



# University of West Florida

## **GRADUATE ASSISTANT HANDBOOK**

UWF Graduate School  
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Pensacola, FL 32514  
(850) 473-7716  
<http://uwf.edu/graduate/>

### **Welcome**

Welcome to your appointment as a Graduate Assistant at the University of West Florida!

Graduate Assistantships are invaluable in that they serve the needs of the University while orienting students to academic life and assisting them in career development. As a Graduate Assistant, you may be the first contact new students have with the University. This situation poses a great opportunity for you to shape the culture of student life at UWF. While the University expects you to maintain the highest expectations for academic excellence in the classroom and in scholarship, we also intend the assistantship to facilitate completion of your degree program in a timely fashion and to effectively orient you to your professional community.

This handbook is intended to help you understand the policies and procedures that structure your appointment as a Graduate Assistant at UWF. While this handbook addresses a number of frequently occurring questions concerning graduate assistantships at UWF, feel free to direct all further inquiries about your position to the supervising department, the Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment at (850) 473-7435, or the Graduate School at (850) 473-7716.

This assistantship is an exciting opportunity for personal growth and career development. Remember, there are resources available to assist you with this endeavor. Help is just a phone call away.

Good luck!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	3
<b>2. ASSISTANTSHIPS</b>	3
2.1. Types of Assistantships	4
2.1.1. Graduate Assistant (9186)	4
2.1.2. Graduate Research Assistant (9182)	4
2.1.3. Graduate Teaching Assistant (9184)	6
2.1.4. Graduate Teaching Assistant – Instructor of Record (9185)	6
2.1.5. Resident Hall Director (9188 & 9199)	8
2.2. Graduate Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluations	8
2.2.1. Student Disability Resource Center	9
2.2.2. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)	10
2.2.3. Teaching Resources	10
<b>3. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS</b>	11
3.1. Eligibility for Assistantship	11
3.2. English as a Second Language	11
3.3. Time Limit and Number of Assistantships	11
<b>4. PAYMENT</b>	12
4.1. Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Explanations	12
4.2. Stipend Minimums and Waivers	12
4.3. Tax Obligations	13
<b>5. RESIDENCY CLASSIFICATION</b>	13
5.1. Florida Residency for Tuition Purposes	13
5.2. Residency Reclassification	14
<b>6. STATUS REQUIREMENTS</b>	14
6.1. Qualifying for a Tuition Waiver	14
6.1.1. Qualifying for an Out-of-State Tuition Waiver	15
6.1.2. The Alabama Differential Tuition Plan	16
6.2. Courses Covered by a Tuition Waiver	16
6.3. Changes in Status Affecting Tuition Waiver	16
6.4. Qualifying for Financial Aid	16
<b>7. CAUSES FOR ASSISTANSHIP DISMISSAL</b>	17
7.1. Maintenance of Academic Standing	17
7.2. Policy for Grades of Incomplete (“I”)	17
7.3. Departmental Policy Concerning Dismissal	17
<b>8. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES</b>	18
8.1. The Professional Role	18
8.2. Solving Work-Related Problems	19
8.2.1. Solving Problems with Students	19
8.2.2. Solving Problems with Peers	19
8.2.3. Solving Problems with Supervisors	20
8.2.4. “Chain of Command”	20
8.3. Dealing with Boundary Issues	20

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Graduate students play a vital role in scholarship and instruction at the University of West Florida. This handbook identifies and clarifies the policies and procedures governing a graduate student's position as a Graduate Assistant. The goal is to answer a number of frequently asked questions about assistantships, including the types of assistantships available at UWF, the general requirements governing assistantships, the policies structuring payment and tuition waivers associated with assistantships, and the student obligations for maintaining a graduate assistantship.

After a graduate student's official appointment as a Graduate Assistant, the department should provide the student with information about the position. This information might be provided in a conversation with the faculty or administrative supervisor or documents specific to the graduate student's program. The graduate student should ask the supervising department for all of the materials available concerning the position.

The graduate student's official letter of appointment should specify the duties associated with the assistantship. See the [Sample Graduate Assistantship award letter](#). It is the responsibility of the student to contact the department to formally accept the offer of a graduate assistantship. The sample graduate assistantship award letter provides a general overview of the questions that should be answered by a faculty or administrative supervisor at the beginning of the appointment. The letter should specify the parameters of the assistantship, including classification title and code, FTE allocation, period of appointment, job description, and supervising faculty. There are different types of assistantships. The student should make sure to understand the responsibilities accompanying his or her position. The present document should help clarify those responsibilities.

## 2. ASSISTANTSHIPS

In general, Graduate Assistants at the University of West Florida are admitted masters-level, specialist-level, or doctoral-level students employed on a part-time basis for the primary purpose of assisting in classroom or laboratory instruction or in the conduct of research.

Graduate Assistants serve a vital function for the University. They support departments, programs, faculty, and personnel across the campus community. They also forward the professional development of graduate students. For this reason, the duties performed by a graduate student serving in an assistantship capacity must directly contribute to his or her program of study. It is the responsibility of the academic unit to ensure duties complement the student's degree program.

All Graduate Assistants regardless of classification must meet the following requirements:

- The student must meet the eligibility requirements set by the Graduate School (refer to the General Requirements section of this handbook).
- The student must meet any special qualifications added to the eligibility requirements as determined by and communicated at the office, department, or college level.

Unless otherwise stated, all Graduate Assistants regardless of classification must meet the following guidelines:

- The student is responsible for assisting faculty members or UWF staff with appropriate duties.
- Specific duties and roles are to be determined by the department or office, and it is the responsibility of that department or office to make the student aware of these duties.
- The student should be employed for a minimum of at least 10 hours per week (0.25 FTE) but no more than 20 hours per week (0.5 FTE), except for Resident Hall Directors who can be employed for 30 hours per week. Though a student may have more than one assistantship, the cumulative hours of employment should not exceed 20 hours per week.
- The student is subject to select office or department employee guidelines in addition to assistantship guidelines.
- The minimum pay is \$10.25 per hour.

