

UNIVERSITY OF
CENTRAL MISSOURI®
LEARNING TO A GREATER DEGREE

**Graduate Assistant
Employment Handbook
Policies and Procedures**

Revised, August 2023

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Overview

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Purpose

This handbook is intended to provide an overview of the University of Central Missouri's policies, procedures, and responsibilities that pertain to Graduate Assistants (GAs). The Graduate Assistant Employee Handbook does not replace policies that are stated in the Graduate Catalog, the Human Resources Procedural Manual, or the University Student Handbook. Some departments or offices have adopted additional guidelines for Graduate Assistants; please check with your supervisor for more information.

Graduate Studies is committed to assisting graduate students at the University of Central Missouri and believes that Graduate Assistants will find the experience to be rewarding. We hope that you have a successful experience as a Graduate Assistant!

Questions regarding graduate assistantships can be addressed to:
Graduate Studies
660-543-4729
gradstudies@ucmo.edu

General Information about Graduate Assistantships

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What is a Graduate Assistantship?

A graduate assistantship (GA) is designed to provide support to graduate students throughout their time of graduate study at the University. The assistantship is a scholarship for which service is required and in return, the student is provided with the opportunity to serve in a professional role on campus and establish professional relationships with other members of the campus community. There are six types of assistantships available at UCM: teaching, lab, research, administrative, student affairs, and athletic. As a Graduate Assistant, the student is making a significant commitment to the University of Central Missouri by agreeing to achieve exceptional academic performance in their degree program and carry extensive professional responsibilities. Graduate Assistants are compensated for their service with a stipend and scholarships.

The Graduate Assistant Employee Handbook does not represent a contract of employment. Graduate Assistants are employed on an at-will basis, meaning that employment is not guaranteed for a specific duration of time. The University has the right to terminate employment at any time, with or without cause.

Equal Employment Opportunity

[Nondiscrimination/Equal Opportunity Statement](#) (see policy on university website)
Board of Governors Policy 1.2.150

The University of Central Missouri actively follows a policy of nondiscrimination in regard to age, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, pregnancy or parental status, national origin, veteran status, genetic information, disability, and all other legally protected classes. This policy applies to educational programs and activities including athletics, instruction, grading, the awarding of student financial aid, recruitment, admission, employment, housing, placement, and retention of students, faculty, and staff. The university complies with applicable federal and state laws and regulations related to discrimination.

Graduate Studies

The University of Central Missouri's Graduate Studies Office takes an active role in establishing the policies that oversee the Graduate Assistantship program. Graduate Studies serves as an advocate for Graduate Assistants to ensure that their responsibilities and duties are reasonable and that they contribute to their academic studies. Graduate Studies also ensure that the Graduate Assistants are receiving fair treatment.

Confidentiality

While working as a Graduate Assistant, students may come in contact with, learn of, and/or produce confidential information concerning the University of Central Missouri's business and personnel. If the Graduate Assistant does have access to such information, it is to remain confidential and as property of the University.

FERPA stands for the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974. It is also known as the Buckley Amendment. FERPA, as amended, sets forth requirements regarding the privacy of student education records. FERPA governs the disclosure of education records maintained by an educational institution and access to those records.

University employees, including GAs, may access and use private educational records only as necessary to conduct official business that is related to the educational interests of the student. University employees may not access the records of any student for personal reasons or for any reason other than to perform their job duties. University employees may not share information from student educational records, including grades or grade point averages, with other faculty or staff members unless their official responsibilities identify their legitimate educational interest in that information for that student. This information also may not be shared with parents or other third parties without written permission from the student.

If in doubt, do not release information about a student. Refer requests to the Registrar's Office at 660-543-4914 or registrar@ucmo.edu.

