

College of Graduate Studies and Research



TOWSON
UNIVERSITY

Graduate Assistantship Handbook

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As of 3/11/09

FORWARD

The College of Graduate Studies and Research has prepared this handbook for the benefit of graduate students and employers of the Graduate Assistantship program at Towson University. This handbook is intended to provide you with information about the various policies and regulations that will be used for awarded positions. If you have any questions pertaining to the discussed policies, then please do not hesitate to contact the Graduate Assistantship Office at 410-704-4484.

Each year the College of Graduate Studies and Research (CGSR) at Towson University and various academic and non-academic departments offers a limited number of graduate assistantships to qualified graduate students.

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 or Doctoral program at Towson University and in good academic standing. Maintaining assistantship eligibility requires a minimum semester grade point average of 3.0 in **all** courses taken for graduate credit: this applies to all pre-requisite and undergraduate courses. Full-time assistants must register for a minimum of six graduate credits in each semester. Half-time assistants must register for at least three graduate credits in each semester. All assistants with summer responsibilities are required to register for at least three graduate credits during the summer sessions. These courses must be approved by your program.

Note: Teaching and Research Assistants need to have completed all pre-requisites and undergraduate work before acceptance of this position.



IMPORTANT- PLEASE NOTE:

- ***The tuition waiver will not be granted for credits unless they are required in the degree program. The Graduate Assistantship Program does not cover classes taken for audit or classes that a student withdraws from after the drop/add deadline.***
- ***No tuition waiver is granted for undergraduate credits unless the courses are prerequisite to or required for a degree program. The student will be charged for these courses at the undergraduate and therefore, the courses will be waived at the undergraduate rate.***
- ***University fees will not be waived and must be paid for by the student by the due date or classes will be dropped.***
- ***Due to Payroll processing it will take at least 4 weeks for the student to receive his or her first paycheck for the stipend (this is ONLY if the necessary paperwork is submitted to the Graduate Assistantship Office on time; if it is late then it will be 4 weeks from the time the paperwork is received). If the student does not receive the first paycheck within 6 weeks he or she should contact the Graduate Assistantship Office (410-704-4484).***
- ***Students accepting an assistantship are cautioned that the tuition waiver may affect an existing financial aid award package. Contact the Financial Aid Office (410-704-4238) if you have any questions.***

Benefits

Benefits for graduate, teaching and research assistants include a stipend and tuition waiver that vary according to the length of the period of employment (months) and the number of hours worked per week (10 or 20).

Graduate assistants of out-of-state residency status are charged the in-state tuition fee for all courses taken.

Payroll Deductions

Graduate assistants are subject to all applicable Internal Revenue Service and Social Security Administration laws, regulations and policies. **Graduate assistants taking less than 6 credits during the fall / spring semesters will be FICA taxable.**

Positions

Graduate assistants may be placed in academic programs, administrative offices; external works sites, or other sites approved by the Graduate Dean or Associate Graduate Dean. When possible, appointments are made in the department of the student's degree program.

Breaks

Students working more than five consecutive hours per day must take a minimum 30 minute unpaid meal break. Paid breaks are given at the discretion of the supervisor. Any additional breaks should not exceed 15 minutes.

Responsibilities

Graduate assistants are responsible for a variety of activities / functions, including assistance to faculty and administrators, research, and diverse assignments for external employers. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research must approve all job descriptions. Assistants provide appropriate work in the assigned department, administrative unit, or for an off-campus employer for the number of hours per week specified in the letter of the appointment. **NOTE: *Provision is not made for sick leave. If illness occurs and the assistant is absent, the assistant must notify his or her supervisor as soon as possible. The hours missed must be made up at the discretion of the supervisor. If the University is closed due to a scheduled holiday or inclement***

weather, the hours-per-work requirement may be modified at the discretion of the supervisor.

- ***Full-time Graduate Assistants*** (20 hours per week): the 20-hour graduate assistantship, together with class attendance and study, is a full-time undertaking. Full-time assistants must satisfactorily fulfill their responsibilities to the university without interference from outside employment.
- ***Half-time Graduate Assistantships*** (10 hours per week): the 10-hour graduate assistantship is designed to accommodate the special needs of departments and working students. Half-time assistants must satisfactorily fulfill their responsibilities to the university without interference from outside employment.

