

Handbook on Graduate Assistants (GAs)

Harding University
Provost Office
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Introduction

The Provost Office administers the Harding University Graduate Assistant (GA) Program.

Graduate assistants have long been an integral part of university life and serve a dual purpose: (1) the participating student benefits from a real-life experience related to his or her area of study and abilities, as well as receiving a scholarship and stipend; and (2) the University benefits from the work of a budding professional.

It should be noted that Harding University has two types of GAs:

University-Level GAs: The GAs addressed by this handbook are competitive positions that are available to any Harding University graduate and professional students currently in good standing. Positions that are available for such students are funded through a budget managed by the Provost Office.

College or Department-Level GAs: There are some GA positions available directly from certain colleges or departments. These are specific to the sponsoring college or department, which handles both the eligibility criteria and the funding. A student who receives such a GA position will work specifically for the sponsoring program. For information regarding this type of GA position please contact the specific college or department of interest.

Working together, we can ensure that Harding's Graduate Assistant Program provides mutual benefits both to recipient students and to the University at large.

Information for Students

Criteria

The following criteria must be met for a student to be eligible to become a GA:

- Must be enrolled at Harding as a fulltime graduate or professional student (nine hours or more during a standard term, six hours or more in the summer).
- Must meet the admission requirements of the program (i.e., not be on conditional admission).
- If a new graduate or professional student, must have a minimum undergraduate GPA of 3.0 and maintain a minimum graduate or professional GPA of 3.0.
- If a current graduate or professional student, must have and maintain a minimum graduate or professional GPA of 3.0.
- Must be and remain a student in good standing with no ethical violations.

NOTE: If any of the above criteria are not met, the student is ineligible for a GA position. If, while serving as a GA, the student fails to meet these criteria, he or she may be removed from the position and will not be eligible for any future GA position until all criteria are met.

Limitations

Graduate assistant awards are limited to three terms. Receiving an award for one term does not guarantee an award for all terms.

There are times when special skills or specialized training may serve as a rationale for students to serve as a GA for more than three terms. The supervisor will be asked to provide a written rationale in such instances, which will be reviewed by the Provost and approved or disapproved.

Stipends

Currently, GA positions provide recipients with \$3,500 per term before taxes (fall and spring) in return for 300 hours of work per semester (approximately 20 hours per week). The summer award is for \$2,500 and requires 214 hours of work. Each term, a \$400 cash stipend is provided and the remaining funds, less applicable taxes, are posted to the student's Harding account. These awards are deemed by the IRS to be taxable income and taxes are deducted before the posting is made.

Responsibilities

Graduate assistants are required to work 300 hours per semester (fall and spring) and 214 hours during the summer term. Generally, this time will be spent on projects related to each student's area of professional interest and abilities. Graduate assistants shall not be used as class instructors, but some instructional duties are acceptable. These include but are not limited to serving as lab assistants, compiling library materials, preparing class presentations, researching course materials, working with outcome data, and similar duties.

A GA is responsible for keeping a timesheet to record the number of hours worked.

How to Apply

To apply for a GA position, please complete and submit the application located at http://www.harding.edu/assets/www/academics/colleges-departments/graduate-professional/pdf/ga_application.pdf.

Selection Process

1. The Provost Office processes all applications and ensures that applicants meet the minimum GPA and enrollment requirements to identify those who will be deemed "eligible."
2. Eligible applicants are then added to the list of all pre-qualified applicants, with a summary of their self-reported skills, educational background, and employment history.
3. This list is regularly distributed to all supervisors who have need of a GA, who review the list, looking for students with the qualifications needed in their areas.
4. Once a student has been identified as meeting the criteria for a specific position, the supervisor contacts that student and arranges an interview. The supervisor will assess whether the student meets the needs of the open position, and expectations for the student will be made clear.
5. Upon selection of a student for a position, the faculty member and student sign a contract/payroll form (available at http://www.harding.edu/assets/www/academics/colleges-departments/graduate-professional/pdf/ga_contract.pdf). This form is then submitted to the Provost Office, as noted on the contract.

