



2008-09
GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS
The Graduate School
Michigan State University

INTRODUCTION

More than 3,000 assistantships are available to qualified graduate students at Michigan State University. The University is concerned with the quality of educational experience that graduate assistants receive, and, for teaching assistants, also the quality of the instruction that they provide to undergraduates.

Graduate assistants are enrolled students whose primary association with MSU is directed toward advanced degree completion. Satisfactory progress toward earning a degree is a condition of maintaining the assistantship. Departments may limit the number of years that a graduate student may hold an assistantship.

Although this brochure outlines University policy, graduate assistants are responsible for knowing the specific policies and procedures that govern their particular assistantship and academic program.

The policies and procedures defined in this brochure that cover wages, benefits, or other terms and conditions of employment do **not** apply to **teaching assistants** subject to the collective bargaining agreement with the Graduate Employees Union/American Federation of Teachers. To view the contract, see the Graduate School's website, <http://grad.msu.edu/geu/agree.pdf>.

PROCEDURES

Graduate assistant appointments are related to the academic semester of enrollment (Fall: August 16-December 31, Spring: January 1-May 15, Summer: May 16-August 15). The appointing department/unit defines the conditions of the assistantship (e.g. quarter- or half-time, Fall, Spring, and/or Summer Semesters).

An INS I-9 form (Employment Eligibility Verification) must be completed and attached to the GA Appointment Recommendation form. A department representative must see the documents used to verify eligibility and identity. These documents can be a passport or driver's license and a Social Security card. **International students must have their I-9 form signed in the Office for International Students and Scholars.** They should bring their passport, I-94 and I-20 ID or the DS-2019 to 103 International Center and 350 Administration Building. The I-9 form must be completed before an individual begins work or within three business days thereafter.

Graduate assistants are paid on the 15th of the month. When the 15th falls on a weekend, the date of payment is the Friday before the weekend. Departments appointing graduate assistants must meet deadlines set by Human Resources (<http://www.hr.msu.edu/HRsite/HiringPostings/Student/GradAsst/default.htm>) for the filing of appointment

forms. If they are unable to meet deadlines, delays may occur in the issuance of the first check and enrollment in the health insurance plan.

At least 15 days prior to the issuance of the first stipend check, new graduate assistants should submit a copy or present their Social Security card to the hiring department. Graduate Assistants are encouraged to complete a withholding tax authorization (Form W-4) and payroll direct deposit form. Graduate Assistants can access the website <http://epayroll.msu.edu> to submit Form W-4 and enroll in the direct deposit program.

Changes in level, stipend, or percentage of time become effective only at the beginning of a semester. A completed appointment form is the key to receiving the stipend and benefits. It also indicates intent by the department and the student to comply with the regulations pertaining to graduate assistantships as published in this brochure, the Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities document, and the Academic Programs catalog.

PREREQUISITES

1. Graduate assistantships are available only to graduate students who are in good standing and actively pursuing degree programs.
2. International graduate assistants must check with the Office for International Students and Scholars (103 International Center, 517.353.1720) to have their I-9 Form signed.
3. Graduate assistants must be registered each semester in which they hold assistantships as follows:
 - a. Doctoral students with quarter-time or half-time assistantships must carry at least 3 credits. They may carry a maximum of 16 course credits (for a quarter-time appointment) or 12 course credits (for a half-time appointment), excluding 899/999 credits. Doctoral students who have passed comprehensive exams may enroll for 1 credit the semester after the student's unit administrator submits the completed exam form to the appropriate college Associate Dean.
 - b. Master's students with quarter-time assistantships or half-time assistantships must carry at least 6 credits. They may carry a maximum of 16 course credits (for a quarter-time appointment) or 12 course credits (for a half-time appointment), excluding 899/999 credits.
 - c. Doctoral and master's students with three-quarter-time assistantships must carry at least 3 credits. They may carry a maximum of 8 course credits, excluding 899/999 credits.
 - d. During the summer session, graduate assistants must carry a minimum of 3 credits.*
 - e. Visitor credits may count as part of a student's credit load if approved in writing by the student's department chair or unit director, college and the Dean of the Graduate School.
 - f. Deviations from the minimum enrollment requirements listed above, except as noted for doctoral students, are permitted only during the semester in which the degree is granted, when students must enroll for at least the number of credits required to complete the degree or meet the University minimum registration requirement of one credit.

*Doctoral students may enroll for 1 credit as described in (a) above.

