



# Graduate Assistant Handbook

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## GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

A graduate assistantship is an opportunity to work on campus in a research or service-oriented capacity in order to gain valuable work experience in higher education or an academic field and earn a stipend.

A GA performs such specific duties as:

- Supporting instruction.
- Supervising labs or other facilities.
- Assisting faculty with scholarship.
- Contributing to departments' academic, scholarship, and service endeavors.
- Contributing to the overall success of the university's operations.

## ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for an assistantship, students:

- Must be matriculated into a degree-seeking graduate program.
- Must be enrolled in a minimum of nine (9) credit hours of graduate coursework applicable to their degree program.
- Must maintain good academic standing (3.0 cumulative GPA) in a graduate program at PennWest.

International students must first have approval from U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services before seeking on-campus employment. I-9 documents can be obtained from the Office of International Programming and Study Away ([conlogue@pennwest.edu](mailto:conlogue@pennwest.edu) or [kspangenberg@pennwest.edu](mailto:kspangenberg@pennwest.edu)).

## DUTIES

All GA employment activities are carried out under the supervision and direction of an approved university faculty or staff member. These may include:

- Assisting faculty with sponsored programs, research, or other scholarship.
- Assisting faculty and departments in academic, professional, or service functions.
- Supporting and assisting faculty in their teaching and instruction.
- Supervising laboratories, studios, or other university facilities.
- Providing service or support functions to academic or non-academic departments and offices.

The collective bargaining agreement between the Association of Pennsylvania State College and University Faculties (APSCUF, the faculty union) and Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE, the State System) includes the following provisions within Article 7.C 1 and 2: Presidents may appoint graduate assistants to be assigned to regular faculty members to assist in research, instruction, and other professional duties. At no time shall graduate assistants instruct lectures or laboratories unless the faculty member assigned to teach the course is present in the classroom or laboratory.

## **PAY RATE AND WORK HOURS**

Graduate assistants are compensated with a stipend, with a pay rate of \$15.00 an hour. Stipends are applied against the student's tuition charges, unless the student has sufficient financial aid to cover the student's account. If there is not a balance owed by the student, payment will be made through the university's bi-weekly payroll system.

100 Hours Stipend/\$15 an hour: \$1,500 per semester

200 Hour Stipend/ \$15 an hour: \$3,000 per semester

300 Hour Stipend/\$15 an hour: \$4,500 per semester

Students are required to pay the difference between the stipend value and the tuition/fee charges when the stipend is presented to the Student Accounts Office for approval, unless there is adequate financial aid in place to cover the charges.

Note: Current Edinboro graduate assistants who are continuing with their program are pre-approved for their current package, which is:

- Tuition waiver for their in-state and non-resident tuition rate; and
- Pay rate of \$7.50 per hour for the graduate assistant work.

## **WORK HOURS**

The length of an appointment may be for a single term or an academic year. Graduate assistants may work 100, 200, or 300 hours per semester/term. Whether the GA position is 100 hours, 200 hours, or 300 hours depends upon several factors, including the available budget for positions, the work required for the position, and the graduate student's availability for completing the work assignments and required work hours. The Graduate Assistant Hiring Form specifies work hours and standard dates of employment.

### **100-Hour Graduate Assistant**

The 100-hour graduate assistant works 6.6 hours per week during the 15-week fall or spring semester, or 10 hours per week during a 10-week summer term.

### **200-Hour Graduate Assistant**

The 200-hour graduate assistant works 13.3 hours per week during the 15-week fall or spring semester, or 20 hours per week during a 10-week summer term.

### **300-Hour Graduate Assistant**

The 300-hour graduate assistant works 20 hours per week during the 15-week fall or spring semester, or 30 hours per week during a 10-week summer term.

## **EVALUATIONS**

Each graduate assistant is evaluated twice a year by the work-site supervisor. At that time, the GA will meet with their supervisor and discuss the evaluation in detail. This provides an opportunity for either party to discuss any deficiencies or expectations that are not being met.

Unsatisfactory performance will be immediately noted, and discussions will occur between work-site supervisor and student to try and improve performance. In some cases, the GA may be relocated to another work site in order to improve their performance. However, continued unsatisfactory performance is cause for loss of the assistantship.

### GRADUATE ASSISTANT EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Graduate assistants are subject to a variety of rules, regulations, and policies. In the performance of their responsibilities, they must abide by all relevant Human Resources employment policies. Graduate assistants shall respect the rights and opinions of students, staff, and faculty and uphold the academic standards of the university.

### BACKGROUND CHECKS

Three types of **mandatory** background checks are required under Pennsylvania law:

1. **Criminal History Record Check** – Conducted by the Pennsylvania State Police indicating the individual has not been convicted of a reportable offense.
2. **Child Abuse Clearance** - Certification from the Department of Human Services as to whether the individual is named in the statewide database as a perpetrator in a pending child abuse investigation, a founded report, or an indicated report of child abuse.
3. **Federal Criminal History Background Check** - Includes fingerprinting and review by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for the purpose of verifying the identity of the individual and obtaining a current record of any criminal arrests and convictions.

These background checks are processed in coordination with the Office of Human Resources. All graduate assistants are required to obtain these clearances with the Office of Human Resources within the GA's first 90 days of work.

The background checks are valid for employment purposes with the university for 60 months; they must be renewed after 60 months if the student is still employed by the university. If a graduate assistant does not complete the background checks and clearances process in coordination with Human Resources within the first 90 days of employment, a hold will be placed on their Payroll Account. The hold on their Payroll Account will not be released until all clearances are complete and received by Human Resources. Under no circumstances will students be allowed to work, receive payment for hours worked, or be able to make up lost hours.

### PAYROLL PROCEDURES

New graduate assistants must complete payroll and tax information prior to the first day of employment. The Student Payroll and Background Check Forms, as well as other applicable forms, are available at <https://pennwest.edu/student-payroll-forms.pdf>. Supervisors are responsible for completing the Graduate Assistant Hiring form <https://pennwest.edu/ga-hiring-form> in addition to ensuring students complete the payroll forms. Specific instructions on the hiring process can be found at <https://pennwest.edu/ga-process>. No graduate assistant may begin work without completing and submitting the necessary payroll forms/background clearance forms. All graduate assistants must use direct deposit. The direct deposit forms are part of the payroll forms.

### **SPRING BREAK AND FINALS WEEK**

Graduate assistants are student employees who normally work when they are actively attending classes and should not work during semester/term breaks, spring break, or finals week. Under special circumstances and with approval of their supervisor, a graduate assistant may work during some of these periods. However, the first priority in considering whether the GA should work during these periods is a focus on student academic success. A secondary consideration is the potential impact related to payroll processes.

### **TERMINATION**

If a graduate assistant terminates employment or is terminated from the position, the stipend will stop. If the graduate assistant was using payroll deduction to make tuition payments, the student will be immediately responsible for any unpaid tuition and fees and any overpayments issued through the Payroll Office. A student may be terminated from a graduate assistant position for cause before expiration of the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form under certain conditions:

- Graduate assistant's schedule drops below the required number of credits noted above.
- Graduate assistant fails to maintain good academic standing.
- Graduate assistant fails to fulfill work assignments, including reporting, satisfactorily.
- Graduate assistant violates laws or university regulations which, in the judgment of the university, affect duties or services performed by the graduate assistant.
- Graduate assistant violates provisions of the stipulations in the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form.
- Graduate assistant fails to meet financial obligations to the university.
- University ceases to make funds available for the graduate assistant positions.