225 Appointment of Graduate Assistants

Approved by President

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Sidney A. McPhee, President

Effective Date: June 5, 2017, 2021

Responsible Division: Academic Affairs
Responsible Office: Dean, College of Graduate Studies
Responsible Officer: Dean, College of Graduate Studies

I. Purpose

This policy establishes the criteria and process regarding employment of graduate assistants at Middle Tennessee State University (MTSU or University).

In accordance with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC), institutions utilizing graduate assistants must provide a structure for administrative oversight at a level above that of the individual academic or assigned unit to assure conformity with institutional policies and procedures.

The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies is responsible for the administration of all aspects of the graduate assistants program: graduate teaching assistants/graduate research assistants/graduate administrative assistants. This responsibility includes approving student applications, checking all credentials and Personnel Appointment Forms, notifying the Business Office and other applicable offices of student appointments, changes, and terminations, recommending stipends, and all other matters relative to graduate student appointments.

II. Types of Graduate Assistantships

A. Graduate Teaching Assistants. The specific duties may vary from department to department. The majority of graduate teaching assistants are assigned one (1) or more of the following responsibilities:

1. Teaching a classroom section of a course, including preparation, grading, and related office hours;

2. Teaching a laboratory or discussion section of a course, including preparation, grading, and related office hours;
3. Tutoring, holding office hours, or providing other special academic assistance to students of the University;

4. Assisting a faculty member in instruction, grading, advising, office hours, and other academic duties necessary to conduct a course; or

5. Assisting directly or indirectly in instruction or supervision of MTSU students in community programs, internships, workshops, or seminars for practicing professionals;

6. Attending workshops, department in-service sessions, and/or mentoring in conjunction with a teaching assignment.

B. Graduate Research Assistants. Duties vary according to the nature of the department and/or the specific research project to which the student is assigned. The student may assist a faculty member in their research or may be part of a team working on an externally funded research project. The duties of a Graduate Research Assistant are performed under the direction and supervision of members of the faculty or academic staff.

C. Graduate Administrative Assistants. Typically, assistantships are awarded in the department in which the degree is to be earned; however, there are cases where exceptions are permitted. These include assistants who are assigned duties of an administrative or clerical nature in the Office of Academic Affairs, College of Graduate Studies, Office of Student Affairs, Business Office, Admissions Office, academic departments, or college offices, etc. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies must approve all appointments of this type.

III. Stipends

All departments and offices at MTSU are to conform with the provisions of this policy and are to pay graduate assistants at the levels established by the College of Graduate Studies. The College of Graduate Studies determines stipends for College of Graduate Studies funded graduate teaching assistants and graduate administrative assistants based on review of market factors and the availability of funds.

A. Stipends for graduate teaching assistants and graduate research assistants funded by the College of Graduate Studies are determined by the College of Graduate Studies based on a review of market factors and the availability of funds. Stipends awarded through external funds such as grants may vary in amount from other assistantships awarded by the University, but may not be lower than the corresponding minimum University established assistantship rate. Stipends for Ed.S. students are the same as
those for master's students. Stipends for doctoral students are greater than those for master's and Ed.S. students.

B. Stipends for graduate administrative assistants will be determined by the College of Graduate Studies in consultation with the administrative unit. In no event will the stipend of a graduate administrative assistant be less than the lowest graduate teaching assistant stipend throughout the University. It is expected that the stipends of administrative graduate assistants will be the same in any given administrative unit, although stipends may vary between administrative units.

C. The University pays the tuition (maintenance fees), debt service fee, and the technology access fee for all students holding assistantships. All other costs (such as books, post office box fees, student parking and transportation fees, and any other fees assessed, including distance learning fees), are the responsibility of the graduate student. The College of Business retracts the College of Business graduate assistants do not pay college course fees. MTSU does not pay tuition for graduate students when during any semester, or portion thereof, in which they do not have assistantship duties or for courses taken at other institutions (except joint programs). The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies must approve payment for undergraduate prerequisites, which must be specified at the time of admission.

D. Non-Tennessee residents holding a graduate assistantship are considered in-state for tuition purposes during the semesters in which they hold an assistantship. Students holding an academic year assistantship during the Spring term, and having an appointment for a graduate assistantship in the following Fall term, are considered in-state for tuition purposes during the Summer term. Summer enrollees without an assistantship for the following Fall must pay out-of-state tuition for the Summer term. Students holding an academic year assistantship in the Spring term, and who have filed an approved Intent to Graduate form for the following Summer term, are considered in-state for tuition purposes during that final Summer term. Students who have held an assistantship but relinquish their assistantship to conduct an off-campus internship that is an integral requirement of their program of study, will be considered in-state for tuition purposes during this internship. These terms on Off-campus internships will count toward the limit of terms that the student may hold an assistantship. Once an assistantship term has ended, non-Tennessee residents must pay out-of-state tuition unless they meet other criteria for in-state tuition set forth in Policy 501 Residency Classification.

