



SNU Policy: Graduate Assistant Policy and Guidelines

SNU Policy ID: Employment Practices B-03

Policy Reviewed by: Director of Human Resources

Approval Authority: Vice President for Business and Finance

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I. Policy Statement and Institutional Mission

Southern Nazarene University (University) is committed to providing graduate students with professional development opportunities that integrate academic rigor with Christian faith and service. The Graduate Assistantship Program is designed to provide financial support, foster professional mentorship, and enhance Graduate Assistants' (GAs) academic experience and participation in the spiritual community of our campus.

As representatives and student leaders of Southern Nazarene University, all GAs are expected to understand, respect, and adhere to the University's Policies and Procedures including the Faith and Life Covenant in the performance of their duties.

II. Types of Assistantships

In accordance with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) regulations governing institutions of higher education, Graduate Assistants at Southern Nazarene University are classified based on their actual primary duties. Job titles alone do not determine FLSA status.

- **Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs):** Classified as **Exempt, Salaried**. Because a GTA's primary duty is teaching, tutoring, coaching, instructing, or lecturing to impart knowledge on behalf of the educational institution, they qualify for the FLSA "Teacher Exemption." They are compensated via a predetermined stipend/salary and are not subject to federal overtime or hourly time-tracking requirements.
- **Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs):** Classified as **Exempt, Salaried / Educational Relationship**. The DOL recognizes that an educational relationship—rather than a traditional employment relationship—exists when a graduate student performs degree-related research under a faculty member's supervision while obtaining their degree. GRAs are compensated via a research stipend and are not subject to hourly time-tracking or overtime provisions.
- **Graduate Support/Administrative Assistants (GSAs):** Classified as **Non-Exempt, Hourly**. Because these positions primarily perform administrative, clerical, or operational duties that do not fall under teaching or primary degree-related academic research, they are treated as student-employees. GSAs must accurately record all hours worked via the University's time-tracking system, must be paid at least the federal/state minimum wage,



and may not exceed their maximum weekly hours without prior written authorization. Unauthorized work may result in discipline.

III. Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for appointment as a Graduate Assistant, a student must:

1. Be fully admitted to a graduate degree program at Southern Nazarene University.
2. Be enrolled in a graduate academic curriculum that relates to the duties of the assistantship. The position must provide meaningful professional experience that enhances the student's academic major or career goals.
3. Maintain regular enrollment of at least 6 credit hours per term.
4. Maintain a record of grades required for graduation as defined in the Graduate Catalog.
5. Remain in good standing with Human Resources and Academic Affairs as defined by the Graduate Catalog.
6. Adhere to University Policies, the Faith and Life Covenant and complete any required training assigned by the University.

IV. Compensation and Benefits

Assistantships are compensated through one or more of the following, as detailed in the individual student's graduate assistant offer letter provided by the department:

- **Tuition Waiver or Reduction:** A waiver or reduction of tuition up to the number of approved credits enrolled.
- **Room and/or Meal Plan:** A waiver or reduction of an on-campus room and/or meal plan may be applied. Such waivers will be charged directly to the department's budget.
- **Wages or Stipend:** A bi-weekly, hourly wage for GSAs or monthly, salaried payment for GRAs or GTAs during the active employment period.
- **Benefits:** Graduate Assistants do not qualify for university-sponsored staff fringe benefits, retirement plans, or paid leave, except as mandated by state or federal law (such as Workers' Compensation).

Note: GAs are responsible for university fees, books, and any tuition costs exceeding the approved waiver allocation unless otherwise stated in the offer letter.

V. Workload and Limitations

- **Maximum Hours:** GAs are employed for a minimum of 10 or a maximum of 20 hours per week during academic terms. Under no circumstances may a student-employee exceed 20 hours of total campus employment per week during academic terms.
- **Outside Employment:** GAs are expected to prioritize their academic studies and assistantship responsibilities. Outside employment that adversely affects a graduate



assistant's job performance or academic standing—including attendance—may result in dismissal from the GA appointment by the supervisor in coordination with the Director of Human Resources and the appropriate area Vice-President.

VI. Performance and Renewal

Assistantships are awarded for one academic year (or on a term-by-term basis) and are **not** automatically renewed. Renewal is contingent upon:

- Satisfactory performance evaluations from the supervisor.
- Maintenance of satisfactory academic progress as defined by the Graduate Catalog.
- Continued eligibility for the appointment.
- Availability of departmental funding.
- Removal from the graduate degree program will require termination of the GA appointment within 30 days.

VII. Financial Aid Compliance

Graduate Assistantship tuition waivers are considered financial assistance and must be included in the student's total aid package.

Departments must report all Graduate Assistant appointments and compensation details to the Office of Financial Services before the start of the applicable term or contract period. Financial Services will review the assistantship as part of the student's overall aid package to ensure compliance with federal, state, and institutional requirements.

Students should understand that receiving a Graduate Assistantship may reduce eligibility for other types of aid, including federal loans, institutional scholarships or grants, outside scholarships, employer tuition benefits, and other third-party assistance.

In order to ensure all eligible Financial Aid is available to the Graduate Assistant, a FAFSA must be completed each year to determine eligibility for Federal Work Study or other grants and awards. A waiver is allowed if the student is still a dependent.