the Graduate Assistants at Frostburg State University. This handbook is intended to provide information about the various policies and regulations that will be used for awarded positions. If you have any questions pertaining to information and policies in this handbook contact the Office of Graduate Services 301-687-7053.

Each year, FSU offers a limited number of graduate assistantships to highly qualified graduate students. Graduate Assistants are assigned individual duties consistent with the needs of the department and the experience and qualifications of the student. GAs have a professional role (albeit of an apprentice nature) in the University, and the duties of a GA are consistent with the mission of the University.

### Objectives and Criteria

- Graduate Assistantships provide ways to recruit academically outstanding students who will contribute to the growth of the departments / programs.
- Assistantships provide the students with professional education in a business / academic setting.

To be eligible for an assistantship, a student must be admitted as a degree-seeking student to a Master's program at FSU and be in good academic standing. Maintaining assistantship eligibility requires a **minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.0 in all semesters for which the student holds a GA position**: this applies to all pre-requisite and undergraduate courses. Full-time assistants must register for a minimum of nine graduate credits in each semester. All assistants with summer responsibilities are required to register for at least three graduate credits during the summer session of the contract period. These courses must be approved by your program.

GAs should become familiar with the policies of the University and their degree program that are found in the Graduate Catalog. This manual is a compilation of the University policies and practices governing graduate assistantships.

## **Purpose and Scope**

Graduate Assistantships at Frostburg State University:

The purpose of graduate assistantships at Frostburg State University is to support graduate students who are appointed to assistantships by:

1. Advancing the student's graduate education through practicum-based experiences, including the development and application of teaching, research and other skills, while also advancing the mission of the institution.
2. Providing financial support, including stipends and tuition assistance, to aid degree-seeking students enrolled in FSU masters or doctoral programs and appointed as graduate assistants in the pursuit of their graduate degrees.

## **Types of Graduate Assistantships**

Graduate Assistants may work within a graduate program, a department or college office, or the office of another unit of the university (Provost's Office, Assessment, Student Life, International Students Office, etc.). Graduate Assistants work under the direct supervision of a program coordinator, faculty member, department chair, or other administrative officer.

Four types of graduate student employment are available at Frostburg State University: Graduate Research Assistants, International Fellowships, Graduate Assistants, and Graduate Associates. Graduate Research Assistants, International Fellowships, and Graduate Assistants receive tuition remission. Graduate Associates are work-for-pay individuals as arranged by a department or an administrative office. Funds to support the Graduate Associates come from the budget of the sponsoring division, department, or office. No tuition remission is provided. However, the sponsor may use budgeted or other sources of funds to pay the students' tuition.

International students are subject to additional rules articulated by the federal government. Differences between international students and domestic students include tax status, duration of stay at FSU after graduation, and the ability to have additional on-campus employment. International students are strongly advised to direct any questions they have to Center for International Education (CIE). Where there are contradictions or differences between this manual and information provided by CIE to international students, CIE is, in all instances, the prevailing authority.

## **Application and Selection**

1. Applications for GA positions are available online on the University website and in the Office of Graduate Services. Complete application materials include: application, resume, and three references and must be received in the Office of Graduate Services by the following deadlines:

Fall - March 15

Spring - October 15

Applicants meeting the deadline for application will be given priority consideration; however applications will continue to be accepted after the deadline for consideration for positions that remain open after the award deadline of June 1<sup>st</sup> for Fall and December 30<sup>th</sup> for Spring.

An exception to the above deadlines applies to the Athletic Department Graduate Assistantship positions as positions are posted on an ongoing basis as openings occur and deadlines are determined accordingly.

