

2017-2018 Guidelines for Graduate Assistantships

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantships are stipends awarded to assist graduate students as they progress toward their degree. A graduate assistantship provides opportunities 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 students with assistantships

- May not work more than a total of 19.6 (.49 FTE) hours per week *for all appointments combined*, during the academic year.
- May work up to 40 hours per week **during school breaks and any or all summer sessions**.
- Must be registered for at least **one** credit hour during the semester corresponding to the dates of their appointment during the academic year.
- **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. International students should verify enrollment requirements with the International Student Scholar Office.

Grants or self-supporting accounts (i.e., tobacco, NRI 21-32's, etc.) should calculate an additional 40% 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 within the semester dates, 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 \$4,696 each semester or \$9,393 for the full academic year 2017-2018 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 from the first use; master's students may only use it for 1 year from the first use.
- 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 and the student will be responsible for the total tuition payment and health insurance benefits.*

Health Insurance Benefits

- 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. 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.
- The University offers graduate assistants a choice of two health insurance plans: (1) the StudentBlue Plan administered through Blue Cross and Blue Shield; and (2) the Bronze Plan is the University's qualifying insurance for the Affordable Care Act. For a comparison of the two plans, students can visit the student health insurance page here: <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/health>.
- Student insurance is provided as part of the graduate assistants' benefits package. If they don't need the University's student health insurance plan, they can waive coverage once the semester bill is available. To keep or waive health insurance, students will:
 - Log into <http://MyRED.unl.edu>
 - Go to the **Student Accounts** tab
 - Under **Important Links**
 - Choose **Waive Student Health Insurance (International Students choose: *Waive International Student Health Insurance.*)**
 - *If they **DO** want coverage, they need to choose **I want my UNL Health Insurance Card!***

Students must opt out before the tenth day of the semester.

International students with "F" or "J" visas registered for classes at UNL are always required to have health insurance coverage, unless proof of insurance from an outside source is provided. If they are an international student, they will automatically be enrolled and billed for the University's student health insurance plan (Student Blue). They also have the option of purchasing additional health insurance for family members from the same plan by contacting the business office at the University Health Center.

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.

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 qualifying assistantship meets the criteria outlined earlier in this memo.*
- 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 2017:* If a graduate assistantship begins in January 2017, 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 2017:* If a graduate assistantship originally begins in Summer 2017, the student will qualify for a full summer tuition waiver if the department can **confirm** a qualifying assistantship* for the entire 2017-2018 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 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.
- Encourage your students to **pre-register** for summer sessions. Pre-registration helps Payroll determine whether or not to withhold FICA/Medicare from a student's first paycheck.

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

2016-17:	\$12,217 = 6 cr. hrs waived
	\$15,184 = 12 cr. hrs waived
2017-18:	\$12,400 = 6 cr. hrs waived
	\$15,412 = 12 cr. hrs waived

Note: Students beginning their assistantship January 2017 may receive tuition remission for summer 2017 courses if the department can confirm a qualifying assistantship for the fall 2017 semester. Six credit hours of tuition will be waived if the stipend is at least **\$12,217**, and twelve credit hours will be waived if the stipend is at least **\$15,184** from January through May 2017 **and** August through December 2017 (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 on page 4.

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 on page 4 and earn the minimum stipend corresponding to that session.

Summer Stipends	
Summer 2017	Summer 2018
\$934 for the pre-session	\$948 for the pre-session
\$2,106 for the eight-week session	\$2,138 for the eight-week session
\$1,552 for each five-week session	\$1,575 for each five-week session

Note: 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 the summer semester. For questions regarding assistantships, please contact Jane Schneider @ 472-8670, or refer to Funding section in the *Graduate Studies Bulletin* found online at <http://bulletin.unl.edu>.

Graduate Assistant Offer Letters

To award a student a graduate assistantship, you must provide a written 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>.

- 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) Resolution. We seek your assistance in complying with its terms. Please read the Resolution carefully while considering your offer of appointment. Attach the CGS agreement to your offer: <http://www.cgsnet.org/students>.
- We recommend that you commit no more than one academic year appointment in your Letter of Offer. If you wish to renew an assistantship appointment, we recommend that you extend a Letter of Offer for renewal of the assistantship.

Appointment Dates

Spring 2017

Teaching Assistants Spring 2017 semester (Term 1171) January 2, 2017 – May 12, 2017
 Research Assistants Spring 2017 semester (Term 1171) No later than February 1, 2017 – May 31, 2017

Summer 2017

Summer Sessions 2017 (Term 1175)
 Pre Session May 15 – June 2, 2017
 Eight-Week Session May 15 – July 7, 2017
 First 5-Week Session June 5 – July 7, 2017
 Second Five-Week Session July 10 – August 10, 2017

Academic Year 2017-2018

August 14, 2017 – May 11, 2018

Fall 2017

Teaching Assistants Fall 2017 semester (Term 1178) August 14, 2017 – January 2, 2018
 Research Assistants Fall 2017 semester (Term 1178) No later than September 1, 2017 – December 31, 2017

Spring 2018

Teaching Assistants Spring 2018 semester (Term 1181) January 2, 2018 – May 11, 2018
 Research Assistants Spring 2018 semester (Term 1181) No later than February 1, 2018 – May 31, 2018

Send Grad PAFs directly to Payroll Services. Payroll Services will have the PAF submission deadline dates available through their office.