

Graduate Assistantship Program

<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/programs/graduate-assistant-program>

What is a UNT Graduate Assistant?

Graduate Assistants are graduate students who, in the course of their academic training, are employed in part-time positions, where the student's academic training is based in part on the research performed or where the duties being performed will assist the student in fulfilling his or her degree requirements. All duties and services Graduate Assistants provide are to be carried out under the supervision and direction of departmental faculty or staff.

DSA Philosophy Statement

The Division of Student Affairs the University of North Texas recognizes the contributions of Graduate Assistants to the Division. Graduate Assistants support the Division in the following ways:

- Provide support for Division programs and services;
- Provide a diverse perspective on student engagement and student learning;
- Provide a conduit to the UNT student experience

In turn, the Division supports Graduate Assistants in the following ways:

- Provide training to increase effectiveness and productivity;
- Provide professional development opportunities for Graduate Assistants to gain valuable experience within their field of study;
- Provide a positive learning and work environment through supervision, competitive compensation, and mentoring.

It is our hope that they gain a better understanding of the link between their educational objectives and professional goals.

 SUPERVISORS

How to Use This Guide

 GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

This guide is a chronological order of events and responsibilities shared by both the graduate assistant and the supervisor. For guidance ease, tabs are located next to each title to which party each section applies. If at any point, you have questions or concerns about this guide, please contact the GA Program Coordinator at melissa.mcguire@unt.edu or call 940-565-2166.



Interviews and Placement

The hiring process for most positions within the DSA are coordinated through the GA Program Coordinator and the Higher Education Program. There are very few departments who have exceptions to this rule.

Timeline:

- Returners: late-January/early-February Timeframe
- New Candidates:
 - Application deadline March 1; Interview Days likely 3rd week of March (Thursday and Friday).

Occasionally positions are left unfilled throughout this process, and these will be filled with regular period applicants of the Higher Education Program which can continue through the summer months.

Returner Rotation – Based on the number of returners rotating into their second year position along with their preferred second year office placement, you may or may not be asked to participate in Returner Rotation Interviews. If you are, you will receive information on which candidates wish to interview with your office, and you will have the opportunity to decide if you would like to interview as part of the group interview process. The GA Program Coordinator will facilitate a matching process before interviews and afterward.

New Candidate Placement – Includes all offices who did not have a 2nd year returner placed with them for the following year. Supervisors will receive applicant packets to review and will be invited to a social event to meet new applicants and a group interview process the following day. You will have the opportunity to decide if you would like to interview a candidate that has expressed interest your position to ensure you are interviewing candidates you believe have the most potential of being a good fit. Placements will occur based on the preferences of both parties, and offices who did not fill a position during the New Candidate Placement will continue receiving applicant packets as they become available.

Policy on Holding Multiple GA Positions

In an effort to ensure the greatest number of graduate students have an opportunity to hold a position within the Division of Student Affairs, a graduate student may **not** hold multiple GA positions simultaneously. This is also true for graduate assistantships outside the DSA, as outlined by the Provost's Office.

Hiring Paperwork

*Note – All job codes are designated as Graduate Assistants with the intent that work duties are related to graduate student's direct field of study, but not necessarily research focused. **Pay levels are determined on September 1 of each year.**

Level 1: First year students without experience in a graduate degree program.

Level 2: Students pursuing a master's or doctoral degree with at least 18 completed credits toward their degree.

Level 3: Doctoral student who has completed all, but their dissertation (ABD); they have passed their qualifying exams.

*If at least 51% of a graduate student's job responsibilities do not align with their degree program, you cannot offer a graduate stipend; you will have to pay the student hourly and they will not be eligible for the Tuition Benefit Program.

*All students need a degree plan on file to be paid a salary.

