



AUBURN UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Graduate Student Handbook

2021-2022

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NOTE: Auburn University reserves the right to change these policies without notice.

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Graduate Students

Academic Calendar

Important academic dates can be found in the [Graduate School's Academic Calendar](#).

Academic Honesty

The [Student Academic Honesty Code](#) applies to all students taking classes at Auburn University with the exception of students in the [College of Veterinary Medicine](#) and the [School of Pharmacy](#) that are enrolled in the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine or Doctor of Pharmacy programs, respectively, who shall be subject to honesty codes published and distributed within each school.

Code of Student Conduct

Standards of acceptable behavior for students and student organizations are reflected in the [Code of Student Conduct](#) and other university policies. The student conduct process and the associated conduct outcomes are designed to be educational, promoting a healthy and safe environment while also respecting the rights of all members of the Auburn University community.

Discrimination/Harassment

Harassment based on protected class constitutes a violation of university policy and may also constitute a violation of civil rights laws. Such harassment will not be tolerated by Auburn University. It subverts the mission of the university and threatens the careers, educational experience and well-being of students, faculty, and staff. Prohibited harassment includes harassment based on race, sex, age, religion, color, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, and veteran status. Read the [Policy Against Discrimination and Harassment](#).

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination and is prohibited by federal regulation – see: [Title IX Sexual Harassment Policy](#). Sexual harassment in academic settings and in the employment area where students are involved is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal, graphic or physical conduct of a sexual nature when (1) submission to such conduct may be explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of a student's academic success or employment, (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct may be used as the basis for employment or academic decisions affecting the student and the student's total educational and/or work experience, or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with a student's employment or academic performance or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive work or educational environment that is severe, pervasive, and objectively offensive.

Students who wish to make a complaint of sexual or other prohibited harassment or discriminatory conduct should contact the [Office of Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity](#), 317 James E. Foy Hall, or call (334) 844-4794.

Due Process for Graduate Students

The student's advisory committee monitors each graduate student's progress toward a degree, and issues of professional and personal development may be considered. While failure to maintain good academic standing merits automatic dismissal, a student also maybe dropped from the Graduate School if progress is unsatisfactory in other areas.

In such cases, the advisory committee will prepare a statement of grievance and discuss it in a meeting with the student. The statement must have the unanimous support of all members of the committee. The student will be warned that corrective measures must be taken within a specified time to avoid action that might result in dismissal. The committee determines the period allowed for correction. Copies of the statement of grievance and meeting summary will be provided the student, the department head or chair, the academic dean, and the graduate school dean.

If the deficiency is not corrected within the time allowed by the committee, a statement reiterating the grievance and recommending dismissal should be sent to the graduate dean with copies to the student, the department head or chair, and the academic dean.

The graduate school dean will provide the student an opportunity to respond and will make a final determination. The student and the advisory committee will be notified. The action taken will not appear on the student's official transcript, and release of information is restricted under the University's policy on the confidentiality of student records.

Exceptions Policy

[Graduate School Policies](#) are enumerated in the Auburn University Bulletin. Exceptions may be made to policies of the Graduate School under special circumstances. A person wishing to request an exception should write a letter to the dean of the Graduate School stating the nature of the request and the reasons for it. If a student is making the request, the letter should be submitted first to the major professor, who will write a letter of recommendation. Both letters go to the department head. If a member of the faculty is making the request, the letter goes to the department head, who will write a letter of recommendation. All letters go to the associated college/school dean for approval. Letters and comments then are forwarded to the graduate school dean. A request for an extension of time to meet degree requirements must be justified. It must be accompanied by a proposed schedule for completion and assurance that the student is current in subjects included in the plan of study worksheet.

Fellowships and Financial Aid

Of the five types of graduate students, only degree-seeking Master's (MST), Education Specialist (EdS), and Doctoral (PhD) students who meet all admissions requirements are eligible for federal loans or financial aid. Graduate Provisional (GPR) and Graduate Non-Degree (GND) students are not eligible for these programs. Read more about [fellowships and financial aid opportunities](#) on the Graduate School website.

