MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY™

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate Assistant Handbook

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GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK
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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on being selected as a graduate assistant! The award of a graduate assistantship is a very high honor. You have demonstrated not only superior academic achievement, but also a commitment and motivation which are very important in becoming a competent and productive professional. The Graduate School applauds you on the recognition of your achievements.

A graduate assistant is a very important and unique position in the University. While assistantships are held only by students, many students may be given some duties and responsibilities of a faculty member. A graduate assistant must perform well in both roles simultaneously and therefore must be familiar with expectations of both positions and their importance within the structure and organization of the University. This Handbook has been developed to assist you in providing important information for your success in this position. One section of this document specifically addresses the expectations of Graduate Teaching Assistants relative to their interaction with students.

The information presented in this Handbook is an abridged consolidation from different University sources. Do not assume this Handbook to be a replacement for the Graduate School Catalog or related publications. Therefore, please consult and know policy and regulations found in these other University publications.

If you have concerns which are not addressed in this Handbook, consult with your graduate advisor, graduate coordinator or director, and/or the appropriate member of the staff of the Graduate School.

Best wishes to you in your service to the University in this very important position and your pursuit of your graduate degree.

A. POLICIES AND PROCEDURES GOVERNING GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

Graduate assistantships are provided as financial support for graduate students. They are intended to facilitate progress toward the earning of a graduate degree. Graduate research, teaching, and service assistantships are available on an annual or nine-month basis. Individual academic and non-academic departments/units are responsible for awarding the assistantship, establishing duties and responsibilities, work schedule, and determining stipend rate. **A graduate assistant's work schedule must not exceed 20 hours per week.** The minimum stipend rate is $600.00 per month.

TYPES OF ASSISTANTSHIP APPOINTMENTS

Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA) - Graduate Research Assistants perform duties in support of University research, which may or may not relate to a student's thesis/dissertation. Many University academic, research, and administrative offices employ GRAs. This opportunity provides an excellent means for students to learn new techniques and methods as well as expand their knowledge by association with research-oriented responsibilities, whether employed within the student's academic discipline or in another department. Duties and stipends vary from program to program and are dependent on the nature of assigned duties.

Graduate Service Assistants (GSA) - Graduate Service Assistants aid faculty and staff members with administrative functions. GSA appointments are available in many academic and non-academic units. Duties vary, depending on administrative needs of the unit making the award, and stipends vary according to the nature of assigned duties.

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) - Graduate Teaching Assistants work under the direct supervision of graduate faculty members and are assigned duties related directly to instruction, such as assisting in the preparation of lectures, leading discussion sections, conducting laboratory exercises, grading papers, and keeping class records. Advanced graduate students who have completed 18 graduate credit hours in thier teaching discipline may be given primary responsibility for teaching an undergraduate course, including student assessment and assignment of final grades.
The 20 hour week work schedule for GTAs is equivalent to teaching courses amounting to 6-credit hours per semester. **GTAs may not be assigned primary responsibilities for teaching and student assessment in courses approved for graduate credit.**

All graduate students planning to serve as Graduate Teaching Assistants must participate in the Graduate Teaching Assistant Workshop prior to beginning the first teaching assignment at MSU and satisfy all program/evaluation requirements necessary to obtain the level of certification (GTA1, GTA2, GTA3) corresponding to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. Please refer to Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification in this publication for detailed certification requirements.

ELIGIBILITY FOR ASSISTANTSHIP

Minimum University Eligibility Requirements
To be eligible for an assistantship a student must be admitted to a specific degree program with "regular" or "contingent" status. A student with "contingent" status must, within the first award enrollment period, satisfy all "regular" admission requirements. An assistantship award will be terminated if these requirements are not met. **"Unclassified" graduate students or graduate students with "provisional"**

admission status may be eligible and will be limited in the type of funding that can be used for an assistantship.

If English is not the native language of an international graduate student, the English Language Requirements for International Students apply and must be satisfied to be eligible for an assistantship. These requirements are found in the International Services section of the Graduate School Catalog.

