

Guidance and Policies for Graduate Research and Teaching Assistantships

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*Any language that includes references to policy or the *OSU Catalog* are current policies and not just best or suggested practices.

Assistantship Offer Letters

The OSU Graduate College provides template letters for making an initial offer of financial support to a prospective student. These templates should be used for any assistantship offers that come with the expected assistantship benefits, such as tuition waivers and/or subsidized, single-person health insurance coverage. When possible, multi-year offers, contingent upon a satisfactory annual review, are encouraged as they are more competitive than one-semester/single-year offers, and templates also include this option. This is an especially important consideration for offers to international students, as the value of the assistantship is used as part of the financial guarantee required of the student; the more offered in the assistantship, the less personal funds needed by the student.

- **Assistantship Types and Definitions:** See [University Catalog, Section 3.5 Graduate Assistantships](#) for complete Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant (GRA/GTA) employment definitions. In brief, GRAs/GTAs must be admitted to and meet the requirements of the Graduate College, be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, enrolled, and be under the supervision of an appropriate graduate faculty member. Assistantships are to align with the student's field of study. Individuals who do not qualify for assistantship positions, such as a lack of proper enrollment and/or being non-degree seeking or certificate-only students, may still be employed as hourly student workers.
- **Student Worker:** The Student Worker is an employed student not meeting the above GRA/GTA criteria and constitutes an employer-employee status within the Oklahoma State University system and requires compensation based on actual time worked as assigned. Documentation of hours worked via a time sheet and an hourly wage of at least the Federal minimum wage, are required.
- See [University Catalog, Section 3.6 Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities](#) for enrollment requirements.

Before an assistantship expires, a new offer letter should be issued to continuing students well in advance of the next assignment start date whenever possible. While budgets and course schedules can be fluid, many programs have a general idea of how many assistantship positions they need each semester and should make as many offers as early as possible to ensure students have the time to plan their resources.

- Offer letter templates can be found in the *Graduate Faculty Canvas Community* under "Modules," "Forms and Templates."

Accepting a Financial Offer

For financial offers that are made for spring 2023 forward, incoming students should be given at least two weeks to accept an offer of financial support (see below, "[Student Time Frame to Consider Financial Offers](#)"). This does not apply to admission-only offers. ([Policy](#))

Assistantship Pay

OSU Institutional Research and Analytics (IRA) does an annual stipend survey for graduate student assistantship positions with several institutions participating. Therefore, data is available on the IRA dashboards about the competitiveness of OSU stipends by discipline. More specific reports can be purchased for a nominal fee.

- See [Graduate Assistant Stipend Comparison](#), [Graduate Assistant Stipend Survey](#) and [Special Studies](#).
- **Minimum Stipend:** The current (2022) minimum stipend for a graduate assistantship is \$1,200/month for a 0.50 FTE. This minimum is announced each summer at least a year in advance of the fiscal year (FY) to ensure programs have time to plan (e.g., announced in summer 2022 for July 1, 2023 or FY24).
- **Differential Pay:** More experienced GRAs/GTAs should receive a higher stipend. This differential pay should be at least 15% higher for students who have a master's degree in the academic discipline or who are post-candidacy in the OSU PhD program. The pay rate is not required to change until the next semester (i.e., no changes during current assignment semester are expected). Note: this is current policy and is under review.

Assistantship Expectations

Once an assistantship offer is accepted, the program should provide any additional details about the position in a timely manner to allow the student to prepare for the assignment. For example, for GTAs, what is the role (e.g., grader, lab prep, discussion session, instructor of record for a course, course assignment)? The program should also provide training to ensure that the student can be effective and define the expectations for being successful in an assistantship position. Handing out a syllabus and a textbook is insufficient “training” for new GTA to be the instructor of record for a course. The Graduate College and ITLE provide training on specific topics semi-annually at the GTA conference; however, this does not address discipline-specific responsibilities. Expectations for GRAs for the time they are employed should also be documented either through agreed upon action items, course syllabus or learning contract.

- Course syllabus and student contract templates can be found in the *Graduate Faculty Canvas Community* under “Modules,” “Forms and Templates,” “Dissertation Research 6000 Syllabus Template,” and “Learning Contract,” respectively.