## **2.1. Types of Assistantships**

There are six distinct classifications of Graduate Assistantships. Each of these appointments has a unique employment code with UWF Human Resources. This code allows academic departments and other employers of Graduate Assistants to fill out student personnel action forms specifying the type of appointment held and the work completed by the graduate student. One of the key distinctions among these classifications concerns whether the position is hourly or salaried. These six classifications are as follows:

### **2.1.1. Graduate Assistant (9186)**

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are admitted masters-level, specialist-level, or doctoral-level students providing support for academic departments, programs, faculty, or personnel. Compensation for students employed under this designation is hourly. A Graduate Assistant appointed under the 9186 designation must fill out a time sheet on a bi-weekly basis reporting the hours and work completed. In addition, the supervisor must provide close supervision of students classified as Graduate Assistants and review and sign the bi-weekly time sheet.

Graduate Assistants may be employed in colleges or department offices that perform professional or service duties outside of teaching or research. In the case that a Graduate Assistant is assigned to a non-academic university office, the student's duties are not required to correspond directly to his or her graduate program.

Department heads and supervising faculty are responsible for assuring that Graduate Assistants receive ample opportunities to make continuing progress toward degree completion.

### **2.1.2. Graduate Research Assistant (9182)**

In general, Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) are admitted masters-level, specialist-level, or doctoral-level students assigned to research duties. A Graduate Assistant (9186) may assist with research-related clerical activities but it is expected that a Graduate Research Assistant (9182) has a higher level of knowledge and skill than that required of a Graduate Assistant. Graduate Research Assistants may prepare and conduct scientific research or engage in original scholarship under the supervision and mentorship of a faculty member or senior researcher. The IPEDS defines Graduate Research Assistants as those whose "specific assignments are for the purpose of conducting research, regardless of academic discipline, by performing duties such a

preparing and conducting scientific research or engaging in original scholarship/scholarly inquiry under the supervision and mentorship of a faculty member or senior researcher."

Compensation for students employed under this designation is hourly. A Graduate Research Assistant appointed under the 9182 designation must fill out a time sheet on a bi-weekly basis reporting the hours and work completed. This time sheet is reviewed and signed by the supervisor.

A student appointed as a Graduate Research Assistant works under direct supervision. Research assistantships may be financed through funds from gifts, grants, contracts, state appropriations designated for research, or through the University's internally sponsored programs. Department heads and supervising faculty are responsible for assuring that Graduate Research Assistants receive ample opportunities to make continuing progress toward degree completion.

In addition to the general guidelines for Graduate Assistants, students employed under these designations are subject to the following unique guidelines:

- The student must perform research duties under the supervision of an appropriate faculty member or administrator of UWF. Such research duties may include, but are not limited to, assisting in lab research, reviewing and summarizing scholarship, assisting in community-based research activities, developing research and evaluation surveys, collecting data, analyzing data using software analyses programs, presenting presentation, and/or writing draft research reports.
- The student is responsible for assisting faculty members with research related to his or her academic program.

Graduate Research Assistants are required to observe ethical practices when conducting sponsored research (research funded by a grant). To comply with this policy, students must complete and provide certification for pertinent responsible conduct in research training. Certification is provided through completion of training modules of the [Online Ethics Course](#) developed with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Research Integrity (ORI) support in conjunction with the University of Montana.

- All required employees (faculty and students engaged in sponsored research) must complete Sections 1-4: *Ethical Issues in Research; Interpersonal Responsibility; Institutional Responsibility; and Professional Responsibility*. Sections 5 and 6, *Animals in Research and Human Participation in Research*, are required as applicable and determined by the Principal Investigator (the student's supervisor).
- Certification must be completed within the first 30 days of appointment as a Graduate Research Assistant.
- Training completion is monitored by the Principal Investigator (the student's supervisor) and Research and Sponsored Programs.
- The above Section 6 module does not meet the training requirements for the UWF Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Research Participants (IRB). See the [IRB website](#) for requirements when doing research using human participants.
- Principal Investigators (student supervisors) should reference the UWF Responsible Conduct in Research Plan in their statements of Broader Impact, Intellectual Merit, and Program Plan as evidence of compliance with this requirement.

For more information on the ethical responsibilities related to university research, see the UWF [Responsible Conduct in Research](#) (RCR) Plan.

### **2.1.3. Graduate Teaching Assistant (9184)**

In general, Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are admitted masters-level, specialist-level, or doctoral-level students assigned to teaching **or teaching-related** duties. They may be assigned as classroom assistants, lab assistants, or other roles directly related to classroom instruction. According to the IPEDS, Graduate Teaching Assistants assist faculty or other instructional staff in postsecondary institutions by performing teaching or teaching-related duties, such as developing teaching materials, giving examinations, and grading examinations or papers. Most Graduate Teaching Assistants are employed and paid by academic departments. A Graduate Teaching Assistant appointed under the 9184 designation assists the Instructor of Record and must fill out a time sheet on a bi-weekly basis reporting the hours and work completed. The time sheet is reviewed and signed by the supervisor.

GTAs must be supervised by at least one faculty member experienced in the discipline. Department heads and supervising faculty are responsible for assuring that Graduate Teaching Assistants receive ample opportunities to make continuing progress toward degree completion.

### **2.1.4. Graduate Teaching Assistant - Instructor of Record (9185)**

Graduate Teaching Assistants at the 9185 level are assigned as undergraduate classroom teachers. The primary difference between this classification and the 9184 classification is that the Graduate Teaching Assistant employed at the 9185 level is **salaried** as an Instructor of Record, whereas the Graduate Teaching Assistant employed at the 9184 level assists the Instructor of Record and is paid **hourly**.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (9185) may not be assigned to teach graduate courses unless they hold the terminal or a highly-related degree in the teaching field. For clarification, see the [memorandum on the use of GTAs as Instructors of Record](#).

Prior to teaching undergraduate courses, each prospective Graduate Teaching Assistant (9185) will be required to submit to the department a curriculum vita, two letters of recommendation from department professors, and a Statement of Teaching (which includes, but is not limited to, the student's short-term goals as a Graduate Teaching Assistant as well as the relevance of the experience to the student's long-term goals). In addition, GTAs must submit syllabi prior to the first day of instruction (see the documents required of all instructors for university accreditation). Departments might require additional materials, so GTAs should contact the supervising chair or program coordinator.

