



ARKANSAS
TECH
UNIVERSITY

Graduate College

Graduate Assistant Handbook

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Philosophy

Graduate assistantships are designed to support students in their pursuit of advanced degrees at Arkansas Tech University. Graduate assistantships are a means to recruit students who desire to study and work in various areas of university programs and life.

It is the responsibility of Arkansas Tech University to uphold a graduate assistant (GA) program which: (1) aids appointed graduate assistants in satisfactory progress toward their graduate degrees; (2) ensures appointed graduate assistants perform appropriate services; (3) facilitates the professional development of appointed graduate assistants; and (4) builds a community which educates students on available university resources.

Categories of Graduate Assistantships

The category of a graduate assistantship is defined by the position's source of funding.

Academic Graduate Assistantships. A graduate assistantship is categorized as *academic* when the appointment specifically falls under the umbrella of Academic Affairs in the Arkansas Tech University organizational structure.

Non-Academic Graduate Assistantships. A graduate assistantship is categorized as *non-academic* when the appointment falls under Student Services, Development, Athletics, or another area outside of Academic Affairs in the Arkansas Tech University organizational structure.

Appointment Procedures

Application Process. Graduate assistant information may be found on the Graduate College website on the [Graduate Assistantships](#) section. Student inquiries regarding specific positions should be directed to the Graduate College. Additionally, it is the responsibility of the applicant to pursue possible positions through the Graduate College or individual departments.

The GA appointment process is standard, regardless of the student's status, residential or international. First, an applicant should complete an online [application for graduate assistantship](#). A list of eligible applicants is forwarded by the Graduate College to program directors. Some applicants may require additional interviewing and/or review of credentials to evaluate appropriate placement.

Hiring Process. All graduate assistant candidates are subject to a background check. Once a candidate is selected for a GA position, the requesting supervisor must initiate a background check through the Onetech portal. Upon receipt of this information, a

disclosure form will be sent to the candidate via email. The candidate will then receive instructions from TrueScreen regarding electronic submission of required information for the background check. The hiring process should not proceed until the background check has been completed and the supervisor has received results from HR.

Once cleared through the background check process, it is the departments' responsibility to notify the Graduate College of their GA selection by completing the [Graduate Assistant Position](#) form. The applicant must also sign this form which outlines the duration of the graduate assistantship, stipend amount, hours to be worked, and a brief description of assigned duties. Prompt notification will allow the Graduate College to maintain accurate records regarding availability of applicants and positions. Upon approval by the Graduate Dean, applicants will receive a contract.

The candidate must have completed the requirements for the baccalaureate degree prior to the first semester of the appointment year and gained [unconditional admission](#) to the Graduate College **and** their academic department in order to merit appointment. Candidates earning a conditional admission may be considered for an assistantship if a hiring department submits an appeal for consideration to the graduate college. Returning GAs must remain in good academic standing with the Graduate College.

Employment Process. After being awarded a graduate assistantship, all GAs are required to complete [HR employment paperwork](#). Graduate assistants must complete all HR employment paperwork prior to their first day of work. Failure to complete these forms prior to the first contracted date will result in a violation with the E-Verify system and possible non-payment for that month. See Appendix for I-9 Employment Eligibility Verification. Students may not begin work until the background check has been completed, a position request form has been approved, and all HR employment paperwork has been submitted.

Additionally, the student must complete all paperwork to gain appropriate computer access the graduate assistantship may require; the applicant will be advised by the department supervisor if any is necessary.

Contract Dates. Requested contract dates on the Graduate Assistant Approval Form should indicate first and last days of work for individual students. These dates will vary by department. No student is permitted to work beyond their date of graduation. Therefore, employment as a graduate assistant will expire upon graduation or the end contract end date, whichever occurs first.