2. A list of available graduate assistantship positions is posted each semester on the FSU website and in the Office of Graduate Services.
3. To be eligible for consideration, the student must have a completed GA application on file and have submitted an application for a graduate program with supporting required documents including a transcript. Because admission deadlines vary among departments, students with completed GA applications, application for admission to the program and transcripts to verify GPA will be considered as eligible candidates for open positions. If a candidate is selected, final awards can only be made when the student is admitted in good standing to a degree program.
4. Candidate lists will be distributed to GA supervisors within 15 days of the deadline and each department will conduct a selection process using the submitted materials as well as other selection criteria that the department determines is appropriate.
5. Candidates will be informed of award decisions by June 1. The application and selection process may continue past this date if a candidate has not been identified.
6. Selected candidates must be admitted in good standing to their degree program before awards can be finalized. Contracts will be sent out to the selected candidate 60 days prior to their appointment start date. If candidates are not selected in time to meet the 60 day notification for any reason, selected candidates will be notified as soon after the selection as possible as long as the student is admitted to their degree program in good standing.
7. In order for the contract to be executed, all paperwork must be completed. Additional paperwork to be completed includes the Employee Withholding Exemption Certificate, the University of Maryland System Graduate Assistant Tuition Remission Form, Release of Information Form, Payroll Direct Deposit Authorization, and an INS I-9 Form. All forms should be returned along with the contract no later than 10 days after the contract receipt. The I-9 form should be returned in person to the Office of Payroll & Employee Services (318 Hitchins Administration Building) no later than the start date. When submitting the I-9 you will need to bring with you original government issued identification documents such as driver's license and social security card or birth certificate.

## **Appointment , Reappointment and Duration of Employment**

1. Length  
Appointments are made for graduate assistantships ranging from a term, an academic year, and 12 months basis and are determined by the department.

2. Time Commitment:

A graduate assistant serves on a full-time basis. For the purposes of this policy, such time commitment is as follows:

**Full-time Assistantship:**

Full time assistantships require an average of 20 hours per week. Tuition remission and stipend are benefits of this position.

3. Summer Assistantships:

Students who are Graduate Assistants during the previous academic year or semester may receive graduate assistantships during the summer. However, when a graduate assistantship position requires an occupant during the summer and no continuing graduate assistant is available, a new student may fill that position. New students will be required to meet all requirements of graduate assistantship appointments. Summer assistantships are determined by the College and are available based on funding availability.

4. Renewal of Appointments:

Students may be re-appointed to assistantships for successive terms, but renewal is not automatic or guaranteed. Factors entering into a decision to reappoint a graduate assistant may include:

- Satisfactory academic performance and progress toward degree;
- Satisfactory performance of assigned assistantship responsibilities and duties;
- Availability of funds;
- Departmental or institutional limits on the number of years for which an assistantship may be held; and
- Specific departmental needs, constraints and policies, including efforts to allow a large number of qualified students to benefit from assistantships.

Reapplication is only required if the GA intends to apply for positions other than the one that is currently held. Renewal of GA positions are provided without reapplication provided the student has met satisfactory academic performance and progress toward degree, satisfactory performance of assigned assistantship responsibilities and duties and the department has determined availability of funds and need for the position.

5. Notice of Appointments:

- a. Except under justifiable circumstances, graduate assistants whose appointments are for more than one term will be notified of their appointments, and of decisions not to renew appointments, at least 60 days before the date upon which the appointment is to begin.
- b. If a decision to renew an appointment cannot be made within that timeline, the graduate assistant will be informed at least 60 days in advance of the assistantship's start date of an estimated date for the renewal decision. Circumstances which may justify fewer than 60 days notice include, but are not limited to, uncertainty in departmental funding and course enrollments.
- c. Nothing in this section shall prevent a department or unit from making an appointment to a graduate assistant on short notice based on changed circumstances in class enrollments, the availability of resources, or other factors.

#### 6. Appointment Letters:

Upon appointment, each graduate assistant will receive an appointment letter that contains detailed information concerning the terms and expectations of the assistantship. The appointment letter shall include, at a minimum:

- a. The length of the appointment;
- b. The starting and ending dates of the appointment, including the dates during which the graduate assistant is expected to be on campus to perform the duties of the assistantship;
- c. The average weekly time commitment of the assistantship;
- d. The basic responsibilities of the assistantship;
- e. The economic benefits of the assistantship, including stipend and tuition assistance amounts, and any access to health and other benefits;
- f. The department or office to which the student will report, including the name of the faculty member or other individual who will supervise the assistantship, when feasible;
- g. An affirmation that the provisions of the institution's graduate assistant handbook apply to the assistantship;
- h. Any special requirements of the assistantship related to leave, scheduling, or other terms (e.g., coverage over breaks and weather emergencies)
- i. Contact information where the graduate assistant may obtain additional information and advice concerning the appointment, the provisions of the handbook, and graduate assistant grievance rights and processes.