NOTE: *In most cases graduate assistants are required to work through the minimester.*



Evaluation of Graduate Assistants

The performance of graduate assistants in their assigned responsibilities is expected to be of the highest quality throughout the term of appointment. It is the responsibility of the supervisors to monitor the quality of an assistant's work and to verify that the required work hours are fulfilled each semester.

Three types of Graduate Assistantships are available: Administrative, Teaching and Research:

ROLE OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Graduate Assistants may work within a graduate program (each program should have at least one graduate assistant assigned to the program), a department or college office, or the office of another units of the university (Provost's Office, Assessment, Student Life, International Students Office, etc.) Graduate Assistants work under the direct supervision of a program director, faculty member, department chair, or other administrative officer.

There is a very wide range of duties, but the following are examples:

- Assist with program assessment activities
- Assist with program development
- Participate in recruitment
- Assist with public relations (e.g. department newsletters, alumni events or contact with the general public)
- Planning special events
- Guiding undergraduate organizations

GA Stipend

- 9 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits per semester/stipend = \$5,000
- 9 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits per semester/stipend = \$2,500
- 4.5 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits/stipend = \$2,500
- 4.5 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits/stipend = \$1,250

ROLE OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Master's level Teaching Assistants always work under the direct supervision of a faculty mentor. Roles vary from *department to department, college to college*, but may include the following:

- Running an undergraduate laboratory
(In-class lab contact hours should be not more than half of the total assistantship hours)
- Assisting the professor in preparation of teaching materials

- Grading class assignments (from a key or rubric of the professor)
- Making a presentation as part of a regular class
- Leading recitation/help sessions for undergraduate students
- Other duties associated with instruction, but not in charge of a regular class

Teaching Assistants in terminal degree programs (doctoral and MFA) may serve as an instructor of a class with assistance and mentoring from a regular faculty member, and **approved by the Chair and Dean.**

TA Stipend

- 9 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits per semester/stipend = \$8,000
- 9 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits per semester/stipend = \$4,000
- 4.5 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits/stipend = \$4,000
- 4.5 month, 10 hours per week : waiver = 6 credits/stipend = \$2,000

TA Workshop

Every August, shortly before the start of the Fall Semester, CGSR holds a one-day workshop for new Teaching Assistants. Several faculty members are invited to give presentations on lesson organization, assessment, learning styles, active learning, academic integrity, and professionalism. One day is certainly not enough to tell TAs all they need to know about teaching, but responses indicate that the students find this useful. Also, individual department and/or faculty mentor meets with their TAs to provide assistance, especially as they are getting started. We may have a brief meeting for the TAs just before the Spring Semester in January, partly to discuss their experience from the Fall Semester and compare notes on what they had learned.

ROLE OF RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Research Assistants always work under the direct supervision of a faculty mentor. Usually their position is connected with a research grant of the professor. The actual work assignment may depend on the nature of the research, but may include the following:

- Assist with literature gathering
- Assist with design of the research components
- Assist with carrying out the research and data gathering
- Input data and run reports

RA Stipend

- 9 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits per semester/stipend = \$8,000
- 9 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits per semester/stipend = \$4,000
- 4.5 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits/stipend = \$4,000
- 4.5 month, 10 hours per week : waiver = 6 credits/stipend = \$2,000

Doctoral RA Stipend

- 9 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits per semester/stipend = \$10,000
- 9 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits per semester/stipend = \$5,000
- 4.5 month, 20 hours per week: waiver = 12 credits/stipend = \$5,000
- 4.5 month, 10 hours per week: waiver = 6 credits/stipend = \$2,500

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. These and other university policies on sexual misconduct, academic integrity, and intellectual property rights are included in the Graduate Catalog.

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. The University Human Relations Code states that Towson University 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.

In the event of violations involving the conduct of GAs as employees of the university, several procedures are available for resolution, some formal and some informal. For details of the formal aspects of the procedure, consult the Graduate Catalog.

