

Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

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Graduate Student Assembly 12/05/17

Office of Graduate Studies (Pending)

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Introduction

We the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) in conjunction with the Office of Graduate Studies at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (hereafter, referred to as the University), have formed an official Graduate and Professional Student Rights document to clarify rights provided by the University. This document intends to act as a resource explicitly defining these rights. This document intends to complement and clarify other documents granting rights of students at the University. Additionally, the documents provided by the University have a large scope and are not specific to Graduate and Professional students. Therefore, we would like the University and GSA to adopt this document as the policy for the rights of all graduate and professional students associated with the University.

This document refers to documents within the University and other Big Ten universities, granting rights to graduate and professional students. The rights outlined in this document aim to preserve an environment of collegiality, in which students, faculty, staff, and the University treat each other in a spirit of respect, professionalism and dignity, and promote the academic and professional success of fellow graduate and professional students. Therefore, the adoption of this Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights at the University will ensure the basic rights of graduate and professional students and ensure graduate and professional students, faculty, staff, and University administration share in their mutual responsibility to protect and maintain the rights of graduate and professional students.

Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights

University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Section I. Preamble

This document elucidates your rights as a graduate or professional student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. These are rights, not policies. Thus, refer to the University Graduate Student Handbook, the Ethics Statement from Faculty Senate, and the Student Code of Conduct for information regarding University policy.

Interpretation

Nothing in this Bill of Rights shall be construed to conflict with any other University rules or applicable laws. However, where anything in this Bill of Rights does conflict with any other University rules or applicable laws, the appropriate University rules or applicable laws shall supersede the conflicting portion of this Bill of Rights, while the non-conflicting parts of this Bill of Rights shall remain in effect.

Section II. Graduate and Professional Student Rights

2.1 Academic Rights

Academic rights, being essential to the function of the University and the success of graduate and professional students, are recognized and respected by the University. The academic rights of graduate and professional students include, but are not limited to the following:

- (i) Exercise of academic freedom, defined as the Constitutional right to articulate and express ideas and opinions without fear of government retaliation, censorship, or other sanction, which includes the right to discover, explore, interpret, and question knowledge and opinions, to engage in critical discourse and deliberation in an effective, responsible and respectful manner, and to not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express opposing views even when they are objectionable. This right is not unlimited and the University expects graduate and professional students, as members of the University community, to serve as models reflecting behavior consistent with the tenets of civil discourse and to abide by other university guidelines and policies in regards to speech on campus and as representatives of the university. Further, speech which incites violence, speech which defames, speech that constitutes a genuine threat or unlawful discrimination, or speech that unlawfully invades privacy are not protected, nor are actions which threaten the safety of person or property.
- (ii) Pursue activities, collaboration, research, and publications pertaining to increasing academic and/or professional development;
- (iii) Work and study in an environment following professional conduct;
- (iv) Have and participate in a community atmosphere where all members, including faculty, staff, and students, are treated with dignity and respect, and where

- discourse and interaction are cooperative and constructive even when there is disagreement;
- (v) Be treated with courtesy in discussions between faculty, administration, and other students, and not be subjected to adverse discussion beyond the purview of departmental and university policies and law;
 - (vi) Pursue research projects pertaining to their thesis or dissertation work;
 - (vii) Refuse activities that are unrelated to academic pursuit or professional development, particularly those that do not have a direct benefit to the completion of defined thesis or dissertation or professional development, without adverse conduct from advisor or department;
 - (viii) Appeal any decision concerning academic progress and/or professional development as outlined by the graduate council (<https://catalog.unl.edu/graduate-professional/graduate/credit/>).

2.2 Rights Regarding Information and Privacy

The University, ~~recognizing~~ recognizes the importance of student privacy and access to pertinent and essential information to continue their academic and professional process smoothly.