APPLICATION FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP

Application for an assistantship must be submitted to the college, department, school, or support unit. The department/unit may provide its own application form or refer the student to the Application for Graduate Assistantship on the Graduate School website. The department/unit establishes application deadlines and review procedures.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP OFFER/APPOINTMENT

Individual academic and non-academic departments are responsible for making the assistantship award offer, establishing the amount of the stipend and the work schedule, and monitoring the performance of the graduate assistant's duties and responsibilities.

ACCEPTING/DECLINING AN ASSISTANTSHIP OFFER

Council of Graduate Schools—Mississippi State University is a member of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) and the Conference of Southern Graduate Schools (CSGS). The University subscribes to the CGS Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees and Assistants. The resolution includes a complete list of participating institutions.

The Resolution reads as follows: "*Acceptance of an offer of financial support (such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties*."

"*Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of this Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which a commitment has been made. Similarly, an offer by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer. It is further agreed by the institutions and organizations subscribing to the above Resolution that a copy of this Resolution should accompany every scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, and assistantship offer*."

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP EXEMPTION, BENEFITS AND TERMINATION

Graduate Research Assistants, Graduate Teaching Assistant and Graduate Service Assistants receive a tuition exemption of 100% of the in-state tuition. All Graduate Assistants who are not Mississippi residents also receive 100% exemption of non-resident tuition.

IRS Code states that the tuition remission of those Graduate Service Assistants whose course of study is specifically related to assistantship duties is not taxable. For a Graduate Service Assistant whose course of study is not specifically related to assistantship duties, tuition remission up to $5,250.00 per calendar year is not subject to tax; however, tuition remission in excess of $5,250.00 per calendar year is taxable.

Stipends

Stipends are paid on the fifteenth and the last working day of each month. When employment begins during a pay period, stipends for the first pay period are calculated on a prorated basis.

Health Insurance Supplement

The University provides a health insurance subsidy for Graduate Assistants who purchase the University-sponsored health insurance plan through the MSU Longest Student Health Center. The total health insurance subsidy is $400 per academic year; $200 for the fall semester and $200 for the spring/summer semester. The subsidy will be deposited into each Graduate Assistant's account in **October** and **February**. To access information about the University-sponsored health insurance plan, visit https://www.healthcenter.msstate.edu/insurance.

Termination of Assistantship

If the assistantship is terminated prior to the specified ending date, the assistant's duties, stipend, and tuition award will cease. **The student will also be required to pay back a prorated portion of the previously applied tuition award, including non-resident tuition as applicable.**

RESPONSIBILITES FOR MAINTAINING A GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP

REQUIRED COURSE LOAD:

Fall and Spring Semesters

Graduate assistants must be full-time students (registered in at least 9 graduate credit hours) and are prohibited from enrolling in more than 13 graduate credit hours.

Online Education

A graduate assistant tuition award does not cover the tuition of Online Education or ESL courses when a student is enrolled in more than 9 credit hours. The tuition exemption does not cover the distance fees; only the basic tuition fee is covered. Therefore, the graduate assistant is responsible for payment of any additional per credit hour rate incurred as a result of Online Education or ESL enrollment. The required full-time status must be maintained throughout the entire semester. Therefore, dropping a course is not permitted if the resulting course load is fewer than the required 9 graduate credit hours. No course in the 9-hour load can be audited or converted to audit status.

Full- and Half-Summer Awards

Full-summer awards require an enrollment in at least 6 graduate credit hours; a maximum of 13 credit hours is permitted. Any combination of Maymester, 1st 5-week, 2nd 5-week, or 10-week terms may be used for the 13-credit hour maximum; however, half-summer awards in either 5-week term may require an enrollment in at least 3 graduate credit hours with a maximum of 7 credit hours allowed.
Additionally, a student holding a half-summer graduate assistantship must be enrolled in courses offered during the term when the assistantship is awarded.

Undergraduate Courses
The full-time course load cannot include undergraduate courses unless the course is a program prerequisite. In such case, only one undergraduate course is permitted as part of the full-time load (per Graduate Council, March 2001). Based on TOEFL scores, the University requires some international students to take ESL 5323 and/or ESL 5313. Both are undergraduate courses and program prerequisites, and a graduate student is permitted to enroll in one of these courses while holding an assistantship. A student cannot be enrolled in ESL 5323 and ELS 5313 concurrently.

