Graduate Assistantships

Departments assign Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA), Graduate Service Assistantships (GSA) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRA) to eligible students according to the guidelines below. Assistantships can be in support of general administrative duties, research, or teaching assignments. These policies apply to GTAs, GSAs and GRAs except where specified.

Graduate assistantships may be awarded to eligible students in the same or closely related field as their degree program.

Assistantship appointments are made on a full-, half-, one-third, or quarter-time basis. Assistantship awards can be made for any one quarter or all four academic quarters.

In general, full-time graduate assistants are expected to devote 20 hours per week to their assignments, half-time graduate assistants devote 10 hours and quarter-time graduate assistants devote 5 hours. However, some academic areas may require different hours.

Students must be in good academic standing in order to maintain eligibility for an assistantship position. Students on academic probation or suspension are not eligible for an assistantship position until that status is resolved. After two consecutive terms below 3.0 GPA a student is not eligible for an assistantship position until the GPA is raised to a 3.0 or better.

Note: Regardless of terminology a unit or department may use to describe these positions (GXA, GSA, GA, RSA, etc.) there are only three official assistantship types of positions: a GTA, a GSA, or a GRA. Units, departments and recipients of these positions must follow these guidelines accordingly.

Following are descriptions of each type of assistantship:

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)

Graduate teaching assistants may support faculty by performing instruction-related duties such as teaching lower-level undergraduate courses and labs, developing teaching materials, leading class discussions, tutoring, preparing and giving examinations, and grading examinations or papers. GTAs are funded by the University budget. GTAs must demonstrate fluency in spoken English to be eligible to receive the GTA award. For more information, see English Language Proficiency (TOEFL/IELTS) (http://www.du.edu/media/documents/graduates/toefl_ielts_table.pdf).

Graduate Service Assistant (GSA)

Graduate service assistants may perform administrative and support functions or discipline-specific projects for an academic department or business unit. Responsibilities may include administrative support, lab monitoring, equipment management, web site development and maintenance, editorial work for scholarly journals, or routine support for publications or social media. To support professional development, the graduate service assistant should be given the opportunity to apply his/her academic skills to the assigned tasks and develop new administrative skills. GSAs are funded by the University budget.

Graduate Research Assistant (GRA)

Graduate research assistants may perform research assignments under the direct supervision of a faculty member who generally is the principal investigator on an external grant or contract. The research must be directly relevant to the student’s academic program of study, should relate directly to the student’s degree requirements, and should be reasonably expected to contribute to the student’s dissertation, thesis, or capstone project.

The label “GRA” only applies to graduate assistants who receive stipend and waiver from external awards (e.g. grants or contracts).

GTA Eligibility and Required Exams

An assistantship recipient must be enrolled in an academic program during the terms in which they receive the award, stipend and tuition waiver hours. Departments may stipulate that recipients must be enrolled full-time.

Required Exams for GTA Eligibility

Any graduate applicant whose native language is not English (including US citizens and permanent residents), regardless of his/ her educational background, who wishes to be considered for a graduate teaching assistantship and who has direct contact with a student or a group of students during any year of study in any graduate department at DU, must demonstrate fluency in spoken English by scoring a minimum of 26 on the Internet Based TOEFL (iBT) speaking section or an IELTS score of 8 on the speaking section. Students will be required to pass the University’s GTA English language assessment by the University of Denver English Language Center (ELC).

Required Credentials or Experience for GTA Eligibility

To serve as instructor of record for an undergraduate course, graduate teaching assistants must be qualified by appropriate credential or tested experience as defined by the Higher Learning Commission.
• Completed program of study in the discipline, with substantial coursework at least one level above that of the courses being taught or developed.
• Earned degree at least one level above that of the program in which they are teaching, typically a master’s degree, with substantial graduate coursework in the discipline of those courses.

or

• Industry certification and years of experience successfully working in the field.
• Documented recognition of excellence in teaching.
• Expertise, ability, and talent validated through publication or wide critical and public acclaim.

