Guidelines on Graduate Assistants Employment

Fifth Edition
The Graduate School, New Mexico State
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Our graduate assistants are engaged in the teaching, research, and service mission of New Mexico State University (NMSU). The efforts of our graduate assistants are vital to our success as a research institution. The primary purpose of the Graduate Assistant Guidelines is to educate faculty, staff, and students about the employment of graduate assistants.

These Guideline are a working document, recognizing that topics will be added or expanded based on the needs of faculty, staff, and students.

Topics covered in the guideline are listed below.

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I. Eligibility for Appointment

Graduate assistants (GA) can work in a teaching, research, service, or administrative assistant role. GAs are selected by departments, research centers, and service units to serve the needs of NMSU. 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 most situations, a graduate student must also meet the following criteria for a regular\(^1\), full-time student:

1. Enroll in nine (9) graded graduate credits during an academic semester (fall or spring semester\(^2\) with only one class below level 450),
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
4. For international students, pass the NMSU International Teaching Assistant screening test administered by the Department of English or another unit of NMSU. In cases where international students do not pass the NMSU English language screening tests, the student must be enrolled in the designated courses.

Exceptions to the stated guidelines

Provisional status students

A. Provisional students can work as research assistants.
B. Provisional students are defined as:
   a. Continuing graduate student
      i. Student whose cumulative grade point average at the close of any term is less than a 3.0 but at least a 2.5.
   b. A beginning graduate student
      i. Student who does not have an overall 3.0 grade point average or 3.0 in the last half of undergraduate work,
      ii. Has at least a grade-point average of 2.5, and
      iii. Has qualified for admission in a specific degree program and is taking nine (9) graded graduate credits. Undeclared graduate students do not qualify for a GA.

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\(^1\)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.

\(^2\)For GAs during the summer months, see section V on Enrollment Requirements.
A student admitted provisionally must complete their first three courses totaling at least nine
credits of graduate work (course level 450 and above), with an average of at least a 3.0.

A provisional student who does not meet the 3.0 grade-point average is subject to dismissal after
their first semester. Provisional students cannot work as teaching assistants.

Graduate students in their final semester before degree completion.

Graduate students in their final semester can submit a waiver for part-time enrollment, enrolling
in fewer credit hours. The level of credit hours is approved by the Department and Graduate
School.

Funding source of GA

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.

1. **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. Graduate students supported through
the New Mexico State General Fund must be admitted with “regular” status.

2. **Non-state funded Graduate Assistants**: A non-state funded GA can be a research
assistantship where students are engaged in research with faculty in their department,
another department or research center at NMSU. In some cases, assistants can also be
engaged in the teaching or service mission of the university. *Either regular or
provisional students with a GPA of at least 2.5 can be research assistants on non-state
funded projects.*

International graduate students.

International students are eligible to receive a graduate assistantship. International students must
have a current Social Security number to be employed at NMSU. If funding for the graduate
assistantship comes from the New Mexico State General Fund, the student must be a “regular”
student.

As noted above, prior to the semester in which a teaching assistantship will be received,
international students must complete the *International Teaching Assistant Screening (ITA)* exam.
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 English 471M to be
hired as a graduate assistant.
Graduate Assistant Orientation.

All new graduate assistants must attend a mandatory orientation or participate in an online, asynchronous orientation offered by the Graduate School.

- The in-person orientation is offered during the first few weeks of the Fall semester.
- Students only need to attend the orientation once; they do not need to repeat the orientation each year.
- 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 or summer semesters, they are required to participate in the online training and provide their department with a certificate of completion.

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) not to exceed 20 hour/week (.50 FTE) graduate assistantship. The GA must be hired in a salary position. For out-of-state students, Human Resource Services and the Graduate School must approve the assistantship before the fall and spring census dates (stated by Registrar’s Office) to qualify for in-state tuition.

- In the past, census date has been the third Friday of the semester. Please check the academic calendar to identify census date each semester.
- Departments can hire students after census date. However, out-of-state students are required to pay out-of-state tuition.

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

Gaining in-state residency

Out-of-state students are encouraged to apply for in-state residency after their first year of enrollment at NMSU. The Petition for In-State Residency Tuition Classification may be accessed through the University Student Records website and submitted to records@nmsu.edu for evaluation. 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).

NOTE: 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. This includes out-of-state graduate students who hold work-study positions.

