

SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL OF MINES & TECHNOLOGY

Policy Manual

SUBJECT: Graduate Teaching and Research Assistants

NUMBER: Policy II-6

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Graduate students may be employed as teaching and/or research assistants by members of the faculty to enhance the quality of instruction or research.

1) Definitions and Qualifications

- A. A Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) or a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is first a student, and the student status is the most important role in the graduate assistant/faculty supervisor relationship.
- B. GRA and GTA appointees (henceforth referred to as GAs) must meet the academic requirements established by the Graduate School for admission and remain in good academic standing. The institution will seek to award assistantships to the best qualified students available to perform the tasks required.
- C. Full-Time Academic Load for Graduate Students
 - a. Full-time graduate student status requires a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester, and 2 credit hours during the summer term.
 - b. The maximum credit hour load during the academic year is 12 credits (per BOR policy) per semester and 6 credits during the summer. Any registration above the maximum requires approval of the student's advisory committee and/or department head, and the executive administrator with responsibility for Graduate Education.
- D. In addition to meeting the upper-level English proficiency scores as defined in the admission requirements, international students receiving an assistantship must have sufficient English proficiency to perform the duties assigned. This determination may involve assessment and observation by a department head relative to a classroom teaching role.
- E. The GA is a "professional in training" who follows and learns from a faculty supervisor/mentor. The faculty mentor is clearly identified, and this person serves as a guide to the GA as he or she fulfills the responsibilities assigned as a condition of the assistantship. The faculty mentor provides continued guidance (e.g., through regular interactions and feedback sessions) throughout the assistantship. The mentor and the student are jointly responsible for achieving, in the student, increased maturity and professional autonomy in carrying out assistantship duties.

- F. Assistantships and hourly positions will be designated as “teaching” or “research” (defined below) according to assigned duties and funding sources.
- G. An individual student may receive a combined teaching and research assistantship and will be compensated for the equivalent of up to 20 hours per week of service, as for a full-time assistantship. Assistantships may also be awarded for three-quarter time (defined below).
- H. Assistantships for terms other than those set forth herein must be individually approved by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs (for teaching assistantships) and/or the Vice President for Research Affairs (for research assistantships) prior to opening the position.
- I. The workload for any combined research/teaching assistantship may not exceed the maximum workload for a full-time research or teaching assistantship.
- J. Departments/Programs are strongly encouraged to establish a fixed amount for their full-time GA stipends, so that all students at the same GA level are compensated at the same rate.
- K. Graduate assistantships may also include reduced [tuition](#) (see below). Only those courses that fulfill requirements for the student’s program shall apply toward the credit-hour eligibility requirement for reduced tuition. Remedial work toward a graduate degree can count for reduced tuition if approved by the assistantship supervisor and the executive administrator with responsibility for Graduate Education.
- L. Graduate assistantship roles fall into two categories: a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) or a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) depending on the type of duties performed and the type of funding used. GTA and GRA positions are the only types of salaried student positions permitted except in cases approved by the Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Dean of Graduate Education.
- M. The Board of Regents personnel system describes two broad types of roles:
 - a. Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Roles:
 - i. Instructor
 1. Engaged in direct teaching via a lecture/discussion and/or laboratory portion of a course
 2. May assign grades, but with direct or indirect faculty or department head supervision
 3. May be assigned a percentage instructor responsibility for master class and faculty workload purposes
 - ii. Instructional/Laboratory Support
 1. Serves in an instructional support role to the instructor or lead teacher in a team-teaching situation
 2. May be responsible for such duties as proctoring exams, preparation of course materials, grading, and lab set-up

3. May be physically present during the delivery of instruction, but only to support rather than replace the instructor

b. Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) Role

- i. Assigned to research projects or researchers and assists in the research function/process
- ii. Does not have direct teaching or instructional lab responsibilities

N. Graduate students may be awarded an hourly work appointment under limited circumstances. Hourly appointments are not subject to the minimum registration requirements for assistantships and do not include reduced tuition. Hourly appointments may be made for only one semester or summer at a time. Students must be registered for the minimum number of continuing registration credit hours required for all thesis/dissertation students during the academic term but do not need to register for summer credits if they are registered for fall term. Graduate hourly appointments (GR Hourly) are classified based on the type of work performed.

