

UMBC

GRADUATE SCHOOL

**GRADUATE ASSISTANT  
POLICIES & GUIDELINES**

*Published by the Graduate School, University of Maryland Baltimore County, 2009  
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I. QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS &amp; SELECTION .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>II. CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>III. APPOINTMENT, REAPPOINTMENT, &amp; DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>IV. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>V. SALARIES &amp; STIPENDS .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>VI. BENEFITS AVAILABLE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>VII. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>VIII. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>IX. DUTIES.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>X. ADDITIONAL UMBC ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>XI. PERFORMANCE REVIEWS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>XII. MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>XIII. CONDUCT &amp; DISCIPLINE.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>XIV. TERMINATION.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>XV. TAX STATUS.....</b>	<b>14</b>

# GRADUATE ASSISTANT POLICIES & GUIDELINES

*Published by the Graduate School, University of Maryland, Baltimore County, 2008*

Graduate assistantships are available to qualified, full-time, degree-seeking graduate students. An assistantship is awarded to a student to enable him or her to obtain academic or research experience while making progress toward a graduate degree.

Graduate assistants are assigned individual duties consistent with the needs of the department and the experience and quality of the student. Graduate assistants have a role as a professional (albeit of an apprentice nature) in the University, and the duties of a graduate assistant are consistent with the teaching and research missions of the University.

All graduate students holding U.S. citizenship wishing financial support from the Financial Aid and Scholarships Office must complete a FAFSA form each year (January) <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>.

Graduate assistants should become thoroughly familiar with the academic regulations of the Graduate School published in the Graduate School Catalog and on the Graduate School website <http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/index.html> and the special requirements of their program. This manual is a compilation of University policies and practices governing the position of graduate assistant. Other University policies and procedures which may apply can be found in the **Graduate School Catalog** or under Graduate School Policies on the Graduate School website: <http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/procedures/policies.html>.



## I. QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS & SELECTION

A graduate assistant must be a full-time registered graduate student who is enrolled in a degree program and who is making satisfactory progress toward the degree. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward the degree. Satisfactory progress is defined as 3.0 or higher G.P.A. and a satisfactory progress report by the student's mentor or Graduate Program Director. Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who appear likely to render a high quality of service to the University by their teaching and research activities.

Applications for assistantships should be made directly to the department in which the applicant desires to study. Offers of assistantships are made contingent on available funds and admission of the student to a degree granting graduate program.

Selection of graduate assistants is made by the chairperson of the department and/or program director with the recommendation of a graduate student recruitment committee or those responsible for graduate studies in that area. Selection of research assistants can also be made by individual faculty members who have external research grants.

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County is an equal opportunity institution with respect to both education and employment. Its policies are consistent with pertinent federal and state laws and regulations on affirmative action equal opportunity employment. Graduate assistants are selected in compliance with these policies.

## **II. CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYMENT STATUS**

There are seven categories of employment for graduate students: Teaching Assistantship, Research Assistantship, Graduate Administrative Assistantship, Graduate Residential Assistantship, Peaceworker Graduate Assistantship, Grader, and Hourly Employee.

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANT (TEACHING)**

A graduate student whose primary focus is assisting in a teaching program. A full-time teaching assistant works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with University guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and the UMBC GA Health Insurance.

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANT (RESEARCH)**

A graduate student whose primary focus is research. A full-time research assistant works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with University guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and the UMBC GA Health Insurance.

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANT (ADMINISTRATIVE)**

A graduate student whose primary focus is assisting with administrative support functions within the needs of a department. A full-time administrative graduate assistant works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with University guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and the UMBC GA Health Insurance.

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANT (RESIDENTIAL)**

A graduate student who assists with the administrative support functions for the Office of Residential Life. The Graduate Residential Assistant works 20 hours per week for the Office of Residential Life, is paid a stipend consistent with University guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and the UMBC GA Health Insurance. He/she receives accommodations in an on-campus apartment and board. These positions are usually awarded to students who have had previous residential life employment experience. A specific description of the position and qualifications may be obtained from the Office of Residential Life.

### **GRADUATE ASSISTANT (PEACEWORKER)**

A graduate student who participates in the Shriver Peaceworker Program and whose primary focus is community service that addresses the economic, social, and/or cultural problems confronting urban America. A full-time Peaceworker graduate assistant works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with University guidelines, and is eligible for tuition remission and the UMBC GA Health Insurance.

