

2012-2013 Guidelines for Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantships are stipends awarded to assist graduate students in making progress toward their degree. A graduate assistantship provides the opportunity for students to expand and/or apply their discipline knowledge and skills under supervision of a faculty mentor while also providing instructional, research, and/or administrative support to departmental efforts. To hold a graduate assistantship a student must be admitted to a department or major area with a specific graduate degree objective. A graduate assistant must be enrolled for credit during the fall and spring semesters.

General Policies Concerning Assistantships

- Graduate assistants may not work more than a total of 19.6 (.49 FTE) hours per week *for all appointments combined*, during the academic year. Graduate assistants may work up to 40 hours per week during school breaks and any or all summer sessions.
- Graduate Assistants are required to be registered for at least **one** credit hour during the semester corresponding to the dates of their appointment during the academic year. **GAs do not have to be registered during the summer.** If a graduate student has a qualifying assistantship that includes a summer tuition benefit, the student may choose to register in the summer terms but is not required to do so.
 - To be exempt from FICA (Social Security) and Medicare withholding, GAs must be enrolled for at least 4 or more credit hours in the academic semesters and 4 or more credits for all summer sessions combined. If a student chooses to be enrolled less than half-time, FICA and Medicare will be withheld.
 - Foreign students on an F-1 or J-1 visa, who are performing employment that is consistent with the provisions of their visa status; and do not meet the substantial presence test (SPT) which is 5 years for students, would be exempt from Social Security and Medicare regardless of their number of enrolled credit hours.
- Grants or self-supporting accounts (i.e., tobacco, NRI 21-32's, etc.) should calculate an additional 41% of the student's stipend to cover tuition benefits, **PLUS** the University's portion (79%) of the student's basic health insurance premium. Tuition and health insurance charges for students paid from state-supported accounts will be charged to a campus-level tuition remission account.
- It is always the student's responsibility to pay ALL student fees plus the student's portion (21%) of the health insurance premium.

Fall/Spring Employment, Tuition Remission, and Registration

Graduate Assistants are eligible for up to 12 credit hours of resident and non-resident tuition remission per semester plus 79% of their basic individual student health insurance premium paid by the University if their appointment meets all of the requirements listed below:

- The appointment must be at least 120 continuous days, the equivalent of four full months. (If the teaching or research appointment is to be paid out in ten equal payments, those 120 days must fall within the official begin/end dates for the semester or academic year as indicated on page four of this memo. For a research assistantship not based on a ten equal payment structure, the 120 days must fall within the dates of August 1st through December 31st and/or January 1st through May 31st)...
AND
- The assistantship or combination of assistantships in one or more departments must total at least .33 (but not more than .49) FTE, which is a minimum of 13-15 hrs but not more than 19.6 hrs per week of work. . . **AND**
- The stipend must be at least \$4,114 each semester or \$8,228 for the full academic year 2012-13...**AND**
- The student must be registered for at least one credit hour per semester...**AND**
- The student must be admitted into a degree program (non-degree students are ineligible for assistantships and fellowships).

Notes:

- Doctoral students granted candidacy and thesis-seeking masters students are eligible to submit the *Certification of Full Time Graduate Status* form **each** semester and if enrolling for summer sessions, one for the entire summer. The form is located on the Web at <http://research.unl.edu/gradstudies/fulltime/>. Doctoral students may only use this form for two years; master's students may only use it for 1 year.
- Non-resident students who earn the minimum stipend listed above, whose appointment is less than .33 and/or who do not work for at least 120 days within the semester dates will be charged tuition at the resident rate.
- Graduate assistants who do not work 120 days within the semester dates will be charged the full semester's tuition and the full cost of the health insurance premium for that semester. *Please inform your graduate assistants if they resign or terminate their assistantship before they have completed four full months of employment (120 consecutive days) within the semester dates, all tuition & health benefits will be **retroactively** forfeited.*

Summer Employment, Tuition Remission and Registration

- Graduate assistants are not required to register during summer sessions, but they may take advantage of the tuition benefit if they have a qualifying assistantship.
- A graduate assistant's total enrollment for ALL summer sessions combined determines whether or not they are exempt from paying FICA & Medicare taxes. If a student's enrollment for all summer sessions combined is 4 or more credit hours, the student will be considered a half-time student, therefore exempt from FICA/Medicare withholding.
- Please encourage your students to **pre-register** for summer sessions as that will help payroll determine whether or not to withhold FICA/Medicare from a student's first paycheck.
- Eligibility for summer tuition remission can be met in one of three ways:
 1. *For Appointments from the Preceding Academic Year:* To determine the number of credit hours a student is eligible to have waived during the summer, a department/unit may only consider the salary earned as a graduate assistant between August 1st and May 31st of the *preceding* academic year. If the original assistantship is a 12-month appointment, the department may still only consider the salary earned between August and May to determine eligibility for a summer tuition waiver.
 2. *For Appointments beginning January 2012:* If a graduate assistantship begins in January 2012, the student will qualify for a full summer tuition waiver if the department can **confirm** a qualifying assistantship* for the following fall semester. The department must also sign and forward a *Summer Tuition Waiver Form*, available on SAPPHIRE, and a copy of the offer letter to the Graduate Studies office.
 3. *For Appointments Beginning Summer 2012:* If a graduate assistantship originally begins in Summer 2012, the student will qualify for a full summer tuition waiver if the department can **confirm** a qualifying assistantship* for the entire 2012-2013 academic year. The department must forward a *Summer Tuition Waiver Form* and a copy of the letter of offer to the Graduate Studies office.