4. Any deviation from the maximum credit requirements must have the written approval of the dean of the student's college before registration.
5. Graduate enrollment must be in courses recognized as being of graduate level unless the student's department, school or program has granted written permission for course work constituting an exception to this policy.
6. Graduate assistants must achieve and maintain satisfactory academic records. This means a 3.00 or higher grade point average. Appointing units or colleges may establish additional or higher required standards.
7. Recommendation for appointment as a graduate assistant must be made by the department chairperson or school/program director.
8. Lifelong Education students, College of Law students (except if dually enrolled in an MSU graduate program), and dually enrolled bachelor's/master's degree students are not eligible for graduate assistantships.

Minimum & Maximum Credit Load for Graduate Assistants

Assistantship Appointment		University Minimum Credit Enrollment	Federal (IRS) Minimum Enrollment per Semester	Maximum Enrollment per Semester (excluding 899/999 credits)
1/4 time	Master's Students	6 in Fall & Spring; 3 in Summer	5 Credits	16 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	16 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	1 Credit	16 credits
1/2 time	Master's Students	6 in Fall & Spring; 3 in Summer	5 Credits	12 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	12 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	1 Credits	12 credits
3/4 time	Master's Students	3 (any semester)	5 Credits	8 credits
	Doctoral Students	3 (any semester)	3 Credits	8 credits
	PhDs who have passed comps	1 (any semester)	3 Credits	8 credits



GRADUATE ASSISTANT ILLNESS/INJURY/PREGNANCY LEAVE POLICY

A graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of his/her appointment because of illness or injury shall notify the administrator of his/her appointing unit as soon as circumstances permit. Similarly, a graduate assistant unable to fulfill the duties of her appointment because of pregnancy shall notify the administrator of her major unit as soon as circumstances permit.

During the illness, injury, or pregnancy, the appointing unit shall adjust (reduce, waive, or reschedule) the graduate assistant's duties as those duties and the assistant's physical circumstances reasonably dictate.

If total absence from duties becomes necessary and the graduate assistant is still enrolled, the appointing unit shall maintain the stipend of the appointment, provided for a period of two months or to the end of the appointment period or the semester, whichever occurs first.

The graduate assistant shall have the right to return to the assistantship, within the original terms of the appointment, at such time as he or she is able to resume their duties.

APPOINTMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Graduate assistants are appointed on a quarter-time, half-time, or three-quarter-time basis for 18 weeks each for Fall and Spring Semesters and 12 weeks for Summer Semester. The approximate expectation of normal workload, averaged over the entire period of the appointment, is:
 - a. 10 hours per week for a quarter-time stipend;
 - b. 20 hours per week for a half-time stipend; or
 - c. 30 hours per week for a three-quarter-time stipend.
2. Graduate assistants are responsible for understanding the weekly workload expectations during the entire period of their appointments. This includes work assigned and the time frame within which the work must be completed, essential duties and responsibilities, work conditions and vacation opportunities, if any.
3. Graduate assistants are appointed at one of three levels:

Level I:

Students with less than one year of experience as a graduate assistant or a full support fellow. They conduct research, perform administrative tasks or other supervised duties such as reading and grading papers.

Level II:

Students with a master's degree or equivalent and/or one year of experience as a graduate assistant or a full support fellow in the appointing department/unit or in a department/unit considered relevant by the chairperson of the appointing department. They conduct research, grade papers, or perform administrative tasks with moderate supervision. Advancement from Level I to Level II is usually routine. The advancement is accompanied by an increase in stipend at least to the minimum of the Level II range established by the University.

Level III:

Six semesters of experience as a graduate RA/TE at Michigan State University, or equivalent. The definition of equivalent experience as an RA/TE should be left to the discretion of the chairperson of the appointing unit, but it is expected that only experience in research-oriented assignments would count toward the six semesters of experience as an RA. (Consistent with current practice, 1/4 time and 3/4 time appointments count the same as 1/2 time appointments, and Summer Semesters count the same as Fall and Spring Semesters.)

Also required is successful completion of doctoral comprehensive exams, as defined by the department in which the student is enrolled.



STIPENDS, ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND OTHER INFORMATION

1. *Stipends*

Within the ranges established by the University, stipends vary by level (see above) and by department/unit.

2. *Tuition Waiver*

A tuition waiver will be provided during the period of the assistantship. The tuition waiver is in the amount of **nine credits for Fall Semester, nine credits for Spring Semester, and five credits for Summer Semester**. Visitor credits may count as part of a graduate assistant's credit load and be covered by the waiver.

If a graduate assistant resigns an assistantship during a semester, such that the appointment does not meet minimum duration standards (53 calendar days in Fall and Spring; 46 calendar days in Summer) he/she will be assessed tuition for all credits carried, and those who are not Michigan (in-state) residents will be assessed out-of-state tuition.

For any changes in courses made after the "End of 100% Refund Period" (see the Academic Calendar:

<http://www.reg.msu.edu/ROInfo/Calendar/Academic.asp>), no refund will be made for credits dropped, nor may courses be exchanged, even when such courses are covered by tuition waiver.

