

# **Handbook for Graduate Administrative, Teaching, and Research Assistants**

**Stephen F. Austin State University  
Nacogdoches, Texas**



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**August 2018**

**(Adapted from earlier version, 2006, by Dr. Allen Richman &**

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## INTRODUCTION

The faculty and administration of Stephen F. Austin State University welcome you to Nacogdoches and to this institution of higher learning. It is anticipated that your stay here will be of intellectual, professional, and personal benefit. The purpose of this handbook is to make your experience here as pleasant and rewarding as possible by answering some basic questions about the university and your role in its processes. SFASU has legal, moral, and professional responsibilities to you. Likewise, you have the same types of responsibilities, tempered by your special role as teacher-student, researcher-student and graduate assistant-student. SFA is a state university and, as such, is controlled by a variety of legislative mandates, as well as regulations established by the Texas Coordinating Board for Higher Education and the SFASU Board of Regents. It is important that you understand the constraints as well as the privileges that apply to you in your new position. This publication, as well as the orientation program you attend, will attempt to familiarize you with your legal and professional responsibilities.

The assistantship offered to you provides unique opportunities. It helps finance your graduate education while providing you with the status of professional staff member. It is a recognition of your past achievements and a statement of faith in your future academic accomplishments. Some graduate assistants will assist regular faculty in the classroom, the laboratory, or the studio. Some will work as research assistants. A few will teach their own courses and will be responsible for the academic content of the course and the entire process whereby grades are assigned. Others will help with administrative functions or research assistance. This handbook will attempt to cover all contingencies, but where questions go unanswered, graduate students should seek clarifying information from (1) the major assigned employer to whom they are assigned; (2) the departmental graduate advisor; (3) the department chair- probably in that order.

It is hoped that your experience here will be productive and successful. Stephen F. Austin provides the amenities of a fairly large university with the clean air and water of a small town in a pleasant country setting. The metropolitan areas of Houston and Dallas are within reach; while so are the forests and lakes of East Texas. We believe that this unique learning environment will meet your expectations and enable you to achieve your graduate school goals. Best of luck!

## OFFICIAL POLICIES OF STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

Graduate Assistantships are awarded to full-time students, carrying at least nine (9) credit hours of graduate level course work each semester; they must remain registered for those courses throughout the entire semester. Thesis research and thesis writing courses count toward the nine hour total. Should the award run through the summer, the student must enroll for at least three credit hours in either summer I or summer II (3) graduate-level hours of course. The student must maintain minimum academic standing for renewal of any graduate assistantship, which at SFASU is defined as at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Some departments may have more rigorous requirements. The student must be properly registered and constrained by no academic or administrative restrictions, such as probationary or non-degree status. Students must also satisfactorily perform the duties assigned in order to maintain their assistantships.

The normal limit for the number of semesters an assistantship may be held is four (4). There are certain exceptions to this rule. Students seeking degrees beyond the M.A., either the Ph.D. in Forestry, the MFA in the College of Fine Arts, or the Doctorate in Educational Leadership, may be eligible for additional semesters of assistantship awards.

Students who accept awards as Graduate Assistants must make wise use of their time in order to meet their commitments to their studies and their professional duties. Course work and professional assignments demand great commitment from GAs. A full-time (50%) assistantship normally requires twenty (20) hours of service per week for the university. A part-time assistantship normally requires proportionately fewer hours; for example a 25% assistantship requires only ten hours of service per week. Within this framework are:

1. actual hours in the classroom, lab or studio, where the student has professional responsibilities
2. office hours
3. time spent in the research lab, library, or elsewhere, actually working in support of an assigned faculty member
4. other assigned responsibilities, such as assisting with advising, proctoring exams, assisting in the department with clerical tasks, etc.

Any GA who believes his/her responsibilities significantly exceed these hourly limits has the right to seek a remedy for this problem. The appropriate sequence of appeal is as follows:

1. speak with the faculty member or employer assigning the excessive hours;
2. if no satisfaction is obtained, explain the problem to the departmental graduate advisor;
3. seek a solution through the office of the departmental chair;
4. if the problem is still unresolved, seek a solution through the office of the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies. Conference rather than confrontation should guide you, but you do have legal and professional rights.

## Legal and Professional Obligations

The Graduate Assistant (GA) is first and foremost a member of a specific department. At SFASU, departments choose GA's, approve courses they take, assign professional responsibilities, and maintain records of employment. Therefore, the department also has the right to remove a GA from professional activities, including classroom, lab, studio, or other activities if the department believes it is in its own best interests or the interests of the undergraduate students or of the GA him or herself. The department has the right to cancel an assistantship at the end of the semester if investigation reveals just cause. It may even cancel an assistantship during the semester in case of more serious legal, ethical or moral offenses.

Office space, desks, teaching supplies and telephones are made available within the limits of space and departmental budgets. Almost all departments make computers accessible. Academic departments have duplication equipment in their own suites of offices, but **FAs** are urged to limit their use of this equipment to professional needs and requirements.

There are activities which carry important responsibilities. Graduate Assistants are expected to post a requisite number of office hours, as defined by the department, and to abide by those hours. Time in offices of less than thirty (30) minutes should not be listed on schedules. Hours should have a reasonable balance, both as to days of the week and hours of the day.

