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Introduction to Graduate Assistantships

Every day, graduate students at California University of Pennsylvania make discoveries that impact their lives and the lives of others. Guided by scholarly faculty or university staff, challenged by rigorous coursework, and supported by state-of-the-art resources, our graduate students learn how to use knowledge to build character and advance their careers. Our students are serious scholars, energetic leaders, and thoughtful collaborators; they are driven to succeed.

California University of Pennsylvania is dedicated to the ideals of exemplary scholarship and high standards of achievement that characterize graduate education. We are proud to offer graduate assistantships to qualified students who share these goals. It is the purpose of this handbook to provide information that pertains to the academic and administrative processes of providing graduate assistantships.

California University of Pennsylvania provides financial support in the form of graduate assistantships to a limited number of qualified graduate students. A Graduate Assistant is a student employee supported by funds provided by the University or other source and administered through the University.

Graduate Assistants perform specific duties and have responsibilities, such as: supporting instruction, supervising laboratories and other facilities, assisting faculty with sponsored programs and research or other scholarship and otherwise assisting departments in academic, scholarly, and service endeavors. A graduate assistantship provides part-time employment to a qualified student in the pursuit of a graduate degree, encourages scholarship and responsibility, enhances the academic experience, and assists departments and faculty in carrying out their missions.

All duties and services of Graduate Assistants are to be carried out under the supervision and direction of approved University faculty or staff.

Types of Graduate Assistantships

Standard and Guskin

California University of Pennsylvania offers two types of graduate assistantships positions to qualified graduate students — Standard and Guskin.

A Standard Graduate Assistant is a graduate student in good academic standing who, in the course of his or her academic preparation, is employed in a part-time position at California University of Pennsylvania where the student’s graduate academic preparation is based in part on the teaching support, scholarship, or service performed, or where the duties being performed will assist the student in fulfilling his or her degree requirements. The Graduate Assistant Request Form (submitted by the supervising department or office) and hiring form for each Standard Graduate Assistant outlines the specific responsibilities, duties, and services, which may include but are not limited to supporting instruction, supervising laboratories and other facilities, assisting faculty with sponsored programs and research or other scholarship, or assisting University departments in academic, scholarly, or service endeavors. All employment activities of a Standard Graduate Assistant are carried out under the supervision and direction of an approved University faculty or staff member.
A **Guskin Graduate Assistant** is a graduate student in good academic standing who, in the course of his or her academic preparation, is employed in a part-time position at California University of Pennsylvania where the student’s graduate academic preparation is based in part on the instructional support activities performed, or where the duties performed assist the student in fulfilling his or her degree requirements. The **Graduate Assistant Request Form** (submitted by the supervising department or office) for each Guskin Graduate Assistant outlines the specific responsibilities, duties, and services of the Graduate Assistant, which primarily involve supporting faculty instruction in larger course sections (typically, 50 or more students registered). Guskin Graduate Assistants are normally assigned to support faculty in multiple sections. Guskin Graduate Assistants are supervised by approved University faculty members.

**Graduate Assistant Work Hours**

Graduate Assistant positions may be scheduled for 300 or 200 hours of work per semester/term. The hiring form specifies the number of work hours to be provided. Each option is described below, with the number of required registered graduate credit hours and typical hours per week specified.

**300-Hour Graduate Assistant**

A Graduate Assistant position (whether Standard or Guskin) may require 300 hours of work per semester/term. A 300-hour Graduate Assistant must be in good academic standing and be registered for nine (9) or more graduate credits. Typically, a 300-hour Graduate Assistant works 20 hours per week during the 15-week Fall or Spring semester or 30 hours per week during a 10-week Summer term. **Under no circumstances may a 300-hour Graduate Assistant work more than 30 hours per week.**

**200-Hour Graduate Assistant**

A second Graduate Assistant option (whether Standard or Guskin) requires 200 hours of work per semester/term. Typically, the 200-hour Graduate Assistant works 13.3 hours per week during the 15-week Fall or Spring semester or 20 hours per week during a 10-week Summer term. A 200-hour Graduate Assistant must be in good academic standing and be registered for at least six (6) graduate credits during the semester or term of employment. **Under no circumstances may a 200-hour Graduate Assistant work more than 30 hours per week.**

Whether the Graduate Assistant position is 300 hours or 200 hours depends upon several factors, including the available budget for positions, the work required for the position and the graduate student’s availability for completing the work assignments and required work hours.