Department heads and supervising faculty are responsible for assuring that Graduate Teaching Assistants receive ample opportunities to make continuing progress toward degree completion.

In addition to the minimum requirements expected of all Graduate Assistants regardless of classification, GTAs who serve as Instructors of Record must meet the following requirements.

- The student must have completed at least 18 graduate semester credits in the teaching field. See the University [memorandum](#) concerning the use of GTAs as Instructors of Record.

- In the case of lecture courses and laboratory sections, GTAs who do not hold a master's degree will be assigned as Instructors of Record to lower-level, and in most cases, to freshman-level courses.
- In cases where conditions dictate the need to assign a GTA who does not hold a master's degree to an upper-level laboratory course, the following stipulations apply:
  - The college dean or designee must be informed prior to the assignment.
  - The laboratory section must be associated with a lecture course that is taught by a faculty member who meets the University's faculty credentials requirements.
  - The faculty member must provide direct supervision of the GTA.
  - The syllabus for the laboratory section must include information about the related lecture course and include contact information for the faculty member teaching the lecture course.
- In the case of supervision of undergraduate practicum and internships, which tend to be junior- and senior-level courses, it is expected that the GTA hold the master's degree in the field related to the practicum or internship, or hold a master's degree with at least 18 graduate semester hour credits in the teaching field related to the practicum or internship, and meet any other qualifications for supervision of practicum and internships specified by the profession.
- International students for whom English is a second language must meet the minimum requirements for admission to graduate studies at UWF, as well as the minimum requirements for individual departments offering graduate programs. International students expecting to receive appointments as Graduate Teaching Assistants also are required by Florida law to pass a test of spoken English. Before receiving a Graduate Teaching Assistantship, the student must submit a minimum TOEFL iBT Listening/Comprehension score of 23. Contact the Office of Equity, Diversity and International Affairs for more information. See the admissions criteria provided on the Graduate School's [website](#) for a list of the English proficiency tests UWF recognizes as well as the scores required for demonstration of competency and proficiency.

In addition to the general guidelines for Graduate Assistants, students employed under this designation are subject to the following unique guidelines:

- The student is responsible to perform all the duties regularly performed by an Instructor of Record. It is the responsibility of the department or office to make the student aware of these duties.
- The student must sign the appointment form in the award letter prior to beginning the assistantship. This form will indicate the student's acknowledgement of the department's/office's expectations.
- A Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI) will be administered to students at the end of each semester through MyUWF.
- The student should expect to be evaluated by the department chair, program coordinator, or supervising faculty mentor. This evaluation should consist of a one-on-one meeting with the supervisor to gauge the student's pedagogical experience and the quality of instruction provided by the student during the course.
- This classification is salaried.

### **2.1.5. Resident Hall Director (9188 & 9189)**

In general, Resident Hall Directors (HDs) are master's-level students who have primary responsibility for the operation of a University resident hall or cluster of resident halls. Department heads and supervising faculty are responsible for assuring that Resident Hall Directors receive ample opportunities to make continuing progress toward degree completion.

Students employed under these designations are subject to the following guidelines.

- The position is a 30 hour per week Graduate Assistantship.
- The student will supervise 6-12 Resident Assistants and other student employees in the residence hall.
- The student must act as a resource person for residents.
- The student must explain and adhere to University housing policies and rules for residents.
- The student must provide assistance and support to students.
- The student must be prepared to mediate disputes among hall residents. The student must be prepared to deal with and report inappropriate behavior or rule infractions committed by hall residents.
- The student must respond to emergencies occurring in residence halls.
- The student must ensure that maintenance needs for the residence halls are effectively reported.
- The student must maintain required records of student residential life.
- The student must create a residential environment which is safe, secure, stimulating, and conducive to the personal growth of the residents.
- The minimum pay for the 9188 classification is \$10.25 per hour.
- The 9189 classification is salaried with an on-campus apartment and meal plan.

### **2.2. Graduate Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluations**

Each Graduate Assistant who is interested in teaching undergraduate courses while pursuing graduate work at UWF is required to take part in Graduate Teaching Assistant training. Because training necessarily depends on the type of instruction to be provided, teacher orientation may be done at the department, college, and/or University level. Students may participate in teacher training and/or hold a Graduate Teaching Assistantship (9184) with an experienced instructor prior to teaching.

It is the responsibility of the supervising department to ensure that the Graduate Teaching Assistant has received the training necessary to perform instructional duties. The training style of the department could range anywhere from off-hour workshops to required coursework to one-on-one shadowing/meeting with an experienced instructor. Because teaching for each department requires different skills, knowledge, rubrics, etc., each department will be responsible for the development, organization, and execution of training sessions.

The UWF Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (CUTLA) and the UWF Graduate School may offer focused workshops throughout the semester. Refer to their websites for information on scheduled events and related opportunities.

UWF Center for University Teaching, Learning, and Assessment  
<http://uwf.edu/cutla/>

UWF Graduate School  
<http://uwf.edu/graduate/>

At the end of each semester, Graduate Teaching Assistants (9185) are subject to two different types of evaluations. At the University level, Graduate Teaching Assistants (9185) will be evaluated by a Student Assessment of Instruction (SAI) administered to students at the end of each semester through MyUWF. At the department level, Graduate Teaching Assistants (9185) will be evaluated by their department chair, program coordinator, or faculty mentor. This evaluation may take the form of a one-on-one meeting to gauge the GTA's pedagogical experience and the quality of instruction offered by the GTA in the classroom.

### **2.2.1. Student Disability Resource Center**

The Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) works with students and faculty to help make UWF an accessible learning environment in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendment Act (ADAAA) of 2008. The SDRC offers a variety of services for students with documented disabilities, including learning disabilities, deaf/hard of hearing, blind/low vision, mobility limitations, ADHD, psychiatric disorders, and medical disabilities. Some of the services provided by SDRC include:

- Interpretive services
- Note taking services
- Testing accommodations
- Student escorts
- Readers/scribes
- Other accommodations as appropriate based on documentation

It is important for students to remember that it is their responsibility to request disability services in the post-secondary setting, and they can start the process at SDRC. See the SDRC website: <http://uwf.edu/sdrc/index.cfm>.