- a. An **academic hourly appointment** includes duties normally done by GTA or GRA students, including teaching labs, grading, research, thesis/dissertation work, etc. It may also include work that provides professional development in the student's discipline, such as cataloging specimens or running lab samples in a research facility. Academic graduate hourly positions are normally hired by academic departments. These policies apply to hourly academic appointments:
 - i. Academic hourly appointments cannot exceed 10 hours per week.
 - ii. The student must be paid at the hourly rate set by the Office of Graduate Education based on stipend rates determined by the BOR and indexed to the BOR-approved percent increase in graduate tuition rates annually.
 - iii. The workload for any combination of student assistantship and hourly academic appointments cannot exceed the maximum workload for a full-time research or teaching assistantship during the academic year. During the summer, a student with a three-quarter-time or full-time assistantship may also be awarded an hourly appointment subject to the same conditions listed above.
- b. A **non-academic hourly appointment** includes work unrelated to the student's discipline, such as cleaning floors, mowing lawns, etc. It may be awarded to graduate students with less than a full-time assistantship or no assistantship. Non-academic hourly graduate positions are normally hired by non-academic departments such as Public Safety or Facilities. These policies apply to non-academic hourly positions:
 - i. The combined workload of all positions held by the student must be consistent with HR policies.

- ii. The combined workload of all academic and non-academic positions is limited to 20 hrs. per week during the academic year and 40 hrs. per week during the summer and winter break.
 - iii. Non-academic hourly positions are not subject to the 10 hour per week limit.
 - iv. The rate of pay can be similar to the typical rate for the type of duties performed and may be less than the GTA/GRA rate.
- c. For the purpose of graduate positions, research centers are considered to be non-academic units that hire non-academic hourly positions. They may coordinate with an academic department to fund or partly fund a GRA position, but the position request will be originated by the academic department using the appropriate faculty member as the supervisor. In deciding whether to hire a student to a GRA or a GR Hourly position, these guidelines should be followed:
 - i. If the duties of the position include work that the student can directly apply to completing the graduate degree for at least 50% of the work effort, then an assistantship is appropriate and encouraged.
 - ii. If the duties of the position allow minimal to no time for the students to engage in activities that directly contribute to completing the graduate degree (running samples for Center clients, for example), then an hourly position should be used. Like other non-academic units, a limit of 20 hours per week during the fall/spring terms and a limit of 40 hours/wk. during summer and academic breaks is imposed on graduate hourly positions.

2. Workload and Salary Policy

- A. South Dakota Mines uses the incentive graduate tuition rate model and calculates a minimum stipend rate per semester that includes an increased tuition benefit. This net rate was established for Fiscal Year 2023 as \$5,772 for resident students and \$5,468 for non-resident students. Future changes to this rate are indexed to the BOR-approved percent change in the graduate tuition rate annually.
- B. GRA workload is based on a hypothetical 20-hour work week, as per Office of Human Resources requirements, for stipend calculation. However, GRA work assignments are not based on hours, but percent of overall effort. It should be noted that the GRA experience is part of a student's educational and professional preparation; therefore, it is not practical or desirable to account for work in terms of hours. In fact, the partitioning of effort is best expressed as a percent of effort divided between research and work associated with degree completion. The following GRA definitions are averages, expressed as percentage of effort, over the course of the academic year. In summer, the academic portions will typically be work the student performs to complete a thesis or dissertation.
 - a. Full-time GRA= average 50% research, 50% academic
 - b. Three-quarter-time GRA= average 37.5% research, 62.5% academic

- C. The Council on Graduate Education will establish the minimum or maximum number of credits for which students must be enrolled to receive a graduate assistantship.
 - a. In order to qualify for a GA, the student must register for a minimum of 9 credit hours during the academic semester in which the GA is in effect (2 hours in the summer). Students must meet the same minimum registration requirements to qualify for the reduced tuition rate.
 - b. A student on an assistantship may register for a maximum of 10 credit hours during the academic semester in which the GA is in effect (2 hours in the summer) unless tuition/fee recovery is available from external sources, or an exemption is approved by the Dean of Graduate Education.
 - c. A student may request a one-time exception to qualify for an assistantship with 2 to 8 credits of registration during the last semester of enrollment. If the student does not complete the degree in that semester for some reason, the student is again subject to the 9 credit (or summer 2 credit) minimum enrollment requirement.