Policies and Procedures

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Graduate Assistant Appointment

Graduate Assistants are appointed by the hiring department or office to Graduate Studies. Once Graduate Studies receives the hiring paperwork and determines academic eligibility, the GA will be contacted. The GA will receive an email to their UCM student email address containing the next steps to be taken to accept the appointment. The GA must complete and accept their employment offer letter from the office of Graduate Studies. Graduate Assistants will need to complete the following forms with the Office of Human Resources: I-9, Direct Deposit, W-4, Personnel Data Sheet, and Emergency Contact Form. These forms must be signed in person at the Office of Human Resources.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a Graduate Assistantship at the University of Central Missouri, a student must be accepted into their graduate degree program and have a minimum undergraduate GPA of 2.7 or a graduate GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. All available Graduate Assistantship positions on UCM's campus are listed at: jobs.ucmo.edu

Students interested in applying for an assistantship position will complete and submit the job application (located at: jobs.ucmo.edu), and upload three letters of reference and academic transcripts. Students must provide accurate and true information on their application; falsifying information will result in the dismissal of the job application. Once the completed application is submitted, it is sent to the hiring department or office for review.

International students who have not completed their primary and their secondary education in a nation or territory where English is the primary language must have completed one term of enrollment in a public institution of higher education in the state of Missouri and successfully completed the Speaking Proficiency English Assessment Test (SPEAK) before they can be appointed as a teaching assistant. An international student in their first term of study may apply for any other type of assistantship offered, so long as they meet the skills required to fulfill the job.

Work Commitment

Full time Graduate Assistants are expected to work 20 hours per week during their dates of employment. Depending on the size of assistantship (half-time or quarter-time); hours per week may vary (10 hours or 5 hours respectively). It is possible to be appointed to more than one partial graduate assistantship position so long as the combined employment does not exceed 20 hours. A GA may not volunteer “extra hours” while employed or be asked to work more time than what they can be paid. Graduate Assistants are not allowed to work as a GA prior to (or after) their specified dates of employment. GAs must complete all required hiring documents with the Office of Human Resources prior to their first day of work.

According to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, international students are limited to a maximum of 20 hours of work per week during the fall and spring semester while classes are in session.

If a Graduate Assistant feels at any time that their work responsibilities cannot be completed during the 20 hours, they should express their concerns with their supervisor immediately to discuss alternative solutions. Working in excess of the 20-hour limit is not permissible. On no occasion should the Graduate Assistant’s workload interfere with their academic study (missing classes/examinations).

The University of Central Missouri defines a work week: Sunday, 12:00:01 a.m. through Saturday, 12:00:00 midnight. If the University is scheduled to be closed (for holidays/weather-related closures), Graduate Assistants are not expected to work or make up the hours they were scheduled to work. Employees are encouraged to sign up for TextCaster alerts through the University to receive prompt notifications about school closings and delays.

Break Periods

Federal law does not require lunch or coffee breaks, however, if the hiring department or office does allow their GA to take breaks, they must adhere to UCM’s break period policy. According to the UCM Human Resources Procedure Manual section on [Special Compensation Calculations](#): Break Periods, “Breaks are a privilege granted to ensure staff are given a brief rest. Breaks are optional if workload and/or staff size do not accommodate them.... Since break period time is compensable time, employees must not be absent from their workstations beyond the 15 minute period. Breaks may not be used in conjunction with non-compensable time, to adjust the starting or ending time for the work day, or leave time.”

Hours of Enrollment

Graduate Assistants must be enrolled in a minimum of six graduate credit hours at UCM to be eligible for an assistantship. For a summer assistantship, a GA must be enrolled in at least three graduate credit hours at UCM. Courses taken for undergraduate credit are not counted toward the minimum enrollment.

The maximum enrollment for any student with a half-time or greater assistantship is twelve credit hours per semester. Students who hold assistantships that are less than half-time may take a maximum of sixteen hours during a regular semester. The maximum number of credit hours for students holding a summer appointment is nine hours. Courses taken for undergraduate credit and for audit are included in the maximum total semester hours.

The recommended number of hours for Graduate Assistants holding half-time or full-time positions is nine hours per regular semester. The maximum enrollment is set at twelve to allow for special situations in which the student needs to enroll in more than nine hours due to requirements for the student's degree program.

