

Mount St. Mary's University



Graduate Assistant Handbook

Welcome to Mount St. Mary's University's Graduate Programs. We are delighted that you have chosen the Mount to pursue your graduate education. We are also pleased that you have been selected to serve as a graduate assistant. A graduate assistantship is an extremely important and unique position within the University. Some of the areas in which you may be involved in this type of position might include teaching, research, program support, and departmental aid. We believe that this assistantship will enable you to gain a broader knowledge base and an understanding of higher education as a business operation. Furthermore, we believe it will benefit your professional career. It is our hope that this handbook will help you to maximize your experience as a graduate student at Mount St. Mary's University.

This handbook presents a broad overview of the graduate assistant position and has been designed to help answer questions you may have about your role. It should be used as a quick reference guide to the policies, procedures, and tuition benefits that are related to the assistantship. The information contained in this handbook is by no means intended to replace the information you received, or will receive, from the department in which you will be working. For more information, or if you have questions and concerns that are not answered in this handbook, please contact the Provost's office.

Best wishes to you in this very important position, in the pursuit of your graduate degree, and in your professional career.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Boyd Creasman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Boyd Creasman
Provost

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Introduction

Mount St. Mary's University provides financial support to a number of graduate students in the form of assistantships. Graduate students are eligible to apply for graduate assistantships once they are accepted into any one of the graduate programs the school offers. Graduate assistants receive tuition remission and a stipend in compensation for their service to the University. The responsibilities placed upon graduate assistants vary depending on the nature of their assignments. A general overview of the basic responsibilities pertaining to graduate assistants is provided in this handbook.

Purpose of Graduate Assistantships

The main purpose of graduate assistantships is to provide an opportunity for graduate students to further their knowledge in both academic and professional fields through involvement in different areas of the University. Although some clerical work may be required, the graduate assistantship is designed to provide a meaningful learning experience. Students who are awarded graduate assistantships may be involved in activities such as research, supervision, student support or assistance, teaching support, administration, and the like.

Compensation

Compensation of graduate assistants consists of tuition remission and an annual stipend. Tuition remission for graduate assistants is limited to seven courses per academic year, and those courses must be graduate level courses. Tuition remission typically excludes tutorials, independent studies, OCICU courses, and internships; any exception to this policy requires the written approval of the dean of the school in which the tutorial, independent study, or internship would be taken. The typical combination of credits includes three courses in the fall semester, three courses in the spring semester, and one course in a summer session. The graduate assistant will be responsible for covering any tuition and costs associated with exceeding the seven course limit. If the

graduate assistant chooses to fund additional courses, he or she should inquire about a student loan with the Financial Aid office. Tuition remission will occur **after** the Graduate Assistant has started working. Any courses taken prior to working will not be eligible for tuition remission. Graduate assistants begin working during the summer and receive tuition remission for the following courses.

- 3 courses Fall semester
- 3 courses Spring semester
- 1 course the following Summer term.

In addition to tuition remission, graduate assistants receive an annual stipend as part of their compensation. While stipends vary from year to year, the way in which they are paid remains the same. If the graduate assistant works on the 12-month schedule, around eight percent or one twelfth of the total annual stipend is paid per month. If the graduate assistant works on the semester schedule, about eleven percent or one ninth of the total annual stipend is paid per month during the nine months the assistant works. The current annual stipend for graduate assistants is \$6,000. Any student who is selected to serve as a graduate assistant may not hold an additional paid position on campus.

Work Schedule

Graduate assistant's schedule may vary depending on the department of the University in which the assistant works. There are, however, two basic schedules that most graduate assistants follow:

- One year contract working fifteen hours a week from June to May.
- One year contract working twenty hours a week from August to May.

Holidays, Paid Time Off, and Benefits

Graduate Assistants should follow the same holiday schedule that the University's administration and staff do. This means that during academic breaks, graduate assistants are expected to work on the days the administration and staff are scheduled to work. Sick days, personal leave, and other paid time off should be discussed directly with the department supervisor or program head administering the assistantship. In relation to

Aramark Dining Hall purchases, Graduate Assistants function as students and thus are not eligible for employee discounts. As students, graduate assistants may use flex dollars, entitling them to save the 6% sales tax on meal purchases.

Housing

Housing for graduate assistants is limited and therefore not guaranteed. Graduate assistants requiring on-campus housing are encouraged to apply for graduate housing as soon as possible to increase their chances of obtaining a spot. The Office of Residence Life will be able to provide guidance through this process.

Additionally, it is important to note that on-campus housing is subject to the academic calendar and not to the dates in the graduate assistant's contract. Thus, the University cannot guarantee on-campus housing during breaks and strongly advises graduate students to inform themselves of all closing dates for residence halls. It is the graduate assistant's sole responsibility to make any necessary arrangements for housing during breaks. Please contact the Office of Residence Life for questions regarding on-campus housing.