When a student is enrolled in a class and he/she requests a SDRC testing room for exams or quizzes, SDRC staff will begin the following process:

- 1) The Student Disability Resource Center will send an email to the instructor that a student has registered for services. If the student has requested separate testing facilities, the SDRC will ask you to complete an online Test Instruction Form.
- 2) The instructor has the opportunity to schedule all of the exams/quizzes for the course in a single Test Instruction Form, including the scheduled date and time for the in-class exam, the permissible dates for the SDRC exam, the preferred method of test delivery (back to the instructor), and the permissible resources for student use during the exam (open book, calculator, etc.). The instructor may also provide further instructions to the SDRC on this form.
- 3) The instructor must deliver the exam on time to the SDRC.
- 4) The exam is taken by the student at the designated time.
- 5) The exam is delivered by SDRC according to the instructions provided by the instructor in the online form.

Student Disability Resource Center  
 Bldg. 19, Rm. 100D  
 (850) 474-2387  
<http://www.uwf.edu/sdrc/>

### 2.2.2. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) places certain restrictions on the kinds of information about students that can be shared without explicit permission from the student. FERPA permits information sharing for emergencies and in other situations where help is needed. The U.S. Department of Education provides an overview of FERPA on its website: <http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.

### 2.2.3. Teaching Resources

There are additional resources available to Graduate Assistants at UWF. The following offices can provide valuable services to you and your students, including separate testing facilities for students with special needs, one-on-one tutoring for writing and math assignments, help navigating the research process (as well as tutorials to help students avoid plagiarism), free access to health services and counseling, as well as assistance with academic advising. Take advantage of these resources, and encourage your students to do the same.

<b>UWF Student Resources</b>	
Testing Center Bldg. 21, Rm. 120 (850) 473-7340 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/testing-center/">http://uwf.edu/offices/testing-center/</a>	Campus Safety (850) 474-2000 <a href="http://uwf.edu/staysafe/">http://uwf.edu/staysafe/</a>
Writing Lab Bldg. 51, Rm. 157 (850) 474-2029 <a href="http://uwf.edu/cassh/support-resources/writing-lab/">http://uwf.edu/cassh/support-resources/writing-lab/</a>	Student Health Center Bldg. 960 (850) 474-2172 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/student-health-services/">http://uwf.edu/offices/student-health-services/</a>
MathStat Lab Bldg. 4 (850) 474-2276 <a href="http://uwf.edu/cse/departments/mathematics-and-statistics/">http://uwf.edu/cse/departments/mathematics-and-statistics/</a>	Student Counseling Center Bldg. 960, Rm. 200A (850) 474-2420 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/counseling-psychological-services/">http://uwf.edu/offices/counseling-psychological-services/</a>
Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) (Tutoring) Bldg. 52 (850) 474-3176 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/university-college/departments/advising-retention/ace/what-we-do/">http://uwf.edu/offices/university-college/departments/advising-retention/ace/what-we-do/</a>	Office of the Registrar Bldg. 18 (850) 474-2244 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/registrar/">http://uwf.edu/offices/registrar/</a>
Library Bldg. 32 (850) 474-2424 <a href="https://secure.uwf.edu/library/">https://secure.uwf.edu/library/</a>	First Year Advising Center Bldg. 18 (850) 474-3170 <a href="http://uwf.edu/offices/university-college/departments/advising-retention/">http://uwf.edu/offices/university-college/departments/advising-retention/</a>

### **3. GENERAL REQUIREMENTS**

#### **3.1. Eligibility for Assistantship**

To be considered for a graduate assistantship, the student must contact the department in which he or she is seeking an appointment. To be eligible for an assistantship, the student must meet the following minimum requirements:

- 1) The student must be an admitted, degree-seeking student at UWF.
- 2) The student must be enrolled in at least 6 hours of graduate coursework during fall and spring semesters and in at least 3 hours of graduate coursework in the summer semester. Continuing education courses do not count toward the minimum number of graduate hours required for eligibility for assistantship unless the courses count toward degree requirements. Continuing education courses are not eligible for waivers. If the student has fewer than the minimum required credit hours for assistantship eligibility remaining in his or her degree plan or has only thesis or dissertation hours remaining, then this policy does not apply.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) The student must be in good academic standing (maintain a 3.0 graduate GPA and not be on probation).

Additional documents, such as letters of recommendation, a CV or resume, or writing sample, may be required at the department's or office's request.

Note that the eligibility requirements for financial aid and for a graduate assistantship might differ. Students interested in receiving financial aid during the fall and spring semesters must meet the minimum enrollment requirements of the federal assistance program. See section 5 on tuition waivers and status requirements for receiving aid. Contact the Office of Financial Aid for more information (<http://uwf.edu/finaid/index.cfm>).

#### **3.2. English as a Second Language**

Students who wish to serve as Graduate Teaching Assistants (9185), but whose first language is not English, will be required to demonstrate English proficiency. Beyond meeting the minimum requirements for admission to graduate studies at UWF as well as the minimum requirements for individual departments offering graduate programs, GTAs serving as Instructors of Record must obtain and report a minimum TOEFL iBT Listening/Comprehension score of 23 to the Graduate School. Written English proficiency training is available through the [UWF Writing Lab](#). Spoken English proficiency training is available through the [Office of International Affairs](#).

#### **3.3. Time Limit and Number of Assistantships**

The time limit on assistantships depends on the type of assistantship as well as the department or office for which the student works. Although each assistantship is subject to termination at the end of the semester, students may continue the same assistantship for multiple semesters as long as the department or office has a position and appropriate funds. A new award letter does not have to be submitted for an assistantship that carries over from fall to spring semesters. Summer will require a new offer letter and Student Personnel Action Form.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that Graduate Assistants at the thesis/dissertation stage of their programs must maintain continuous enrollment by registering for at least one hour each semester.

UWF recognizes the increasing expense of graduate study and, therefore, makes conscientious attempts to provide financial assistance to graduate students. With that in mind, the University encourages colleges and departments to allocate no more than 20 hours per week (0.50 FTE) to a single Graduate Assistant. Exceptions may be made, and Graduate Assistants who wish to obtain Graduate Assistant positions from one or multiple offices that total more than 0.50 FTE (20 hours per week) must also obtain authorization from the Dean of the college over the student's major academic department and the Graduate School. The form to request such authorization is available on MyUWF, Graduate School Forms, Authorization for GA Appointments Exceeding 0.50 FTE. Permission to exceed 0.50 FTE is only granted in exceptional circumstances. All Graduate Assistant appointments combined across all units must not exceed 0.75 FTE.