### **GRADER**

A graduate student who provides support in a teaching program by grading student assignments. A full-time grader works 20 hours per week, is paid a stipend consistent with university guidelines, is eligible to be billed at the in-state rate for tuition, and is eligible to purchase insurance under the UMBC GA Health Insurance plan. A half-time grader works 10 hours per week.

### **HOURLY EMPLOYEE**

A graduate student whose primary focus is to assist with the administrative and support functions within the needs of a department or University office. An hourly employee may work a maximum of 20 hours per week. An hourly employee is not a graduate assistant and is not entitled to any of the benefits provided for graduate assistants. Hourly wage rates may vary, but no student can be paid less than the equivalent hourly rate of the minimum hourly stipend posted on the Graduate School website [http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum\\_stipend\\_levels.html](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum_stipend_levels.html).

## **III. APPOINTMENT, REAPPOINTMENT & DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

An assistantship appointment may be for either a full-time assistantship (20 hours per week) or a half-time assistantship (10 hours per week). Appointments may not be for less than half-time. One-quarter, two-thirds, or three-quarter or other fractional appointments are not permitted.



Graduate assistants are generally appointed for either a regular academic year (10 months) or a 12-month period in research or administration. The appointment may be for a shorter period if so specified in the official offer. The academic year appointment begins in the summer and may end late in the spring semester or early summer. Starting and ending dates each year are determined based on the university payroll schedule. Students may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the department. In order to allow a larger number of qualified students to benefit from these positions, some departments have limited the number of years in which a student may serve as a graduate assistant.

Each department is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with University policy, for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships. In general, reappointment is

dependent upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree, and the needs of the department. As with all faculty and staff positions, appointment and reappointment are contingent on the availability of funds.

The continuation of an assistantship will be evaluated at the end of each semester and is contingent on the student's quality of work, academic standing, and registration in appropriate courses.

#### **IV. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT**

The official letter of appointment for a graduate assistantship comes from the vice-president, dean, department chairperson, program director, or faculty member whose research project funds the assistantship. Students **MUST** be provided with a letter of appointment/reappointment annually. This letter will provide pertinent information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

- a. stipend level with biweekly pay rate;
- b. remission of tuition for permissible level of course registration per semester;
- c. UMBC GA Health Insurance benefits;
- d. specific beginning and ending dates of the appointment;
- e. date on which the graduate assistant is expected to report to the department;
- f. indication of the expected type of duties;
- g. indication of approximate time commitment in terms of responsibilities to the department;
- h. acceptance deadline date;
- i. the Associate Dean of the Graduate School must be copied on all letters of acceptance. For international students, the Director of International Education Services must also be copied.

A sample *Letter of Appointment* is available on the Graduate Schools' website:

[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad\\_assist/award\\_letter.doc](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad_assist/award_letter.doc).

#### **V. SALARIES & STIPENDS**

- a. Minimum stipend levels for graduate assistants, graders and hourly employees are set annually in accordance with institutional guidelines.
- b. The minimum stipend levels are available on the Graduate School's website at [http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum\\_stipend\\_levels.html](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum_stipend_levels.html).

## VI. BENEFITS AVAILABLE

### Remission of Tuition

Tuition benefits are based upon assistantship appointment status.

**Full Assistantship** (20 hours per week): up to **10 credit hours** tuition remission each semester, fall and spring.

**Half Assistantship** (10 hours per week): up to **5 credit hours** tuition remission each semester, fall and spring.

Graduate assistants appointed to a **12-month**, full-time assistantship may also be eligible to receive tuition remission for 2 credit hours of coursework or 1 credit of 799 or 898 during the summer session, in addition to the 10 credits each fall and spring semesters. Graduate teaching assistants supported by the Office of Summer, Winter and Special programs are eligible for up to 3 credits of tuition remission during the summer session. The policy on tuition remission for summer is available on the Graduate School's website at *WEB ADDRESS GIVEN ONCE GUIDELINES ARE POSTED*. There is no remission for winter session.

For **each semester** assistants are eligible for remission, they must complete and submit a Tuition Remission form by the required deadline. **Tuition remission is not automatically applied to a student's account.** Remission will be granted only for those courses deemed necessary for the completion of the student's degree as determined by the student's mentor and Graduate Program Director.