III. How to Apply for a Graduate Assistantship

Students should contact their academic department about the availability of graduate assistantships. Departments often 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 posted through the graduate student email list-serve, through the Department of Experiential Learning’s Handshake platform, or via social media platforms. 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. 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. Departments, research centers, and service units may pay students more than the suggested minimum salary. Levels of support vary among student levels as indicated below. A description of the levels of support is discussed below.

1. G1 (Level I): This level is for regularly enrolled students pursuing a master’s degree. This level is also for first-year doctoral students who do not currently hold a master’s degree. Once doctoral students become a second-year student and pass their qualifying exam, they are classified as a Level II student.

2. G2 (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 graduate students who currently hold a master’s degree and are entering a doctoral degree program. It is also for a student who currently holds a master’s degree and is entering another master’s degree program.
3. G3 (Level III): This level is for doctoral degree students who has passed the comprehensive exam and have advanced to candidacy.

To recruit the best students, and depending on the GA funding source, departments, research centers and service units may offer graduate assistants more than the minimum amount stated by the Graduate School.

V. Enrollment Requirements

As noted above, all graduate assistants must enroll as full-time students taking at least 9 graded graduate credits (courses numbered 450 and above). Additional enrollment criteria:

- No audits can be taken as part of the 9 minimum credits.
- A graduate assistant may not enroll for more than 15 credits each semester, unless given permission from the department and Graduate School.
- Students must maintain at least a 3.0 grade-point average to continue 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 (450 or below) and a minimum of 6 graded graduate credits during their first semester at NMSU.

Summer enrollment

- During the summer months, students are not required to enroll in courses while they hold a GA position.
- The amount earned during the summer could have an impact the student’s financial aid for the following year.

Tax implications of course enrollment

Students enrolled in at least 5 credits of instruction do not pay FICA/Medicare taxes. Students not enrolled in courses, or enrolled less than 5 credits of instruction, will lose their FICA/Medicare exemption status, and will be required to pay these taxes. Please check with Human Resource Services to see if the rules have changed regarding Student FICA/Medicare taxation.

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. *Departments can place additional limits on the years of support graduate students receive from all sources of support.*
NOTE: For all these program limitations, funding for additional semesters should come from other sources of support beyond state funds.

State degree limitations:

- **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 5th semester of support.
- **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 7th semester of support.
- **Students seeking a second master’s degree at NMSU:**
  - Can receive 2 to 3 years of additional support depending on the required years to complete the program.
- **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 6th year of support.
- **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 5th year of support.

VII. Maximum Number of Hours per Week

Graduate assistant employment during the academic year is typically limited to 20 (.50 FTE) hours a week (hr/wk), regardless of the funding source. The limitations on number of GA hours worked adheres to federal regulations specific to employment benefits (see below for more details), and ensures that students graduate in a timely manner. The Graduate School discourages departments from hiring newly enrolled students for more than 20 hr/wk. This includes all forms of employment.

Students may be hired in more than one graduate assistantship if the combined employment does not exceed more than the 20 hr/wk (or .50 FTE). In the hiring process, we strongly encourage departments and service units to investigate whether a student is employed by another campus unit.
Federal hourly limits on graduate assistant positions.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act have implications for the maximum hours that all graduate assistants can work at NMSU. During the Academic year, the maximum number of hours is set at 25 hours per week for domestic students and 20 hours per week for international students. For those departments that wish to increase the number of hours worked beyond 20 hours per week, the department must submit a memo to the Graduate School for approval, and only five additional hours can be added to a domestic student’s current 20 hour a week workload. During the summer months, all graduate students can work up to 40 hours. These new changes will allow New Mexico State University to meet the requirements of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. For more information on the implications of this new law for all employees of NMSU, please visit the Human Resources website.

Employment options and procedures beyond 20 hours a week

1. Domestic students during the fall and spring semesters
   a. Domestic students can work up to 25 hr/wk (.625 FTE) university wide.
   b. Departments wishing to hire domestic students for more than the 20 hr/wk (.50 FTE) must seek approval by the Graduate School.
   c. A memo must be submitted that includes:
      i. the number of additional hours to be worked (not to exceed 25 hr/wk or .625 FTE)
      ii. the number of credits in which the student has enrolled in,
      iii. their current GPA,
      iv. the additional activities of work, and
      v. approval from the department head or academic advisor.
   d. The Graduate School can terminate graduate assistantships if departments, research centers, or service units fail to process forms for employment.