#### 7. Assignments:

To the extent feasible, graduate assistants shall be given a written description of their teaching, research or other assignments, duties, and responsibilities at least two weeks before the beginning of the semester. However, departments retain the flexibility to adjust assignments as necessary due to loss of funding, course enrollment fluctuations, or other unanticipated events, even after the semester has begun.

#### 8. Duration of Appointment

The appointment to the position is renewable as long as the GA meets both satisfactory academic progress and meets expectations of performance for as long as the length of the degree program but not to exceed two years. However, reappointments are subject to funding availability and specific departmental needs.

#### 9. Termination of Assistantships:

An assistantship may be terminated within the term of the appointment under unusual and compelling conditions, for causes outlined below:

##### a. Termination of Assistantship By The Student:

Termination of the assistantship by the student prior to the end of the assistantship completion date requires 2 weeks written notice to the Supervisor and the School Dean or contract originator. In such cases, tuition waiver is voided, and the student is billed for the tuition owed for the semester. Once the GA contract is terminated, the student will no longer be permitted to work and will not receive any additional stipend from the date of termination.

b. Termination of Assistantship by the University:

Termination of the graduate assistantship by the University is the responsibility of the Dean or contract originator. Graduate assistants can be terminated for cause only. Termination should be considered only as a last resort and after all other alternatives have been pursued. Grounds for termination shall be unsatisfactory performance (e.g., extended absenteeism or illness, violation of the terms of the contract or university policy). To ensure fairness and to protect the rights of the graduate assistant, the following process for termination has been developed.

- If the Supervisor recommends to the Department Chair/Program Coordinator that a graduate assistant be terminated, there must be adequate documentation substantiating the termination. This would include accurate documentation of the problem(s), demonstration of effort to assist the graduate assistant in correcting the problem(s), and a copy of at least 1 written warning to the graduate assistant. The graduate assistant has the right to appeal a termination decision of the Department Chair/Program Coordinator to the Dean or contract originator.
- In severe cases where university policy is breached, the graduate assistant may be terminated without warning.
- If cause is established and termination of the graduate assistant results, payment of the stipend and voiding of the tuition waiver is the same as when the student terminates the assistantship.
- Request to appeal the termination should be made to the Dean or contract originator by written request within 10 days of the termination.

## **Financial Assistance**

Graduate Assistants may work within a graduate program, a department or college office, or the office of another unit of the university (Provost's Office, Assessment, Student Life, International Students Office, etc.). Graduate Assistants work under the direct supervision of a program coordinator, faculty member, department chair, or other administrative officer.

Four types of graduate student employment are available at Frostburg State University: Graduate Research Assistants, International Fellowships, Graduate Assistants, and Graduate Associates. Graduate Associates are work-for-pay individuals as arranged by a department or an administrative office. Funds to support the Graduate Associates come from the budget of the sponsoring division, department, or office. No tuition remission are provided. However, the sponsor may use budgeted or other sources of funds to pay the students' tuition.

### **GA Stipend**

#### **Graduate Research Assistants Full Time:**

Work Hours: 20 hours per week

Tuition waiver: 12 credits per semester/3 credits per intersession not to exceed 30 credits in 12 month period

Stipend: = \$2,500 per semester/\$5,000 academic year

**Graduate Assistant Full Time:**

Work Hours: 20 hours per week

Tuition waiver: 12 credits per semester/3 credits per intersession not to exceed 30 credits in 12 month period

Stipend: 2,500 per semester/\$5,000 academic year

**Graduate Assistant Full Time - Resident Director**

Work Hours: 20 hours per week

Tuition waiver: 9 credits per semester not to exceed 18 in 12 month period

Stipend: \$2,000 per semester/\$4,000 academic year, Meal Plan

**Summer Graduate Assistants Full Time:**

Work Hours: 20 hours per week

Tuition waiver: 12 credits per summer not to exceed 30 credits in 12 month period

Stipend: \$1,000 per six week summer session

**International Fellowships Full Time:**

Work Hours: 20 hours per week

Tuition waiver: 12 credits per semester/3 credits intersession not to exceed 30 credits in a 12 month period

Stipend: \$3,325 per semester/ \$6,650 per year.