If GAs have classroom or lab assignments, they are expected to be there performing their professional responsibilities. Casual dismissal of classes, studios, or labs is ethically wrong and professionally irresponsible. SFASU is a public institution, and it has very clear contractual responsibilities toward its students. [See Appendix "C" of this Handbook.]

Students often have a strong positive feeling toward Graduate Assistants, who are closer in age and are viewed as wiser and more experienced peers. Undergraduates are frequently more willing to seek help and advice from a graduate student than from a senior faculty member. Most who come to GA offices will be earnestly seeking assistance on study techniques, exam preparation, lab procedure, or just simple explanations of the course material.

For Graduate Teaching or Research Assistants working under the direct supervision of a regular faculty member, there are certain practices which are strongly recommended. Among the guidelines to be established with the professor are:

1. Is there anything the GA should do or read especially to prepare for the course requirements?
2. When exactly should the GA be at the professor's office, classroom, studio, lab, etc.?
3. If supervising a lab or studio, how are supplies controlled; how much assistance should students receive; in case of an emergency, what is the procedure?
4. What audio-visual equipment will be needed; how is it obtained; where is it returned?
5. What will the GAs role be in preparing and grading exams, etc., both in the intermediary and the final grade stage; how precisely will records be made of the grades?

Within the grading process are certain other guidelines to be established, such as:

- a. When should the process be complete?
  - b. What is the basis and what are the criteria for grades?
  - c. How are disputed grades handled?
  - d. Are students and GAs clear on how final grades are assigned?
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6. Will the GA be leading discussions and, if so, when?
  7. When and what kinds of assistance should be given to individual students?
  8. What are the freedoms and the limits on the parts of the course controlled by the GA?
  9. What is the procedure if the GA cannot meet his/her assigned class?
  10. How exactly should student complaints be dealt with? How should the GA deal with cheating or plagiarism?
  11. What special additional responsibilities will the Teaching GA have, such as holding review sessions before exams, performing other tasks for the professor, or even conducting a class or lab for the professor?

For Teaching GAs or Research GAs who control their own class sections, there are certain other practices that are strongly recommended and others that are required by university policy. Among the guidelines to follow are:

1. Meet classes or labs at the assigned time and hold them for the assigned number of minutes.
2. Assist the department in any necessary functions such as registration. Participate in any required course evaluation process determined by the department.
3. Provide the student with a reasonable and fairly precise course syllabus. It should include:
  - a. office number; office hours; office phone
  - b. material to be covered in the course
  - c. assignments or readings for which the student will be responsible
  - d. lab, studio, field, or other projects to be completed
  - e. a reasonable expectation as to when assignments are due and when exams are to be taken
  - f. absence policy and make-up policy on assignments
  - g. method and criteria to be used for determining grades
  - h. clear policy on cheating/plagiarism
  - i. statement regarding disability services

The university requests that no new assignments be imposed for “Dead-week”, the week before finals, though the student is responsible for all assignments listed at the beginning of the semester. {See Appendix “J” of this Handbook.}

Personal grade records are legal documents within the framework of Texas state law. A GA will most likely record the course grades for each student using a computer-based

spreadsheet. The GA should back-up the computer file often. Also, the GA should print the grade sheet after each modification and place the document in a secure location. If the grades are recorded in a written format, only, make multiple copies each time the grade sheet is modified. Final grades for a course may be entered by the GA, supervisory professor, or departmental staff using a web-based format. However, printed or written final grade reports and complete grade records will have to be submitted to the department at the end of the semester. In summary, grade records should be neat and accurate, and multiple, updated copies should be maintained, regardless of format, throughout the semester. Maintaining grade records is a major professional responsibility. [Student Records Policy 2.10.]

There are very specific federal confidentiality rules regarding college records. Do not discuss the student's grades or academic progress with those off campus, including parents, without the student's permission. Do not post grades by name or even initials. **It is illegal to post exam and final grades by social security number.** Also, do not use a student's SFASU Student Identification number. Some teachers are using alternative systems which they develop, with the students' permission, at the beginning of the semester. Clear your policy with the supervising professor.

[Pertinent sections of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 may be found in Appendix "L" of this Handbook.]

## A Graduate Teaching & Lab Assistant's Survival Guide

### Your First Day in Class

For those in direct contact with undergraduates, find your classroom or lab before the first day. Make sure it has enough chairs, chalk, erasers, and other necessary equipment. If using *PowerPoint*, make sure the software and hardware is working.

Print the course names and section and your own name on the board or on a *PowerPoint* presentation. The number of lost souls in introductory courses is surprisingly large.

If you distribute your syllabus and handouts the first day, you will have a basis for a serious discussion of course content and purpose, and you will be able to take care of a lot of housekeeping chores—"the rules and regulations of the course!" It is a good idea to show your handouts to the supervising teacher or the graduate advisor before distributing them.