#### **4. PAYMENT**

##### **4.1. Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Explanations**

Full-time assistantships (0.50 FTE) require students to perform assistantship assignments for 20 hours per week during the period of the assignment. Half-time assistantships (0.25 FTE) require students to work 10 hours per week during the period of assignment. The minimum required for an initial appointment is 0.25 FTE. Graduate students with initial appointments of less than 10 hours per week should be classified as OPS. They cannot be classified as Graduate Assistants and are not eligible for tuition waivers.

Two priorities govern the allocation of Graduate Assistantships: University recruitment and departmental teaching and research needs. The Graduate School encourages and strongly recommends that departments hire graduate students to full-time appointments (0.50 FTE or 20 hours per week) but do not exceed full-time appointments (over 0.50 FTE or 20 hours per week). All Graduate Assistant appointments combined across all units must not exceed 0.75 FTE.

##### **4.2. Stipend Minimums and Waivers**

The minimum hourly pay for Graduate Assistantships is \$10.25 per hour. This payment may be generated in a bi-weekly paycheck for which the student submits an electronic timesheet every two weeks to be approved by his or her department chair or office supervisor. For GTAs – Instructor of Record this payment is generated through a semester stipend at the equivalent of \$10.25 per hour. For Graduate Assistants receiving a stipend, the money will be dispersed evenly throughout the weeks of the semester. No electronic timesheet is required in this case.

Part of the financial package for Graduate Assistants working a combination of 0.25 FTE or greater (10 hours or more per week) is eligibility for a matriculation waiver of the in-state portion of graduate basic tuition, excluding fees, (current as of Fall 2012). Out-of-state students will also qualify for a waiver for the out-of-state portion of tuition.

The department or office granting the assistantship will initiate a request for tuition waiver through the college dean's office in which the student is enrolled. It is not uncommon for a graduate student to have multiple assistantship appointments simultaneously.

For more information on tuition and fees, see the catalog available at:  
<http://catalog.uwf.edu/graduate/tuitionandfees/>.

### 4.3. Tax Obligations

All students must obtain a Social Security Number in order to receive payments from the University, including fellowships, assistantships, and tuition support. Students are responsible for determining their tax obligations.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) excludes certain types of student wages from the IRS definition of “employment” for purposes of FICA tax withholding. The Internal Revenue Code (IRC) 3121[b][10][B] provides that wages paid by a university to one of its student employees who is enrolled at least half-time and regularly attending classes are exempt from the FICA tax withholding. The University has the sole discretion to determine whether a student’s employment at the University of West Florida is exempt from FICA withholding taxes.

Students not exempt from Social Security/Medicare are automatically enrolled in the Retirement Plan for OPS employees. Employees enrolled in the plan contribute 7.5% of their pay, pre-tax, into an investment account in their name. They are not subject to the Social Security tax of 6.2%, but are subject to the Medicare tax of 1.45%. Departments are responsible for the matching of the 1.45% Medicare tax. See the Human Resources [website](#) for more information.

## 5. RESIDENCY CLASSIFICATION

### 5.1. Florida Residency for Tuition Purposes

The University of West Florida is required to adhere to specific procedures in making initial determinations of residency for tuition purposes. The student’s residency classification determines the rate of tuition, and students classified as “Florida residents” pay less in fees per credit hour than students classified as “non-Florida residents.”

In accordance with S1009.21 Florida Statutes, Rules 6A-10.044 and 6A-20.003, Florida Administrative Code, and the Board of Governors Residency Regulation, the Graduate School is required to adhere to specific procedures in making determinations for establishing residency for tuition purposes as does the Office of the Registrar for residency reclassification for students who were initially classified as non-Florida residents.

To qualify as a Florida Resident for Tuition Purposes, the student (graduate students are assumed to be independent per Florida residency guidelines unless proved to be dependent as defined by IRS regulations) must be a U.S. Citizen, permanent resident alien or a legal alien granted indefinite stay by U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, and must have established physical and legal residence in Florida for at least *12 consecutive months prior to the first day of classes* for the semester of enrollment. Students who do not meet these basic criteria cannot be classified as residents for tuition purposes.

NOTE: Living in Florida for a year or longer **DOES NOT** automatically qualify a student as a Florida resident for tuition purposes (in-state tuition). Students who depend on out-of-state parents for support are presumed to be legal residents of the same state as their parents.

The burden of proof rests with the applicant to present *clear and convincing* documentation that supports permanent legal residency in Florida for at least 12 consecutive months rather than temporary residency for the purpose of pursuing an education. **All applicants are considered “non-Florida residents” until they provide proof otherwise.** Failure to

provide all relevant information and required documentation in the residency section of the admission application could result in a 'non-Florida resident' classification for tuition purposes. All documentation must be submitted no later than the first day of classes for the semester of enrollment. Judgments as to residency will be made on the basis of all information provided. No single document shall be conclusive.

For further information on establishing Florida residency for tuition purposes, see [uwf.edu/graduate/apply/residency/](http://uwf.edu/graduate/apply/residency/). This website also includes a list of acceptable documents for proving residency.

## **5.2. Residency Reclassification**

Currently enrolled students who are classified as non-Florida residents for tuition purposes and wish to become Florida residents for tuition purposes should contact the Office of the Registrar for reclassification documentation and information. The guidelines for residency reclassification changed effective July 1, 2009. For further information, see the notice posted on the website of the Office of the Registrar.

## **6. STATUS REQUIREMENTS**

Graduate students seeking or holding an assistantship should be aware of their student status for three separate reasons, including eligibility for an assistantship, eligibility for a tuition waiver, and qualification for financial aid. According to University policy, a graduate student is considered full-time when taking at least 6 semester hours in fall, spring, and summer semesters. For purposes of student classification with the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Financial Aid, 6 or more semester hours constitutes full-time status regardless of semester.

