

## TERMS OF OFFER AND GENERAL CONDITIONS OF A GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP APPOINTMENT

### I. Terms of Offer:

Offer Made To: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Offer: \_\_\_\_\_  
Total Stipend: \_\_\_\_\_ Plus Remission of Graduate  
Starting Date of Assistantship: \_\_\_\_\_ Assistant Rate Tuition: \_\_\_\_\_  
Department\* Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Date of Assistantship: \_\_\_\_\_  
Type of Assistantship: \_\_\_\_\_ Estimated Weekly Hours: \_\_\_\_\_  
Appointment Description: \_\_\_\_\_

Contingent Upon Your Enrollment in the Graduate School as a graduate student in the major field of: \_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Program Search

Date Upon Which to Report: \_\_\_\_\_ Report to: \_\_\_\_\_  
Status of Admission: \_\_\_\_\_

During the course of their assistantship activities, graduate students are expected to maintain the same high standards of ethical and moral behavior expected of faculty members (see Policy [AC47 General Standards of Professional Ethics](#)).

Satisfactory performance of assistantship activities and academic progress is a condition of the appointment. An assistantship may be terminated if a graduate student fails to meet departmental standards. Procedural guidelines are available on the Graduate School website under [GCAC-804: Termination of Assistantship Due to Inadequate Performance](#).

Additional paperwork is required to finalize all new assistantship appointments. Please contact your department for information.

An early acceptance (or refusal) would be appreciated. If you accept an offer for fall semester before April 15, you are free to withdraw your acceptance until that date. An acceptance left in force beyond April 15 is a commitment not to accept an offer from any other university for the period of this offer. If you have received an offer after April 15, you have ten (10) working days from the date of the offer (given above) to accept. Please return signed copy of this offer and retain a copy for your files. Acceptance of this offer will not preclude you from being offered a fellowship or traineeship at a later date. Should you be offered such an appointment at The Pennsylvania State University, you are free to resign this appointment in order to accept the better offer.

\*Wherever the word "department" appears, it refers to the unit with fiscal responsibility for the student's assistantship..

### II. General Conditions of a Graduate Assistantship Appointment

#### Period of Appointment:

The Pennsylvania State University operates on a semester calendar system. The period of instruction each semester is 15 weeks. Graduate assistants are appointed for 18 weeks each semester, for on average the number of hours per week appropriate to the assistantship type (e.g., 1/4-time, 1/2-time, or 3/4-time). All graduate assistantship appointments are made for one or two semesters and/or for the summer sessions. Students are expected to be involved in assistantship activities for an approximate total of 18 weeks per semester during the dates indicated on their Terms of Offer, not including official University holidays, campus closures (including for inclement weather, etc.) and during the spring break and the Thanksgiving holiday break. Under particular circumstances, primarily for students whose first semester will be during the summer session, students may be appointed to traditional graduate assistantships during the summer session for a period of up to 12 weeks. However, in most cases, students are appointed as Summer Lecture/Researchers during the summer sessions, see [GSAD-905 Summer Lecture/Researcher](#).

There may be exceptional circumstances such as with specialized maintenance and/or data collection from research animals, where assistantship activities must be conducted during University holidays/closures and cannot be delegated to other individuals, or when an experimental protocol runs over months and cannot be interrupted or suspended to allow time away. In such circumstances, the graduate student should be made aware prior to the start of the assistantship appointment involving the affected period, and other time away should be arranged in exchange. Students should consult with the following individuals as needed to address any concerns about a request that assistantship activities span University holidays/closures: assistantship provider, advisor (if not the same individual), graduate program chair, college/school administrator for graduate education (typically an assistant/associate/senior associate dean). Finally, if preferred or if necessary when the previously mentioned individuals cannot assist, the Associate Dean for Graduate Student Affairs in the Graduate School serves as ombudsperson for Graduate Students and is available to discuss your specific situation.

The period of appointment being offered to you is set forth above. Preference in renewals normally is given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in the performance of assistantship activities and in academic progress. A graduate assistantship may be terminated prior to completion of the full term of appointment if the student fails to meet departmental standards as described above, following due process procedures as described in [GCAC-804: Procedures for Termination of Assistantships Dues to Inadequate Performance](#).

#### Eligibility:

New appointments are contingent upon the student's admission to the Graduate School as a degree-seeking student enrolled in residence. Certain IUG students in simultaneous degree programs, approved by the Dean of the Graduate School, are also eligible. Non-degree students are not eligible for assistantship appointments.

#### Objectives of Assistantships:

Graduate assistants are students, and graduate assistantships provide pedagogic and educational experiences designed to make students better instructors, researchers, and scholars. Thus, it is a general policy to assign graduate assistants largely scholarly tasks that will provide a useful and meaningful experience in their major field. Assistantship activities may include teaching, research, and other activities as assigned by the unit providing the assistantship.

