Graduate Assistantships

**Purpose**

Graduate assistantships provide financial assistance for graduate students, allowing them to pursue a higher degree and grow professionally through the development and application of discipline-based knowledge and skills. Graduate assistantships are awarded through an application process and offer the student financial assistance, typically through a stipend and/or reduced tuition.

The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research is responsible for the implementation of these policies and regulations; any deviations from them must have prior approval from the Dean and Provost.

**Definition**

A graduate assistantship is a position that provides financial support for graduate students through their involvement in teaching, research, and/or service to the University.

**Eligibility**

To be eligible for a graduate assistantship, a student must be fully admitted into a graduate degree program at the University, in good academic standing, and take a minimum of nine (9) six (6) hours during the semester (Fall, Spring) of the assistantship. A minimum of five (5) one (1) credit hours is required during the Summer of an assistantship. Some programs may require students that their Graduate Assistants to be enrolled in more than nine (9) additional hours during a semester or summer period. Students in their last semester of completing their degree may be exempt from the minimum hour requirement with approval by of the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research if they are in the last semester of completing their degree, if they have completed all course requirements for their degree but are still working on their thesis or dissertation, or if they have other extenuating circumstances.

A student whose unique situation may not align with the normal procedures for assistantship appointments may petition the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research for special consideration. Graduate students in Masters and Specialist programs are eligible to receive the equivalent of four (4) semester-long, university-funded Graduate Assistantships for that degree.
Graduate students in doctoral programs are eligible to receive ten (10) such assistantships. A full summer assistantship is equivalent to one (1) semester-long internship. There is no limit to the number of externally-funded Graduate Assistantships (e.g. funded from grants or contracts) that a student can receive, as long as the student is enrolled and in good standing.

Students admitted to a program provisionally are not eligible for an assistantship.

**Assistantship Duties**

Assistantship duties reflect three areas of University productivity: teaching, research, and service. Assistantship duties may include a single area or a combination of areas. Normally students with a... can be awarded either a half-time assistantship work (20 hours per week) or a quarter-time appointment is typically assistantship (10 hours per week).

**Graduate Assistant**

- Provides administrative and/or faculty support such as assisting with special project assignments, institutional research/service, data collecting and analysis, and/or technical/support services, etc. May assist with undergraduate classes or laboratories under direct supervision of a faculty member. Assistance may include tutoring, attending and helping prepare lectures, grading papers, keeping class records, or conducting group discussions.

**Research Assistant**

- Engages in active research and/or research support under the direct supervision of faculty or staff conducting grant-supported research. The assistantship is funded through the grant.

**Teaching Assistant**

- Teaches undergraduate classes or laboratories.

A Graduate Teaching Assistant must have a master’s degree in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations. (SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1 of the Principles of Accreditation, Faculty Credentials Guidelines).

**Appointments**

Students will receive a letter of offer for the assistantship appointment. The letter will clearly identify the category of the assistantship, the supervisor, hourly expectations, and the duties to be performed, i.e., job description. Students and their supervisors should work together to develop a written plan, based on reasonable expectations of student productivity, to involve an amount of effort commensurate with the appointment.
Students may not receive assistantship appointments from Coastal Carolina University (CCU) funds that exceed the expected completion time for their program of study without prior approval from the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research and the Provost.

**Supervision**

Each academic and administrative unit with assistantship appointments should clearly communicate expectations about assistantships to students as well as to supervising faculty and staff to ensure that students’ duties have intellectual and educational value. Each student with an assistantship will have an immediate supervisor who will be either the Cost Center Director or an individual appointed by the Cost Center Director.

Students should keep their supervisor(s) apprised of any changes that need to be made to the agreed-upon schedule. Changes may be necessary because of the student’s own classes, examinations, job searches, conferences, illness, or other personal or professional factors. Flexibility is needed in interpreting the time commitment of the student to accommodate the demands of the assignment, the needs of the student, and the varying skills and capabilities of the student. Having flexibility in the time a student spends on assistantship duties, however, is not license for departments to increase these duties to an unreasonable level or lower them beyond a reasonable expectation. The hiring unit is expected to provide students on assistantships with work space and equipment necessary for their work.

