SOUTH DAKOTA SCHOOL OF MINES AND TECHNOLOGY

Policy Manual

SUBJECT: Graduate Teaching and Research Assistants

NUMBER: Policy II-6 (Formerly Policy II-C-7)

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. Students awarded assistantships must be enrolled as full-time students, as defined in South Dakota Board of Regents guidelines, and have at least a 3.0 GPA (see below for credit hour requirements). The Council on Graduate Education will establish the minimum number of credits for which students must be enrolled to receive a graduate assistantship during the summer term. The current minimum is 2 credit hours.

C. In addition to meeting the minimum 520 TOEFL score required for admission, international students receiving an assistantship must have sufficient English proficiency to perform the duties assigned. Ordinarily, this will be interpreted to mean TOEFL scores at or above 560; however, it may also involve further assessment and observation by a department head relative to a classroom teaching role.

D. 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.

E. Assistantships will be designated as “teaching” or “research” (defined below) according to assigned duties and funding sources.
F. 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 during the academic year, as for a full-time assistantship. Assistantships may also be awarded for half time and three-quarter time (defined below).

G. Assistantships for terms other than those set forth herein must be individually approved by the Provost/Vice President for Academic Affairs prior to opening the position. Compensation for any combined research/teaching assistantship may not exceed the maximum awarded for a full-time research or teaching assistantship.

H. 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. The maximum award amount for MS students receiving a GA should be 12% less than the PhD GA rate (e.g., if the full-time, annual PhD rate is $25,000, the full-time, annual MS rate should be $22,000).

I. Graduate assistantships may also include reduced tuition (see below). Only those courses defined by the student’s graduate advisory committee and approved by the executive administrator with responsibility for Graduate Education, as necessary for his or her program of study, shall apply toward the credit-hour eligibility requirement for reduced tuition. Remedial work toward a graduate degree can count for reduced tuition if they are included in the student's approved Program of Study.

J. Types of Graduate Assistant Roles

1) Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Role
The Board of Regents personnel system describes three broad types of GTA roles.
   a. Instructor (Position Classification 01056)
      i. Engaged in direct teaching via a lecture/discussion and/or laboratory portion of a course
      ii. May assign grades, but with direct or indirect faculty or department head supervision
      iii. May be assigned a percentage instructor responsibility for master class and faculty workload purposes

   b. Instructional/Laboratory Support (Position Classification 01057)
      i. Serve in an instructional support role to the instructor or lead teacher in a team teaching situation
      ii. May be responsible for such duties as proctoring exams, preparation of course materials, and lab set-up
      iii. May be physically present during the delivery of instruction, but only to support rather than replace the instructor

   c. Paper/Assignment Grading or Other Paperwork Support (Position Classification 01058)
      i. Serves in a grading/paperwork support capacity only
2) Graduate Research Assistant Role (Position Classification 01052)
   a. Assigned to research projects or researchers and assists in the research function/process
   b. Does not have direct teaching or instructional lab responsibilities

2. Workload and Salary Policy
   A. The Board of Regents establishes minimum GA stipends that qualify for reduced tuition at their spring meeting. These stipends take effect at the end of the spring semester. Current stipend rates are set by the Board of Regents yearly and are available in the catalogue and the Graduate Office.
   B. During the fall and spring academic terms, 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 classroom activities. The following GRA definitions are averages, expressed as percentage of effort, over the course of the academic year.
      1) Full-time GRA = average 50% research, 50% academic
      2) Three-quarter-time GRA = average 37.5% research, 62.5% academic
      3) Half-time GRA = average 25% research, 75% academic
   C. During the summer term, the GRA workload uses a hypothetical 40-hour work week as a basis and the average percentages above are adjusted, accordingly (i.e., Full-time GRA = average of 100% research). An academic course may be taken during the summer without affecting the GRA status.
   D. In addition, in order to qualify for a GRA the student must register for the following minimum credit hours during the academic semester in which the GRA is in effect.
      1) Full-time GRA = 9 credits (2 credits in summer)
      2) Three-quarter-time GRA = 7 credits (1 credit in summer)
      3) Half-time GRA = 5 credits (1 credit in summer)
   E. For the student to receive reduced tuition, a minimum of 9 credit hours must be maintained during any academic semester that the GRA is in effect and a minimum of 2 credit hours during the summer.
   F. Implementation Guidelines
      1) Workload percentages apply to all GAs
      2) 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.
3) Faculty supervisors are responsible for monitoring GA performance and for providing the requisite level of mentoring, support, and guidance.