Introduce yourself and tell your students what you expect of them. Perhaps say something about your own background. Elaborate on your handouts. Offer to answer questions about the syllabus, handouts, and assignments. College students always want to know the "bottom line," so explain how grades are determined. Define your attendance policies, and be reasonable. Remember, if you are too generous, some students will take you literally, and you may never see them. If you are too harsh, you will create an unnecessary adversarial relationship. [See "Excused Absence" in Appendix "F" of this Handbook.]

Discuss the purpose of the course, in both the narrow and the university-wide context. Tell students your expectations, both specifically and ideally. Explain out-of-class, independent assignments. Lower division students need close guidance.

Dress in a civil manner. This does not imply a jacket and tie appearance; it merely requests a minimum appropriate standard. Cut-offs and sandals are fine for the students if they wish to

wear them to class, but they are not appropriate for the Teaching and Research Graduate Assistant. Clothing policy for field laboratories should be clearly stated in the course syllabus.

Check your class roll against the students actually in the room, but give the latecomers plenty of time to straggle in the first day. They often get lost. BE patient when students disapprovingly correct your pronunciation of their names-on this issue they are almost always sensitive. If students insist they are registered, though their name does not appear on the roll sheet, ask the student to go to the Registrar's Office in the Rusk Building to clarify their enrollment status. Students may add the course, if not filled, up to the fourth class day.

Bring copies of assigned books, lab kits, or other equipment to be purchased or in other ways acquired. This helps many of the students to focus on materials to be obtained. Tell them where these materials may be acquired-often the bookstore, but not always. If desk copies of books, manuals, etc., have not been ordered for you, the department secretary will do so, though you may have to work with a borrowed copy until your own arrives. If course materials are on reserve at the library, explain the procedure for checking out those materials.

Establish a practical policy in courses where students are likely to use tape recorders. A few teachers ban them, but remember that recorders and microphones are now so small as to be very unobtrusive and they can easily be used without your permission.

Make your policy on late arrival clear, but remember, some students with tight schedules must hustle across campus in a very short amount of time, especially if they are coming from a class where the professor habitually keeps them late.

Stephen F. Austin State University is very proud of its efforts to aid in the education of students with disabilities. Wheelchair ramps and other facilities have been installed or modified to enable those with physical disabilities to reach virtually all classrooms, labs, and other areas associated with their educational and related needs. Help provide strategic seating arrangements for persons with interpreters, or other support people. Students seeking special accommodations for learning or physical disability must first contact the Office of Disability Service. Accommodation requests must be discussed with the GA or supervisory professor.

In the laboratory, safety must be the first concern. Chemical, biological, electrical, and mechanical equipment can be very dangerous if handled incorrectly. Therefore, you must learn departmental rules and procedures for handling all potentially hazardous materials and you must make sure the students learn them as well. You must know and enforce rules on protection of breathing, eyesight, and any exposed parts of the body. If you are working in a lab you must be clear on the location of fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and all safety equipment. You must also know what procedure to follow in case of an emergency.

Lower-division students fear and distrust chaos. Many of them are away from home for the first time. If they think you do not know what you are doing, their own fears and uncertainties will increase and weaken the bond between you and them.

Seek advice from senior Graduate Assistants. Having "been there," they will have insights that are an invaluable pool of information.

## Where Do I Go From Here?

Whether you teach your own section or assist a regular faculty member, you should keep a calendar with enough space on which to make notes. Include dates of exams, quizzes, and other assignments that you or the professor have made. Then determine when your own course assignments are due and make a note of them. Doing so will prevent your running into conflicts at critical times like mid-semester and preparation for final assignments. Time management is one of the most important assets of a professional.

Do not ask any of the departmental secretarial staff to type your own papers or personal correspondence. Their job is to assist you in preparing quizzes and exams and to deal with other professional responsibilities for the whole department. You are responsible for preparation of your own work in the courses you are taking unless you get the express permission of the chair of the department.

If you arrive at your class a little early, you will often discover students come in with questions about assignments, tests, or other practices and procedures. When class is over, try not to be the first one out of the room—students sometimes need clarification on points discussed or presented.

Learn who your students are and avoid giving grades to a faceless set of numbers. If possible, call them by name in class or labs. Accept differing viewpoints and offer positive reinforcement when they attempt to answer questions in class. Do not cut them short. Hear what they have to say. But if they abuse the privilege and attempt regularly to dominate the discussion, you must protect the rest of the class by gently, but firmly, telling them not to speak unless specifically called upon. (The other students will love you for it.)

Do not sit in a chair to teach unless you resort to a technique like circular discussion groups, which can be very effective, but the group must be fairly small. On the other hand, pacing up and down can be just as disconcerting to your students. Modern students seem particularly observant of body language. Using small note cards can be quite effective in some classes, if it frees you from dependence on pages of long written material.

Give a reasonable number of exams and quizzes so that students have a reliable way of measuring their academic progress in a course. Inform students periodically of their current grade in the course. This is especially important prior to the last drop-date at mid-semester. Students at this university often comment on this problem. Remember that a sufficient number of exams makes it easier to defend your judgment on a final course grade. Keep your records accurately and in a secure place—perhaps even keep more than one copy.

If in-class recitation or responses are a required part of the course, for example in a math course, then students should be made aware of this requirement in a very precise manner. Many students are reticent about speaking up in class. Explain the purpose of the process and why their participation is essential, rather than simply that their grade depends on it.