**GRA/GSA Eligibility and Required Exams**

**Required Exams for GSA/GRA Eligibility**

Official scores from the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or International English Language Testing System (IELTS) are required of all graduate applicants, regardless of citizenship status, whose native language is not English or who have been educated in countries where English is not the native language. The minimum TOEFL score accepted by the University is 80 (iBT) or 550 (paper-based), and the minimum IELTS score accepted by the University is 6.0. Applicants may be exempted from English proficiency test requirements if by the time of matriculation they have earned a baccalaureate degree or higher from a formally-recognized/accredited university where the institution’s language of instruction and examination is English. Students whose native language is not English and who are required to submit TOEFL/IELTS scores will be assessed by the University of Denver English Language Center (ELC).

**Assistantship Employment Restrictions**

Students who are admitted with provisions who are appointed to an assistantship position must satisfy the provisions in the time frame specified in the admission letter in order to remain eligible for a graduate assistantship.

Should a graduate assistantship recipient wish to change his/her major field of study to another college, school or department, the award is not transferable to the new department.

Students cannot hold a GTA/GSA/GRA position and a work-study position simultaneously. However, within the same academic year a student may hold a GTA/GSA/GRA and a work-study position, just not during the same term.

A graduate student cannot hold more than the equivalent of one full-time assistantship and/or student employee position, or combination thereof at any time (GTA, GSA and/or GRA). Full-time is normally defined as 20 hours per week (1.0 FTE).

Students cannot be a GTA/GSA/GRA and enrolled in the same class they would be the graduate assistant for at the same time.

**Stipend and Waiver Awards**

Assistantship positions receive both a tuition waiver and monthly stipend unless the student has completed all coursework and is registered for Continuous Enrollment. In that case, the assistantship is only eligible to receive a stipend, but not a tuition waiver. Awards are made through the graduate college, school, or department. Assistantship awards can be made for any one quarter or all four academic quarters. The combination of all tuition waivers cannot exceed tuition charges (prior to any assessed fees) and waivers cannot be awarded in cash.

Assistantship awards will be full-, half-, one-third, or quarter-time. Graduate Assistants who are less than full-time receive stipend and waivers proportional to their appointment.

Normally, full-time graduate assistants receive 8-10 hours of waiver for each academic term. Awards in specific colleges, schools, or departments may vary.

There is no tuition-waiver benefit for spouses, dependents, or non-dependents of graduate assistants.

**Award Duration and Use for Assistantships**

When assistantship recipients have both scholarship and waiver hours available in any given term, scholarship hours will be drawn upon first to pay tuition bills. When assistantship recipients are also employees and have a combination of employee waiver, scholarship and/or assistantship waiver hours available in any given term, the employee waiver will be drawn upon first, then the scholarship hours and finally the assistantship waiver hours will be drawn upon to pay tuition bills.

Because the fiscal year ends before the summer term closes, waivers cannot be carried forward from the spring to the summer term.

Waiver hours cannot be used for interterm courses, noncredit courses, or any other fees or fines, including continuous enrollment fees.

If the student drops courses after or during the refund period for which waiver hours have been used, the waiver will not be re-awarded for future use.
GTA and GSA Award Duration and Use

When awards are made for multiple terms during an aid year (for instance, fall through spring), GTA and GSA waiver hours will be divided equally among the terms, except in the case of term-by-term appointments which should be entered into the specific term for which the award is to be used. Students must inform their program of their plan for waiver hour use. Appointments cannot be effective prior to the term in which the student will actually begin working; i.e., a GTA and GSA appointment cannot begin in the summer if the student will not be working until fall term. Appointed means that the student is working and earning a stipend.

When awards are made for a single term, waiver hours will be available for use during the term of appointment only. GTAs appointed term-by-term cannot borrow waiver hours from the future or carry over waiver hours to the next term. GTAs will not receive waiver hours during any term they are not receiving a stipend.