Summer IF: 12 credits per summer not to exceed 30 credits in 12 month period

Summer IF Stipend: \$1,400 per six week session

**Please note that fees associated with enrollment are not covered under the Graduate Assistant contract and are the sole responsibility of the Graduate Assistant. Fees per credit hour can be found on the university website at <http://www.frostburg.edu/grad>.**

**Eligibility and Enrollment**

Eligibility for a graduate assistantship requires full admission to a master's degree program. Students who have begun study and have been admitted to a degree program must be in good academic standing and maintain a minimum grade point average of 3.0 in semesters. In addition, graduate assistants must register for a minimum of 9 credits leading to the degree during every semester of the assistantship. If awarded an assistantship for a summer session, the student must be registered for at least 3 credits during the contract period. Tuition remission for Graduate Assistants, Graduate Research Assistants and International Fellows is provided for a maximum of 12 credits per semester not to exceed 30 credits in a 12 month period. Tuition remission for Graduate Assistant Resident Directors is provided for a maximum of 9 credit hours per semester not to exceed 18 credits in a twelve month period.

Tuition remission (waiver of tuition for enrollment in course work leading to a graduate degree) are provided uniformly for only three categories of student employment: Graduate Research Assistants, International Fellowships, and Graduate Assistants. The students employed in these categories are supervised by academic departments, the Department of Athletics and offices/departments as approved by the Director of Graduate Services. Offices and departments with the funds for stipends may be approved for assistantships when they demonstrate the assignments contribute to the students'

professional goals and complements their program of study. The budget for tuition remission may not be exceeded by the Director of Graduate Services

## **Other Employment**

Graduate Assistant responsibilities combined with course work represent a full-time undertaking. Graduate Assistants are full-time students who are registered for 9 or more graduate credits and work twenty hours per week. Graduate Assistants are not permitted to work for pay for more than twenty hours per week for the University. Graduate Assistants may work additional part-time jobs provided they meet all three of the following: 1.) the additional jobs do not interfere with their academic success; 2.) the additional jobs do not interfere with the responsibilities or schedule assigned to their graduate assistantship and; 3.) the additional jobs do not take away opportunities for other students to gain financial assistance. These additional part-time jobs do not include a second assistantship and the Appointee must secure permission from their GA Supervisor, Program Coordinator, Provost Office and Director of Graduate Services. Performance both academic and job-related, will be monitored by the student's academic advisor/graduate program coordinator and the advisor will sign each student's time sheet to indicate acceptable levels of performance. **This policy does not extend to international students, who are restricted to 20-hour work week by the Immigrations & Naturalization Service guidelines.**

## **Other Benefits**

**Sick and Emergency Leave:** If the Graduate Assistant is sick or has an emergency, leave should be supported collegially and can be made up at the discretion of the supervisor. Notification and rescheduling are the responsibility of the graduate assistant who must work with the Supervisor to gain the approval. Inability to work for extended periods or on a regular basis because of illness may be cause for termination of the assistantship.

**University Closure and Holiday:** If the University is closed due to a scheduled holiday or inclement weather and it falls on a regularly scheduled work day, the GA will not be required to make up scheduled hours and it will be considered paid worked time.

**Vacation/Personal Leave :** Paid leave of 20 hours will be provided to Graduate Students that have a full time (20 hour per week) 12 month contract. All requests for time away from duty must be approved by the GA supervisor and Department Chair or Dean with consideration given to the personal needs of the graduate assistant for such leave. Graduate Assistants with less than a 12 month contract are not eligible for vacation/personal paid leave.