### Student Fees

Payment of student fees is mandatory and is the responsibility of the graduate assistant or considered an additional benefit to be paid by the department.

### In-State Billing Status

During the semesters of the performance of the assistantship, graduate assistants are eligible to be billed at the in-state rate for tuition in excess of the allotted remission. All other fees are the responsibility of the graduate student. Upon termination of the assistantship, students revert to their original billing status unless they are granted in-state re-classification through the formal petition process for change of residency. Copies of the in-state status residency petition are available from the Graduate School or the Office of the Registrar <http://www.umbc.edu/registrar/residency.html>.

### Health Insurance

Graduate assistants are eligible to enroll in the UMBC GA Health Insurance program. Additional information is available from the departmental payroll office or Graduate School or University Health Services or the GSA website <http://www.umbc.edu/gsa/healthcare.html>.

### **Retirement, Unemployment and Social Security**

Retirement contributions are not withheld from the salaries of graduate assistants, and they are not entitled to retirement benefits. Social Security and unemployment insurance (FICA) are not withheld during the academic year when a student is registered as a full-time student. Graduate assistants are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

### **Credit Union**

Graduate assistants are eligible to join the Maryland State Employees Credit Union.

### **Sick Leave**

If a graduate assistant becomes ill, sick leave should be supported collegially, up to 40 hours total during the contract year (this includes summer term for TAs supported during the summer session). After four consecutive days of sick leave, the supervisor may require the graduate assistant to provide a letter from a physician or other licensed health-care professional that states (1) the nature of the illness; (2) that the graduate assistant can or cannot not return to work for health reasons; and, (3) the duration of the required sick leave. This letter can be submitted upon the GA's return to work. Sick days should be recorded on time sheets using the UMBC standard time sheet codes.

### **Maternity Leave**

Maternity leave is not regarded as sick leave. If maternity leave is required, it should be discussed with the graduate assistant's graduate program director or supervisor as soon as possible. While maternity leave arrangements should be made to fit the individual circumstances, all arrangements must include a six-week minimum post-birth recovery period. Examples of leave arrangements that have been used in the past are available from the Graduate School. All maternity leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. A central pool of funding will be available to reimburse, upon request from the department, the cost of stipends of GAs on maternity leave.

### **Vacation**

Academic year graduate assistants are not eligible to earn credit towards vacation. All graduate assistants with twelve-month appointments will be allowed time away from their duties during the course of the appointment. A twenty-hour assistantship over a twelve-month period carries with it the expectation that the student will be allowed 40 hours of leave. This time away from duties must be taken during the current appointment and may not be accumulated or transferred, nor does it include time when the University is closed. It may be taken following reasonable prior notification and with the approval of the student's supervisor. These days should be recorded on time sheets using the UMBC standard time sheet codes. Excess leave, unused at the end of the contractual appointment, will not be "paid-out" or financially compensated, but instead will be forfeited.

### **Other Long-Term Leave**

Other long-term leave that is not discussed here will be handled on an individual basis. All leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

### **Holidays and Snow Days**

When the university is closed for a recognized holiday, due to inclement weather, or for any other reason, graduate assistants will not be required to come to work. Graduate assistants (GAs) who would normally work those days will receive their normal bi-weekly compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed with increased hours on other days. These days should be recorded on time sheets using the UMBC standard time sheet codes. Holidays and inclement weather days do not excuse GAs from completing work on time. For example, homework assignments must be graded by the previously agreed upon date. Under certain circumstances, selected GAs can be classified as essential staff through the regular university process to maintain sensitive equipment and laboratory animals.

### **Library Privileges**

Faculty level library privileges may be obtained by presenting a copy of the assistantship letter of appointment to the Library each instance of use. Additional information can be found on the UMBC Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery website for borrowing information and privileges at <http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/circulation/borrowing.php>.

## **VII. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

Graduate assistants must be registered as full-time students whether they are appointed to a full-time assistantship or a half-time assistantship. To be considered full-time, a student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credits. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward their degree.

