

GA HANDBOOK

2025-2026



GRADUATE SCHOOL

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

WELCOME

Welcome to East Tennessee State University

Your selection as a graduate assistant is a significant achievement in your graduate education. Whether your responsibilities will involve teaching, research, or administration/service, this assignment places you in a unique dual role in the university, as you straddle the role of student and the role of an instructor, researcher, or other support staff member.

The experience and opportunities you will gain as a graduate assistant can have a profound impact on your professional growth. Thus, your role as an emerging researcher, scholar, and teacher is important and to be taken seriously. Avail yourself of opportunities offered through your program and the university to grow professionally. We, the university faculty, are entrusting you to be the best graduate assistant—and student—you can be.

To guide you in your assignment, this handbook has been developed to inform you of various policies, rules, issues and services in fulfillment of your obligations as a graduate assistant or tuition scholar. While the [Graduate Catalog](#) provides the policies and processes for graduate students, this handbook is meant to guide you as a graduate assistant. However, this handbook does not replace any other official University policies or documents. In addition, the unit in which you are employed in your role may also have specific relevant policies and procedures that you must learn and follow.

Please be assured that the Graduate School is fully supportive of your educational training and advanced study. We hope that your graduate experiences at ETSU will be meaningful and challenging.

The best of success in the pursuit of your graduate and professional goals!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Welcome to East Tennessee State University	2
Becoming Part of East Tennessee State University and the Graduate School	7
ETSU Mission.....	7
Graduate School Mission	8
Graduate Assistantships	9
Purpose of Graduate Assistantships	9
Types of Graduate Assistantships	9
Teaching Assistants	10
Teaching Associates	10
Research Assistants.....	10
Administrative Assistants.....	11
Supervisory Unit.....	11
Eligibility to Hold a Graduate Assistantship	11
English Proficiency Requirement	12
Physical Presence in the United States	12
Course Load Requirements.....	12
Time Limit.....	13
Financial Package and Information.....	14
Explanation of Full- and Half-Time Graduate Assistantships.....	14
Financial Package	14
In-state Graduate Assistantship Tuition Waiver	14
Out-of-State Graduate Assistantship Tuition Waiver	14
Limits on Tuition Waivers	15
Program of Study	15
Fees	15
Winter Session	15
Summer	15
Other Scholarships	15
Federal Financial Aid	16
Pre-Employment, Onboarding, and Offboarding	17
Pre-Employment Requirements	17

Contracts	17
I-9	17
W-4.....	17
Direct Deposit	17
Onboarding	17
Offboarding	18
Working Conditions and Time Keeping	19
Teaching Assistant/Associate Workload.....	19
Research Assistant Workload	20
Leave	21
Recording Time	21
Accepting an Assistantship	21
Additional Employment at ETSU.....	21
Professional Expectations and Responsibilities.....	23
Professional Demeanor.....	23
Confidentiality.....	23
Training	24
Solving Problems in the Workplace	24
Solving Problems with Other Students.....	24
Solving Problems with Co-Workers	25
Solving Problems with a Supervisor.....	25
Utilizing “Chain of Command”	26
Appointment, Evaluation, and Continuation.....	27
Evaluation	27
Rescinding a Graduate Assistantship Offer	27
Resignation from a Graduate Assistantship	28
Non-Renewal of Graduate Assistantship Contract.....	28
Future Eligibility after Non-Renewal.....	29
Cancellation of a Graduate Assistantship	29
1. Failure to Maintain Good Academic Standing and Make Satisfactory Academic Progress.....	29
2. Unsatisfactory Evaluation or Performance	29

3. Failure to Meet Departmental/Supervisory Unit Policies	29
Performance Improvement Plan	30
When a Performance Improvement Plan is Not Required	30
When a Performance Improvement Plan is Required	30
Cancellation Process	31
Acts of Misconduct and Unprofessionalism That May Warrant Immediate Action.....	32
Appeal Process for Contract Cancellation	33
Future Eligibility after Cancellation	33
Tuition Reimbursement Following Resignation or Cancellation	33
Rights and Protections	34
Discrimination and Harassment.....	34
Disability Accommodations Requests.....	34
Limited English Proficiency	34
Pregnancy Accommodation Requests	34
Title IX (Sex and Gender Discrimination)	34
Workplace Injury.....	35
Workplace Violence	35
Resources for Graduate Students.....	36
Graduate Student Success Specialists	36
Graduate and Professional Student Association	36
Center for Academic Achievement.....	36
Graduate Council	36
Other Campus Resources.....	36
Appendix 1: Additional Information for Those with Teaching Responsibilities	37
Developing Your Course.....	37
Some Important Teaching Policies	37
Posting Student Grades	38
Retention of Papers, Tests, and Records	38
Academic Integrity and Misconduct	38
Grade Appeals.....	38
Early Attendance Reporting.....	38
Early Semester Progress Reports.....	38

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).....	39
ETSU Email for Communication	39
Other Teaching Information	39
Responsibilities for Course Instruction	39
Academic Calendar	39
D2L	40
Center for Teaching Excellence.....	40
The Importance of Your Teaching Role	40
Establishing Boundaries as an Instructor.....	40
Appendix 2: Additional Information for Supervisory Units	42
Contracts.....	42
Pre-Employment Paperwork.....	42
Onboarding	42
Post-Employment Paperwork.....	42
Training	42
Evaluations.....	43
Funding for Assistantships	43
Grant-Funded Assistantships	43
Tuition Remission Availability Following Cancellation/Resignation.....	43
Appendix 3: Performance Improvement Plan Sample Template	45
1. 🌟 Purpose of This Plan	45
2. 🌀 Areas for Growth	45
1. 🎯 Goals for Improvement	46
4. 🛠️ Support and Resources.....	46
5. 🤝 Communication and Feedback.....	47
6. 📅 Review and Next Steps	47
7. 📝 Acknowledgment.....	47
Appendix 4: Sample Template for Documenting PIP Improvement	48
Appendix 5: Sample Template for Final PIP Evaluation Form	49
Appendix 6: Graduate Assistant Evaluation Form	51

Becoming Part of East Tennessee State University and the Graduate School

East Tennessee State University (ETSU) was founded in 1911 to improve the quality of life for people in the Appalachian Highlands and beyond. Dr. Brian Noland is the ninth president of East Tennessee State University in 2012. Dr. Kimberly D. McCorkle is the Senior Vice President for Academics and Provost. ETSU's motto of "Bucs Go Beyond" captures the university's commitment to excellence in academics, research, and community engagement.

ETSU's Graduate School has been supporting graduate education for over 75 years since the admission of the university's first graduate students. As an ETSU graduate student, you part of a storied tradition of graduate education.

ETSU Mission

ETSU provides a student-centered community of learning, reflecting high standards and promoting a balance of liberal arts and professional preparation, and continuous improvement. The university conducts a wide array of educational and research programs and clinical services including a comprehensive Academic Health Sciences Center. Education is the university's highest priority, and the institution is committed to increasing the level of educational attainment in the state and region based on core values where:

PEOPLE come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential;

RELATIONSHIPS are built on honesty, integrity, and trust;

DIVERSITY of people and thought is respected;

EXCELLENCE is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic;

EFFICIENCY is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources; and

COMMITMENT to intellectual achievement is embraced.

ETSU endorses the value of liberal education and provides enriching experiences in honors education, student research and creative activity, study abroad, service learning, and community-based education.

ETSU honors and preserves the rich heritage of Southern Appalachia through distinctive education, research, and service programs and is actively engaged in regional stewardship. ETSU affirms the contributions of diverse people, cultures, and thought to intellectual, social, and economic development.

ETSU offers students a total university experience that includes cultural and artistic programs, diverse student activities, a variety of residential opportunities, and outstanding recreational and intercollegiate athletic programs.

ETSU awards degrees in over one hundred baccalaureate, master, and doctoral programs, including distinctive interdisciplinary programs and distance education offerings that serve students from the region and beyond.

(Approved by the ETSU Board of Trustees 9/16/2022)

Graduate School Mission

The mission of the Graduate School is to foster post-baccalaureate programs of scholarship that are recognized for their excellence and contributions to society. The Graduate School will provide an environment that stimulates:

- Advanced understanding of the concepts, issues and practices of a discipline;
- Independent thought and the ability to generate new knowledge;
- The ability to contribute significantly to the academic community, professions, and society;
- Diversity among ideas, programs, and people.

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Assistantships (GA) support the institution and the student. Graduate assistants enhance the research, teaching, and service mission of the university while providing graduate students with important professional experience while earning a degree.

Purpose of Graduate Assistantships

Both the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC) and the Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools (TCGS) maintain the position that the goal of the graduate assistantship should be to enhance students' ability to complete their graduate degrees.

The Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools provides a guiding philosophy of graduate assistantships:

Programs of graduate study are designed to transform the individual from student to professional scholar. When a graduate assistantship is well conceived and executed, it should serve as an ideal instrument to help facilitate the desired transformation. The primary goal of an assistantship, then, is to facilitate progress toward the graduate degree. Rather than interfere or conflict with the student's educational objective, the assistantship is to aid in the prompt and successful completion of the degree program. While the student makes progress toward an advanced degree, he or she also receives work experience in a profession under the supervision of a faculty mentor. (2)¹

When at all possible, work assignments made to graduate assistants should reinforce their educational goals. For example, research assignments made to graduate research assistants should provide an experience that will help them hone research skills and teaching assistantships should help prepare the student to function independently in the classroom. The best use of the graduate assistantship provides professional growth for the student as well as benefits to the university. Courses have been designated to document these professional growth experiences on the graduate student transcript. XXXX 5019 (Supervised Experience in Teaching) and XXXX 5029 (Supervised Experience in Research) are available in nearly all academic units, and XXXX 5039 (Supervised Experience in Administration) is available in many units (where XXXX is the prefix for courses in your program, e.g., ENGL for the English M.A. program). Students receiving graduate assistantships must consult with their supervisor and enroll in the appropriate course for each term that they are receiving support.