If a 1st year student is going to be hired into your department,

- Make sure your GA is already been accepted to UNT through the Toulouse School or Graduate Studies and admitted to a program through their departmental field of study. You may not hire your student until registration for courses has already occurred. This is especially important to check on if you are hiring your candidate earlier than the beginning of the fall semester (summer months).
- Submit an offer letter to the candidate outlining their start date, salary, information on how to complete a background check, and any other pertinent information for the position (a draft of this letter will be provided by the GA Program Coordinator).
- On Boarding
- I-9 Verification
- Complete the ePAR hiring process
- Prior to submitting an ePAR, make sure your GA has enrolled in classes.
- Job code = 0831 at monthly pay of \$1,424.32 at Level 1 pay

If a 2nd year+ student is going to be hired into your department,

- Submit an offer letter to the candidate outlining their start date, salary, information on how to complete a background check, and any other pertinent information for the position (a draft of this letter will be provided by the GA Program Coordinator).
- Complete the ePAR hiring process
- Job code = 0832 at monthly pay of \$1,675.67 at Level 2 pay

If a 2nd year+ student who meets requirements for Level 3 pay is going to be hired into your department,

- Submit an offer letter to the candidate outlining their start date, salary, information on how to complete a background check, and any other pertinent information for the position (a draft of this letter will be provided by the GA Program Coordinator).
- Complete certification document through Provost Office
- Complete the ePAR hiring process
- Job code = 0833 at monthly pay of \$1,927.02 at Level 3 pay

A Graduate Assistant will not reach Level 3 pay unless they are a doctoral student who has completed “all, but their dissertation (ABD)”. “All” includes their qualifying exam.

Offering above entry: Graduate students may receive annual pay increases if warranted and recommended by the department head if financial resources are available. However, under no circumstances should a graduate student exceed the maximum salary at the level in which they are situated. If you offer more than entry, you must provide justification on the ePar.

Out-of-State Tuition Waivers

Graduate Assistants are eligible to receive an in-state tuition reduction to help ease the burden of the cost of their educational experience based on their specific role.

Resident rather than non-resident tuition is applied to a teaching or research assistant provided the student is employed at least one-half time by UNT in a position that relates to the degree sought. Requires official application approved by hiring department. This waiver waives out of state tuition and allows the student to pay in-state tuition rates.

The waiver might be applied in one of three ways:

- **::NEW::** The department of employment offers a tuition benefit to the student. Any tuition benefit we give will automatically qualify a student for an employment waiver.
- The department of study may award a competitive scholarship of at least \$1,000 to the student, which allows a student to have the out-of-state tuition to be waived, or

- The department of employment along with the related faculty of area of study should agree upon a “research agenda with deliverables” that the graduate research assistant will complete by the end of the academic term. This document should be turned into Student Accounting along with the tuition waiver form for final approval.

To qualify for a Research Assistant (option 3 above), students must be:

- Admitted to a UNT graduate degree program;
- Enrolled full-time (9 semester credit hours in long semesters and six semester credit hours during the summer);
- Employed as at least a quarter-time research assistant;
- In good academic standing while making progress toward their degree;
- Turn in waiver documents per **each term**.
- Job code = 0821, 0822, or 0823, depending on pay level.

Tuition Benefit Program

Although the future of this program is uncertain from year to year, if offered, the GA Program Coordinator will notify supervisors of their GAs tuition benefit. Below are the guidelines the Division of Student Affairs follows to award the tuition benefit.

- Higher Education students in the cohort will receive \$2,715 per semester.
- Higher Education students (non-cohort) will receive \$1,535 per semester.
- Rec Sports GAs, whose majors are Recreation or Kinesiology) will receive \$2,715 per semester.
- All other majors, assuming they are eligible for the Tuition Benefit program, will receive \$1,535 per semester, while we have funding still available.
- All awards are on a first come, first served basis; never promise a tuition benefit without confirming with GA Program Coordinator or the department may be required to fund the tuition benefit.
- **::NEW::** A graduate assistant must be employed by the census date to receive a tuition benefit.
- **::NEW::** Students receiving the Faculty/Staff Scholarship are ineligible for a typical tuition award, but they may be eligible for partial funding (~100 per TBP credit hour). If a GA falls in this category, **they** should contact gradaward@unt.edu to see what they are eligible for. From there, I will see what tuition benefit we have remaining.

