



# Graduate Research Assistant/Associate and Graduate Teaching Assistant/ Associate – Guidelines Document<sup>1</sup>

Assistantships are paid employment opportunities for graduate students which promote the professional development of the student while supporting the instruction, research, and Extension efforts of programs within the College. Our academic and administrative units within the College award numerous teaching and research assistantships with competitive stipends. Half time (50% FTE assistantship appointments include, in addition to the monthly stipend, a full non-resident tuition waiver, full resident tuition waiver, and health insurance benefits.

## 1. Types of Assistantships

OSU recognizes two types of assistantships for graduate students enrolled in master's, specialist, and doctoral degree programs: 1) Graduate Teaching Assistants/Associates (GTA) and 2) Graduate Research Assistants/Associates (GRA). The designation of Assistant applies to graduate students who have not yet earned a master's degree, while the title Associate refers to graduate students who have earned a master's degree in the field or a closely related field. Note: Students in graduate certificates and non-degree seeking students are not eligible for GTA or GRA positions or associated benefits.

A Graduate Teaching Assistant/Associate (GTA) must be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, enrolled, and be under the supervision of an appropriate graduate faculty member. In consultation with the supervisor, the GTA works to gain instructional skills and an increased understanding of the discipline. The GTA's primary responsibilities are to support the University's instructional mission. Duties performed by a GTA may include: classroom or laboratory teaching; advising and mentoring of students; proctoring examinations; grading papers, homework, and/or projects; accompanying/coaching musical or vocal performances, providing artistic instruction or assisting with preparation and management of materials and programs that are utilized in imparting knowledge or in the instructional process; or providing other general assistance in the instruction process. A GTA may be assigned primary responsibilities in an Extension or outreach role for which those responsibilities support the instructional mission of the University. GTAs may not be given duties to support faculty research or those primarily clerical in nature.

A Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) must be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, enrolled, and be under the supervision of an appropriate graduate faculty member. A GRA's

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the content for this document is OSU Graduate College policy and is taken from the OSU Catalog. This document is intended to reinforce and supplement (not replace) Graduate College policy.

primary responsibilities are to provide general support to the University's research mission. In consultation with the supervisor, the GRA works to gain competencies in applying and mastering research concepts, practices or methods of scholarship. These responsibilities may or may not relate directly to the student's thesis or dissertation. Duties performed by a GTA may include: assisting faculty members in a research or creative activity; perform degree-related professional or administrative services that supports research, instruction, professional development, or outreach missions of the University; developing and evaluating instructional materials or curricula; or assuming responsibility for designated scholarly endeavors.

## 2. Appointment Terms

A typical appointment is 25% FTE or 50% FTE. Employment as a graduate assistant is limited to a total, from all University sources (including external grants and contracts), of 50% FTE (an average of 20 hours per week) in the fall and spring semesters and 75% FTE (an average of 30 hours per week) between the end of the Spring semester and the beginning of the Fall semester. Exceptions to this limitation may be requested by the employing unit or graduate program to the dean of the Graduate College; exceptions are granted on a semester by semester basis.

Assistantships are salaried, monthly-paid employment. When it is possible and appropriate (i.e. funding is available), appointments should be made on continuous 9-month (academic year) basis., based upon satisfactory performance It is also permissible to offer appointments per semester.

Graduate students cannot be GTAs for graduate-level courses, nor can they be instructor of record for graduate-level courses.

Assistantship inquiries should be addressed to the unit head or graduate program coordinator of the unit/department/school/program in which the appointment is desired. The expected work activities are governed by the terms of the appointment.

The graduate program handbook should describe the process for applying for an assistantship and include criteria for awarding, renewing, and terminating assistantships, including length of eligibility and the process of performance evaluation.

A graduate student who resigns from their assistantship must provide written notice to the employing unit/department/school/program and the OSU Graduate College (email: grad-i@okstate.edu). The stipend will terminate on the day the resignation is effective.

## 3. Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities

An offer of an assistantship is a commitment by a unit/department/school/program to provide financial support to admitted graduate students. Assistantships are an investment made by a unit/department/school/program and are granted primarily to enable the student to pursue an advanced degree and gain valuable experience.

Accepting an assistantship brings with it a professional obligation to fulfill all of the responsibilities associated with the assistantship assignment. Included in this professional

obligation is the expectation that students who have accepted an assistantship will diligently pursue their degree to completion.

A student with an 50% FTE assistantship is expected to devote, on average, 20 hours per week to their duties as a graduate teaching or research assistant; the remainder of academic effort is devoted to his/her own studies and research. The time devoted to the assistantship may vary from day to day and week to week as long as it does not exceed the average given above. Graduate research assistants/associates and graduate teaching assistants/associates are not expected to work on officially designated University holidays. Otherwise, they are expected to be on duty throughout the appointment period. It is the responsibility for the GRA and GTA to account for their time each week and to be able to produce, when asked, an accounting of how their time has been spent.

All students holding a graduate assistantship are required to be full-time students. For fall and spring semesters, students employed 50% FTE must be enrolled in at least six credit hours to be considered full-time, while students employed less than 50% FTE must be enrolled in at least nine credit hours to be considered full-time. However, full-time enrollment for students admitted to doctoral candidacy is two credit hours. For the summer terms, students employed at any level must be enrolled in at least two credit hours during any summer session to be considered full-time.