Employment Location

Note that any assistantship that has the GTA/GRA working outside of the state of Oklahoma requires review in advance by Human Resources and Legal Counsel to ensure OSU is abiding by the employment and tax laws of the entity where the work is being performed. Depending on the extent of the review, units may bear significant expenses for such approval. To determine if grant- and contract-funded site work may be exempt from these provisions, please contact the grad.dean@okstate.edu well in advance.

International Students

International graduate students cannot be admitted to online programs if they plan to come to the US for their graduate work, nor can they take the majority of their coursework online while here.

- **Teaching Assistants:** Note international teaching assistants cannot be assigned most instructional responsibilities without passing the International Teaching Assistant (ITA) exam given through the Graduate College.
- See [University Catalog, Section 4.4.2 Spoken English proficiency for Employment](#) for testing requirements.

Assistantship Appointment: Duration and Hours

By OSU's definition on record with the federal government, a Full Time Equivalent (FTE) position of 1.00 is 40 hours/week. Assistantships are normally 0.50 FTE (tuition waiver and health insurance eligible) or 0.25 FTE (health insurance eligible), which equates to approximately 20 or 10 hours/week, respectively. The FTE must reflect the average work being performed on a regular basis and should not be adjusted to change the pay of the individual.

- See [University Catalog, Section 3.6 Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities](#) for FTE information.

To qualify for assistantship benefits, the assistantship must be at length of the academic term of employment. For example, a qualifying appointment for fall/spring semesters is 17 weeks – classwork begins to classwork/finals end. Assistantships that are less than the minimum timeframe are an exception that must be approved by the Graduate College in advance to determine if any benefits will apply. An example of an exception is when a student is graduating and departing mid-semester for their new employment.

- See [Tuition Waiver Exception Request](#).

Per policy, students may not be employed more than 0.50 FTE during the fall and spring semesters or 0.75 FTE in the summer. Any exceptions for employment above these maximums must be approved by the Graduate College. Note, international students cannot be approved for employment that exceeds 0.50 FTE during the fall and spring semesters due to visa restrictions.

- See [University Catalog, Section 3.6 Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities](#) for maximum FTE information.

Leave Expectations

Graduate student assistantship positions do not accrue leave; however, like all people, there is a need for periodic time away from work as well as recovery time from illnesses.

- **Annual Leave:** Students are expected to fulfill the obligations of their assistantship and only take pre-approved leave for personal time off, such as vacation. For example, GTAs

should not expect time off during their instructional responsibilities or during critical project deadlines for those on GRAs. However, those on year-long assistantships should be given time off for life events and to reboot. At least one week a year with the additional University-recognized federal holidays is the recommended minimum amount of time off for students on assistantship. Federal holidays do not refer to entire University breaks, such as winter break, as this can be the most beneficial time to make significant progress toward degree. Any leave requires communication between the student and supervisor to allow for appropriate expectations and planning.

- **Sick Leave:** Unfortunately, most people will become sick at some point during the year, and for those on assistantship it may interfere with their position responsibilities.

Graduate programs and research advisors should have a policy to address how these situations are handled. For example, with teaching appointments, it is common to trade assignments to cover those that are out due to illness for a short period of time. Any graduate student on an assistantship should be provided in writing what to do when they are sick, and it should not involve them calling around for a replacement to cover their assignment that day. Units/research programs should have a central contact point and a standard way of handling these situations.

Many times, illnesses are obvious and do not require medical intervention; therefore, requiring someone to visit a healthcare facility to seek unnecessary medical attention for a single instance of illness is not reasonable and adds unnecessary burdens to our healthcare organizations. Use the reasonable person test: What would a reasonable person with knowledge of the facts do? Certainly, if there is a repeated concern, then requiring a medical excuse is warranted.

- **Extended Leave:** There are times when extended leave, such as for birth of a child or long-term illness, is necessary. In these cases, a formal leave of absence, temporary change of assignment, etc. may be appropriate. Please reach out to the Graduate College for assistance as necessary.
- See [University Catalog, Section 7.1 Leave of Absence](#).