::NEW:: If a TBP recipient is employed in a department other than their degree major, they are required to submit a certification from both the employer and academic authority in their major department to certify there is a direct relationship between the employment position and degree program.

- Toulouse Graduate School will notify GA Program Coordinator of which graduate assistants need one of these.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor and graduate student to ensure all eligibility criteria is met before submitting the signed award agreement form to the GA Program Coordinator. Failure to meet criteria will result in the graduate student paying back their tuition benefit (if disbursed).

Course Load Exemptions:

If a student is not enrolled in 9 SCH, they are required to complete a **Course Load Exemption** through the Graduate School to receive their tuition benefit. Typically, these are reserved for students in final semester or ABD status.

- *Notes:*
 - A student must have a degree plan on for the Graduate School to review.
 - This should be completed 2 weeks prior to the start of the semester, for each term.
 - Faculty advisor **MUST** sign-off on this form (and submit it via the Toulouse Graduate School secure portal) as they know the student's degree plan more than we do. **We do not have any authority over this form.**
- *International*
 - International students do NOT need to submit a Course Load Exemption form; instead, they submit the **Graduate Student Full-Time Equivalency Report** from UNT-International. This is needed for Visa purposes.
 - The form can be found on the Toulouse Graduate School and International Advising websites.
 - Students know this form as "the purple form."
 - Signatures on this form cannot be electronic.
 - Form must be submitted by the student.

New Hire Checklist

GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

Read through the following list to make sure you have completed or addressed each item within the first two weeks on the job.

- Meet with you supervisor to gain an understanding of your role within the office, department and Division of Student Affairs.
- Complete the Expectations Worksheet and meet with your supervisor to discuss your answers and perspectives on each item.
- Review the GA Evaluation with your supervisor so that you are aware of what you will be evaluated on during your December and May evaluation periods.
- If you have been paired with a Transition Mentor, make contact with that mentor to introduce yourself and plan your first meeting.
- Attend the GA Orientation.
- Make efforts to get to know your peers and all you can about UNT. The more you know, the more resourceful you will be to students.

Expectations Worksheet – Sometimes supervisors and graduate assistants have different ideas and assumptions of what their roles are and what is expected of them. The GA/Supervisor Expectations exercise is designed to allow each party to share expectations and begin discussion of what will best facilitate a successful partnership. This worksheet should be completed within 14 days of the graduate assistants hire date. Once completed one copy will be submitted to the GA program office, one copy should be returned to the graduate assistant and one copy should be kept for your records.



Salary

Graduate Assistants are salaried .5 Full-Time Employee (FTE) positions and receive payment on the 1st of every month for hours worked in the previous month.

- Gross salary payment for Level 1 Graduate Assistants is \$1,424.32 per month.
- Gross salary payment for Level 2 Graduate Assistants is \$1,675.67 per month.
- Gross salary payment for Level 3 Graduate Assistants is \$1,927.02 per month.

Increases into the next level can only occur at the beginning of a new fiscal year (9/1) regardless of when eligibility for the next level is reached.

Salaried Graduate Student Compensation Plan can be found <http://vpaa.unt.edu/FY13-Gradstud-Pay-Schedule.pdf>.

Timekeeping

Graduate assistants and supervisors are responsible for working out a work schedule that complements the needs of the students' course load as well as the needs of the department.

Each month, the graduate assistant is required to complete **4 hours per weekdays in the given month, regardless of holidays, administrative closures, or days in each month.** A range of 80-92 hours per month is typical, depending on the number of business days in the month. Hours may be moved around from day-to-day or week-to-week in order to ensure a minimum of 80 hours are completed per month. No "roll over hours" are allowed from month to month.

A salaried position implies that a set amount is paid to employee regardless of exact number of hours/minutes worked. Time management is key to ensure the minimum number of hours required per month are being met, while not compromising quality of work or duties assigned. (More on this will be addressed in Professional Development - Conferences section.)