Types of Graduate Assistantships

ETSU recognizes four (4) types of graduate assistantships:

¹ C.W. Minkel & Mary P. Richards, 1987, *A Model Policy for Graduate Assistantship Administration*. Tennessee Conference of Graduate Schools, Publication No. 4, University of Tennessee, Knoxville Graphic Arts Service.

Teaching Assistants, Teaching Associates, Research Assistants, and Administrative Assistants. The duties assigned to graduate assistants will usually vary according to category and sponsoring unit; some assistants may be assigned duties in more than one of these categories.

Teaching Assistants

Teaching assistants usually work to support the efforts of faculty members in specific courses. They will generally not teach a course as the primary instructor but may be responsible for a section of a lecture, laboratory, or physical activity course under the direct supervision of an experienced faculty member. Responsibilities may also include grading examinations, leading discussion sections, or performing other duties related to the instructional program.

Teaching Associates

The graduate teaching associate will normally have primary responsibility for teaching an undergraduate course and for assigning final grades for said course. A graduate teaching associate shall not have responsibility for teaching a graduate level course. ETSU's accrediting body, The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC), has specific requirements that must be met before a graduate student can be assigned responsibilities in this category. These requirements include:

- having completed 18 graduate credits in the assigned teaching discipline;
- teaching under the supervision of a faculty member; and
- receiving regular in-service training.

In exceptional cases, relevant professional experience and demonstrated contributions to the assigned teaching discipline may be considered in lieu of formal academic training. The department, and particularly of the faculty supervisor, have a duty to help the teaching associate gain skill in communicating knowledge of the discipline to students.

The department chair or unit supervisor is responsible for certifying each graduate teaching assistant or teaching associate assignment and ensuring each person placed in such an assignment meets the appropriate requirements for the assignment as given above. This certification must be included in the comments section in the GA contract for review by the Dean (or designee) of the Graduate School.

Research Assistants

The graduate research assistant will work under the supervision of a faculty mentor. The research assistant is assigned to conduct research that is for the student's own learning and for the benefit of the university, faculty, or academic staff supervisor or granting agency. Often, the research is directly related to the professional and scholarly goals of the student, but sometimes Research Assistants are hired to work on projects unrelated to their own research. The student should gain experience in all aspects of conducting a research project including such things as literature searches, design of experiments,

evaluation of information relevant to the project, and preparation of manuscripts to be submitted for publication. The development of these skills should advance the student's professional qualifications and, ideally, lead to the development of a prospectus for the thesis, or dissertation, or capstone project.

Administrative Assistants

The graduate administrative assistant may work at the level of a department, college, or university administrative unit. When at all possible, the work assigned to the graduate administrative assistant should be relevant to the graduate program and the professional and scholarly goals of the student. For example, this work could involve gathering, organizing, and evaluating information, engaging in editorial work related to the preparation and review of papers and reports, generating creative content to support a unit's social media or website, technical systems support and development, serving in residential housing, providing health and wellness care, or the like. The graduate administrative assistantship should provide the opportunity for the student to use knowledge of her or his academic field while enhancing skills relevant to the student's professional goals. The ideal graduate administrative assistantship will provide the student with a broader and deeper understanding of university function and, under the supervision of a mentor, enhance the quality of information available to the university.

Supervisory Unit

Graduate assistants provide teaching, research, or service/support to the sponsoring unit. Most often, the student's academic department or program is the sponsoring unit; however, campus services or other non-degree granting units may also be a sponsoring unit. External agencies may also fund graduate assistantships with approval of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Graduate assistants are responsible for satisfactorily performing the assigned duties of the sponsoring unit.

Eligibility to Hold a Graduate Assistantship

Candidates for appointment as graduate assistants must meet the following criteria:

- Graduate students must be officially admitted to the Graduate School and accepted into a graduate degree program.
- Students cannot be an M.D. or Pharm.D. student.
- Accelerated Bachelor's to Master's students can hold a GA position after they complete their undergraduate degree and become a graduate student.
- Graduate students who have a graduate assistantship and are admitted with provisions to a degree program have until the deadline stated in their offer of admission to meet the provisions stated in their offer of admission. If provisions are not met by the deadline, the graduate assistantship contract will be canceled unless the supervisory unit requests an exception in writing to the Dean of the Graduate School.

- Graduate students who have previously taken graduate level courses must have at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average to be awarded a graduate assistantship.
- Current graduate assistants must maintain a minimum 3.0 cumulative grade point average (GPA) to remain eligible for assistantship support. A graduate assistant who does not maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA will be allowed one (1) semester to remedy the GPA.

English Proficiency Requirement

Students whose prior language of education is not English must demonstrate a level of oral proficiency suitable to the responsibilities assigned to hold an assistantship. Students who meet this criterion and have a new graduate assistantship contract will receive an email with instructions on how to sign up for an Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). This interview will occur upon arrival at ETSU. Rating on this evaluation will determine eligibility for different categories of assignments. ETSU provides international students with a variety of opportunities to improve English fluency during their time as students.

Physical Presence in the United States

Students who hold F-1 visas must be physically and lawfully present in the United States to hold a graduate assistantship.

Course Load Requirements

The course load requirements for graduate assistants (both full and half) are as follows:

1. Graduate assistants are required to register for a minimum of nine (9) graduate credits per term during the Fall and Spring semesters. The required nine graduate credits must be maintained for the entire semester.
2. The course load may not include undergraduate courses unless the course is a required admission provision listed in the letter of admission. In this case, one undergraduate course of three (3) credits per semester for a limit of two semesters only may be taken to count towards course load eligibility required for a GA position.
3. Graduate students who have held assistantships for at least one semester, are within six semester hours or less of completing their programs, have applied to graduate, and are in their final full-time term of their graduate program are permitted to hold a graduate assistantship while enrolled in a minimum of six hours of graduate course work.
4. A graduate student holding an assistantship in the summer must be registered for a minimum of six (6) graduate credits during summer, which can be in any summer session. Graduate assistants may not take more than a total of nine (9) graduate credit hours during the entire summer. The Dean of the Graduate School (or designee) may approve requests for fewer credits in summer as required by the student's program of study or course offerings. The tuition waiver for Summer covers a maximum of six credits only, even if more credits are required by the program. Refer to the section "Summer Tuition Remission for Graduate Assistantships."

5. Graduate Assistants must enroll in XXXX 5019 (Supervised Experience in Teaching) and XXXX 5029 (Supervised Experience in Research) are available in nearly all academic units, and XXXX 5039 (Supervised Experience in Administration) is available in many units (where XXXX is the prefix for courses in your program, e.g., ENGL for the English M.A. program). Students receiving graduate assistantships must consult with their supervisor and enroll in the appropriate course for each term that they are receiving support.
6. The assistantship will be terminated if the student's academic load falls below nine graduate credits during Fall or Spring semester, or below six graduate credits during the summer semester or their final semester.
7. Graduate assistants may not enroll in more than sixteen (16) credits during the Fall or Spring terms without prior permission of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Time Limit

A student may hold a graduate assistantship for no more than four semesters in a master's program, four years in a doctoral program for those students entering with a master's degree, or six years in a doctoral program for students entering with a baccalaureate degree. Exception: Students enrolled in a single master's program with 50 or more credit hours to complete may hold a graduate assistantship for three years without additional approval (approved by Graduate Council March 22, 2022).

Requests for time extensions must be made by the supervisory unit in writing to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Financial Package and Information

Explanation of Full- and Half-Time Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistants are categorized as either full GA or one-half GA. A student receiving a full GA (50% work effort or 0.5 Full-Time Equivalent employment [FTE]) is assigned to 20 clock hours per week (or equivalent in classroom teaching or laboratory supervision) by the appropriate supervisor; a student receiving a half GA (25% work effort or 0.25 FTE) is assigned to 10 clock hours per week. Departments, colleges, and divisions are not authorized to offer a graduate assistantship of less than a half appointment. Most graduate assistantship occur on an academic year appointment, which is August 16-May 15.

Financial Package

Graduate assistantships receive a stipend and tuition waiver.

The minimum stipend for a full GA on an academic year appointment is \$3500 per semester for the 2025-2026 academic year. The minimum stipend for a half GA (.25 FTE/10 hours) on an academic year appointment is \$1750 per semester (i.e., one half of \$3500). Graduate Assistants are paid monthly. Those on an academic year appointment receive checks at the end of each respective month in September, October, November, and December, January, February, March, April. Those on a fiscal year appointment will receive checks monthly from July – June. (Note: Students who graduate in May or whose contract states otherwise will not receive a June check).

All graduate students at ETSU will be classified as either “in-state” or “out-of-state” for tuition and fee purposes. In-state students are required to pay in-state graduate tuition (called the maintenance fee at ETSU). Out-of-state students are required to pay in-state plus out-of-state graduate tuition if in an on-ground program, or the graduate eRate (online maintenance fee) if in an online program. Note: Auxiliary Services are responsible for the tuition waiver in their respective units.

In-state Graduate Assistantship Tuition Waiver

In-state full GAs will receive a waiver for the full amount of their in-state tuition. In-state half GAs will receive a waiver for half of their in-state tuition.

