



# **Graduate Assistant Supervisor Handbook**

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## Table of Contents

Mission Statement	2
Philosophy	2
Types of Graduate Assistantships	2
Assistantships by Program	2
Graduate Assistant Position General Duties	3
Establishing a Graduate Assistant	4
Base-Budget GA's	4
Department and Grant Funded GA's	4
Hiring Process for Base-Budget, Department, and Grant Funded GAs	5
Cost of GA to Department	6
Graduate Assistant Stipends	6
Graduate Assistant Tuition Scholarships	6
Graduate Assistant Residency	7
Summer Carry-Over Tuition	7
Keeping Laptop Over the Summer	7
Failure to Meet Assigned Responsibilities	7
Evaluating GA's	8
What to do if GA is Leaving	8
GA Contracts dates	8
New GA Orientation	9
Non-Discrimination Statement	9

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Graduate Assistant program at NMU is to help recruit high quality graduate level students while simultaneously providing experience aligned with their academic pursuits. Graduate Assistantships aim to foster professional and personal growth and development for graduate students while providing highly skilled graduate student workers to help support various departments across campus.

## **Philosophy**

Programs of graduate study have been established at Northern Michigan University to assist the individual in gaining advanced knowledge with their chosen discipline, and to help transform the individual from the role of student to one of professional scholar. Graduate assistantships are used to attract highly desired students. The primary role of the graduate assistantships is to facilitate progress toward completion of the graduate degree. While the graduate assistant is expected to make progress toward degree completion, they also receive professional work experience under the supervision of a faculty mentor. While graduate assistants are expected to carry out responsibilities greater than those of other graduate students, the opportunities for professional development are greater.

Graduate assistants are expected to perform well academically in order to retain their assistantships. As they develop their professional skills, assistants should expect regular counseling and evaluation by a faculty/staff mentor to assure development of professional skills. Moreover, as an appointed representative of Northern Michigan University, the graduate assistant is expected to meet teaching, research, and/or administrative obligations. They are expected to work under the supervision of experienced faculty/staff and receive in-service training for assigned duties.

Whenever possible, the studies of graduate students and their assistantship responsibilities should reinforce each other and enhance the development of professional skills necessary for successful career development.

## **Types of Graduate Assistantships**

***Teaching Assistantships:*** A teaching assistant works with students in an assigned course to provide support for the faculty member in charge, and may teach the course as the primary instructor under the direct supervision of a faculty mentor.

***Administrative Assistantships:*** An administrative assistant works with the administrative staff of a department, college, or division primarily in gathering, organizing, and analyzing information. While the assistantship may not directly enhance advanced disciplinary knowledge, the experiences should enhance the skills necessary for professional career development.

***Research Assistantships:*** A research assistant works directly under the supervision of the principal investigator of a research project. The range of duties varies, but may include library searches, field work, laboratory experimentation, and preparation of reports, etc. It is the intent, the student's work on a research project will lead to a thesis or research practicum, and provide long-range direction for the student's scholarly development.

### **Graduate Assistant Position General Duties and Expectations**

- Duties of a graduate assistant are designed to complement the student's graduate program and to advance the program of the assigning department. Duties assigned to the graduate assistant are subject to approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research. The workload of a graduate assistant should be attainable in 20 hours per week during the fall and winter semesters. There are no exceptions to this rule. Typical duties and responsibilities of graduate assistants may include:
  - GAs are expected to be more responsible and take more initiative than a regular student worker, but less than a full-time employee. Job tasks should reflect this. A GA cannot take the job of a unioned worker. Their tasks must be different from those of full-time employees.
  - Examples of appropriate tasks for GAAs: GAAs typically work on individual projects, help to run small scale events and meetings, work on specific grants or projects, assist full-time employees with tasks.
  - Examples of inappropriate tasks: writing policy and guidelines, being the only person 'in-charge' of events or meetings, tasks that cannot flex around their class schedule, tasks that will take more than 20 hours per week, anything that is written in the job description of a current employee or an open union employee position.
  - All GAs must be students in good academic standing and maintain a 3.0 GPA. Students who are admitted with an academic (GPA) condition are not eligible for a GAship until the condition is met.
  - All GAs must be enrolled in at least 6 graduate credit hours
  - GA's may not be employed in any other long term capacity at Northern Michigan University during their contracted dates
  - If you are not sure if a student you are interested in hiring is eligible, contact Graduate Studies to check. This is best done before the interview stage.

## **Establishing a Graduate Assistant**

To create a new Graduate Assistant position, a department needs to develop a written description of the related duties and submit it to the Assistant Director of Graduate Student Affairs, along with an outline of the student's workload. The workload will consist of 20 assigned hours per week. The graduate Office will authorize the establishment of a Graduate Assistant position upon approval of the written description.

## **Base-Budget GA's**

Base-Budget GA's are GA's that are funded through the University's base-budget. Base-budget GA's are divided among academic departments and can consist of Graduate Teaching Assistants, Graduate Research Assistants, and Graduate Administrative Assistants.

