

# HIRING A GRADUATE STUDENT EMPLOYEE

## General

The University of Alabama is subject to many federal and state laws relating to student employees that affect student financial aid, federal and state taxes, and the University's obligation for payroll taxes. While these laws define student employees differently, all include some criteria for enrollment, attendance, course load and number of hours worked.

Student employment at The University of Alabama should afford students opportunities to use and further develop their skills, creativity, sense of awareness, and responsibilities while earning a portion of their educational costs. The employing department is responsible for adhering to the University's employment policies for students. When considering offering employment to students, employers must consider carefully the effects of the employment on the student's academic program.

Assistantships are not fellowships, fellowships are not assistantships – a fellowship is a form of scholarship and does not require any service in return for the payment, whereas an assistantship is a form of employment which require some work, task, or service to be performed in return for some form of consideration. Do not confuse the two, determination depends on the nature of the relationship not the desired terms of payment or benefits.

By virtue of their appointment, student employees are not eligible for benefits.

Graduate students who are employed under assistantships where tuition support and health insurance scholarships are given are subject to qualifying conditions as determined by the University's accreditation organization and Academic Affairs. These conditions apply equally to all assistantships regardless of the source of funding.

## Steps to Hiring a Graduate Student

1. Review the current [Graduate Student Employment Policy](#).
2. Draw up a brief but comprehensive job description which sets out tasks and duties and any responsibilities.
3. Based on the job description, the levels of skills required, and the experience expected, determine a pay rate for the job and the appropriate Full Time Equivalent percentage (FTE) based on a 40-hour per week. Federal minimum wage rates apply as well as [UA Minimum GA stipend rates](#).
4. Identify the period(s) that the assignment will cover, set a start and end date taking account of such factors as:
  - a. Budget availability,
  - b. UA's fiscal accounting periods,
  - c. Project start and end dates,

- d. Date of graduation (a student's eligibility for hire normally ends when he or she graduates),
  - e. Start and end of semester.
5. Identify and select a student who meets the job description requirements. You do not need to conduct a full HR recruitment, but HR does include recruitment resources for [Hiring Student Employees](#).
6. Check that the student selected is eligible to be employed and eligible for the type of appointment you wish to make.
7. Check to see if the student has any other employment simultaneous with this new appointment and, if so, that the overall workload is within the permissible limits set out in the Graduate Student Employment Policy. Remember, a student CAN be a staff or faculty employee but CANNOT be a student employee and a staff or faculty employee at the same time.
8. Prepare an offer letter and/or a Memorandum of Appointment.
9. Check to see if they have already been background checked. If they have been previously background checked for graduate student employment then no additional checks are needed. If not, get the signed release forms from the student and submit a formal background check request. A successful check remains valid for the remainder of the student's academic career here at UA, subject to the requirement for them to self-disclose any post-employment criminal convictions. See [Department Guide for Processing Pre-Employment Background Checks for Graduate Student Employees](#).
10. Once a successful background check has been received and notified you may proceed with the rest of the hiring process.
11. Choose the appropriate combination of Official Position Title, Position Number, Employee Class, and Position Class, based on the job description.
12. Select a vacant Graduate Student Position Number from your Banner HR reports, where one does not match the combination of elements you have chosen contact HR to request a new Graduate Student Position Number.
13. Prepare a PA form following the Payroll Department's instructions for Banner PA forms.
14. Allocate the appropriate budget funds to the chosen Position Number. Contact Budget Office or Contract & Grant Accounting Office for assistance.
15. Obtain the appropriate forms from the student to complete the HR requirements for the PA form – including but not limited to tax forms, deposit forms, I9, etc. Attach to PA. All graduate student employees must complete I9 Form in accordance with requirements for all hires.
16. Obtain appropriate signatures for PA form and then forward to the Graduate School for processing.
17. Where tuition and health insurance scholarships associated with the appointment, process the awards through the online GA TOPS Tuition System for each semester(s) covered by the appointment.

Specific information about each of the above steps is detailed below. Please also refer to the web documents where hyperlinks are inserted.

