

Guidelines for Graduate Assistant Work and Study

Applies to Graduate Assistants/Graduate Research Assistants (revised 11/2015)

Ph.D. students serving as Graduate Research Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants are all engaged in academic programs where their primary role is that of a full-time graduate student. All Ph.D. students in these positions are required to maintain full-time status (9 credit hours in Fall and Spring semesters; 7 credit hours in Summer session). In addition, students are not to hold other regular employment without the permission of their Supervisor, Supervisory Committee and Graduate Dean. Serving as a tutor for other students or other “light-load” special teaching experiences are typical exceptions to this “no other work” policy.

Appointments are traditionally assigned an FTE of 0.49 with a stipend at, or above, the current NIH recommended level for Pre-Doctoral study. Some programs or mentors may supplement this level of stipend. These appointments are considered as “exempt” from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA). This is due to the understanding that the positions are held by students and their education and training are their primary responsibilities. The exempt status has several implications, including no expectation of timecards and no overtime pay. In addition, students on Graduate Assistantships do not receive traditional benefits (retirement contribution, health insurance, vacation accrual, etc.). **Nonetheless, in keeping with their emerging professional role, the University has established some expectations and benefits that apply to both the student and the program.**

- 1) Graduate students are expected to devote an appropriate level of professional effort to work and study. The total time spent on the research project(s) at UNMC and in their enrolled curriculum will comprise full-time effort. *[Note: The work of a professional in the sciences has noticeable variability in intensity. In all successful cases, the “work necessary to get the job done” describes how much time and effort is dedicated to a given project at a given time. Late nights, weekend projects and even occasional holiday work may be required, but are usually balanced by periods of less intense effort.]*
- 2) Graduate students supported by a traditional 0.49 FTE stipend should average at least 20 hours of effort per week on the research project.
- 3) Graduate students will not be expected to work on traditional university holidays unless required by the unique schedule of an experiment design. (UNMC holidays: New Year’s Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, the day after Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day)
- 4) Graduate students may expect, on average, to be allowed at least 14 days (regular workdays, M-F) of personal vacation in a given year. Students desiring longer break periods should expect to use the allowance accumulated over more than one year, as well as receive appropriate approval from their Advisor/Supervisor and program Graduate Committee.
- 5) Graduate students requesting maternity/paternity leave (including for adoption) are required to get appropriate approval from the Dean for Graduate Studies or their designee. Maternity/Paternity leave and other forms of personal leave may require the suspension of the stipend and must be discussed with the mentor before meeting with the Graduate Dean's Office. (A reasonable expectation for maternity leave, supported by the Graduate Council, would be to arrange 8 weeks of leave as is common at most universities and suggested at UNL. Continued stipend support is generally provided during this period with the expectation that the student will devote a portion of her time toward reading, writing, data analysis or other activities that can be accomplished without being present on campus.)
- 6) All students, faculty and staff are expected to adhere to the **UNMC Code of Conduct** as detailed in [UNMC Policy 8006](#). The Code reflects the professional ethical conduct that should be shown in all relationships and fosters development and maintenance of a supportive climate emphasizing respect and dignity. It also points to the special role that teachers, mentors and supervisors play in demonstrating or modeling professional ethical behavior. Finally, it makes very clear that laws and regulations often complement or even comprise elements of the Code.
- 7) If any member of the UNMC community has concerns about adherence to the Code of Conduct, they may contact the Human Resources Department, the Chief Student Affairs Officer, the Compliance Officer, the UNMC Ombudsman’s office, or the UNMC Compliance Hot Line at 1-866-568-5430. Reports to the Compliance Hotline may be made anonymously.