Sexual Harassment

Towson University is committed to maintaining a work and learning environment in which students, faculty, and staff can develop intellectually, professionally, personally, and socially. Such an environment must be free of intimidation, fear, coercion, or the threat of reprisal. The campus strictly prohibits sexual harassment. Sexual harassment may cause others unjustifiable offense, anxiety, and injury. Sexual harassment threatens the legitimate expectation of all members of the campus community. Academic or employment progress is determined by the publicly stated requirements of job and classroom performance, and the campus environment will not unreasonably impede work or study. Sexual harassment by university faculty, staff and students is prohibited. This constitutes campus policy. Sexual harassment may also constitute violations of the criminal and civil laws of the State of Maryland and the United States. For the purpose of this campus policy, sexual harassment is defined as follows: 1)unwelcome sexual

advances; 2) unwelcome requests for sexual favors; and 3) other behavior of a sexual nature where:

- a. Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or participation in a university-sponsored educational program or activity;
- b. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic or employment decision affecting that individual;
- c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with the individual's academic or work performance, or of creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive educational or working environment.

Equal Opportunity Statement

Towson University is an equal opportunity institution with respect to both education and employment. The university does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, national origin, sex, or handicap in admission or access to, or treatment of employment in its programs and activities as required by federal (Title VI, Title IX, Section 504) and state laws and regulations. Inquiries regarding compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended, Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Termination of Assistantship

Students may terminate the assistantship at any time by giving two week notice in writing to their supervisor and to the Graduate Assistantship Office. The stipend will be paid until the last day of work. Termination by the student prior to completion of the contractual agreement voids the tuition waiver and the student will be billed for the tuition owed for the semester.

The assistantship may be terminated by the supervisor for such reasons as unsatisfactory performance, excessive absenteeism, attitude considered detrimental to the department or external employer, extended illness (consistent with applicable law, including ADA and FMLA), or violation of the terms of the assistantship agreement. Written notice of such termination is to be given to the student and the Graduate Assistantship Office by the supervisor. Payment of the stipend and voiding of the tuition waiver is the same as when the student terminates the assistantship. The assistantship can also be terminated due to departmental financial exigency. In this case, the stipend is discontinued as of a specified date, but the tuition waiver is continued to the end of the current semester.

Complaints and Dispute Resolution

GAs should always make an effort to resolve job-related difficulties first at the departmental level. A number of departments have formal, written procedures for handling grievances held by GAs. The university employer has grievance procedures for orderly action on specific issues, including a complete Human Relations Code. If there is a problem or complaint not covered by any specific code or procedure, consult the department or follow the suggestions enumerated below. Please note that these descriptions refer to grievances of Graduate Assistants as student employees of the university, not as students with academic grievances. The procedures for dealing with the latter are detailed in the Graduate Catalog.

Informal Consultation

If the GA is having unusual difficulties with his or her assignment, he or she should first discuss the situation with the individual faculty member or office head who serves as his or her supervisor. These people are very concerned with the success of the project or course to which GAs are assigned, so they are usually eager to help GAs straighten out any difficulties. If the GA remains unsatisfied, he or she may wish to discuss the matter with the chair of the department. If problems arise related to the GAs academic work, the GA should consult first with his or her academic advisor or major professor; second, the course supervisor; and finally, the department's Director of Graduate Studies. If further discussion is necessary, the GA may wish to contact the chair of the department.

Formal Complaints

If a GA wishes to make a complaint he or she should see the Dean of the college. If the college Dean is unable to satisfy the complainant's concerns, he or she should feel free to seek counsel from the Dean or the Associate Dean of the College of Graduate Studies & Research (7800 York Road Building, 410-704-2077).

ADDITIONAL ON-CAMPUS AND OUTSIDE EMPLOYMENT

According to policy at Towson University, domestic GAs who wish to hold more than one position on campus may do so only if the payment for the additional position comes on an hourly basis paid through a timesheet. However, there are no timesheets completed for the graduate assistantship position. Graduate Assistants may be employed on campus for a maximum of 10 hours per week beyond assistantship duties. International students may be limited to a certain number of hours of employment according to their visa status; these students should check with the International Student & Scholar Services Office, (410) 704-2421.

