

Graduate Assistant Handbook

The Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

Revised October 2023

INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on being appointed as a Graduate Assistant at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. This handbook explains the benefits and responsibilities that all graduate assistants share. It also offers information that will be useful as you carry out your duties.

The Graduate School is responsible for helping to assure you understand and comply with the terms and conditions of your appointment. We are available to answer your questions regarding your tuition waiver, course load, stipend, and other aspects of your assistantship.

Your hiring unit will tell you who is responsible for supervising your assistantship activities and will provide you with specific training or guidance in performing your duties.

Please feel free to contact the Graduate School for any information about your assistantship appointment at any of the following.

2215 Rendleman Hall
Campus Box 1046
618-650-3010
www.siu.edu/graduate-students

Jerry B. Weinberg, Dean

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I. APPOINTMENTS

Eligibility

Students must be admitted to a graduate degree program and be enrolled in classified graduate status in order to hold an assistantship. Students must maintain a cumulative 3.0 grade point average during the assistantship and meet the minimum class load requirements listed under Enrollment and Class Load Requirements in this document. If a student has an extended contract (lasting more than one term), their eligibility will be reassessed at the beginning of each term.

Students who have graduated from their graduate degree program are no longer eligible to work a graduate assistantship position unless they are enrolled in a second graduate degree program. Students no longer admitted must be terminated from their graduate assistantship by the last date of the term they graduated in.

Undergraduate students are allowed to hold appointments only with permission of the Dean of the Graduate School. This permission may be granted only in exceptional circumstances such as to a qualified student in an approved combined baccalaureate and graduate program when they are within two academic terms (a maximum of 24 semester hours) of receiving a baccalaureate degree.

See [Policy 4A3](#) for more information on graduate assistant eligibility.

Basis of Appointments

A graduate assistant contract can be for a minimum of one term and a maximum of one year. Contracts shorter than the duration required to earn a tuition waiver (12 weeks in the fall/spring, 8 weeks in the summer) are not allowed unless they are an extension of a current contract or the hiring unit has obtained permission from the graduate school.

Your current assistantship appointment does not automatically entitle you to additional contract terms. If your appointment is supported by an externally-sponsored project, the appointment can remain in force only as long as there are sufficient funds in the grant's account.

The minimum appointment percentage for a GA contract is 25% (an average of 10 hours of work per week) and the maximum is 50% (an average of 20 hours of work per week). If a student works multiple GA positions simultaneously, the total appointment percentages of all positions must fit within these parameters.

Categories of Assistantships

There are different types of graduate assistantships. The broader term GA refers to all three types of graduate assistantships. The categories are as follows.

- General Assistant - renders general service to an academic or administrative unit.
- Research Assistant - performs scholarly activities, such as conducting experiments; organizing or analyzing data; presenting findings; collaborating with others in preparing publications or productions; and conducting institutional research for an academic or administrative unit.
- Teaching Assistant - performs instructional duties, such as providing or coordinating classroom instruction, including lab or discussion sessions; tutoring students; grading tests and assignments; developing instructional materials; providing artistic instruction; accompanying/coaching musical or vocal performances; and proctoring exams.

Workload

A graduate student who has a graduate assistant appointment and who meets the student employment enrollment requirements may simultaneously have student work appointments such that the hours worked between the assistantship and student work total to no more than the maximum student work hours per [Policy 4B3 – Policies Governing Student Work](#). For example, a student with a 50% graduate assistantship (20 hours of work per week) could work a maximum of 8 hours of student work. Students on F-1 or J-1 Visas, including students with graduate assistantships, are prohibited from working more than 20 hours per week while classes are in session during fall and spring semesters but may work up to 28 hours per week during summer semester.

Teaching assistants' hours include preparation and grading as well as time spent in the classroom.

Graduate assistants typically should work in no more than 4-hour blocks of time. However, if a graduate assistant is to work 7.5 continuous hours or more in one day, they must receive a 20-minute break after 5 hours.

