

# Graduate Assistantship and Fellowship Policies

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A graduate assistantship provides financial support for pursuing graduate studies in the form of employment. In return for contribution to the academic mission of North Dakota State University through teaching, research, or administrative service, students receive a stipend, and if requirements are met, a waiver of graduate base tuition may be granted at the discretion of the graduate program's academic college. A graduate assistantship may involve research or teaching experiences conducted off-campus. In these instances, the experience should be clearly linked to the student's Plan of Study and involve a collaborative relationship between NDSU and the outside entity.

Students with Graduate Fellowships who are contracted to work in NDSU laboratories and/or classrooms must adhere to Graduate Assistant Policies.

To be eligible for an assistantship students must

- Be a degree seeking students
- Be in good academic standing
- Be enroll in a minimum of 6 credits during the fall and spring semester
  - This policy does not apply if the student has fewer than 6 credits remaining to complete their program of study.
  - Departments may require students to register for more than 6 credits to hold an assistantship
  - Students seeking a summer assistantship must be enrolled for a minimum of 6 credits either during the spring prior or fall term immediately after the summer fellowship; summer enrollment is not required for a summer term assistantship.

Assistantship appointments may vary in length and are contingent upon the availability of funding, which is determined by individual graduate programs. Graduate assistants must be paid at least minimum wage and wage is determined by individual graduate programs. For information, refer to the graduate student handbook or website of the program/department.

A full-time assistantship consists of 320 hours per term (i.e. 20 hours/week). Exceptions may include:

- Allowing up to 40 hours of work weekly during spring break, winter break, and summer semester.
- Allowing up to 26 total hours/week.
  - To make this request, a Special Request form must be filed each spring and fall semester to add additional hours to a full-time domestic or permanent resident student's assistantship.
  - If approved by the Graduate College, a copy of the request must be attached to the payroll form.

In some instances, degree seeking students in good academic standing and meeting the enrollment requirement of six credits during the fall or spring semester may be eligible for a half- or part-time graduate assistantship. A minimum of 160 hours per semester (i.e. 10 hours/week) are required to qualify for a half- or part-time assistantship.

## Assistantship Categories

**Graduate Research Assistants (GRA)** conduct research with faculty members that contributes directly to their graduate education and may lead to a dissertation or thesis topic. GRAs responsible for, or with access to, controlled substances and other drugs, explosives, or potentially dangerous chemicals must submit to a criminal background check. Students on research assistantships may also do related research for course credit. The number of hours of work per credit may vary depending on the discipline/department.

**Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA)** share faculty responsibilities for undergraduate teaching but cannot teach graduate level courses. Responsibilities may include instruction, grading, course development, and proctoring exams. GTAs must demonstrate English proficiency (refer to catalog section titled "English Language Proficiency Procedures for Graduate Teaching Assistants"). A criminal background check is required.

**Graduate Service Assistants (GSA)** provide non-academic support for departments and campus services. Duties may vary between departments and positions. A criminal background check is required.

## Additional Employment

Students with a full-time assistantship are discouraged from having additional off-campus employment.

Further, students with a full-time assistantship are restricted from working in any other capacity for NDSU, any other North Dakota University System (NDUS) campus, or any State of North Dakota agency or office.

## Expectations of Graduate Assistant/Fellow

Students receiving a graduate assistantship are expected to fulfill their responsibilities adhering to the professional and academic expectations of their discipline and in compliance with NDUS and NDSU policies. Violations of these policies and expectations may result in sanctions, including loss of assistantship and/or termination from the Graduate College. Adjudication of these violations will occur using NDSU Policy 335: Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct

Graduate assistants must

- be registered for a minimum of six graduate credits each semester (fall and spring) they receive an assistantship; credit requirements may vary by program
- remain in good academic standing
  - Students placed on Academic Warning may retain their assistantship
  - Students placed on Academic Probation may no longer receive an assistantship
- maintain the appropriate residency status
- abide by the appointment conditions outlined in the assistantship contract
- perform tasks as assigned
- make satisfactory degree progress
- make satisfactory research progress
- complete required trainings within 30 days of their first day of work and as required thereafter

## Expectations of Assistantship Supervisor

### Assistantship and Fellowship contracts

The Graduate Contract specifies expectations and responsibilities of the graduate assistant or fellow.

