
Graduate Assistant Handbook

The Graduate School

University of North Dakota

This handbook was updated by the University of North Dakota Graduate School
August 2004

Any exception to these policies must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY Inquiries as to the equal opportunity, affirmative action or diversity policies for the University of North Dakota or coverage of state or federal civil or human rights statutes or regulations may be directed to Sally J. Page, Affirmative Action Officer, 307 Twamley Hall, P.O. Box 7097, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND 58202-7097; telephone (701) 777-4171. Concerns regarding Title VI, Title IX or Section 504 (educational opportunity) may be addressed to the Affirmative Action Officer or to the Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Office of Education, Federal Building, Suite 310, 1244 Speer Blvd., Denver, CO 80204-3582.

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CHAPTER I GENERAL INFORMATION

This handbook is produced to provide information about the policies and procedures affecting Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA), Graduate Research Assistants (GRA), and Graduate Service Assistants (GSA). If you have questions, please contact your faculty advisor, your department chairperson, or the Graduate School office (414 Twamley Hall, phone 701-777-2784).

The Graduate Assistant (GA) fulfills a unique position in the university because he/she is both student and employee. Graduate study demands an extensive commitment. Effective service as a Graduate Assistant also requires extensive commitment. It is for this reason that limits are placed on the amount of effort (academic credits and teaching/research/service hours) to be spent in each role. Graduate Assistants are normally appointed as half-time assistants, but some may be appointed as quarter-time assistants.

Policy on Outside Employment for Graduate Assistants

The UND Graduate School does not encourage outside employment for Graduate Student Assistants. Such employment may limit the ability of the student to make satisfactory progress towards his/her degree. Failure to make satisfactory progress towards their degree can constitute grounds for dismissal.

Graduate assistants are expected to meet the terms of their appointment in areas of teaching, research and/or service. These appointments should not exceed 100%. The Graduate School defines 100% effort for assistants as 50% employment and 50% coursework (1/2 time assistant) or 25% employment and 75% coursework (1/4 time assistant). In unusual circumstances, Graduate Assistants can serve as consultants to projects or activities supported with University administered funds provided all of the following criteria are satisfied: (1) The services of the Graduate Student Consultant are outside of the realm of their Graduate Assistant responsibilities, (2) The services provided are limited in scope and do not involve prolonged teaching or research activities, (3) The combined activities, Assistant + Consulting, cannot exceed 120% effort, (4) The consulting fee is appropriate considering the qualifications of the individual to be utilized, and the nature of the services to be rendered. The hourly rate should be no less than minimum wage, and (5) The overload must be sanctioned by the Graduate Program Director of the program in which the student is enrolled and approved by the Graduate School Dean. Notice of appointment forms are administered by the Graduate School.

Selection of Graduate Assistants

Applicants for GA positions must meet the eligibility requirements of the specific appointment and will not be subjected to unlawful discriminatory treatment. University educational employment policy states

that there shall be no discrimination against persons because of race, religion, age, creed, color, sex, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, marital status, veterans' status, or political belief or affiliation. North Dakota state law also prohibits discrimination in employment with regards to

participation in lawful activity off University property during non-working hours, which is not in direct conflict with the essential business-related interests of the University.

Interested students may apply for a GA appointment to the graduate department to which they have been admitted or to service units, which may be related to their major field.

Applications are considered at any time, but most GA positions are committed by March 15 for the following academic year.

GTAs are selected by the department in which the student is pursuing his/her major field of study and in which the teaching assistant duties are to be performed. GRAs are selected by the faculty research supervisor with the concurrence of the student's major department chairperson. GSAs are selected by the administrator of the service unit.