The University of West Florida reports enrollment status based on the definitions listed below:

<u>Status</u>	<u>Fall, Spring, &amp; Summer</u>
Full-time	6 SH or more
Half-time	3 SH
Less than half-time	1-2 SH

The following sections provide details concerning status requirements for assistantships, waivers, and financial aid.

### **6.1. Qualifying for a Tuition Waiver**

The cost of graduate education is composed of two separate elements: tuition and fees. See the [Schedule of Tuition and Fees](#) for the University of West Florida for a full presentation of the current cost of graduate education per credit hour. The cost of graduate education at the University of West Florida is composed of base tuition, differentials for out-of-state residents, and student fees. The Florida Legislature, the Florida Board of Governors, and the UWF Board of Trustees periodically review tuition and fees, so these figures are subject to adjustment. In addition, certain academic programs may require additional differential tuition to cover unique

programmatic costs. Students should contact the [Office of the Registrar](#) for the most current figures.

All graduate students with qualifying graduate assistantships may be eligible to receive a matriculation waiver for a portion of the in-state tuition as part of their financial aid package with the University. In addition, non-Florida residents receiving a graduate assistantship will receive a full waiver of the out-of-state differential of tuition. Continuing education courses are not eligible for fee waivers. Program chairs and advisers should make students aware of this exclusion. **Note that all graduate students are required to pay student fees.** A tuition waiver does not cover student fees.

To qualify for a graduate assistantship, the student must be:

- fully matriculated in (admitted into) a graduate program at UWF as a degree-seeking student,
- be enrolled in at least 6 credit hours in the fall and spring semesters and 3 credit hours in the summer (unless in final course or thesis or dissertation hours)
- work at least 0.25 FTE (or 10 hours), and
- be paid a stipend of at least \$10.25 per hour.

Students who begin work as Graduate Assistants after the beginning of the term receive a prorated waiver for the length of the term remaining. Students may not start a new appointment after the first day of classes in part of Term 3 in any semester. Exceptions and special circumstances can be sent to the Graduate School for approval.

For a student who has multiple assistantships, the dean's office and the college in which the student is fully and regularly admitted and matriculated is responsible for processing the student's tuition waivers. Additionally, for a student who has one assistantship that takes place outside his or her academic department (i.e. in a non-academic, administrative office), the major department is still responsible for processing the student's tuition waivers. A student receiving an assistantship in a non-academic department who meets all the requirements for a fee waiver must contact his or her supervisor. It is the responsibility of the non-academic department offering the assistantship to contact the college dean's office in which the student is fully admitted to process the fee waiver request.

The awarding of waivers is subject to school or college approval. Note that a student on assistantship in his or her last semester and having applied for graduation with fewer than 6 semester hours of required coursework for degree completion is still eligible for fee waivers.

For more information on funding opportunities, contact the [Graduate School](#).

### **6.1.1. Qualifying for an Out-of-State Tuition Waiver**

To qualify for an out-of-state waiver, a graduate student must be awarded a graduate assistantship. Out-of-state fees for graduate assistants will be waived if the GA is:

- Matriculated in a UWF graduate degree program
- Appointed at a minimum of 0.25 FTE or greater, and
- Enrolled in at least 6 graduate level credits during the fall/spring semester in which they are appointed as a Graduate Assistant. For summer GA appointments, enrollment in at least 3 graduate level credits is required.

- Graduate Assistants at the thesis/dissertation stage of their programs who have only thesis or dissertation hours remaining must maintain continuous enrollment by registering for at least one hour each semester to qualify for the out-of-state waiver.

These waivers apply only to out-of-state tuition. Out-of-state students may also receive the in-state matriculation waiver and be responsible for the balance of in-state tuition and fees. Out-of-state and matriculation fee waivers are processed through the student's academic department, program, or college. Note that a waiver is not a scholarship and cannot result in a refund of dollars back to the student.

### **6.1.2 The Alabama Differential Tuition Plan**

Graduate Assistants who meet all the requirements for an out-of-state waiver (as enumerated in section 6.1.1) and are residents of Alabama will be eligible for a waiver of the Alabama differential portion of their tuition.

For more information, new graduate students should contact the [Graduate School](#).

### **6.2. Courses Covered by a Tuition Waiver**

Waivers may be used to cover courses related to the student's academic degree program, including thesis and dissertation hours.

Note that continuing education courses do not count as credit hours for purposes of receiving a tuition waiver.

### **6.3. Changes in Status Affecting a Tuition Waiver**

If a student drops or withdraws from a course for which a tuition waiver has been received and falls below the required number of credit hours for waiver qualification as a result (under 6 credit hours in the fall and spring and under 3 in the summer), then the tuition waiver will be removed, and the student must pay for tuition. Holds on student records will prevent students from registering for classes, receiving transcripts, or receiving grade reports until payment is received by the Cashier's Office.

If a student drops or withdraws from a course for which a tuition waiver has been received, the student must pay a pro-rated amount for the remainder of the course tuition for the semester.<sup>3</sup> Note that a student does have the right to appeal the fee that may be assessed, but only for the amount he or she actually paid for tuition. The student cannot appeal the amount of the waiver.

A student with a tuition waiver who is dismissed from the University or resigns from a graduate assistantship at any point during the term will have his or her tuition waivers removed and the student must repay the tuition.

### **6.4. Qualifying for Financial Aid**

According to federal policy, a graduate student is considered eligible for financial aid when taking at least 6 credit hours. For further information, please refer to the [Office of Financial Aid](#).

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<sup>3</sup> See the attached [spreadsheet](#) for the pro-rated repayment schedule.

## **7. CAUSES FOR ASSISTANTSHIP DISMISSAL**

University policy requires that graduate students maintain good academic standing in order to keep their graduate assistantships. Being placed on academic probation is cause for dismissal of a graduate assistantship. Students are also required to maintain eligibility requirements of enrollment and hours worked. If a student drops below the minimum of 6 credit hours (less if enrolled in last course, thesis or dissertation hours) they will lose their assistantship eligibility and could be cause for dismissal of appointment.

### **7.1. Maintenance of Academic Standing**

All Graduate Assistants must maintain a good academic standing with a cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0 or higher each term.<sup>4</sup> Inability to maintain good academic standing with the University may result in academic dismissal.