Orientation. The Graduate College views the [orientation](#) as an integral part of the graduate assistantship program; attending orientation is a prerequisite to holding a

graduate assistantship. If an applicant accepts a graduate assistantship for summer or fall, they must attend the new Graduate Assistant Orientation offered in the fall semester of each year. New GAs in the spring semester will have a spring orientation session, which may be conducted online. At the orientation, the Graduate College staff will not only outline expectations, but also help students transition into their role as a GA. Returning GAs are not required to attend a physical GA Orientation session but will be required to complete an online, abbreviated version of the GA Orientation at the beginning of a new academic year. Failure to attend a GA Orientation session or to complete the online version may result in non-payment.

Graduate Assistant Role

Applicants selected to hold a graduate assistantship may work only within their contracted department; multiple graduate assistantships within one time period are not acceptable. Additionally, GAs may not hold multiple on-campus roles (i.e. GA and student worker) during the same semester term without prior approval from the Graduate College Dean/Associate Dean. Students who are approved to work in both a GA and an additional role may not exceed a total of 28 working hours per week.

Compensation for Graduate Assistants

All students granted a graduate assistantship receive a tuition waiver. This waiver will pay all tuition costs for a maximum of nine (9) credit hours per semester, or six (6) credit hours per summer term. However, no more than 18 graduate credit hours may be taken within one (1) fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). Contracted GAs may use waiver hours during summer sessions, not to exceed the maximum 18 hours in the fiscal year (July – Summer II to June – Summer I).

Tuition waivers will apply to all academic GAs' accounts after the 11th class day. Tuition waivers for those working as non-academic GAs will apply to student accounts at the department's discretion.

Non-academic graduate assistantships are awarded varied stipend amounts, according to responsibilities and expectations for individual positions. Obligations and payment are explicitly discussed prior to a contract agreement. These positions may also be affected by the length of the contract and responsibilities associated with the appointment.

Non-academic GAs may not work more than a total of 20 hours per week. However, they may appeal to work up to 28 hours if they are hired as a student worker/extra

laborer. This request must be approved by the Graduate College prior to the extra work beginning.

A contract for an agreed upon stipend will be issued by Academic Affairs Office. In order to ensure academic graduate assistants are paid in a consistent manner and to more easily respond to increases in minimum wage, all academic graduate assistants are paid based on a daily rate. The stipend amount may vary each month, depending upon the number of work days in that particular month. The specific monthly amount will be listed on the GA contract. A GA will receive the contract from their supervisor. Signed contracts must be returned to the supervisor promptly and then returned to Academic Affairs within 10 days after issuance.

All GA's will successfully need to pass a criminal background check prior to a contract being issued. The hiring office of the GA will initiate the process with HR. Each GA will need to complete this background check each academic year.

All new GAs must complete an I-9 and other [human resources documents](#) prior to beginning their appointment. Therefore, international students should obtain social security cards to complete the required paperwork, and to subsequently receive payment. Completed paperwork is necessary to meet payroll requirements. Failure to complete this paperwork will result in non-payment. GAs may receive payment through direct deposit. The [direct deposit form](#) is available on the Human Resources webpage. Those opting to receive a physical payment may go to Accounts Payable (Browning building, room 302) on the last day of each month, to secure their check. All checks not picked up by 2 pm on the last day of the month will be mailed to the recipient's home address. All graduate assistants under contract will receive stipend disbursements as a monthly paycheck on the last day of each month.

Appointment Terms and Eligibility for Reappointment

GA appointments should be contracted for one or both semesters of a nine (9) month academic year or a twelve (12) month fiscal year. To ensure timely consideration, students seeking a graduate assistantship are strongly encouraged to complete the online application no later than May 1 for the fall semester or November 1 for a spring assistantship. GA applications are valid for only one calendar year; therefore, returning graduate students, who did not receive a graduate assistantship during the previous academic year, should reapply. Entering graduate students must meet Graduate College unconditional admission standards and returning students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA). Late applications may be submitted, however, consideration of applicants will be at the discretion of individual departments.