Out-of-State Graduate Assistantship Tuition Waiver

Out-of-state full GAs in on-ground programs will receive a waiver for the full amount of both their in-state and out-of-state tuition. Out-of-state half GAs will receive a waiver for half of their in-state tuition and the full amount of their out-of-state tuition.

Out-of-state GAs in online programs are not eligible for the eRate, but will be treated as if they were in an on-ground program. Out-of-state full GAs will receive a waiver for the full amount of

both their in-state and out-of-state tuition. Out-of-state half GAs will receive a waiver for half of their in-state tuition and the full amount of their out-of-state tuition.

Limits on Tuition Waivers

Program of Study

The tuition coverage covers credits in the student's program of study only.

Fees

The graduate assistantship does not cover program service or course fees.

Winter Session

The tuition remission that comes with a GA contract does not cover tuition for winter session courses and winter session courses do not count toward the requirement to be enrolled in 9 graduate hours for spring term (see Course Load Requirements below).

Summer

Students on a fiscal year (12-month) or summer term graduate assistantship are eligible for a summer tuition waiver. However, tuition support is very limited for summer session; consequently, the tuition waiver for Summer covers a **maximum** of six (6) credits. Even if a program requires that students enroll in more than six credits during the summer, the maximum tuition waiver is for six credits. Full GAs will receive a waiver of the full amount of tuition up to six credits, and half GAs will receive a waiver of half the amount of tuition up to six credits.

Graduate assistantships on an academic year appointment (9 months) who enroll in courses in summer sessions are responsible for tuition. However, out-of-state tuition is waived in the summer for academic year GAs who held a position in the at least the spring term of the academic year. Students who are taking courses in the summer must contact the Graduate School Office Manager and request that they be coded to pay summer tuition at the in-state rate to receive the out-of-state tuition waiver.

Other Scholarships

ETSU students who receive a graduate assistantship are not eligible for any other tuition discount programs at ETSU. This includes, but is not limited to, the Carter Scholarship, Carter Plus Scholarship, Creative Arts Scholarship, Gilbreath Scholarship, or International Merit Scholarship. In addition, out-of-state students are not eligible for any other ETSU program that covers or waives out-of-state tuition.

Federal Financial Aid

The awarding of a graduate assistantship or tuition scholarship may impact a student's federal financial aid offer. Any questions about federal financial aid should be addressed to [ETSU's Financial Aid Office](#).

Pre-Employment, Onboarding, and Offboarding

Your graduate assistantship is employment, and as such you will have responsibilities prior to starting your position and before leaving.

Pre-Employment Requirements

The following requirements are time sensitive.

Contracts

Each GA will need to review and sign their electronic contract. You cannot begin work without a contract.

I-9

Federal law requires employers to verify employment eligibility. Verifying eligibility must be done in person at ETSU's Human Resources Office. You are required to show specific documents to verify eligibility for employment. You must complete this step no later than three (3) days from your contract start date regardless of when you start. For example, if you are a new GA with a Fall contract that begins August 16, you must complete your I-9 verification no later than August 19. Failing to complete I-9 paperwork may result in contract cancelation or fines.

W-4

Every employee will need to complete a W-4 federal tax form. The US Internal Revenue Service (IRS) has strict regulations regarding taxation and reporting of payments made to non-US citizens. Non-US resident students can learn more [here](#).

Direct Deposit

ETSU uses direct deposit for paychecks. You will need to complete a direct deposit authorization form.

You can learn more about each of the requirements listed below at ETSU's [New Employee Paperwork](#) webpage.

Onboarding

As you begin your work, your supervisor, academic department or supervisory unit should have some type of onboarding process. This onboarding may include training for the courses you will be teaching, information about departmental or unit leadership, and the like.

Offboarding

As you complete your GA position, you will need to do some offboarding processes.

1. Complete the [required tasks](#) from Human Resources.
2. Return any keys, equipment, supplies, etc. to your supervising unit. Complete any unit offboarding.

Working Conditions and Time Keeping

A full graduate assistant is required to work 20 hours per week and a half graduate assistant is required to work 10 hours per week. The work requirements of a graduate assistant should be reasonable and should correspond to the contractual hours. In unusual circumstances where the weekly hour requirements are scheduled to exceed the contractual hours, there must be a similar reduction in hours in nearby weeks.

The work assignment or service obligation is the prerogative of the supervisor, but the graduate assistant has the right to have the assignment fully explained. Such explanation may be especially important in the case of a graduate research assistant because research done on her/his thesis or dissertation may so overlap with work done as a research assistant that it may be difficult to determine the amount of time spent on assistantship work and time spent on thesis/dissertation work.

GAs are not paid hourly and their workloads may be heavier in some weeks than in others, so not every week will require precisely 20 or 10 hours of work, and some weeks may require considerably more.

In general, Graduate Administrative Assistant workloads are relatively straightforward to determine, whereas Teaching Assistant/Associate and Research Assistant workloads are less so.

Teaching Assistant/Associate Workload

The time investment for Graduate Teaching Assistants and Associates vary considerably depending upon the kind of activity required, familiarity with the material taught, and the graduate student's teaching experience. New Teaching Assistants and Associates often spend more time preparing than experienced GAs. The amount of time assessing student work also varies; for example, it usually takes less time to grade multiple choice exams than it does to provide formative feedback on student writing. GAs who provide tutoring often have very little preparation time and more contact time. On the other hand, teaching assistants who primarily grade and support a faculty member will have different time commitments for preparation and contact.

In general, full GAs classified as teaching assistants and associates shall be assigned

- no more than six (6) contact hours per week classroom or laboratory instruction; or
- no more than nine (9) contact hours per week of laboratory supervision; or
- a combination of the above.

A good piece of advice for new Teaching Assistants or Associates is to track the amount of time spent on teaching activities and discuss this time with your supervisor or instructor in Supervised Teaching to get a sense of this is a reasonable amount of time spent on teaching preparation, class meetings, reading, online discussion feedback, grading and other activities.

GAs who teach should plan to attend the Graduate School's Orientation for New Teaching Assistants and Associates each Fall semester. In addition, we strongly encourage Teaching GAs to enroll in GRAD 5110 Teaching Pedagogy, a one credit course offered each fall and spring semesters.

Research Assistant Workload

A research assistant in full GA appointment should expect to work about 20 hours per week if they hold a full GA or 10 hours per week if they hold a half GA.

Research Assistant work typically falls into two types:

1. Working either for a faculty member or university unit/administrator conducting research (e.g., literature searches, survey building, data analysis, data modeling, etc.) that supports the faculty member's or unit's research needs. This research does not directly contribute to the student's own research project.
2. Working with thesis or dissertation advisors on shared projects that benefit both the Principal Investigator's and the graduate student's own research.

Work of the first type is straightforward to distinguish in terms of time spent on the project. Workloads may be heavier in some weeks than in others, so not every week will require precisely 20 or 10 hours of work, and some weeks may require considerably more. However, Research Assistants in this role should work on average either 20 or 10 hours per week during the contract term.

Work of the second type is less clear in terms of time commitment. It is usually impossible to draw a clear and distinct line between time spent working as a Research Assistant, and time spent working on one's own research because the employment significantly overlaps with student's own research—these are often one in the same. Research is a significant part of a student's overall research goals and academic training.

Supervisors should clearly communicate how much time Research Assistants may need to spend engaged in research activities for the purposes of their studies and academic progress beyond the 20 or 10 hours per week. Research Assistants and their advisors should engage in regular conversation about the time commitment in light of changing results, opportunities, and demands.

The total work assignment for full-time graduate assistants, regardless of responsibility, cannot exceed 20 or 10 clock hours per week.

The work requirements of a graduate assistant should be reasonable and should correspond to the contractual hours. In unusual circumstances where the weekly hour requirements are scheduled to exceed the contractual hours, there must be a similar reduction in hours in nearby weeks. Primary assignments that are predominantly office or clerically oriented must follow contractual time limits and standard time reporting.

Leave

A graduate assistant on an academic or calendar year appointment does not accrue annual leave or sick leave and is obligated to work each week of their contractual period with the following exception: Days of administrative closing (12 holidays annually) of the university will not be considered work days.

Graduate assistants are responsible for making up missed hours due to illness, appointments, or other absences. If the graduate assistant has a classroom, laboratory, other “time-sensitive” assignment, it is important to follow your department’s or unit’s protocol for absences. Keep in mind that ETSU is committed to student learning, therefore class and laboratory time is important; canceling classes should be a last resort used only in emergencies and only with supervisor permission.

Recording Time

Graduate Assistants will not record time in the university’s time keeping system. The Graduate School advises each GA to track their time on paper, a calendar or app. Each unit may have a process for graduate assistants to record and report their time. It is the student’s responsibility to accurately and honestly report hours to the supervisor.

Accepting an Assistantship

ETSU adheres to the Council of Graduate School’s [Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants](#). Acceptance of an assistantship completes an agreement that both the student and the Graduate School expect to be honored. An acceptance after April 15 commits the student to that agreement unless they have received a written release. Acceptances before April 15 must be resigned by April 15. Without formal release by the original appointing unit, the Graduate School cannot make a subsequent appointment. Furthermore, the original appointing unit is not required to release a student when the loss of the appointment, because of its timing and nature, will create a hardship.

Additional Employment at ETSU

A graduate assistant may not work for ETSU more than 20 hours per week without special permission from the Dean of the Graduate School. This includes any job held in addition to the assistantship. Therefore, graduate students holding full assistantship may not work any additional time for ETSU without prior permission from the Dean of the Graduate School. Graduate students who hold half assistantship may work a total of 10 additional hours without permission.

