



ARKANSAS
TECH
UNIVERSITY

Graduate College

Graduate Assistant Handbook

Revised October 2021

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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 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 Affairs, Advancement, 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. Please follow instructions outlined on individual position postings.

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 HireRight 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 Human Resources.

Once cleared through the background check process, it is the department's responsibility to notify the Graduate College of their selection by completing the *Graduate Assistant Request* form.

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 graduate assistants must remain in good academic standing with the Graduate College.

Employment Process. After being awarded a graduate assistantship, all Graduate assistants 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 the Appendix on page 17 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 Human Resources 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 such access 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 two days prior to 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. When an applicant accepts a graduate assistantship, whether returning Graduate Assistants or new Graduate Assistants, they must complete Graduate Assistant Orientation. This orientation will outline expectations as well as helping to transition the student into their role as a graduate assistant. Orientation

must be completed in the Fall Semester for those accepting an Assistantship for Summer or Fall semesters, and in the Spring semester for those accepting an Assistantship for the Spring semester. Failure to complete orientation may result in non-payment.

Graduate Assistant Role

Applicants selected to hold a graduate assistantship may work only within their contracted department. Students may not hold multiple graduate assistantships within a single time period. Additionally, graduate assistants may not hold multiple on-campus roles (i.e. graduate assistant 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 any 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. For academic graduate assistantships, this waiver will pay all tuition costs for a maximum of 18 graduate credit hours within one (1) fiscal year (July 1 – June 30). Contracted graduate assistants 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 graduate assistants' accounts after the 11th day of class. Tuition waivers for those working as non-academic graduate assistants will apply to student accounts at the department's discretion.

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.

Graduate assistants may not work more than a total of 20 hours per week for the university; however, students may work up to 28 hours per week if they receive approval from the Graduate College. If a Graduate Student is working less than the maximum university amount of 28 hours per week, they may, with prior approval from the Graduate College, work up to the full 28 hours

per week in an additional role if offered (i.e. student worker or extra labor). Approval must be obtained before work in the student worker or extra labor position begins.

A contract for an agreed upon stipend will be issued by the 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 graduate assistant contract. A graduate assistant will receive the contract from their supervisor. Signed contracts must be submitted to the supervisor promptly and then returned to Academic Affairs within 10 days of issuance.

All graduate assistants will need to pass a criminal background check prior to a contract being issued. The hiring department will initiate the process with Human Resources. Each graduate assistant will need to complete a background check each academic year.

All new graduate assistants must complete an I-9 and other [human resources forms](#) prior to beginning their appointment. International students should obtain social security cards to complete the required paperwork and receive payment. Completed paperwork is necessary to meet payroll requirements. Failure to complete this paperwork will result in non-payment. Graduate assistants 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 Hall, third floor) on the last day of each month, to secure their check. All checks not picked up by 2:00 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

Appointments should be contracted for one or both semesters of a nine (9) month academic year or a twelve (12) month fiscal year. Entering graduate students must meet Graduate College unconditional admission standards and returning students must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA).

Students holding a graduate assistantship and majoring in a program that requires thirty-three (33) or more credit hours must enroll and complete eighteen (18) hours of graduate credit per fiscal year (Summer 2, Fall, Spring, Summer 1 terms). Students holding a graduate assistantship and majoring in a program that requires only thirty (30) credit hours must enroll and complete at least fifteen (15) hours of graduate credit per fiscal year (Summer 2, Fall, Spring, Summer 1 terms).

Exceptions may be made (for example, during the last term if more credits are not required to complete the degree) upon the approval of the appropriate department head and the Graduate College Dean. Students enrolled in six (6) graduate credit hours in any single Fall or Spring term, while holding a graduate assistant 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 College 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 graduate assistants 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 graduate assistants working with, but not limited to: (1) Banner, INB or Self-Service; (2) student grades or other sensitive information, as defined by FERPA; 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. Graduate assistants over the age of 21, 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, graduate assistants must submit an [*Authorization to Operate State Vehicles 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 travel, please contact the Travel Office at (479) 356-2034.

Reappointment. All graduate assistants seeking reappointment must receive continued departmental approval. Program directors should request a new contract for the returning student by submitting a new *Graduate Assistant Request form* to the Graduate College. Also, to remain eligible applicants must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA.

Summer Sessions. Graduate assistants 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. Intercessions and summer terms do not count as part of the four (4) semesters of graduate assistant eligibility.

Holidays. Graduate assistants are not expected to work during holidays when 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; graduate assistants are expected to be report for duty by 10:00 am. Those unable to make it to campus safely are required to notify their supervisor and make up hours missed.

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

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

Resignation/Termination of Academic Graduate Assistantship

Resignation. Those leaving an 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.

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

Graduate assistants 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) 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) enrolls in the minimum number of graduate credit hours required.

Termination. Unsatisfactory performance of assigned duties will be grounds for termination of the appointment at the discretion of the department head or Graduate College Dean. Students terminated from an appointment are considered ineligible for future positions, regardless of department.

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

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

Circumstances Justifying Immediate Termination. Termination of a graduate assistant may be immediate in the following circumstances: (1) the student fails to complete Graduate Assistant Orientation; (2) the graduate assistant 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, termination is left to the discretion of the immediate supervisor and the ability of the graduate assistant to make-up hours within the parameters set forth by the Graduate College); (3) if it is determined the student committed sexual misconduct 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 graduate assistant will be paid for the pro-rated amount of time worked that semester. Students terminated from an 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 graduate assistant is not working during the summer term but plans to return the fall semester; (2) the graduate assistant has worked four (4) semesters and has not been approved for an additional semester; and (3) the graduate assistant'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 for graduate assistants 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, graduate assistants 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 ATU employees, including graduate assistants. Remember to use an appropriate greeting when meeting new coworkers, peers, or guests. In addition, use titles such as "Mr.", "Ms.", or "Dr." when appropriate and withhold overly personal conversations/information in public areas of the work place.