## **Tax Status**

Because of the U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987; all graduate students became liable to pay income tax on compensation received for Graduate Assistantships. The amount remitted for tuition is taxable as a general rule, however the IRS makes an exception to this rule for a graduate student who is engaged in teaching and research activities for the institution. (IRS Code, Title 26, Section 117). Thus the full amount of tuition remission/reduction for a teaching or research assistant is not subject to federal or state taxation. If a GA has questions concerning tax obligations, he or she should consult a tax counsel or the **Internal Revenue Service (1-800-829-1040)**.

**Retirement and Social Security (FICA)**

Retirement benefits are not withheld from the salaries of Graduate Assistants. Graduate Assistants are exempt from Federal Insurance Contribution Act (FICA) taxes provided that they maintain enrollment and are registered with at least half-time status (6 credits).

**Residency Classification**

All GAs are billed at the in-state tuition rate for credits taken during their appointment, excluding any credits they take over the tuition remittance allowance. Official residency classification, however, does not change. Consequently, at any time when the graduate student is no longer supported by the assistantship (including summer months) he or she will be billed according to the official residency status. We strongly urge all graduate students to be aware of their official residency status and address any problems immediately.

**Parking**

All full-time (20 hour) graduate assistants are eligible for Faculty/Staff parking permits at the lowest rate. Parking permits are to be obtained from Billing Office in Pullen Hall. To obtain a parking tag, all assistants must bring a copy of his or her assistantship offer letter.

**Due Process Protections****Informal Resolution of Concerns:**

Graduate assistants are strongly encouraged to attempt to resolve grievances informally with their mentor(s) and/or supervisor(s). If the GA and supervisor are unable to resolve the conflict they should request mediation with the Department Chair and/or Director of Graduate Services. In cases where resolution cannot be reached informally, the Graduate student may file a written grievance according to the grievance policy below.

**Formal Complaints:**

To address concerns that cannot be resolved informally, a graduate student may file a formal complaint to the Office of the Dean in the respective College where the GA is assigned.

If a GA wishes to make a formal complaint, he or she should take the case to the Dean of the college. It is the student's responsibility to provide a written complaint including facts and evidence that support the grievance and explain his or her position. If the college Dean is unable to satisfy the complainant's concerns, he or she should appeal to the Provost Office. This appeal should be made as soon as possible after the issue arises, no later than the end of the current semester. Appeals should be submitted in written form providing facts, evidence that supports the complaint and explanation of his/her position and steps taken to resolve the issue. Appeals will be addressed within 15 days of receipt. Reprisals against GA's that file a grievance is prohibited.

Concerns that cannot be resolved informally which warrant consideration by the Dean or Appeal process include:

- a. Workload volume and scheduling;
- b. Inappropriate work assignments;
- c. Termination of a graduate assistantship within the term of appointment; and
- d. Non-renewal of an assistantship for arbitrary or capricious reasons including reprisal for filing a grievance.

### **Right to the Grievance**

Graduate assistants have the right to file grievances for matters of discrimination on the basis of race, sex, national origin, disabling conditions, religion, age, sexual orientation or marital status, duties performed and specific work environment. Graduate assistants wishing to file grievances should request a copy of the grievance procedure from the University's Fair Practices Office.

Graduate assistants may raise concerns regarding suspected on-campus fraud or fiscal irregularities through the confidential University System of Maryland hot-line mechanisms established in USM Policy VIII-7.10, "Policy on Reporting Suspected or Known Fiscal Irregularities," institution fraud reporting policies, and any relevant state or federal "whistleblower" laws.

Complaints and grievances related to academics should follow the academic grievance policies outlined in the Graduate Catalog.

### **Conduct and Professional Behavior**

A Graduate Assistant's teaching, research, and administrative activities are subject to the ethical precepts and code of the academic profession, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the university policies that govern institutional obligations. Violation of any of these regulations constitutes the basis for disciplinary action in accordance with procedures set forth in the university's policies.

In their interactions with students, faculty, and all other members of the university community, GAs are expected to conduct themselves with the same sensitivity and thoughtfulness that they would expect to receive from others. FSU affirms its commitment to a policy of eliminating discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, personal appearance, age, national origin, political affiliation, religious affiliation, physical or mental disability, or on the basis of the exercise of rights secured by the First Amendment of the United States Constitution.

### **For information and application contact:**

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