Some courses, because of their nature, require extensive use of the chalkboard, or overhead projector, or *PowerPoint* presentations. The course might be mathematics or one of the sciences, but it might be a social science course, where the terminology is unfamiliar. Neatness of printing and some sort of organized outline approach will make students' note taking immeasurably easier and greatly aid their study habits. Pronounce difficult words and terminology. Many contemporary college students have not done much reading and have limited vocabularies. Class notes sometimes contain the most obscure references because the student had no idea what the



teacher was saying. Some teachers prepare handouts for the lecture if they anticipate the problem of too much chalkboard writing or too much material on the screen.

At the end of the class period, clean the board before you leave. As you would wish such consideration, do not leave behind a mess for others to clean up. Likewise, if you choose to change the classroom seating for such purposes as operating several discussion groups, return the chairs to the order in which you found them when you arrived. Do not leave the room in confusion.

It is not necessary to talk down to or belittle your students to let them know you are in charge. Conducting the class, lab, studio, or discussion is proof of previous academic accomplishment. On the other hand, do not deliberately make things difficult just to produce a sense of respect. Most students are nervous and insecure enough without added fears.

Never be afraid to admit that you do not know the answer to a question. Do not try to bluff your way through because your best students will know that you do not know what you are talking about, and your rapport with them will suffer. It is far better to offer to check on the facts and to clarify the point in the next class meeting. Then follow up and find the information.

Sometimes students come to a Graduate Assistant, or even faculty members, with non-academic or emotional or mental problems. If it is just a matter of giving the student a short amount of friendly listening time, try to be sympathetic. If their visits become habitual, you must learn to cut the process short. If the problem the student presents is major, or even life-threatening, seek the advice and assistance of the graduate advisor, the department chair, or, in an emergency, the campus police. There are physicians on campus and two hospitals nearby. Do not get involved in a problem which requires serious professional help. Seek immediate and appropriate assistance. [The Office of Counseling Services, on the third floor of the Rusk Building, has personnel who have the training to assist you in dealing with students exhibiting mental or emotional stress. See Appendix "K" in this Handbook.]

## The Exam Process

Be cautious about using prepared exam questions that come from publishers and sometimes accompany their textbooks. Such file banks will often produce questions that disagree with your own interpretations. While these kinds of exams should not necessarily be discounted, creating your own exams involves you more intimately with the teaching process and enables you to precisely frame questions that elicit the information you deem the most important.

Go from tough grading policies to more lenient ones. If you make any changes in grading practice, it is far easier to curve grades at the end of the course than at the beginning.

In creating exams and quizzes, remember that objective types, particularly true-false forms, may be the quickest ones to devise and grade, but they are considered the least valid way of testing knowledge or comprehension. Such questions depend on interpretation of words that may often be ambiguous to your students.

In order to minimize the problem of cheating, design an exam or quiz process incorporating some of the following:

1. use more than one exam form
2. if possible, stagger the seating
3. use essays
4. if the student will need scrap paper for calculations, supply it with the exam
5. supply your own paper for quizzes where the students know or can anticipate the questions
6. request that students bring in blue exam books at the beginning of the semester-then mark or stamp them before distributing them on exam day
7. stay in the room during quizzes and exams, but move around

Students caught cheating should receive an appropriate level of punishment. However, you should not summarily fail them in the course. A more appropriate measure is to fail them or give them a “0” on the quiz or exam. If such a grade makes it impossible for them to pass the course, then that becomes their problem. If they still have time to drop the course before mid-semester, they have the right to do so, and, of course, they lose the credit hours and the tuition and fees they have paid. Punishing cheating also catches the attention of other students. [Official university policy on cheating and plagiarism is found in the *Student Code of Conduct Policy 10.4*. See Appendix “I” of the Handbook.]

Plagiarism is probably the most common form of student dishonesty. If you make an assignment where there is a risk of the student copying someone else’s work, discuss the definition of plagiarism with them. Explain how to paraphrase or how to use simple footnotes. It is probably wise to discuss the concept of research and explain why and how to find material and bring it together in an acceptable academic form.

Making an attempt to know who your students are, either in your own class or in the class of a professor, will make it a lot more difficult for someone else to come in and take the exam for one of your own students. That is why some teachers find seating charts so useful, even if they do not seat students alphabetically.

Keep exams and grade books under lock and key. Common sense will avoid the problem of anyone tampering with private, controlled information. Since common theft is also a problem at all colleges, GAs should also keep such items as their personal belongings secure.

Final exams must be given on the scheduled day and at the scheduled time. All faculty members and GAs are expected to abide by the rules established by the university. Though the content of the exam is determined by the person responsible for the course, a reasonable testing process is expected. [See *Final Examination Scheduling 7.4*].

A student may drop a course with a grade of “W” up to mid-semester. The exact date will appear on the registrar’s web page and in the academic calendar online. Students may also drop the course up to the last two weeks of the semester if they withdraw from the university. Only in this circumstance is the teacher or GA required to give a grade of Withdraw Passing (WP) or Withdraw Failing (WF). Students who have not dropped, but who have disappeared from the class are to be given a Quit Failing (QF).