- D. Implementation Guidelines
 - a. Workload percentages apply to all GAs
 - b. The department head/program manager, in consultation with the faculty supervisor and with the approval of the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs, determines the degree/nature of the GA's responsibility within the awarded GRA/GTA.
 - c. Faculty supervisors are responsible for monitoring GA performance and for providing the requisite level of mentoring, support, and guidance.
 - d. GA workload shall include meetings with supervisors, office hours, and other such work-related expectations requiring the time of the GA.

3. Other Guidelines

- A. Academic Breaks: All GRAs are expected to report for work during academic breaks, unless otherwise authorized by the department head/program manager in writing.
- B. Benefits: GAs do not accumulate sick leave and annual leave ([SDCL Chapter 3-6](#)), nor do they qualify for health insurance (SDCL Chapter 3-12A) or retirement benefits (Chapter 3-12). This applies regardless of percent appointment.
- C. Appointments: GAs will be appointed using the processes established by Human Resources.
- D. Reduced Tuition ([Regents Policy 5:22](#)): The Board has adopted a special tuition rate for graduate assistants and graduate fellows for state-support courses. South Dakota Mines refers to this policy in determining eligibility and application of the reduced tuition rate. In addition, these procedures shall be followed.
 - a. A GA whose employment performance does not meet expectations may

have his or her assistantship terminated during the contract period, with no further stipend payments. Prior to termination, the student must be notified in writing of the specific performance deficits and given a minimum of two weeks to improve performance to expected levels. This written notice must be provided to the Graduate Office at the same time it is given to the student.

- b. If a student's assistantship terminates prior to the semester withdrawal deadline, she/he will be responsible for the full tuition rate.
- c. All GAs and supervisors are expected to consult with Human Resources concerning Social Security and Internal Revenue Service regulations and guidelines for graduate students.

4. Graduate Assistantships and Academic Eligibility

- A. GAs are meritorious awards provided to students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement and maintain a graduate GPA of 3.0 or higher.
- B. Assistantships may be awarded to students on academic probation only in restricted cases, under unusual and justifiable circumstances. Justification from the department head/program director for GA awards to students on academic probation is required in all cases and must be approved by the executive administrator with responsibility for Graduate Education.
- C. Award of a GA to a student with a GPA below 3.00 does not waive the requirement that the student achieve a final GPA of 3.00 or higher to graduate from their graduate program.

5. GA Tuition Remission Policy

- A. GAs carrying the appropriate number of credit hours per semester and receiving at least the minimum stipend are eligible for the GA reduced tuition rate. For those students receiving reduced tuition, tuition remission must, under most circumstances, be recovered.
- B. Tuition remission for assistantships must be charged to an externally funded research activity or graduate program, whether funded through South Dakota Mines or the South Dakota Mines Center of Alumni Relations & Advancement (CARA).
- C. Scholarships and fellowships do not require work as a condition of award, do not qualify a student for the GA tuition rate, and hence, will not be charged for tuition remission or used in the ratio for calculation of tuition remission charges.
- D. A review will be made of the source or sources of salary funds for each graduate student receiving the GA tuition rate. The review will be conducted separately for each of the following three academic periods: summer, fall and spring. The review will be designed to analyze the composition, by source, of funds in the total salary disbursement to each GA.
- E. At the conclusion of the salary review, direct charges for the applicable share of the GA tuition benefit will be made to all funded projects based on the ratio of

non-state-appropriated salary to total salary. Direct charges for reduced tuition benefits will not be made to state-appropriated funds (unless the graduate program has funds specifically designated for tuition remission) or to funds used to support teaching assistantships.

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BOR Policy/Committee References: Policy 5:5, Policy 5:17, Policy 5:22