Graduate Assistant Handbook

Department of Educational Studies and Research
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Purpose of Graduate Assistantships
The purpose of an ESR graduate assistantship is twofold: 1) to provide students with a variety of opportunities for professional and scholarly development and 2) to support faculty within the department in the areas of teaching, research and service. Graduate assistantships provide students an opportunity to gain practical experience in teaching, research, and/or other academic service under the guidance of one or more faculty members and provide opportunities for students to become acculturated in the higher education setting. The experience further benefits students by providing concentrated exposure to graduate faculty, university resources and networking with other graduate students while completing degree requirements. Additionally, a graduate assistantship provides financial support in the form of tuition and stipends.

Requirements for Graduate Assistant Appointment
To be eligible for a graduate assistantship appointment, students must meet all of the following conditions:

- Must qualify for admission to the Graduate School (Please see http://www.usm.edu/graduate-school for more information)
- Must be enrolled in the Graduate School by the beginning of the semester in which the assistantship is to commence and must be registered for a minimum of 9 course hours and up to 13 course hours during each fall and spring semester of the appointment;
- Must meet academic standards of their degree program and cannot be on academic probation;
- Must receive final approval of their appointment to an assistantship from the Office of the Provost.

Students who are not native speakers of English must also demonstrate competence in spoken English before being appointed to a graduate assistantship. Specifically, these students must receive acceptable evaluations after the following examinations:

- The Test of Spoken English (TSE) administered by the Educational Testing Service, with an acceptable score of 50 or better.
- Evaluation by a representative or committee in the student’s department.

If such students have tentatively been offered assistantships but have not passed the exams above, the offers must be suspended until they have done so.

Administration of Graduate Assistantships

Application: To apply for a graduate assistantship, students should provide: (a) a letter of application indicating interest in a graduate assistantship, (b) current résumé and (c) completed Application for Assistantship (Appendix A). Application materials can be hand-delivered to the ESR Office at OMH 135 or mailed to:

Department of Educational Studies and Research
Attn: Graduate Assistant Selection Committee
118 College Drive, #5093
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Selection: Members of the Graduate Assistant Selection Committee will be faculty appointed by the department chair. The committee will meet each spring to review applications and make recommendations for appointments and reappointments of graduate assistants for the following fall. Assistantships that become available during the academic year will be selected by the department chair or designee. Preference will be given to applicants who possess experience and aptitude and are studying for an advanced degree in a program within the Department of Educational Studies and Research.

Appointment: The Graduate Assistant Selection Committee recommends appointments to the department chair. The chair or designee is responsible for making formal offers of assistantships in an official letter that includes a statement of expectations that the graduate assistant: (a) can commit to work 20 hours per week, (b) will enroll as a full time student (9 - 13 hrs fall/spring; up to 6 hrs summer), and (c) will abide by the policies set forth in the ESR Graduate Assistant Handbook. Once an offer has been accepted, the department chair will complete the Graduate Assistant Assignment Form required by the Graduate School.
Supervision: Graduate assistants will be assigned to one or more faculty members or in some cases assigned to work in the department office. Faculty mentors will be responsible for all assignments related to the execution of graduate assistant responsibilities. The department chair, or designee, will be responsible for all assignments related to the execution of graduate assistant responsibilities for those assigned to the office. During department sponsored events, supervision will be the responsibility of the department member in charge of the event and/or designee. Graduate assistants may also be asked to complete tasks for other faculty or staff as needed, and as long as there is time during regular weekly assigned work hours.

Responsibilities of Graduate Assistants
As temporary university employees and full time students, graduate assistants are expected to maintain high academic standards while carrying out their work-related responsibilities in a professional manner that is consistent with the mission and policies of the university. In particular, graduate assistants should refer to policies on Acceptable Use and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Course Load: Graduate Assistants must be full-time students in good-standing with the university, i.e., must maintain university and program requirements including an appropriate GPA. Full time status is considered 9 - 13 hours of graduate level course work during fall and spring semesters. Graduate assistants may be eligible for a tuition waiver for summer, but must enroll in a maximum of 6 semester hours during the summer semester. A graduate assistant may enroll in up to 3 hours of independent research (ADE/CPS/HE/REF 791, 792, or 797 designated courses) each semester as part of this full-time load.