The following general eligibility requirements are applicable to the award of and continued holding of any Graduate Assistantship at UND:

- Students admitted to the Graduate School and notified that they have been granted an appointment or award before they have actually received a bachelor's degree may neither register nor hold an appointment or award until they have received the bachelor's degree and fulfilled all requirements for admission to the Graduate School as a degree student.
- Degree students in Approved and Qualified Status may hold awards or appointments.
- Assistantship appointments will not exceed one-half time in all combinations.
- Students must maintain the credit load requirements defined in the appointment letter to retain appointments or awards.
- Students must maintain a 3.00 GPA to retain awards or appointments.
- A student may be removed from an appointment due to unsatisfactory job performance.
- Students in good academic standing (i.e., a GPA of 3.00 or higher; 2.75 for Master of Engineering candidates) and who are performing their assigned duties satisfactorily are eligible for reappointment.
- Students who withdraw from or are dismissed from the Graduate School become immediately ineligible for and may not continue to hold an appointment or award.

Appointment of Graduate Assistants

All GA appointments specify a fixed term of appointment and a stipend. The maximum period for a single contract is 12 months. Reappointment is possible, but not guaranteed, and requires satisfactory job performance and at least a 3.00 grade point average.

All GA appointments are initiated by the department using the **Graduate Appointment Form** available from the Graduate School. GTA appointments are initiated by the major department chairperson and require the approval of the Dean of the college/school in which the instruction occurs and of the Dean of the Graduate School. GRA appointments are initiated by the research supervisor and require the approval of the major department chairperson and the Dean of the Graduate School. GSA appointments are initiated by the service unit administrator and require the approval of the Dean of the Graduate School. All appointments will indicate the person to whom the student is responsible for the performance of the GA duties.

Formal appointment of all GAs is by virtue of a university contract issued by the Dean of the Graduate School. **The student must sign to accept their contract.** Students must have accepted the appointment in order for the paperwork to be further processed by the Graduate School, Payroll Office and to be given a tuition waiver. All GTA appointment forms must be in to the Graduate School by the end of the first week that classes begin in order to receive a tuition waiver. All GRA and GSA appointment forms must be in by the end of the second week of classes. The summer semester is an exception to this, and has its own deadlines that will be advertised in April.

GA Rights and Responsibilities

“All GAs are responsible for abiding by all policies as outlined in the *Code of Student Life*. Additionally, they are subject to the ethical precepts and code of their academic profession, through the laws of the State of North Dakota regarding its employees, and through the University of North Dakota policies, which govern their institutional obligations. Violation of these constitutes a basis for disciplinary action in accordance with the procedures set forth herein.” (Section 1-9, *Code of Student Life*) (Available at www.und.edu/dept/csl.)

GA employment rights are full-time endeavor. GTAs are first and foremost graduate students, and they must meet the demands of that role.

In their role as teachers, they are members of the academic staff (but not faculty) of the University, and are accorded the rights and responsibilities of academic freedom as set forth in the “Regulations on Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Due Process” (see the *ND State Board of Higher Education Policy Manual*, section 605.1 at www.ndus.nodak.edu/policies_procedures.)

International Student Graduate Assistants

International students whose native language is not English normally will not be appointed as a GA until the completion of one year of graduate study at UND in order to provide the department an opportunity to assess the student’s ability in the use of the English language.

International Graduate Assistants who are non-native speakers of English are required to take the TSE (Test of Spoken English) and achieve a score of 50 before an assistantship may be offered if either lecture or laboratory assistance is involved. If the appointee has not taken the TSE, he/she must take the SPEAK test (offered at UND) and achieve a score of 50. For further information on the SPEAK test, contact the Counseling Center at (701) 777-4157.

The North Dakota State Board of Higher Education policy requires all international students to purchase the health insurance approved by the institution. The policy states that students must carry this insurance from the time of their registration at the institution until termination or completion of their studies.

Payroll Facts

Any problems experienced by students, faculty, or departments regarding payroll matters for GAs should be brought to the attention of the Graduate School for resolution.

GA appointments must be finalized (i.e., the student's written acceptance and personal data form received) in order for the paperwork to be sent to the Payroll Office. The Graduate School has deadlines. It is the student's responsibility to make sure the proper paperwork has been submitted.

The 1986 Tax Reform Act provides that all GA stipends are subject to income tax, and tax will be withheld by the University. W-2 forms will be issued to GAs in January of each year.