Forms

Required forms to initiate processes such as matriculation, a schedule adjustment, graduation, awards, and more can be found in the [Graduate School Forms online listing](#).

Graduate Student Information

Information on the following topics can be found on the [Current Students section](#) of the Graduate School website:

- Academic Resources
- Assistantships and Funding

- Campus Resources and Organizations
- Student Life

Student Counseling and Psychological Services

Student Counseling & Psychological Services provide short-term individual and on-going group counseling to address the emotional/developmental concerns of students. Educational and academic-related, skill-building workshops are offered to the campus community. Safe Harbor provides sexual assault/violence counseling services for victims. Students needing long-term psychotherapy or 24-hour crisis management are provided an appropriate referral. For assistance, call (334) 844-5123 or visit the [Student Counseling & Psychological Services website](#).

Student Policy eHandbook

The [Student Policy eHandbook](#) provides information for all students about academic affairs; student records, grades, and schedules; financial; information technology; parking and transit services; housing and residence life; student conduct; and safety.

Research Involving Animals

The [Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee \(IACUC\)](#) is charged with the responsibility of ensuring the proper care, use, and humane treatment of animals used in research, teaching, outreach, production, and demonstration at Auburn University. The IACUC reviews all animal use protocols, reviews the animal care and use program, and monitors university animal facilities to ensure compliance with standards and regulatory requirements. The IACUC serves as a campus-wide resource and is engaged in assisting with animal-related needs. Information may be obtained from the [IACUC Administrator](#), 540 Devall Drive, Suite 200, Auburn, AL or by phone at (334) 844-5966.

Research Involving Humans

Auburn University established the [Institutional Review Board for the Use of Human Subjects in Research \(IRB\)](#) to evaluate research for compliance with the guidelines and policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Public Health Service, the Food and Drug Administration and other federal, state and local regulations. All research in which human subjects are used, whether by faculty, staff, or students, must be approved in advance by the IRB, regardless of the source of funding, lack of funding or any other consideration. Research involving human subjects not approved in advance may be disallowed and may incur severe penalties for non-compliance with institutional policy. Information and review forms may be obtained from the [IRB Administrator](#), 540 Devall Drive, Suite 200, Auburn, AL 36832 or by phone at (334) 844-5966.

Graduate Assistantships

Purpose of Graduate Assistantships

Auburn University's programs of graduate study aim to provide students with a variety of opportunities for professional and scholarly development. Because graduate assistantships give students an opportunity to gain practical experience in teaching, research, or other academic service under the guidance of a faculty member, they can be a significant and challenging avenue for that development. The work experiences of graduate assistants are designed to reinforce and enhance their academic development. Thus, service as a graduate assistant presents a dual challenge: those who hold that position are both students and employees. As students, they are expected to concentrate on their studies under the direction of faculty and to make satisfactory progress toward their scholarly or professional objectives. As temporary university employees, they are expected to perform their assigned responsibilities within the university's threefold mission of instruction, research, and engagement/outreach. The Office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs administers assistantships through the departments. That office may delegate day-to-day responsibility to the Graduate School.

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 assistant makes progress toward an advanced degree, he or she also receives work experience in a profession under the supervision of a faculty mentor.

The graduate assistant is both student and employee. As a student, the graduate assistant is expected to perform well academically to retain the assistantship. They are to be counseled and evaluated regularly by a faculty mentor so as to develop professional skills. As an employee, the graduate assistant is expected to meet teaching, research, and/or administrative obligations. They are to work under the supervision of experienced faculty and receive in-service training. In summary, the graduate assistant receives financial support for graduate study by contributing to the teaching and/or research mission of the university. The totality of responsibility may be greater than that required of other students or staff members, but the opportunities for professional development also are greater for the graduate assistant.

