

## GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

### Appointment, Assignment and Evaluation

WWU uses the term graduate assistant (GA) to include teaching assistant (TA) and research assistant (RA). Most GA's provide instructional assistance as TA's. RA's are generally employed by grants with external research funds. Currently the Graduate School funds the equivalent of about 150 full assistantships annually from the University's instructional budget. This information sheet and the attached application are for students applying for the graduate (teaching) assistantship.

Students who apply for financial aid and are granted work study are graduate work study research assistants. Information on applying for financial aid is available from: <http://www.finaid.wwu.edu/finaid>. This application and information does not apply to graduate work study students.

Graduate assistantships are paid positions. They are not awarded on the basis of financial need. Graduate Assistants are paid twice monthly. Full-time graduate teaching assistants earn a minimum of approximately \$10,737 (cash compensation) per academic year. Half-time graduate teaching assistants receive approximately \$5,322 per academic year. Some graduate science programs' cash compensation figures are higher for both full-time and half-time graduate teaching assistants. (Contact the Graduate School for exact figures for specific M.S. programs.) Currently a partial tuition waiver is in effect for all graduate teaching assistants. The tuition waiver only pays for courses leading to the degree and listed on a student's Plan of Study. ALL graduate teaching assistants pay an out-of-pocket fee each quarter, approximately 10% of the total tuition amount (subject to change). The waiver applies only for credit taken through regular Western registration (not extended education or other institutions).

Students and applicants interested in a graduate assistant position funded by the Graduate School should indicate their interest on their application for admission, or [email the Graduate School](#) using the link provided and attach a resume. The Graduate School forwards the materials to the department which recommends students to the Graduate School. A nominee must have full admit status to the Graduate School (not provisional status) and, if a current student, be making satisfactory progress toward the degree. The Graduate School awards assistantships by an official letter of appointment (delivered via email). The Graduate School notifies the Student Accounts and Financial Aid offices of the names of assistantship recipients, and their records for fee payment and financial aid purposes reflect this.

Graduate teaching assistantship applicants whose native language is not English must demonstrate English language proficiency required for classroom or laboratory instruction.

Full-time appointments require 20 hours of service per week; half-time appointments require 10 hours of service per week. Students receiving a full-time appointment may not accept other on-campus employment during the time they are in pay status as graduate assistants. Students receiving a half-time appointment may accept other on-campus employment up to 9 hours/week during the time they are in pay status as graduate assistants. This is institutional policy based on student work regulations.

Teaching assistantships are renewable for a second year upon request of the department. (A student may serve as a teaching assistant for up to 6 full-time quarters.) A graduate teaching assistantship is

canceled if the graduate student does not maintain a GPA of 3.0, fails to meet the expectations stated in printed departmental or university publications, or performs duties unsatisfactorily. Most graduate assistants, whether holding a full- or part-time appointment, must be registered for a minimum of 8 credits each quarter the appointment has been awarded. Graduate assistants who have registered for, and completed, all courses on their approved graduate plan of study with the exception of their thesis (690) or other research (691), are allowed to register for a minimum of 2 credits each quarter. These credits must be thesis, research, or continuous enrollment. Generally, only second-year students in their 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> quarter of study will be eligible for registration of less than 8 credits per quarter. For purposes of some kinds of full-time financial aid, the minimum enrollment is 8 credits per quarter. Graduate assistants with questions or concerns about minimum credit enrollment requirements for financial aid or loan deferment purposes should contact the Financial Aid office at WWU at 360/650-3470 or their lending institution.

Proper assignments for a graduate teaching assistant include instruction (under the supervision of a graduate faculty member), grading of tests or essays (at the lower-division level), preparation of labs, or assistance to faculty members conducting research. The Chair of the department should give assignments in writing to the assistant. Primary responsibility for five hours per week of instruction or laboratory supervision is considered a full-time assignment, given the preparation, grading, etc., that go with it. Shared responsibility for instruction or laboratory supervision should not exceed seven contact hours per week. Half-time assistants' assignments for instruction or supervision are three and four hours per week for primary and shared duties, respectively.

Improper duties for graduate assistants are routine (clerical) assignments, tasks that undergraduate work-study students can perform, tasks that do not relate in any direct way to the assistant's academic reasons for being at WWU, and tasks that are properly performed only by regular faculty members--that is, advisement, substituting for absent faculty members, etc. It is the responsibility of the department Chair and the Graduate Adviser to see that assignments are appropriate. Every effort should be made to ensure that the assignments given assistants do not prevent the person from taking required courses, especially core courses, or interfere with the assistant's principal reason for being at WWU--which is the expeditious completion of the Master's degree.

The Graduate School recommends that assistants be evaluated quarterly, preferably with the evaluation form used by WWU faculty. The assistant's mentor (i.e., Graduate Adviser) should discuss with the assistant the strengths and weaknesses indicated on the evaluation form. The department Chair should retain the forms until the assistantship has terminated; the forms should then be destroyed or, upon request, given to the assistant. They are not to be shared with anyone except the Graduate Adviser, the Chairperson, and the assistant.

The Graduate School holds a graduate teaching assistant orientation session prior to the start of each fall quarter for all newly appointed assistants. Attendance is mandatory. Each department is responsible for providing new graduate assistants with an introduction to basic instructional methods, grading of assignments or courses, and techniques for dealing with problems or controversies that frequently are encountered in the assistant's assignments. In larger departments, this professional help can be provided by several experienced faculty members. In smaller departments, it may be necessary for the Graduate Adviser to take full responsibility.

Although circumstances will vary among departments and assignments, any exception to the conditions stated above must be cleared with the Graduate Dean.

Graduate assistants who encounter problems should consult their Graduate Adviser first, then their department Chair, then the Graduate School office.

Departments may invite assistants to attend faculty meetings of the department, serve on committees, or otherwise participate in academic gatherings and meetings. That is a decision for the department faculty to make.