Travel

If part of a GA's job duties include attending a special event or training, the GA should be given equivalent time off for hours worked while at the event. The supervisor and GA should come to an agreement on the hours to be compensated and when those hours will be taken for compensation prior to the event. The hours taken for compensation must be during the same contract period, and ideally as close to the event as possible.

If significant or overnight travel is involved in such an event, the actual hours worked should be used to determine hours needing compensation time, not necessarily total time spent away in order to attend. Normal travel to and from work is not eligible for compensation time.

Stipends

Appointment Percentage	Minimum Semi-Monthly Stipend – CURRENT RATES	Minimum Semi-Monthly Stipend – EFFECTIVE 1/1/2024	Minimum Semi-Monthly Stipend – EFFECTIVE 1/1/2025
25%	\$260	\$280	\$300
37.5%	\$390	\$420	\$450
50%	\$520	\$560	\$600

Grant Funded GA Positions: It is always recommended to budget for more than the minimum stipend on grant funded GA positions to accommodate potential stipend fluctuations.

Paychecks/Direct Deposit

Graduate Assistants are paid semi-monthly, on the 16th and the last day of the month. New GA's who have never worked an on campus position before will receive their first paycheck at their mailing address. All graduate assistants are required to enter their own direct deposit information via cougarNET. This should be done as soon as possible once the contract is processed.

II. TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Contract Responsibilities

- Students must not begin working until after the contract and all hiring documents are completed and signed.
- Students should not continue working after the ending date of their contract.
- Working outside of the dates of the contract is considered volunteered time and the University has no obligation to provide compensation for it.

Time Keeping

Graduate assistants are required to log their time worked to the nearest quarter hour on the Graduate Assistant Time Sheet, which can be found under Graduate Student Forms at <https://www.siu.edu/graduate/forms/graduate-assistants.shtml>

The form must be completed every month, signed by the supervisor, and turned into the hiring unit. Graduate Assistants should also retain a copy of each timesheet for their own records. For questions regarding the specific process in your unit, ask your unit.

Working with Minors

All graduate assistants working with or around minors must submit to a background check. Final hiring is contingent on the outcome of the background check. Background checks are conducted through the Human Resources office.

Release of Information

As an applicant for or the recipient of a tuition or fee waiver award from Southern Illinois University, all graduate assistants must acknowledge that they understand that the University has the legal authority to release their name and address, the name of their former high school or college, the name of their award, and the award amount. This release is valid for the period of time the tuition waiver is in effect.

Language Requirement

To comply with SIU System policy, all students who are selected for teaching assistantships will be evaluated for oral English proficiency with their initial TA position. The chair of the department the student is working in will be asked to confirm that the student meets the oral English proficiency requirements as part of the student's hiring process.

Honoring the Assistantship Contract

By accepting the University's offer of financial support, you have completed an agreement that you, as well as the Graduate School and the unit that hired you, are obliged to honor. If you choose to resign from your graduate assistantship appointment prior to the completion of the academic term, you will forfeit the tuition waiver, be liable for full payment of tuition, will no longer be eligible for the Earned Summer Tuition Waiver, and will not be eligible for appointment in another unit at the university until the beginning of a new term. Exceptions to this condition may be granted upon recommendation from the original hiring unit and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School. See the section below on tuition waivers for more details.

Position Description/Job Duties

Please read the job description/job duties section of the Graduate Assistantship Contract carefully and discuss anything that isn't clear with your supervisor before approving it. It is also acceptable for your supervisor to assign tasks that are not specifically listed on the contract, as long as they relate to your position and are not considered unethical.

Abiding by University Policies

General Graduate Assistant Policies

This document is based, in part, on the below university policies that pertain to graduate assistants:

- [Guidelines for Graduate Assistantships and Regulatory Policies – 4A3](#)
- [Graduate Student Course Loads – 1L1](#)
- [Teaching Responsibilities Assigned to Graduate Students – 1L4](#)

Please review the posted policy for the most current information.