Remember, it is illegal to post exam and final grades by social security number and do not use a student’s SFASU student identification number. Some teachers are using alternative systems which they develop, with the students’ permission, at the beginning of the semester. Clear your policy with the supervising professor.

## Personal Contact with Your Students

Deal with your students as you would expect your own professors to deal with you. Therefore, avoid prejudiced behavior and attempt to be open and fair with those whose grades you will determine.

Let students know that your office is open to them for course-related conferences. You may urge students in academic trouble, to come to your office for a conference, but you may not force them to do so.

Suspend judgment about your students' abilities until you have adequate evidence to render a professional evaluation. Do not depend on the arrogance of knowledge and position to awe them. Finally, remember that confidence and enthusiasm are contagious.

However, if you believe a problem is developing and you are not presenting your material effectively due to content or style, solicit input from better students; run your own mid-semester evaluation, or even meet with a small group to gain their perceptions.

It is not necessary to embarrass or belittle students. As has been noted by observers of the profession, even inappropriate compliments may prove very troubling. Your power as the authority figure in class should not be abused, especially with freshmen. On the other hand, if one or more students become difficult to deal with, do not live with the problem. Seek advice and discuss the problem as soon as possible with the supervising professor or the graduate advisor. Do not let the situation get out of hand and ruin the class for yourself and the other students.

Do not use foul and abusive language in the classroom. The student body at this university is rather socially conservative. Anguished complaints are regularly received by administrators from students and parents about these practices. This is not an infringement of your academic freedom. If a controversial passage in a book troubles a student, your rights as a teacher will be protected. But profanity as a teaching style is a poor substitute for skill and knowledge. Of course, ethnic, racial, and sexist slurs are all inexcusable and illegal. [The university statement on Academic Freedom is found in Appendix "M" of this Handbook.]

Avoid all unnecessary physical contact with your students beyond normal politeness. Graduate Assistants should also avoid suggestive conversation. Sexual harassment, physically and by language, is the fastest rising complaint on college campuses and in the work force in general. Abuse, threats, innuendo, and unwarranted physical contact will be treated as a most serious infraction of your professional status, and these carry legal penalties. [Federal policy regarding sexual harassment may be found in Appendix "N" of this Handbook.]

Dating or becoming seriously socially involved with your students is fraught with peril. Soon most of the other students will know about such a relationship and resent it. It raises questions of impartiality and leaves the teaching assistant open to challenges on fair grading. This certainly does not preclude having coffee or a soft drink with one or more students. But common sense should guide you while you serve as an instructor or grader.

## Change of Grades

If the Graduate Assistant believes a student has a legitimate reason for not finishing the course, a grade defined as Withheld (WH) may be given. The student has up to a year from the end of the semester in which the course was given to complete the course work, but the GA must guard against abuse of this system. [Official university policy on withheld grades is found in the current General Bulletin.] Make sure the student is justified in not finishing his/her work. Departmental policy should be determined by consulting with chairs, graduate advisors, or lab coordinators. Some record of the “WH” grades should be on file with the graduate advisor or department chair in case the GA is no longer associated with the university when the work is completed by the student. Include a note on unfinished requirements and the percentage of the grade carried by the assignment.

Some students habitually fail to turn in their assignments and finish the semester lacking major parts of their course responsibilities. One way to avoid this is to establish a rule that students may not take the next exam or do the next project until they make up the one they have missed. Another approach is to forbid them to do any further work in the course until all their missing projects are completed. Decide on what is best for you and ask advisors or returning GAs what policies seem the most effective.

Once a letter grade has been turned in, grade changes are much more difficult. Such changes require the approval and signature of your chair and your dean. Avoid the difficulties this process entails by being careful about your final grade determinations. You should save and file final exams and final projects for at least a year, in case the student decides later to contest a grade, which happens in a very small number of cases.

## Academic Assistance Resource Center (AARC)

Students with academic problems beyond those with which the graduate teaching assistant is able to deal should be urged to go to the AARC desk on the ground floor of the Library. It is on the right-hand side within the glass-walled room. They should seek a conference with a staff member, who will then attempt to arrange an assistance effort with one of the student tutors working for the center. Lab assistance is essentially a self-help process, but with the aid of capable undergraduate and graduate assistants.

## Library Facilities

The staff of the Ralph Steen Library is very competent and efficient. They will be more than happy to help you with special requests like putting books and journals on reserve for your students. The electronic catalog system is very easy to learn and makes search and retrieval of information quick and convenient. The library also provides a limited number of carrels for storage of notepaper, cards, and other research aids. There is no charge, but they are released on a first-come first-serve basis and must be renewed on an annual basis.

## GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT GUIDANCE

### General

- A. All graduate students are responsible for understanding the material in the Graduate Bulletin, Thesis and Dissertation Guide, and Faculty and Staff Handbook. Graduate students should be familiar with the general requirements for earning their graduate degree, including all formal paperwork requirements
- B. Key milestones during your graduate education may include:
  1. **Degree Plan**
  2. **Qualifying Oral and/or Written Examination**
  3. **Research Proposal**
  4. **Candidacy for Degree**
  5. **Complete Thesis, Exhibition, Dissertation**
  6. **Complete Coursework within 6 Years**
  7. **Final Written and/or Oral Examination or Culminating Experience**

Degree Plan, Candidacy, Coursework and Final Examination are required by all graduate students. Other milestones may or may not be required depending on the degree being earned. Discuss with your major professor the milestones required and their timing for completion.

