

# Graduate Assistant Handbook

Academic Year 2016-2017



# Florida International University

## Overview

Welcome to Florida International University's Graduate Assistantship program. Colleges and Departments at Florida International University provide Graduate Assistantships (GAs) to qualified students on a competitive basis. GAs may teach, conduct research, or have other responsibilities that contribute to the student's professional development. This Graduate Assistant Guide has been designed to address the frequently asked questions in regards to graduate, research and teaching assistantships at FIU.

## Requirements for Assistantships

Any student that is awarded an assistantship:

- Must be **fully admitted** to a graduate degree program and under the supervision of an appropriate faculty member.
- Must meet the minimum graduate school full time registration requirement which consists of 9 graduate credits in the Fall and Spring; 6 graduate credits in Summer. Undergraduate or audited courses do not count toward these requirements.
- Must maintain good academic standing as defined in the FIU Student Handbook, by maintaining a cumulative grade point average of 3.0 or higher.
- Must maintain reasonable progress toward a graduate degree.

## Terms and Conditions of a Graduate Assistant Contract

- A full graduate assistantship requires 20 hours of work per week.
- A GA may not exceed the 20-hour work requirement without **prior** petition approval from the Dean of the University Graduate School.
- Graduate assistants are not permitted to have any additional employment outside or inside of FIU while they are on an active GA contract.
- Employment is contingent upon full-time enrollment and satisfactory academic and work performance.

## Frequently Asked Questions

Who do I contact if I am interested in a graduate assistant position?

- Interested graduate students should contact their academic departments to discuss assistantship opportunities, as the academic unit manages the assistantship positions.

What are the criteria to be eligible for a graduate assistantship?

To be eligible for a graduate assistantship (GA, TA or RA), students must be:

- Fully admitted to a master's, specialist or doctoral degree program. A student admitted under a conditional admission that has not yet met the terms of his or her conditional admission is not eligible.
- Employment is contingent upon full-time enrollment and satisfactory academic and work performance.
- Graduate assistants must maintain a 3.0 cumulative graduate grade point average.
- Graduate assistants must be enrolled full-time for nine (9) semester hours of graduate coursework for each Fall and Spring term and six (6) semester hours for the Summer term.

How many hours are required to work while on an assistantship?

- Graduate assistantships can either hold a 10 hour work week (0.25 FTE) or 20 hour work week (0.50 FTE). Only 20 hour work week GAs receive the benefit of tuition waiver and subsidized insurance. **Please note that GAs with only a 10 hour a week contract will receive a stipend and will have the out-of-state portion of tuition waived. Students with a 10 hour contract do not receive the tuition waiver and insurance benefits.**

What does the assistantship provide?

- The graduate assistantship provides a stipend, tuition waiver and subsidized health insurance.

Are there any employment restrictions while on an assistantship?

- A student receiving a GA/TA/RA must agree not to accept additional employment, within or outside the University, without expressed written prior approval (petition approval) from the University Graduate School. This includes any fee for service activity. This petition process is initiated by your hiring unit.

Am I able to apply for financial aid as a graduate assistant?

- Yes, students who receive a graduate assistantship may also be considered for financial aid.

What are the steps to the hiring process?

- Once the hiring department offers an appointment for assistantship, the following steps need to be taken to ensure all proper documentation is submitted to the Human Resource payroll department:

#### **NEW HIRES**

- Once hired and prior to beginning employment, the student must complete the New Hire Employee Sign-On Packet for Graduate Assistants which is located on the Human Resource website <http://hr.fiu.edu> under “Forms Library”. This packet must be completed and submitted to HR in PC 224 by the specific payroll deadlines. <http://hr.fiu.edu/index.php?name=calendars/schedules>
- Graduate managers enter and submit the graduate assistant contract online (Panthersoft HR system) within the specified deadlines by the University Graduate School.
- Sign employment agreement form.

## **INTERNATIONAL NEW HIRES**

- Once hired and prior to beginning employment, the student must go to the International Student & Scholar Services (ISSS) Office located in SASC 230(MMC) OR WUC363 (BBC). They will provide the international students with a notarized document to submit to the Social Security Administration office to apply for their Social Security card.
- Along with the notarized document, the student is to also take their international documentation- i.e. passport, I-20, visa, I-94, etc. to the Social Security Administration office.
- The Form I-9 must be completed with the valid document(s) before or within 3 days of employment.
- Upon receipt of the Social Security card and prior to beginning employment, the student must complete the New Hire Employee Sign-On Packet for Graduate Assistants which is located on the Human Resource website <http://hr.fiu.edu> under "Forms Library". This packet must be completed and submitted to HR in PC 224 by the specific payroll deadlines.  
<http://hr.fiu.edu/index.php?name=calendars/schedules>
- Graduate managers enter and submit the graduate assistant contract online (Panthersoft HR system) within the specified deadlines by the University Graduate School.
- Sign employment agreement form

Do I need to sign a contract?