Ethical Policies

You are expected to behave professionally and ethically during the length of your assistantship. Please feel free to contact the Graduate School with questions pertaining to ethical issues. You may complete the [Graduate School Feedback Form](#) to provide information on concerns, which may be completed anonymously.

You are expected to comply with university policies and procedures and represent SIUE creditably on all occasions. These policies include but are not limited to:

- [Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment Policy – 2C7 and 3C6](#)
- [Sexual Assault, Sexual Misconduct and Relationship Violence Policy & Procedures – 2C13 and 3C14](#)
- [Plagiarism – 1I6](#)
- [Conflicts of Interest and Commitment – 1Q9](#)
- [University Policy Concerning Intellectual Property – 1L15](#)
- [Procedures Governing Student Employment Grievances and Appeals - 4B5](#)
- [Policy on Academic Integrity in Scholarship and Research – 1Q5](#)

A more comprehensive list of the University's policies and procedures can be found at <http://www.siu.edu/policies/toc.shtml>.

Graduate Assistants Engaged in Research

Graduate assistants engaged in research must comply with all legal and ethical policies on research, including those governing use and care of animals, recombinant DNA, biosafety, and human subjects. For information on training requirements and relevant policies, please review the [Graduate School Compliance website](#).

Sexual Harassment Policy

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville does not tolerate sexual harassment of students by faculty, staff members, or other students.

Students should file complaints of sexual harassment with the Office of Equal Opportunity, Access and Title IX Coordination (formerly the Office of Institutional Compliance, OIC), Rendleman Hall, Room 3202 (<http://www.siu.edu/ea/>).

See University [Policy 2C5](#) for guidance on what constitutes harassment and formal and informal complaint procedures.

Professional Misconduct

Graduate Assistants are expected to act in a professional manner at all times. Holding a graduate assistantship is a privilege and students are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity during their appointment. The Graduate School will work with the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs to manage any violations of the Student Code of Conduct.

Graduate Assistants who violate the Student Code of Conduct or act in an unprofessional manner during their assistantship may be terminated from their contract and/or deemed ineligible to receive future assistantship positions.

Graduate Assistants must abide by all conditions listed in the contract. By signing the contract, the student indicates that he/she will be the person performing the work and receiving pay for that work; the student will work the dates listed in the contract; the student will work the appropriate number of hours listed in the contract; and the student will contact the supervisor immediately if he/she is unable to meet the obligations of the contract.

Certain acts of misconduct may result in a termination from the contract including but not limited to:

- Committing fraud – indicating that you are working but are not
- Direct threat of violence (statement or gesture)
- Sexual Assault or Sexual Harassment
- Possession or use of weapons, dangerous substances, or controlled substances on campus or incapacitation due to drug use
- Manufacture or sale or delivery of controlled substances
- Hazing
- Tampering with fire safety equipment or destruction of property
- Multiple violations of the Student Code of Conduct
- A felony criminal charge with a nexus to campus

A student who receives an Interim Separation by Student Affairs will automatically be terminated from their contract. Contracts may be reinstated after the investigation by Student Affairs is complete and the student is permitted to continue their program.

Drug-free Workplace Guidelines

All graduate assistants must comply with the Drug-Free Workplace Policies that are online at http://www.siu.edu/humanresources/employment/workplace_drug_testing.shtml

Retention

In order to maintain your assistantship, you must make satisfactory progress toward the completion of your degree. The Graduate School will periodically review your academic record for the following.

- **Grade point average** - If your GPA falls below the 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA requirement, the Graduate School may terminate your appointment.
- **Satisfactory Progress** - You are expected to make satisfactory progress toward completing your degree. If you accumulate excessive hours of Incomplete or Deferred grades, you will not be eligible for future terms as a graduate assistant. You may not delay completion of your degree in order to prolong an assistantship appointment.

