

# **Guidelines on Employment of Graduate Assistants Third Edition**

## **The Graduate School, New Mexico State University Revised August 1, 2008**

Our graduate assistants are engaged in the teaching and research mission of New Mexico State University and are vital to our success as a *research institution*. The primary purpose of the *Graduate Assistant Guideline* is to educate faculty, staff and students about the employment of graduate assistants. Topics covered in the guideline are listed below.

- I. Eligibility for Employment*
- II. Eligibility for in-state tuition*
- III. How to apply for a graduate assistantship*
- IV. Minimum Salary Requirements*
- V. Enrollment requirements*
- VI. Number of years of support*
- VII. Maximum hours of employment*
- VIII. Holidays*
- IX. Termination of employment*
- X. Roles and responsibilities*
- XI. Graduate Assistant Health Insurance Benefit Program*

This Guideline is a working document. Topics will be added or expanded based on the needs of faculty, staff and students.

### **I. Eligibility for Appointment**

Graduate assistants can be a teaching assistant, a research assistant or an administrative assistant. They are selected by departments, research centers and service units to serve the needs of New Mexico State University. To be eligible for employment as graduate assistants, the student must be admitted to the Graduate School and to an academic department in the semester of hire. In addition, the student must meet criteria for a regular full time student: (1) be enrolled in 9 graded graduate credits during an academic semester (fall or spring semester), (2) have a 3.0 cumulative GPA, (3) have not exhausted years of state level of support (see section VI on Years of Support), and in the case of international students, pass the NMSU International Teaching Assistant screening tests administered by the Department of Communications or another unit of NMSU. In cases where international students do not pass NMSU English language screening tests, the student must be enrolled in the designated courses. For graduate assistantships during the summer months, see section V on Enrollment Requirements.

The funding source plays a major role in the type of student that can be hired for different types of activities including teaching, research and service. Below we list two types of students that can be employed as graduate assistants.

- a. **New Mexico State General Fund and Graduate Assistants:** Students receiving support from the New Mexico State General Fund should primarily be engaged in the educational mission of the university. Usually these students are teaching assistants that provide instructional support in a classroom or lab setting. Students supported through the New Mexico State General Fund must be admitted with “regular” status as a graduate student.
- b. **Non-state funded Graduate Assistants:** A non-state funded graduate assistantship can be a research assistantship where students are engaged in research with faculty in their department, another department or research center at New Mexico State University. In some cases, assistants can also be engaged in the teaching or service mission of the university. Either regular or provisional students can be research assistants on non-state funded projects.
- c. **Definitions**
  1. **Regular student:** A regular student, in the *Graduate Catalog*, is defined as (a) a beginning graduate student who has either an overall 3.0 grade point average or a grade point average of 3.0 in the last half of undergraduate work or, (b) a continuing graduate student who maintains at least a 3.0 grade point average.
  2. **Provisional student:** A provisional student is (a) a continuing graduate student whose cumulative grade-point average at the end of any term is less than a 3.0, or (b) a beginning graduate student who does not have an overall 3.0 grade-point average or a 3.0 grade-point average in the last half of undergraduate work. An admitted provisional student must have at least a 2.5 grade-point average to enroll as a graduate student. Please note that students admitted provisionally must complete their first semester including 9 credits (course level 450 and above) with at least a 3.0 grade-point average in order to remain in graduate school. Provisional students can work as research assistants.

International students are eligible to receive a graduate assistantship. If funding for the graduate assistantship comes from the New Mexico State General Fund, the student must be a “regular” student. International students must have a current Social Security number in order to be employed at NMSU. Prior to the semester in which a teaching assistantship will be received, international students must complete the *International Teaching Assistant Screening* exam that is offered by the Communication Studies department of New Mexico State University. Students who pass the screening exam are eligible immediately for a teaching assignment. Those that do not pass the screening exam must enroll in and successfully complete Communication 485 (Comm. 485) in order to be hired as a graduate assistant.