Work Load: Graduate assistants follow the 20/9 - 13 rule: 20 hours of work and 9 - 13 hours of coursework per week. For this reason, graduate students are discouraged from holding other employment during the time of the assistantship.

Work schedule: Graduate assistants work from the first day of the semester to the last day (including exam week) except for university designated holidays and breaks. Graduate assistants do not earn sick leave or personal leave and must notify their supervising faculty member(s) immediately when sickness or emergencies dictate missing normal work hours. Hours missed should be made up at a later time.

Individual work schedules (specific days/times for work) will be decided based on class schedules and the needs of the supervising faculty member(s). Graduate assistants are expected to be present in assigned work areas and also be available to do assigned work in other areas on campus including the library, front office or at department sponsored events. At the discretion of the supervising faculty member(s), graduate assistants may or may not be asked to maintain a time log (Appendix B).

Department Sponsored Events: On occasion, graduate assistants are asked to assist with department sponsored events. Graduate assistants may be asked to assist with planning, set-up, registration, hosting, clean-up and other duties. Only the department chair can assign graduate students to department sponsored events and will request that supervising faculty members provide release time so that a graduate assistant will not be required to exceed a 20 hour work week.

Professionalism: Graduate assistants are expected to exercise appropriate professional judgment including office attire, interactions with students, staff and faculty, use of university owned equipment, matters of confidentiality and in not conducting personal business during working hours. Graduate assistants may have access to or knowledge of information that is personal, confidential and/or protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Such information must be treated in a judicious and professional manner. Breeches in confidentiality may result in termination of the graduate assistantship.

When available and appropriate, graduate assistants are provided access to work space, computers, equipment and office supplies for work-related tasks. Printing, copying, and faxing should be confined to work-related documents only. Graduate assistants may, however, use an office computer for school-related personal use (homework, class assignments, etc.) when it will not interfere with them or someone else completing assigned tasks. All personal files must be stored on flashdrives (or other external devices) and not on computer hard drives.
Compensation

Pay schedule: Graduate assistants receive a stipend during the fall and spring semesters. The amount is set annually by the department chair based on available funding. There is no compensation for summer months unless funded through a supervising mentor(s)’ grant. Pay shall be distributed on the last working day of each month.

Tuition Waivers: Graduate assistants receive tuition waivers for each semester. This includes 9 - 13 hours for fall and 9 - 13 hours for spring. Depending on Graduate School funding, students may be eligible for up to 6 hours of tuition waiver during the summer. Graduate assistants are only required to enroll during fall and spring semesters; summer enrollment is optional.

Performance Evaluation

Evaluation of the graduate assistant's performance should be of an ongoing nature with the supervising faculty member(s). There are, however, two formal evaluation components, evaluation by faculty mentor(s) and feedback from graduate assistants. Appendix C contains an evaluation form where the supervisor(s) outlines the objectives or responsibilities of the graduate assistant and provides an assessment of performance at the end of the academic year. Objectives and responsibilities should be discussed as early as possible. Appendix D contains a form for graduate assistants to provide feedback on their experience and is completed and submitted to the department chair at the end of the academic year. Supervising faculty and graduate assistants are strongly encouraged to openly communicate about expectations or issues at any time, however, the formal process is meant to ensure that the department is provided with information on how the program is working and how it might be modified to better serve graduate assistant and faculty needs.

Continuance of Graduate Assistantship

Reappointment: Reappointments are not automatic. Graduate assistant will be considered for reappointment by the Graduate Selection Committee each spring. Recommendations for reappointments will be based on past performance, recommendations of supervising faculty, departmental needs, and available funding. Students should notify the department chair by April 1 if they wish to be considered for reappointment for the next academic year.