## **Are They Eligible?**

### **(a) Graduate Student Assistants**

If you are just hiring the graduate student to work in a simple administrative function for an hourly rate and without any tuition or health insurance scholarships then a simple bi-weekly appointment can be made using the Official Title “Graduate Student Assistant” (see below for Banner Titles, Position Classes, and FOAPALs).

The only qualifying requirements here are:

1. Admission to the Graduate School and to a graduate degree-seeking program, and
2. Minimum enrollment in at least 4.5 graduate semester hours, and
3. A successful graduate student employee background check (see below).

### **(b) Graduate Assistants with Tuition and Health Insurance Scholarships**

Where the graduate student assignment includes tuition and/or health insurance scholarships then the qualifying requirements are more onerous.

The qualifying requirements here are:

1. Admission to the Graduate School and to a graduate degree-seeking program, and
2. Minimum enrollment of full time (defined below), and
3. Minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 3.00, and
4. A successful graduate student employee background check (see below), and
5. Signed Memorandum of Appointment or offer letter which includes at least the same details as the MoA on file, and
6. Must have completed a baccalaureate degree.

Note: Students enrolled non-degree are not qualified for any student employment.

Also, remember that as soon as a student graduates he or she is no longer a student and therefore CANNOT be hired as a student employee after graduation.

But, if you have an undergraduate student employee who graduates say in May, if he or she has been formally admitted to Graduate School for the following fall, you may employ them as a graduate student employee through the summer. Just remember they will need a background check.

Please be careful regarding minimum registration requirements for students who are in their final semester or who have submitted their thesis or dissertation and are trying to take advantage of minimum registration dispensations which are specific for those situations; they are overridden where the student wishes to be employed. Please take careful note of these provisions details of which are in the [Minimum Registration Requirements policy](#).

Full details and additional specific requirements for international students, students with provisional language admission status, and all non-native speakers of English, as well as special dispensations for those students in their first 12 graduate semester hours of study are set out in the “Qualifications for Graduate Assistantships” section of the Departments Guide to Administration of Graduate Assistantships.

### **Minimum Enrollment of Full Time for Graduate Assistants**

As stated above, all graduate employees on assistantships where tuition and health insurance benefits are awarded must register full time whilst they hold the assistantship. Full time means 12 graduate semester hours, however graduate assistants in this category may meet the full-time status by including their assistantship as “equivalent hours”.

As set out in the Graduate Student Employment Policy, the level of minimum registration needed for each level of FTE of assistantship is:

<b>Combined FTE level</b>	<b>Combined workload (hours per week)</b>	<b>Minimum registered hours required</b>
0.5	20	6
0.2	10	9

If it is the student’s graduating semester and all degree requirements have been met, then a minimum registration of 1 hour thesis research (for master’s students) or 3 hours dissertation research (for doctoral students) may apply under this exception. **This will not allowed for second or subsequent semesters.**

The limit for maximum registration where the student is employed is 15 hours.

Full details can be found in the statement of the [Minimum Registration Requirements](#).

### **Graduate Student Employee Position Titles**

The term Graduate Assistant refers generally to a graduate student enrolled at the University who is employed to assist a faculty or staff member in the areas of administration and research or to serve in some instructional capacity at any time. The type of assistantship is determined by the nature of the appointment - the tasks, responsibilities, and the services required.

### **Graduate Administrative Assistantship (GAA)**

A *GAA* assists the University's administrative staff or that of a specific department within the University by collecting, ordering, and interpreting various kinds of administrative data. A *GAA* may assist at registration, help with departmental exhibitions, or work on special projects of a wide variety. Minor activities may include attending seminars, doing library research, and holding conferences. Assistantship appointments are typically for the 9-month academic year or fall and spring semesters.

### **Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA)**

A *GRA* assumes research-oriented responsibilities such as library research, computer programming and analysis, fieldwork, laboratory experiments, scientific investigations, writing and editing material, etc. Assistantship appointments are typically for the 9-month academic year or fall and spring semesters.

### **Graduate Student-Monthly and Graduate Student-Biweekly**

These two types are used **ONLY** as pooled categories for research assistantships supervised by Contract and Grant Accounting, they may not be used for any state or gift funded appointments. See table below.