### External Funding Support for Graduate Research Assistants

- A. Your major professor may have secured a grant from a public agency, foundation, or private company to conduct research on a specific issue, and is using this money to provide financial support for your graduate education.
- B. The grantor expects a report detailing the methods, results and conclusions of the research. Often, the thesis or dissertation serves as the report. Recognize that completion of your research and coursework will assist you in meeting degree requirements as well as result in a product that meets the requirements of the grant that provided your financial support.

### Selecting a Research Committee

- A. Select research committee members that have expertise in disciplines that will help you complete your research. Consult with your major professor regarding prospective committee members.
- B. You should not ask a faculty member to serve on your committee by email, phone, or other impersonal methods. Request a meeting with a potential committee member in order to ask if they are willing to serve on your committee.
- C. Be prepared to discuss your proposed coursework and research with the prospective committee member.

### Degree Plan and Research Proposal

- A. Complete a degree plan and a research proposal as early as possible. These documents will outline the requirements agreed upon between you and your research committee for graduation.
- B. If research must begin before the proposal is approved, make sure the research objectives and methods are clearly understood between you and your major professor.
- C. Once approved, refer to the degree plan and proposal frequently in order to insure that all course work and research objectives are being completed.
- D. Any deviation from the objectives outlined in the degree plan or research proposal should be approved by the research committee. If the degree plan is modified, a change of degree plan form must be submitted through the major professor and the department to the Registrar's Office.

### Communication

- A. Stay in regular contact with your major professor. Each semester, inform your major advisor of office hours when you can be reached.
- B. If doing field research, inform your major professor when you will be going to the field, where you are going, and who will be working with you.
- C. On a regular basis, meet with your major professor and research committee regarding the progress of your research.
- D. You should inform your major professor prior to any contact with your research committee or others on issues regarding your coursework or research. Also, your major professor should be notified, if you have been contacted regarding your work. **Your major professor should be the first person to review any document regarding your research, including your research proposal and thesis or dissertation.**
- E. Follow the rules and procedures regarding requests for equipment, office supplies, vehicle use and staff assistance for your department. Your major professor should grant prior approval before your requests.
- F. Reference the SFA Graduate School web-site for the steps involved in preparing a proposal or thesis.
- G. Graduate students often underestimate the time required for the major professor and the research committee to review the thesis or dissertation and to make corrections. A thesis or dissertation should be in a “**defensible**” condition before the final examination is scheduled. Recognize that your major professor, faculty and staff have time constraints and other demands imposed on them.



Assuming that your thesis or dissertation draft is complete and of good quality, a reasonable period of time for review and corrections prior to scheduling a final examination is:

- |                                    |         |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| 1. First review by Major Professor | 2 weeks |
| 2. Corrections                     | 1 week  |
| 3. Review by Research Committee    | 2 weeks |
| 4. Corrections                     | 1 week  |

Additional reviews requested by your research committee, incomplete and poorly written documents, and unavoidable conflicts will extend the time required for review and corrections and further delay scheduling the final examination.

- H. The Graduate School must approve the format of your thesis or dissertation. Deadlines each semester for scheduling the final examination and final thesis or dissertation approval by the Graduate School are published in the Graduate Bulletin and the Office of Research and Graduate Studies website.

#### Data Management

- A. Proper credit should be given to the work of others. Copyright violations and the use of data collected by others without permission are unethical.
- B. Falsifying or fabrication data is unethical and may be grounds for removal from the program.
- C. Data collection should be done in a manner that will allow evaluation by peers in your field of study.
- D. Become familiar with and honor the confidentiality and proprietary rules regarding the data.

#### Authorship

Discuss with your major advisor protocols regarding authorship of published work.

#### Supervising Students

- A. Interaction between you and undergraduate and graduate assistants should be accomplished in a mature, professional, and civil manner. Problems between you and your assistants should be brought to the immediate attention of your major professor.
- B. Instructions regarding assigned tasks should be done in a clear and concise manner. Consider student safety in all tasks assigned.

## APPENDICES

[Additional information on material provided in these appendices can be found in the SFASU *Policy and Procedures Manual*, the General Bulletin or the Graduate Bulletin.]

### Appendix A

#### Office Hours

Each faculty member is expected to be available a minimum of ten office hours per week for student conferences. [For the GTA with a 50% award it is five office hours per week.] This should include one hour in the morning and one hour in the afternoon provided this arrangement is consistent with the individual's teaching schedule. If necessary, other arrangements may be made with the department chair. When it is not possible to keep posted office hours, the department chair should be notified.

### Appendix B

#### Absences from Class by Faculty

Unless classes have been dismissed by administrative authority, the instructor is responsible for meeting all his/her classes on schedule. When it is necessary that a faculty member be absent, arrangements should be made through the department chair to have someone meet the class. Those persons meeting the classes must be members of the faculty unless authority is granted by the dean of the appropriate school

### Appendix C

#### Meeting and Conducting Classes

All personnel shall meet their assigned classes at the times and places officially scheduled. Courses should be conducted in accordance with the descriptions contained in the University's General Bulletin and Graduate Bulletin. Exceptions may be made with appropriate department chair approval.