Supervision & Evaluation

All GAs are supervised by a graduate faculty member within an academic department or by a professional staff member within the University. The supervisor is responsible for evaluating the GAs performance each semester. If the evaluation is unsatisfactory, the supervisor may recommend termination of the appointment or decline to offer rehire for a subsequent semester. Teaching assistants will also be evaluated by their students, under the direction of the supervisor. Graduate Assistants may be evaluated more than once throughout the semester and the supervisor will provide continuing feedback about the GA's performance.

Additional Employment

Graduate Assistantships are a form of student employment, which is limited to 20 hours of work per week on campus. Graduate Assistants may accept additional off-campus employment, however, are strongly cautioned against doing so. Their first responsibility is that of a student. Their second responsibility is that of the assistantship. If outside employment interferes with the assistantship duties, the assistantship may be removed. If outside employment causes the Graduate Assistant's grade point average to fall below the 3.0 cumulative average, the assistantship will be terminated. International students must check with the Office of International Student Services about additional employment.

Academic Standards

Graduate Assistants are expected to maintain an overall 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA. Failure to exhibit the expected academic standards will result in automatic termination of the assistantship. If a student is placed on academic probation, their assistantship will be terminated. Graduate

Assistants must also enroll in the minimum number of graduate credit hours each semester to maintain their assistantship.

Compensation

The current pay rate for the stipend and scholarships are available at the Graduate Studies Office. Graduate Assistants are eligible to receive a graduate tuition waiver, a graduate nonresident tuition waiver (if applicable), and a graduate mandatory fees waiver. The scholarship is in the form of a waiver and the funds are not deposited into the GA's personal account. Instead, the student's bill is reduced by the amount of the scholarship awarded. If the maximum amount of the scholarship is not used, the remainder is not paid to the Graduate Assistant in cash and unused scholarship money cannot be carried over to another semester. The scholarship is applied to graduate-level courses only; courses taken for undergraduate credit are not eligible to be covered by the GA scholarship.

The stipend is paid to the GA via direct deposit and is deposited into their account on the 15th and the last working day of the month. If the 15th of the month is a weekend or holiday, the GA will be paid on the first non-holiday weekday before the 15th. The electronic paystub can be found in the Graduate Assistant's MyCentral, then click on 'Employee Dashboard', then 'Direct Deposit Information'. For more information, please contact the UCM Payroll Office.

The compensation received as a GA must be reported as income when filing state and federal tax returns.

Benefits

Graduate Assistants are ineligible for vacation, sick, and holiday pay or unemployment benefits. Supervisors reserve the right to revoke, deny, or reschedule absences on the basis of workloads and deadlines.

Resignation & Termination

If for any reason a GA finds it necessary to resign from their assistantship position, a letter of resignation must be submitted to the GA's supervisor and to Graduate Studies as soon as possible. If the resignation takes place prior to the end of the employment period, the GA's stipend will be pro-rated accordingly. The written notice must contain the specific position and the GA's last date of employment.

The supervisor may terminate an assistantship if the GA: fails to adequately perform their assigned duties and responsibilities specified with the job, exhibits unprofessional behavior, or fails to meet the minimum GPA or enrollment hours required each semester. Since a Graduate Assistantship is a service scholarship, GAs who are terminated or resign are not eligible to receive unemployment compensation.

A Graduate Assistant may be terminated for any one of the following reasons: (a) is found to have engaged in sexual harassment; faculty and graduate students should familiarize themselves with the University Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment (b) the overall grade point average for graduate courses at UCM falls below 3.0, (c) the semester course load falls below the minimum full-time load of six graduate credit hours, (d) an allegation of academic or scientific misconduct such as cheating, plagiarism, or falsification of data, has been investigated and verified (e) suspension or dismissal of a graduate student from the University for disciplinary reasons will terminate concurrently both a graduate tuition scholarship and a Graduate Assistantship.