In situations where the University is closed (Winter Break, Spring Break, etc.), graduate assistants may want to work more hours one week to make up for the hours that will be missed. This is allowable, but must fall in line with Policy 15.2.27: Recruitment and Selection of Teaching Fellows and Teaching Assistants. Although graduate assistants in Student Affairs do not fall within these classifications, the same rules apply. Per this policy, the following guidelines should be followed:

- If graduate assistant is taking 6 semester credit hours, maximum allowable work hours is 40 hours/week.*
- If graduate assistant is taking 9 semester credit hours, maximum allowable work hours is 30 hours/week.*
- If graduate assistant is taking 12 semester credit hours, maximum allowable work hours is 20 hours/week.

Students who do not meet the 80 hours/month requirement will need to be placed on a Work Break in EIS.

*Please note that working more than 20 hours/week should be allowed by a supervisor minimally. If within a year, there are more than 18 weeks where a GA has worked 30 hours+/week, the university will be required to offer the GA benefits, per the Affordable Care Act.

Compensation

While graduate assistants are salaried, they are not benefits-eligible (e.g. holiday, sick, overtime, or administrative closure leaves). Doctor visits or vacations can be accommodated by asking for supervisory permission to rearrange the weekly or monthly work schedule.



Transition Mentor

New graduate assistants will sign up for a Transition Mentor during GA Orientation and will be matched in the following weeks based on personal and professional interests. Within a few weeks, you will receive notification of your Transition Mentor match, and it is your responsibility to contact your mentor to set up your first meeting.

Our honest philosophy of mentoring is that mentoring in its most natural form is very organic and unlike a forced assignment. Typically a person finds the traits and character of another person, perhaps further along in their career, and is thus sought out for guidance and advice. Not the other way around... but....

Since it's tough not only getting to know a new life as a graduate student, paraprofessional staff, and a new campus (for some), we do facilitate the Transition Mentor Program. Through this, GAs will be paired with one staff member who does not work in your department so that you can get to know other staff members as well as the functions that other departments play in student success. Your pairing will be "active" for 12 weeks, in which time you should meet with your Transition Mentor at least 4 times, or an average of once every 3 weeks. It is primarily your responsibility to reach out to your Transition Mentor and set up meeting times. Remember that you are trying to learn from them and what they have to offer, so the responsibility of keeping this on your radar lies with you.

General Mentorship

Outside of the Transition Mentor Program, GAs are strongly encouraged to reach out to any person at any time that you feel you can learn from and guide your professional pathway. This might be a professor, a staff member, a doctoral student, another master's student, supervisor, or someone involved with a professional association that you would like to learn more about. Mentorship is foremost an organic process that can grow from the most unlikely of circumstances. I would always suggest a humble phone call or email to ask if you can get some of their time just to get to know their path and more about them professionally. If no long-term

mentorship comes of it, at least you have another helpful contact in life. Nevertheless, if you never reach out, you will never know what could have been!



A primary responsibility of the Graduate Assistantship Supervisor is to ensure that the duties of the GA positions enhance the student's graduate experience and facilitate growth in professionalism and scholarship upon which these positions are predicated. Graduate studies and assistantship work should reinforce one another. Projects should be similar to those that a student would perform as a professional and, whenever possible, should be useful in completing course or program requirements. You are responsible for professionally mentoring your graduate assistant and offering helpful tips of the trade along the way. Your graduate assistant is likely in this role because he or she hopes to be in your shoes someday soon, so think back to what you would have appreciated being in those graduate student shoes again.

In addition to the knowledge you can impart upon your GA, there are also several avenues where additional professional development opportunities can be found:

- HR website - <http://bsc.untssystem.edu/training-development>
- Departmental staff meetings
- All DSA staff meetings – scheduled about 1-2 times per semester
- Webinars
- Drive-in, Regional or National conferences.

