



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. A non-academic GA may be assigned to an academic program or office.

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

Available graduate assistantships may be found on the Graduate College website at www.atu.edu/gradcollege. Available assistantships will be posted and updated accordingly throughout the academic year. 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 and posted openings.

The GA appointment process is standard, regardless of the student's status, residential or international. Confirmation of a student appointment is dependent upon the following process:

(1) The applicant completes an application for graduate assistantship online at <http://www.atu.edu/gradcollege/gradapp.php>. A list of eligible applicants is forwarded

by the Graduate College to the program directors. Some applicants may require additional interviewing and/or review of credentials to evaluate appropriate placement. It is the departments' responsibility to notify the Graduate College upon selecting a GA by completing the *Graduate Assistant Position* form. Prompt notification will allow the Graduate College to maintain accurate records regarding availability of applications and positions. Upon approval by the Graduate College, applicants will receive a letter of appointment from the Graduate College.

(2) The applicant must have completed the requirements for the baccalaureate degree prior to the first semester of the appointment year and gain unconditional admission to the Graduate College in order to merit appointment.

(3) The applicant must sign a contract which outlines the duration of the graduate assistantship, the stipend amount, hours associated with the assistantship, and a brief description of the duties to be performed. After signing the contract, all GAs are required to fill out Human Resources paperwork. Failure to complete these forms prior to the start of the semester will result in non-payment for that month. Additionally, the student must complete all additional paperwork to gain appropriate computer access the graduate assistantship may require; the applicant will be advised by the department supervisor if any is required.

(4) 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 Graduate Assistant Orientation offered in the fall semester of each year. New GAs in the spring semester will have a spring session. At the orientation, the Director of Graduate Support Services will not only reiterate expectations, but also help students transition into their role as a GA.

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.

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 four (4) credit hours per summer term. However, no more than 18 graduate credit hours may be taken within one (1) academic year. Students are responsible for paying all fees and purchasing books.

Generally speaking, students holding an academic assistantship will receive a stipend of \$4,800 annually, \$2,400 per semester, with a maximum appointment of 50% (20 hours per week). However, the amount of the stipend awarded may vary depending on the nature of the GA position, effective start date, and the number of hours worked by the student each week.

Non-academic graduate assistantships are awarded with 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.

All new GAs must complete an I-9 and other human resources documents prior to beginning their appointment. 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. Completed direct deposit forms and one canceled check should be submitted to the Payroll Office (Bryan Hall, room 200). Those opting to receive a physical payment may go to Accounts Payable (Administration building, room 206) 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.

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 should 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 academic 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-Serve; (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 at <http://www.atu.edu/ir/ferpa.shtml>. 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. Those with an unacceptable driving record will receive a formal letter from the Travel Office. 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. For questions regarding student reimbursement, please contact the Purchasing Office at 479.968.0633.

Reappointment. All GAs seeking reappointment must receive continued departmental approval. Program directors should request a new contract for the returning student. Also, to continue eligibility, applicants must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA.

Summer Sessions. GAs holding summer appointments must enroll and complete a minimum of three (3) credit hours, maximum of four (4) credit hours per summer term to maintain a graduate assistantship. Maymester and summer terms do not count as part of the four (4) semesters as long as 18 graduate credit hours are not exceeded within one (1) academic year. GAs electing to work during one or both summer sessions may have a 100% appointment (40 hours a week), if decided by their individual department.

Timesheets. Documentation of time worked is required monthly. GAs should complete the appropriate timesheet required by their department on the last day of each month. A copy of each GA's monthly timesheet must be kept on file within the department, whether physically or electronically, for five years for 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 documenting 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.

Holidays. GAs are not expected to work during holidays on which the campus is closed. Additionally, they are not expected to work during spring break or Christmas 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. 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) they provide a written resignation describing the nature of their departure; (3) they have a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0; and (4) they 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 sent a bill for the pro-rated amount of tuition benefits provided to the student that semester.

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, the Human Resources Office will contact various departments on campus to cancel any and all related departmental computer access. This procedure will terminate the student's ability to drive a state vehicle or to be reimbursed for travel expenses.

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. However, the following type of clothing is not appropriate: (1) spaghetti straps, halter tops, strapless, or tank tops; (2) clothing with any kind of stains or holes; (3) shorts or skirts well above the knee; (4) pants that show underwear; (5) apparel from other institutions; and (6) visible tattoos/piercings.

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. Facebook, Twitter, and other social media sites are forbidden during work hours. Additionally, no negative posts should be made regarding ATU while employed by the institution.

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 Building 229

- 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, Dean Hall 126

- Provides personal & group counseling, outreach programming, consultations, & resources to the Tech community
- <http://www.atu.edu/cscenter/> Phone: 479.968.0276

Disability Services – Bryan Hall 103

- 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/testing/> Phone: 479.968.0302

Financial Aid – Doc Bryan Student Services Building 117

- 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

Health Center – Dean Hall 126

- 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 a drop-in basis, Monday – Friday 8 am – 5 pm
- <http://www.atu.edu/hwc/> Phone: 479.968.0329

Human Resources – Bryan Hall

- 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 – Doc Bryan Student Services Building 153

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

Student Accounts – Doc Bryan Student Services Building 133

- 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
- <http://www.atu.edu/worldlanguages/computerlabs.shtml> Phone: 479.968.0256