Students holding a graduate assistantship must enroll and complete a minimum of six (6) hours, maximum of nine (9) hours of graduate credit per semester. Exceptions may be made upon the approval of the appropriate department head and the Graduate College Dean. Students enrolled in six (6) graduate credit hours, while holding a GA position, are considered full-time students by Arkansas Tech University.

A student may receive a graduate assistantship award for four (4) semesters, if they meet the Graduate College eligibility guidelines and receive continued departmental approval. A program director may appeal for one (1) extra semester by completing a [Graduate Assistant Fifth Semester Request Form](#) and providing a detailed written justification to the Graduate Dean. The form can be found on the Graduate College website. All requests for an additional semester should be received by the application deadlines.

Training. Computer access forms must be completed and returned to Human Resources if the assistantship requires access. All departments are expected to explicitly define the job requirements and expectations for GAs through a training process at the beginning of each semester. Additionally, a review of Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) guidelines is required for all GAs working with, but not limited to: (1) Banner, INB or Self-Service; (2) student grades or other sensitive information, as defined by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; and (3) students in a peer capacity. The Arkansas Tech University FERPA form and confidentiality agreement can be found on the [Institutional Research webpage](#). Any violations to FERPA regulations are grounds for immediate termination.

Driving Policy for Graduate Assistants. GAs who have completed Human Resources paperwork and have an acceptable driving record are eligible to drive on state business. Prior to participating in travel or operating a State vehicle, GAs must submit an [Authorization to Operate State Vehciles and Private Vehicles on State Business](#) form to the Travel Office. Those with an unacceptable driving record will receive a formal letter from the Travel Office, and may not operate a State vehicle. Approved students driving personal vehicles for state business may be reimbursed for their travel. For questions regarding GA travel, please contact the Travel Office at 479.356.2034.

Reappointment. All GAs seeking reappointment must receive continued departmental approval. Program directors should request a new contract for the returning student, by submitting a new [Graduate Assistant form](#) to the Graduate College. Also, to continue eligibility, applicants must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA.

Summer Sessions. GAs may enroll in a maximum of six (6) credit hours per summer term, as long as 18 graduate credit hours are not exceeded within one (1) fiscal year. Maymester and summer terms do not count as part of the four (4) semesters of GA eligibility.

Timesheets. Documentation of time worked is required monthly. GAs should complete the appropriate timesheet required by their department. The timesheet should require a GA to sign in and sign out and be initialed by the supervisor, to document daily time worked. A copy of each GA's monthly timesheet must be kept on file within the department, whether physically or electronically, for five years for state auditing purposes.

GAs with teaching assignments must satisfy their contract hours by: 1) teaching courses at their indicated times; 2) grading/returning coursework in a timely manner; and 3) maintaining posted office hours. A separate timesheet may be used for these positions.

Sickness and emergencies are to be expected. However, it is both the GAs' and the departments' responsibility to ensure missed time is made up, in order to fulfill the contractual agreement. Missed time should be made up within the same pay period in which the GA is absent, not to exceed 28 hours per week.

Holidays. GAs are not expected to work during holidays on which the campus is closed. Additionally, they are not expected to work during spring, fall, or winter holiday (December-January) break, unless otherwise specified within their contractual agreement.

Inclement Weather. The Arkansas Tech University inclement weather policies and procedures are as follows:

Inclement Weather Policy. Classes are canceled. However, graduate assistants are expected to be in attendance by 10:00 am. Those unable to make it to campus safely are required to appropriately notify their supervisor and make up hours missed.

Campus Closed. All classes and offices are closed; GAs are not expected to report to work. Missed time is not expected to be made up.

During times of bad weather, refer to www.arkansastechnews.com for the most accurate information regarding campus operations.

Resignation/Termination of Graduate Assistantship

Resignation. Those leaving a GA appointment before the contractual end date must provide their supervisor and the Graduate College written notice of their resignation. An email with a read-receipt request is acceptable or a properly stamped and addressed letter to the recipients. The written notice must contain the following: (1) name; (2) reason for resignation; and (3) the effective date of resignation. Graduate College notification should be sent to gradcollege@atu.edu or mailed directly to the Graduate College through the US Postal Service.

