

ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISION ACAF Academic Affairs		POLICY NUMBER ACAF 4.00
POLICY TITLE Graduate Assistantships		
SCOPE OF POLICY University System		DATE OF REVISION April 14, 2025
RESPONSIBLE OFFICER Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost		ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE Office of the Provost

PURPOSE

This policy defines the rights and responsibilities for graduate students offered temporary employment as graduate assistants at the University of South Carolina.

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

Academic Unit: The department, school or college administering an academic program.

Compensation: the amount paid to a graduate assistant for working as described in a written work agreement. The compensation can be either a salary (fixed amount for the term of appointment and services described) or hourly wages (amount based on hourly rate and reported hours worked). Certain graduate assistants are paid a stipend, a particular form of salary, when the assistantship responsibilities are directly aligned with the academic program.

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA): The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) establishes minimum wage, overtime pay, recordkeeping, and child labor standards affecting full-time and part-time workers in the private sector and in Federal, State, and local governments.

FICA exemption: FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act, including Social Security and Medicare) taxes do not apply to service performed by a student who are employed by a university where the student is pursuing a program of study and satisfies the criteria detailed in Rev. Proc. 2005-11.

Graduate Assistant (GA): A degree-seeking student enrolled in the Graduate School who assists, under faculty supervision, in the conduct of the university's total education program by providing teaching, research or other services.

Graduate Assistantship: The position held by a graduate assistant.

Hiring Unit: The administrative unit processing employment

Tuition Supplement: funds provided by either the student's hiring unit or academic unit and credited toward the student's tuition and fees

POLICY STATEMENT

A graduate assistant is a student enrolled in the Graduate School who assists, under faculty supervision, in the conduct of the University's total education program by providing teaching, research or other services.

The categories for appointment as a graduate assistant are as follows (see [Student Employment Job Codes](#)):

- Graduate Athletics Assistant (GAA/SGAA) – assistants with practice, training, and coaching responsibilities associated with student athletes and athletics programs,
- Graduate Instructional Assistant (GIA/SGIA) - assists with instruction, but cannot be listed as the instructor of record and must have attended a series of workshops for Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Instructional Assistants sponsored by the Graduate School;
- Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA/SGTA) - functions as an instructor of record, must attend a series of workshops for Graduate Teaching Assistants and Graduate Instructional Assistants and have completed 18 semester hours of graduate course work in the discipline to be taught. Additionally, in accordance with University Policy ACAF 1.20 Credential Verification for Instructors of Record, a graduate teaching assistant who does not hold a graduate degree in the teaching discipline must be periodically evaluated by his or her faculty supervisor or other faculty member in the discipline.
- Graduate Research Assistant (GRA/SGRA) - assists faculty or staff in conducting research;
- Graduate Residence/Housing Assistant (GRH/SGRH) – works in campus housing;
- Graduate Staff Assistant (GSA/SGST) - provides administrative assistance. A graduate staff assistant must be hired on an hourly basis, is covered by the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and is subject to both the minimum wage and overtime requirements of the law.

In addition to fulfilling functions that would otherwise be performed by regular faculty and staff members, graduate assistants also receive valuable practical experience as they prepare for future teaching, research, or administrative responsibilities.

These regulations are designed to ensure compliance with state and federal law and to protect and enhance the student experience of every graduate assistant. The Dean of the Graduate School is responsible for the implementation of these policies and regulations, and any deviations must have the Dean's prior written approval. These regulations apply to all graduate assistantships, regardless of funding source. Any graduate students not meeting the requirements to be classified as a graduate assistant may be hired as a temporary hourly employee (see [HR 1.86](#)).

- A. In addition to receiving compensation in the form of hourly wages, salary or stipend, non-South Carolina residents who are graduate assistants are assessed the resident tuition rate ¹ (see [FINA 4.03 Tuition and Fees Reduction](#)) and receive a subsidy toward the premium cost for student health insurance, if this coverage is not waived (see the [Student Health Service website](#)).
1. The hiring unit may offer a tuition supplement in addition to the direct compensation. The tuition supplement will be processed by the hiring unit as a credit with the Bursar's Office against which tuition will be charged each semester. Students are responsible for any portion of their tuition and fees not covered by the employing unit and/or by their academic unit.
 2. Assessment of resident tuition during the spring semester for a graduate assistantship shall be extended to summer enrollment.
 3. Graduate assistants who are appointed after the first 20 days of a semester or after the first ten days of a Summer term (dates published annually by the Graduate School) shall not be coded as such for tuition or other purposes during the term of appointment.
 4. Non-South Carolina residents who receive timely appointments as graduate assistants, but whose duties terminate before the midterm date of the term appointed, shall be billed as non-resident for tuition purposes.
- B. The minimum number of hours of work required per week for a graduate assistantship is ten, and the maximum is twenty. A graduate assistant's stipend must satisfy federal minimum wage requirements for the effort and duration specified in the work agreement. . The current minimum salary, stipend and hourly rate for graduate assistants are found at [URL]
- C. For fall and spring semesters, the minimum enrollment requirement for a graduate assistant is six graduate credit hours per semester. For the summer, the minimum enrollment requirement is three graduate credit hours. For under-enrolled students approved for special enrollment (Z-status), the minimum enrollment requirement is one credit hour per semester. The student's program or academic unit may establish a maximum enrollment.
- D. Graduate assistants must have a written agreement with the hiring unit. The Human Resources [Student Employment website](#) provides a template that includes some information, but the Graduate School encourages the hiring unit to address as much of the following information as possible:
1. Beginning and end dates of appointment (not to exceed 12 months)
 2. Supervisor; if immediate supervisor is not a university employee, must also identify faculty advisor for the appointment.
 3. Potential for reappointment

¹ The Moore School of Business master's-level students are not included.

