

# GUIDELINES FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANT WORK AND LEAVE

## These guidelines apply to UNMC graduate students appointed as Graduate Assistants or Graduate Research Assistants

Ph.D. students serving as Graduate Research Assistants and Graduate Teaching Assistants are all engaged in academic programs where their primary role is that of a full-time graduate student. All Ph.D. students in these positions are required to maintain full-time status. In addition, students are not to hold other regular employment without the permission of their Supervisor, Supervisory Committee and the Graduate Dean. Serving as a tutor for other students or other "light-load" special teaching experiences are typical exceptions to this "no other work" policy.

Appointments are traditionally assigned an FTE of 0.49 with a stipend at, or above, the current NIH recommended level for predoctoral study. Some programs or mentors may supplement this level of stipend. These appointments are considered as "exempt" from the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) due to the understanding that the **positions are held by students and their education and training are their primary responsibilities**. The exempt status has several implications, including no expectation of timecards and no overtime pay. In addition, students on Graduate Assistantships do not receive traditional benefits (retirement contribution, health insurance, vacation accrual, etc.). **Nonetheless, in keeping with their emerging professional role, the University has established some expectations and benefits that apply to both the student and the program.**

1. Graduate students are expected to devote an appropriate level of professional effort to work and study. The **total** time spent on the research project(s) at UNMC **and** in their enrolled curriculum will comprise full-time effort. *[Note: The work of a professional in the sciences has noticeable variability in intensity. In all successful cases, the "work necessary to get the job done" describes how much time and effort is dedicated to a given project at a given time. Late nights, weekend projects and even occasional holiday work may be required, but are usually balanced by periods of less intense effort.]*
2. Graduate students supported by a traditional 0.49 FTE stipend should average at least 20 hours of effort per week on the research project.
3. Graduate students will not be expected to work on traditional university holidays unless required by the unique schedule of an experiment design. (UNMC holidays: New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, the day after Thanksgiving, and Christmas Day)
4. Graduate students should expect, on average, to be allowed 14 days (regular workdays, M-F) of personal vacation in a given year. Students desiring longer break periods should expect to use the allowance accumulated over more than one year, as well as receive appropriate approval from their Advisor/Supervisor and program Graduate Committee. In general, students accrue 1 day per calendar month, with an additional day accrued at the end of each Fall and Spring semester (total of 14 days). For students needing time away who have not yet accrued days, advanced time or other arrangements can be made, as appropriate, with their Advisor/Supervisor. Students without a permanent Advisor/Supervisor should work with their program director regarding leave.

5. Graduate students requesting maternity/paternity leave (including for adoption) are required to get appropriate approval from the Dean for Graduate Studies or their designee. Maternity/paternity leave and other forms of personal leave **may** require the suspension of the stipend and **must** be discussed with the mentor before meeting with the Graduate Dean's Office. A reasonable expectation for maternity leave, supported by the Graduate Council, would be to arrange 8 weeks of leave as is common at most universities and suggested at UNL. Continued stipend support is provided during this period generally has the expectation that the student will devote a portion of her time toward reading, writing, data analysis or other activities that can be accomplished without being present on campus.
6. All students, faculty and staff are expected to adhere to the **UNMC Code of Conduct** as detailed in UNMC Policy 8006 ([https://wiki.unmc.edu/index.php/Code\\_of\\_Conduct/](https://wiki.unmc.edu/index.php/Code_of_Conduct/)). The Code reflects the professional ethical conduct that should be shown in all relationships and fosters development and maintenance of a supportive climate emphasizing respect and dignity. The Code also points to the special role that teachers, mentors and supervisors play in demonstrating or modeling professional ethical behavior. Finally, it makes very clear that laws and regulations often complement or even comprise elements of the Code. If any member of the UNMC community has concerns about adherence to the Code of Conduct, they may contact the Human Resources Department, the Chief Student Affairs Officer, the Compliance Officer, the UNMC Ombudsman's office, or the UNMC Compliance Hot Line at 1-866-568-5430. Reports to the Compliance Hotline may be made anonymously.

*Approved by UNMC Graduate Council 8/2012; revised for clarification 11/2012, 7/2017, 2/2024; corrected the standard FTE and summer credit hr requirement for full time status 07/2017, 02/2024.*