

ASSISTANTSHIPS

Graduate Studies

Intro

A graduate assistantship provides financial support for a graduate student for a set period of time during which the student is expected to pursue activities towards the advanced degree.

Time Required

Work required by an assistantship and not directly related to the student's degree program cannot exceed **13-19.6 hours per week (.33 to .49 FTE)**.

Although students on graduate assistantships may not have employment exceeding 19.6 hours per week from all sources both on and off campus during the period of the assistantship, there is no limit to time spent on studies and research relating to the advanced degree.

Because of the potential for exploitation of graduate students, any assignment of responsibilities, such as teaching a course, must be associated with a fair and reasonable compensation. Graduate students may not volunteer for any significant service to the department without an appropriate stipend.

Types of Assistantships

In each case, the student is expected to continue working towards the advanced degree while a graduate assistant.

- A **teaching assistantship** provides a stipend to a student who is typically assisting in an academic department's teaching program, i.e., grading, assisting a professor with a course, etc.
- A **research assistantship** provides a stipend to a student who is typically assisting a professor with a research project, enabling the graduate student to work towards an advanced degree.
- **Other graduate assistantships** provide a stipend to a student who is assisting an academic or nonacademic department with a wide variety of functions.

Eligibility

To hold a graduate assistantship a student must be admitted for a specific graduate degree objective and enrolled for credit during the tenure of the assistantship.

Individual departments make assistantship appointments. Students who wish to be considered for assistantships in their major should direct inquiries to the graduate chair of their department. All **international** graduate students who are to be teaching assistants at UNL must attend the Institute for International Teaching Assistants (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/ita>).

Benefits

Benefits Offered

Tuition remission of up to 12 hours per semester is provided as a benefit of eligible assistantships. Students holding eligible assistantships are provided basic individual **student health insurance** coverage with related benefits. The University subsidizes part of the student health insurance (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/health>) premium for eligible graduate assistants.

Within departments and within each level of differentiation (master's or doctoral, new or experienced, number of work hours), stipends should generally be equivalent. Guidelines used to determine stipend levels should be available to students through the department.

Assistants may be given **@unl.edu email addresses**; those accounts close at the end of the assistantship.

Eligibility For Benefits

Eligibility for assistantship benefits requires meeting all of the following criteria:

- A continuous appointment for four full months within the semester dates.
- The stipend meets the minimum salary level set by the University.
- The assistantship or combination of assistantships in one or more departments totals at least 13.33 hours per week employment.

Resignation or Termination

If a graduate assistant resigns or their assistantship is terminated during the semester **before four full months** of consecutive service (e.g., 120 consecutive days within the semester dates, August-December or January-May) **all benefits will be lost** and the student will be responsible for the total tuition payment and health insurance premiums.

Summer Tuition

If a graduate assistant, while on an appointment during both semesters of the preceding academic year, was paid a stipend meeting the **minimum qualification** for summer tuition, the student is not charged tuition for the first 6 hours during the summer sessions. If such a stipend met the **next level of qualification**, the student is not charged tuition for the first 12 hours during the summer sessions. (Specific dollar amounts are available each year in the Guidelines for Graduate Assistantships (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/facstaff/funding>)).

Non-Benefits-Eligible Assistantships

A student on a non-benefits-eligible graduate assistantship is charged tuition at resident rates if the stipend received is equal to, or greater than, the total of the amount set by the University for the relative summer session.

Hiring and Renewal

The responsibilities of the graduate assistant and the method by which the student will be evaluated should be provided in writing to the student by the immediate supervisor at the beginning of the assistantship.

General Responsibilities

Each department or unit shall establish its own documented procedures for recruitment, selection, retention and dismissal of graduate assistants in accordance with UNL graduate policy and Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity guidelines. These procedures shall be made available to each graduate student and posted in the department. Individual departments may establish a required minimum course load (<https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/graduate/registration/requirements>) for funded students.

Departments must provide students with an official signed offer letter (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/facstaff/funding>), informing them of assistantship expectations, responsibilities, and compensation. A

graduate assistant's duties are assigned by the departmental chair/head, graduate committee chair, administrative supervisor, or others.

Graduate assistants are expected to be assigned relevant professional work that may include, among other tasks:

- teaching or assisting in a course (under the supervision of a director or mentor)
- grading for a course
- working in a department-sponsored laboratory or instructional center
- assisting a professor on a research project, professional conference development, tutoring, or development of administrative skills

No graduate assistant should be assigned to a project which is primarily clerical or housekeeping. A portion of any project may have clerical elements, but all projects should incorporate decision-making, judgment, analysis and evaluation skills. All projects must be supervised by a member of the graduate faculty or administrative staff.

Renewal and Performance Evaluation

Assistantships without a fixed term specified in the initial letter of offer may, at the discretion of the department, be renewed if the following criteria are met:

1. Funding is available.
2. The student is making satisfactory academic progress.
3. The student's assistantship performance is judged to be satisfactory by his or her supervisor.

Where the number of years of funding is within those specified in the initial letter of offer, an assistantship must be renewed if these three criteria are met.

The faculty member or staff person who supervises the assistant's work should conduct a timely written evaluation of the student's performance (<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/facstaff/funding/#eval>) and provide a copy of that evaluation to the student and to the chair/director for placement in the student's file.

Evaluations of performance shall not be influenced on the basis of sex, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran's status, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation, nor shall they be influenced by students' exercise of their First Amendment freedoms of expression and association.

Academic Freedom of GTAs

The academic freedom of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) is not necessarily coextensive with that of faculty. All GTAs are engaged in supervised teaching or instruction. Supervisors are responsible for defining the nature, scope and manner of instruction to be used for each course. Supervisors should communicate the extent to which GTAs have discretion to introduce additional material. Graduate teaching assistants should follow the instructions of the supervisor. Graduate teaching assistants may not be penalized for expressing their own views on matters within the scope of the course, provided they adequately represent these views as their own.

In interpreting teaching evaluations, supervisors shall make every effort to distinguish legitimate critiques of the course from negative evaluations due to

- a. prejudice against the GTA on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion or other protected status, or
- b. disagreement with viewpoints expressed by the GTA or by students in the class.