Course Overload
A graduate assistant wishing to schedule more than a full-time course load maximum of 13 hours may, with the approval of his/her major professor, department head, graduate coordinator and dean, register for more than 13 hours by submitting an Request for Scheduling Overload Form to the major professor. The dean's office sends the approved form to the Registrar's Office. Such transmission will allow application of additional tuition exemption consistent with current policy.

Academic Achievement
To retain an assistantship, a student must demonstrate satisfactory progress in graduate study. Failure to do so may result in a termination of the assistantship. Unsatisfactory progress may be defined as the failure to maintain a B average in graduate courses attempted after being admitted to a specific program; a grade of U, D, or F in any course; more than two grades below a B; failure of the preliminary/comprehensive examination; an unsatisfactory evaluation of a thesis or dissertation; failure of a research defense; or any other failure of a required component of one's program of study. Any, or a combination of these, may constitute the basis for the termination of a student's graduate study in a degree program. Individual programs have the right to establish their own criteria; however, the preceding definition must be the minimum standard for continuing in graduate programs and holding graduate assistantships. In the case of dismissal, a student's assistantship is terminated.

ADDITIONAL EMPLOYMENT

Graduate assistants are not permitted to engage in additional employment beyond the 20 hours per week commitment of the assistantship. This prohibition is based on the assumption that a full-time student with this level of work commitment (obligations) would not be able to meet successfully all academic requirements. Before hiring any graduate student to be paid on wages, the unit must check with the Graduate School to determine the assistantship status of the student.

Any exceptions to the employment policy must have approval of the student's primary employing department (when additional employment is different from the assistantship granting unit), and the Graduate School **PRIOR** to the GA performing additional work. A request for such an exception **MUST** be made in writing by the hiring unit head to Dean of the Graduate School. A copy of the approved request should accompany the pay documents submitted when the work by the student/graduate assistant is completed.

The laws for visa status may place limits on employment eligibility of an international student. If an international student is uncertain about whether visa status allows acceptance of an assistantship or additional work hours, they should contact the International Student Office for clarification

RETIREMENT

Graduate assistants are not eligible to participate in the University's retirement program.

VACATION, SICK LEAVE AND UNEMPLOYMENT COMPENSATION

Graduate assistants are not eligible for vacation, sick leave or unemployment compensation. Graduate Assistants are entitled to the same university holidays as faculty and staff unless other arrangements are agreed upon in the department.

INJURIES ON THE JOB

Graduate assistants, like all MSU employees, are covered by Workers' Compensation. Workers' Compensation is a no-fault insurance plan that is mandated by state law. It pays medical expenses of employees resulting from allowable work-related injury or illness, including roundtrip mileage to receive medical treatment from an approved provider. **Any workplace injury or illness must be reported to the supervisor immediately.**

PERMITS AND PARKING

Any individual who operates or parks a motor vehicle or motorcycle on the campus and streets of Mississippi State University must register the vehicle within 48 hours of bringing the vehicle on campus. The GA permit must be purchased in-person at the Office of Parking Services. The student must bring his/her MSU ID and assistantship offer letter. The GA permit allows graduate assistants to park in any commuter zone or residential zone. This permit does not allow parking in staff zones. The cost of a permit can be obtained by contacting the Office of Parking Services at 662-325-2661 or visiting the following link: http://www.parkingservices.msstate.edu/parking/

LEGAL RESIDENT STATUS

Graduate Assistants are encouraged to petition for residency as soon as requirements are met.

Students are classified as in-state or out-of-state for the purpose of paying University fees. The Graduate School classifies a student when their initial application for admission is processed. The burden of proof for establishing residency resides with the applicant. If a student misrepresents residency status, then the student will be responsible for paying all fees that should have been assessed and will be subject to disciplinary action that may include dismissal. The University Registrar is authorized to change a student's residence status when evidence that the student is improperly classified is obtained.