Graduate and professional student rights regarding information and privacy include but are not limited to:

- (a) Graduate and Professional Students shall have the right to information, including the right to:
 - (i) Be informed of their rights and responsibilities;
 - (ii) Be informed in advance of any changes to the University's health insurance policy as they pertain to the primary insured and dependents.
 - (iii) Be included in any decision-making regarding services and policies pertaining to their well-being;
 - (iv) Clear, written information on the degree program pertaining to degree requirements, departmental requirements, expectations of students, and the expected timeline for academic progress;
 - (v) Have their plan of academic progress reviewed and approved by their advisor annually;
 - (vi) Adhere to the plan of academic progress and ~~shall~~ not be hindered by the University/professors/advisors/administrators;
 - (vii) Written communication of any changes made to department expectations on degree requirements, academic progress, and funding requirements;
 - (viii) Opportunities for departmental, college-level, and University-level funding and expectations for obtaining and maintaining such funding;
 - (ix) Inquire about, discuss, and contest contractual provisions relating to family leave, sick leave, departmental service requirements, definition of working hours.
- (b) Graduate and Professional Students under an assistantship of any kind shall also have the right to:

- (i) Access a university health insurance plan that provides physical, dental and mental care coverage;
 - (ii) ~~Have a right to~~ Subsidized health insurance as a benefit of their employment;
 - (iii) Know the minimum departmental stipend within their own department prior to signing a contract;
 - (iv) Clearly outlined time and role expectations of their assistantship through a signed contract at the beginning of their funding period;
 - (v) Be informed in advance and in writing of any changes made to their assistantship contracts;
 - (vi) Be informed of the schedule of stipend payments and the right to immediate recourse if that schedule is violated;
 - (vii) Be informed in advance and in writing termination of their contract and be reasonably allowed to make other accommodations;
 - (viii) Receive ~~funding~~ a stipend adequate to meet the minimum annual living expenses for a single adult living in Lancaster County, Nebraska, as calculated by the [MIT Living Wage Calculator](#) and adjusted with annual inflation rates;
- (c) Graduate and Professional Students shall have the right to privacy including the right to:
- (i) Keep any activity not involving the University private;
 - (ii) Keep any accommodation under Section 2.4 (iv)-(v) of this document private;

2.3 Rights Regarding Professional Development

The University recognizes that professional development is an essential aspect of graduate and professional students' present and future professional lives. Graduate and professional student rights regarding professional development include, but are not limited to:

- (i) Ownership and access to their intellectual property;
- (ii) Authorship and acknowledgment on scholarly publications commensurate with their contribution to such works;
- (iii) Take part in activities to foster their professional development including, but not limited to, internships, relevant conferences, volunteer experience, workshops, and courses;
- (iv) Professional and academic guidance from their advisor;
- (v) Seek professional and academic guidance from faculty and staff besides their advisor;
- (vi) Not have their progress hindered by University/professors/advisors/administrators as long as the student is within good standing with their department;
- (vii) Change their faculty advisor;
- (viii) Collaborate with students, faculty, and staff for their professional and academic development;
- (ix) All funding as outlined in their contract as long as they have abided by the terms of the contract, and maintained good academic standing in their department.

2.4 Freedom from Discrimination and Adverse Conduct

The University, in keeping with its commitment to diversity, inclusion, and safety, guarantees graduate and professional students the following rights in regards to discrimination and adverse conduct including, but not limited to:

- (i) Conduct research, learn, teach, participate in University programs and activities, and access to healthcare free of discrimination and/or adverse conduct;
- (ii) Report any discrimination and/or adverse conduct against him/herself to an entity outside of the student's immediate department, including, but not limited to, the University Institutional Equity and Compliance (IEC) office [<https://www.unl.edu/equity/>], a University Ombudsman, the University Police Department [<https://police.unl.edu>], and mental health workers, without retaliation as defined by University rules and/or applicable law;
- (iii) Due process regarding unfair treatment or reports of assault;
- (iv) Reasonable accommodation for any disability that a Graduate or Professional Student already has upon receiving University status or that emerges after receiving University status, and that is protected by University rules and/or applicable law; and develop a reasonable accommodation plan with the University Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office (<https://www.unl.edu/ssd/home>).