A high proportion of lower-division teaching, and much of the day-to-day research function of the university, is conducted by graduate assistants. Since they play an important role in the educational activities of the institution, they should be given assignments and supervision that will help them to grow professionally. Their graduate studies and assistantship responsibilities should reinforce each other. Research projects, for instance, should lead to a thesis or dissertation. Teaching should give them greater insight into their own performance as students. The mentor relationship is vital in achieving this type of integration. The best graduate assistant experience will evolve from careful planning and monitoring to see that both the students and the university benefit from the relationship.

The graduate assistantship should be used as a recruiting device to attract highly desired students, including women and minorities. Used effectively, the assistantship can be a tool in the university's equal opportunity/affirmative action program to the benefit of the academic community. It can build confidence in graduate students from diverse backgrounds as it helps them to become better

professionals.

Source: C. W. Minkel and Mary P. Richards, "A Model Policy for Graduate Assistantship Administration" (Knoxville: Tennessee, Conference of Graduate Schools, 1983 edition).

Responsibilities of Graduate Assistants

A fundamental responsibility of the graduate assistant is to work closely with the faculty supervisor in carrying out assigned duties, at the same time making satisfactory progress towards the completion of the degree program. If the student's workload and academic program are properly coordinated, these responsibilities will be compatible. Whether working in a laboratory, classroom, office, or other setting, the graduate assistant is obligated to maintain standards of academic honesty, integrity, and scientific conduct, and to report violations of these to the faculty supervisor. The graduate assistant should keep well informed of departmental, college, and institutional regulations, and follow them consistently.

The graduate assistant should keep careful [written] records of work assignments so that progress and problems can be fully documented. Recognizing that the assistantship is a temporary position, the graduate assistant should leave records such that decisions can be traced, results verified, and incomplete work finished after the graduate assistant has left the position.

If problems arise in the work assignment, the graduate assistant should seek help first from the faculty supervisor. Even if the graduate assistant encounters few problems, they are responsible for getting the most out of the apprenticeship experience. This means that the graduate assistant, in consultation with the faculty supervisor, should assess the work experience on a continuing basis so as to improve it. The graduate assistant should articulate their goals early in the term of appointment and work with the supervisor to achieve them.

Source: C. W. Minkel and Mary P. Richards, "A Model Policy for Graduate Assistantship Administration" (Knoxville: Tennessee, Conference of Graduate Schools, 1983 edition).

Types of Graduate Assistantships

The following graduate assistantship classifications are used at Auburn University:

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

A Graduate Teaching Assistant must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member. The GTA's primary responsibility is to support the instructional mission of the University. The GTA's responsibilities may include, for example: classroom or laboratory teaching*; advising or mentoring of students; proctoring exams; grading papers, homework, and/or projects; preparing instructional materials; or providing other general assistance in the instructional process. A GTA may also be assigned primary responsibilities in an extension, outreach, or service role for which those responsibilities support the instructional mission of the university. GTAs may not be given duties to support faculty research or duties primarily clerical in nature. Whatever their instructional responsibilities, GTAs must be supervised by a faculty member who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating their performance at least on an annual basis. GTAs who have no prior teaching experience must be given some form of training before being allowed to teach. Any GTA with primary responsibility for a course must have a minimum of 18 semester hours of graduate course credit in that field of instruction.

*GTAs are not permitted to teach courses numbered 6000 or above, although they may assist with laboratories for such courses. Additionally, they may not teach or assist with a course in which they are enrolled.

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs)

A Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member. The GRA's primary responsibility is to provide general support to the University's research mission. Services provided by a GRA may include, for example: assisting faculty members in a research or creative activity; performing degree-related professional or administrative services that support the research, instruction, professional development, or outreach missions of the University; performing research related to the objectives of an extramural grant or contract; developing and evaluating instructional materials or curricula; or assuming responsibility for designated scholarly endeavors. Since many GRAs assist with projects funded by external grants or contracts, the GRA's responsibilities may or may not be related directly to the student's thesis or dissertation. The faculty supervisor determines the students' specific duties and is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the GRA's performance at least on an annual basis. GRAs should perform degree-related professional or administrative services that only include jobs that are within the student's field of study.

