Graduate Assistantship Policy

Graduate assistants are typically full-time graduate students who participate in teaching, research, or administrative activities in exchange for financial support at North Dakota State University. Graduate assistantships contribute to student professional development with the primary purpose of assisting students in the successful completion of their academic program. Students placed on Academic Warning may retain their assistantship. Students placed on Probation may no longer receive an assistantship.

Graduate assistantships may be awarded outside of the student's home program. These assistantships require the continued approval of the graduate program administrator of the student's program, the student's adviser and the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies.

Assistantship appointments may vary in length and are contingent upon the availability of funding. Some assistantships are granted for one academic term or year with reappointment dependent upon performance review. Other assistantships are for multiple years with annual performance reviews. A graduate assistantship can also involve research or teaching experiences conducted at an off-campus entity, such as a university, agency, or business. In these instances, the experience should be clearly linked to the student's program of study and involve a collaborative relationship between NDSU and the outside entity.

Fellowships may be awarded by NDSU or by an outside entity (e.g., a foundation, a government, etc.). Fellowships may require some specific activities, including work in a laboratory or teaching. If a fellowship includes specific activities, the guidelines established in this policy apply.

Eligibility for Assistantships

Recommendations for assistantships are made to the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies and are subject to the dean's approval. Graduate programs may have specific requirements for eligibility.

Before any assistantship can be awarded, students must be admitted to the Graduate School as a degree-seeking student. The tuition waiver may be reduced by other financial awards directed specifically to pay tuition.

- Students must be registered for graduate credit each semester (fall and spring) they receive an assistantship, and must be in good academic standing and maintaining satisfactory progress toward their degree. In addition, international students must maintain the appropriate residency status.
- Teaching assistants whose native language is not English must demonstrate English proficiency (refer to section titled "English Language Proficiency Procedures for Graduate Teaching Assistants").
- Students offered a graduate teaching or graduate service assistantship must consent to a criminal background check.
- Students placed on Academic Warning may retain their assistantship. Students placed on Probation may no longer receive an assistantship.

Expectations of Program/Assistantship Supervisor

Each graduate program must develop a procedure for the awarding of graduate assistantships. The Graduate College requires that a contract be provided to all graduate assistants. This document would specify expectations for the assistantship, including number of hours of work, stipend amount, activities, etc. Programs/assistantship supervisors must provide periodic oral and written assessment and feedback regarding a graduate assistant's performance. This feedback should document areas where improvement is needed, and graduate assistants should be given adequate time to improve in those areas. Feedback should be provided annually at a minimum.

Expectations of Graduate Assistant

Students must dedicate the required number of hours assigned to work each week. Graduate assistants must work a minimum of 10 hours per week for 16 weeks, and must receive at least minimum wage. Graduate assistantships cannot exceed 20 hours per week. Students on full-time assistantships are generally discouraged from having additional off-campus employment.

Students receiving a graduate assistantship or fellowship are expected to maintain good academic standing and satisfactory progress toward their degrees. Please refer to the section on Graduate College Policies for more information.

Students receiving a graduate assistantship are expected to complete required trainings annually (e.g., Baseline Safety Training, Sexual Harassment Prevention Training, Title IX Training) within 30 days of accepting their appointment. Failure to complete training can lead to sanctions, including revocation of the tuition waiver and termination of the assistantship.

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 the assistantship and/or termination from the Graduate College. Adjudication of these violations will occur using NDSU Policy 335.1.

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.

Stipend Levels and Tuition Waivers

Graduate assistantship stipends vary by discipline. A full-time assistantship consists of 20 hours/week. For information on the current minimum stipend level for a full assistantship, refer to graduate student handbooks for the specific department and/or departmental website information. Departments may award stipends of less than the full-time amount, but they must reduce the workload accordingly.

The responsibilities associated with a graduate assistantship may vary in nature. 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.

Students receiving graduate assistantships also receive tuition waivers to cover base tuition for regular NDSU graduate credits only. Students are responsible for any differential tuition, student fees, and tuition for other types of credits taken, such as undergraduate credits, Distance and Continuing Education credits or Cooperative Education credits. To be eligible for a tuition waiver, the assistantship must be at least 160 hours per semester and must pay at least the federal minimum wage. Partial tuition waivers are not given when a graduate assistant works less than 160 hours in the semester. 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. The tuition waiver may have limitations depending on the assistantship appointment.

To be eligible for a summer tuition waiver, a student must have department approval and have received a tuition waiver for the preceding or the following academic term (spring or fall semester).

Students eligible for a graduate assistantship waiver may not also receive other NDSU tuition waivers. If a student is eligible for more than one waiver, the waiver which results in the highest tuition to be waived will be applied.

Additional Employment at NDSU or in the NDUS

Graduate assistants on full assistantships are not allowed to work on a second assistantship, as part-time instructors, as student workers, or in any other capacity for NDSU, any other campus in the North Dakota University System, or State of North Dakota agency or office while working as a graduate assistant, unless an exception is approved by the Dean of the College of Graduate and Interdisciplinary Studies ***prior to the work being performed***.

Exceptions may be granted for up to six (6) additional hours (a total of no more than 26 total hours for the assistantship plus additional work). Additional work performed during the winter or spring breaks is allowed. Additional hours may also be appropriate during the summer term, depending upon the student's credit load for the summer term. Any of these exceptions must be recommended in writing by the student's supervisor, approved by the student's adviser and the student's department or program administrator, and forwarded to the Graduate College PRIOR to submission of the payroll form. The approval should then be attached to the payroll form. These steps must be completed in the order described and before the student begins work.

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 *Graduate Bulletin*, 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. This means:

- 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 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 two weeks of notification of the mediation results (refer to section titled "Graduate Student Appeals").

Students should not carry more than a full-time load. Individual departments will determine a minimum and a maximum number of credit hours.