If a Graduate Assistant's overall GPA falls out of good academic standing, he or she will automatically be placed on academic probation and be ineligible to maintain or renew the assistantship. Exceptions to this policy will be made in only very rare circumstances on a case-by-case basis, with final approval made by the Graduate School.

All Graduate Assistants must make satisfactory progress to their degree. Satisfactory progress is determined on a case-by-case basis by the Graduate Assistant's program director or coordinator. If it is determined that satisfactory progress is not being made, even if the student is meeting other minimum requirements (i.e., GPA and continuous enrollment status), the Graduate Assistant may lose his or her assistantship.

### **7.2. Policy for Grades of Incomplete ("I")**

If a student is placed on academic probation as a result of an "I" grade, he or she will not be eligible for a graduate assistantship. It is imperative that faculty and Graduate Assistants are aware of the policies regarding the consequences of not resolving "I" grades, and take measures to resolve incompletes before they convert to a "F." An "I" grade may adversely affect the Graduate Assistant's GPA and may result in ineligibility for the assistantship.

For more information, see the Office of the Registrar's [Policy on Incomplete Grades](#).

### **7.3. Departmental Policy Concerning Dismissal**

In addition, departments reserve discretion over the reappointment of Graduate Assistantships. Each department or office offering Graduate Assistantships should provide the following information to graduate students receiving assistantship offers, whether through the letter of appointment, a separate document, or a departmental orientation session:

- Evaluation procedures
- Procedures and criteria for reappointment
- Conditions under which an assistantship could be terminated

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<sup>4</sup> Doctoral-level students must maintain a cumulative graduate GPA of 3.25 or higher each term.

Every department or office is responsible for forming its own guidelines for Graduate Assistants. These guidelines may include, but are not limited to, dress code, absence/tardy policy, and causes for dismissal. Here is a sample [GA evaluation form](#).

## 8. PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

### 8.1. The Professional Role

When accepting an assistantship position in the academic enterprise at the University of West Florida, graduate students may find that some aspects of the role are new and unfamiliar. Graduate Assistants are considered to be professionals at the beginning of their discipline-based careers in an academic setting. As such, they must recognize that they are agreeing to contribute time and intellectual effort to help with program or faculty needs in exchange for a paycheck, stipend, or tuition support and for opportunities commensurate with the role.

Although the demands of any given graduate assistantship vary according to the specific context of employment, assistants are likely to have specified duties, a set number of hours per week in which the student is expected to work, and a supervisor who will oversee the student's work. Supervisors should be able to communicate with assistants regarding the number of assigned hours per week. For example, some supervisors may encourage assistants to do some extra hours during the early weeks of the semester in exchange for reducing obligated time during final exams. However, a graduate student appointed as an assistant should have a formal discussion with his or her supervisor about departmental expectations regarding how, where, and when the student commits his or her time.

UWF's strategic plan articulated several values that are geared toward producing the kind of campus experience for students and employees alike. The University expects student employees to demonstrate these values in their work. These values include the following:

**Caring:** Providing a safe and dynamic learning environment that encourages the development of individual potential.

**Integrity:** Doing the right things for the right reasons.

**Quality:** Dedication to uncompromising excellence.

**Innovation:** Dedication to exploring and expanding the boundaries of knowledge.

**Teamwork:** Working together to achieve shared goals.

**Stewardship:** Managing and protecting our resources.

**Courage:** Daring to be different by design.

In addition, UWF identified several "virtues" to clarify behavior that contributes to high quality service delivered by the academic and support staff. These include the following:

**Ambassadorship, Communications, Courtesy, Flexibility, Helpfulness, Knowledge, Ownership, Professionalism, Responsiveness, and Safety.** It may sound like a tall order, but commitment to these principles will help UWF live up to its mission of "empowering each individual we serve with knowledge and opportunity to contribute responsibly and creatively to a complex world."

Graduate Assistants are strongly encouraged to adopt high standards of professional behavior. A graduate student engaging in on-campus employment will be establishing his or her professional reputation as someone who is reliable, ethical, and trustworthy. The student will attract new opportunities, build a strong resume, and develop relationships that will help him or her achieve strong letters of reference for future professional opportunities.

## **8.2. Solving Work-Related Problems**

UWF hopes employment as graduate assistants will be trouble-free; however, sometimes interpersonal problems will complicate the job. Some general pointers can set the stage for effective solutions:

- The student should recognize that no one will have his or her exact vantage point on the problem, so the student should strive to explain his or her position clearly and without being defensive.
- The student should listen carefully to the position of the person raising the complication.
- The student should avoid raising his or her voice, using inappropriate or obscene language, or fueling even worse outcomes by other unprofessional behavior.
- The student should focus on the specific behavior that is problematic rather than attributions or motives that he or she thinks contribute to the behavior.
- The student should not use email when angry. It generally makes a situation much worse when people cannot rely on body language to clarify real meaning.
- If tempers flare, the student may want to seek the assistance of an appropriate mediator. UWF provides a mediation service to assist employees in situations that appear hard to resolve. Contact UWF's Informal Dispute Resolution services at 857-6050.

For more information on Human Resources Conflict Resolution Services go to <http://uwf.edu/offices/human-resources/i-am-a/employee/employee-relations/conflict-resolution/#d.en.81722>.

### **8.2.1. Solving Problems with Students**

Although a Graduate Teaching Assistant serving as the Instructor of Record may not be much older than the undergraduates in the classroom, the graduate student holds authority in this setting. UWF trusts GTAs to carry out the specific assignments related to serving as a classroom instructor. If a student challenges a GTA's authority, it helps if the GTA can point to the syllabus or an outline from class notes that identifies the instructor's obligation to serve the class. If an informal conversation does not appear to solve the problem, the GTA should confer with a supervisor for assistance regarding the most appropriate course of action.

### **8.2.2. Solving Problems with Peers**

Occasionally difficulties with peers can surface, particularly in competitive contexts. In shared work assignments, a graduate student may find that co-workers may not work as hard as they do toward task completion. To prevent such problems, a Graduate Assistant should try to clarify workload assignments from the outset. The student should inquire early about what may be happening that could contribute to disappointing performance from peers. The student should express disappointment directly to the individual who is generating the problems and ask for cooperation. The student should be prepared for the possibility that the peer may share similar feelings of resentment or have some mutual disappointments in the contributions or style of

others. If the graduate student is unable to come to terms on a more productive and satisfying means of interacting, the student should ask for assistance or mediation from the supervisor.