Graduate Assistants (GAs)

Graduate Assistants must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by a faculty member, administrator, or other appropriate university employee. GAs are responsible for duties other than teaching, research, or extension. These responsibilities can be varied and could include performing administrative duties not related to the GA's field of study or the instructional or research missions of the university. Whatever their responsibilities, GAs should be supervised by a faculty member, administrator, or other appropriate university employee who is responsible for monitoring and evaluating their performance at least on an annual basis.

Graduate Extension Assistants (GEAs)

A Graduate Extension Assistant must meet eligibility requirements and be supervised by an appropriate graduate faculty member or extension agent. GEAs are responsible for various kinds of extension work and interaction with the public. The various branches of the Extension Service award these assistantships. A faculty member or extension agent should be responsible for monitoring and evaluating the performance of GEAs at least on an annual basis.

Administration of Graduate Assistantships

Appointments of GTAs, GAs, GEAs and, commonly, GRAs are made by the head or chair of the academic department. Faculty members who have grant or contract funds designated for GRAs can suggest candidates for appointment. In any case, department heads, chairs, or their designees are responsible for making formal offers of assistantships in an official letter and for assuring that students receiving offers meet all criteria for appointment. The letter of appointment should provide the following information:

- Type of assistantship being offered (GTA, GRA, GA, GEA);
- Fraction of full-time workload and length of the appointment;
- Stipend;
- Tuition waiver (if applicable)

- General description of responsibilities;
- Explanation of how to accept the offer;
- Deadline for accepting the offer;
- Expectation of work schedule around university holidays and between semesters.

To conform with the requirements of due process, departments should also provide the following information to those receiving assistantship offers, whether through the letter of appointment, a separate document, or a departmental orientation session:

- Evaluation procedures;
- Procedures and criteria for reappointment;
- Conditions under which an assistantship could be terminated.

Departments are encouraged to develop written guides to policies concerning graduate students and assistants. If such a guide is available, it should be forwarded to students before they enroll or distributed to them when they arrive.

At the time of the initial assistantship offer, each department or unit employing graduate assistants must provide specific departmental policies regarding academic loads. Departments or units must also provide graduate assistants with materials they will need in order to carry out their assigned responsibilities, e.g., textbooks, research equipment, access to computers, etc.

Teaching assistantships are generally offered for a period of nine months and research assistantships for a period of 12 months. Factors such as fluctuating course enrollment and variations in extramural funding can dictate other periods of appointment.

Graduate Student Employee Background Check Policy

All new graduate student employees (including hourly paid) must have an approved consumer report and/or investigative consumer report (background check) as a condition for appointment. The information contained in these reports may be used to deny an individual employment or continued employment with Auburn University. The background report and its contents are deemed private and confidential and shall be disclosed only for the purposes described in [“Procedures for Securing Background Reports for Graduate Students Before Hiring”](#) to those University employees who have a need to know, or as otherwise required or permitted by law.

Requirements for Graduate Assistant Appointment

To be eligible for appointment to any sort of graduate assistantship, students must meet all of the following conditions:

- They must qualify for admission to the Auburn University Graduate School (see [Information for Applicants and Prospective Students](#)).
- They must submit, when applying, official transcripts of college credits to the Graduate School.
- They must be enrolled in the Auburn University Graduate School by the beginning of the semester in which the assistantship is to commence and must be registered for at least one course during each semester of the appointment.
- They should possess an undergraduate degree with substantial work in the field involved in the appointment. They should be devoting full-time efforts toward the degree. They should

have achieved, and should continue to maintain, an excellent academic record. They should be studying for an advanced degree in the field to which they are appointed or in a closely-related field in which they have a substantial background.