Term Limitation for Assistantships

Qualified students may hold an assistantship for no more than a total of seven academic terms per degree to a maximum of 14 terms total. The Graduate Dean may grant an exception to this policy for students who pursue degrees that require more than 45 semester hours for completion. An academic term is defined as fall, spring or summer semester.

Enrollment and Course Load Requirements

See Graduate Student Course Loads [Policy – 1L1](#) for current information on course load requirements for assistants.

Undergraduate courses, courses listed as “Not for Graduate Credit,” UNIV 500, and courses taken for AUDIT do not count toward satisfying the minimum course load. Enrollment in such courses must be authorized if it will cause a student’s class load to exceed the maximum.

For students enrolled in a cooperative Ph.D. program, courses at both SIUE and SIUC will count toward the minimum and maximum requirements.

If a graduate assistant withdraws from the University, his or her assistantship appointment is terminated immediately, along with the related tuition waiver. The individual may be responsible for repaying tuition previously waived. Exceptions to this condition may be granted upon recommendation from the original hiring unit and approval by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Please make every effort to complete the courses you sign up for. Excessive withdrawals may affect your eligibility for a future Earned Summer Tuition Waiver or graduate assistantship.

Underload/Overload

Requests to enroll in fewer or more than the required number of credit hours must be based on academic program needs and not on assistantship appointment requirements. Requests must be submitted before the second week of the academic term.

Graduate assistants who want to carry an overload (more than 12 hours in the fall spring/more than 9 hours in the summer) or an underload (less than 6 hours in the fall/spring, less than 3 in the summer) during any semester must complete the [Underload/Overload Approval Form](#). After the Faculty Advisor approves the form, it is submitted to the Graduate School for consideration.

Tuition Waivers

As a graduate assistant, you are entitled to a waiver of tuition for courses required for your degree and are subject to the terms and conditions described in this handbook. You are, however, responsible for paying student fees ([Need help calculating your fees? Check out the Tuition and Fees Estimator](#)). In order to avoid

tuition payment late fees, contracts must be received by the graduate school office at least 3 weeks before a term begins. Waivers are processed by the Graduate School and entered into your university financial records.

You are eligible for a tuition waiver if you hold a valid assistantship appointment for a minimum of 12 weeks of a fall or spring semester or 8 weeks of a summer term.

You are not eligible for a tuition waiver if your appointment is:

- less than 12 weeks of a fall or spring semester or 8 weeks of a summer term or
- terminated before the end of 12 weeks of a fall or spring semester or 8 weeks of a summer term

You will forfeit your tuition waiver and become liable for the full amount due if you withdraw from classes after the first two weeks of the term.

Graduate assistants over the summer term must be enrolled in classes for at least 8 weeks of the summer regardless of when their contract starts or ends to earn a tuition waiver.

Taxation of General Assistant's Tuition Waivers

All general assistant's tuition waivers will be reported as non-cash taxable wages in excess of \$5250. These non-cash wages are subject to tax withholding by the IRS for students whose positions are not specifically classified as "research" or "teaching". Please keep this in mind when planning your course load or using the Earned Summer Tuition Waiver.

Please [read this](#) for more information.

Performance Concerns and Termination from Employment

Graduate assistants will have clear employment expectations set by their supervisor at the start of employment. These expectations should include but are not be limited to the scope and responsibilities of the position, the process for evaluation, the hours that the graduate assistant is scheduled to work, the absenteeism policy, and immediate causes for termination.

Immediate causes for termination include but are not limited to violations related to health, safety, and compliance. If a graduate assistant is terminated for an immediate cause, the supervisor and student should meet face-to-face, and the supervisor should formally document the reason for termination. At this point, the hiring unit will complete termination paperwork, and the tuition waiver will be rescinded.

In the event, that the graduate assistant is not meeting other expectations identified by the hiring unit, the following steps should be taken.