Petition for Change of Residency Classification: An individual who enters the State of Mississippi from another state and enrolls is considered a non-resident. Any person who has attained twenty-one (21) years of age and resided within the State of Mississippi for twelve (12) consecutive months after attaining twenty-one (21) years of age may petition for a change in residency classification for the purposes of fees and tuition assessment. The petition must be accompanied by a sworn affidavit and other documentation of residency as well as proof of financial independence.

A. The institution is permitted to conduct a reasonable inquiry into the validity of the petitioner's claim.

B. The petition for change of residency must be received prior to the last day a student may register without penalty for the term in which the student is applying for residency.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

Graduate assistants are expected to support and maintain an academic environment conducive to the positive educational development of all students and faculty members. This standard of professional conduct requires each graduate assistant to perform their responsibilities without intimidation and harassment based upon race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other status protected by state or federal law. Special caution must be exercised to avoid exploitation of students or colleagues for private or professional advantage, especially those who are subject to your authority.

Professional behavior must be maintained in the relationships among students, peers, and faculty members. Sexual harassment, intimidation, or exploitation of professional relationships undermines the academic freedom of all. Protection of the atmosphere of trust, essential to the flourishing of an academic community, is the professional responsibility of all University personnel.

DRUG and ALCOHOL-FREE WORKPLACE

Mississippi State University employees expect to work in a drug-free environment. The University expects its employees to be free from the effects of alcohol and drugs while on the job or in the workplace. More details are provided in HRM 60.118. http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/60118.html

SMOKING AND TOBACCO USE ON CAMPUS

Mississippi State University is a Smoke-Free Campus. Smoking of any tobacco-based product, including e-cigarettes, is prohibited in any university facilities and on the Starkville and Meridian campuses. See MSU Smoking Policy (Student Affairs OP 91.301)

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Animal Welfare - The use of laboratory animals is essential to teaching, testing, and research, and must be considered a privilege, not a right, of the academic and scientific communities. To ensure that animal care and use on campus are in compliance with local, state, and federal laws, regulations, and policies, the University Laboratory Animal Veterinarian (ULAV) has been established in the Office of the Vice President for Research. This unit is a university-wide resource that provides or oversees health care, and technical and scientific support and compliance oversight for MSU programs using animals in biomedical research, testing and teaching.

The ULAV is advised on a university-wide basis by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, a standing committee reporting to the Vice President for Research. The committee is charged with (1) establishing and reviewing compliance with standards and procedures relating to laboratory animal welfare, and (2) advising individuals and agencies dealing with such animals.

University instructors and researchers planning projects that utilize vertebrate animals in biomedical research, testing, and teaching must submit their proposed protocol to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee for review and approval of animal care and use aspects, including animal costs, during the planning process. Also, researchers seeking outside funding for projects that utilize vertebrate animals must obtain IACUC approval before funding can be awarded.

Human Subjects - University policy and federal regulation require that all research involving human subjects be reviewed and approved by the University's Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) **prior to initiation of the research**. This requirement applies to all human subject research conducted by faculty, staff, and students, on- and off-campus, regardless of the funding support for the project. Projects conducted by non-MSU affiliated persons at MSU facilities also fall under the auspices of this policy.

Additional information concerning animal welfare and human subjects is available online at https://www.orc.msstate.edu/.

ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Mississippi State University recognizes that within the academy of scholars certain indisputable rights to freedom of expression exist. The University encourages the search for knowledge and truth, and will not abridge the scholar's right to reveal their findings through appropriate channels by both spoken and written word, even, if doing so, they may be in conflict with students and professional peers, as well as with the lay community. However, the scholar must recognize the fact that, as a human being, they possesses opinions, some of which may be subject to human frailty of bias and error. As a free citizen, they have the right to express these opinions. The degree to which one expresses them as a scholar, claiming sanctuary in the University is a matter of academic responsibility. The University shall insist upon scholarly objectivity within and outside the classroom.

HONOR CODE

Mississippi State University instituted an Honor code in the Fall of 2007. All students are expected to abide by the following statement of conduct: ***"As a Mississippi State University student I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."***

Misconduct in research or scholarship includes fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, reviewing, or reporting research or other academic work. It does not include honest error or honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data. Mississippi State University students are responsible for authenticating any assignment submitted to an instructor or graduate committee, excluding examinations. If asked, a student must be able to produce proof that the assignment submitted is indeed his/her work. Students must keep appropriate records at all times. A student's inability to authenticate work, should the instructor or graduate committee request it, is sufficient grounds to initiate an academic dishonesty case.