Although funding for these opportunities may vary between departments, a general rule of thumb is to spend about \$500.00 per GA per academic year. This can be divided however is suitable between the GA and the supervisor. Please note that spending this amount is not mandated, but rather highly encouraged so that all GAs in the Division receive a similar level of opportunity to benefit from professional development. This also is not an expectation for GAs whose coursework is not related to higher education or the department's purpose. (e.g. yes for a higher education student working for the orientation office or for a kinesiology student working for the rec center, but not for a history student working in student activities.).

Timekeeping for Conferences – If an office makes a commitment to fund a GAs conference attendance, in return, the GA agrees to commit time to that professional development opportunity that will not be wholly counted in your monthly hours. Therefore, when attending a conference, a GA should not list weekend hours or any more than four hours per business day as a part of the total hours for that month. This way, the GA's opportunity to attend a conference does not take away from the productivity of the office, and the GA does not have to make up hours missed during time away from the office on business days.

Timekeeping for Professional Development on Campus GA's are always welcome and encouraged to attend more professional development sessions, but those hours will not be counted toward the total number of hours worked for the month, unless approved by supervisor.

All DSA GA Gatherings

- **GA Orientation** – At the start of each fall semester, all GAs are required to attend the GA Orientation to acquaint them with their roles as a graduate student, graduate assistant, within the Division, and at UNT.
- **GA Lunches** – About once a month, an All DSA GA Lunch will be held. If a These are designed to cover topics that cross all areas of student services and issues in higher education that will contribute to their professional development and networking opportunities. While these are not mandatory, *all possible efforts should be made to encourage the attendance of your GA*. These are usually held around a lunch hour and fluctuate a bit on time of day to accommodate various responsibilities and schedules of the difference offices.

Program Assessment



GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

The GA Program will be assessed in a number of ways throughout the year:

GA Evaluation – Each Supervisor and GA pair will complete a formal written evaluation of the GA using the GA Evaluation Form. After both parties have looked over and filling out the GA Evaluation Form, please set up a time to meet together to discuss the evaluation. At this meeting, address each section of the evaluation and allow the opportunity to add any comments or notes before you both sign the evaluation. After the December evaluation process, records may be kept with the supervisor. After the May evaluation is completed, final signed copies of the evaluation should be filed with your department head and the GA Program Coordinator. Since there is no formal process for the GA to evaluate the Supervisor, please use the last comment box to allow for candid conversations on what the GA needs from the Supervisor in order to be most effective in his/her position.

GA Lunches Learning Outcomes – After each GA Lunch, the GA will be asked to submit 3-5 bullet points on items he/she learned as a result of attending the GA lunch. These will be compiled per each lunch at all together at the end of the academic year to create an overall theme analysis

Post-Graduate Employment Tracking – Upon graduating each master's student who graduates from the GA Program will be tracked for employment placement within the first few months

after graduation. At this time, our placement rates are extremely successful and we hope to continue and improve this trend over time.

 **Removal /Termination**

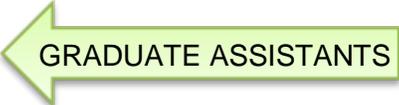
If a student leaves or is removed from his/her position, the GA Supervisor must contact the DSA GA Program Coordinator immediately. If a problem or suspicion arises that a student is in jeopardy of being terminated, *keep the DSA GA Program Coordinator informed of this as early as possible*. A termination should not be coming as a surprise if it does lead to that conclusion. In some cases, removal from a graduate assistant role could also mean removal from certain academic programs, so whenever possible, measures should be taken that helps the employee correct whatever actions or behaviors are causing a concern within their role prior to termination. In addition, the supervisor is responsible for submitting ePAR immediately so that the correct end date is applied to the graduate assistant's last paycheck, coding the action as "Termination."

A student who withdraws completely from his/her academic program or courses for the semester will not be allowed to continue as a Graduate Assistant. Immediate action must take place to terminate student in the ePAR system since requirements for holding the position will no longer be met. If the situation warrants the individual to continue working for the department, individual may be rehired as an hourly employee.