GRAs and GTAs should submit an informal, but detailed, report of their activities at the end of each semester (to the assistantship faculty sponsor/supervisor and/or graduate program coordinator). Students should follow the protocol for their specific program.

### 3.1 English Proficiency for Teaching Assistantships

OSU policy requires all persons for whom English is a second language to demonstrate an acceptable level of spoken English before being employed in an instructional related capacity, including laboratory assignments. Any new international teaching assistant (ITA) is required to have a qualifying score of 26 or greater on the speaking portion of the internet-based TOEFL or to take the OSU International Teaching Assistant Test prior to being approved for instructional assignments. All new ITAs are also required to participate in the international teaching assistant orientation. Refer to the ITA Test for specific policy requirements.

## **4. Graduate Assistantship General Benefits**

Note that all graduate student benefit programs, such as tuition waivers, are only available to individuals with a primary classification as a graduate student enrolled in a degree program, which does not include certificate-seeking or non-degree seeking graduate students. OSU employees taking graduate classes do not qualify for graduate student benefit programs, irrespective of whether their employment is a benefit eligible position. One cannot selectively opt-out of certain benefits to seek eligibility for other benefits.

### 4.1 Tuition Waiver Benefits

Graduate Teaching or Research Assistants/Associates employed at least 50% FTE during the fall/spring semester (average of 20 hours per week) and enrolled in a minimum of six eligible graduate credit hours (or two hours for doctoral candidates) will receive a tuition waiver. Courses must be required by the graduate degree program, be included on graduate student's

approved Plan of Study, and be within the credit hour limits of the degree program. Tuition and fees are separate; graduate students are responsible for the fees associated with their enrollment. Tuition waivers cannot be applied to pre-admission, leveling, audit, undergraduate, correspondence, some outreach type courses, or certificate required courses. Tuition waivers for eligible courses taken during summer sessions are based on spring semester eligibility and apply without summer GRA/GTA employment.

Granting tuition waivers is also contingent upon the student submitting an electronic GTA/GRA (GSSI) tuition waiver agreement through the Graduate College website by the first day of the semester, in which they acknowledge their employment, enrollment and good academic standing responsibilities. Once enrolled, good academic standing (i.e., not on academic probation – beyond probationary admission) is a requirement for OSU tuition waiver eligibility. Once matriculated, a graduate student going on probation is not eligible for tuition waiver benefits; however, this does not preclude a GTA/GRA appointment. Graduate programs can request a one-time exception for exceptional circumstances from the graduate dean. Any graduate student employed as a GTA and/or a GRA less than 50% FTE total per week will not be eligible for any type of tuition waiver benefit.<sup>2</sup>

## 4.2 Health Insurance Benefits

Graduate Teaching or Research Assistants/Associates employed in a 25% FTE GTA/GRA position during the fall or spring semesters and who are enrolled in at least nine graduate credit hours throughout that entire semester are eligible for single-person-coverage health insurance through OSU for the fall (or spring) semester. Note: Spring semester eligibility coverage continues through the following summer regardless of employment or enrollment status.

Graduate Teaching or Research Assistants/Associates who are not eligible for health insurance coverage during the summer session by virtue of their eligibility during the previous spring semester, but who are employed in a 25% FTE GTA/GRA position during the eight-week summer session and enrolled in at least two graduate credit hours, are eligible for single-person-coverage health insurance through OSU for the summer term.

## 4.3 Time Off

Graduate students on assistantship appointments do not accrue vacation leave; nor do they accrue sick leave. Graduate assistants are not expected to work on officially designated University holidays. Otherwise, they are expected to be on duty throughout the appointment period.

Arrangements for any variations in work hours, including time off for attending a conference/professional meeting, vacation, jury duty, illness, or related use of sick time should be made individually with the faculty sponsor/supervisor. To the extent possible, graduate students are encouraged to make up missed work hours within one to two weeks and faculty sponsors/supervisors are encouraged to offer flexibility in work hours.

If a graduate student on a GRA/GTA appointment is ill for an extended period of time (i.e. two weeks or more), a leave of absence is recommended. Please refer to the OSU Graduate

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<sup>2</sup> A few of our graduate programs have applied for and received an exception (from the OSU Graduate College) so that graduate students enrolled in these programs with 25% FTE assistantships qualify for tuition waiver benefits.

College's leave of absence policy for instructions on how to request, submit, and obtain university approval for a leave of absence; see section 7.1 of the OSU Catalog.

## **5. Salary**

Stipends vary according to program level (masters and doctoral) and discipline. Within each program, the doctoral-level GRA/GTA (associate) rate must be at least 15% higher than the master's-level GRA/GTA (assistant) rate; this is an OSU policy. OSU establishes annually the minimum salary levels for graduate student assistantships. For FY20, the minimum salary stipend for GTAs and GRA is \$1,040/month at 50% FTE. No maximum salary level is specified by the University.

### **5.1 Source of Funding**

Salary for GRAs may be paid by an external/sponsored source of funds or College/school/departmental funds. Salary for GTAs may be paid by a University budget allocation to the schools/departments or by school/departmental funds.

### **5.2 Variable Rate Compensation for Research Assistants**

A graduate student employed as a GRA should be paid at the salary rate applicable to her/his home academic department, no matter where on campus they are employed as a GRA.

### **5.3 Variable Rate Compensation for Teaching Assistants**

A graduate student employed as a GTA should be paid at the salary rate applicable to the department in which they are serving as a GTA.