Once the department receives a formal resignation from a GA, a copy of the written resignation and a completed [Graduate Assistant Resignation/Termination](#) form should be sent to the Graduate College. The vacant graduate assistantship may not be refilled until proper notification is received and processed by the Graduate College.

GAs who terminate their graduate enrollment during the academic year, forfeit their graduate assistantship and void their current contract; compensation will be pro-rated for time worked. In these cases, the student may be eligible for future assistantships if they meet the following procedures: (1) GA leaves position on good terms; (2) provides a written resignation describing the nature of their departure; (3) have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0; and (4) enroll in the minimum number of graduate credit hours required.

Termination. Unsatisfactory performance of assigned GA duties will be grounds for termination of the GA appointment at the discretion of the department head or graduate dean. Students terminated from a GA appointment are considered ineligible for future positions, regardless of department.

Notice of deficient performance. Before termination is final, the department head and/or graduate dean will provide a written explanation of the unsatisfactory performance and outline their expectations for the GA moving forward.

Final Termination. If after a period of two weeks the GA has not satisfied the written expectations of the department head or graduate dean, the GA may be terminated.

Circumstances Justifying Immediate Termination. Termination of a GA may be immediate in the following circumstances: (1) the student fails to attend the Graduate Assistant Orientation (failure to attend will result in immediate termination from the position unless the Graduate College Dean provides an exception); (2) the GA misses at least 50% of their scheduled work dates within

first two (2) weeks of the assistantship as indicated by their contract (under this circumstance, GA termination is left to the discretion of the immediate supervisor and the ability of the GA to make-up hours within the parameters set forth by the Graduate College); (3) if it is determined the student committed sexual harassment against another student, faculty, or staff as defined by university policy; (4) the overall GPA of the student falls below 3.0; (5) if it is determined the student committed an act of academic misconduct, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, or falsification of data; (6) dishonesty, insubordination, or other conduct reflecting unfavorably upon the reputation of the University; (7) improperly disclosing information protected under FERPA; or (8) violation of Student Code of Conduct, state or federal law.

Ramifications. In the event of resignation or termination, the GA will be paid for the pro-rated amount of time worked that semester. Students terminated from a GA appointment are considered ineligible for future positions, regardless of department.

Departments are responsible for sending all documentation of deficient performance and a completed [Graduate Assistant Resignation/Termination](#) form to the Graduate College immediately upon termination proceedings. The vacant graduate assistantship may not be refilled until proper notification is received and processed by the Graduate College.

Termination forms are not necessary in the following circumstances: (1) the GA is not working during the summer term but plans to return the fall semester; (2) the GA has satisfied his/her four (4) semesters and has not been approved for an additional semester; and (3) the GA's contract has expired and the department has opted not to renew. When an assignment is terminated, Budget, Payroll, Human Resources, and any other appropriate offices (e.g. Academic Affairs) will be notified based on the type of graduate assistantship (i.e. academic or non-academic). This procedure will terminate the student's ability to drive a state vehicle, be reimbursed for travel expenses, or have departmental computer access.

Departmental Requests for Graduate Assistants

Individual offices may request temporary assignment of GAs from assistantships that are not filled. If the graduate assistantship is offered in the fall semester, it will be renewable for one (1) semester only (spring). The GA position will then return to the original college/department/program. The [Graduate Assistant Request](#) form can be found on the Graduate College webpage.

Expectations of Graduate Assistants

Image. As a member of the Arkansas Tech University team, appearance is a reflection on the institution. Therefore, GAs are expected to dress appropriately and maintain proper hygiene for their appointment. What is considered appropriate may depend on the type of graduate assistantship and the nature of work in a given circumstance.