**Weekly Hour Limits**

In some situations with supervisor direction or approval, a Graduate Assistant may work more or less than 20 (300-hour Graduate Assistant) or 13.3 (200-hour Graduate Assistant) hours per week. **Under no circumstances may a Graduate Assistant be permitted to work more than 30 hours per week.** In situations where a Graduate Assistant misses work and needs to make up missed time, the Graduate Assistant Supervisor shall not permit the amount of time missed to exceed the amount of hours in one normal work week (20 hours per week for a 300-hour Graduate Assistant and 13.3 hours for a 200-hour Graduate Assistant). If a Graduate Assistant misses more than the hours in one normal work week, the Graduate Assistant Supervisor must notify Payroll immediately.
Stipends

Graduate Assistants are paid by stipend through the University’s bi-weekly payroll system. The amount of the stipend is set each year by the University. Typically, this action takes place in the summer after the Board of Governors of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (PASSHE) establishes tuition charges for the upcoming academic year.

Typically, the stipend is the only form of compensation for a Graduate Assistant at California University. Graduate Assistants are responsible for paying graduate tuition and all fees. The value of the stipend is typically less than the cost of tuition and fees.

There is no difference in the stipend amount for a Standard Graduate Assistant or a Guskin Graduate Assistant. The amount of the stipend is determined by the number of work hours specified in the Graduate Assistant’s hiring form. A 300-hour Graduate Assistant qualifies for the full stipend amount, and a 200-hour Graduate Assistant is paid two-thirds of the full stipend amount.

**Tax Status of Stipends** The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) treats stipends paid to Graduate Assistants as taxable income, and the University is obliged to withhold income taxes. The Payroll Office will deduct appropriate Federal, State of Pennsylvania, and local income taxes. Students should contact the IRS directly for tax information or consult a tax adviser. California University does not provide tax consultation.

**For Supervisors: Requesting a Graduate Assistant**

To request a Graduate Assistant position, a department, office, or program must submit a *Graduate Assistant Request Form* to the School of Graduate Studies & Research by the announced due date, which is typically in the Spring semester.

The *Graduate Assistant Request Form* is drafted by the proposed Graduate Assistant Supervisor. The information required on the *Graduate Assistant Request Form* includes:

- **Learning Outcomes** - At least three outcomes are required. Terms from Bloom’s Taxonomy are used to clearly describe each learning outcome.

- **Assessment/Evaluation** - Each learning outcome is accompanied by a description of the methods used to assess and evaluate the Graduate Assistant’s progress toward achieving the learning outcomes.

- **Tasks** - All of the tasks, assignments, activities, duties, and responsibilities that will be completed by the Graduate Assistant during the employment period.
For Students: Finding a Graduate Assistant Position

To secure a Graduate Assistant position, a department, office, or program submits a Graduate Assistant Request Form to the School of Graduate Studies & Research. The Graduate Assistant Request Form identifies the supervisor for the proposed Graduate Assistant position. The School of Graduate Studies & Research notifies supervisors whose requests are approved.

Available positions are announced over the California University of Pennsylvania email Announcement system and via other means available to the department.

Any graduate student who qualifies for a Graduate Assistant position may express interest in securing a position by contacting a department, office or program that is offering a position that aligns with the student’s academic interests and educational development plans. Interested graduate students may also express interest in a Graduate Assistant position by emailing their resume to Karlene Petrisek (petrisek@calu.edu) in the School of Graduate Studies & Research. The School of Graduate Studies & Research will provide the names and resumes of interested students to departments, offices, and programs that are approved for a Graduate Assistant position.