- They must receive final approval of their appointment to an assistantship from the Graduate School.
- All new graduate assistant appointees must pass a background check.

Students who are not native speakers of English must also demonstrate competence in spoken English before being appointed to a GTA or undertaking any other teaching responsibilities. Specifically, such students must receive acceptable evaluations in one of the following examinations:

- The Test of Spoken English (TSE) administered by the Educational Testing Service, with an acceptable score of at least 50 or an acceptable score of at least 23 on the iBT Speaking section.
- Evaluation and approval by the director of the English as a Second Language Program (ESL).

Compliance with these requirements is the responsibility of the hiring department. If such students have tentatively been offered assistantships but have not passed at least one of the exams above, the offers must be suspended until they have done so, or they must be given assignments that do not require spoken English in a teaching situation.

International students should not be eligible to apply for a teaching assistantship until they have completed at least a term of graduate work. Their knowledge of the specific field in which they may work as a graduate assistant, and their command of the English language to a degree appropriate to the demands of the assignment, should be evaluated thoroughly by faculty supervisors before an award is made. International graduate students must comply with all university, local, state, and federal regulations including but not limited to visas, International Student Fees, health insurance requirements, employment, curriculum changes, and other requirements that may arise. International students need to consult with the [Office of International Programs](#) for details concerning all aspects of International Education at Auburn University.

Graduate Assistantship Workloads

Graduate students may not normally hold an appointment of more than 50 percent (0.50 FTE or 20 hours per week), whether the appointment is from a single unit or multiple units combined. This policy also applies to internship appointments (whether called an internship or externship). Graduate students may hold multiple assistantships (assistantships and/or hourly employment) from one or more units on campus, but the cumulative appointments must add up to a 0.25 FTE, 0.33 FTE, or .50 FTE appointment. This allows the students the time needed to devote to their academic programs. An exception is automatically allowed in the special case of a graduate assistant assigned to teach one four credit course and one three/ four credit course. In such cases, appointments will be made at 0.58/0.67 FTE, respectively. Other exceptions may be requested, with compelling academic justification, in writing to the graduate school dean. For multiple assistantships from different units, coordinating approval memos from the home unit and the hiring units are required. Please note that federal regulations limit the cumulative appointment for international graduate students to no more than a 0.50 FTE (20 hours per week) appointment.

Requirements for Graduate Assistant Reappointment

Graduate assistant appointments are temporary. Continuation depends upon availability of funds, level of enrollment, and research needs. In order to be considered for reappointment, those holding assistantships must have maintained a cumulative grade-point average of at least 3.0 on all graduate course work and received acceptable evaluations from their supervisor. If the student's cumulative GPA falls below 3.0, there is a grace period of the next 11 hours of graduate enrollment during which the student must raise the GPA back to that minimum level or lose the assistantship. Assistants eligible to be considered for reappointment should be notified of the department's decision, in writing, by June 15 if at all possible, preceding the next academic year. For assistantships not tied to the academic calendar, reasonable written notice of reappointment decisions should also be given.

Graduate Assistant Grievance Policy

In addition to their rights as students at Auburn University, all graduate assistants have certain other rights as assistants. First, they have the right to receive written notification of all decisions, actions, or contingencies that will affect their assistantship. For example, they should receive in advance an account of the procedures by which they will be evaluated as assistants. They should also receive notice of reappointment procedures well in advance, so that they can prepare their requests or applications.

Second, graduate students have the right to seek a resolution of assistantship-related grievances through the Graduate Assistants Grievance Policy. As students, all graduate assistants also have the right to seek redress of academic grievances through the [Student Academic Grievance Policy](#). Since the duties of many graduate assistants are intertwined with their academic work, those who believe that they have a grievance should carefully consider which process to initiate. The process outlined here for graduate assistants applies only to grievances arising specifically from their work as graduate assistants.