4) GA workload shall include meetings with supervisors, office hours, and other such work-related expectations requiring the time of the GA.

5) Academic Loads for Graduate Students
Full-time graduate student status requires a minimum of 9 credit hours of course work per semester, and 2 credit hours during the summer term. 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. All graduate students, regardless of GA status, must meet these requirements for the purpose of continuing registration.

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 a single Payroll Authorization Request (PAR). The PAR is prepared by the Graduate Office. If paid from multiple sources, all sources must be included on the PAR. The funding department/faculty mentor prepares and submits the Assistantship/Fellowship Authorization form to the Graduate Office for processing. Changes to funding sources that occur during the appointment will require a new authorization and PAR that will be prepared that shows all funding sources. Placing the GA on hourly payroll is not permitted.

D. Reduced Tuition (Regents Policy 5:22): To allow the universities to compete effectively when recruiting highly qualified prospective graduate students, the Board has adopted a special tuition rate for graduate assistants and graduate fellows for state-support courses (see Policy 5:5 Tuition and Fees). The graduate assistants and graduate student fellows shall be assessed one-third (1/3) of the resident graduate tuition rate for all state-support courses (Policy 5:17).

1) Eligibility for the special tuition rate is limited to GAs and fellows who are:
   a) unconditionally admitted to a graduate degree program and are registered at the university for its required minimum number of credit hours; and,

   b) awarded an assistantship or fellowship at or above the minimum rate established annually by the Board. Students who have received a qualifying graduate assistantship or fellowship for the
preceding fall and spring are automatically eligible for the special graduate assistant tuition rate for the following summer.

2) If a student’s assistantship terminates prior to earning the minimum stipend, she/he will be responsible for the full tuition rate.

3) A GA whose employment performance does not meet expectations may have his or her assistantship terminated, with no further stipend payments and will be responsible for remitting the full tuition accrued for that semester.

4) All GAs and fellows not meeting these eligibility requirements, for any other reason, shall be charged the appropriate regular tuition rate established by the Board.

5) When a graduate degree program is offered jointly by two or more institutions, the Board may provide that GAs and fellows who are eligible for the special tuition rate at one institution are also eligible at the other institution(s). This would be addressed in the program approval process.

6) All GAs and advisors 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 Probation**

   A. GAs are meritorious awards provided to students who have demonstrated outstanding academic achievement. Such awards may be given to students on academic probation (GPA below 3.00) only in restricted cases, under unusual and justifiable circumstances.

   B. To be eligible for consideration for a GA, students who have been enrolled as a degree-seeking graduate student for a minimum of one semester carrying a minimum of six credit hours of course work, must maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher in all courses at the 300 level or above. Should an assistantship be awarded, the minimum credit hour policy denoted in Section 2 must be followed, as long as the assistantship is in force.

   C. Only under special circumstances will a GA be awarded to students on academic probation, and only if the student has a GPA between 2.75 and 2.99. 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.

   D. Exceptions to this policy (award of a GA to a student with a GPA below 2.75) must be approved by the Council on Graduate Education.

   E. 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.

1) Tuition remission for assistantships must be charged to an externally-funded research activity or graduate program, whether funded through SDSM&T or the SDSM&T Foundation.

2) Scholarships and fellowships funded from private funds, including those funded through the SDSM&T Foundation, 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.

3) 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.

4) 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.

5) Research fellowship eligibility requirements and restrictions are parallel to those for research assistantships. A fellowship award may not always include reduced tuition as a benefit.

BOR Reference: Policy 5:5, Policy 5:17, Policy 5:22