Hiring Process

Once the Graduate Assistant position has been approved, the School of Graduate Studies & Research notifies the supervisor, who may begin to search for a qualified applicant to fill the position. When the supervisor has identified the individual to fill the position, the following takes place:

- The School of Graduate Studies & Research completes the section of the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form containing the department, cost center, and number of work hours (300 or 200) of the position. The form is emailed to the supervisor for processing.
- The Graduate Assistant supervisor completes the section on the form containing the name and CWID of the graduate student to be hired and, if applicable, the number of work hours.
- The form is printed and given to the graduate student who completes the form sections dealing with the number of credits earned, credits enrolled, and anticipated graduation date.
- The graduate student delivers the form to the Bursar’s Office for processing.
- The graduate student delivers the form to the Payroll Office for processing.
- The graduate student signs and dates the Agreement to Conditions of Employment and Payroll Deduction Authorization section of the form.
- Payroll stamps the form when complete and maintains the original. Payroll gives a copy of the approved form to the graduate student and to the School of Graduate Studies & Research.

The form must be completed and submitted to the School of Graduate Studies & Research before the Graduate Assistant begins work. No Graduate Assistant may work without submitting a fully executed hiring form. The supervisor must have a signed form stamped by Payroll before permitting the Graduate Assistant to begin work.
**Payroll Procedures**

New Graduate Assistants must complete payroll and tax information prior to the first day of employment. The **Student Payroll Form** and other applicable forms are available on the Payroll web page ([http://www.calu.edu/faculty-staff/administration/payroll/](http://www.calu.edu/faculty-staff/administration/payroll/)). Students should download and complete all of the necessary forms prior to visiting the Payroll Office in Dixon Hall. **No Graduate Assistant may begin work without completing the necessary payroll forms.**

Payroll is processed bi-weekly and after-the-fact. Thus, paychecks are for the two-week pay period that ended two weeks before the pay date. Paychecks cannot be advanced or released prior to payday, without exception. Should a payday occur on an observed holiday, the processing schedule will be adjusted, and payday will precede the holiday.

Paychecks and earnings statements are distributed on payday (every other Friday) between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. at the information desk on the first floor of the Natali Student Center. Paychecks not picked up by the end of the current two-week pay period are mailed. Earnings statements are returned to the Payroll Office for filing.

Graduate Assistants are encouraged to use direct deposit. The direct deposit form is available on the Payroll web page. Once the direct deposit has been activated, Graduate Assistants must notify the Payroll Office prior to making changes or closing the account. Failure to do so may result in a delay of payment.

**Graduate Assistant Employment Policies**

**Sexual Harassment Training**

Through the services of Workplace Answers, the Office of Social Equity offers online training to faculty, staff and students of California University of Pennsylvania. All graduate students, including Graduate Assistants, must complete the university-offered online sexual harassment training. Training modules are available on the California University web page at the following location: [http://www.calu.edu/academics/colleges/graduate-school/campus-orientation/index.htm](http://www.calu.edu/academics/colleges/graduate-school/campus-orientation/index.htm)

**FERPA Regulations**

Often, Graduate Assistants interact with students and/or student records, including academics, financial aid, billing, and other personal information. All student information and records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). FERPA is a federal law that protects students from any persons gaining access to their student records without their permission. When a position requires a Graduate Assistant to interact with student records, the Supervisor reviews the relevant FERPA regulations, provides training in handling student information, and requires the Graduate Assistant to sign a form to verify their understanding of and intent to follow FERPA regulations.
Graduate Assistant Hiring Form

A fully-executed Graduate Assistant Hiring Form must be completed and submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research before a Graduate Assistant begins working. No Graduate Assistant may work or complete any assignments or tasks until the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form is fully approved by the Bursar and Payroll and submitted to the graduate school.

A Graduate Assistant will not be compensated for work that is completed prior to a Graduate Assistant Hiring Form being approved and submitted to the Graduate School. If a Graduate Assistant Hiring Form is submitted after the first week of the semester/term, the Graduate Assistant compensation will be prorated based on the available pay periods in the term.

