

Office/Contact: Graduate School

Source: SDBOR Policies 4.3.1 and 5.22

Link: <https://public.powerdms.com/SDRegents/documents/1726696>;

<https://public.powerdms.com/SDRegents/tree/documents/1722956>

Associated Forms: [Letter of Offer Template](#), [PAR](#)

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY
Policy and Procedure Manual

SUBJECT: Graduate Assistants and Fellows

NUMBER: 2:19

1. Purpose

This policy and its procedures designate the standards applicable to Graduate Assistantships and Graduate Fellowships to ensure conformity with SDBOR policies and state and federal law.

2. Definitions

a. Graduate Assistantships (Graduate Assistants (“GA”)):

i. Graduate Teaching Assistant (“GTA”): a graduate student with a primary duty of teaching, tutoring, instructing or lecturing in the activity of imparting knowledge and who is employed and engaged in this activity at the University. A GTA has latitude to make independent decisions, use judgment, and exercise discretion when dealing with student matters. A GTA is exempt from Fair Labor Standards regulations as a “teaching professional.” If assigned to grade papers or tests, the GTA must also be assigned other teaching duties.

1. GTA – Instructor (Class Code 01056): This individual engages in direct teaching with the instructional delivery function performed by this individual for the lecture/discussion and/or laboratory portion of a course. Grades may or may not be determined by this individual. Faculty or Department Head supervision continues, which may include direct and indirect monitoring and supervising of the grading process. If a GTA – Instructor delivers a portion of the course, they can be assigned a percentage of the teaching responsibility of the course.

2. GTA – Instructional/Laboratory Support (Class Code 01056): This individual serves in an instructional support role to the instructor or lead faculty in a team teaching situation. This individual may be responsible for such duties as proctoring exams, preparation of course materials, and lab set-up. This individual may be physically present during the delivery of instruction but only to support the instructor.

ii. Graduate Research Assistant (“GRA”): a graduate student assigned to research in the course of obtaining an advanced degree and where the research is performed

under the supervision of a member of the faculty in a research environment. GRAs have the latitude to make decisions involving judgment and/or discretionary choices when collecting data, performing experiments, operating equipment, or assisting in laboratories. There is no employee/employer relationship asserted by the U.S. Department of Labor and therefore this position is exempt from overtime under the Fair Labor Standards Act.

- iii. Graduate Administrative Assistant (“GAA”): a graduate student assigned to perform work that does not meet the GTA or GRA definitions. Specific duties of GAAs vary widely, depending on the administrative or academic unit to which they are assigned, but should be at a level to make use of their education and abilities. The function is to perform more than receptionist or secretary duties. GAAs are non-exempt from the Fair Labor Standards regulations. The position must be paid at least minimum wage for all hours worked and must receive overtime pay or compensatory time in accordance with University and SDBOR policies for hours worked over 40 in a workweek. Timesheets must be completed to record actual hours worked.
- b. Graduate Fellowship: A financial award provided to the student by the University or administered by the University, or designee, for an external agency to aid in the student’s educational expenses. Fellowships do not carry work expectations, and Graduate Fellows are not University employees. Each graduate fellowship program should have a memorandum of agreement between the university and the funder stating the terms of the fellowship.
- c. Paid internship: an internship or experiential learning experience that is credit-bearing for which the student receives financial compensation.
- d. Compensation for Services:
 - i. Stipend: a lump sum of money, as per the amount specified in the GTA or GRA over a set period of time for teaching or research. An employment stipend represents a salary where a service element is defined.
 - ii. Hourly Wage: hourly positions must include, and GAAs must receive, at least minimum wage and overtime or compensatory time, when incurred, at one and one half (1 ½) times the regular rate of pay through payroll.

3. Policy

- a. The primary purpose of Graduate Assistantships is to provide students with professional experience and the necessary financial resources to attend a graduate educational program. A GA is first a degree-seeking student and second, an employee of the University whose assigned duties may assist the University with completions of tasks, but more importantly substantially contribute to the student’s academic and professional development. A Graduate Fellow receives a financial package for assistance with educational expenses; however, professional development is not necessarily required.
- b. A Graduate Student may be eligible for a Graduate Assistantship if the student is:

- i. Unconditionally admitted in a graduate degree program;
 - ii. Degree seeking;
 - iii. Registered for one (1) or more credit hours; and
 - iv. Maintaining a cumulative graduate program GPA ≥ 2.75 .
- c. Graduate students who are awarded a Graduate Assistantship and otherwise qualify shall, in addition to any required wages, have an incentive tuition rate of zero percent (0%) and program fees of zero percent (0%), except the General Activity Fee shall be paid one-hundred percent (100%), in accordance with SDBOR Policy 5.22.
- i. The incentive tuition rate begins the semester the student is appointed to a Graduate Assistantship and not before.
 - ii. A GA's first GA appointment may begin thirty (30) days prior to the graduate student's first semester at the University, so long as the graduate student is admitted and registered in a graduate program that begins within that thirty (30) day period.
 - iii. Graduate Assistants seeking to enroll for the Summer semester who do not receive a sufficient stipend to meet minimum requirements for the incentive tuition rate for the Summer semester may receive the rate, provided they received a qualifying Graduate Assistantship for the preceding Fall and Spring semesters. Continuation of the Graduate Assistantship during the Summer semester requires registration for the required minimum number of credit hours during the Summer semester.
 - iv. If a Graduate Assistantship is terminated, or the student resigns prior to the withdrawal date, the student is responsible for the prorated full tuition rates for the current term. Full tuition rates shall be assessed in all subsequent terms in which the student is not awarded a Graduate Assistantship.
 - v. Graduate Assistants who are eligible for this incentive tuition rate will receive the same benefit for courses taken at other SDBOR institutions. The incentive tuition rate shall also be applied for all distance, off-campus, and Center courses taken.
 - vi. A GA must be awarded and receive at least the minimum stipend set annually by the University in accordance with SDBOR policies. GAs are expected to work a full semester to receive the full semester compensation and incentive tuition rate. The minimum compensation may be prorated according to the term of appointment in accordance with the provisions contained herein and in SDBOR Policy 5.22.
- d. GAs are considered Non-Faculty Exempt, but are not employed in a permanent classification. Grievances are subject to SDBOR Policy 4.3.1.