All new graduate assistants must **attend a mandatory orientation** offered by the Graduate School. The orientation is offered during the first few weeks in August. Students only need to attend the orientation once. They do not need to repeat the orientation each year. In addition, departments may also require students to complete training workshops, seminars and orientations

to receive an assistantship. If a student becomes a new graduate assistant in the spring semester, departments are responsible for training their students.

## **II. Eligibility for In-State Tuition**

Out-of-state students and International students are eligible for in-state tuition if they obtain at least a 10 hour/week (.25 FTE) graduate assistantship. It must be a salary position. The Employment Services of the Office of Human Resources must approve the assistantship before census date (stated by Registrar's Office) each fall and spring semester for those out-of-state students that wish to pay in-state tuition. In the past, census date has been the third Friday of the semester. Please check with the Registrar's Office to identify census date each semester. Departments can hire students after census date. However, out-of-state students will be required to pay out-of-state tuition.

In order for graduate assistants to start their assistantships, the hiring department must complete the E-Hire forms and receive approval from Employment Services of the Office of Human Resources. We strongly suggest that graduate assistants check with their departments to ensure that the "E-Hire" form has been completed and submitted to Employment Services as soon as possible and in particular, prior to census date. Graduate assistants approved after census date will have to pay out-of-state tuition and fees. This is a New Mexico state policy not an NMSU policy.

We encourage out-of-state students to apply for in-state residency after their first year of enrollment at NMSU. Applications for state residency may be obtained in the Registrar's Office, in the Educational Services Building. We strongly encourage domestic students to become New Mexico residents. However, students will need to explore the impact of a change in residency on services they receive in their prior state of residency (such as car insurance). We realize that international students cannot apply for New Mexico state residency.

Out-of-state graduate students and international students who are paid by the hour are not eligible for in-state tuition and Graduate Assistant Health Insurance. This includes out-of-state graduate students who hold work-study positions.

## **III. How to Apply for a Graduate Assistantship**

In most cases, students do not apply directly for an academic department graduate assistantship. Departments offer first year students graduate assistantships as part of the recruitment process. For continuing graduate students, graduate assistantships are offered based on the needs of the program and the skills of the students. The Graduate School recommends that students contact the program they will be or are enrolled in and ask to be considered for a graduate assistantship. Some departments may require students to complete an employment application.

Service units and research centers also hire graduate assistants. In most cases, the announcement or advertisement of the position describes how to apply for employment. Job announcements are usually posted around campus, advertised in the student newspaper and/or through email.

Students seeking employment with a service unit or research center should investigate if payment is salary or hourly. As mentioned in part II, students who are paid by the hour do not qualify for in-state tuition.

#### **IV. Minimum Salary Requirements**

Each summer the Graduate School establishes a minimum payment scale for graduate assistants. Departments, research centers and service units **may pay students more** than the suggested minimum salary. Levels of support vary among students as indicated below. If a raise is issued by the state of New Mexico, a letter is sent to department heads during the summer indicating the new payment scale for all graduate assistantships. A description of the levels of support is discussed below.

Level I: This level is for regularly enrolled students pursuing a master's degree. This level is also for a first year student seeking a doctoral degree who does not currently hold a master's degree. Once the doctoral student becomes a second year student and passes their qualifying exam, they can obtain support as a Level II student.

Level II: This level is for regularly enrolled students pursuing the education specialist or doctoral degree who have passed the qualifying exam. This level is also for a graduate student who currently holds a master's degree and is entering a doctoral degree program.

Level III: This level is for a doctoral degree student who has passed the comprehensive exam and has advanced to candidacy.

To recruit the best students, departments, research centers and service units may wish to offer graduate assistants more than the minimum amount stated by the Graduate School.