Complete details of the Honor Code are found in *Academic Operating Policies* (AOP 12.07)

HARASSMENT

Mississippi State University fosters a campus environment that recognizes individual and cultural differences and is strongly committed to the ethical and legal principle that each faculty member of the university community enjoys academic freedom and all members of the university have a constitutional right to free speech. The right of free expression and the open exchange of ideas and views are essential, especially in a learning environment. Mississippi State University vigorously upholds these freedoms. However, the value of free expression may be undermined by certain acts of harassment. Such harassment may result in the loss of self-esteem for the victim and the deterioration of a quality classroom, social, or work environment and will not be tolerated.

As members of the University community, students, faculty, administrators, and staff have the responsibility to respect and not violate the rights of others and to show tolerance for opinions that differ from their own. However, nothing in this policy prohibits appropriate admonition, argument, and correction by a teacher in the conduct of their professional responsibility in the interest of maintaining order, upholding standards, stimulating thought, or promoting competence. Such action is, by definition, not a violation of this policy. Likewise, nothing in this policy precludes management's inherent authority to plan, direct and evaluate the activities of other organizational members in accordance with sound management principles and directives, including communicating, training and disciplining employees.

Harassment based upon race, color, ethnicity, sex, pregnancy, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, or any other characteristic protected by applicable law will not be tolerated.

Punitive action against any person complaining of harassment is prohibited by law and this policy and will not be tolerated.

All students, faculty and staff are expected to adhere to this university policy and therefore will be held accountable for violating it. Mississippi State University will respond promptly to all complaints of harassment and retaliation. Violation of this policy can result in serious disciplinary action up to and including expulsion for students or discharge for employees.

Disciplinary action for violations of this policy is the responsibility of an employee's unit head or other appropriate administrator, or for students, the Dean of Students.

The policy on harassment is online at https://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/0303.

GRADUATE STUDENT ACADEMIC GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

AOP 12.37 details the process and procedure to establish standardized procedures concerning graduate student academic grievances. The University operates under a philosophy that emphasizes the importance of ensuring the rights of its students. When a situation arises that results in an individual graduate student having an academic grievance, then efforts will be made to determine the information surrounding that grievance and respond appropriately and justly.

PERTINENT CONTACTS AND LINKS:

HRM Policy on Employee conduct:
http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/60401.html

Faculty Grievance Procedures:
https://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1305

Code of Student Conduct:
http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/91100.html

Guidelines for Resolution of Discrimination and Harassment Complaints:
http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/PDF/0303.pdf
http://www.odep.msstate.edu/

Dissent, Disruption, and Academic Freedom:
http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/91109.html

Ethics in Research and Other Scholarly Activities:
https://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/8002

Academic Freedom:
https://www.policies.msstate.edu/policy/1311

Grade Appeal and Academic Review Board:
http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/1314.html

Sexual Harassment Awareness, Response, and Prevention (SHARP) Training:
https://www.oci.msstate.edu/training-events/sharp/

Graduate Student Association:
https://www.grad.msstate.edu/students/graduate-student-development/graduate-student-association

International Admissions & Services:
https://www.admissions.msstate.edu/prospective-students/international-students/admission-requirements

A complete list of Policies and Procedures can be found at https://www.policies.msstate.edu/.

B. POLICIES AND PROTOCOL FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

The Role of the Teaching Assistant

Teaching -- Showing the way; directing, guiding; imparting instruction or knowledge.
Assistant – One who is present to help; aiding, auxiliary. (Oxford English Dictionary)

Overview

As a teaching assistant, you play a vital role in providing effective classroom instruction at Mississippi State University. You will assist students and professors. You will direct some learning activities yourself and you will be providing support in others. Yet new teaching assistants often have little experience in teaching. This guide is designed to help you as you attempt to provide high quality instruction in the lecture hall, the classroom or the lab. Some people are more "natural" teachers than others, but, given solid information about the "best practices" in teaching and learning, everyone can improve their skills.