Will all of the activities assigned to this student be required of every degree candidate in the applicable program as a condition of receiving a degree? This only applies to those Graduate Assistantship appointments where the student is performing activities in Pennsylvania. If the student is living and performing activities outside of Pennsylvania, the Yes (non-taxable) does not apply.

FALL SEMESTER:

SPRING SEMESTER:

## Employment Prohibition:

Additional compensation may be paid to a graduate assistant by the University for additional hours of activities only with special, advance approval of the administrative head of the unit in which the assistantship is held and the head of the student's graduate program, with the primary considerations being that the additional hours of activities not compromise the student's academic progress, or their assistantship responsibilities. If the additional hours are not related to the assigned assistantship activities, a wage appointment should be used, whereas if they are related to the assigned assistantship activities, the appointment should more appropriately be changed to a 3/4-time appointment, rather than adding the additional hours as wage payroll

**EXAMPLE:** : A graduate student is appointed to a 1/2-time Research Assistantship conducting research for their dissertation and may, with prior approval, perform 10 additional hours of duties a week as a ticket clerk at the Bryce Jordan Center on a wage payroll appointment.

A graduate assistant may accept concurrent employment outside the University, only with prior permission from the head of the unit providing the assistantship and the head of the student's graduate program, with the primary consideration being that the additional hours not compromise the student's academic progress, or their assistantship responsibilities.

## Payment:

Assistantship stipends are paid monthly. See [GSAD-901 Graduate Assistants](#), for more information regarding stipend payment.

## Credit Load:

Graduate assistants must be enrolled at Penn State as graduate students working toward advanced degrees. Because assistantships are provided as aids to completion of advanced degrees, assistants are expected to enroll for credit loads each semester that fall within the limits indicated in the table below. Upper limits on permissible credit loads are indicated in order to ensure that the student can devote the necessary attention to academic progress while holding an assistantship. These considerations give rise to the table of credit loads below (see exceptions below).

For Graduate Assistants enrolled in a research degree program (M.A., M.S. or Ph.D)				
Type of Assistantship	Minimum Credits Per Semester	Maximum Credits Per Semester	Minimum Credits Per Summer Session**	Maximum Credits Per Summer Session
Quarter-Time	9	14	5	7
Half-Time	9	12	4	6
Three-Quarter-Time*	6	8	3	4

For Graduate Assistants enrolled in a professional degree program (e.g., M.B.A., D.N.P., M.P.S. or M.Arch., etc.)				
Type of Assistantship	Minimum Credits Per Semester	Maximum Credits Per Semester	Minimum Credits Per Summer Session**	Maximum Credits Per Summer Session
Quarter-Time	9	18	5	15
Half-Time	9	15	4	12
Three-Quarter-Time	6	12	3	9

\* International students may not hold three-quarter time assistantships in accordance with [HR26 Matters Involving Foreign Nationals Employed by the University](#).

\*\* Credits taken during the Maymester and over both six-week summer sessions must total a minimum of 9 (for 1/4- and 1/2-time assistantships) and cannot exceed a maximum of 8 (for 3/4-time assistantships), 12 (for 1/2-time assistantships), or 14 (for 1/4-time assistantships).

Exceptions to the specified limits may be made in particular cases with the approval of the student's assistantship supervisor, the program head, and the Dean of the Graduate School. The Graduate School expects that an exception made in one semester will be compensated for by a suitably modified credit load in the subsequent semester, so that, on the average, normal progress is maintained at a rate falling within the limits previously mentioned. Failure to do so may jeopardize the student's academic status.

## Tax Withholdings:

The University is required to withhold all applicable taxes from assistantship paychecks. Therefore, students on assistantships will receive a W-2 form at the end of each calendar year summarizing funds received and taxes withheld. **If a GA is not enrolled at least half time the university is required to withhold FICA (OADI/Medicare) and SUI taxes.**

## Health Insurance:

The University provides a health insurance benefit as part of the assistantship agreement. The University will pay a percentage of the annual premium for the Penn State Student Health Insurance Plan. The remaining percentage will be automatically deducted from the student's assistantship stipend. The University will not supplement, nor will a payroll deduction be made, for insurance policies other than the Penn State Student Insurance Plan.

For more information about Penn State student health insurance requirements refer to the Student Affairs health insurance website or contact the Student Insurance Office at 814-865-7467.

## Important University Policies:

University Policy covering Patents and Copyrights (Intellectual Property) must be adhered to during a graduate assistant's appointment, see [IP01 Ownership and Management of Intellectual Property](#). Please refer to Graduate School Policy [GSAD-901 Graduate Assistants](#) and the Graduate Degree Programs Bulletin for additional information concerning graduate assistants.

A condition of this appointment is that you accept by \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Title of Official Making Offer

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**My acceptance of this offer indicates that I have read and agree to the "Terms of Offer and General Conditions of a Graduate Assistantship Appointment" set forth in this document.**

I accept this offer:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Address until start of assistantship:

I decline this offer of a graduate assistantship because:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date