#### **V. Enrollment Requirements**

All graduate assistants must enroll as full-time students taking at least 9 graded graduate credits (courses numbered 450 and above). No audits can be taken as part of the 9 minimum credits. Only 3 of the 9 credits may be taken as an S/U option. A graduate assistant may not enroll for more than 15 credits each semester. Students must maintain at least a 3.0 grade-point average in order to continue on an assistantship.

If a "regular" student (see prior definitions) needs to take deficiency courses as part of the 9 credits, then a memo from the advisor or department head should be submitted to the Graduate School. If approved, the student can register for 3 undergraduate credits and a minimum of 6 graded graduate credits during their first semester at New Mexico State University.

During the summer months, students are not required to enroll in courses while they hold positions as graduate assistants. If students enroll in at least 3 credits of instruction and work less than 21 hours a week, they do not pay FICA. However, if students are enrolled in at least 3

credits of instruction and work from 21 to 40 hours per week, the student and the department are required to pay FICA. If students do not enroll in courses, the student and the department is required to pay FICA regardless of the number of hours worked. Please check with the Payroll Office to see if the rules have changed regarding FICA.

It should be mentioned that the amount earned during the summer could have an impact the student's financial aid for the following year.

## **VI. Number of Years of Support from New Mexico State General Fund**

Limitations have been placed on years of support of graduate assistants that receive support from the New Mexico State General Fund through NMSU. This policy has been put in place to encourage students to graduate in a timely manner. For doctoral degree students, the limitations encourage departments to seek research support for their students.

*Departments can also place limits on the years of support graduate students receive from all sources of support.*

*a. Students enrolled in a 2-year master's degree program (less than 40 required credits):*

Only 2 years of support should be awarded from the New Mexico State General Fund. Departments can appeal for a 5<sup>th</sup> semester of support. Funding for additional semesters should come from other sources of support.

*b. Students enrolled in a 3-year Master's degree program (more than 40 required credits):*

Only 3 years of support should be awarded from the New Mexico State General Fund. Departments can appeal for a 7<sup>th</sup> semester of support. Funding for additional semesters should come from other sources of support. Students seeking a second master's degree at New Mexico State University can receive 2 to 3 years of additional support depending on the required years to complete the program.

*c. Entering Ph.D. students without a master's degree in the field of study:* For those students entering doctoral programs without a master's degree in their field of study, no more than 5 years of support should come from New Mexico State General Fund. Departments can appeal for a 6<sup>th</sup> year of support. Funding for additional years should come from other sources.

*d. Entering Ph.D. students with a master's degree in the field of study:* For those students entering doctoral programs with a master's degree in their field of study, a limit of 4 years of support should come from New Mexico State General Fund. Departments can appeal for a 5<sup>th</sup> year of support. Support for additional years should come from other sources.

## **VII. Maximum Number of Hours per Week**

Employment during the academic year is limited to 20 (.50 FTE) hours a week for graduate assistants regardless of the funding source. Students may seek other student employment positions as long as the combined employment does not exceed more than the 20 hours or .50

FTE.

We strongly encourage departments and service units to investigate whether a student is employed by another unit on campus.

Please note that NMSU does not allowed units, departments and/or research centers (all hiring units) to hire international students for more than 20 hours a week (.50 FTE) during the academic year.

Departments wishing to hire domestic students for more than the 20 hours a week (.50 FTE) must seek approval by the Graduate School. A memo must be submitted that discusses the number of credits in which the student has enrolled in, his/her current GPA and the additional activities of work. The memo must also include the number of additional hours of work as well as the total hours of work. Additional hours of work must include all forms of employment including the graduate assistantship, research assistantship, and employment as a college instructor and college faculty, to name a few. The Graduate School can terminate graduate assistantships if departments, research centers and service units fail to process forms for employment. The department head and the academic advisor must endorse the memorandum prior to submitting it to the Graduate School. The Graduate School discourages departments from hiring newly enrolled students for more than 20 hours per week. This includes all forms of employment.