As you go about your duties note that you are not alone. A faculty mentor in your own department, usually the faculty member of the course to which you are assigned, is the best aid to your professional development as a teacher. If such a mentor is not available to you then try to partner with a mentor outside your discipline. Many skilled and experienced MSU professors are ready to help you as you learn how to teach. The Center for Teaching and Learning and its webpage can be important sources of support for you. Other MSU offices (including the Mitchell Memorial Library) also can provide various forms of assistance. See the section on "MSU Support Services" on the official web site.

As a teaching assistant you have the opportunity to develop presentation skills as well as your powers of observation and feelings of empathy. The preparation that goes into teaching is taxing, but the rewards of teaching others and doing a good job are worth the time and effort. Never forget that teaching effectively takes a great deal of time, effort, and dedication. In other words, be prepared for a demanding but gratifying task as you help students to progress and succeed.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The Graduate Teaching Assistant Workshop (GTAW) is designed to introduce first-time teaching assistants to the techniques and skills necessary to be effective instructors in a university environment and promote excellence in undergraduate education at Mississippi State University. Held semi-annually before the fall and spring semesters begin, the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop introduces students who have accepted teaching assistantships to effective teaching methods and tools and educates them about University policies and resources. The GTA workshop emphasizes the importance of providing high-quality instruction to undergraduate students at Mississippi State University. All first-time GTAs, both domestic and international, are required to attend the workshop.

The GTA Workshop consists of the following two components:

- GTA Workshop General Session (for all GTA levels)
- Classroom Certification Evaluation (for GTA2/GTA3 certification).

Additional information about the Graduate Teaching Assistant Workshop is available online by visiting https://www.grad.msstate.edu/funding-tuition/assistantships/grad-assistantship-teaching-workshop.

Failure to complete the GTA workshop, including partial attendance or tardiness of significant duration to Workshop sessions, will render a student ineligible for a teaching assistantship award.

Classroom Certification Evaluation - Held semi-annually as part of the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) Workshop, Classroom Certification Evaluation is the tool used to determine whether a GTA is equipped with the skills needed to deliver high-quality instruction to undergraduate students at Mississippi State University. Prospective students for GTA2/GTA3 certification prepare a 10-15 minute interactive mini-lesson that would be presented to students as part of an assigned course; the mini-lesson is presented to an evaluative panel of graduate faculty members. Classroom certification is required of all teaching assistants whose responsibilities involve direct contact with students such as giving presentations in lectures or laboratories, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups. A student cannot participate in the Classroom Certification Evaluation segment until all other Teaching Assistant Certification Program requirements are completed.

CERTIFICATION LEVELS FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

By participating in the GTA Workshop, graduate students can become certified at one of the three levels that correspond to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. A minimum of GTA1 certification is required for ALL graduate assistantship appointments at MSU.

Graduate Teaching Assistant 1 (GTA1) - The graduate student will assist in such tasks as preparing examinations, proctoring examinations, grading papers, preparing class lectures, maintaining class records, and tutoring students outside formal classes. This position does not require the Classroom Certification component of the workshop. A GTA who initially received assignment to a GTA1 level appointment may later complete the Classroom Certification Evaluation in anticipation of a change in duties/responsibilities that require classroom or laboratory teaching. A GTA who has already obtained GTA1 level certification is not required to complete the GTA Workshop General Session again.

Graduate Teaching Assistant 2 (GTA2) - This level requires completion of the Classroom Certification Evaluation. The graduate assistant may have some of the same duties as GTA1. Other responsibilities include making presentations in laboratories/classrooms, conducting lectures, and leading discussion groups. These tasks involve classroom or laboratory teaching of students, but the graduate teaching assistant is not the instructor of record.

Graduate Teaching Assistant 3 (GTA3) - The graduate student will teach for credit as the instructor of record and/or as the person primarily responsible for assigning grades. Mississippi State University Academic Operating Policy and Procedure (AOP) 13.09 Credentials for Teaching, states “Graduate teaching assistants may serve as instructors of record only for undergraduate courses. These graduate students must possess a master’s in the teaching discipline, or at least 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and obtain classroom certification from the Graduate School. Graduate teaching assistants must receive direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the same teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned periodic evaluations. Graduate teaching assistants cannot serve as instructors of record for graduate level courses, regardless of qualifications.”