Employment over University breaks

If a student is continuing in a GRA or GTA position the following semester, assistantships should continue through breaks whenever possible. This does not imply additional assistantship responsibilities should be assigned during this time. Programs that terminate assistantships over breaks, like during the winter break, and restart them the following spring semester should understand this impact. Graduate students, like faculty and staff, continue to have living expenses, and a program's ability to recruit well-prepared, talented students is impacted by such non-competitive financial offers. Students talk to prospective students, and this practice will be viewed negatively by prospective students and not competitive with their other offers. Moreover, this can be a great time to make progress on their research, scholarly and creative activities.

Summer Assistantships and Enrollment

Students on assistantships must be enrolled during the summer for a minimum of two credit hours and may be employed at 0.75 FTE if necessary.

- See [University Catalog, Section 3.6 Graduate Assistantship Responsibilities](#) for minimum enrollment requirements.

Termination of an Assistantship and Required Due Process

If a student is not meeting assistantship expectations and/or making satisfactory degree progress, including UR grades, those concerns should be documented, and a remediation plan developed with a clear indication of the potential consequences of not meeting expectations in the plan. For example, the remediation plan should clearly delineate the requirements for reemployment as a GRA/GTA if that is a possibility or grounds for termination of the position at the end of the assignment. Allegations of misconduct, such as Academic Integrity (AI) charges, do not allow for an assistantship to be terminated. Due process for such charges must occur; actions are taken based on a finding of responsibility not just an allegation.

Assistantship positions should not be terminated without the involvement of the Graduate College to ensure policy and procedures are followed and the associated assistantship benefits are addressed. In the absence of extraordinary circumstances, such as failure to show for the assignment or creating safety concerns, assistantships are not terminated mid-semester. In rare cases when an assistantship is terminated early, the associated assistantship tuition waiver benefits are pro-rated based on the business days of employment. Catastrophic personal circumstances should be handled through the **leave of absence policy** whenever possible. Any assistantship termination is to be in writing to the student with appropriate individuals copied.

- See [University Catalog, Section 7.1 Leave of Absence](#).

Tuition Waiver Contracts

Students must submit tuition waiver contracts by the deadline *each and every* semester, including summer, that students want to receive tuition waiver benefits. Waivers without the required employment (EPAF) and enrollment will not process. See below for course eligibility and frequent reasons why a waiver has not posted to a bursar account.

- See [Tuition Waiver Information and Eligibility](#) for additional information.
- Typical reason why a tuition waiver did not post: eligible assistantship not in the payroll system; not enrolled in sufficient hours per employment or academic requirements; no contract submitted and/or admission into an ineligible graduate program (i.e., certificate-seeking only, non-degree seeking).

Employment vs. Volunteering

If an individual is performing duties that would normally be under an assistantship or staff position, they must be paid for that work at the time the work is performed versus “volunteering.” Workload exceptions that exceed the maximums must also be processed prior to the work being performed and are not approved after the fact. Both requirements are necessary for OSU to comply with federal regulations.

OSU does have individuals who volunteer their time on occasion, such as a student working in a lab under the guidance of a faculty member on a school project. In these cases, the individual should have submitted the [OSU Volunteer Form](#). If the volunteer is a minor, OSU policies, such as [Minors Participating in OSU-Related Activities and Programs](#), must be followed.

Student Time Frame to Consider Financial Offers

Offers of Financial Support that Accompany Admissions Recommendations: Units (e.g., graduate programs, auxiliary units, academic advising offices) making financial offers are required to provide applicants appropriate time to consider offers. The OSU Graduate Council has set a *minimum* consideration time of two weeks or 14 calendar days post official, written notification (e.g., via the Slate portal) for applicants to accept offers of financial support (e.g., a graduate fellowship, scholarship, assistantship or traineeship). Acceptance of such an offer by a prospective or enrolled graduate student is an agreement that both student and graduate program are to honor. Acceptance of a financial offer commits the individual not to accept another offer without first notifying the institution to which the original commitment was made. Approved by Graduate Council: March 25, 2022

Endorsed by Graduate Council, October 28, 2022