Special note about additional employment for international students: International Students holding an F-1 or J-1 visa cannot work more than 20 hours per week total per federal regulations. For example, an international student who has a full GA position (20 hours per week) cannot have additional employment at ETSU; this includes employment with

contractors like Sodexo. International students with a half GA position (10 hours per week) can, with approval, hold additional employment but that employment cannot exceed 10 hours. International students who exceed the work hours requirement risk having their visa revoked by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. International students should review the [International Student Employment Policy](#).

Professional Expectations and Responsibilities

Professional Demeanor

Graduate assistants are simultaneously students and professionals. As emerging professionals, graduate students should adopt high standards of professional behavior. You will be establishing yourself as someone trustworthy, hard-working, reliable, and ethical. Your supervisors will be writing letters of recommendation or giving references to future employers.

Your primary responsibility as a Graduate Assistant is to assist the faculty member or supervisor, whether you are responsible for direct instruction, supplemental instruction or lab supervision, research, administrative, or other relevant work. As a representative of ETSU, you have a responsibility to conduct yourself professionally in your interactions with colleagues, peers, students, staff, and campus visitors while performing your assignment.

Graduate assistants must become informed about departmental, college, and university regulations that are related to the responsibilities of their employment or service and follow them consistently. The faculty mentor should help the graduate student understand these regulations.

Important university policies include:

[ADA and Section 504 Grievance Procedure](#)

[Consensual Relationships Policy](#)

[Discrimination and Harassment](#)

[Drug-Free Campus](#)

[Fitness for Duty](#)

[Sexual Misconduct](#)

[Smoking and Tobacco Use](#)

The graduate assistant also must report unethical behavior observed or experienced in the workplace, including instances of sexual harassment and has the right to be protected from retribution for reporting instances of unethical behavior. However, it is also the obligation of any person reporting such behavior to be able to present documentation of the occurrence of the behavior.

Confidentiality

In your assignment, it may be necessary for you to discuss student progress or grades, interact with faculty, staff, and other graduate students, and/or maintain student or client records. The discussion of grades or other confidential information should be handled with care and discernment so as not to violate the [Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#) (FERPA). Discuss your obligations for confidentiality and privacy with your faculty or unit supervisor.

Furthermore, you should be aware that even when you are in the confines of a university office, laughing about, posting examples of, or ridiculing students or their work/behaviors/actions is highly unprofessional. You should also not post students' work—for either positive or negative

reasons—on social media without their consent. Discuss these issues with your supervisor if you are unsure about appropriateness.

Training

The Graduate School provides a New Graduate Teaching Assistant/Associate Orientation each Fall. In addition, the Supervisory Unit ensures that graduate assistants receive the training necessary to perform their duties. This training can take a variety of forms such as one-on-one training/shadowing, group training, workshops, or training courses (either face-to-face or online). Each unit will be responsible for developing, organizing, and delivering training appropriate to the needs of the duties assigned.

Solving Problems in the Workplace

No working environment is without issues. To address conflicts that may arise, keep ETSU's core values in mind:

PEOPLE come first, are treated with dignity and respect, and are encouraged to achieve their full potential;

RELATIONSHIPS are built on honesty, integrity, and trust;

DIVERSITY of people and thought is respected;

EXCELLENCE is achieved through teamwork, leadership, creativity, and a strong work ethic;

EFFICIENCY is achieved through wise use of human and financial resources; and

COMMITMENT to intellectual achievement is embraced.

Framing a workplace issue to value people, relationships, diversity, excellence, efficiency, and commitment will go a long way in helping you seek a satisfactory resolution. The following sections provide guides to addressing issues with various groups you may encounter in your working environment.

Solving Problems with Other Students²

In the sometimes tense and competitive realm of graduate school, difficulties may arise with other students. These general pointers can help you find effective solutions to problems with other students and peers:

- Recognize that everyone has a unique view of the situation. Try to explain your vantage point clearly and calmly.
- Invite the other person to give their perspective. Listen carefully and try not to become defensive.

² The sections "Solving Problems with Other Students," "Solving Problems with Co-Workers," "Solving Problems with a Supervisor," and "Utilizing 'Chain of Command'" are modeled heavily on the information in the *University of West Florida Graduate Assistant Handbook* 2018.

- Keep your tone measured, your voice calm, your language professional. (Being in the “heat of the moment” often causes people to interact unprofessionally such as using obscenities or inappropriate language.)
- Do not send an email when you are angry. In almost all cases, doing so will escalate a problem.
- Identify specific behaviors or actions that are problematic and frame the discussion using “I” statements. (“I” statements focus the behavior on how it makes you feel or react, rather than blaming the other person for behaving a particular way.) For example, “I am upset that I had to clean up the lab last night by myself because I missed bedtime with my child.”

If you cannot resolve the issue using these techniques, then it is time to bring it to the attention of your professor, advisor, mentor, or the Dean of Students, Dr. Michelle Byrd.

Solving Problems with Co-Workers

Your co-workers may be other graduate students or staff. Sometimes those co-workers may be your peers or they may have a higher rank than you do, which can create a power dynamic that can be challenging to navigate. To address these problems, try the techniques listed in the above section. In addition, you should

- Clarify workload assignments or responsibilities if these are the source of the tension.
- Involve your co-workers in brainstorming other approaches or solutions to address the issue.

If you are unable to resolve the issue, ask your supervisor for assistance.

Solving Problems with a Supervisor

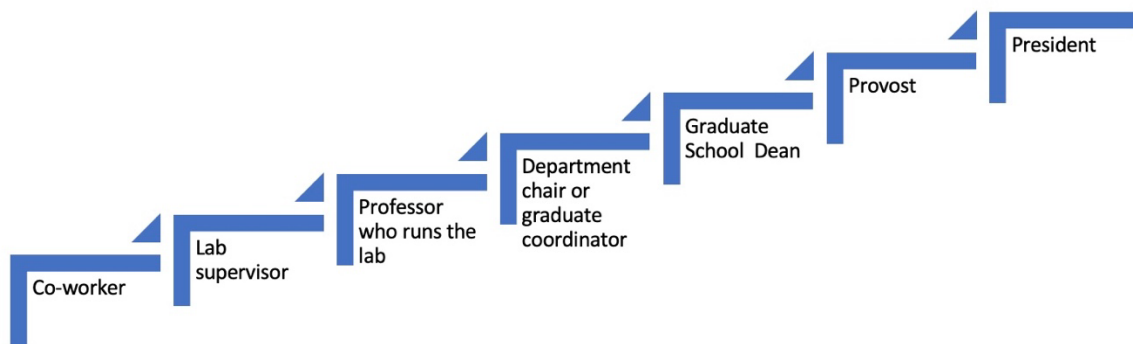
You may experience challenges with your supervisor such as the supervisor being unclear with expectations, not posting your work assignment consistently, placing unrealistic demands in a short time frame or not showing up for appointments. While rare, sometimes supervisors may be insulting or demeaning. The University of West Florida offers this advice for graduate students dealing with supervisor problems:

...[T]ake steps early in the process to identify the problem and seek opportunities for explanation and reconciliation. The student should keep in mind that the supervisor has greater authority and experience in the situation and stay open to the idea that there could be some legitimate explanation for the behavior perceived to be problematic. However, if the student is not able to reach an accord, s/he may want to explore whether a different assignment may be appropriate and/or available. Another option is to speak to the person who supervises the student’s immediate supervisor.³

³ University of West Florida Graduate Assistant Handbook 2018.

Utilizing “Chain of Command”

It is typical in most workplaces, regardless of type, that employees are expected to follow the “chain of command” to resolve problems. The concept of “chain of command” means that the problem should be addressed directly with the person in the organization who is closest to the problem; if a resolution is not forthcoming, then the problem is taken to the direct step higher up. Suppose you have a problem with a co-worker in your laboratory. The chain of command would look something like this:



Skipping steps in the chain usually means that you will be sent back to the appropriate starting point in the chain of command since problems are most often able to be resolved by those closest to the issue.

Appointment, Evaluation, and Continuation

Decisions regarding who shall hold graduate assistantships are made at the level of the department or unit in which the student will work. Therefore, the selection procedure varies. Some units use committees to screen applicants; in others, the chair, director, or head of the unit may make the decision. Additionally, if an assistantship is funded from a grant or contract, the principal investigator or project director will typically make the choice. Regardless of the mechanism for selection or source of funding, the contract of appointment for a graduate assistantship must be signed by the department chair or unit head and the Dean of the Graduate School.

Evaluation

Each graduate assistant will receive a written evaluation at least once each year, preferably each semester.

In many ways the graduate assistantship is an apprenticeship. The evaluation process should begin with the development of clear outcome goals for the assistantship. Because these goals will necessarily vary according to the type of assistantship (teaching, research, or administration) and among the various departments and divisions that employ graduate assistant/scholarship recipients, it is the responsibility of each department or supervisory unit to develop goals for each of its graduate assistants.

Each department/unit is also responsible for developing a method of evaluation for graduate assistants. The results of the formal written evaluation of each graduate assistant must be filed with The Office Manager in the Graduate School at the end of each academic year and/or upon conclusion of the graduate assistant's contract. The formal evaluation should be supplemented by periodic informal conferences/evaluations with the student's mentor. The results of all evaluations should be kept in the departmental/unit file. The methods used for both formal and informal evaluations should be explained to the student when the appointment is made.