### **Graduate Teaching Assistantship (GTA)**

A *GTA* serves an instructional role in a class or laboratory within a specific department of the University, performing pedagogical (teaching) functions such as preparing lectures, conducting classes, constructing and grading tests, holding student conferences, and assigning course grades. Because the majority of Graduate Assistants are GTAs, you will find that a major portion of this Guide is devoted to specific information about teaching. Assistantship appointments are typically for the 9-month academic year or fall and spring semesters.

For the purposes of reporting to the university's accreditation body the Graduate School identifies two groups of GTAs:

1. Those who are the primary instructor of record for a class and who will have primary responsibility for teaching a course and/or assigning final grades. These students must satisfy the SACS "18 hour rule" requirements and, if they are non-native speakers of English, they must also have successfully completed the university's ITAP (please see International Students later).
2. Those who are not the primary instructor of record and who will not have primary course teaching or grading responsibility but will assist an instructor of record. This category includes tutors (e.g. Community Music Teachers), athletic department staff, Recreation Center Staff, etc. This category also includes those assistants who will be marking and grading class work.

Separate occupation codes have been established for each of the above categories and must be used as appropriate.

### **Graduate Student Assistant (GSA)**

A Graduate Student Assistant is appointed for any other category of employment. It is used for

those students who are not on a regular assistantship (i.e. no benefits) and are usually – but not exclusively - hourly paid.

The Banner Account Number and Position Class that must be used for each category of assistant are as follows:

Position Title	Acronym	Banner Account Code	Position Class
Graduate Administrative Assistant	GAA	602110	60030
Graduate Research Assistant	GRA	602110	42030
Graduate Teaching Assistant - Teaching	GTA	602106	40050
Graduate Teaching Assistant - Assisting	GTA	602106	44010
Graduate Student Assistant	GSA	602102	60040
<i>These next are C&amp;G use only:</i>			
Graduate Student – Monthly (C&G only)	GSM	602110	60050
Graduate Student – Biweekly (C&G only)	GSB	602110	60060

### Summer Appointments

Where surplus funds are available, departments may appoint assistantships in the summer. The Graduate School does not require students to attend school in the summer and therefore the normal minimum registration policies do not apply.

Please use the regular Banner Account, Position Title, and Position Class Number.

### Summer GTA's

Academic Affairs provides specific funds and special Banner HR Position Numbers for Summer GTA's.

### Other Assistantship Types

Academic Affairs has established unique Position Titles and Position Classes for the following groups:

60070	Graduate Student - Athletic Tutor
61040	Graduate Student - CMS Teacher
60080	Graduate Student - Library

### Workloads and Employment Limits

The Health Care Reform Act includes provisions which directly affect the number of hours that students may work and in common with most other national institutions of higher education UA has implemented these limits in advance of the legislation.

These limits apply equally to all graduate students regardless of the source of funding for the positions and also irrespective of whether or not they are hourly or monthly paid. Thus, contract or grant funded positions or endowments are subject to these provisions in addition to any requirements set out in the contract, grant, gift, or endowment agreement.

All graduate student employees - domestic and international - are limited to working **no more than 20 hours per week (or 0.50 FTE) during Fall and Spring semesters**. They may work up to but **no more than 40 hours per week during Summer terms and academic year break periods**.

Where additional or multiple on-campus assignments are taken, this limit applies to the combined hours or aggregate FTE of all assignments.

## **Memorandum of Appointment**

All assistantships require some work, task, or service to be performed in return for consideration by way of a stipend. The appointment is similar to a contract of employment and as such requires formal documentation to record the terms and conditions between the student and the assistantship provider. This is evidenced by the Memorandum of Appointment. It is the responsibility of the appointing department to prepare the Memorandum of Appointment and obtain the necessary approvals.

### *Terms and Conditions*

Like an employment contract, the Memorandum of Appointment sets out the following key elements:

1. The student's identity – name and campus wide id number.
2. The appointing official.
3. Start and end dates.
4. Monthly stipend to be paid.
5. Total stipend to be paid.
6. FTE of the appointment – this is determined by the number of hours' work per week that the appointment requires.
7. The student's immediate supervisor, and
8. The specific duties of the appointment.