Finally, please keep in mind that housing costs are not covered by the assistantship and are the responsibility of the graduate assistant.

Renewal of Appointments

Renewal of appointments is not guaranteed at Mount St. Mary's University. Reappointments are based on the discretion of the graduate assistant's supervisor and the availability of funds to support the assistantship. If the supervisor believes that the assistant is not meeting the needs of the department or is not doing satisfactory work, the assistant will not be reappointed. Assistants must meet with their supervisors to discuss reappointment and, in some cases, must reapply for the graduate assistantship. All reappointments require contract renewals at the end of the academic year in order to maintain tuition remission and stipend.

Resignation or Termination before End of Appointment

Unless otherwise agreed, graduate assistants are appointed for a one-year term. Resignation or termination before the end of the contracted term means that the graduate student will not fulfill the commitment acquired with the University. If resignation occurs before the agreed end date, the graduate assistant must provide written notification to both the department where the assistantship was being administered and the Office of Human Resources. If termination occurs, tuition remission will cease immediately, any outstanding tuition or balances will be due, and the stipend will no longer be paid to the individual. Department supervisors should coordinate the termination procedure with the Office of Human Resources.

Responsibilities

Graduate assistants are subject to the rules of Mount St. Mary's University and those of the department in which they work. Graduate assistants represent not only the department in which they work but the University as a whole. Therefore, they are expected to keep this in mind when making decisions and are asked to use their discretion when necessary. Additionally, graduate assistants should respect the rights and opinions of others and uphold the academic standards of Mount St. Mary's University at all times. Finally, graduate assistants should be aware that university records that they might see or have access to, are confidential in nature and cannot be discussed with anyone outside the department in which they work.

Non-Discrimination Policy

Mount St. Mary's University and Seminary prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, political or religious opinion or affiliation, marital status, age, sex, or disability in the recruitment or admission of students, against any employee or applicant for employment, or in the administration of the University's educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and athletic programs, employment policies (except when sex, age, or religion constitutes a *bona fide* occupational qualification), and other University administered activities and programs.

Sexual Harassment Policy

Mount St. Mary's University is a Catholic University committed to upholding standards which promote respect and human dignity in an environment fostering learning and professionalism. Any form of sexual harassment is a violation of these standards and a violation of state and federal laws and will not be tolerated by the University.

Mount St. Mary's University views sexual harassment as a very serious matter and will make every effort to eliminate it. Formal complaints of sexual harassment involving an employee (administrator, faculty, or staff) as the accused will be heard by the employee's supervisor, the Compliance Officer, and/or the Discrimination Grievance Panel. Formal complaints of sexual harassment involving a student as the accused will be resolved under student discipline policies and procedures. The University considers sexual harassment to be an act of misconduct and grounds for disciplinary action or dismissal. The University reserves the right to take appropriate action to enforce its policy prohibiting sexual harassment, whether or not the person who alleges a violation or any other party wishes to pursue the matter. For more information check with the Office of Human Resources.

Consensual Relationships Policy

Consensual, romantic and/or sexual relationships (referred to in this policy as "consensual relationships") between members of the University community create the potential for, or appearance of, favoritism, exploitation, and harassment and may limit the educational or employment opportunities of the parties. Consistent with the University's mission, identity, and concern for the dignity of each person, consensual relationships are to be avoided where an employee has (or reasonably could have) responsibility for the academic or job performance or professional future of an employee or student.

For purposes of this policy, "employee" includes faculty, staff, administrators, and graduate assistants, but not undergraduate employees. "Professional responsibilities" include but are not limited to: teaching, academic advising, mentoring, coaching, moderating a student organization or activity, serving on an evaluation or awards committee, serving on a

thesis committee, supervising research, and hiring, firing, supervising or evaluating an employee.

All University employees are considered to have professional responsibility for undergraduate students. **Therefore, consensual relationships between employees and undergraduate students are prohibited in all cases.**

Consensual relationships between employees and graduate students are prohibited in cases where the employee has, or reasonably can expect to have, professional responsibility for that student. Similarly, consensual relationships between employees are prohibited in cases where one employee has, or reasonably can expect to have, professional responsibility for the other employee.

In the case of a pre-existing (permissible) consensual relationship, employees are expected to remove themselves from or decline positions of professional responsibility with respect to the other individual. In cases where this is not feasible or would be harmful to the other individual, the employee must consult with the Vice President of the division in which the employee works.

Violation of this policy by an employee is considered a breach of professional ethics and may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination.

Note: This policy applies to mutual, consensual relationships. Unwelcome sexual advances or other forms of sexual harassment are prohibited by the University's harassment and discrimination policy; Section 14.1.0. The University's policy regarding hiring relatives and friends of current employees is found at Section 14.7.0.