- e. GAs must be provided an official Letter of Offer, which states the terms of the appointment. The standard format of the offer shall be designated and maintained by the Office of Human Resources. Deviations for the standard offer must be approved by the Assistant Vice President for Human Resources, or designee, and the Dean of the Graduate School. Graduate Fellows must be provided a letter of terms from the program in which the fellow is enrolled.
- f. GAs are not permitted to enroll in any course for which they are assigned Graduate Assistantship duties.
- g. GAs are considered to be institutional employees as defined in SDBOR Policy 4.9.1. Assignment of intellectual property to the SDBOR is a mandatory condition of a Graduate Assistantship or Graduate Fellowship, and the GA or Graduate Fellow is required to disclose intellectual property to the Office of Technology Transfer and Commercialization.
- h. GAs generally do not accumulate sick leave and annual leave, nor do they qualify for health insurance or retirement benefits. Should a GA provide services at a level to which they begin to be legally entitled to such benefits, the Office of Human Resources will notify the supervisor in order to facilitate adjustment of the services required of and provided by the GA.
- i. Time expectations for GAs are determined as follows:
 - i. GA appointments greater than 49% effort will be granted only with proper justification.
 - ii. GTA hours to determine ACA compensable time are calculated as: 2 ¼ hours of service per week for each credit hour of teaching or classroom time, plus one (1) hour of service per week for each additional hour outside of classroom duties the GTA spends performing other required duties.
 - iii. GRA and GAA hours are counted as they accrue. Percent time is counted as: 100% representing 40 hours/week; 95% = 38 hours/week; 75% = 30 hours/week; 49%= 20 hours/week, and 25% = 10 hours/week.
 - iv. GTA or GRA appointments and hourly appointments cannot be held in combination. GAAs, however, may have additional hourly appointments.
 - v. Support activities, such as time spent in required meetings, office hours, and other related activities, are considered as part of the time expectations for the Graduate Assistantship.

- vi. International student GAs must not total greater than 49% effort in a single appointment or in combination of other appointments, though exceptions may be made for summer work for students returning to school in the fall.
- vii. GAs may be assigned to their own thesis or dissertation research; however, comparable to all other students, GAs are expected to complete their thesis or dissertation research outside of a Graduate Assistantship.
- viii. Unless otherwise noted in the letter of appointment, GAs are expected to be available to work Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. GTAs must be available to teach when the course is scheduled. Requirements to work off-hours, Saturdays, Sundays, holidays and other days when the University is closed must be indicated in the letter of appointment.

j. Evaluation

- i. GA performance must be evaluated annually by the supervisor. The GA will receive a written evaluation with a copy retained by the hiring department for the duration of the appointment. The Non-Faculty Exempt evaluation forms shall be used.
- ii. Graduate Fellows will be evaluated as described by the terms of the fellowship.

k. Termination of Graduate Assistants

- i. GAs are at-will employees allowing either the graduate student or the University to terminate the appointment at any time, with or without cause. In most instances, the University may terminate appointments for reasons such as, but not limited to: lack of funds; failure to maintain satisfactory academic status; failure to maintain consistent progress toward completion of the degree requirements; no further need for the functions to be performed; failure to perform assigned duties; and misconduct.
- ii. A termination of appointment action is initiated by the hiring supervisor, who will work with Human Resources to ensure the proper process is followed. The hiring supervisor meets with, or otherwise informs, the GA of the termination.

l. Complaints and Grievances

- i. GAs and supervisors should work in good faith to resolve any issue or complaint regarding the Graduate Assistantship through informal discussion. If a resolution cannot be made, grievances can be filed in accordance with SDBOR Policy 4.3.1.

4. Procedures

a. Employment Procedures

- i. For graduate student admissions processes, the University-approved Letter of Offer should be sent to the student either as an attachment to the admission letter issued by the Dean of the Graduate School or following issuance of the admission letter.

b. Payroll or A/P procedures

- i. The Letter of Offer signed by the student and supervisor must accompany the Personnel Action Request (“PAR”) for approval.
- ii. The Graduate School will approve the Letter of Offer and the personnel action request forms to ensure the student meets the academic requirements.
- iii. The Office of Human Resources will receive the PAR and Letter of Offer, and enter into the Banner system.
- iv. The Payroll Center will review the PAR regarding visa regulations.

The Office of Finance and Business will review the PAR for employment requirements and data entry into Banner.

5. Responsible Administrator

The Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, successor, or designee is responsible for biannual and ad hoc review of this policy its procedures. The University President is responsible for approval of this policy.

SOURCE: Approved by President on 08/21/2015. Revised; Approved by President on 11/26/2019. Revised; Approved by President on 02/09/2020. Revised 08/01/2020 (clerical). Revised 01/26/2024 (clerical).