A **full-time assistantship** is equivalent to 5 credits, therefore a student appointed to a full assistantship must register for a minimum of 4 credits in addition to the assistantship

A **half-time assistantship** is equivalent to 3 credits, therefore a student appointed to a half assistantship must register for a minimum of 6 credits in addition to the assistantship

There are three scenarios for Graduate Assistants or Graders:

- If you are a full-time Graduate Assistant or are a full-time Grader, such that the total commitment is 20 hours per week, please register for GRAD 601. This course is fixed at five credits.
- If you are a part-time Graduate Assistant or a part-time Grader in two different departments, such that the total commitment is 20 hours per week, please register for GRAD 601. This course is fixed at five credits.

- If you are a part-time Graduate Assistant or a part-time Grader, such that the total commitment is 10 hours per week, please register for GRAD 600. This course is fixed at three credits.

Please note:

- You will not be billed for either GRAD 600 or GRAD 601.
- You will receive credit towards full-time status for these courses.
- You must be a full-time student to be eligible for Graduate Assistant or Grader positions.
- GRAD 600 and GRAD 601 are not eligible for financial aid, nor are they considered when determining your financial aid eligibility.
- GRAD 600 and GRAD 601 do not appear on your transcript.
- You will be required to register for your respective course for each semester.
- Master's thesis research (799) is a variable (2-9) credit course (billed at ½ rate) – based on the amount of involvement in the university research program.

Pre-Candidacy Doctoral dissertation research (898) (for students who have not reached the doctoral candidacy stage) is a variable (3-9) credit course (billed at 1/3 rate)—based on the amount of involvement in the university research program..

Doctoral dissertation research (899) for students who have reached the doctoral candidacy stage carries 9 credits (billed at 2/9 rate). Each semester after the student reaches candidacy, he or she must register for 9 credits each fall and spring until graduation.

## **VIII. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP**

The graduate assistant works directly under the supervision of the department that offers the appointment. The department determines the assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for continuation, reappointment, and promotion. The department is the primary source of information about any of the details of the assistantship. The responsibility for the assistant's work is determined by the department chair or program director, any duly appointed executive committees and assistants to the chair, and the faculty member assigned to supervise a particular course, laboratory session, or research project.

## **IX. DUTIES**

The assigned duties of a graduate assistant shall be consistent with the mission of the University. The particular assignment depends on the department's needs and the experience and qualifications of the assistant.

### **Graduate Teaching Assistants**

The specific duties of a graduate teaching assistant vary from one department to another, but for the majority, assignments and responsibilities will fall into the following five categories:

- a. teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion section of a course;
- b. teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the director or directors of the course;
- c. assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative duties necessary for a course or courses;
- d. assisting with the administration of community programs, workshops, etc.;
- e. assisting with general departmental administrative duties.

All graduate teaching assistants serving in any capacity are under the direction and close supervision of a regularly appointed member of the faculty. Graduate students functioning as teaching assistants will not be permitted to be solely in charge of a course, but will be given an appropriate degree of responsibility in a classroom or laboratory so that they may be introduced to teaching activities gradually and effectively. The final responsibility for material covered, grades, and other formal course responsibilities must remain with the supervising faculty member. Distribution of responsibilities among teaching assistants is in the hands of the department and should reflect both the interests and skills of the graduate assistants and the desire of the department to further his or her professional development.

#### **Graduate Research Assistants**

The duties of graduate research assistants vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of funding. Graduate research assistants *may* or *may not* be assigned to work on research which is directly applicable to their thesis or dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's or doctoral degree. The duties of the research assistant are performed under the direction and supervision of a member of the faculty.

#### **Graduate Assistants with Administrative Assignments**

A number of administrative offices employ graduate assistants in administrative roles. Responsibilities vary, as do the durations of appointments. Usually graduate assistants with such appointments perform administrative support functions but should not perform the duties of or replace an Administrative Assistant.

#### **Graduate Assistants with Residential Assignments**

A small number of resident graduate assistant positions in the UMBC undergraduate residence halls are available. Application should be made to the Director of Residential Life.

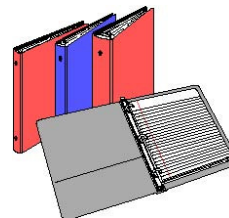
#### **Peaceworker Graduate Assistants**

A graduate student who participates in the Shriver Peaceworker Program and whose primary focus is community service that addresses the economic, social and/or cultural problems confronting urban America is eligible for a Peaceworker Graduate

Assistantship. Supervision for these assistantship recipients resides in the Shriver Center.