Job Descriptions & Work Responsibilities

The area in which the Graduate Assistant is assigned to work is expected to clearly communicate the position's responsibilities, duties, and expectations to the GA in a written/electronic job description. The job description should specify the essential functions of the assistantship such as the work schedule expected, lines of authority, daily work activities, etc. If physical access (keys, fobs) and/or technological access (login credentials) are needed Graduate Assistants should request such from their immediate supervisor.

The area is also responsible for letting the Graduate Assistant know who their immediate supervisor will be during their appointment. The supervisor should update the position's description accordingly as duties are assigned or taken away.

The work schedule of the GA should be determined between the immediate supervisor and the Graduate Assistant. The supervisor understands that the GA's academic success is the primary importance at UCM, and work responsibilities should not replace the academic responsibility of a student. The supervisor and the GA should discuss scheduling conflicts when abuse of flexible scheduling occurs.

The University requires regular attendance and punctuality at work. The GA should communicate any prior notifications of absence to their supervisor. If prior notification is not achievable, communication needs to be made as soon as possible.

Graduate Assistants should refer to their individual job description or their supervisor for specific details regarding the required dress attire required for their position.

Check-Out Upon Ending Employment

Graduate Assistants should contact and work with their immediate supervisor when their employment time has ended. All equipment, keys, manuals, course materials, textbooks, and other materials issued to Graduate Assistants must be returned upon cessation of employment. It is the Graduate Assistant's responsibility to return all items to their immediate supervisor or to the rightful office. It is the Graduate Assistant's responsibility to make sure all tasks are completed before leaving the University.

Graduate Assistant Rehire

Graduate Assistant appointments are made for one semester at a time as determined by the department or office. GAs can be re-appointed or rehired for additional semesters. A GA wanting re-appointment should contact their supervisor to let them know they would like to be reconsidered for additional semesters. If the department or office chooses to re-appoint the GA, a rehire approval form will need to be submitted to the Graduate Studies Office.

If a GA is working on a Master's degree, they can hold an assistantship for no more than a total of four semesters. After a Master's degree is conferred and the GA is working on an Education Specialist degree, they can hold an assistantship for no more than a total of three semesters. Any summer GA appointments do not count against the maximum number of semesters one can hold an assistantship.

Resources

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Orientation

Graduate Studies will host an online orientation, using Blackboard, for all new Graduate Assistants during each semester of the school year. It is mandatory that any new GA complete the online training and orientation modules. Individual departments or offices in which GAs are hired will also provide training and orientation concerning the GA's specific position.

Teaching Assistants

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) or Teaching Assistants (TAs), in addition to Graduate Studies' online orientation, are highly recommended to attend the New Faculty Symposium in the fall semester. It is recommended that TAs attend all the workshops offered to improve their teaching experience and ability to support student success.

TAs are expected to comply with all University academic policies.

University Property

All equipment, keys, manuals, and books issued to Graduate Assistants become the responsibility of the student employee. Keys are not to be loaned or distributed to other personnel, students, or faculty and must be returned upon completion of the assistantship. All items issued to University employees may be recalled at any time and must be surrendered upon cessation of employment.

Grievances

If the case of concern arises regarding the Graduate Assistant's work or academic performance, there is an obligation for the GA to attempt to resolve the concern with their supervisor at the department or office level. If adequate resolutions cannot be attained, the GA should contact the Chair at the department or office level. If a satisfactory resolution cannot be attained at that level, the GA should contact Graduate Studies to try to work out a successful resolution.

Resources

Graduate Studies, a complete website for GAs at: <https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/graduate-studies/index.php>

Office of Human Resources:

<https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/human-resources/employment/index.php>

A list of available assistantship openings on campus can be found at: <https://jobs.ucmo.edu/>

The Graduate Catalog: <https://catalog.ucmo.edu/>

Student Financial Services:

<https://www.ucmo.edu/future-students/tuition-costs-and-financial-aid/index.php>

Graduate Student Funding and Scholarships:

<https://www.ucmo.edu/future-students/tuition-costs-and-financial-aid/financing-your-education/scholarships/index.php>

<https://www.ucmo.edu/offices/graduate-studies/research-funding-and-support/index.php>

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