Graduate assistants must show satisfactory progress toward completing their graduate academic program, as defined by the department, maintain appropriate standards of academic conduct, and honor the terms and conditions of the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form.

Graduate Assistant Tasks

Graduate assistant tasks, responsibilities, and duties are assigned by the approved Graduate Assistant supervisor. Graduate assistant work hours and tasks must be recorded and saved on the official Graduate Assistant Timesheet, which is available for download on the Forms and Student Resources web page of the School of Graduate Studies and Research.

Enrollment Requirements

A Graduate Assistant must be enrolled in graduate studies at California University of Pennsylvania in good academic standing (3.00 GPA or higher) and satisfactorily perform assigned tasks. A 300-hour Graduate Assistant must be in good academic standing and be registered for nine (9) or more graduate credits. A 200-hour Graduate Assistant must be in good academic standing and be registered for at least six (6) graduate credits during the semester or term of employment. A Graduate Assistant may be terminated for failing to maintain good academic standing, for not fulfilling work assignments, or for failing to meet financial obligations to the University.

Any drops or withdrawals from classes that reduce the Graduate Assistant’s enrolled credits below the minimum required in the Graduate Assistant Hiring Form will automatically result in termination from the Graduate Assistant position regardless of when the withdrawal occurs. Stipends will be terminated as of the date of withdrawal.

Graduate assistants are required to visit the Bursar’s Office whenever any changes take place in their account (i.e., add/drop classes, changing rooms & meal plans, changes in financial aid, etc.).

Hiring Form & Term Limits

Graduate Assistants are hired for one semester/term. A student who holds a Graduate Assistant position may be rehired in subsequent semesters/terms and may be eligible to hold the Graduate Assistant position for up to four (4) terms (including Summers); provided the University approves and funds the Graduate Assistant position, the student maintains good academic standing, and the Graduate Assistant duties and
responsibilities are completed satisfactorily. Students in high-credit programs may request an extension of the four-term limit.

Weekly Hour Limits
In some situations with Supervisor direction or approval, a Graduate Assistant may work more or less than 20 (300-hour Graduate Assistant) or 13.3 (200-hour Graduate Assistant) hours per week. **Under no circumstances may a Graduate Assistant be permitted to work more than 30 hours per week.** The Graduate Assistant Supervisor must ensure that a Graduate Assistant does not work more than 30 hours per week. In situations where a Graduate Assistant misses work and needs to make up missed time, the Graduate Assistant Supervisor shall not permit the amount of time missed to exceed the amount of hours in one normal work week (20 hours per week for a 300-hour Graduate Assistant and 13.3 hours for a 200-hour Graduate Assistant).

Vacation & Holidays
Graduate Assistants do not earn vacation hours or accrue sick time. Graduate Assistants observe the University holiday schedule when offices are closed. Graduate Assistants work while classes are in session; from the start date to the end date of the semester/term. Some graduate assistant positions may require work during break weeks. Variations from this working schedule must be noted on the *Graduate Assistant Hiring Form* and approved before implementation. The supervisor of the Graduate Assistant is required to monitor the semester hours worked to ensure the total number of hours specified in the *Graduate Assistant Hiring Form* are met.

Workers’ Compensation
The University Workers’ Compensation Program covers all full-time, part-time, and student employees of California University for injuries occurring in the course and scope of employment. In accordance with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Injury Leave Manual M530.2 and the Workers’ Compensation Act, students who work for academic credit or for a practicum are deemed employees. As with all injuries, the university’s third-party administrator determines whether the injury is covered by the Workers’ Compensation Law. If necessary, review the University’s Work-Related Injury Procedures on the Environmental Health and Safety website (http://www.calu.edu/faculty-staff/administration/ehs/) and follow the appropriate procedures required for a work-related incident.