Resignation: Occasionally, a graduate assistant will not be able to fulfill his or her commitment to an assistantship due to personal or professional reasons. Should it become necessary for a graduate assistant to resign, he or she should submit a Resignation Form (Appendix E) to the department chair and notify the Graduate School immediately. The graduate assistant will be responsible for meeting with supervising faculty and accounting for works-in-progress and returning any equipment and materials that were provided by the department or faculty member(s). Should the resignation occur during a semester, the student may be financially responsible for waived tuition (all or part) and any pay received after ending the assistantship.

Termination: Continuation as a graduate assistant is contingent upon and subject to continued funding and satisfactory performance of assigned duties, as determined by supervising mentor(s) and the department chair. A graduate assistantship may be terminated for:

a. unethical conduct including breach of confidentiality (e.g., job-related misconduct);
b. failure to perform reasonable assignments due to incompetence or neglect of duties;
c. failure to maintain eligibility for continuing enrollment in an academic program;
d. failure to provide appropriate verification/documentation in case of absences due to illness or personal emergencies

Before termination of a graduate assistant for unsatisfactory performance of job duties, the supervising mentor(s) must give the graduate assistant written notice of the specific deficiencies in performance along with suggestions for improvement. If deficiencies are not corrected within a specified period of time, the supervising faculty member(s) should notify the Department Chair and provide a copy of written documentation.

When a termination is recommended The Department Chair will meet with the graduate assistant and will complete a Termination Form (Appendix F). Additionally, the Department Chair must complete the Graduate Assistant Assignment Form notifying the Graduate Studies Office of the termination.
Appeals: Graduate assistants are afforded due process and have a right to appeal termination decisions. The appeal process is as follows:

1) Within 10 working days of notification of termination the graduate assistant can appeal in writing to the department chair in the form of a letter requesting a review of the termination.

2) The department chair will convene the Graduate Assistant Selection Committee for the purposes of reviewing the merits of the termination and advising the department chair if the termination should be upheld or rescinded. There is no further appeal at the department level.
Appendix A

Application for Assistantship in the
Department of Educational Studies and Research

Graduate assistantships are competitive and are awarded for the nine-month academic year, from the first day of class through Final Exams for Fall and Spring Semester. Assistantships are not available during summer, however the 9-month assistantship qualifies the students for tuition waiver during the summer semester. Assistantships are usually awarded to doctoral students. Assistantships in the department primarily involve assisting faculty members with teaching and research, and may emphasize one or the other. Some basic work such as copying, filing, and other office work may also be required. When possible, the assignment will occur within the students’ program of study.

Once selected, graduate assistants are assigned by the department chair to work with one or more faculty member(s). Graduate assistants must be available to work 20 hours per week during office hours. Most work is done in the office but on occasion may take place in other venues. Scheduling is done with the faculty member(s), the department chair and/or the department secretary.

Name ____________________________ USM ID# __________

Current Mailing Address _____________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________

Email address ____________________________ Mississippi resident? Yes___ No___

Phone ____________________________ Cell phone ____________________________

Degree and Program of Study ____________________________________________

Date of Application ______________ Date Available __________________________

What skills and experiences do you hope to gain by participating in a graduate assistantship?
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

What are your career goals? ________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

Please provide 1) at least one reference letter, and 2) brief information about your work history on a separate page (alternatively, you may supply a résumé or curriculum vitae with your application).

Will you have other employment during the period of the Assistantship? Yes___ No___

If so, where? _____________________________________________________________ Number of hours per week __________

Outside employment should not interfere with completing the requirements of the graduate assistantship.
Please rate your Skills and Abilities in the Following Areas

Please be honest—this information will be used to match you with faculty members.
We recognize that this form represents a wide range of skills and abilities. We do not expect anyone to score highly on all of them.