- There is a GA employment agreement form that must be signed, aside from this, each department may have an additional contract to sign. Please check with your department regarding which documents they may require.

How much is my stipend?

- Your hiring unit determines your stipend amount.

What do I need to do to enroll on to the Graduate Assistant health insurance plan?

- UGS will enroll you automatically into the health insurance plan. Subsidized health insurance is provided to all graduate assistants holding an appointment for 20 hours (0.5 FTE) per week. All Graduate Assistants are **required** to participate in this health insurance plan and are responsible for paying 25% of the health insurance premium. The premium will be deducted from their paycheck throughout the semester.
- Graduate Assistants may opt-out of this plan if their own health insurance company demonstrates equivalent coverage. For more information regarding the GA insurance please visit <https://www.gallagherstudent.com/FIU>. International students on an F-1 or J-1 student visa who wish to opt-out of the University's health insurance plan must complete the International Student Health Insurance Compliance Form provided by FIU's Student Health Services. You may obtain the form at <http://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/health-and-fitness/student-health/insurance/international-students/index.php>. Graduate Assistants who opt out of this coverage will not receive a subsidy for their own insurance plan.

What type of insurance plan will I receive?

- GA's will receive the FIU student health insurance plan, provided by UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company and serviced by Gallagher Student Health and Special Risk. The details of the plan are available at the Gallagher Student Health and Special Risk website <https://www.gallagherstudent.com/FIU>.

When will I receive information about my health insurance coverage and my health insurance card?

- Once you are enrolled by UGS, you will be able to obtain information on your coverage. For more information please refer to our webpage <http://gradschool.fiu.edu/current-students-grad-assistants.shtml>

Will I be able to add my dependents to the plan?

- Yes, an individual who meets the eligibility criteria as an eligible dependent may apply for coverage under the Plan. The details on how to enroll your dependent are available on <https://www.gallagherstudent.com/FIU>. GA insurance does not cover dependents.

Does my insurance coverage plan cover vision or dental care?

- No, the plan does not include vision or dental coverage; however, this additional coverage is available for purchase. The details on how to enroll are available on <https://www.gallagherstudent.com/FIU>.

How many credits does the tuition waiver cover?

- The tuition waiver covers 9 graduate level credits in the Fall and Spring semesters and 6 graduate level credits in the Summer semester.
- The waiver covers the tuition portion of the tuition charge. The GA is financially responsible for the per credit fees, semester fees, online and lab fees. The following link will provide you with the Graduate Assistantship Program Summary Chart 2016-2017 <http://gradschool.fiu.edu/documents/ga-summary-chart.pdf> which explains the tuition charges.
- The tuition waiver only covers courses that are state-funded. If you register for a course outside of your department, you must contact the department in which you will be taking the course from and verify that the course is not a “market rate” course. The same applies to online courses. The GA is responsible for charges not covered by the tuition waiver. Check your student account at <http://my.fiu.edu> to ensure the charges are reflected correctly.

What if I am in my last semester and all I need to take are my last three credits?

- When on an assistantship, you must be enrolled full-time (9 credits in the Fall and Spring semester, 6 credits in the Summer semester). Throughout the contract period in which you have been hired.

As a GA, am I permitted to have an internship?

- Yes, but the internship must be unpaid and not interfere with the responsibilities of the graduate assistantship.

What happens if I decide to take a job elsewhere before the end of my contract period?

- If this occurs before the end of your contract period then your contract will be canceled and the tuition waiver will be reversed. If you are an out-of-state student your charges will be adjusted to reflect the out-of-state rate. Also, your health insurance will be canceled.

What if I quit my assistantship before the end of my contract period?

- Your contract will be canceled and your tuition waiver reversed, therefore you will be financially responsible for your tuition balance. If you are an out-of-state student your charges will be adjusted to reflect the out-of-state rate. Also, your health insurance will be canceled.

Do I have to work in between semesters when classes are not in session or during holidays?

- There are no breaks during your contract period therefore any time off will need to be discussed with your supervisor.

What do I do if I miss work due to illness?

- You would need to speak to your supervisor to discuss how you would make up the hours missed.

Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns regarding my assistantship?

- You may contact: Betty Sigler, Assistant Director  
Academic Support Services  
Phone: (305)348-0394  
bsigler@fiu.edu