The hour commitment defined by an assistantship may be averaged across a given time period. For example, a teaching assistantship of 20 hours/week should total to 320 hours across the 16 weeks of the academic term. In these cases, students should be given adequate advance notice of these variable expectations so that they can adjust their schedules to meet the requirements of the assistantship. Supervisors must also remain sensitive to the academic demands faced by graduate students.

### Assessment

Assistantship supervisors must provide oral and written assessment of graduate student employees. As outlined in the contract, GSA and GRA performance must be evaluated at least annually. GTA review with respect to overall communication proficiency must be completed by the third week of the semester.

## Tuition Waivers

Tuition waivers may be offered to students receiving a qualifying graduate assistantship or fellowship and are governed by the specific tuition waiver policies of the granting academic college.

Qualifying graduate assistantships must be a minimum of 10 hours a week and may not exceed 20 hours a week (see previous page) and must total a minimum of 160 hours during spring and fall semesters.

- Students who, for any reason, do not complete a minimum of 160 hours in a given semester will not be eligible for that semester's waiver and will be billed for the tuition.
- Partial tuition waivers are not given if the student works fewer than the minimum hours (160) required per semester.

Tuition waivers cover base tuition for NDSU graduate credits only. Students are responsible for differential tuition, student fees, and tuition for non-graduate level credits taken or Cooperative Education credits.

- The tuition waiver may be reduced by other financial awards directed specifically to pay tuition.
- Students receiving a graduate tuition waiver may not receive other NDSU tuition waivers. Student eligible for multiple tuition waivers will receive the waiver resulting in the most tuition being waived.

Tuition waivers are applied to student accounts following completion of required trainings.

Eligibility for a summer tuition waiver is dependent upon the specific tuition waiver policies of the granting college which may include holding a summer assistantship or having received a tuition waiver for the preceding or following academic term (spring or fall semester).

## Rights and Privileges of Graduate Assistants

Graduate assistants have certain rights and privileges specific to the assistantship experience:

- The right to be notified in writing of all decisions that affect their status as a graduate assistant. This includes advance notification of evaluation procedures and a summary of their performance evaluation.
- The right to be notified of any complaints received by a supervisor or department chair concerning their performance of duties.
- The right to respond in writing to such complaints.

- The right, depending on the availability of departmental and university resources, to be supported in pursuing additional activities that pertain to their professional development.
- The right to balance their assistantship responsibilities with their responsibilities to their academic program so that they can complete their degree in a timely manner.
- The privilege of being treated as a professional in their chosen field of study.

## Termination

Graduate assistants may have their assistantship terminated by the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies, upon recommendation by their supervisor, with documentation of probable cause. Early termination for cause may occur when:

- A student does not abide by the appointment conditions.
- A student fails to perform tasks as assigned.
- A student does not make adequate degree progress.
- A student is placed on Academic Probation.
- A student does not make satisfactory research progress.
- A student fails to maintain minimum registration.
- A student persistently refuses to follow reasonable advice and counsel of faculty in carrying out assistantship obligations.
- A student fails to comply with responsibilities as an employee set forth in the *University Catalog*, department rules and regulations governing assistantships, or the terms of sponsored research agreements that fund the assistantship.
- A student's personal conduct is seriously prejudicial to the university, including violation of the NDSU Code of Student Behavior, state or federal law, and general university regulations.

## Appeals Process

The North Dakota State University philosophy is to encourage and seek resolution of problems at the level most closely related to the origin of the specific disputes.

The first step should be an informal conference to first discuss and attempt to resolve the problem(s) with the person(s) directly involved.

When a mutually satisfactory resolution cannot be reached or if discussion of the problem(s) seems inappropriate because of the nature of the student's complaint, the student should seek advice from the director of the program, chair of the department, or the graduate program coordinator.

Depending on the nature of the problem(s), the department chair or student's graduate committee chair may deal with the situation directly, advise the student to discuss the problem(s) with the appropriate academic dean and/or the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies, or advise the student of the appropriate grievance procedure to pursue.

If the graduate assistant wishes to challenge the termination decision, a written appeal to the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies must be made within 14 calendar days of notification of the mediation results (refer to section titled "Graduate Student Appeals").