IV. Required Assignments

A. All graduate assistants must meet the assignment requirements as set forth in the MTSU Standard Assistantship Agreement. Failure to fulfill the terms of this agreement results in a termination of the student’s assistantship.
B. Assignment: Full-time graduate assistants will engage in twenty (20) hours of activities as assigned by the department and agreed to by the student. This requirement can be met in a variety of ways such as the examples outlined below, including combinations of the following:

1. Six (6) contact hours per week in classroom or laboratory instruction in which the graduate teaching assistant assigns the grade, or

2. Eight (8) contact hours per week in laboratory supervision in which the faculty member assigns the grade, or

3. Ten (10) contact hours per week in teaching at the Campus School, or

4. Clock hours (up to twenty (20)) per week in supervised activities in the department or office of their assistantship, or

5. A combination of the above, not to exceed these specifications.

C. All graduate assistants must be available outside of their course of study to fulfill the twenty (20) hours per week of activity assignments as determined by the department. The twenty (20) hours per week are required during the semester while classes are in session for the standard Spring, Summer (for twelve-month appointments), and Fall terms.

D. All graduate assistants must register for at least six (6) graduate credit hours of course work per semester in order to receive an assistantship and be classified as full-time graduate students. Graduate assistants in their last semester of study may register for only those hours remaining to complete the degree. Graduate assistants holding Summer term appointments must be enrolled for graduate credit hours. They may register for fewer than six (6) hours in the Summer term and still receive their stipend. Graduate assistants taking fewer than five (5) graduate hours in any semester will have Social Security and Medicare tax deducted from their stipends. All catalog regulations pertaining to full-time students apply to graduate assistants.

E. The required Graduate Assistants must maintain a six (6)-hours course load throughout the term, must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Courses may not be dropped if the resulting course load is less than the required six (6) credit hours. Courses may not be changed to audit.

F. Half-time graduate assistants will perform the equivalent of half (½) of the assignment of full-time graduate Assistants. Half-time graduate assistants will receive half (½) of the stipend and half (½) of the tuition and fees of full-time graduate assistants. Half-time
graduate assistants are charged the balance of their tuition and fees at the resident in-state fee level.

V. Appointment

The department shall follow standard procedures developed by the department for appointment of graduate assistants.

A. Assistantship Period.

1. An assistantship agreement may be issued for one (1) or two (2) semesters or for (12) twelve months \(\text{three [3] semesters, including Summer}\).

2. For a master’s or Ed.S. program, students may be awarded an assistantship for no more than six (6) semesters or, for those on twelve (12)-month agreements, assistantships, no more than two (2) years or the its equivalent thereof.

3. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies must approve any changes to the nine (9)-month and twelve (12)-month agreements. For a M.F.A. program, students may be awarded an assistantship for no more than twelve (12) semesters.

4. Assistantships are not guaranteed beyond the term specified in the contract and are renewed annually based on appropriate academic progress, satisfactory completion of required work assignments, and professional/academic conduct. For a doctoral program, students may be awarded an assistantship for no more than five (5) years (fifteen [15] semesters). For support beyond this limit, one (1) additional year (three [3] semesters) may be granted upon review of academic progress. In exceptional cases, a further extension of up to one (1) year (three [3] semesters) may be granted on request on a semester-by-semester basis. Writing fellowships may be an available option for this support, but may not be granted beyond the seventh (7th) year of support.

5. For a M.F.A. program, students may be awarded an assistantship for no more than twelve (12) semesters.

6. For a doctoral program, students may be awarded an assistantship with annual renewals for no more than five (5) years, \(\text{i.e. (fifteen [15] semesters)}\). For support beyond this limit, one (1) additional year, \(\text{i.e. (three [3] semesters)}\) may be granted upon review of academic progress. In exceptional cases, a further extension of up to one (1) year, \(\text{i.e. (three [3] semesters)}\) may be requested granted on request on a semester-by-semester basis. Writing fellowships may be an available option for this support, but may not be granted beyond the seventh (7th)-year of support.
57. Students who have completed one (1) degree while holding a graduate assistantship, and who are accepted into a second (2nd)-graduate degree program, may be eligible to apply for another graduate assistantship. The student must graduate from the first degree program before beginning the second in order to be awarded an assistantship for the second program.

86. Variations from the nine (9)-month and twelve (12)-month agreements must be approved by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.

7. Tuition and fees are granted only for the courses of the primary program for which a student has been accepted. If a student is accepted into a second degree program or one or more certificate programs while receiving an assistantship for the primary program, the tuition for the additional courses will not be provided by the graduate assistantship. Students may request in writing that the tuition of an additional degree program or certificate be covered by the graduate assistantship. The request must be approved by the department, college, or other entity providing the assistantship and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies. The decision of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies is final. All graduate assistants are students first. Teaching and assignment schedules should be assigned with consideration for the graduate assistant’s class schedule. Department/administrative offices are expected to provide for their taking the usual student holidays such as Labor Day, Fall break, Spring break, etc. Graduate assistants should not be required to work on student holidays.