The purpose of the evaluations is to provide a supportive process that facilitates the attainment of the student's long-range professional goals. Thus, the student should be given constructive feedback regarding the outcome of each evaluation with suggestions concerning changes that the graduate assistant might make to improve performance. Additionally, the evaluation process is to ensure fairness in reappointment to the assistantship. Finally, as part of the process, the evaluation may include the student's assessment of the experience.

Rescinding a Graduate Assistantship Offer

The offer of a Graduate Assistantship is conditioned on the student meeting all requirements of the assistantship. Occasionally, although not often, a program or unit finds itself in the regrettable position of needing to rescind an offer of a Graduate Assistantship. While this

situation occurs rarely, it is sometimes necessary in situations including but not limited to: loss of funding for the assistantship position, the student does not meet the academic qualifications for admission, does not have the GPA to be awarded a GA position (as described in this handbook), has a serious academic misconduct sanction, or has not demonstrated sound professional or academic judgment or behavior as determined in the discretion of the graduate coordinator, supervisor, or other unit leader; the Dean of Students; or the Dean of the Graduate School. When a unit needs to rescind an offer that has been, the unit must notify the Dean of the Graduate School that an offer will be rescinded and the reason. The unit must also notify the student in writing (email) after the Dean of the Graduate School approves.

To rescind an offer means that a verbal and/or written offer of a GA has been made to a student, but the contract has not yet been completed and/or the contract date has not started. If a contract has been completed and/or the student has started work, then the unit would follow the cancellation process as described below.

Resignation from a Graduate Assistantship

If a graduate assistant recipient decides to resign from their assistantship before the expiration of the contract, the student must notify the Graduate School and their supervisor in writing two (2) weeks before the date of resignation, if possible. (See “Tuition Reimbursement Following Resignation or Cancellation” section below to learn more about the tuition implications of resigning.)

Non-Renewal of Graduate Assistantship Contract

Non-renewal means that the student and supervisory unit fulfill the current contract obligations but no future contract from that unit will be offered. The unit should inform the graduate assistant as soon as is reasonably possible that the contract will not be renewed. Sometimes the supervisory unit states this information at the time of hire when it is known the contract will be limited to a specific period.

Even though a graduate assistant has positive evaluation(s) and made satisfactory academic progress, their graduate assistantship may not be renewed for various reasons including but not limited to the position’s funding source has been reduced or eliminated, the position is no longer needed, or similar reasons that are not due to the graduate assistant’s performance. The hiring unit has sole discretion in deciding to renew or not to renew a GA contract.

A unit may choose not to renew a graduate assistantship after the contract period ends for any of the reasons listed in the “Canceling a Graduate Assistantship” section below. In this case, the student’s performance is related to the non-renewal, but in certain situations, it is best to allow the GA to finish the contract period rather than terminate immediately.

Future Eligibility after Non-Renewal

The student may be eligible for a contract with another unit if the student remains in academic good standing and has not exceeded the time limits of eligibility (see “Time Limits” section).

Cancellation of a Graduate Assistantship

ETSU may cancel a graduate assistantship contract before the contract period ends for reasons, including but not limited to those listed below. The supervisor must engage in the Performance Improvement Process (PIP) outlined before canceling a contract due to unsatisfactory performance or violating policies (reasons 2 and 3 below) or for any other reason than failure to maintain good academic standing and make satisfactory academic progress. (See “Tuition Reimbursement Following Resignation or Cancellation” section below to learn more about tuition implications for the student.)

1. Failure to Maintain Good Academic Standing and Make Satisfactory Academic Progress

Graduate assistants must maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average (GPA) to remain eligible for their support. If a student’s cumulative GPA falls below 3.0, the student will have one probationary term to raise the GPA. If the student’s GPA is not 3.0 or above after the probationary term, the assistantship may be terminated. Sometimes a student makes good progress in raising the GPA but needs more than one semester to reach a 3.0 GPA; in these cases, the Dean of the Graduate School may make an exception for the student to hold a GPA for an additional semester.

All graduate assistants must also make satisfactory progress toward their degrees. Satisfactory progress is determined on a case-by-case basis by the graduate coordinator and/or mentor in consultation with the Dean of the Graduate School. If it is determined that satisfactory progress is not being made, even if the student is meeting other minimum requirements (e.g. GPA and continuous enrollment status), the graduate assistantship may be canceled; this is typically done at the end of a semester but before the contract period ends. For example, an academic year contract may be canceled in December for failing to maintain good academic standing and/or make satisfactory progress toward their degree.

2. Unsatisfactory Evaluation or Performance

If the performance or conduct of the graduate assistant is not satisfactory as determined by the graduate coordinator or supervisor, the graduate assistantship may be canceled.

3. Failure to Meet Departmental/Supervisory Unit Policies

It is in the discretion of the departments and supervisory units to retain or reappoint a graduate assistantship to a student. Departments, units, and programs may have requirements and guidelines for graduate students; these should be outlined in a program handbook. These

guidelines may include, but are not limited to, dress code, absence/tardiness to work assignment, professional standards of practice, following with safety policies, and complying with federal, state, and local statutes.

Performance Improvement Plan

Prior to canceling a graduate assistantship contract, a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is required in most, but not all, situations.

When a Performance Improvement Plan is Not Required

A PIP is not required when

1. A graduate assistantship is being canceled for not maintaining good academic standing and/or making satisfactory academic progress;
2. A matter has been adjudicated through, for example, Academic Misconduct, Research Misconduct, Title IX, or Student Conduct policies; or
3. Funding for the position has been eliminated.

When a Performance Improvement Plan is Required

If a graduate assistant is not performing their job satisfactorily or is not following department or supervisory unit policies, the supervisor will implement a Graduate Assistantship Performance Improvement Process (PIP). The process involves three (3) steps:

1. As soon as the supervisor becomes aware of unsatisfactory performance or violation of policies, the supervisor must discuss the issue with the student. Together, they will review the duties and responsibilities expected of the graduate assistant, and the supervisor will identify those areas in which the performance of duties and responsibilities is judged to be unsatisfactory. The feedback needs to be specific, concrete, and direct. Feedback should be given when concerns initially arise and in a manner that will encourage the Graduate Assistant to identify ways to resolve the skill deficiencies. The supervisor's responsibility is to provide clear and accurate feedback.
2. During the meeting the supervisor will advise the graduate assistant that if their performance does not improve to a satisfactory level with a time specified by the supervisor, the assistantship will be canceled. The time established by the supervisor should provide a specific and reasonable time for the graduate assistant to demonstrate a satisfactory level of performance. In some cases, the graduate assistant's failure to meet satisfactory standards of performance may be disruptive to the educational process (e.g., failure to appear for a teaching assignment, or failure to grade examinations in a timely manner) or to campus health and safety (e.g., failure to care for research animals properly, or failure to show for client appointments). In such instances, the graduate student should be advised that any subsequent failure to meet satisfactory performance standards may result in immediate cancelation of the assistantship.

3. As soon as possible after this meeting (generally within three (3) working days), the supervisor will provide the assistant with a written summary of the meeting, including notice of areas of unsatisfactory performance with suggestions for improvement and a time specified for improvement to a satisfactory level. A copy of this signed written summary will be sent to the department chair for review/approval and the to the Dean of the Graduate School.
4. The GA and supervisor should meet at regular intervals during the PIP period to review progress. At the end of the time specified, or before if appropriate, the supervisor and the graduate assistant will meet to review the student's progress toward meeting the supervisor's written expectations. If, in the professional judgment of the supervisor, sufficient progress has been made to resolve the issues, the graduate assistantship can continue.

Sample PIP, follow-up plan, and final review documents are available in the appendices of this handbook.

In the unfortunate situation where improvement is still not forthcoming, the supervisor will begin the Cancellation Process.

Cancellation Process

If a graduate assistant fails to meet acceptable standards of performance as prescribed in the Performance Improvement Plan, the cancellation process can begin as follows:

1. The supervisor will notify the department chair or unit head and provide the PIP, notes, and documentation used in the process.
2. The department chair or unit head will review the PIP, progress notes, and any other documentation, generally within three (3) business days. If the department chair/unit head determines that the graduate assistantship has been given opportunity and guidance for improvement and the graduate assistant's performance is still deemed unsatisfactory by the supervisor, the department chair or unit supervisor may cancel a graduate assistant appointment.
3. To cancel the assistantship appointment, the department chair or unit supervisor will provide a written notice to the student that his or her is assistantship is being canceled.
4. Copies of notice of cancellation from graduate assistantship must be filed with the Dean of the Graduate School, the Graduate School Office Manager, and with the dean of the college in which the student holds the assistantship.
5. The student may appeal the cancellation following the procedures outlined in the "Appeal Process for Cancellation of Contracts" below. A student may be placed on administrative leave with pay pending the appeals timeline at the discretion of the Dean of the Graduate School.

Acts of Misconduct and Unprofessionalism That May Warrant Immediate Action

Acts of gross misconduct and/or flagrant unprofessionalism may require prompt action. Such acts may include but are not limited to:

1. Refusing to obey reasonable and necessary instructions or job assignments, insubordination, or using abusive or unprofessional language in the workplace.
2. Engaging in offensive or obscene behavior.
3. Coming to work under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol.
4. Engaging in physical altercations with students, faculty, staff, or the public while on campus.
5. Touching students or other engaging in unprofessional actions with students.
6. Stealing or misappropriating University property or property belonging to students or university employees.
7. Having a pending review or adjudicated finding of scientific or academic misconduct.
8. Violating state or federal laws or University policies, including safety policies, while conducting responsibilities of the assistantship.