Starting in **January** the Base-Budget GA process starts. You will receive an email with a Graduate Assistant Request Form to fill out. Department heads should work with graduate program directors to fill the form out with the academic department's rationale and number of base-budgeted graduate assistant requests. Please fill out one GA request form per department.

Once all submissions are received the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies and Research meets with the Deans of the other departments Base-Budget GA lines are assigned. Keep in mind there are only 77 Base-Budget GA lines to allocate, everything is done to meet each department's needs, but sometimes it just isn't possible to do so.

Departments are only considered to have base-budget lines if they meet the following criteria:

- Are requested to and have completed the Graduate Assistant Request Form
- Have received an email from the College of Graduate Studies allocating GA lines to that specific department
  - Base budget GAs lines are only guaranteed through **June 1st** of each year. After that date, unassigned GA lines *may* be reassigned to a different department.

## **Department and Grant Funded GAs**

Departments who want to hire a GA but haven't been allocated base-budget GA's, may decide to fund their own GA or find funding for a GA, these are called *Department and Grant Funded GA's*. All GAs that are not funded through the base-budget GA lines will fall under this category.

## Hiring Process for Base-Budget, Department, and Grant Funded GAs

- For pre-existing positions, if requested, send your position description to Sarah Amidon, Assistant Director of Graduate Student Affairs for review and approval. Position descriptions should be reviewed every 2 years and kept on file with the hiring department and the College of Graduate Studies and Research.
- For new GA positions, submit the job description to the [GA Job Description Approval Form](#). Graduate Studies will review the job description to ensure that it meets the criteria outlined above or suggest revisions.
- Upon approval, Graduate Studies will email approval to the department. Graduate Studies will post the position on their [GA Info and Open Positions page](#). The posting department can choose to post the position in other venues as they wish.
- Predetermined selection criteria needs to be established based on the approved position description, to help objectively make your hiring decisions.
  - If you have questions about how to establish selection criteria please contact Sarah Amidon-Assistant Director of Graduate Student Affairs
- Advertising position- If hiring a **NEW GRADUATE ASSISTANT** you must run a search to ensure every qualified student is given an equal opportunity to apply and be considered.
  - Jobs can be posted on Graduate Studies website and also on Handshake
- The materials requested for applicants are up to the hiring department. Most departments ask for a resume, cover letter, and sometimes letters of recommendation/references. Students should send all application documents directly to the hiring department.
- Interviews must be given to the top candidate(s)
- The position should be given to the student who is most qualified for the position based on the predetermined selection criteria
- For both returning GAs and new GAs, the department will complete the [GA hiring form](#), serving as documentation for processing the GA request and creating the contract.
- The department must also start the background check process by completing this [background check form](#).
  - Once this process is started an email will be generated to the student to finish the process. The person from the department who initiated it, will receive an email once the background check is complete.
    - ***All GA's returning or new must have a background check completed every 12 months per HR rules. To avoid any disruption in the process, all GA's are required to get background checks every fall.***
- Upon completion of the background check, and GA hiring form, the contract and GA offer letter will be generated and sent to the student.

- Once the GA's contract is signed Academic Affairs finalizes it and sends it to the student, the hiring department's administrative assistant, Human Resources, Payroll, and the College of Graduate Studies and Research.
- Students are instructed to contact their hiring departments Administrative Assistant to complete their Human Resource Forms. This is the information they receive in their offer letter: “**Action Required #2: To be completed after turning in your signed contract.** If you are a new hire to the university you will need to complete an electronic I-9, a MI W4, a Federal W 4, and a direct deposit form. These forms can be found at <https://nmu.edu/hr/hr-forms>. Please contact your department to complete the electronic I-9 and payroll forms.”
- Students must complete a notarized College Oath. Bree Butler in Academic Affairs is a notary public, and is available for in-person appointments. They may contact her to schedule an appointment and receive their Oath Card. If they are a returning GA they do not need to fill another Oath Card out.
- It is up to the department to keep detailed records of their hiring process

### **Cost of GA to Department**

#### *Graduate Assistant Benefits*

- Annual stipend of \$11,236 (paid out bi-weekly while on-contract)
- Full-tuition scholarships covering 100% of in-state tuition and fees (up to 8 credits/semester)
  - Please see the cost of tuition for your particular program by following this [LINK](#).
- Complimentary faculty/staff parking pass
- Access to the Vielmetti Health Center
- University issued laptop
- 3 meals auto loaded weekly to their ID card during the academic year

### **Graduate Assistant Stipends**

Stipends for graduate assistants have been standardized for full-time appointments. Some part-time appointments may be available and will vary depending upon assignment. Salary and tuition reduction are stated in both the contract and the job description for the position.

GA's are paid on normal NMU pay days. Please check out the [payroll website](#).

### **Graduate Assistant Tuition Scholarships**

Graduate Assistants receive tuition scholarships for graduate-level credits for the period of time that they are appointed. Full appointments allow up to 16 credit hours of tuition scholarship per

academic year. Part-time appointments cover 8 credit hours of tuition scholarship per academic year.