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, clearly and at an appropriate

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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, clearly and at an appropriate level; (2) non-verbal—be aware of your body language and facial expressions; and (3) written—aim to be concise and remember to proofread everything (i.e. Ask yourself if the document is ready for the President to review).

Social media is another growing form of communication. Do not post items on social media that would poorly represent the institution. In addition, personal use of Facebook, Twitter, or other social media sites is not permitted during work hours unless required as a task for an assigned project.

Responsibility. If granted a graduate assistantship, one accepts a role in a professional workplace. As such, it is important graduate assistants 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. Graduate assistants 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 graduate assistants will be provided training for their position but it is the responsibility of the graduate assistant to acquire the skills necessary to complete assigned tasks. Questions and note-taking are encouraged for accurate training results.

Relationships. At Arkansas Tech, you are part of something big. You are part of a family - a strong family, sharing life together. Strong families spend time together, communicate effectively, appreciate and take care of one another. These relationships make Tech a special place.

Just like any family, university families face tough issues together. We share in the responsibility of working together to ensure that we have a safe and supportive learning and working environment, free from sexual misconduct, alcohol and drug abuse, and any other negative behaviors that are counterproductive for us all to feel valued and respected. If you observe behavior that is concerning, alarming, or threatening, please report the incident to the [CARE Team](#).

Report any immediate threat to self or others directly to the Department of Public Safety by dialing 911.

Student Resources

Athletic Events

- ATU students are provided free admission to Tech sporting events with Tech ID

Career Services – Doc Bryan 153

- Provides career counseling, helps with résumé building/interviewing, and aids in career placement
- Phone: (479) 968-0278
- Email: career.services@atu.edu

CARE Team – Doc Bryan 233

- Multidisciplinary, proactive campus threat assessment and behavioral intervention team dedicated to improving campus safety through a coordinated, objective approach to prevention, identification, assessment, intervention, and management of situations that may pose a threat to the safety and well-being of individuals and the university community
- [Submit an online referral](#)

Counseling Services – Doc Bryan 119

- Provides personal & group counseling, outreach programming, consultations, & resources to the Tech community
- Phone: (479) 968-0239

Disability Services – Doc Bryan 141

- Endorses both the Americans with Disabilities Act & Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- Aids students in need of accommodations
- Phone: (479) 968-0302

Diversity and Inclusion – Doc Bryan 229

- Support for students within underrepresented populations and marginalized groups
- Training, workshops, and cultural celebration events
- Phone: (479) 880-4372

Financial Aid – Brown 206

- Federal Aid (including FAFSA & Student Loans)
- Phone: (479) 968-0399

Graduate College – Tomlinson 113

- One-stop shop for all Graduate needs
- Phone: (479) 968-0398

Graduate Student Council

- A council designated to provide an active role and voice for graduate students on the Tech campus.
- For more information, contact the Graduate College at (479) 968-0398

Health Center – Doc Bryan 119

- Offers primary health care to students on an out-patient basis, including:
 - treatment of minor acute illnesses or injuries
 - flu shots
 - prescriptions
 - allergy shots ordered by private physician
 - blood pressure monitoring
 - monitoring of body mass index
 - loan of crutches, wheelchair, heating pad
 - individual, group, and couples counseling
 - women's health services one day a week.
 - clinical laboratory procedures
 - pregnancy
 - mono
 - strep
 - urinalysis
 - glucose monitoring
 - blood tests
 - limited STD testing
- Students are seen by appointment and are screened and assessed by a health care provider. Students may be treated by one of our advanced practice registered nurses including obtaining a prescription if appropriate or referral to a local health care provider if the nature of the visit requires such.
- Monday – Friday: 8:30 am until 4:30 pm
- Schedule appointment online: <https://atu.medicatconnect.com/>
- Phone: (479) 968-0329

Human Resources – Brown 434

- Oversight of employee services
- Phone: (479) 968-0396

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](#)
- Phone: (479) 968-0222
- In case of emergency, dial 911

Registrar's Office – Brown 307

- Access to catalogs, transcript requests, & applications for graduation
- Phone: (479) 968-0272

Ross Pendergraft Library

- Research support, professional journals, news articles, hard copy books, music lab, article databases, & the Interlibrary Loan
- Phone: (479) 964-0569

Student Accounts – Doc Bryan 133

- All student account information & Tech ID
- Phone: (479) 968-0271

Tech Fit – Hull Building

- Tech Fit is the on-campus exercise facility
- Provides circuit training, free weights, cardio, & abdominal training
- To join, bring Tech ID to the facility
- Phone: (479) 498-6088

Title IX – Doc Bryan 233

- Please contact Amy Pennington, Title IX Coordinator, by email at apennington@atu.edu or by phone at 479-968-0407, if you have questions about an incident you have witnessed and/or been a victim of or for more information on how to report an act of gender discrimination or sexual misconduct (including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation)
- [Online Reporting Form](#)

English Department Writing Lab – Witherspoon 365

- Provides assistance with writing and proofreading
- Aids students in preparation for Praxis II exams
- 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 I94, 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		