

UMSL Graduate School

Expectations for Graduate Assistants

Introduction

Congratulations on your new role as a Graduate Assistant at the University of Missouri – St. Louis. Graduate Assistants serve a vital role by assisting faculty and staff in carrying out teaching, research and administrative support activities. This document is meant to serve as only a general set of instructions. Graduate Assistants should discuss specific duties, tasks, and responsibilities with their supervisor.

Privacy

As a Graduate Assistant, you may have access to or be required to work with sensitive information about students that is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). All non-directory information outlined in FERPA is expected to be protected and only discussed in the appropriate workplace setting. Additionally, it is inappropriate to discuss university personnel issues with students. Please take time to learn about the basic requirements of FERPA by reviewing <https://www.umsu.edu/~registration/Faculty-Staff/ferpa.html>.

Professional behavior when working with students

Graduate Assistants assist faculty and staff with a variety of tasks related to classroom teaching. Given that you represent the university and the department or college, we ask that you always conduct yourself professionally when interacting with students.

- If you are tasked with classroom responsibilities, you will assist with delivering material, grading, and/or other tasks. Be prepared to help students by answering questions in a clear and concise manner, providing professional feedback on student work, and meeting with students outside of class. For example, in courses taught in computer labs using software demonstration, be proactive and prepared if necessary to walk around the room to assist students who may get stuck or have questions.
- You might find yourself conducting labs or study sessions, meeting with students outside of class, or researching and preparing instructional materials such as handouts, slideshows, or other tools for delivery.
- If students ask you a question and you do not know the answer, first try to find the answer yourself. If you cannot, then you should forward the question to your supervisor.
- Do your best to answer to students in a timely fashion. For example, if students email you, respond within 24 hours.
- If you are grading assignments or projects, ask your supervisor about grading policies, their grading preferences, when items should be returned to students, and so on. Generally, it's ideal to grade and return work as soon as possible. Try to give feedback to the students in ways that are commensurate with the assignment. Lastly, if you are noticing common problems or potential pitfalls in student's work, please let your faculty supervisor know so that they can address those concerns and issues.

Taking initiative and being proactive

Whether you are assisting faculty in a classroom setting, a research project, or in another assigned capacity, the best way for Graduate Assistants to assist faculty and staff is to be proactive and ask for tasks to perform. You should feel free to take initiative and make suggestions, contribute ideas, offer to

UMSL Graduate School

Expectations for Graduate Assistants

help, and ask how you can be of assistance. Your supervisor might not know what you don't know so when tasks are unclear, ask questions. Do not be afraid to ask your supervisor how you can be of assistance.

Presence, reporting, punctuality, and communication etiquette

We recommend scheduling regular review meetings with your faculty supervisor. Develop a schedule with your supervisor to establish when you are available to work and establish deadlines for each assigned task you are given.

- Arrive on time, prepared, and remain for the required time, and ensure any tasks are completed on time.
- Avoid unexplained absences or tardiness. If circumstances arise that prevent you from keeping to your scheduled hours, then report this to your supervisor as soon as you can. This way they can adjust and modify their own plans if needed.
- In general, if you cannot meet an obligation that has been assigned to you or need to cancel a meeting, do not panic. Instead, contact your supervisor as soon as you are able. If you need to cancel a meeting, 24-hours' notice is typical professional courtesy.
- When tasks are assigned to you during a face-to-face meeting, it could be helpful to follow up with an email to your supervisor with a bulleted list of key action items assigned to you during the course of the meeting. This way the supervisor confirms you understand your assigned tasks and it creates a document that helps you both to be accountable.

Communicating with supervisors, faculty and staff

- As soon as possible, discuss with your supervisor how best to address and contact him or her. Some supervisors are more comfortable with a "first name basis" rapport and others prefer to be addressed by his or her professional title. If you are unsure, ask your supervisor what he or she prefers. Keep the communication channels open, so that you can engage in honest, timely, and open dialogue anytime that it is needed. Some faculty and staff members prefer to keep all written communication over campus e-mail or Canvas, while others may be willing to share personal contact info such as phone number.
- All of your school-related and department-related communications with faculty, staff and students whom you are assisting need to happen through the official school and department media channel (campus e-mail or Canvas, not your personal e-mail).

Conclusion

These are just a few guidelines to help you make your contribution to the department or college as a Graduate Assistant. Your efforts can directly and positively influence student success. This opportunity will provide valuable experience for everyone and we look forward to your contributions!