4. Tuition supplement and additional subsidy for student health insurance, if applicable
 5. Anticipated work schedule (e.g., total hours or hours/week; expectation for work outside of normal working hours; accommodations for holidays, exams, personal requests)
 6. Compensation, expressed either as a salary or stipend for the described appointment (required for graduate research assistant, graduate teaching assistant, graduate instructional assistant, graduate athletics assistant and graduate resident housing assistant) or as hourly wages to be paid for reported hours worked (required for graduate staff assistants)
 7. Work responsibilities
 8. Evaluation and feedback processes
 9. Grounds for dismissal, including both unsatisfactory performance of the work responsibilities and academic performance/degree progression. Note that as temporary employees, however, the appointment can be terminated at any time with or without cause.
 10. Procedures for grievance (or, reference to where to find language on how to deal with concerns with treatment by the hiring agent/agency)
- E. Graduate staff assistants are hourly employees and must report time worked for compensation. The cumulative hours worked must satisfy a weekly average of 10-20 hours/week, although individual weeks may be outside of this range upon mutual agreement of the graduate assistant and supervisor.
- F. Graduate assistants do not earn personal leave. The graduate assistant can request up to three weeks of leave without pay during any semester without loss of the graduate assistantship and related benefits. The request must include justification such as personal illness or hardship or serious illness or death in the immediate family.
- G. Students serving as graduate teaching assistants, graduate instructional assistants, graduate research assistants and graduate resident assistants are exempt from minimum wage and overtime requirements as defined in the Fair Labor Standards Act.
- H. Students serving as graduate staff assistants are generally not exempt from FLSA minimum wage and overtime requirements. To request exempt status for a graduate staff assistantship, the hiring unit must submit a justification to the Classification and Compensation Office in the Division of Human Resources.
- I. Students serving as graduate assistantships and satisfying the enrollment and work requirements defined above are exempt from FICA withholding based on the status as an employee being incident to and for the purpose of pursuing a program of study.

- J. Graduate assistants protesting dismissal, alleging violations of their work agreement, or expressing other concerns about their work conditions can consult with the graduate student ombuds or petition for resolution following standard procedures for grievances, petitions and appeals
(http://bulletin.sc.edu/content.php?catoid=97&navoid=2837#Course_Enrollment_Load)

K. Fellowships and Traineeships

A graduate assistant may receive additional aid in the form of a scholarship, fellowship or traineeship requiring no additional duties.

L. Outside Employment

Graduate assistants are expected to devote full-time effort to their studies and their assistantship responsibilities. They are, therefore, discouraged from having additional employment on or off campus, during the term(s) for which they are appointed. In addition, regular university employees are not eligible for assistantships.

M. External Funding

Graduate assistantships may be funded by external sources, including for work performed on an externally sponsored project (e.g., grant) or for work performed directly on behalf of an external organization (e.g., state agency, nonprofit or business). Externally-funded assistantships should include funds to cover a portion of, or all, of a student's tuition.

Students working on sponsored projects are appointed by the principal investigator/project director (PI/PD) and their salary is charged to the designated sponsored program account. The student works under the supervision of the PI/PD and all aspects of employment are treated as if paid by internal funds.

Students appointed to assistantships may also work directly for an external organization while being paid by the university. This type of assignment is deemed to be a Graduate Student Work Experience which is covered by a specific agreement between the university and the external organization. Students working under these agreements are advised by a member USC faculty member and supervised by a qualified employee of the external organization. The Work Experience should be related to the students' academic program and is executed by the academic department and/or college.

N. MD/JD/PharmD Students

Students in the MD program are not eligible for graduate assistantships. JD students are eligible for appointments as graduate research assistants or graduate staff assistants in the School of Law. JD students enrolled in dual degree programs may be eligible for appointment as graduate assistants in schools or colleges other than the School of Law. JD students who are not South Carolina residents and who are appointed as graduate assistants are eligible for resident School of Law tuition rates if approved by the dean of the School of Law. Subject to the approval of

the dean of the College of Pharmacy, students in the PharmD program may be appointed as graduate assistants. PharmD students appointed as teaching or instructional assistants must complete GTA/GIA workshops sponsored by the Graduate School.

PROCEDURE

- A. The hiring unit initiates the appointment of a graduate assistant following procedures documented at https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/human_resources/student_employment/index.php after confirming that the student is enrolled in the minimum number of graduate credit hours. If applicable, the hiring unit submits any tuition supplement documentation to the Office of Student Financial Aid and Scholarships. This includes a signed work agreement (see policy section E above) including a request for FLSA exempt status if applicable for graduate staff assistants.
- B. The Graduate School confirms enrollment eligibility for a graduate assistantship.

RELATED UNIVERSITY, STATE AND FEDERAL POLICIES

[ACAF 1.20 Credential Verification for Instructors of Record](#)

HISTORY OF REVISIONS

DATE OF REVISION	REASON FOR REVISION
February 1, 1995	New policy approval
October 10, 2016	Policy revised to reference related policy, ACAF 1.20 Credential Verification for Instructors of Record, and to align graduate teaching assistant requirements with SACSCOC requirements for instructors of record.
October 1, 2020	Policy revised to document compliance with federal law, require a written work agreement for any graduate assistantship, and establish a grievance process for graduate assistants.
April 14, 2025	Policy reviewed and revalidated.