

Policy Background

Graduate Assistantships are stipends awarded to assist students in making progress toward their degree. Graduate Assistants provide instructional, research and/or administrative support to departmental efforts. A graduate assistantship provides the opportunity for a student to practice what is being studied in an applied activity, such as research, teaching, and other sorts of professional practice.

Policy Statement

Graduate assistantships are awarded to full-time students who are fully admitted to a graduate program and who maintain good academic standing during the time of the award. Appointments are competitive and are determined on the basis of undergraduate and/or graduate grade point average, test scores, letters of recommendation, pertinent experience, educational preparation, interviews, or a combination of these factors. The amount of compensation and terms and conditions of awards will be maintained and published by the College of Graduate Studies.

Requirements

Since the purpose of the award is to assist the student in making progress toward the degree, the maximum time commitment to assistantship activities is normally 20 hours per week (for a teaching assistant, 8-9 semester credits over 2 semesters). Teaching assistants may be assigned extra duties (not to exceed the equivalent of 9 semester credits). In special cases when a student is in the last term of study, additional assignments may be made up to 30 hours per week. For the same reasons, a student must be concurrently enrolled each term for at least 6 graduate semester credits, but not more than 12 semester credits. Summer session appointments require a minimum of 1 graduate semester credit. A student who was assigned a limited number of deficiency courses as a condition of admission may petition the Graduate Dean to accept the deficiency credits toward meeting the minimum credits required for the assistantship. The maximum length of appointment (from all sources of funding) is limited to the normal length of time for completing the degree, in most cases, 2 years (a few programs which require more than a minimum of 40 credits have a normal length of 3 years to completion).

Compensation

The amount of the Graduate Assistant stipend is published each year by the College of Graduate Studies. As far as possible, stipends are set to cover the full cost of attending the institution, as determined by the Office of Financial Aid. Stipends are calculated on a full-time equivalent of “20 hours per week.” The stipend is subject to State and Federal taxes. Full awards carry a waiver of 18 credits of tuition for Fall and Spring semesters (normally, 9 each semester). Tuition waivers for more than 9 credits each semester must be approved by the Graduate Dean. No tuition waiver is provided for Summer Session appointments. Tuition waivers for duties which include teaching or research are not subject to State and Federal taxes. Partial awards are permitted and may carry a corresponding reduction in tuition waiver. Students may hold multiple concurrent appointments in different departments or administrative units, as long as the total of all appointments does not exceed the maximum allowed. At no time will a graduate assistant be employed concurrently as an adjunct faculty.

Students who hold an assistantship are considered residents for Minnesota resident tuition purposes during the time of their award, and over the Summer if they held an award the previous Spring semester, during the Summer, or have accepted an award for the following Fall semester.

Terms and Conditions

Prior to the beginning date of the award, graduate assistants will receive a letter summarizing their general duties, stipend, and times and flexibility of duties. During the first week of duty, graduate assistants will be given an initial orientation to their assigned duties by their supervisor, including a description of specific duties, standards for evaluation of performance, and training and other resources available.

Appointment

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. Resignation from an appointment before the end of the term initially specified should also be in writing, and should be delivered to the department as early as possible. Students who resign or are released from their appointment prior to the mid-point of a semester will lose the tuition waiver for that term.

Termination

Graduate assistants are expected to meet the standards of performance described at their appointment, and to maintain satisfactory academic progress toward their degree. Failure to meet either set of standards can lead to termination of the assistantship. Although, immediate termination may be invoked for serious misbehavior or failure to perform, under normal circumstances of poor performance the following guidelines will be followed:

1. Written notice of warning, with a two-week trial period; followed (if necessary) by
2. Written notice of termination, effective immediately.

Copies of this correspondence will be sent to the Graduate Dean and to the department chairperson (for departmental appointments) or to the unit's director (for administrative unit appointments). The notice of termination must also be sent to the Business Office, and to the International Student Office (if appropriate). All compensation accrued prior to receipt of the notice of termination in the Business Office will be charged to the unit responsible for direct supervision of the student.

Both written notice of warning and written notice of termination may be appealed. In case of appeal, the student will send to the department chair or the unit director a copy of the written notice and a letter stating the errors of fact or interpretation, which is the basis of the appeal. The chair or unit director must investigate the appeal and deliver a written response within one week. The appeal may be carried one step further, in writing, to the College dean (for appointments in academic departments) or to the appropriate vice president (for appointments outside the academic departments). The dean or vice president will consult with the Dean of Graduate Studies, and their decision will be final. The initiation of an appeal does not extend the trial period or the termination of duties.