Graduate Assistantships and Fellowships

Responsibilities of the Graduate Assistant or Trainee

A fundamental responsibility of a graduate assistant is to work closely with their faculty supervisor in carrying out research or teaching activities, while at the same time making good progress toward the completion of the degree program. If a student’s assistantship responsibilities and academic program are properly coordinated, these responsibilities will be compatible. The assistant should articulate their goals early in the term of appointment and work with their supervisor to achieve them. The graduate assistant is obligated at all times to maintain high ethical standards in academic and nonacademic activities, and to report violations of these to the faculty supervisor. The graduate assistant should stay well informed of departmental, school, and institutional regulations, and follow them consistently. If problems arise in the assistantship assignments, the graduate assistant should seek help first from the faculty supervisor. If problems cannot be resolved, the student should consult the Program Director. In general, graduate assistants are expected to be available in the periods between academic terms.

Full-Time Enrollment

Students who are receiving a graduate assistantship or fellowship are required to be enrolled as a full-time graduate student for a full academic year (fall, spring and summer semesters). Full-time enrollment is defined as:

- at least 9 semester hours in the fall and spring semesters, and
- registration for credit hours in the summer at a minimum level established by the academic unit (school, college, department or graduate program). Students should consult with their program director before registering for summer credit hours.

Students enrolled in programs that traditionally only offer course work and research opportunities during fall and spring semesters are considered to be full-time even if they do not enroll during the summer terms.

Graduate Assistant Leave

Graduate assistants are entitled to the following short-term leaves:

- A maximum of 15 calendar days (one-half month) paid leave of absence (vacation) per calendar year,
- 3 calendar days paid sick leave of absence per calendar year, and
- Parental leave of absence (with pay) of 30 consecutive days per calendar year upon the birth or adoption of a child. Either or both parents are eligible for parental leave. NOTE: Graduate students (Trainees and Assistants) are not eligible for FMLA.

Vacation, sick and parental leaves do not accrue over calendar years. All leave must be requested and require approval by the student’s mentor and graduate program director. With the agreement of the mentor and graduate program director, extended, unpaid, non-emergency absences from campus for periods up to a month may be approved. Extended absences (without pay) for non-academic purposes should be limited.

Program policies regarding leaves of absence must apply equitably to all full time students in good standing in the program. Students should consult the Graduate School’s policy concerning leaves of academic absence (http://catalog.uab.edu/graduate/enrollment). In emergencies, graduate assistants should inform their mentors or program directors as soon as possible about the need for a leave of academic absence.