Graduate students may work up to 40 hours a week during the summer as well as during fall, spring and winter breaks.

Limitations on number of hours of work are made to ensure that students graduate in a timely manner.

### **VIII. Holidays**

Graduate assistants are entitled to fall and spring breaks as well as the same holidays of faculty and staff. Refer to the current academic calendar for information on reporting dates and holidays. Students can also speak to their supervisors about make-up hours during fall and spring breaks.

### **IX. Termination of Employment**

Faculty and staff may find situations where they need to terminate an appointment of a graduate student. Grounds for termination include situations where the student is not performing satisfactory work. A termination should be handled in the same manner as terminating an employee. Supervisors must give the students a “verbal warning” and a “written warning” prior to dismissing them from their positions. The supervisor should make sure to document in writing the reasons for termination. The Graduate School suggests that supervisors review the NMSU Policy Manual on personnel issues. Prior to taking any action, please inform the Associate Dean of the Graduate School in writing about the student and the rationale for

termination. The Associate Dean will determine if it's possible to come up with a viable solution that meets the unit and students' needs or if termination is the best solution.

Staff/faculty must complete and submit a Personnel Action Form (PAF) anytime a student is terminating prior to their end date. You must also enter an Effective End Date. The student must sign the Personnel Action Form before it is routed for appropriate signatures. If a student chooses not to sign, please indicate the reason for termination in the Comments Section. If the student has sent you an email or a note or letter, please attach that to the Personnel Action Form.

Students may appeal to the Graduate School if they have evidence that their employment was unfairly terminated. Students should contact the Graduate School within 10 business days from the date of termination. A formal grievance letter (not an email) should be addressed to the Dean of the Graduate School. The dean will determine whether an investigation is appropriate. The dean will respond directly to the student in a timely manner.

## **X. Roles and Responsibilities**

### **a. The Graduate School**

The Graduate School provides a number of services related to the employment of graduate assistants. A brief summary is provided below.

- Acts as an advocate for graduate students at the university, state and national levels
- Provides mediation in cases of employment conflicts involving graduate students
- Disseminates information on the minimum pay scale for graduate assistants
- Approves appeals for graduate assistants related to employment (required by Employment Services for changes in hours and academic standing changes)
- Offers an orientation for graduate assistants engaged in instruction every August
- Monitors the academic progress of graduate assistants
- Provides professional development and retention workshops for students

Each August, the Graduate School offers a one-day mandatory orientation for graduate assistants. Topics include effective teaching strategies, working with a diverse student body, codes and policies of New Mexico State University and balancing teaching and academic life, to mention a few. The Graduate School also collaborates with a number of units on campus to offer workshops and support services for graduate assistants. Please check our web site for our list of workshops.

If departments would like for a domestic graduate assistant to work more than 20 hours during the academic year, they must send a request to the Graduate School for approval. The Graduate School reviews the academic performance of the student to determine if they can work additional hours and maintain a grade point average of 3.0 and above. The department must share the approved request with Employment Services. Staff of Employment Services can increase the hours of employment in their data base.

## **b. Employment Services, Office of Human Resources**

Employment Services is a unit within Human Resources that works with departments to process employment of NMSU staff, faculty and students including graduate assistants. Departments complete an “E-Hire” form with Employment Services to hire graduate assistants. Services that are provided by Employment Services are mentioned below:

- Offers employment workshops to units and departments on campus
- Processes E-Hire forms for payroll
- Works with the Graduate School on department appeals related to GA employment

For more information on hiring processes, please contact Employment Services, 575 646-8000. We also suggest that students, faculty and staff review information on employment in the Policy Manual of NMSU.

## **c. Graduate Assistants**

Graduate assistants are engaged in a number of professional activities that support the research and teaching mission of New Mexico State University. Responsibilities and expectations of graduate assistants are stated below.