If a student is determined to have engaged in an act of gross misconduct or flagrant unprofessionalism as outlined above, the unit may cancel the assistantship, suspend the assistantship for a specified period, or reduce of the assistantship and associated benefits. If a supervisor believes a graduate assistant has engaged in such an act of misconduct or unprofessionalism, the following steps are to be taken:

1. The supervisor will provide notice of the proposed administrative action to the graduate assistant and document the situation in a written report.
 - a. In such cases, the graduate assistant may be placed on immediate administrative leave with pay from the assistantship duties, at the discretion of the supervisor, pending investigation.
 - b. The report will be provided to the department chair or unit head to whom the supervisor reports within two (2) business days.
2. The department chair or unit head will schedule a meeting with the supervisor and graduate assistant as soon as possible, generally within three (3) business days of receiving the report.
3. At that meeting, the incident(s) will be reviewed, and the proposed administrative action may be affirmed, amended (including termination), or overturned by the department chair.
4. The department chair or unit head will provide a written notice summarizing the meeting and his/her decision regarding the administrative action to the GA supervisor, the graduate assistant, the dean of the college, and the Dean of the Graduate School within five (5) working days of the meeting. If the department chair determines that cancelation is warranted, the GA will be placed on administrative leave with pay pending the appeal process.

Appeal Process for Contract Cancellation

A graduate assistant may file one (1) appeal if the contract is canceled or not renewed with cause. However, cancellation or non-renewal of a contract due to (1) failure to maintain academic good standing or make satisfactory academic progress, (2) reduction or loss of funding for the position, or (3) position elimination cannot be appealed. The appeal procedure is as follows:

1. The student must submit a written appeal with all supporting materials should be presented to the Dean of the Graduate School within five (5) business days of the cancellation or non-renewal notice.
2. The Dean of the Graduate School will appoint an *ad hoc* committee comprised of two graduate students and two graduate faculty members. An associate dean of the Graduate School will facilitate the hearing. This committee shall elect a chairperson and hold a hearing concerning the appeal. At this hearing, the student and supervisor will each have an opportunity to present evidence, including witnesses. The ad hoc committee may also request witnesses. The committee will make every effort to review the appeal within 15 business days. The committee will provide the Dean of the Graduate School with a written recommendation as to whether the termination is appropriate or not.
3. The Dean of the Graduate School will provide a written notice of a decision to the graduate assistant, the GA's supervisor, the department chair, and college dean within five (5) days of receiving the committee's recommendation.
 - a. If the dean's decision upholds the cancellation, the dean will initiate the process for the graduate assistantship appointment to be canceled.
 - b. If the dean's decision finds in favor of the graduate assistant, the dean will provide direction to the unit and GA about resuming work.
4. The decision of the Dean of the Graduate School is final.

Future Eligibility after Cancellation

When a graduate assistantship is canceled, the student is no longer eligible for a graduate assistantship in future semesters.

Tuition Reimbursement Following Resignation or Cancellation

If a graduate assistant resigns or if the contract is canceled during the semester, and the student does not withdraw from ETSU, the student has the responsibility to pay ETSU the amount of tuition *pro rata* for that part of the semester during which the student does not hold the assistantship. The Financial Aid Office will notify the student of the tuition reimbursement amount.

Rights and Protections

A graduate assistant has the rights possessed by any student at ETSU. Extended to the specific instance of graduate assistants as employees as ETSU representatives in their scholarship obligations, these include the right to consideration for continued contracts/scholarships without regard to age, sex, color, race, religion, national origin, disability, veteran status, or sexual orientation/gender identity.

Discrimination and Harassment

ETSU believes that the campus environment should be free from [discrimination and harassment](#). All ETSU employees, including graduate assistants, are designated as Mandatory Reporters and required to report prohibited conduct. More information about how to report Discrimination and Harassment can be found on the university's Compliance [website](#).

Disability Accommodations Requests

ETSU is committed to the goal of fully integrating disabled individuals into the campus community as possible. Services are offered within a framework that stresses independence and self-reliance. Services include arrangements for access, accommodations in instruction, and provision of a variety of support services designed to enable the student to take full advantage of the university's programs. Students who have special needs as a result of a disability should contact the [Disability Support Services](#), D.P. Culp University Center Suite 309, phone 439-8346 V/TDD.

Limited English Proficiency

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the University must take reasonable steps to provide meaningful access to persons with Limited English Proficiency. Title VI complaints can be filed with [University Compliance](#).

Pregnancy Accommodation Requests

The [Pregnancy Workers Fairness Act \(PWFA\)](#) requires covered employers to provide a "reasonable accommodation" to a qualified employee's known limitations related to, affected by, or arising out of, pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, unless the accommodation will cause the employer an 'undue hardship.'" PWFA accommodations can be requested through [Disability Support Services](#).

Title IX (Sex and Gender Discrimination)

ETSU desires to maintain an environment that is safe and supportive for students and employees and to reward performance solely based on relevant criteria. ETSU complies with Title IX:

Title IX is a federal civil rights law that prohibits all sex or gender discrimination on educational campuses. Title IX protects individuals of all genders and sexual orientations and applies to students, faculty, staff, independent contractors, campus visitors, and all other participants in university educational programs and activities. All forms of sexual or gender-based harassment, including but not limited to dating and domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault, are violations of Title IX. (ETSU University Compliance).

Accordingly, the university will not tolerate sexual harassment of students or employees. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual harassment when:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a
- term or condition of an individual's employment or academic standing; or
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as a basis for employment or academic decisions affecting an individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or academic environment.

All questions, reports, or complaints about any form of unwelcome sexual conduct should be reported directly to ETSU's Title IX Coordinator. The Title IX Coordinator can provide guidance and support regarding your rights and responsibilities under Title IX. Further, ETSU's [University Compliance Office](#) website provides useful information about Title IX matters.

Workplace Injury

Even though ETSU is committed to the safety of its employees, unfortunately, accidents sometimes happen. If a graduate assistant is injured within the scope of their work responsibilities while on the job, they are eligible for Workers' Compensation Insurance. This coverage is only applicable in the case of on-the-job injury. If you are injured on the job, you must report the injury to your supervisor as soon as possible. More information on reporting injury and benefit can be found on the [Human Resources website](#).

Workplace Violence

ETSU has a commitment to its employees to provide a safe, healthy, and secure work environment. Violence, threats, or intimidation toward individuals does not align with ETSU's core values and is not tolerated. ETSU's [Workplace Violence Policy](#) provides more information.

Resources for Graduate Students

Graduate Student Success Specialists

The Graduate School provides the services of the [Graduate Student Success Specialist](#) to graduate students who need assistance in finding campus or off-campus resources to help them in meeting their daily living needs. The Graduate Student Success Specialist is located in Room 462 in Sherrod Library, 439-7062, gradsuccess@etsu.edu.

Graduate and Professional Student Association

The [Graduate and Professional Student Association \(GPSA\)](#) is the representative body for students enrolled in the Graduate School. The executive board of the GPSA is elected from representatives of the various graduate programs. Two graduate students from the GPSA are elected members of the Graduate Council. The GPSA encourages social, athletic, cultural, and other extracurricular activities, promotes closer relations between graduate students and faculty outside the formal academic settings, and provides a voice for ideas and concerns of graduate students. It is open to all graduate students; graduate assistants are especially encouraged to join.

Center for Academic Achievement

The [Center for Academic Achievement](#) is a one-stop shop to help students be academically successful in college. The CFAA is home to three academic support programs: The Tutoring Center, Supplemental Instruction (SI), and Academic Coaching. Located on the first floor of the Charles C. Sherrod Library, the CFAA's free services include: individual tutoring for many ETSU courses and writing consultations, Supplemental Instruction, and Academic Coaching.

Graduate Council

The [Graduate Council](#) is the faculty governance body for graduate education at ETSU. Graduate Council approves curriculum, graduate faculty status, and establishes policies related to graduate education.

Other Campus Resources

Graduate students have access to a wide array of campus resources and activities, many of which are paid for by student fees. A [comprehensive list of resources](#) is available on the Graduate School website.

Appendix 1: Additional Information for Those with Teaching Responsibilities

Students who attend ETSU should have an educational experience that provides the opportunity to deeply engage with academic pursuits free from bias, discrimination, harassment, and capricious evaluation. As a teaching assistant or associate, you will be responsible for maintaining a supportive academic environment.

Developing Your Course

Each course must have a syllabus that [policy](#) requirements. Your supervisor and department will guide you as you develop a syllabus and course policies for the classes in which you have primary responsibility. As you create your syllabus, you will want to review the ETSU's Center for Teaching Excellence's [Syllabus Toolkit](#). Your syllabus should address the following topics, among others:

1. Class attendance. Attendance is a contract between faculty and students. It is expected that students will attend classes regularly and provide faculty members with a reason for any absence.
2. [Academic Integrity and Misconduct](#). Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty are prohibited. Students guilty of academic misconduct, either directly or indirectly, through participation or assistance, are immediately responsible to the instructor of the class. In addition to other possible disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the university's academic misconduct policy as a result of academic misconduct, the instructor has the authority to assign an "F" or a zero ("0") for the exercise or examination, or to assign an "F" in the course.
3. Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI). Review ETSU's [GAI guidance](#) as you prepare your class policies.
4. Grading Policy. Each course should have a statement about grading and how grades will be calculated.
5. Handling Disruptive Behavior. Disruptive behavior in the classroom may be defined as, but not limited to, behavior that obstructs or disrupts the learning environment (e.g., offensive language, harassment of students and professors, repeated outbursts from a student which disrupt the flow of instruction or prevent concentration on the subject taught, failure to cooperate in maintaining classroom decorum, etc.), text messaging, and the continued use of any electronic or other noise or light emitting device which disturbs others (e.g., disturbing noises from cell phones, lap-top computers, games, etc.).