Semester pay periods are August 16 to December 31 and January 1 to May 15 (i.e., 4.5 months each with nine payments). The academic year pay period is August 16 to May 15 (nine months, 18 payments). Paychecks for GAs are sent to the departments on the 15th of the month and the last day of the month (or the last working day preceding those dates if pay day falls on a non-working day).

GAs may arrange for direct deposit of their paycheck to a financial institution.

GA Benefits

GAs are granted a waiver of tuition but must pay all other fees (University fee, Student Activity fee, etc.).

A health insurance benefit is provided to all US/Canadian GAs for each semester they hold a Graduate Assistant appointment.

International students are covered under a separate plan and are required to purchase health insurance prior to attending any college or university in North Dakota. An international GA will be reimbursed the portion of the premium equal to what is paid for a US/Canadian GA for each semester he/she holds the appointment.

GAs are exempt from Social Security participation and are not eligible to participate in the university retirement plans. GAs are covered by Worker's Compensation.

Half-time GAs are eligible to obtain faculty parking privileges and may be assigned priority for student housing, subject to its availability.

GAs with spring semester appointments are also eligible for tuition waivers for the succeeding summer session but must apply, through their department, for the limited number available.

Academic Complaints

Each department has a written procedure for dealing with academic grievances. Graduate Assistants should be aware of the department's policy as well as the University's policies.

You can find them defined and described in the *Code of Student Life* (Section 3-1,-3-5). (Available at www.und.edu/dept/csl/).

Sexual Harassment

The University of North Dakota does not tolerate harassment. If you feel that you have been harassed, please report the incident to one of the following: If you are a student, contact the Dean of Students Office. If you are a graduate student and the harassment deals with academic issues, graduate assistantships, awards, and scholarships, contact the Graduate School. If you work within the academic arena, contact the Office of the Dean. If you are a medical student or resident, contact the Associate Dean of Students of the School of Medicine and Health Sciences. If you are a law student, contact the Office of the Dean of the School of Law. If the incident occurred in housing, contact the Housing Office. If you are a student or graduate student and the incident occurred during your employment, contact the Financial Aid Office. If you are a staff member, contact Human Resources. Also, the Affirmative Action Office is always available to help. The procedures are also available at www.und.edu/dept/aao/.

NOTES

CHAPTER II THE GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT (GTA)

Graduate Teaching Assistantships are university appointments, which provide stipends to students who are providing teaching service in the department in which they are pursuing their academic major. The GTA system is a valuable part of the instructional program of UND in that it serves undergraduate and graduate education. The purposes of the GTA program are:

- To provide financial support for the students enrolled in the graduate degree program.
- To provide an introduction to college teaching and a supervised teaching experience for graduate students, some of whom eventually will become faculty in higher education institutions.
- To assist the university in its instructional program, especially in working with undergraduates in small class, discussion, or laboratory situations.

Because the major special activity expected of a GTA is related to teaching, the main criterion for appointment of a GTA is the potential for becoming a capable, concerned, and responsible teacher.

Teaching Responsibilities

The GTA is responsible to the chairperson of the department for the performance of duties. Often this responsibility is delegated to a faculty member who has overall responsibility for the course(s) in which the student may assist. The teaching assignment should be consistent with the GTA's background and experience, and contribute both to the department's needs and the GTA's experience.

GTAs are considered professional academic staff and will not be assigned routine clerical work. However, they may be expected to assist in grading (examinations, term papers, laboratory exercises, problems) or in supporting the teaching program in other roles.

GTAs who are assigned responsibility for a class or laboratory group are expected to perform their duties as responsible professionals representing the university. This includes meeting all scheduled classes, being prepared for each day's class, knowing the background of knowledge which students bring to the class, and becoming aware of the students' special interests and capabilities.

The GTA is simultaneously pursuing an academic program leading to a graduate degree and performing an instructional function, the combination of the two being a full-time endeavor.