- Provide a written schedule of work hours and/or agreed on tasks at the beginning of each semester
- Give your immediate supervisor your contact information---phone numbers, email addresses. The immediate supervisor is the primary faculty or staff that you report to and obtain work assignments from.
- Contact your primary supervisor immediately if you can't come to work
- Perform tasks assigned as professionally as possible
- The Graduate School expects all employers to provide regular written and oral performance evaluations to graduate assistants. If you are not receiving performance evaluations, we suggest that you request them from your immediate supervisor.
- Maintain academic status
- Learn about and use campus resources

NMSU views graduate assistants as emerging scholars, teachers, and professionals. We encourage students to behave as professionals. We expect students to devote an appropriate amount of time and energy to completing work assignments. We also expect students to let employers know when they cannot come to work. We want students to report to work at expected times, complete assignments in a timely fashion, and ask for help when needed. We encourage graduate students to review all policies of NMSU. We expect graduate assistants to maintain their academic status as students. We want students to engage in open discussions with their faculty especially in situations when they find themselves spending more than 20 hours per week on their work assignments. We also encourage graduate assistants to take advantage of professional development workshops offered by NMSU.

#### **d. Departments, Research Centers and Service Units**

Graduate assistants that are funded by the General Fund of the state of New Mexico should primarily be engaged in the educational mission of the university. They are expected to *work* for the assistantship. It is not a fellowship.

We ask that hiring units, either academic departments or service units, provide the following services to graduate assistants.

- An orientation for new student employees
- Regular performance evaluations to allow students to learn of their strengths and weaknesses
- Teaching evaluations
- Information on whom to contact in case of emergencies
- Guidelines on office procedures, for example, what to do if they can't come to work
- A hiring contract that informs students of the type of employment, their responsibilities, hours of employment, and reasons for termination of the contract.
- Other written guidelines that are specific to the appointment

Many of our graduate students are new to New Mexico State University. We ask that department and service units offer an orientation for new student employees that includes written office policies and procedures. We request that departments, research centers and service units conduct regular oral and written performance evaluations to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement. We encourage departments to evaluate the quality of teaching of graduate assistants. This could include adding a section on an existing evaluation form or creating a separate form for graduate assistants. It could also include participant observations in a classroom or lab.

#### **XI. Graduate Assistant Health Insurance Benefit Program**

New Mexico State University offers health insurance to all graduate assistants including teaching assistants, research assistants and graduate assistants employed by student services and other support units on campus. The university covers 70 percent of the cost of the health insurance plan. Graduate assistants cover the remaining 30 percent through payroll deductions.

*Eligibility* for the Graduate Assistant Health Insurance Benefit Program includes the following. Students must be on NMSU payroll as a graduate assistant to be eligible for this benefit program. Other criteria including the following: a) work at least 10 hours per week for an academic semester (.25 FTE) in a salary position; b) are a full-time graduate student enrolled in at least 9 graded credits from NMSU; c) are in good academic standing, d) attend one of the health insurance orientation programs for new graduate assistants, and e) complete the NMSU Graduate Assistant Health Insurance Benefit Program enrollment forms. All of the above criteria must be met to be eligible for health insurance.

For domestic students, enrollment in the health insurance program is *voluntary*. We realize that some students have health care insurance through their partner's or spouse's health insurance plan. International graduate assistants are required to have health insurance.

For more information on health insurance for graduate assistants, please visit the web site of the Graduate School: <http://gradschool.nmsu.edu/health/> or contact Benefit Services at 575 646-8000.

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We welcome your feedback on the Guidelines. Again the purpose of the *Guidelines on Graduate Assistantships* is to educate faculty, staff and students about the employment of graduate assistants. We wish to ensure that our students have a productive experience while completing their degree program in a timely manner.

Please email the Dean of the Graduate School if you have any questions or suggestions, [lacey@nmsu.edu](mailto:lacey@nmsu.edu).

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