### **8.2.3. Solving Problems with Supervisors**

It is possible that a Graduate Assistant may experience some challenges with his or her supervisor. Examples could include a supervisor having unrealistic work expectations or placing too many demands in too short a time frame. Going to the other extreme, sometimes supervisors can neglect their assistants by not showing up for appointments or not fulfilling commitments. Although rare, supervisors can also be insulting or demeaning. Should a negative situation develop with a supervisor, the student should take steps early in the process to identify the problem and seek opportunities for explanation and reconciliation. The student should keep in mind that the supervisor has greater authority and experience in the situation and stay open to the idea that there could be some legitimate explanation for the behavior perceived to be problematic. However, if the student is not able to reach an accord, he or she may want to explore whether a different assignment may be available. There is also the option of speaking to the person who supervises the student's immediate supervisor.

### **8.2.4. "Chain of Command"**

When attempting to solve problems, most organizations subscribe to the concept of "chain of command." In general, this principle entails a first attempt at resolving a problem by directly addressing the person in the organization who seems responsible for the problem. Failing that, the student seeking to address a problem should go up the chain of command to that person's supervisor, and so forth. In an academic setting, a student in the classroom would have the following entities to deal with in the academic chain of command.

Graduate Student->Instructor->Program Director/Department Head->College Dean->Provost->President

Attempts to skip some links in the chain of command when solving problems will most likely be met with resistance. The student can expect to be sent back to the level that was skipped as individuals higher up in the chain of command do not wish to undermine the authority of those whose job it is to address and solve problems.

## **8.3. Dealing with Boundary Issues**

One challenge that graduate students may face is finding a comfortable stance in how to relate to their students. There is an old dictum that can be helpful: "Be friendly, but not familiar." Academic professionals strive to be friendly because graduate students who are in a teaching or support role are more likely to facilitate student learning if students feel friendly support from the graduate student. However, familiarity can create problems. Students sometimes see a familiar teacher as one who can be manipulated for their own gains. At the very least, it may be hard to manage equitable grading practices in situations when the GTA has befriended some students in the class and clearly not befriended others. It sets the stage for challenges about discriminatory practices. Graduate students should have a clear understanding how frustrating it can be to suspect the absence of a level playing field with regard to grades and opportunities.

Discrimination is a serious matter in an environment that prides itself on fair treatment. Demographic variables, such as age, color, disability, gender (including sex and gender identity), marital status, national origin, race, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status, should have no bearing on judgments regarding quality of performance. When students suspect their rights are being violated on the basis of protected class, they have a right to make a complaint with

Human Resources alleging the specific nature of the discriminatory treatment. Taking great care to treat students with respect regardless of their personal characteristics will go a long way to avoid this unpleasant outcome. Similarly, if a graduate student suspects inequitable treatment, he or she should identify the problem with the faculty member and try to explore a resolution. However, if that is unsuccessful, or if the student believes that discrimination based on a protected class is the basis for the inequitable treatment, the student may contact the Equal Opportunity Coordinator in Human Resources for assistance and/or to file a complaint. In this situation, students need not follow the normal problem-solving chain of command. Refer to the University's Policy Prohibiting Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation for more information: <http://uwf.edu/ohr/empRelations/InvestigationProcedure.pdf>.

Boundary issues become more complicated when romantic entanglements become part of the landscape. Such relationships with students are a conflict of interest for the GTA. UWF actively discourages GTAs from becoming romantically involved with students for several reasons:

- 1) It potentially compromises objectivity in grading. Even if grading remained strictly objective, close relationships provide an appearance of bias that could make students question the teaching assistant or instructor's integrity.
- 2) The person in authority has power over the student. As such, it could later be argued that the person in authority pursued the relationship as an abuse of that power.
- 3) Our current regulations require employees to report romantic entanglements to their supervisors so that appropriate steps can be taken to protect both parties from accusations and disappointments. It is simply smarter to avoid entanglement socially until the power relationship (e.g., the class) is officially over.

The same principles apply to romantic entanglements with professors. What seems like a good idea when sparks get ignited at a conference may turn out to be a career-challenging move over the long run. It is best for students to avoid romantic entanglements with individuals in positions of authority in the workplace or the educational environment. Such relationships can result in career disruptions or other problems.

Harassment is another potentially challenging source of turmoil. Technically, sexual harassment involves unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct that unreasonably interferes with academic performance or creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive climate. Graduate Assistants could be accused of sexually harassing students by asking a student for a date. Graduate Assistants could also be the target of someone who harasses.

As an authority figure, Graduate Teaching Assistants will be held to a standard of those in authority. Flirtatious behavior can easily cross the line of acceptability for some students into unwelcome attention. Sexual jokes, suggestive nicknames, and suggestive display items (e.g., a large calendar of nude photos on the wall) serve as examples that could help to build a case that the Graduate Teaching Assistant engages in harassing behavior or expects favors in return for special treatment. As a supervisor, it is the responsibility of the Graduate Teaching Assistant to know and comply with University policy and procedures, to avoid behavior that could be construed as discriminatory, and to serve as a good example. Upon receiving any complaints from students or other employees or upon witnessing inappropriate behavior, Graduate Assistants should immediately report that activity to the Equal Opportunity Coordinator in Human Resources.

If a Graduate Assistant becomes the target of unwelcomed attention, he or she is encouraged to let the offender know that the behavior is unwelcomed and to request that the behavior stop. For example, the Graduate Assistant can state, "I don't appreciate the joke you just told. It offends me, and I'd like you not to do that again in my presence." If the problem continues, the student should call the Equal Opportunity Coordinator in Human Resources or others listed in the Discrimination policy to discuss concerns and options. It may be possible to resolve these concerns informally, or the student may elect to file a formal complaint. This is an instance in which the student need not follow chain of command in problem solving. In most cases, an investigation will unfold, and the individual under investigation will be warned against any potential retaliatory practices. After reporting such an episode, it is also important to maintain confidentiality about the report to ensure that the investigation is a fair one.