## X. ADDITIONAL UMBC ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

Graduate students awarded a full assistantship are not eligible to work for the University beyond the 20 hours per week associated with the assistantship. Any exceptions **must** have the prior approval of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.



Students awarded a half assistantship are not eligible to work for the University for more than 10 additional hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with the assistantship.

***Winter and Summer Sessions:*** During the Winter or Summer Sessions, Graduate Assistants on a 10 month assignment are eligible to work for the University up to an additional 20 hours per week beyond the 20 hours associated with their assistantship. However, employment may not exceed a 40-hour work week.

## XI. PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Each department employing Graduate Assistants is responsible for developing clear descriptions of the duties required of students employed in these positions, descriptions that are detailed and specific enough to make meaningful evaluation of performance feasible and that permit external evaluation of the approximate equity of the workloads associated with the different varieties of duties assigned. Each graduate assistant should be provided with the appropriate job description prior to commencing each semester of appointment<sup>1</sup> and clear information regarding supervising authority and the criteria and structure of how performance will be evaluated.

Each department is responsible for determining and implementing procedures for review and evaluation of graduate assistants. Therefore, the process of evaluation will vary, but it may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluation. The results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the graduate assistant concerned.

Every attempt should be made to resolve difficulties between graduate assistants and faculty members involved. If such resolution is impossible, official grievances should be made per the Graduate School Policies that can be found at <http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/procedures/policies.html>.

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<sup>1</sup> 12-month graduate assistantships only require annual job descriptions unless duties change during the appointment contract.

Graduate assistants are encouraged to document work related experiences for future job searches. Faculty members should agree to provide letters of reference for work done which will be included in the student's departmental file.

## **XII. MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS**

Several departments have formal or informal structures for handling complaints of graduate assistants and graduate students. An attempt should always be made first to resolve difficulties at the departmental level. In addition, the University has in effect procedures for orderly action on specific issues such as race discrimination, sex discrimination, academic misconduct, sexual harassment, arbitrary and capricious grading, and student academic and non-academic misconduct. A mediation procedure is also established to try to resolve conflicts that are not covered by other grievance policies. These policies may be found under Graduate School Policies on the Graduate School website: <http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/procedures/policies.html>.

1. **Informal Consultation:** If a graduate assistant is having unusual difficulties with his or her assignment, the situation first should be discussed with the individual faculty member who serves as the supervisor. If the problem is not resolved, the graduate assistant may wish to discuss the matter with the director of the graduate program and the chairperson of the department.
2. **Formal Complaints:** If a graduate assistant does not receive satisfaction at the departmental level, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The Associate Dean is available to mediate any difficulties whether they are related to work as a graduate assistant or as a graduate student. The Dean and Associate Dean are directly concerned with all academic problems of graduate students that require mediation beyond the department.

## **XIII. CONDUCT & DISCIPLINE**

In their teaching and research activities, all graduate assistants are subject to the ethical precepts and code of the academic profession, to federal laws such as immigration status, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the University policies which govern their institutional obligations. Violation of any of these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action. The minimum expectation of graduate assistants includes behavior in compliance with the UMBC Code of Student Conduct <http://www.umbc.edu/sjp/articles/articleALL.html>.

## **XIV. TERMINATION**

An appointment may be terminated before expiration of the specified time under

unusual and compelling conditions that include, but are not limited to:

- a. incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty;
- b. misconduct that is job-related;
- c. delinquency in academic work;
- d. moral turpitude;
- e. discontinuance of the work in which the appointment is made;
- f. academic misconduct;
- g. enrolling in courses unrelated to the degree being pursued;
- h. violation of the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities for Academic Integrity;
- i. voluntary mutual agreement;
- j. budgetary appropriations;
- k. violation of federal or state law;
- l. misrepresentation or false data given on graduate application material; or,
- m. violation of the UMBC Code of Student Conduct.



Except in the most egregious instances, the graduate assistant will receive written notice of termination at least two weeks prior to the effective date of termination. The amount of the stipend and the tuition remission benefit will be prorated according to the termination date.

## **XV. TAX STATUS**

As a result of the U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987, all graduate students became liable to pay income tax on stipends received for graduate assistantships.

Reductions in tuition received by assistants are tax-exempt provided that such reductions are not received in lieu of compensation for performance by the recipient of past, present, or future service.

If an assistant has any questions, it is best, in every case, to consult tax counsel or the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.