The Graduate Assistant Grievance Policy is not designed to encourage or provide for formal adjudication of differences or to create a bureaucracy of review. Instead, the policy is intended to provide a fair and uniform set of guidelines by which the grievances of graduate assistants may be heard and resolved. All grievances should be resolved at the lowest possible administrative level and in the most equitable way. While those seeking redress of grievances have the right of appeal to successive levels of administration, they should recognize that the more formal the review, the more certainly they must bear the burden of proof.

Graduate Assistant Grievance Policy process: Before filing a grievance, graduate assistants should first inform their immediate academic advisor or supervisor of the problem and seek their help in solving it. If necessary, the graduate assistant may then appeal to the program director or department head or chair for assistance. Only if a satisfactory resolution of the problem cannot be achieved at these levels should a graduate assistant appeal to a higher one. If the problem cannot be resolved at the department level or if the nature of the problem or the personalities involved would make it too awkward or embarrassing to begin the grievance process at that level, the graduate assistant may present the grievance to the academic dean or, in a unit without an academic dean, to another appropriate administrative officer(s). If the problem cannot be resolved there, the student may appeal to the graduate school dean, Provost, or designee, whose decision is final. At every level of consideration, the graduate assistant is entitled to a fair and impartial review. Those considering the grievance should make every effort to act with proper regard to the graduate assistant's welfare and confidentiality, as well as to sound academic policy.

Finally, just as graduate assistants may encounter problems in carrying out their duties, so they may become the subject of complaints or grievances brought by others. When the graduate assistant's supervisor, academic advisor, or department head or chair receives such complaints, the graduate assistant has the right to receive prompt notification and to be offered the opportunity to respond to the complaint, presenting evidence in defense. Here, too, the burden of proof should rest on the person making the complaint.

Tuition Fellowships and Non-resident Tuition Waivers

Auburn University has a program to provide in-state tuition fellowships to qualifying graduate assistants. Those graduate students pay no tuition, although they will be charged applicable fees. Tuition fellowship recipients must hold a concurrent graduate assistantship at a minimum of a 0.333 FTE and abide by the guidelines set forth by the Graduate School and the academic unit in which the student is working. Graduate assistants who do not qualify for the tuition fellowship (less than 0.333 FTE) may receive a waiver of the non-resident portion of tuition if they meet certain criteria. Eligibility requirements can be found at [Guidelines for Graduate Tuition Fellowship](#). Tuition fellowships and non-resident tuition waivers are administered through the Graduate School and are automatically applied to the student's account. Any questions concerning eligibility or enrollment should be directed to Julie Reece in the Graduate School by emailing reeceju@auburn.edu or calling (334) 844-2125.

Health Insurance

All graduate assistants with assignments of 10 hours (0.25 FTE) or greater for the full semester in the fall and/or spring semesters, who meet the minimum monthly stipend established by the Office of the Provost, and are in good academic standing, are required to have health insurance coverage. This group will be automatically enrolled in the Auburn University [Graduate Student Group Health Plan \(GSGHP\)](#). Annual premiums, billed in two installments – one for fall and another for spring/summer – are updated by academic year on the GSGHP website linked above.

If one has equivalent/greater prior coverage and can so demonstrate, that person may choose to opt out of the University plan. Those who wish to opt out must complete the required form by September 5th for the fall and February 16th for the spring. [Waiver applications](#) are accepted for two months following the waiver deadline but are subject to prorated insurance costs.

International graduate students and dependents in F or J immigration status will continue to be covered and billed similarly under the [Mandatory International Student and Scholar Health Plan](#). Contact the Office of International Programs' Insurance office in 228 Foy Hall or by [email](#) for details.

Graduate students who do not qualify for the automatic enrollment may opt-in to the program. They must complete a request form and submit it to the Graduate School. For further information on optional enrollment, please visit the [Detailed Enrollment Information](#). To find out more about the GSGHP or to get enrolled, please contact Aime McCorcle by [email](#) or call (334) 844-5012.