Etiquette. Proper manners and social behavior is mandatory for all GAs. Remember to shake hands when meeting new coworkers, peers, or guests. In addition, utilize titles such as “Mr.,” “Ms.,” or “Dr.,” and withhold overly personal conversations/information in the workplace.

Communication. Poor communication can create problems amongst co-workers and guests alike. It is imperative to communicate clearly and concisely. Please consider the following tips: (1) verbal—speak with a positive tone, speak clearly and at an appropriate level; (2) non-verbal—be aware of your body language and personal hygiene; and (3) written—aim to be concise and remember to proofread everything.

Social media is another growing form of communication. Personal use of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites is forbidden during work hours, unless required as a task for a job assigned.

Responsibility. If granted a graduate assistantship, one will enter a professional workplace. As such, it is important GAs are accountable for individual actions, decisions, and choices within the work setting. Be aware that generating trust among coworkers is important. If you claim you will complete something, be sure it is completed well and in a timely manner.

Confidentiality. GAs are, in some capacity, privy to sensitive student and personnel information. Therefore, all non-directory information outlined in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is expected to be protected and only discussed in the appropriate workplace setting. Violations to FERPA are grounds for immediate termination. Additionally, it is inappropriate to discuss university personnel issues with students.

Competency. All GAs will be provided training for their position but it is the responsibility of the GA to acquire competency with assigned tasks. Questions and note-taking are encouraged for accurate training results.

Relationships. Demonstrating a level of respect to any individual located on the Arkansas Tech University campus is essential. Also, while in the work setting, do not

discuss problems in your personal life. This may cause tension, make people feel uncomfortable, and decrease the overall productivity of the workplace.

Student Resources

Athletic Events

- ATU students are provided free admission to Tech sporting events with Tech ID
- If you can't make it to the game, listen to the live broadcast through the Surfer Network at <http://www.atu.edu/techathleticaudiostreaming.shtml>
- <http://athletics.atu.edu/>

Career Services – Doc Bryan Student Services Suite 153

- Provides career counseling, helps with résumé building/interviewing, & aids in job searches
- <http://www.atu.edu/career/> Phone: 479.968.0278

Counseling Services – Health and Wellness Center, Doc Bryan Student Services Suite 119

- Provides personal & group counseling, outreach programming, consultations, & resources to the Tech community
- <http://www.atu.edu/cslcenter/> Phone: 479.968.0329

Disability Services – Doc Bryan Student Services Suite 141

Endorses both the Americans with Disabilities Act & Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

- Aids students in requesting services & documentation of services
- <http://www.atu.edu/disabilities/> Phone: 479.968.0302

Financial Aid – Brown Hall Suite 206

- Federal Aid (including FAFSA & Student Loans)
- <http://www.atu.edu/finaid/> Phone: 479.968.0399

Graduate College – Tomlinson Building 113

- One-stop shop for all Graduate needs
- <http://www.atu.edu/gradcollege/> Phone: 479.968.0398

Graduate Student Council

- A council designated to provide an active role and voice for graduate students on the Tech campus.
- <http://www.atu.edu/gradcollege/gsc.php> Email: gradcollege@atu.edu

Health Center – Doc Bryan Student Services Suite 119

- Offers primary nursing care to students on an out-patient basis
- Services include:
 - health education
 - health promotion
 - health maintenance
 - health history & physical assessment
 - first aid (including bandages & crutches)
 - limited number of routine clinical lab procedures
 - treatment for illness
- Registered Nurse sees students on an appointment basis, Monday–Friday 8:30 am – 4:30 pm. Schedule online: <https://atu.medicatconnect.com>
- <http://www.atu.edu/hwc/> Phone: 479.968.0329

Human Resources – Brown Hall Suite 434

- Oversight of employee services
- <http://www.atu.edu/hr/> Phone: 479.968.0396

Library – Ross Pendergraft Library

- Houses books, professional journals, news articles, music lab, article databases, & the InterLibrary Loan
- <http://library.atu.edu/> Phone: 479.964.0569