Although it is expected that the combined responsibilities of a graduate assistantship and necessary study will occupy all the time available to a student during the academic year, the university does not prohibit a GAs outside employment in addition to their university appointment. It is up to the GA to determine the amount of time, if any, he or she may devote to additional activities while still maintaining satisfactory progress toward the degree and satisfactory fulfillment of his or her assistantship obligations. Departments and programs do have the discretionary right, however, to make appointments to students whose commitment suggests that they are most likely to attain their educational goals and maintain assistantship responsibilities in the most expeditious and effective ways.

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 a fringe benefit and is not taxed. 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).

VACATION AND SICK LEAVE

Graduate Assistants are not eligible for vacation or sick leave credit. If a GA does become ill, sick leave should be supported collegially. In the event that sick leave exceeds a time period longer than two weeks, the Graduate Assistant should be kept on payroll. Maternity leave is not regarded as sick leave. If maternity leave is required, it should be discussed with the GAs graduate director or supervisor as soon as possible.

RESIDENCY CLASSIFICATION

All GAs who are on full-time or half-time appointments are billed at the in-state tuition rate for credits taken during their appointment, including any credits they take over the 10-credit 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 which was assigned upon admission. Thus, a student may pay in-state tuition rates during the academic year but out-of-state rates during the summer if that student is classified as out-of-state. We strongly urge all graduate students to be aware of their official residency status and address any problems immediately.

MINIMESTER TUITION REMISSION AND MANDATORY FEES

10 and 12 month GAs are allowed to take minimester courses at the in-state tuition rate. However, while GAs are allowed to take class during the minimester, there is **no tuition waiver** for these credits.

All requests to do so must be made in writing to the Graduate Assistantship Office (7800 York Road, Room 232). Once the request is made, a letter will be issued from the Graduate Assistantship Office allowing the student to be billed at the in-state rates.

SUMMER SESSION

Graduate Assistants are only eligible for a tuition waiver and stipend during the summer term if a summer assistantship position has been granted. Please take note that summer assistantships have separate contracts than Fall/Spring assistantships.

Students that are not enrolled in classes during the summer sessions are not eligible to be graduate assistants. If a department chooses to continue the employment of a student who is not enrolled in a summer class, then the student must be paid through an hourly position.

FACILITIES

Departments generally provide GAs with suitable workspace, laboratory space, and office space when necessary. Also, GAs usually have access to desks; file space, mail-boxes, computers, telephones, and duplicating machines or services. Contact the individual program or department for more specific information.

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 the Parking Services Office, Room 118, University Union. To obtain a parking tag, all assistants must bring a copy of his or her assistantship offer letter.

PROCEDURES AND DEADLINES as apply to Graduate Assistants

Part One:

- Once a student has been accepted into his or her program of study they can apply for an assistantship. A student can apply online or print off an application and submit it, along with a resume, to the Graduate Assistantship Office.
- A list of available assistantship openings is listed on the Graduate Assistantship Office web page. All openings may not be listed on the web site, so the student should check with his or her department of study as well.
- Resumes and applications are kept on file in the Dean's Office in the Graduate School. If a department is interested in reviewing applications they should make an appointment with the Assistantship Office to do so. Applications are *not* to be removed from the office; if needed the requestor may make his or her own copies to use for the interview process.

Part Two:

- Once a student has accepted an assistantship position the supervisor must submit a graduate assistantship request form, which can be located on the web site, to the Graduate Assistantship Office.
- The Graduate Assistantship Office will then contact the student either in the form of an email or a letter in the mail. If the student is a new employee to the campus community then he or she will be instructed to come in to the office to complete the payroll packet and will be sent to Human Resources to complete the I-9 form. **The student must complete the I-9 before he or she is legally allowed to work.**
- Due to payroll, parking, and tuition issues, a deadline has been applied. *Anything considered late will **not** be rushed.* The student is to be advised that **all** fees and tuition dues are to be paid on time *regardless* of the assistantship. If not paid on time a penalty will be issued and it is possible that courses will be dropped. There will be no advance pay for this situation.