3. *Exemption from Out-of-State Tuition*

This exemption also applies to Summer Semesters preceding or following a full academic year appointment (consecutive Fall and Spring appointments).

4. *Fees*

Matriculation and energy fees are waived. Any additional fees required by a particular program or college or by status as an international student are not covered.

5. *Financial Aid*

Most graduate assistants qualify for additional financial assistance, usually in the form of student loans. The Office of Financial Aid should be consulted for further details at 517.353.5940 or via email at finaid@msu.edu.

6. *Health Insurance*

Graduate assistants (domestic and international) are automatically enrolled in a GA health insurance plan, the premium of which is paid by the University. The plan provides the following coverage:

- Fall appointment only: coverage from August 15 to February 14 of the following year.
- Fall and Spring appointments—coverage from August 15 to August 14 of the following year.
- Spring appointment only—coverage from January 1 to August 14.
- Summer appointment only—coverage from May 12 to August 14.

Enrolled students may also insure their eligible spouse and/or dependent children (residing with the insured). MSU will contribute \$1300 annually toward the cost of a spouse or child and \$1600 annually toward the cost of a spouse and/or multiple dependents. For questions regarding coverage under this plan, enrollment or premium payment, contact *The Chickering Group* directly at 800.859.8452 or on the web at <http://www.chickering.com/msudirect.htm>.

For questions concerning waiver processing or general information, contact the MSU Benefits office at 517.353.4434 or 800.353.4434, or via email at studentinsurance@hr.msu.edu. The Benefits Office is located at 1407 S. Harrison Road, Suite 140 (Nisbet Building), East Lansing, MI 48823 and on the web at <http://www.hr.msu.edu>.

7. *Taxes*

- Graduate Assistantship stipends may not be subject to Social Security (FICA) taxes as long as they meet federal guidelines and federal requirements for enrollment.
- Stipends are subject to income taxes with few exceptions. The taxability of stipends is subject to review by the Internal Revenue Service. For more information, call the Payroll Office at 355.5010, ext. 204. Please note that tax laws are subject to continuing revision and students should verify their tax liability yearly.



STIPENDS, ADDITIONAL BENEFITS AND OTHER INFORMATION (cont.)

8. Spouse Privileges

The spouse of a graduate assistant may obtain a spouse identification card.

9. Other Information

Graduate assistants are:

- a. Eligible for student discounts on football, basketball and/or hockey season tickets for themselves and their spouses.
- b. Eligible for student discounts on series tickets to professional performing arts events at the

Wharton Center for Performing Arts, including one guest ticket at the student rate with ID.

- c. Eligible to apply for parking and driving permits on campus. Details are published each year in the Student Motor Vehicle Regulations, available at the Vehicle Office of the MSU Department of Police and Public Safety.
- d. Accorded library privileges, Intramural Building privileges, and eligibility to register for membership in the MSU Credit Union.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Students with disabilities may request reasonable accommodation at the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities (120 Bessey Hall, 517.353.9642, or TTY: 517.355.1293).

Graduate assistants are covered under other MSU policies, including those regarding laboratory and campus safety, Drug and Alcohol-Free Workplace, policy on Religious Observance, Procedures for Handling Allegations of Misconduct in Scholarship, MSU Anti-discrimination Policy, and the policies on Sexual Harassment and Conflict of Interest in Educational Responsibilities Resulting from Consensual Amorous or Sexual Relationships.

Other information on the University policies pertaining to graduate assistants is available from additional sources:

Graduate Student Rights and Responsibilities (GSRR):

Section 4.2 "Graduate Assistants" and Section 2.5 "Educational Training of Graduate Students in Teaching Roles" describe the department/unit responsibilities for training and evaluation of graduate assistants. Copies of the GSRR may be obtained from the Council of Graduate Students Office (316 Student Services Building, 353.9189) or the Graduate School (118 Linton Hall, 517.355.0301), or viewed on the web at <http://www.vps.msu.edu/SpLife/index.htm>.

The Academic Programs catalog:

Obtainable on the web at <http://www.reg.msu.edu/UCC/AcademicPrograms.asp>.

Note To Graduate Assistants:

As a graduate assistant at Michigan State University, you will be entitled to certain privileges and benefits. Careful attention to the appointment procedures enrollment requirements and academic progress will help you to obtain these benefits with a minimum of delay and inconvenience. Regulations and procedures contained in this folder are subject to review and, if necessary, to revision without notice. If you have any questions or concerns about these policies, please direct them to your unit administrator.

This document does not supersede either the Graduate Students Rights and Responsibilities document or the Academic Programs catalog.

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MSU is an affirmative action/ equal opportunity employer.