Please note that it is insufficient to simply state under duties vague descriptions such as “to be determined by supervisor”, or “as required”. Care must be taken to ensure that the description correctly reflects the exact nature of the work or service being performed. When the assignment is for teaching assistance it is vital to include details of classes being taught, or whether or not the student is, say, grading papers or homework.

In addition, the Memorandum also sets out clearly the student's obligations under the contract of employment regarding:

- Continuing to meet the minimum graduate student employment qualifying requirements throughout the entire period of the appointment.
- Meeting minimum performance standards established by the appointing official.

- The student's obligations when the appointment is terminated prior to the end of the appointment and/or prior to the end of an academic semester.

#### *Evidencing Approval and Agreement*

The Memorandum must be signed by both the appointing official AND the student as evidence that both parties understand the commitments, rights, and obligations of both parties under the contract.

#### *Modifying the Terms and Conditions*

When any of the terms and conditions is modified prior to the termination of the contract a new Memorandum must be prepared which replaces the original effective from the date of change.

Modifications include but are not limited to:

- Increasing or decreasing the monthly and total stipend rate.
- Increasing or decreasing the hours worked and the FTE.
- Changing the tasks or responsibilities of the appointment. This includes changing the class to be taught where appropriate.

#### *Retention and Distribution of Memorandum of Appointment*

The original signed Memorandum must be kept on file in the appointing department. Copies must be given to the student and the Graduate School. The Graduate School's copy should be attached to the Personnel Action Form (PAF) when submitted to Graduate School.

If desired, the hiring department's offer letter can be used as a substitute for the MoA, however ONLY where the following conditions are met:

1. The student and the supervisor both sign the offer letter; and
2. The offer letter contains as a minimum all of the elements included in the MoA (see terms and conditions above); and
3. The offer letter must expressly require that the student meet all of the continuing academic requirements for holding the assistantship.

You can access a skeleton [Memorandum of Appointment](#) and complete online and then print for signatures directly from the Graduate School web site. Note there is a slightly different version for grant funded appointments, which requires an additional approval from the grant PI.

## **Pre-Employment Criminal Background Checks for Graduate Student Employees**

As a matter of routine, the University of Alabama obtains background reports, also known as consumer reports and investigative consumer reports, on many of its employees. This includes all graduate student employees including hourly paid. The background report will include the results of:

- Criminal history search;
- Social security number trace (to verify name and address); and
- National sex offender registry search; and



may include other information intended for use for employment purposes. In addition, to the extent a Graduate School applicant indicated on his/her application for admission that he/she had not ever been convicted of, pled guilty to, or pled no contest to a felony or sexual offense, and the background report indicates otherwise, the Graduate School will use this information to determine whether false or inaccurate information was provided on the application, making the student potentially ineligible for admission and enrollment or subject to suspension, as indicated on the Graduate School admissions application.

Verity of admissions disclosures and/or proper admission (admission that is based on truthful information) is a pre-requisite to graduate student employment; consequently, verification of admission disclosures will be used to evaluate employment eligibility, and if false information was provided, may impact student status.

Full instructions for checking whether or not a successful background check has been completed for a student and how to request a background check are on the Graduate School's web site under [Department Guide for Processing Pre-Employment Background Checks for Graduate Student Employees](#).

### **Preparing the PA Form**

Please make sure that you download the latest current version of the fillable Personnel Action Form from the Payroll/HR web pages each time – this way, you ensure that you are using the correct version. Go to [Banner Personnel Action Form](#).

Double-check all of the separate elements agree with Banner and are consistent, especially Position Title, Position Number, Employee Class, and Position Class. Review the Banner FOAPAL and confirm that the correct account number is used.

Remember, that there is no such thing as supplemental pay for graduate student employees. Every appointment has a workload value (FTE) and that each graduate student employee is subject to maximum limits of FTE each semester. The FTE must properly reflect the actual workload for the position based on the following guidelines:

- 20 hours per week work equates to 0.50 FTE, 10 hours is 0.25 FTE, “n” hours per week equates to  $n/20 \times 0.50$  FTE ;
- For GTA's, a teaching load of one 3-hour credit class equates to 0.25 FTE, teaching two 3-hour credit classes equates to 0.50, “n” class credit hours equates to  $n/6 \times 0.50$  FTE.