REMINDER:

- Assistantships cover normal tuition costs. They do not cover credits that are higher in cost. However, those students in the joint UB masters program (Accountancy and MBA) may have a higher tuition rate and must be covered. Fees are **not** covered.
- Students taking AIT courses may have to pay a portion of the AIT tuition costs out of pocket due to the higher rates. The waiver is only given at the in-state rate. However, departments can choose to pay the full AIT amount; however, that must come out of the department's budget. CGSR only covers the in-state rate.
- No tuition waiver is granted for undergraduate credits unless the courses are prerequisite to or required for a degree program. The student will be charged for these courses at the undergraduate and therefore, the courses will be waived at the undergraduate rate.
- Assistantships are only valid for the dates expressly stated in the Graduate Assistantship contract. Assistantships are not automatically renewed.
- Students are not permitted to work until all of their paperwork has been processed in the Graduate Assistantship Office. Please note that due to payroll processing deadlines this process takes an average of 4 weeks before the assistant will receive his or her first paycheck.
- Students should not work over the 10 or 20 hours they are assigned. If this occurs, they should be compensated by one of two ways:
 1. Paid as a student worker for any extra hours.
 2. Allowed to leave early for another day so that the hours worked are properly balanced.

COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What is a graduate assistantship (GA)?

- A.* The Towson University Graduate School administers a program offering a limited number of positions within specific departments to qualifying graduate students in order to cover their expenses (i.e. tuition), as well as to give them professional experience as they pursue their degree.

Q. Where are assistantships available?

- A.* Applicants are placed within their major programs if positions are available. Other positions are typically available in various academic programs and administrative offices.

Q. What would be my responsibilities?

- A. Graduate assistants are responsible for a variety of activities, including assistance to faculty and administrators, research, and diverse assignments for external employers. Assistants provide appropriate work for the number of hours per week specified in the letter of employment.

Q. What are the requirements for a graduate to apply for and retain an assistantship?

- A. Admission to a graduate program is required for a student to apply for an assistantship. Once in the program, they must maintain a minimum GPA overall of 3.0 each semester for all graduate work.

Q. How many hours must I work each week?

- A. The graduate assistantship offers you a choice of 20 or 10 hours to work per week. With class attendance and study, a 20 hour position is expected to be a full-time undertaking. A 10 hour position is designed to accommodate the special needs of the hiring departments. Graduate assistants must satisfactorily fulfill their responsibilities to the university without interference from outside employment.

Q. If we do not use the entire tuition waiver awarded to us each semester can we use them the following semester?

- A. Tuition waivers are awarded per semester per credit hours and do not transfer to the next semester.

Q. What kind of payment does a Graduate Assistant receive?

A. Current payment, based on a full-time 9 month position, includes a \$5,000 stipend and a maximum annual tuition waiver of 24 credits (per credit dollar amount multiplied by 12 credits per semester). A 9 month part time position includes a \$2,500 stipend and a maximum tuition waiver of 12 credits (per credit dollar amount multiplied by 6 credits per semester). **Graduate assistants are charged the in-state tuition fee rate for all courses taken.**

Q. Are there any health benefits or other benefits with the assistantship?

A. There are neither health care benefits under the assistantship nor any other benefits such as a retirement plan.

Q. Is the stipend taxable?

A. Yes. Please understand that the stipend is considered an income. As for the tuition waiver please contact the IRS to see if it is tax exempt.

Q. How does one apply for an assistantship?

A. We recommend that you apply by completing the online application, found at https://grad.towson.edu/finance/ga/ga_app.asp . Alternatively, you may contact our office (410) 704-4484 and ask for an application to be mailed to you or stop by and pick one up in Room 232 of the 7800 York Road Building. The application and a resume should be returned to Room 232. We will retain the applications for review by the departments for one year. Departments hiring Graduate Assistants will contact prospective students for interview, they will select the student they wish to have for that particular position. The department will contact the student directly as well as notify the Graduate Assistantship Office of their selection. If you wish to remain in the pool of candidates for another year's selection please be sure to re-apply by April 1st.

Please remember students are not allowed to begin working in their department without signing a contract in the Graduate Assistantship Office and completing an I9 form in Human Resources.