B. Twelve (12)-Month Appointment: The appointment period is from September 1 through August 31.

C. Term Academic Year Appointment: The Fall term-semester appointment period will begin one (1) day after the University Convocation and end one (1) day before Fall graduation. The Spring term-semester appointment period will begin on the Monday preceding the day classes begin and end one (1) day before Spring graduation. Summer appointments begin the first day of the Summer term and end one (1) day before Summer graduation.

D. Semester Academic Year Appointment: The assistantship schedule follows the appropriate semester as shown in this section. The Academic Year appointment period will begin one (1) day after the University convocation and end one (1) day before Spring graduation.

E. Failure to Comply with Assistantship Agreement: Assistants whose appointments are terminated because they have not complied with the terms of the agreement are subject to a pro-rated charge-back of tuition. Please note that assistants who fall under the provision of Policy 504 Educational Adjustment for Pregnant and Parenting Students
are not considered to have failed to comply, and their assistantship status will be retained in accordance with this policy.

F. Registered sex offenders are not eligible for employment at MTSU in accordance with T.C.A. § 40-39-211, which prohibits sex offenders required to register under T.C.A. § 40-39-2 from knowingly accepting employment at MTSU.

VI. Payment of Stipends

All stipend payments are made by direct deposit.

A. Twelve (12)-Month Fiscal Year Appointments: Assistants receiving fiscal year appointments are paid in twelve (12) equal installments beginning September 1 and ending August 31. Payments are made on the last business day of each month.

B. Term Appointments: Assistants receiving a semester appointment are paid in four (4) installments based upon beginning and ending dates.

C. Academic Year Appointments: Assistants receiving academic year appointments are paid in eight (8) equal installments beginning September 1 and ending April 30. Payments are made on the last business day of each month.

C. Semester Appointments: Assistants receiving a semester appointment are paid in four (4) installments based upon beginning and ending dates.

VII. Procedures in Securing Assistantships

A. Responsibilities. The student seeking a graduate assistantship should complete the Graduate Assistantship Application form on the Application for Assistantship Form from the College of Graduate Studies website. The completed form should be filed with the College of Graduate Studies.

B. The department/administrative office checks for the following requirements:

1. Overall grade point average (GPA), whether undergraduate or graduate, must be at least 3.0. Currently enrolled doctoral students seeking an assistantship must have a 3.25 GPA;

2. All entrance requirements have been met, and the student has been accepted into a graduate degree program unconditionally;

3. Graduate teaching assistants who are Instructors of Record have primary responsibility for teaching a course for credit and/or for assigning final grades for such must have earned at least eighteen (18) graduate semester hours in their teaching discipline, be under the direct supervision of an experienced faculty member;
member, experienced in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training/mentoring, and be evaluated on a regular basis. The eighteen (18)-hour requirement does not apply to graduate teaching assistants who are engaged in assignments such as laboratory assistance, attending or helping prepare lectures, grading assignments/papers, keeping class records, and conducting discussion groups.

4. Graduate teaching assistants whose first language is not English must demonstrate an appropriate level of competency in spoken English.

B. The department/administrative office shall follow its established procedures for appointing assistants and is responsible for obtaining any other information needed in addition to that identified in this section.

C. When a department/administrative office has made a decision to offer an assistantship, the recommendation and appointment forms are forwarded by the department to the College of Graduate Studies. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies is the final approver for the awarding of all graduate assistantships. If approval is granted, shall forward the required forms to the appropriate offices. Any correspondence with applicants, whether written or verbal, should indicate that all decisions depend upon office level are tentative and that final approval of appointments is predicated on the availability of funds and the final approval of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies.

D. A completed hiring packet for an assistantship candidate includes, when forwarded to the College of Graduate Studies, should contain completed copies of the following:

1. Graduate Assistant Application Summary Form;

2. Personnel Appointment Form (PAF);

3. Employment verification, which for students must be submitted via the Human Resource Services Workflow and approved prior to the first day of employment.

E. The College of Graduate Studies requires that all Assistants undergo appropriate pre-service and in-service training, including. Such training consists of the University-wide/online orientation as well as department/administrative office-based sessions.

F. The College of Graduate Studies requires that all graduate assistants be evaluated each semester while holding the assistantship.

G. Graduate assistants who fail to maintain a 3.0 (master's) or a 3.25 (doctoral) for any semester while holding an assistantship will be placed on assistantship probation. The
graduate assistant will be given one (1) semester to regain the required grade point average. Failure to do so will result in termination of the graduate assistantship contract at the close of the probationary semester.

I. Graduate assistantships may be terminated at any time due to failure to provide unsatisfactory work performance and/or violations of appropriate conduct policies.

Forms:

- Graduate Assistantship Application
- Application for Assistantship
- Personnel Appointment Form (PAF)

Revisions: none June 5, 2017 (original); __________, 2021.

Last Reviewed: November 2020 __________ 2021.

References: Policies 501 Residency Classification; 504 Educational Adjustment for Pregnant and Parenting Students; T.C.A. §§ 40-39-2; 40-39-211.