2. Graduate students may be hired up to 40 hours a week during the summer months.

3. International students.
   a. Please note federal regulations (i.e., SEVIS) do not allow NMSU hiring units (departments and/or research centers) to hire international students for more than 20 hours a week (.50 FTE) during the academic year.
   b. International students may work 40 hours per week during the summer.
   c. International students who have questions about this may contact the International Students and Scholar Services department (ISSS)

VIII. Holiday breaks

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. Roles and Responsibilities of GA employment

(1) The Graduate School

The Graduate School provides several services related to the employment of graduate assistants.

As stated earlier, the Graduate School provides mandatory orientation for new graduate assistants. The Graduate School also collaborates with campus units to offer teaching assistant workshops and support services for graduate assistants. The Graduate School approves domestic graduate assistant work beyond 20 hr/wk (.50 FTE) during the academic year to determine if GAs can work additional hours and maintain a 3.0 GPA and above.

The Graduate School also serves to:
- Act as an advocate for graduate assistants at the university, state, and national levels.
- Provides initial mediation in cases of employment conflict involving graduate assistants.
- Disseminates information about graduate assistant pay scale
- Provides professional development and retention workshops for students
- Appeals for graduate assistants on issues related to employment, as required by HRS for changes in hours and academic standing changes
- Monitors the academic progress of graduate assistants

(2) Office of Human Resources

Several departments within the Office of Human Resources have responsibilities with GA employment. We encourage students, faculty, and staff review information on employment in the Policy Manual of NMSU.

Employment and Compensation 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 the hiring process to hire graduate assistants. Services that are provided by Employment and Compensation Services are mentioned below:
- Offer employment workshops to units/departments on campus
- Reviews hiring actions
- For more information on hiring processes, please contact Employment and Compensation Services, at teamhrs@nmsu.edu 575 646-8000.

Employee & Labor Relations (ELR) works with the Graduate School on department appeals related to GA employment and termination.
(3) Graduate Assistants

Graduate assistants maintain responsibilities and expectations in their professional activities that support the research and teaching mission of NMSU. NMSU views graduate assistants as emerging scholars, teachers, and professionals. We encourage students to behave as professionals.

As professionals, the Graduate School has the following expectations for graduate assistants:

- We expect GAs to devote an appropriate amount of time and energy to completing work assignments.
- We expect GAs to work with your immediate supervisor to develop a written schedule of work hours and/or agreed upon tasks at the beginning of each semester.
- We also expect GAs to provide supervisors necessary contact information (i.e., cell numbers) and let employers know when they cannot come to work.
- We want GAs to report to work at expected times, complete assignments in a timely fashion, and ask for help when needed.
- We encourage GAs to review all policies of NMSU.
- We expect GAs to maintain their academic status as students.
- We want GAs to engage in open discussions with their faculty, especially in situations when they believe they are spending more than 20 hours per week on their work assignments.
- We encourage GAs to take advantage of professional development workshops offered by NMSU.
- We expect GAs to have a right to receive 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.

(4) 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. Many of our graduate students are new to NMSU. As such, the Graduate School asks that hiring units, either academic departments or service units, provide the following services to graduate assistants.

- Submit an Electronic Personnel Action Form with a copy of the approved request to Employment Services.
o Offer an orientation for new student employees that includes content specific to the place of work (i.e., written office/department/lab policies and procedures).

o Create an offer letter that informs GAs of the type of employment, employment responsibilities, hours of employment, guidelines on office procedures, and reasons for contract termination. Please visit the Graduate Assistant Toolkit on the HR website for a sample offer letter. It is important that you visit the link to download the latest letter each semester for the most up-to-date language and requirements.

o Provides contact and procedural information in the event of emergencies.

o Conduct regular oral and written performance evaluations to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

o 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.

o Develop other written guidelines that are specific to the GA appointment.

X. 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 Dean of the Graduate School in writing about the student and the rationale for termination. The 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.

When terminating a student prior to the stated end date, staff/faculty must complete and submit an Electronic Personnel Action Form (EPAF). You must also enter an Effective End Date. If the student has sent you an email or a note or letter, please attach that to the Personnel Action Form.