It is the responsibility of the student’s immediate supervisor to supervise the student’s work and also be informed as to the student’s progress in his or her academic program. The primary reason that the graduate student is at the University is the successful completion of a graduate program. This understanding should be kept foremost in mind by the supervisor in working with the student in fulfilling his or her responsibilities.

Students must be formally evaluated at the end of each semester that the assistantship is held. The evaluation must be conducted by the student’s immediate supervisor and be specific to the duties assigned. The results of the evaluation should be conveyed to the student in writing in a timely manner and filed in both the college as well as the Office of Graduate Studies.

**Hours, Course Loads, Salaries, Tuition Rates and Fees**

**Hours**

Students can be awarded either a half-time assistantship (20 hours per week) or a quarter-time assistantship (10 hours per week). Though termed “half-time,” 20 hours per week is typically the maximum expectation for a Graduate Assistant. The work schedule for a student with an assistantship is typically termed a half-time appointment. It may be arranged in terms of hours per week [customarily, no more than twenty (20) hours per week] or tasks completed, e.g., courses taught, research project, etc. A quarter-time schedule is arranged, likewise, in terms of hours per week [customarily, no more than ten (10)] or tasks completed.
Assistantships are ordinarily awarded for a semester, Fall or Spring; but may also be awarded during the Summer. Assistantships may be renewed at the end of the semester. As employees at the University, students are typically considered by the Office of Human Resources and Equal Opportunity to be on semester-long appointments. In some cases when the assistantship duties are clearly defined for a longer period, an academic year appointment can be approved by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research (fall and spring semesters combined).

**Salary**

Students receive an hourly salary and typically work 20 hours per week and are paid on a bi-weekly schedule. Appointments may vary by semester but typically fall within the designated semester hiring periods: Fall (8/16 - 12/15); Spring (1/16 - 5/15); Summer (5/16 - 8/15).

The total semester salary and associated hourly rate for University-funded Graduate Assistantships are established by the Office of Graduate Studies. Half-time assistantships (20 hours per week) earn the same hourly rate as quarter-time assistantships (10 hours per week), but because they work more hours, their total semester salary is twice that of the quarter-time assistantships. Salaries and hourly expectations are equivalent for fall, spring, and summer appointments. Externally-funded Graduate Assistantships are encouraged to pay the same salary as University-funded assistantships, but these rates can vary due to the requirements or specifications of the funding agreements (e.g. grants, contracts, etc.). Students on a half-time appointment normally receive a salary for the semester. Comparably to the Fall and Spring semesters, students who hold graduate assistantships in the Summer receive a salary and follow a work schedule typical of schedules arranged in the Fall and Spring semesters. Graduate students on a quarter-time appointment normally receive a salary that is one-half the salary for a half-time appointment.

**Course Loads for Graduate Assistants and Reduced Tuition**

Students with an assistantship must take a minimum of nine (9) hours during the semester of the assistantship. A minimum of five (5) hours is required if the assistantship is during the summer. These minimum credit hour requirements may be waived by the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research if a student is in their last semester. Preference is given in awarding graduate assistantships to full-time students unless the student is in their last semester.

**Tuition Rates and Fees**

All students (in-state and out-of-state) on assistantship pay in-state tuition. All students are billed a technology fee and may incur lab fees. In addition, all students who park a vehicle on campus are required to purchase a parking sticker.

In addition to receiving a salary, students may have a portion or all of their tuition paid by their hiring units. When this is the case, the tuition portion of the student’s compensation will be
established by the hiring unit as a credit with the Office of Student Accounts against which the tuition for the semester will be charged. Students are responsible for any portion of their tuition and fees not covered by the employing unit.

Awards from grants or contracts should pay the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition for Graduate Assistants classified as out-of-state students. If funding is not sufficient for this, the out-of-state student can still be paid at the same rate while classified as a graduate student employee, but he or she will not be classified as a Graduate Assistant and must pay the out-of-state tuition rate.

Typically, students who are appointed to an assistantship after the first 30 days of a semester or after the first 10 days of a Summer term are not eligible for the reduced tuition rate during that semester. Students who are appointed prior to these deadline dates but whose duties terminate before the midterm date or before they earn the minimum salary payment amount will be billed for full tuition. This standard applies specifically to CCU-funded assistantships.