### Appendix D

#### Administering Final Examinations

Faculty members conducting classes shall adhere to the official schedule for administering final examinations published in the Schedule of Classes and distributed to the faculty by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs. Final examinations for any course not listed in the Schedule of Classes, including but not limited to distance education courses, Internet courses, evening or weekend courses, should be scheduled in consideration of resource availability. No final examination may be administered after 5 pm on the last day of the semester. Exceptions may be made by the appropriate academic dean.

## Appendix E

### Class Attendance

Regular and punctual attendance is expected at all classes, laboratories, and other activities for which a student is registered. For those classes where attendance is a factor in the course grade, the instructor shall make his/her class policy known in writing at the beginning of each term and shall maintain an accurate record of attendance.

## Appendix F

### Excused Absences

See *Academic Affairs Policy and Procedures*, Policy 6.7, in the University Policy and Procedures Manual.

It is University policy to excuse students from attendance for certain reasons. Among these are absences related to health, family emergencies, and student participation in certain University-sponsored events.

Students are responsible for providing to the instructor of each class missed, satisfactory documentation for an excused absence. Students with acceptable excuses will be permitted to make up work for absences to a maximum of three weeks of a semester or one week of the six-week summer term when the nature of the work missed permits.

In the case of absences caused by participation in University-sponsored events, announcement via the web site of such absences by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs will constitute an official excuse. Faculty members should submit as an attachment to an e-mail a written explanation of the absence, including the date, time and an alphabetical listing of all students attending to the office of the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs for publication.

## Appendix G

### Class Records

An accurate, understandable record of class performance must be kept on each student. The class record for each semester or each academic year must be filed with the department chair in accordance with his/her instructions. When the individual faculty member terminates his/her employment with the University, his/her Class Record Book must be filed with the department chair.

## Appendix H

### Drink, Food, and Tobacco in Classrooms and Laboratories

Eating, drinking of beverages, and use of all tobacco products ordinarily is prohibited in the public areas of the Steen Library and in all indoor classrooms and laboratories. Under extraordinary circumstances and with advance approval of the appropriate academic dean, eating or drinking of beverages (but not the use of tobacco products) may be permitted, provided such permission does not conflict with the law. As of August 22, 2016, Stephen F. Austin State University is a tobacco and vape free campus. This policy includes all property that is owned, leased, occupied, or controlled by the University.

The tobacco and vape free campus policy is part of the University's commitment to creating a healthy and sustainable environment for all members of the SFA community, and is designed to be positive and health-directed. The University is not requiring faculty, staff, and students to quit using tobacco products, but does expect the policy to be adhered to by all individuals on University property.

Enforcement of the policy will be achieved primarily through education, awareness and a spirit of cooperation. Tobacco users are expected to adhere to the policy and be respectful to ex-tobacco users and non-tobacco users. Individuals noticing violations of the policy should strive to be non-confrontational and respectful to tobacco users when communicating this policy.

## Appendix I

### University Rules on Cheating and Plagiarism

Throughout their education program, students should be impressed with the fact that cheating and plagiarism are morally degrading and that these practices seriously interfere with learning and intellectual development. It is a responsibility of faculty members to make every effort (1) to inspire in their students an appreciation of and a desire for honest in academic work, (2) to prevent dishonesty and to protect the honest student, and (3) to take appropriate action in instances of dishonesty [See Student Code of Conduct Policy 10.4].

#### Cheating

Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, written assignments, in or out of class, alteration or records, or illegal possession of current examinations or keys to examinations shall be considered cheating. It is the responsibility of the student not only to abstain from cheating but, in addition, to avoid the appearance of cheating and to guard against making it possible for others to cheat.

It is the responsibility of each faculty member to maintain the best possible conditions to prevent cheating in any manner. Each faculty member shall arrange for vigilant protection of all

examinations and class exercises. He/she shall also employ every precaution to deny access to class records or examinations to anyone who is not entitled to such information.

### Plagiarism

Courtesy and honesty require that any ideas or materials borrowed from another must be fully acknowledged. Offering the work of another as one's own is plagiarism. The subject matter of ideas thus taken from another may range from a few sentences or paragraphs to entire articles, copies from books, periodicals, or the writing of other students. The offering of materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment is also considered plagiarism. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas or materials that he/she takes from another is guilty of plagiarism.

It shall be the responsibility of each faculty member to define, describe, and explain plagiarism whenever the work of his/her class is of such a nature as to subject his/her students to the possibility of plagiarism. A student's innocent failure to give credit for sources of ideas or materials because of ignorance of procedures or confusion of assignments may be avoided by the conscientious and regular effort of each faculty member to discharge the responsibility. A complete discussion on cheating and plagiarism is contained in the *Academic Affairs Policy and Procedures*, Policy 4.1, in the University Policy and Procedures Manual.