GTAs are first and foremost graduate students, and they must meet the demand of that role. In their role as teachers, they are members of the academic staff (but not faculty) of the University, and are accorded

the rights and responsibilities of academic freedom as set forth in the “*Regulations on Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Due Process*” (see *ND State Board of Higher Education Policy Manual*, section 605.1 at www.ndus.nodak.edu/policies_procedures.)

Appointment Conditions

The period of appointment and stipend will be specified in the written contract. GTAs are classified by level as follows:

Level I Master’s candidates

Level II Doctoral candidates holding a master’s degree or equivalent

The normal GTA appointment is for half-time service. Some appointments may be for quarter-time. Half-time GTAs will be expected to work 15-20 hours per week, dependent upon departmental requirements. For many GTAs the workload will be relatively uniform throughout the semester, but for others, the load will be uneven due to the nature of the duties.

Half-time GTAs must carry an academic load of a minimum of six and a maximum of ten credits during the semester. Quarter-time GTAs must carry from eight to twelve credits during the semester. Summer session half-time GTA appointments require three to five credits. Summer session quarter-time GTA appointments require four to six credits.

As a member of the academic staff of the University, and the recipient of a contract for services, a GTA “appointment terminates at the end of the term stated on the contract and may be renewed at the discretion of the institution.” This and other portions of the “*Regulations on Academic Freedom, Tenure, and Due Process*” (Faculty Handbook) provide protection to a GTA, provided that the GTA remains academically qualified to continue as an assistant.

CHAPTER III THE GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT (GRA)

Graduate Research Assistantships are appointments, which provide stipends to students who are assisting in a research project undertaken by the department in which they are pursuing their academic major. Graduate Research Assistantships provide financial assistance to students enrolled in the graduate degree program, and an opportunity for a student to participate in an ongoing research project under the supervision of an experienced investigator, and thereby learn the methods and skills of research in the discipline.

GRAs normally will be responsible to the faculty member who is the principal investigator on the research project, and the GRA duties will be assigned by that person. Students will be selected for available GRA positions by the principal investigators with the concurrence of the department chairperson and the Dean of the Graduate School. Criteria in the selection of GRAs include a strong academic record, course work related to the field of research, successful graduate study in the department, and an interest in the research topic.

Many GRA appointments also provide the student an opportunity to use the research project as the topic for a thesis or dissertation. In such instances, the research supervisor must be the student's thesis/dissertation advisor and the chairperson of the student's Faculty Advisory Committee.

Appointment Conditions

The period of appointment and stipend will be specified in the written contract. The normal GRA appointment is for half-time service. Half-time GRAs will be expected to work 15-20 hours per week, dependent upon departmental requirements. Some appointments may be for half of that.

Half-time GRAs must carry an academic load of a minimum of six and a maximum of ten credits during the semester. Quarter-time GRAs must carry from eight to twelve credits during the semester. Summer session half-time GRA appointments require three to five credits. Summer session quarter-time GRA appointments require four to six credits.

An exception to the above credit hour load specifications is the GRA whose research work will be included in the thesis or dissertation. Such GRAs must carry at least twelve credits during the semester and six credits in the Summer Session.

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CHAPTER IV THE GRADUATE SERVICE ASSISTANT (GSA)

Graduate Service Assistantships provide stipends to students who are assisting in a service unit whose mission and function is closely related to the student's area of academic study and interest.

GSAs will be responsible to a professional member of the service unit who will supervise and train the student in the service role. Students will be selected for a GSA appointment by the service unit supervisor. Criteria for selection include the academic record, course work related to the field, successful graduate study in the major department, and an interest in the service field.

Appointment Conditions

The period of appointment and stipend will be specified in the written contract. The normal GSA appointment is for half-time service. Half-time GSAs will be expected to work 15-20 hours per week dependent upon departmental requirements. Some appointments may be for half of that effort (i.e., quarter-time).

Half-time GSAs must carry an academic load of a minimum of six and maximum of ten semester credits during the semester. Quarter-time GSAs must carry from eight to twelve credits during the semester. Summer session half-time GSA appointments require three to five credits. Summer session quarter-time GSA appointments require four to six credits.

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