GRA Award Duration and Use

GRA awards are for one-quarter duration and GRA waivers cannot carry forward. There is no borrowing from the future and no carry-over from one term to the next, and GRA waivers cannot be made available until the term they are earned. GRA awards are subject to these policies for the life of the research grant.

Neither the stipend nor the waiver portion of a GRA award can cover any period outside of the grant or contract period. For example, if a grant or contract begins or ends at the halfway point of a term, no more than one-half of a full award (stipend and waiver) can be paid during that term.

Late Awards

Graduate assistant positions awarded late or after the fall term may affect other financial aid that a student is receiving.

Taxability

Because waiver hours are considered to be merit-based scholarships, they are not taxable income. All stipend money received by a graduate assistant is taxable income. Recipients must have a W-4 form on file in the Controller's Office (http://www.du.edu/controller/payroll).

Hiring Graduate Assistants

Graduate units must submit an I-9 form for graduate assistants to Human Resources within three business days of hire. When domestic students and US Citizens are hired as, the graduate unit should re-verify (but not necessarily resubmit) the I-9 when the graduate assistant has been absent for more than one term.

International students: If the visa status changes after the student has been hired, a new I-9 must be submitted.

Background Checks

All student employees, including GTAs, GSAs and GRAs, must complete the background check process and be cleared as eligible to hire by Human Resources prior to officially being offered the assistantship.

Background checks must be run if the student has never been employed at DU before or if they have not worked at DU for more than 120 days.

Terminating Graduate Assistants

If a graduate assistant is proven incapable of performing the responsibilities of the position, the unit has the right to terminate the award prior to the end of the award period.

If the appointment of a graduate assistant is terminated by means other than death or disablement before the end of an academic term, the award recipient is responsible for repayment of the “unearned” share of the award, including waiver hours “borrowed” from the future (GTAs only). Repayment may occur through deductions from the final paycheck or by other means.

With permission from the appropriate budget officer, the program may hire a replacement graduate assistant and reallocate the unused portion of any remaining stipend or waiver award to the new assistant.

Health Insurance Scholarship for Graduate Teaching and Research Assistants

The GTA/GSA/GRA Health Insurance Scholarship covers the cost of the DU Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) and the Health & Counseling Fee (HCF). Eligibility is determined one time per year in the fall.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the GTA/GSA/GRA Health Insurance Scholarship, graduate assistants must meet the following criteria:

- have a full-time appointment as a GTA, GRA or GRA for fall, winter, and spring quarters
- successfully complete the requirements of their full-time appointment as a GTA, GSA or GRA for fall, winter, and spring quarters
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- have a tuition waiver offer from the department averaging at least eight credit hours for the fall, winter, and spring quarters (for a total of at least 24 credits)
- register for and complete an average of eight credit hours during the fall, winter, and spring quarters (for a total of at least 24 credits of actual coursework, not including Continuous Enrollment)
- must not be registering for Continuous Enrollment (CENR) alone in any one of the three quarters
- must complete the acceptance process by the annual fall quarter deadline.

After receiving the Health Insurance Scholarship, failure to comply with any of the above listed rules may result in a hold being placed on the student's account. The hold will not be removed until the student has re-paid the Health Insurance charges.

Students who wish to receive the GTA/GSA/GRA Health Insurance Scholarship must accept the terms and conditions of the scholarship and the award in Pioneerweb. The award (payment) will automatically be applied to the student's account if they have registered for classes, have been assessed the DU Health Insurance Plan (SHIP) and/or the health and counseling Fee (HCF) and have not waived the SHIP and/or HCF online.

Students who are on Continuous Enrollment or are not registered for six credits are not automatically accessed the SHIP or HCF each quarter. In order to be accessed the SHIP and HCF and receive the scholarship, students must complete the SHIP and HCF enrollment forms for Continuous Enrollment (available through the Health Center) for all applicable terms.