

**THE CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
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**Date:** January 11, 2005 **Code:** HR 2005-03  
**To:** CSU Presidents **Supersedes:** HR 2001-20  
**From:** Jackie R. McClain   
Vice Chancellor  
Human Resources  
**Subject:** **Graduate Assistant Employment Policy and Classification Standard**

The Graduate Assistant employment policy has been updated to include current Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exemption status information, current instructions on graduate assistants and the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) and the Graduate Assistant-On-Campus Work-Study classification. The policy regarding appointment of graduate assistants is as follows:

- Incumbents in a Graduate Assistant classification must be registered in a CSU graduate degree program and enrolled in courses toward the completion of a graduate degree during the graduate assistant appointment period. Students enrolled in credential programs and students enrolled in graduate programs outside the CSU are not eligible for this classification.
- To afford more flexibility, a monthly Graduate Assistant classification remains available to accommodate appointments that begin and end throughout the academic term, depending on the particular assignment and campus need. Monthly pay rates are established for this classification.
- For funding purposes, a new Graduate Assistant – On-Campus Work-Study classification became available effective November 2, 2004.
- It is systemwide policy that “full time” for a graduate assistant is 20 hours per week during the academic term. Appointments in any Graduate Assistant classification may be allowed in any fraction up to full time, as long as the fraction is exactly equivalent to a 2-decimal FTE without rounding. Appointments are not just limited to 1/4, 1/2, 3/4, and full time appointments. Timebase is proportionate to 20 hours (e.g., half-time equals 10 hours).

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Graduate Deans	

- It is allowable for a graduate assistant to be appointed in another student classification, up to a combined total of approximately 20 hours per week.
- The Graduate Assistant classification is available for graduate students enrolled in courses during the summer.
- Graduate assistants are exempt from FICA (Social Security and Medicare) during the academic term, provided the student meets the student FICA exemption addressed in Internal Revenue Code 3121(b)(10). When the graduate assistant qualifies for the student FICA exemption, the Retirement Account Code (PIMS Item 505) is set at “N.” Continuing graduate assistants who qualify for a graduate assistant appointment during academic breaks, but who no longer qualify for the student FICA exemption, are enrolled in the Department of Personnel Administration (DPA) PST Retirement Plan in lieu of Social Security. Medicare withholding is required also. For these graduate assistants, the Retirement Account Code (PIMS Item 505) is changed from “N” to “TM.”
- Effective November 2, 2004, the Graduate Assistant classifications were changed to “non-exempt.” As a result of the new “white collar” FLSA regulations, the U.S. Department of Labor confirmed that graduate assistants whose work involves research related to their course of study continue to be considered “students” and not “employees.” In this case, an employer-employee relationship does not exist and these “graduate research assistants” are not subject to the FLSA provisions. However, graduate assistants who do not perform research related to their course of study are considered “employees” and are subject to FLSA provisions (e.g., record-keeping requirements, overtime, minimum wage). Campuses are required to make this FLSA status determination.
- Because non-research graduate assistants do not qualify as “exempt” under the FLSA “white collar” exemption tests, they are considered “non-exempt.” Work hours must be tracked in accordance with the FLSA and graduate assistants must be paid for all hours worked. Although contrary to CSU policy, in the unusual event a graduate assistant works over forty (40) hours in a workweek, the graduate assistant must be paid for all hours worked plus overtime. For more information, refer to Human Resources’ FLSA Web site at: <http://www.calstate.edu/HRAdm/Policies/flsa.shtml>.
- Since the Graduate Assistant classification is a student classification, graduate assistants are not provided benefits.

The Graduate Assistant Classification and Qualification Standard, which includes the academic year (AY) classification, the monthly Graduate Assistant classification, and the on-campus work-study classification, is provided in Attachment A.

This memorandum is also available on the Human Resources Administration’s Web site at: <http://www.calstate.edu/HRAdm/memos.shtml>. Questions may be directed to Academic Human Resources at (562) 951-4425.

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## Graduate Assistant

*AY Class Code: 2355*

*Monthly Class Code: 2325*

*On-Campus Work-Study Class Code: 2326*

*Date Established: 07-01-1963*

*Date Revised: 11-02-2004*

### OVERVIEW:

Under immediate supervision, the Graduate Assistant assists a regular faculty member or the teaching staff with various professional and technical duties associated generally with the subjects or programs in which the assistant is doing graduate work. This work should not take precedence over the successful completion of the graduate degree program by the student in a timely manner.

### DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS:

The Graduate Assistant is distinguished from those classifications used for undergraduate student help in the instructional program who perform clerical or other routine tasks such as grading examinations, recording grades, etc., by the following:

- ◆ Graduate Assistants are provided part-time employment and practical experience in fields related to their advanced study.
- ◆ Graduate Assistants provide professional non-teaching assistance to faculty members.

Graduate Assistant work may involve supervising students in a classroom, workshop, or laboratory (where final responsibility for the class and its entire instruction, including the performance of the Graduate Assistant, is vested in a member of the faculty); training students in the use of equipment or other resources; assisting faculty with research and preparation of course materials; participating in the evaluation of students' work; tutoring students; and other related work.

Graduate Assistants are not responsible for the instructional content of a course, selecting student assignments, planning of examinations, determining the term grade for students, instructing the entire enrollment of a course, or providing the entire instruction of a group of students enrolled in a course. Graduate Assistants may not be employed to assist in a course in which he/she is enrolled, nor should they be consulted regarding the grading of their peers.

Classification code 2326 (On-Campus Work-Study) is for Work-Study graduate students funded by the Federal Work-Study Program. Appointments to this classification code must meet provisions of the Federal Work-Study Program.

### TYPICAL ACTIVITIES:

Typical activities of Graduate Assistants may include: (1) assisting in the instruction of students by conducting small discussion groups related to large lecture or television courses and the like, supervising laboratory periods, workshops, production courses or other course activities, assisting by handling equipment, performing demonstrations, maintaining office hours to provide direct individual contact between student and graduate assistant, clarifying course material or course content for students; (2) providing assistance to faculty conducting authorized

research by collecting and arranging data, developing source materials, summarizing reports, searching the literature and compiling bibliographies, developing and operating research equipment, preparing and caring for research materials, assisting in the conduct of experiments, etc.; and/or (3) generally assisting faculty in evaluating student work and examinations; preparing course materials and aids, or performing other functions requiring knowledge and background beyond that generally possessed by undergraduate assistants.

**MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:**

***Knowledge and Abilities:***

Knowledge of the subject matter of the discipline in which assigned. Ability to relate well to others within the academic environment; ability to supervise, assist, and train students; and ability to assist faculty in the conduct of special projects/research within the discipline.

***Experience:***

For the initial appointment, evidence of satisfactory achievement in previous academic work. For subsequent appointment, evidence of satisfactory progress toward completion of the degree.

***Education:***

Equivalent to completion of the requirements for a bachelor's degree and registration in a CSU graduate degree program. Students enrolled in credential programs are not eligible for this position.