**A qualifying assistantship meets the criteria outlined earlier in this memo.*

Minimum Stipend Earned (the preceding academic year) to be Eligible for Summer Tuition Waiver:

2011-12: \$10,864 = 6 cr. hrs waived
\$13,503 = 12 cr. hrs waived

2012-13: \$10,864 = 6 cr. hrs waived
\$13,503 = 12 cr. hrs waived

Note: Students beginning their assistantship January 2012 may receive tuition remission for summer 2012 courses if the department can confirm a qualifying assistantship for the fall 2012 semester. Six credit hours of tuition will be waived if the stipend is at least **\$10,864**, and twelve credit hours will be waived if the stipend is at least **\$13,503** from January through May 2012 **and** August through December 2012 (spring and fall pay combined).

Minimum Stipend Earned to be Eligible for a *Reduced* Summer Tuition Waiver

Non-resident students will have their summer tuition reduced to the resident rate if they are employed as a graduate assistant (not student hourly) during the summer, and the stipend they earn equals or exceeds the minimum stipend corresponding with the session as indicated below

Also, a nonresident student who earned enough as a graduate assistant between August 1 and May 31 of the *preceding* academic year to have 6 credit hrs of summer tuition waived, will have any additional tuition reduced to the resident rate for credit hours between 6 and 12, if they are employed as grad assistants during one of the sessions listed below and earn the minimum stipend corresponding to that session.

Summer Stipends	
Summer 2012	Summer 2013
\$831 for the pre-session	\$831 for the pre-session
\$1,873 for the eight-week session	\$1,873 for the eight-week session
\$1,380 for each five-week session	\$1,380 for each five-week session

Please be aware that health insurance benefits are not automatic for a GA whose original assistantship appointment begins in the summer. The student must visit the health center and apply. For questions regarding assistantships, please contact the Office of Graduate Studies @ 472-8670, or refer to Funding section in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* found online at Bulletin.unl.edu.

UNL Healthy Option Student Plan

- Health insurance is available to all graduate students. Graduate assistants and international students will be automatically enrolled in the insurance plan unless they choose to opt out of the program and complete a waiver before the 14th day of classes. All other students are eligible to apply for health insurance on MyRED if registered for at least 3 credit hours **OR** are full-time certified.
- To opt out of the plan requires completion of the Student Health Insurance Waiver Request Form by the following deadlines, otherwise a graduate assistant will be automatically enrolled in the plan and the student account will be charged.
 - **January 27, 2012 (for spring and summer 2012)**
 - **September 10, 2012, (for fall 2012)**
 - **January 21, 2013 (for spring and summer 2013)**
- The waiver form will be made available 45 days before the deadline each semester and can only be done on-line at <http://health.unl.edu>. Paper copies will not be accepted.
- Students who want to purchase the University health insurance must be enrolled for at least 3 credit hours (unless eligible to be certified for full-time status).
- University Program and Facilities Fees (UPFF) are based on enrollment. If enrolled for less than 7 credit hours (even if full-time certified) for any semester or the summer, the health center fee is deducted from the UPFF fees. This means that the student will be charged for their visits. If the student is enrolled for 7 credit hours or more for any semester, the University Health Center fee is included in the UPFF fees.
- **TIMING IS EVERYTHING. Benefits do not start until the student is 1) enrolled and 2) has an active appointment in SAP.**

Graduate Assistant Offer Letters

The award of a graduate assistantship is made by a letter of offer. Acceptance must also be in writing, and constitutes an agreement between the student and the department that both are expected to honor. The letter of offer should clearly articulate the details of the appointment (e.g., contract dates, FTE, monthly stipend/salary, tuition remission, health insurance benefits, etc.), and expectations regarding specific work assignments and work schedules. There is a minimum amount of required information that must be included in every offer letter. You can find a list of the required elements and suggestions for specific language at: <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/facstaff/funding.shtml>.

- Departments may add more information to the letters as needed.
- Departments may also use a contract instead of a letter, but the minimum information must be used.
- The University of Nebraska-Lincoln is a participant in the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)