Assistantships funded by sources external to CCU, however, may be considered on a flexible or variable schedule as determined by the University’s receipt of funds from an external funding agency or organization. For example, external funding may be confirmed early in or even prior to a particular semester but not be in place until the semester is underway. In such a circumstance, a student may be selected for the assistantship, officially begin work when the funding becomes available, but also receive reduced tuition for that semester as it has been confirmed that the funding has been awarded.

Students on assistantships do not accrue sick leave; consequently, work missed due to illness should be made up. It is the responsibility of the department or hiring unit to discuss and confirm work schedules with the graduate assistant when he or she is appointed. Normally, students are not expected to work during examination periods or during state and staff holidays.

Students who fail to perform the duties of the assistantship may be terminated from their appointments.

**Renewal, Resignation, and Termination of Appointments**

As previously noted, assistantships are ordinarily assigned for a semester or for the Summer.

**Renewal**

Typically, students are appointed to an assistantship for one semester with the possibility of renewal. In those programs which require two (2) years for completion, students are allowed to hold a CCU-funded assistantship for a maximum of two (2) academic years. Continuation of an assistantship is contingent upon departmental policy and the following:

1. Registering for a minimum of 9 hours per semester (except in the last semester) Meeting the criteria described in the Eligibility section,
2. Maintaining a 3.0 or better cumulative GPA,
3. Making satisfactory academic progress in their program, and
4. Satisfactory evaluation for the prior assistantship appointment.

As previously noted, graduate students should receive an offer letter for an assistantship that clearly identifies the student’s supervisor and expected duties to be performed. It is against this identification of duties that the determination of satisfactory performance should be based.

Students should be informed as early as possible of a department’s intention about renewing the assistantship. If, because of enrollment, budget or other uncertainties, a unit cannot make a firm commitment to a student about reappointment, a letter of intent should be sent to the assistant stating that these uncertainties exist and explicitly defining the unit’s plans once the situation is clarified.

If a student wishes to be in a unit other than that of his or her initial assistantship application, they will need to submit a new graduate assistantship application and three professional letters of recommendation to support this application.

Resignation

Student appointments are expected to follow the semester or term schedule from beginning to end in order to be eligible for reduced tuition during the period of appointment.

A student who resigns an assistantship appointment or whose appointment is canceled before service is rendered for at least two-thirds of the term during the regular semester or half of a Summer term is required to pay the full amount of appropriate tuition and fees for that term.

Termination

An assistantship appointment may be terminated during the term of the appointment if the assistant is no longer a student at the University, no longer making satisfactory academic progress, or substantially fails to perform his or her assigned duties. Academic Department Chairs, College Deans, Program Coordinators or Directors, and/or office administrator reserve the right to terminate a graduate assistant if the student is not fulfilling the duties of the assistantship. The Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research and the Provost are to be informed if a graduate assistant is to be terminated, and provided a copy of the letter of termination.

In cases of termination, the student should be provided written notice and an opportunity to respond to the supervisor prior to termination.

Assistantship Evaluation

Graduate assistants will be evaluated at the end of each semester. The evaluation is included in determining a graduate assistant’s eligibility to continue in the position. (See Supervision.)

Additional Employment

It is the responsibility of the student’s immediate supervisor to supervise the student’s work but also be informed as to the student’s progress in his or her academic program. The primary reason
that the graduate student is at the University is the successful completion of a graduate degree program. This understanding should be kept foremost in mind in working with students in fulfilling their responsibilities.

The following points are of importance in this area.

While students with assistantships are officially employees of the University, they are unique employees in that they are being employed as a means of supporting themselves in their pursuit of advanced study. Additional employment by the student away from the University is discouraged.

Additional employment at the University, in addition to the assistantship, must be approved by the student’s immediate supervisor and the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research. This approval will be influenced by the quality of the student’s work in the assistantship assignment but also the quality of the student’s work in his or her academic program. If it is felt that additional employment is not in the best interest of the student’s successful completion of the academic progress, it should not be approved.