Payroll

Early in the semester, each GA will receive an email notifying them of the date on which they will receive their initial \$400 check. If the GA lives on campus, the check is sent to the student's campus mailbox; if not, the student must come and pick up the check. (The Student Payroll Office is located in Ezell 142.)

Other On-Campus Employment

A GA may not work concurrently as a student worker. On rare occasions, a GA may work as an adjunct, but only with prior written approval from the Provost.

Information for Supervisors

GA “Slots”

Graduate assistant (GA) positions are allocated as “slots,” meaning that each “slot” is a separate award. Slots are allocated to programs, departments, and colleges, and the senior executive in each such category has full authority regarding how his or her slots are (1) allocated among supervisors and (2) allocated among the fall, spring, and summer semesters as best meets the need of each individual program.

Funding

Funding for the Graduate Assistant Program is directed by the Provost Office.

Hiring

1. Prior to a new semester, a list of students eligible to be GAs is distributed to all supervisors.
2. Supervisors review the list, looking for students with the qualifications needed in their area.
3. Once a student has been identified as meeting the criteria for a specific position, the supervisor contacts that student and arranges an interview.
4. The supervisor will interview the applicant, assessing whether the student meets the needs of the open position, and expectations for the student are made clear.
5. Upon selection of a student for a position, the faculty member and student sign a two-page contract/payroll form (http://www.harding.edu/assets/www/academics/colleges-departments/graduate-professional/pdf/ga_contract.pdf).
6. The contract is submitted to the address on the form.
7. A new two-page contract must be signed and submitted each semester.

Hours Worked

The supervisor is responsible for reviewing the GA’s time sheets.

As the GA approaches 300 hours of time worked (214 in the summer), one of two things must occur:

1. The supervisor may allow the GA to stop working when the 300-hour requirement has been fulfilled.
2. The supervisor, with the GA’s consent, can continue to employ the GA at the same rate of pay, but the wages will have to be charged to the supervisor’s student worker budget.

If a GA does not work the required number of hours, his or her award will be prorated based on the number of hours actually worked. In this case, the college or department must notify the Provost Office and send the number of hours worked so that the student’s account can be adjusted.

Work Assignments

Graduate assistants are NOT to be used exclusively as clerical help. Most colleges or departments have funds for student workers who are hourly employees that may perform clerical duties.

Ideally, GAs should be involved in activities that will enhance their skills and knowledge as they prepare for professional employment.

Other On-Campus Employment

A GA may not work concurrently as a student worker. On rare occasions, a GA may work as an adjunct, but only with prior written approval from the Provost.

Information for Program Administrator

Advertising for Applicants

1. Approximately two months before each term (April, July, October), send an email reminder to the deans of the colleges with graduate and professional programs asking them to inform students of the availability of GA positions throughout the university.
2. Include a link to the GA handbook and application.

Processing Applications

1. Upon receiving an application, create a file for the applicant that includes the application and resume (if provided), along with the payroll verification card.
2. Check the applicant's eligibility (GPA and fulltime enrollment) and note the status at the bottom of the application.
3. If the applicant qualifies, enter him/her into the *Eligible Applicants* spreadsheet, summarizing their self-reported skills, educational background, and employment history.
4. Note: If the applicant is an international student (e.g., Walton Scholar, Sino-American Program, etc.), notify them that they are required to take the English Proficiency Exam through the ESL program located in the Center for Student Success. The results will be emailed to the GA program administrator and should be placed in the applicant's folder and recorded in the last column of the *Eligible Applicants* spreadsheet.
5. Approximately two months before each term (April, July, October), email the *Eligible Applicants* spreadsheet to all supervisors so they can review the pool of applicants. Attach a copy of the contract.