1. VERBAL WARNING

The supervisor and graduate assistant meet face-to-face, and the supervisor explains the performance concern in an informal performance counseling session. The graduate assistant has the opportunity to ask clarifying questions. Once the clarification occurs, the supervisor (1) sends the student an email or other written notification summarizing the conversation and (2) states that the next step if the issue is not resolved is a written warning.

2. WRITTEN WARNING

If the graduate assistant fails again to meet expectations, the supervisor will meet with the graduate assistant and formally note the performance concerns and the required solution, including if needed a deadline. At the end of this meeting, both the supervisor and the graduate assistant should sign the formal document and a

copy should be given to (1) the graduate assistant and (2) the chair of the department. The supervisor retains the original. The next step following a written warning is termination.

3. TERMINATION

If after the written warning, the graduate assistant fails to meet the expectations of the job, he or she will be terminated from the position. Termination should occur through a face-to-face meeting. In any case, the process should be formally documented. At this point, the hiring unit will complete termination paperwork and the tuition waiver will be rescinded.

Causes justifying discharge include but are not limited to:

- A. recurring unauthorized and unexcused absences
- B. refusal to do work assigned or refusal to work properly assigned time period
- C. intentionally falsifying entry of hours worked on time records
- D. inability to perform tasks required by the nature of the position after completion of a reasonable training period
- E. violations of the University Student Conduct Code which occur in connection with student employment
- F. violation of the University policy concerning the Privacy Act in giving out confidential information, including but not limited to information from student records
- G. violations of research compliance policies, including but not limited to animal care and human subjects.

Student-What to do when you have a problem with your employer

Many times a problem starts or escalates because of poor communication. Ensure that you have the correct understanding of your responsibilities and your supervisor's expectations. One method to do so is to have face-to-face communication followed by a written summary.

When you are faced with a conflict with your supervisor, it is important to address the situation quickly instead of waiting until the relationship is beyond repair.

Students should begin at the most basic level – the direct supervisor. All attempts should be made to alleviate the conflict directly. Meet face to face with the supervisor to discuss your concerns instead of trying to communicate via email or telephone. Follow up with a written summary to ensure that you are both in agreement. If the situation is still not resolved, the student can seek assistance from the director/chair of the unit in which you are employed. This meeting should also take place face to face so that you can clearly explain your concerns and attempt to remedy the situation directly. Follow up the meeting with a written summary to ensure that you are both or all in agreement.

At any time while navigating the resolution of conflict, the student can contact the Director of Graduate Education in the Graduate School for assistance.

If a student chooses, he/she may file a formal grievance. For a grievance related to employment, see Policy 4B5 Procedures Governing Student Employment Grievances and Appeals outlined under the Student Employment Policies section at <http://www.siue.edu/policies/4b5.shtml>. Note the required timeline that must be followed.

III. BENEFITS AND SERVICES

Graduate assistants work the same schedule as other university personnel. When the University is open, a graduate assistant is expected to be available to work unless prior arrangements are made between the supervisor and graduate assistant.

Graduate assistants, except for those on sponsored internship agreements, are entitled to the same legal holidays and breaks between academic terms as other University personnel. If their assistance is required by their supervisors during such periods, arrangements should be made to compensate them by relief from duties, when necessary, during subsequent slack periods. Graduate assistants are expected to work when the University is open unless contractual arrangements require otherwise or prior arrangements are made with their supervisors.

Graduate assistants on sponsored internship agreements will follow the schedule of the sponsor during the contract period.

Sick and Bereavement Leave

Graduate assistants on 50% appointments are eligible for a non-accruable sick leave benefit of one work day each month covered by the appointment. A work day for a graduate assistant on 50% appointment is equivalent to 4 hours. For appointments less than 50%, the entitlement is prorated according to the percentage of the appointment. For assistantships with split appointments (e.g., two 25% appointments), the benefit is earned by appointment (e.g., 2 hours in each appointment). Sick leave earned in one appointment cannot be used in another without the consent of both hiring units. Graduate assistants unable to work because of illness or injury must promptly notify the supervisor or unit head. Assistants are subject to applicable university policies concerning use of sick leave, including documentation of an illness or injury from a physician or other acceptable source. Graduate assistants are not entitled to extended sick leave benefits.