### **Graduate Student Position Numbers**

Generally, unique position numbers are assigned for each graduate student position, although there are one or two very limited exceptions where pooled position numbers are available for certain limited groups of assistantships. For example, Athletic Tutors, University Library Graduate Student Assistants, and Contract and Grant Accounting funds.

You must use a vacant Graduate Student Position Number where the Position Title, Employee Class, and Position Class match the category of assistantship you have determined based on the job description.

If you do not have a vacant line that fits you can request a new Graduate Position Number from HR following their [Guidelines for Graduate Student Position Numbers](#).

## **Graduate Assistant Tuition & Health Insurance Scholarships**

Each semester covered by the assistantship includes a tuition and health insurance scholarship. These are processed before and during each semester through the online Graduate Assistant Tuition Online Processing System (GA TOPS). Instructions for completing the posting and making any changes and adjustments can be found in the [GA TOPS User Manual](#). The dates when the system is open for posting for each semester are published by Student Receivables and allow sufficient time for departments to process the scholarships in time for student bills to reflect the appropriate credits.

Although the award is processed through GA TOPS, the student MUST still go to the Student Health Center at the start of each semester when he or she wishes to accept the health insurance benefit. Registration can only be made during the open enrollment periods at the start of each semester and which expire approximately 2 – 3 weeks after the start of the semester.

Generally, where a student is appointed to an assistantship which qualifies for tuition and health benefits for the summer then the tuition award is processed in exactly the same manner as for the fall and spring semesters, depending on the type of funded assistantship. Remember, that the health insurance plans for GA's cover two 6-month periods and therefore any GA who receives the insurance with a spring assistantship has coverage through the summer and therefore NO health insurance postings are required for the summer.

Remember, the vast majority of GA stipends are permanently budgeted as 9 month appointments. Therefore, in state tuition budget is NOT AVAILABLE for GA awards in the summer. However, where a college has permanently budgeted GA lines as 12 month appointments you may enter those awards through this system. All other summer in state tuition charges must be funded by each college just like any other GA line that is not permanently funded.

## **International Students**

Warning! Be very careful with international graduate students when considering hiring them as student employees. The INS places very strict rules on work allowances for students on education visas.

Any international student who presents himself or herself for work must produce a current valid I20 visa document as part of the I9 verification process.

Please note the following major differences for international student employment:

- All graduate international students who are attending college on F1 and J1 student visas must be enrolled in a minimum of 9 hours.
- Where a graduate international student is employed on campus he or she may combine the equivalent hours of the assignment (IDGR hours as calculated by the Graduate School) with registered class hours to meet the minimum 9 hour requirement. The IDGR hours must be posted on the student's academic transcript.
- A graduate international student is not required to register for classes in the summer semester unless he or she is using University facilities, however where an international student has an I20 which indicates that he or she is starting their program in the summer semester then the student must be enrolled full-time i.e. **9** hours.
- International students on F-1 or J-1 student visa status cannot use the 0-credit hour exception with early submission of thesis or dissertation as the basis of maintaining minimum enrollment requirements as active students.
- The only other exceptions to minimum registration of 9 hours for graduate international students are:
  - a) Student is formally registered with full-time Curricular Practical Training (CPT) status. The student's academic advisor must indicate formally to Capstone International Office how many hours the student is required to register to be full time. Part-time CPT still requires minimum 9 hours.
  - b) Student has completed all regular classes and is registering in just thesis or dissertation research hours. Again, student's academic advisor must indicate formally to Capstone International Office the minimum number of hours they must register.
- According to immigration regulations, an international student's visa status ends during the semester in which his/her studies are complete. F-1 and J-1 students must plan to apply for post-completion work authorization, begin a new program of study, transfer to a new academic institution, or prepare to leave the U.S. within the grace period allowed after the last day of the semester in which they complete their current program (<http://is.ua.edu/currentstudents/final-semesterchecklist/>). Students should contact Capstone International Services with regard to USCIS regulations and their status after completion of their current program in regard to their thesis or dissertation.

As a matter of routine you should always contact Capstone International Office for any questions regarding eligibility of an international student for employment.

John Chambers  
Director of Administration  
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