If the student is being removed from payroll during the summer months but plans to return in the fall, please make sure to code their termination as "Summer Termination" using the ePAR system so that insurance is not interrupted over summer, causing the 90 day waiting period to restart when the GA returns.

If the student is being removed from your payroll and does not intend to return to the university because of graduation, you may code the termination as "Termination" through the ePAR system, since the end of their tenure.

Conflict Resolution & Complaints



The University of North Texas Human Resources Department provides the “Dispute Resolution Toolkit” in order to outline and provide guidelines for appropriate and successful conflict resolution. This toolkit is a great resource and can be found online through the UNT HR Website. In the case of a conflict with a supervisor, the employee is encouraged to first address the issue directly with the supervisor, and if no further improvement or action is seen, the employee is within reasonable rights to seek assistance from the supervisor’s supervisor. If the situation calls for escalated measures to find a resolution, please see more options below.

Dispute Resolution

UNT recognizes that in most conflicts, neither party is right or wrong; instead, different perceptions collide to create disagreement. Conflict is natural and it is up to you to respond to conflict situations quickly and professionally. Conflict can be very positive; if you deal with it openly, you can strengthen your work unit by correcting problems. Conflicting views give you a chance to learn more about yourself, explore views of others, and develop productive relationships. Clear and open communication is the foundation of successful conflict resolution.

Complaints and Grievances

The University of North Texas encourages direct communication between supervisors and employees to promptly resolve workplace concerns. While the university has a formal grievance procedure, employees are encouraged to use conflict resolution skills and resources to resolve differences. The best and most lasting solutions and resolutions are those created by the people directly involved.

The university provides a fair and efficient process for employees to present and resolve complaints and grievances arising out of the employment relationship. The dispute resolution process helps:

- resolve concerns at the earliest possible opportunity,
- increase the parties’ satisfaction with the solutions,
- develop positive and effective communication between you and your supervisor
- preserve the ongoing working relationship

In addition, the Ombuds is a person who investigates complaints and mediates fair settlements, especially between aggrieved parties such as faculty or staff and an institution or organization. Probationary and temporary staff members, teaching fellows and teaching assistants, student research assistants and hourly paid student assistants are eligible to use the Complaint procedure, but are not eligible to use the Grievance procedure.

Conflict and Resolution/Grievance Procedure

Complaint

A complaint is an employee's formal expression of disagreement or dissatisfaction with aspects of employment such as working conditions, hours of work, environment, relationships with supervisor and/or other employees, or policies or decisions of the department considered by the employee to be inappropriate, harmful, or unfair.

Alleged Discrimination or Harassment

Any complaint involving alleged discrimination under the law or sexual harassment should be filed with the Equal Opportunity Office, at (940) 565-2759 or e-mailed to oeo@unt.edu.

How to File a Complaint or Grievance

A complaint or grievance should be presented to the first-line supervisor for discussion and consideration within ten working days of the date of the action or condition giving rise to the complaint or grievance. Complaints and Grievances should be submitted by using the Employee Complaint or Grievance Form. If a complaint is not satisfactorily resolved by the first-line supervisor, the complainant may present his or her complaint in writing to each subsequent level of management as described in the Complaint and Grievance Policy, UNT Policy 1.7.2, until resolved or no further level of review is available.

Mediation

Mediation is an alternative approach to the traditional methods of resolving disputes. Mediation is a voluntary, confidential, interactive process that enables disputants to work through issues of importance that are causing conflict between them. During a mediation session, an impartial person, the mediator, facilitates communication between the parties to promote reconciliation, settlement, or understanding.

A mediation session will provide you with a neutral forum to:

- discuss and clarify issues that are causing conflict
- express feelings
- discuss interests of each party
- discuss possible solutions
- work out an agreement to resolve the conflict

To schedule mediation, please contact Human Resources.

The UNT Policy on Complaints and Grievances as well as the Human Resources forms and additional information can be found online: <http://hr.unt.edu>.