Some Important Teaching Policies

The following includes important teaching policies. Your supervisory unit should provide you with other relevant policies.

Posting Student Grades

In order to comply with provisions of the “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974” (Buckley Amendment), the posting of student grades at ETSU is prohibited. Interpretations of the Buckley Amendment have also prohibited the use of any codes such as Social Security numbers and other devices that might make identification of a student and his/her grade possible.

Retention of Papers, Tests, and Records

Unless the papers are returned to the students, ETSU faculty members will retain papers (including but not limited to tests, examinations, and research papers) on which grades are based at least until the period for grade challenge has expired (one calendar year from the time the grade was issued). Any student who challenges a grade must provide returned papers if they are to be used as evidence for the challenge. This [policy](#) provides more detail.

Academic Integrity and Misconduct

Instructors are responsible for maintaining academic integrity. ETSU’s [Academic Integrity and Misconduct Policy](#) outlines the policy and procedures related to academic misconduct.

Grade Appeals

Students who believe a course grade has been assigned in a malicious, capricious, erroneous, or arbitrary manner may appeal a grade. Policies for [Undergraduate Grade Appeals](#) and [Graduate Grade Appeals](#) outline the policies and processes involved.

Early Attendance Reporting

In week 2 of the term, instructors should enter attendance reporting for students in the course. “Attendance” can mean different things—such as logging in regularly to an online course, being physically present in a face-to-face course, turning in work, and the like. The university must comply with federal financial aid requirements to report early attendance; therefore, it is important that you do so. The Provost will send an email alerting instructors to record attendance in Goldlink.

Early Semester Progress Reports

Instructors are to provide undergraduate students with a [midterm grade](#). The Provost will send announcements via email reminding instructors to assign the midterm grade. Reporting the midterm grade is important for all students, but especially those who are struggling. Academic advisors will be able to reach out the student to help them so that they can (hopefully) improve their success.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

[FERPA](#) protects students' personally identifiable information, including their progress in courses, from being shared without their consent; this includes sharing information with parents, spouses, or others who are not university faculty or staff. Students can provide permission using the First Mate system. Your department chair will be able to give you information on finding whether or not a student has a First Mate with whom information can be shared.

The exception to FERPA is that information can be shared with university officials who have a legitimate need for student information in order to fulfill their professional responsibilities. These officials may include, but are not limited to, the Registrar, advisors, athletic staff, counselors, etc. If you have any questions about to whom you can share information, consult your department chair or direct supervisor.

ETSU Email for Communication

When communicating with students via email, instructors only use students official [ETSU email](#) addresses.

Other Teaching Information

Some resources and information for instructors are highlighted below.

Responsibilities for Course Instruction

All students should have a full 15 weeks of academic instruction in a regular term. Instructors should cancel class rarely and not without approval of their supervisor or department chair. When possible, instructors should provide an alternative instructional assignment via D2L so that students receive a full instructional experience.

The week before finals is to be used for classroom instruction. ETSU policy states "Under no circumstances will this week be used for final examinations. Exceptions shall be made for laboratories." More details about expectations for pre-finals week activities can be found [here](#).

Academic Calendar

ETSU publishes its [academic calendar](#) on its website. Key dates for the semester are indicated. Instructors should familiarize themselves with each semester's academic calendar. Be sure to review the [Academic Work During University Holidays and Breaks policy](#) as you set your course calendar.

D2L

D2L is ETSU's Learning Management System (LMS). Teaching Associates will have access to a course shell to develop. Teaching assistants will usually be added as an instructor to D2L. Consult with your department about how course shells should be developed. Many resources for learning D2L are available for [instructors](#).

[GRAD 5110: Teaching Pedagogy for the Graduate Teaching Assistant](#)

This one-credit hour course is taught by ETSU faculty and is designed to help new graduate assistants develop effective classroom management and effective communication strategies. It is offered each Fall and Spring semesters; students enroll through Goldlink.

Center for Teaching Excellence

The [Center for Teaching Excellence](#) provides support for faculty, including graduate students with teaching responsibilities, to develop their teaching practice. CTE offers many workshops and has a robust website with teaching "toolkits" that are an excellent resource.

The Importance of Your Teaching Role

In addition to guiding students to learn content and skills in the course you teach, instructors of first year courses play a significant role in students' success during their entire time at the university. Extensive research has shown that the first-year experiences, both inside and outside the classroom, are crucial to student success. In their large-scale longitudinal study, Chambliss and Takacs found several key factors in student success, one of those factors being personal connection. They posit, "Faculty-student interactions...have dramatic effects on student learning" (4)⁴. They go on to say that in addition to friends, faculty can make or break the student experience: "When good teachers are encountered early, they legitimize academic involvement, while poor teachers destroy the reputation of departments. ...Relationships are important because they raise or suppress the motivation to learn" (155).

Chambliss and Takacs note that when instructors do "small things" such as using students' preferred name in class, treating students with respect, inviting them to office hours, the impact is significant.

Establishing Boundaries as an Instructor

While building relationships with students in your course has an important impact on their learning, at the same time, instructors need to establish clear boundaries with students. Oftentimes, graduate students who are teaching or assisting with a course struggle to find the appropriate way to interact with undergraduate students who may not be much older than they are—or who may be quite a bit older. A good rule of thumb is to "be friendly, but not

⁴ Daniel Chambliss and Christopher Takacs. *How College Works*. Harvard University Press, 2014.

familiar.” In other words, treat your students with respect, but do not share the details of the party you attended over the weekend. You are their instructor, not their buddy.

Students appreciate it when their instructor says “hi” to them in the Culp Center. Yet, friendliness can sometimes be interpreted in ways that can pose risks. Some students may think that they can take advantage of a teacher’s friendliness for their advantage to “bend the rules” for the student or “give the student a break” with grading. The University of West Florida advises graduate teaching assistants that

Befriending a student can result in the GTA [Graduate Teaching Assistant/Associate] finding it difficult to enforce equitable grading practices. Situations such as this set the stage for challenges with discriminatory practices. Graduate Teaching Assistants should have a clear understanding of the issues that can arise in the absence of fair treatment with regard to grades and learning opportunities. (20)

Be mindful that you are treating all students equitably.

Friendliness can also sometimes be interpreted as flirtatious. As an instructor, you should be aware of the power dynamic. Even though you may feel like a student yourself, in your role as an instructor, you are in a position of authority and your behavior could easily cross the boundary of acceptable to unwanted. Keeping in mind that your students are not your buddies, sexual jokes or innuendo, suggestive nicknames or physical items (stickers on your laptop, a calendar on your office wall) could be viewed by a student as sexual harassment. ETSU does not condone [sexual harassment](#). Concerns about sexual or other harassment or discrimination of any kind can be reported to [University Compliance](#).

If the Graduate Assistant receives unwelcome attention from a student in your course, a peer, a faculty or staff member, or another person, you are encouraged to tell the person that the attention is unwanted and request that it stop. Use direct language such as “I don’t like the language you use to describe women. It is offense, and I do not want you to continue using that language in my presence.” If the behavior or unwanted attention continues, it is acceptable to skip the chain of command and move directly into filing a complaint with University Compliance.

Appendix 2: Additional Information for Supervisory Units

Contracts

GA contracts must be entered into the contract system. The Graduate School's Office Manager will train new Executive Aides or others who enter contracts on using the system.

Pre-Employment Paperwork

All new employees, including Graduate Assistants, must complete mandatory federal requirements, the most time sensitive of which is I-9 verification. I-9 verification must take place in person at the ETSU Human Resources office **no later than three (3) days** from the contract start date. For example, Academic Year GA contracts have a start date of August 16, which means that new GAs must complete the I-9 verification process no later than August 19. If a student completes the process late, the department account will be charged \$500. GAs who are remote will have to contact Human Resources to find an acceptable alternative location to verify; there is a \$45 charge billed to departments. In addition, any remote positions will need to be vetted by HR to determine if Tennessee can meet any state labor law requirements.

Onboarding

Your unit should provide at least some basic onboarding to the unit and position, including a tour of the area, introduction to the GA's supervisor and the supervisor's supervisor, facility information, etc. You should also discuss expectations for working hours, reporting absences, timekeeping (which is no longer required in Voyager but we recommend that units have internal processes for timekeeping), how to handle emergencies, etc. Encourage students who are teaching to attend the Graduate School's GA Orientation and enroll in GRAD 5110 Teaching Pedagogy. Your program should also provide teaching instruction and training for GAs. Research GAs should be instructed in any safety protocols, research expectations, and equipment, etc.

Post-Employment Paperwork

All ETSU employees, including GAs, must complete HR [required processes](#). As a supervisor, please instruct your GAs to complete these processes. If they don't, they may be inadvertently issued paychecks from your account after the contract is completed.

In addition, your department or unit may should have some offboarding plan for Graduate Assistants. For example, they may need to return keys to the department, transfer research data, and leave grading documents with the department or unit.

Training

Each unit must provide training in the duties assigned to the graduate assistants so that they can perform their jobs appropriately and safely. Training should include clear expectations for performance, work schedule, safety, unit rules, applicable university rules and policies,

professional behavior, and the like. All GAs should be enrolled in one credit of Supervised Teaching, Research, or Administration under the supervision of a graduate faculty member each semester.

