

Rights/Responsibilities of Graduate Assistants

As specified in the *Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual* (Section 100 105-Pr3, p 2), "A student employee is one whose primary function is that of enrollment in an academic program." Thus, first priority of all graduate assistants must be satisfactory progress in their scholastic program. At the same time, acceptance of an assistantship is predicated on the belief that satisfactory progress can be concurrently achieved in work assignments and scholastic programs. Collaborative efforts between graduate assistants and their supervisors should be focused on the goal of satisfactory performance in both these areas.

In cases where graduate assistants feel that they have a legitimate complaint about any aspect of carrying out their assignments (work hours, duties assigned, pay, work conditions, etc.), they have a right to pursue all established channels to resolve the conflict. In the order that follows, the student should speak to his/her immediate supervisor, the appropriate department head, the appeals committees in the home unit or college, and the dean of the college/school involved. If the student feels that a resolution should be sought beyond the department/college level, the Dean of the Graduate School should be contacted. Established procedures outlined in the Graduate Council Appeals Procedure and/or *Hilltopics* will be followed.

Graduate assistants' benefits as employees of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, in addition to fee waivers as explained elsewhere, include workers' compensation as defined in the *Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual* under employees' status. The specific wording reads, "Employees so designated [as student employees] receive no benefits other than statutorily required payments which include Workers' Compensation" (Section 100 105-Pr2-3).

Graduate student assistantship appointments (Graduate Assistants, Graduate Teaching Assistants, Graduate Teaching Associates and Graduate Research Assistants) are of two types: academic year and twelve month or other. Students on academic year appointments for the fall and spring terms receive 12 equal monthly payments for the nine months of service and a waiver of fees for three terms (including the summer). Students appointed to an academic year appointment beginning in the spring term have the option of receiving seven equal monthly payments for the January-July period or six equal payments for the February-July period. In both cases a fee waiver is provided for spring and summer terms. Graduate students on academic year appointments have no assistantship responsibilities in the summer term. Students appointed to 12 month or other appointments receive equal monthly payments for the months of the appointments and have assistantship responsibilities for the full period of the appointment. For these appointments a waiver of fees is provided only for those terms included within the appointments (i.e., a waiver of fees for the summer term requires an appointment which encompasses the summer term in its entirety.) In some situations, a graduate assistant may be appointed for a period shorter than a year (e.g., a semester).

Graduate assistants who are performing satisfactorily are normally reappointed up to the maximum time limit as stated below. In situations where the demands of the department do not call for a job to be continued, reappointment may not be made. In cases where a department has a rotational plan for assistantships, graduate assistants likewise may not be reappointed.

In all cases of appointment and reappointment, the supervisor is responsible for notifying the graduate assistant as early as possible. When an assistantship is not to be renewed, the graduate student should be notified in advance. In most cases, this notice must be given no later than one month prior to the end of the appointment. Specific reasons for not renewing the contract should be given (e.g., discontinuation of the program or grant, significant neglect of duty, unsatisfactory academic performance or progress toward a degree, non-compliance with university policies, etc.). In cases where an assistantship is for one year only, the student should be told this at the time of appointment. In some circumstances, graduate assistants may be given a conditional appointment such as an appointment in which funding of a grant is pending.

As students, graduate assistants' rights and responsibilities are defined in the *Faculty Handbook* section on Student Rights and Responsibilities and the Student Rights and Responsibilities section of *Hilltopics*. Additional rights and responsibilities of graduate students are found on the student's copy of the admission status form.