Graduate assistants are eligible to receive up to three workdays of paid bereavement leave to attend the funeral upon the death of an assistant's immediate family, domestic partner, in-laws, grandchildren, and/or grandparents. Assistants are also eligible for up to one workday of paid bereavement leave for a relative other than the above.

Pregnancy/Parenting Leave

[Policy 3C15](#) is established to ensure the protection and equal treatment of pregnant students, students with pregnancy related medical conditions including as a result of termination of pregnancy, and students who become new parents including parents adopting or fostering to adopt for the first 12 weeks a child is in the home.

This policy provides all students with the ability to request a pregnancy or newly parenting related accommodation, a parental leave of absence request, or a program modification request. Graduate Assistants may take unpaid leave from their assistantship position for up to 12 weeks beginning with their birth of their child under this policy and have their tuition waiver honored for the semester in which the leave begins. The contractual stipend amount will only be paid for the hours actually worked. For additional information on this policy or to discuss seeking accommodations, students should reach out to [SIUE's Office of Equal Opportunity, Access, and Title IX Coordination \(EOA\)](#).

Military Leave

Graduate assistants who are required to fulfill short-term military service obligations while under contract should not be at any detriment due to service obligations. Graduate assistants may be required to make up

hours missed during short-term military service and should consult with their supervisor immediately upon becoming aware of service obligations. Graduate assistants are not eligible for differential pay while on military leave, as they are not defined as a “public employee” under the Illinois Service Member Employment and Reemployment Rights Act.

For more information, see the Guidelines for Graduate Assistantships and Regulatory Policies - 4A3 ([Policy 4a3](#)).

Lovejoy Library

Graduate assistants may check out books for faculty members if the faculty member completes a Proxy Borrower Authorization Form that is available at the Library Circulation Desk or on Lovejoy Library’s website.

Audio Visual Services

Teaching assistants have the same user access to Audio Visual Services as faculty members. General assistants and research assistants have access to production services through their supervisors.

Earned Summer Tuition Waiver

If you have fully completed at least two consecutive graduate assistantship contracts and meet the graduate assistantship eligibility requirements (listed on page 4), you may apply for an Earned Summer Tuition Waiver. Graduate Assistants who do not fulfil the terms of their contract are not eligible for the waiver. Please read the [Summer Tuition Waiver for Former Graduate Assistants policy](#) for more information.

These waivers:

- Do not require you to work.
- Are available once following the completion of two terms as a graduate assistant per graduate degree program.
- Must be used during the summer term immediately following two consecutive semesters of service as a graduate assistant.
- Can be applied to up to 9 credit hours.
- Apply only to courses that count toward completion of your current degree program.

To apply, complete the Earned Summer Tuition Waiver form, available on the [GA forms page](#), no later than the first day of the summer term for which the waiver applies but not until you have enrolled for summer courses. Forms submitted outside of this timeframe will not be processed. Once the form is approved by your Advisor and Supervisor, it will be processed by the Graduate School. After the Graduate School approves your waiver, it will be entered into your University financial records. Students are responsible for fees, as well as any late fees charged to their account due to outstanding fees.

Enrollment in UNIV 500 is not covered by the Earned Summer Tuition Waiver.

COMPETITIVE GRADUATE AWARD RECIPIENTS ONLY: You may use the Earned Summer Tuition Waiver the summer immediately following two consecutive terms of service as a CGA recipient. If you work as a graduate assistant after your terms as a CGA recipient, you could be eligible for the Earned Waiver as a GA according to the guidelines listed above.