Evaluations

Each unit must develop a plan for providing a formal, written evaluation to graduate assistants. At a minimum, the evaluation should occur at the end of the academic year. Preferably, informal evaluations should occur at least once a semester. Each unit's evaluation plan must be filed with the Graduate School's Office Manager. The results of the formal written evaluation of each graduate assistant must be filed with the Graduate School's Office Manager at the end of each academic year and/or upon conclusion of the graduate assistant's contract. The results of all evaluations should also be kept in the departmental/unit file. The methods used for both formal and informal evaluations should be explained to the student when the appointment is made.

Funding for Assistantships

Each supervisory unit is responsible for funding the stipend for the graduate assistantship. Non-grant funded assistantships are eligible to use the general tuition pool to cover tuition remission. Requests for new assistantship positions should be discussed with the Dean of the Graduate School.

Grant-Funded Assistantships

Principal investigators/program directors who submit proposals to external agencies in which support for a graduate assistant is requested must request sufficient monies to pay the maintenance fees for the graduate assistant's full term of employment. Should the funding agency not pay the tuition, the departmental unit will be responsible for the maintenance fee obligation, although some exceptions can be made by the Dean of the Graduate School.

Tuition Remission Availability Following Cancellation/Resignation

In the event a student resigns from the graduate assistantship, or is terminated, the student has the responsibility to pay ETSU the amount of tuition *pro rata* for that part of the semester during which the student does not hold the assistantship. The Financial Aid Office will notify the student of the tuition reimbursement amount.

If the department appoints another student to the assistantship the department may request that any remaining tuition waiver be used for the newly appointed student and that student will receive an appropriate refund.

If a graduate assistant recipient resigns the assistantship and withdraws from ETSU then the department or unit will have access to a tuition waiver for a replacement in accord with the refund of fees policies applied to students who pay tuition. These are as follows:

1. One hundred percent (100%) of the fees will be available to the department or unit for resignations with withdrawal prior to the beginning of classes.
2. Seventy-five percent (75%) of fees will be available to the department if the graduate assistant resigns and withdraws during a period of 14 days beginning with, and inclusive of, the first official day of classes or within an equivalent period of time for summer or other short-term courses.
3. Twenty-five percent (25%) will be available to the department if the student resigns and withdraws following the expiration of the 14-day limit given in (b.) for a period of time equal to 25% of the term.
4. No return of fee waiver will be available beyond the 25 percent term period.

Appendix 3: Performance Improvement Plan Sample Template

Note: Departments can request a digital copy of this form from the Graduate School.



Graduate Assistantship Performance Improvement Plan (PIP)⁵

Graduate Assistant Name:

Supervisor Name:

Department/Program:

Date of Initial Meeting:

Date PIP Sent to GA:

Review Date(s) will be listed below.

1. ☀️ Purpose of This Plan

This Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) is designed to support your growth and success in your graduate assistantship role. Our goal is to work collaboratively to identify areas for development, provide clear expectations, and offer resources and support in a respectful and helpful way.

2. 🌀 Areas for Growth

We've identified the following areas where improvement is needed. These observations are shared with the intention of fostering learning and professional development.

Directions to Supervisors: Modify this section as needed. Remove examples below and replace with clear, direct, and specific feedback.

Area of Concern	Description	Impact
e.g., Timeliness of grading assignments	e.g., Student homework assignments 3, 4, and 6 were returned to students 7-10 days after submitted. Students should be receiving graded homework returned within 3 days of submission.	e.g., When students do not receive their homework back in a timely manner, they are unable to study for upcoming quizzes or tests, which can impact their ability to succeed in the course.
e.g., Consistently ending class sessions early	e.g., Students reported to me that class sessions	e.g., It is important that class sessions meet for the full

⁵ This guide for this template was prepared with the help of Microsoft CoPilot. It has been modified by the Graduate School.

	consistently end 10-20 minutes early.	allotted time with meaningful activities being done. Not only is the university's accrediting agency concerned with class time, but students are short-changed in their preparation for exams when classes do not meet for the full time.
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Note to Student: This section is not intended to assign blame, but to create shared understanding.

1. 🎯 Goals for Improvement

Directions to Supervisors: Modify this section as needed. Remove examples below and replace with clear, direct, and specific feedback.

Together, we will work toward the following specific, measurable, and achievable goals:

Goal	Success Criteria	Timeline
e.g., Return graded assignments to students within 3 days of submission	e.g., Homework will be returned through D2L to students by 11:30 pm.	e.g., Consistent improvement should be shown over the next 4 weeks.
e.g., Prepare more material than you think you need for the class period, including hands-on and/or active learning activities.	e.g., Class sessions will meet productively for the full allotted time.	e.g., Consistent improvement should be shown over the next 4 weeks.

4. 🛠️ Support and Resources

Directions to Supervisors: Modify this section as needed. Include support and resources that can help the GA meet the goals outlined above. Some examples are listed below, although this is not an encompassing list. Please remove items that are not relevant and add items that are.

We are committed to supporting you. The following resources and strategies will be made available:

- Regular check-ins (e.g., weekly 1:1 meetings)
- Attend workshop on *TOPIC* at the Center for Teaching Excellence to be held on *DATE*
- Access to mentorship or peer support
- Time management tools or training
- Referrals to campus resources (e.g., counseling, academic support)

Please let us know if there are additional supports that would be helpful for you.

5. 🤝 Communication and Feedback

We will maintain open, respectful, and consistent communication throughout this process. You are encouraged to share your perspective, ask questions, and express any concerns.

- Check-in Schedule:
- Preferred Communication Method:
- Feedback Mechanism:

6. 📅 Review and Next Steps

We will review progress on the goals outlined above on the following date(s):

- Midpoint Review:
- Final Review:

At the final review, we will discuss whether the goals have been met and determine next steps collaboratively.

7. 📝 Acknowledgment

This plan is a shared agreement. Signing below indicates that we have discussed the contents of this plan and are committed to working together toward improvement.

Graduate Assistant Signature:

Date:

Supervisor Signature:

Date:

A signed copy of this form should be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Appendix 4: Sample Template for Documenting PIP Improvement

Note: Departments can request a digital copy of this form from the Graduate School.



Graduate Assistantship Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) Regular Check-In

Supervisors should plan to have regular check-in meetings with a GA who is on a PIP and take notes to document progress. Supervisors can modify this template as needed, or create their own, to document progress.

Meeting Date:

		Supervisor Assessment		Graduate Assistant Self-Assessment	
Goal from PIP	Shown improvement since last meeting?	Yes	No	Yes	No

Notes:

Meeting Date:

		Supervisor Assessment		Graduate Assistant Self-Assessment	
Goal from PIP	Shown improvement since last meeting?	Yes	No	Yes	No

Notes:

Appendix 5: Sample Template for Final PIP Evaluation Form

Note: Departments can request a digital copy of this form from the Graduate School.

Final Evaluation Form for Graduate Assistants on Performance Improvement Plan

Graduate Assistant Name: _____

Supervisor Name: _____

Department: _____

Evaluation Date: _____

PIP Start Date: _____

PIP End Date: _____

1. Performance Goals and Outcomes

Goal	Met	Partially Met	Not Met	Comments
1.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

2. Core Competencies

Rate the graduate assistant's performance in the following areas:

Competency	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement	Comments
Quality of Work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Timeliness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Professionalism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Initiative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

3. Supervisor Summary

Overall Progress:

☐ Satisfactory – All or most goals met; performance has improved.

☐ Marginal – Some progress made, but further improvement needed.

☐ Unsatisfactory – Goals not met; performance remains below expectations.

Comments:

4. Final Recommendation

- ☐ Continue in current role without further monitoring
- ☐ Extend PIP for additional period (specify duration): _____
- ☐ Terminate assistantship

Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Graduate Assistant Signature: _____ Date: _____

> Note: Signature indicates that the evaluation has been reviewed, not necessarily agreement with the content.

A signed copy of this form should be submitted to the Dean of the Graduate School.

Appendix 6: Graduate Assistant Evaluation

Supervisors can use the Graduate Assistant Performance Review [form](#), which is available to complete and submit electronically.

Supervisors will evaluate GAs on the following areas using a scale of Exceeds Expectations, Meets Expectations, or Needs Improvement.

Job Knowledge and Skills: Demonstrates technical, general, or other specific knowledge and skills required to perform job duties and accomplish stated objectives. Includes adapting to new requirements and pursuing development opportunities related to job responsibilities.

Quality of Work: Works to a high standard.

Interpersonal Skills: Works well with supervising faculty/supervisor, and, as appropriate to the position, other faculty, staff, graduate students, undergraduate students, and the public. Is receptive to others' ideas; handles difficult situations with diplomacy and tact; gives, receives, and acts upon constructive feedback.

Planning and Organizing: Works efficiently and productively; manages resources (labor, time, materials, etc.) Prioritizes, plans and organizes work for greatest efficiency and effectiveness. For teaching GAs, this would mean that class time is used productively, classes meet regularly, and students have meaningful instruction and activities to support learning.

Communication Skills: Proficient and professional in oral and written communication; communicates effectively.

Initiative: Takes initiative in problem solving; is self-directed, as appropriate for position.

Judgment: Analyzes problems effectively; determines appropriate course of action for solutions; makes clear, consistent, and timely decisions while acting with integrity.

Professionalism: Adheres to acceptable standards of professional behavior, ethics, and appropriate codes of conduct consistent with university, college, unit, and department standards, policies, and practices.

Reliability and Attendance: Completes tasks reliably; is punctual; reports absences using unit protocol; meets attendance expectations.