### Qualifying for Tuition Scholarship

- To qualify for the tuition scholarship, Graduate Assistants must be enrolled in at least 6 graduate-level credits in each of the fall and winter semesters. The tuition scholarship can be split unevenly between the semesters. The scholarship will adjust automatically for 6 – 8 credits.
- The student must fill out the [Tuition Flex Form](#), requesting 9 or 10 credits of tuition scholarship in a semester or using remaining GA credits to pay for summer classes

### Tuition and Fees

- Graduate Assistants may receive the tuition scholarship up to the number of credits required to fulfill their degree. All credits paid for under this tuition waiver must be a requirement for that student's graduate program.
- The Tuition Scholarship covers tuition and most fees.
  - The tuition scholarship does not cover the Doctor of Nursing Practice Program fee or other licensure fees.

### Graduate Assistant Residency

For the purpose of tuition charges, all Graduate Assistants are considered residents of Michigan.

### Summer Carry-Over Tuition

- Graduate assistants may elect to use part of their tuition waivers from their current appointment to pay for summer graduate-level credits. The maximum that can be “carried-over” is two credit hours from each semester, since the student must remain enrolled in at least six credits each semester of the academic year to be eligible for their assistantship.
- At the conclusion of the winter semester, the College of Graduate Studies will communicate summer tuition requests to the Financial Aid Office.
- The Financial Aid Office will put the tuition stipend on the student's record, as long as the student is registered for the credits.
- Failure to enroll in the approved summer credit hours by **June 1** will result in forfeiture of the credit waiver.



### **Keeping Laptop Over the Summer**

During the summer, graduate assistants who want to keep their laptops must be pre-registered for the fall semester. If the student fails to pre-register, he or she will be given the choice of either turning in the computer or paying the computer fee.

### **Failure to Meet Assigned Responsibilities**

It is expected that graduate assistants will meet their assigned responsibilities in a professional manner. If for any reason they are ill or unable to carry out these responsibilities, they are expected to notify the faculty or staff mentor and the department head immediately. Appointed graduate assistants do not have the benefit of paid sick leave. If prolonged periods of illness or absence exist, the department maintains the responsibility to make recommendations for how the assigned responsibilities can be met. Because the appointment to a graduate assistantship does not provide the individual with employment rights, missed time is expected to be made up at the discretion of the departments.

Departments hold disciplinary oversight for those assistants who do not meet assigned responsibilities. The Assistant Director of Graduate Student Affairs should be notified by the appropriate department head when a graduate assistant fails to meet assigned responsibilities and termination is being considered.

### **Evaluating GA's**

GA supervisors should evaluate each GA once a semester, but are responsible for evaluating GA performance at the end of each contract. It is expected that the supervisor will go over any concerns they have, set goals for the following year if the GA is returning, and any updated expectations.

If a supervisor is having an unsatisfactory experience with a GA it is important to talk to Sarah Amidon in the College of Graduate Studies and Research, but also communicate any concerns with the GA. It is encouraged to document any corrective or disciplinary conversations you have.

### **[GA Evaluation Form](#)**

### **What to do if GA is Leaving**

In the event a GA is leaving before the end of their contract, the GA's Supervisor **MUST** report this to Sarah Amidon in the College of Graduate Studies and Research, the hiring departments Administrative Assistant, along with the Department Head. The College of Graduate Studies and

Research needs to communicate this information to Academic Affairs, Payroll, and many other offices across campus to avoid any overpayment or security risk.

### [Termination Form](#)

### **GA Contracts dates**

GA contract dates with the hiring department's run from the Wednesday before classes start in the fall semester to the Tuesday grades are due in December. Contracts start again the Wednesday before classes start in the winter semester and end Tuesday grades are due in May. GA's are given Fall Break, Holiday Break, and Spring Break as off contract times, and do not need to report to work during these days. Please check out the [academic calendar](#).

GA contracts run during the academic year. If you wish to hire your GA as a graduate student worker during the summer, that is done through the EPAF system and goes through HR.

### **New GA Orientation**

New GA's must complete orientation. All new GA's starting in the fall will participate in and complete College of Graduate Studies and Research orientation and New Faculty orientation on the Monday and Tuesday in August before their contracts with the department starts on Wednesday. This orientation is **MANDATORY**.

New GA's who start in the winter will receive an on-line orientation and be expected to participate in the next fall's orientation dates.

### **Non-Discrimination Statement**

Northern Michigan University does not unlawfully discriminate on the basis of ancestry, race, color, ethnicity, religion or creed, sex or gender, gender identity\*, gender expression, genetic information, national origin, immigration status (unless restricted by State or federal laws and regulations), age, height, weight, marital status, familial status, pregnancy, disability, sexual orientation, military or veteran status, or any other characteristic protected by federal or state law in employment or the provision of services. NMU provides, upon request, reasonable accommodation including auxiliary aids and services necessary to afford individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to participate in all programs and activities.

For more information visit the [Equal Opportunity website](#).