### Appendix J

#### Dead Week

Dead Week is an established tradition in higher education to allow students the necessary time to prepare for final examinations. During the last five days of each long semester, written examinations (except to cover daily assignments) and themes or assignments beyond normal daily requirements are not to be assigned without written notification to the students prior to the twelfth class day. The division of University Student Affairs and major student groups (SGA, RHA, IFC, Panhellenic, UC Programs) of the University shall observe Dead Week by refraining from sponsoring on-campus student social activities (parties, dances, films, concerts, banquets).

### Appendix K

#### Regarding Students Displaying Psychological Problems

Serious psychological problems include, but are not limited to:

1. Instances of actual or potential harm to the physical well-being of the student or others.
2. Significant disruptive activity caused by psychological problems

A comprehensive policy on dealing with students displaying psychological problems is available in the *General Regulations Policy and Procedures*, **Policy D-35** in the University Policy and Procedures Manual, which should be read by all persons in charge of a classroom, lab or studio.

## Appendix L

### Family Privacy Act

The University complies with the requirements of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, which allows students the right to access of their education records and protects them from illegal use of those records. Specific information regarding types of records, as well as student and University rights can be found in the *General Regulations Policy and Procedures*, Policy 2.10 Student Records, in the University Policy and Procedure Manual.

## Appendix M

### Academic Freedom

See *Academic Affairs Policy and Procedures*, Policy 7.3, in the University Policy and Procedures Manual.

Institutions of higher education are conducted for the common good. The common good depends upon an uninhibited search for truth and its open expression. Hence, it is essential that each faculty member be free to pursue scholarly inquiry without undue restriction, and to voice and publish individual conclusions concerning the significance of evidence that he or she considers relevant. Each faculty member must be free from the corrosive fear that others, inside or outside the University community, because their vision may differ, may threaten his or her professional career or the material benefits accruing from it.

Each faculty member is entitled to full freedom in the classroom in discussing the subject which he or she teaches but is expected not to introduce into his or her teachings controversial matters which have no relation to the classroom subject. Each faculty member also serves the nation, state, and community, and when speaking, writing or acting as such, must be free from institutional censorship or discipline, subject to academic responsibility as hereinafter set out, and the faculty member should make it clear that he or she is not speaking for the institution.

### Academic Responsibility

The concept of academic freedom for faculty must be accompanied by an equally demanding concept of academic responsibility of faculty. A faculty member has a responsibility to the institution, his or her profession, his or her students, and to society-at-large. The rights and privileges of faculty members extended by society and protected by governing boards and administrators through written policies and procedures on academic freedom and tenure, and as further protected by the courts, require reciprocally the assumption of certain responsibilities by faculty members. Some of these follow below:

1. The fundamental responsibilities of a faculty member as a teacher and scholar includes maintenance of competence in his or her field of specialization and the exhibition of such professional competence in the classroom, studio or laboratory, and in the public arena by such activities as discussions, lectures, consulting, publications, or participation in professional organizations and meetings.
2. The exercise of professional integrity by a faculty member includes recognition that the public will judge his or her profession and institution by his or her statements. Therefore, the faculty member should strive to be accurate, to exercise proper restraint, to be willing to listen to and show respect to others expressing different opinions, and to avoid creating the impression that the faculty member speaks of acts for his or her college or university when speaking or acting as a private person.
3. The constitutionally protected rights of the faculty member, as a citizen to freedom of expression must be balanced with the interest of the State, as an employer, in promoting

the efficiency of the educational services it performs through its employees. A faculty member's comments are protected even though they may be highly critical in tone or content, or erroneous, but such statements are not protected free speech if they either substantially impede the faculty member's performance of his or her daily duties or materially and substantially interfere with the regular operation of the institution.

4. A faculty member should be judicious in the use of controversial material in the classroom and should introduce such material only as it has clear relationship to his or her subject field.
5. A faculty member should be professional in his or her conduct in the classroom and in his or her relationships with students. The faculty member should maintain respect for the student and for the student's posture as a learner. The faculty member should make himself or herself appropriately available to the student for consultation on course work.
6. A faculty member has the responsibility to provide timely and adequate notice of his or her intention to interrupt or terminate institutional services.

## Appendix N

### Policy for Resolving Complaints Involving Sexual Harassment

It is the policy of Stephen F. Austin State University not to discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, age, national origin, disability, or disabled veteran status. Unlawful discrimination based on sex includes discrimination defined as sexual harassment. Stephen F. Austin State University is committed to the principles of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) law. An employee who violates this policy is subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.

#### Definition

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, even if carried out under the guise of humor, constitute sexual harassment when:

- a. Submission to or tolerance of such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or education; or
- b. Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions (including admissions and hiring) affecting that individual' or
- c. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual's academic or professional performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive employment, educational or living environment.

The university will not tolerate sexual harassment of any employee or student by another employee, supervisor, or other person with whom an employee or student may have contact with as part of his or her duties.

The totality of facts and circumstances in any given situation will have a bearing upon whether unlawful discrimination or sexual harassment has occurred.



A complete discussion of this subject is contained in the *Human Resources Policy and Procedures*, Policy 2.13, Discrimination Complaints/Sexual Harassment, in the University Policy and Procedures Manual.