Termination
If a Graduate Assistant terminates employment or is terminated from the position, the stipend will stop. If the Graduate Assistant was using payroll deduction to make tuition payments, the student will be immediately responsible for any unpaid tuition and fees and any overpayments issued through Payroll. A student may be terminated from a Graduate Assistant position for cause before expiration of the *Graduate Assistant Hiring Form* under certain conditions:

1. Graduate Assistant fails to maintain good academic standing,
2. Graduate Assistant fails to fulfill work assignments, including reporting, satisfactorily,
3. Graduate Assistant violates laws or University regulations which in the judgment of the University affect duties or services performed by the Graduate Assistant,
4. Graduate Assistant violates provisions of the stipulations in the *Graduate Assistant Hiring Form*,
5. Graduate Assistant fails to meet financial obligations to the University, or
6. University ceases to make funds available for the Graduate Assistant position.
Graduate Assistant Supervision

Graduate Assistant Supervisors
As noted above, Graduate Assistant tasks, responsibilities, and duties are assigned by approved Graduate Assistant Supervisors. The Graduate Assistant Supervisor, who may be a faculty or staff member of the university, is directly responsible for the items listed below. These responsibilities may not be re-assigned by the Graduate Assistant Supervisor to any other faculty or staff member without approval by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research.

Responsibilities of Graduate Assistant Supervisors:

1. Requesting a Graduate Assistant position by the established annual due date, including:
   a. Learning Outcomes- At least three outcomes are required. Terms from Bloom's Taxonomy are used to clearly describe each learning outcome.
   b. Assessment/Evaluation-Each learning outcome is accompanied by a description of the methods used to assess and evaluate the Graduate Assistant's progress toward achieving the learning outcomes.
   c. Tasks- All of the tasks, assignments, activities, duties, and responsibilities that will be completed by the Graduate Assistant during the employment period.

2. Finding a qualified student to fill an approved Graduate Assistant position and ensuring that the university hiring processes are completed prior to the Graduate Assistant commencing work;

3. Ensuring that the Graduate Assistant has completed the sexual harassment training program that is part of the orientation for all graduate students;

4. Assigning each task, assignment, activity, etc. to the Graduate Assistant and ensuring that no work infringes on bargaining unit work in relevant collective bargaining agreements;

5. Monitoring the work habits and functions of the Graduate Assistant and providing feedback, re-direction, and adjusting performance, when required;

6. Ensuring that the Graduate Assistant regularly documents and submits to the Supervisor time on task accurately on the official time sheet;

7. Ensuring that the Graduate Assistant never works more than 30 hours per week and not permitting the amount of time missed to exceed the amount of hours in one normal Graduate Assistant work week;

8. Assessing, evaluating, and documenting the Graduate Assistant’s progress toward attainment of the learning outcomes for the approved position, and

9. Promptly notifying Payroll, Bursar, and the Graduate Dean’s offices of any deficiencies in work performance, any changes in employment (including termination and dismissal), or if the Graduate Assistant misses more than the hours in one normal Graduate Assistant work week.
Graduate Assistant Learning Outcomes & Tasks
As noted above, Graduate Assistant tasks, responsibilities, and duties are assigned by the approved Graduate Assistant supervisor. On the Graduate Assistant Request Form, the supervisor specifies the following:

- **Learning Outcomes**— At least three outcomes are required. Terms from Bloom’s Taxonomy are used to clearly describe each learning outcome.

- **Assessment/Evaluation**— Each learning outcome is accompanied by a description of the methods used to assess and evaluate the Graduate Assistant’s progress toward achieving the learning outcomes.

- **Tasks**— All of the tasks, assignments, activities, duties, and responsibilities that will be completed by the Graduate Assistant during the employment period.

Prior to the start of the employment period, and periodically, as needed throughout the employment period, the supervisor reviews the learning outcomes, assessment/evaluation, and tasks with the Graduate Assistant.

Graduate Assistant work hours and tasks are recorded and saved on the official Graduate Assistant Timesheet, which is available for download on the Forms and Student Resources web page of the School of Graduate Studies and Research. Supervisors are responsible to submit Graduate Assistant Timesheets, when requested, to Payroll and the School of Graduate Studies and Research.