Processing Contracts

1. Upon receiving a two-page contract, ensure that all signatures have been obtained and make a copy for the Student Payroll office. The original contract should be placed into the student's file. Newly employed students who have not submitted a payroll verification card must be sent to the Student Payroll Office (located in Ezell 142) to obtain one.
2. Enter the student into the *GA Assignment* spreadsheet, ensuring that he/she is placed with the appropriate supervisor. Code each student with a number to show how many semesters they have served. For example, in her first semester as a GA Mary would be designated as "Mary Smith 1."
3. Add the student's name, H-number, and email to the term's payroll tab in the *GA Assignment* spreadsheet.
4. If a new hire, remove the student's name from the *Eligible Applicants* spreadsheet.

Filing Payroll

After all GA contracts have been submitted and all entries made on the payroll tab:

1. Deliver copies of each two-page contract to the Student Payroll Office.

2. Email the Student Payroll Office and the Business Office the Excel payroll lists. (Cut and copy the lists into new files each term.)
3. The Student Payroll Office will notify you regarding the date on which the students will receive their \$400 checks.
4. Email the students so they will know when they will be receiving their paychecks.

Special Circumstances

There are times when a GA has a special skill set (for example, fluency in a foreign languages) or has received special training. A written appeal can be made to hire such a GA for more than the allotted three semesters. The supervisor will be asked to provide a rationale in such instances, which will be reviewed by the Provost and approved or disapproved.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *How will a GA know when his or her account has been credited with the award?*

The Provost Office will send out an email notifying GAs the date that their \$400 checks will be ready for pick up. This usually happens during the first few weeks of the semester.

2. *What if a GA works less than 300 hours (or 214 in the summer)?*

If a GA does not work the required number of hours, his or her award will be prorated based on the number of hours they did work. In this case, the college or department must notify the Provost Office so that the student's account can be adjusted.

3. *Can a GA work more than 300 hours per semester?*

The supervisor is responsible for reviewing the GA's time sheets. As the GA approaches 300 hours of time worked (214 in the summer), one of several things must occur:

- a. The supervisor allows the GA to stop working when the 300 hour requirement has been fulfilled; or
- b. The supervisor, with the GA's consent, can continue to employ the GA at the same rate of pay, but the wages will have to be charged to the supervisor's student worker budget. NOTE: See also item 4 (below).

4. *Can a GA work more than 20 hours per week?*

Yes. On occasion a GA may work up to but no more than 27 hours per week. In such a case, the GA may not work more than the required 300 total hours (214 in summer), unless paid for by the supervisor's student worker budget. Important: No GA may work more than 27 hours per week. The institution may be subject to federal penalties if any GA or student worker exceeds this limit.

5. *Can a student be employed as a student worker as well as a GA?*

No. Due to recent federal regulations, this is not allowed.

6. *Does a GA have to pay taxes?*

Yes, both state and federal taxes must be collected from the award. A student who accepts a GA position must file a federal I-9 form.

7. *Why is my fall stipend so much smaller than the spring stipend?*

The federal tax laws have recently changed, meaning that more taxes are withheld from paychecks after certain earning thresholds have been met. Any questions regarding this issue can be addressed by the Student Payroll Office at 501-279-4324.

8. *How can I get a GA assigned to me?*

Deans, chairs and program directors submit requests in the spring (around April) to request GA “slots” for the next academic year. Those who receive GA slots have full responsibility regarding the distribution of those slots within their programs. Prior to budget planning (which begins in the late fall/early spring semesters), speak to your dean, chair, or director if you feel you can justify the need for a GA. The person who submits your budget will make the final decision regarding a GA request; however, it should be noted that all budget requests are considered within the context of the needs of the entire university, so a strong rationale is important.

9. *Can a GA serve for more than three terms?*

There are times when a GA has a special skill set (for example, fluency in a foreign language) or has received special training. A written appeal can be made to hire such a GA for more than the allotted three semesters. The supervisor will be asked to provide a rationale in such instances, which will be reviewed by the Provost and approved or disapproved.

10. *Can a GA also work as an adjunct?*

On rare occasions a GA may work as an adjunct, but only with prior written approval from the Provost.