1 = poor, 2 = fair, 3 = good, 4 = very good, 5 = excellent

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proficiency with Software</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Word Processing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>e.g., Microsoft Word</td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Library Research/Database Searches</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching Skills</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong></td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<th>Office Skills</th>
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<td><strong>Telephone Skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Personal Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professionalism</strong></td>
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<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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Other, please specify
# Appendix B

## Weekly Time Log

Week of ___________________________ Name ___________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>4:00</td>
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</table>

Graduate Assistant Signature: ___________________________ Date __________
## Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form

**Educational Studies and Research**

Name ___________________________________________ School Year/Term ________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Objective/Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Performance: Below Expectations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>2. Objective/Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Performance: Below Expectations</td>
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<tr>
<th>3. Objective/Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Performance: Below Expectations</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4. Objective/Responsibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of Performance: Below Expectations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Objective/Responsibility

Assessment of Performance:  
- Below Expectations  
- Met Expectations  
- Exceeded Expectations

6. Objective/Responsibility

Assessment of Performance:  
- Below Expectations  
- Met Expectations  
- Exceeded Expectations

Overall Assessment/Comments ______________________________________________________________
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____________________________________________________________________________________________________________

Faculty/Supervisor Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

Graduate Assistant Signature ___________________________ Date ________________

(Signature does not imply agreement)
Appendix D

Graduate Assistant Experience Feedback
Educational Studies and Research
To be delivered anonymously to Department Chair or designee.

What were the most helpful experiences to you?

Insert comments here.

What were the least helpful experiences to you?

Insert comments here.

What suggestions do you have to improve the GA experience?

Insert comments here.
Appendix E

Resignation Form

Graduate assistants who are unable or unwilling to complete a commitment to serve the full term of an assistantship must complete this resignation form and submit it to the Department Chair.

Name: ___________________________________________  ID #: __________________

Supervising Faculty Member(s): __________________________________________

During the current academic year, which semester(s) had you originally agreed to serve?

___Spring  ___ Fall  ___ Summer

Briefly state the reason you are resigning: __________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________

Your signature below indicates you have completed the following:

1. Met with supervising faculty member(s) to inform them of resignation
2. Turned in all assignments and/or data including those “in-progress”
3. Turned in all university-owned equipment/materials
4. Turned in keys and left workspace in good condition
5. Notified Graduate School of resignation

Graduate assistants should announce resignations as soon as possible, but not less than 2 weeks before the effective date of the resignation.

Resignation is effective: ________________________________ (date)

________________________________________________________  __________________
Graduate Assistant Signature  Date

________________________________________________________  __________________
Supervising Faculty Member(s) Signature(s):  Date

________________________________________________________  __________________
Department Chair Signature  Date
Appendix F

Termination Form

Continuation as a graduate assistant is contingent upon and subject to satisfactory performance of assigned duties, as determined by supervising mentor(s) and the department chair. The termination form is completed when it becomes necessary to terminate a graduate assistant.

Graduate Assistant: ___________________________ ID #: _____________________
Supervising Faculty Member(s): ___________________________

Graduate Assistant Assignment for the current year was for the following semester(s)?
___ Spring   ___ Fall   ___ Summer

Reason(s) for termination:
___ Unethical conduct including breach of confidentiality (e.g., job-related misconduct)
___ Failure to maintain eligibility for continuing enrollment in an academic program
___ Failure to provide appropriate verification/documentation in case of absences due to illness or personal emergencies
___ Failure to perform reasonable assignments due to incompetence or neglect of duties (attach documentation that the supervising mentor(s) gave the graduate assistant written notice of the specific deficiencies in performance along with suggestions for improvement.

Comments: ________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________

Termination becomes effective on: __________________________ (date)

________________________________________  __________________________
Department Chair Signature                Date

________________________________________  __________________________
Graduate Assistant Signature              Date