Students must satisfy all program/evaluation requirements necessary to obtain the level of certification (GTA1, GTA2, GTA3) corresponding to the duties/responsibilities of the teaching assistantship appointment. Waivers to allow classroom/laboratory teaching (GTA2/GTA3 levels) without successful completion of all Graduate Teaching Assistant Certification Program component requirements WILL NOT be issued.

UNIVERSITY HIERARCHY AND POLICIES RELATING TO GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Members of the teaching hierarchy belong to the following categories:

- Teaching assistants constitute the lowest rank and are usually graduate students seeking their PhD degrees.
- Part-time faculty members are called adjunct professors.
- Full-time "non-tenure track" faculty members are called auxiliary professors. Adjuncts and auxiliaries generally are appointed for one academic term or one academic year.
- Tenured faculty members are usually either associate or full professors. Tenure consists of a permanent faculty appointment that can be terminated only if the discipline in which a person is tenured has been eliminated from the curriculum or if the faculty member has committed serious offenses of ethical standards or has been found guilty of criminal behavior. Tenure-track faculty members who are not yet tenured are generally lecturers, instructors or assistant professors. Retired faculty may be awarded the honorary title of emeritus professor.

Faculty and teaching assistants belong to academic departments. Related departments make up a college. Department heads report to the Dean of their college. Academic deans report to the Provost, who is the chief academic officer of the university. The Provost reports to the President, who is chief executive officer of the university. The President reports to the Board of Trustees, a body of experts who deliberate on and approve or disapprove policies and financial decisions proposed by the President.

Your dual role as student and graduate assistant necessitates your review and understanding of University Policy and Regulations that provide guidance and direction for handling complaints. Two documents applicable in such cases are Student Code of Conduct and Policies and Procedures for Handling Academic Misconduct. These documents can be found at http://www.msstate.edu/web/security/student_policies.html.

- Faculty Handbook - http://www.msstate.edu/web/faculty_handbook/
- Mississippi State University Graduate Catalog - http://catalog.msstate.edu/graduate/

GTAs could be the subject of a grievance filed by a student. If you are aware of a student grievance, contact your immediate supervisor immediately. A grievance must be handled officially and result in final resolution.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC RESPONSIBILITY

The basic functions of a university are the advancement and dissemination of knowledge, the development of critical thinking, and the education of citizens and professional workers within the society of which the university is a part.

The indispensable condition for the successful discharge of these functions is an atmosphere of intellectual freedom. Unless free to pursue the quest for knowledge and understanding, wherever it may lead, and to report and discuss the findings, whatever they may be, the university faculty member cannot properly perform work. As a participant in an enterprise that depends upon freedom for its health and

integrity, the faculty member has a special interest in promoting conditions of free inquiry and furthering public understanding of academic freedom.

Freedom entails responsibilities. It is incumbent upon the teaching assistant to accept the responsibilities which are concomitant with the needed freedom. All members of the University community are obligated to adhere strictly to the highest standards of integrity in study, research, instruction, and evaluation.

It is presumed that those who instruct and administer will observe such standards of integrity. Administrators and senior faculty members are presumed further to encourage these standards among graduate teaching assistants. Graduate students are presumed to accept the concept of academic integrity and to seek to live by it, but they may need continuing clarification of the concept and guidance in its observance. Particularly, graduate students need the assurance that those who work honestly will not suffer thereby in comparison with the dishonest. Those who cannot or will not adopt the concept and practices of academic honesty do not belong within the University.

PRIVACY: FAMILY EDUCATION RIGHTS AND PRIVACY ACT (FERPA)

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA or Buckley Amendment) passed by Congress on November 19, 1974, requires educational agencies or institutions to provide eligible students access to their educational records**. It also requires that certain identifiable information may not be revealed from a student's educational records to unauthorized third parties without the prior written consent of the student**. However, directory information, as defined in the *MSU Graduate School Catalog*, may be released without the written consent of the student.

GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT REQUIREMENTS AND OBLIGATIONS

Within a syllabus distributed at the first meeting of a course, make clear the objectives of the course or program, establish requirements, set standards of achievement, and evaluation of the student's performance.

Meet classes as scheduled and, when circumstances do not allow such, arrange alternate and equivalent instruction.

Present a reasonable range of opinions on controversial issues within the scope of the course. A faculty member's own views on such issues should always be identified as such. When values, judgments, or speculative opinions rather than fact constitute part of the subject matter presented, they should be appropriately identified as such.

Evaluate a student's work fairly and impartially. Such evaluation should be consistent with recognized standards and must not be influenced by irrelevancies such as religion, race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, political views, or be based on a student's agreement with the teacher's opinion on controversial issues in the discipline.

Do not engage in any exploitation of students for personal advantage.

Describe to students, within the period in which a student may add or drop a course, orally, or in writing, or by reference to printed course descriptions, the general content and objectives of a course; and announce the methods and standards of evaluation, including the importance to be assigned to various factors in academic evaluation and, in advance of any evaluation, the permissible materials or references allowed during evaluation. See Academic Add/Drop Policy (AOP 12.01) for more information.

CLASS ATTENDANCE: INSTRUCTORS

It is assumed that instructors will be in classes during the full scheduled times unless prevented by circumstances beyond their control. When teachers cannot meet scheduled classes, timely announcements must be made. When a teacher is absent and has not been able to notify the class ahead of time, by custom, the class remains in the classroom for at least ten minutes after the beginning of the period, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor.

CLASS ATTENDANCE: STUDENTS

Upon registration, a student accepts the responsibility of attending all classes and completing all assignments. Students have the responsibility of making arrangements satisfactory to the instructor regarding all absences unless unusual circumstances arise. Such arrangements should be made prior to the absence. Class attendance will not be the only factor when grades are assigned. More information can be found in AOP 12.09.

STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

Instructors are expected, as part of their professional duties, to engage in instructor-student dialogue. Faculty may be the first to recognize students in distress. When professional guidance and counseling would help a student, an instructor should refer the student to Student Counseling Services (662-325-2091) or the Dean of Student's Office (662-325-3611). Additional information to help students in distress can be found here. MSU students, faculty, and staff should not presume or promise confidentiality to anyone who discusses any violation of MSU policy or state law. Once an incident has been reported to a campus official, it becomes the university's obligation to take appropriate measures.

EXAMINATIONS

Time and Place - A schedule of time and place for examinations is published for each examination period. Except for the latitude described below, all examinations must be in conformity with the published schedule. When teaching more than one section of the same course, the instructor may grant permission to one or more students to take the final examination in any one of the instructor's sections, provided this procedure does not result in a conflict or in too many examinations in one day.

Examinations - All final examinations shall be held as specified on the examination schedule except for classes meeting fewer than two lectures per week and/or certain other classes whose examinations may be given at particular times by special permission from the Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. Exceptions to the published examination schedule will be announced in the classes affected. Classes meeting fewer than two lecture hours per week and all laboratories will have their examinations at the last regular meeting of the class. Evening classes will have their examinations at the regular meeting hour of the class during the examination period.

Exceptions to this schedule should be discouraged. However, if any exceptions are considered, they must be approved by the respective department head and dean, with copies of these approvals placed on file in the dean's office.

ACADEMIC GRADING AND STUDENT CLASSIFICATION

The class work of the student will be rated according to the following pattern of values. Please consult AOP 12.12 for the policy and procedures for credit and grades.

Grade		Quality Points Per Credit Hour
A	Excellent	4
B	Good	3
C	Satisfactory	2
D	Poor	1
F	Failure	0
I	Incomplete	0
S	Satisfactory	--
U	Unsatisfactory	--
W	Withdrawn Without Penalty	--
WI	Permanent Incomplete	--

RETENTION OF RECORDS

As part of the University's grade appeal procedure, instructors are required to keep records on grades, examinations, projects, term papers and other pertinent material not returned to the students on file for a minimum of six months.

OFFICE HOURS

Instructors should arrange weekday office hours to accommodate the need for student conferences in keeping with departmental policies and customs.