Public Safety – Public Safety Building

- Complete services include:
 - traffic control
 - jumpstart & lockout
 - chaperon service
 - educational safety programs
 - all law enforcement functions
- All Tech students, faculty, & staff are required to buy a parking pass annually
 - Parking Regulations: <http://www.atu.edu/psafe/park-reg.shtml>
- <http://www.atu.edu/psafe/> Phone: 479.968.0222

Registrar’s Office – Brown Hall Suite 307

- Access to catalogs, transcript requests, Veteran’s benefits, & applications for graduation
- <http://www.atu.edu/registrar/> Phone: 479.968.0272

Student Accounts – Brown Hall Suite 241

- All student account information & Tech ID
- <http://www.atu.edu/stuaccts/> Phone: 479.968.0271

Student Activities Board

- A student governance association, responsible for planning student activities such as: movie nights, Super Bowl watch party, art show, Big Money Bingo, & much more
- <http://www.atustudentactivitiesboard.com/>

Tech Fit – Hull Hall

- Tech Fit is the on-campus workout facility
- Provides circuit training, free weights, cardio, & abdominal training
- To join, bring Tech ID to the facility
- <http://www.atu.edu/techfit/facilities.shtml> Phone: 479.498.6088

Writing Lab – Witherspoon Building 365

- Facility which provides students with computer & printer access, as well as, assistance with writing/proofreading
- Online Writing Lab:
https://www.atu.edu/worldlanguages/docs/online_writing_lab.pdf
- Phone: 479.968.0256

Appendix

Form I-9, Employment Eligibility Verification

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's employment eligibility process requires that employees must present, to their employer, evidence of identity and employment eligibility within three business days of the date employment begins. If an employee is authorized to work, but is unable to present the required document(s) within three business days, they must present a receipt for the application of the document(s) within three business days and the actual document(s) within ninety (90) days.

LISTS OF ACCEPTABLE DOCUMENTS

You may provide a document from List A which establishes both identity and employment eligibility or you may provide a document from List B (establishing your identity) and a document from List C (establishing your employment eligibility).

LIST A Documents that Establish Both Identity and Employment Eligibility	OR	LIST B Documents that Establish Identity	AND	LIST C Documents that Establish Employment Eligibility
1. U.S. Passport (unexpired or expired)		1. Driver's license or ID card issued by a state or outlying possession of the United States provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color and address		1. U.S. Social card issued by the Social Security Administration <i>(other than a card stating it is not valid for employment)</i>
2. Permanent Resident Card or Alien Registration Receipt Card (Form I-551)		2. ID card issued by federal, state or local government agencies or entities, provided it contains a photograph or information such as name, date of birth, gender, height, eye color and address		2. Certification of Birth Abroad issued by the Department of State <i>(form FS-545 or Form DS-1350)</i>
3. An unexpired foreign passport with a temporary I-551 stamp		3. School ID card with a photograph		3. Original or certified copy of a birth certificate issued by a state, county, municipal authority or outlying possession of the United States bearing an official seal
4. An unexpired Employment Authorization Document that contains a photograph (Form I-766, I-688, I-688A, I-688B)		4. Voter's registration card		4. Native American tribal document
		5. U.S. Military card or draft record		5. U.S. Citizen ID Card <i>(Form I-197)</i>
5. An unexpired foreign passport with an unexpired Arrival-Departure Record, Form I-94, bearing the same name as the passport and containing an endorsement of the alien's nonimmigrant status, if that status authorizes the alien to work for the employer		6. Military dependent's ID card		6. ID Card for use of Resident Citizen in the United States <i>(Form I-179)</i>
		7. U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Card		7. Unexpired employment authorization document issued by DHS <i>(other than those listed under List A)</i>
		8. Native American tribal document		
		9. Driver's license issued by a Canadian government authority		
		For persons under age 18 who are unable to present a document listed above:		
		10. School record or report		
		11. Clinic, doctor, or hospital record		
		12. Daycare or nursery school record		