



# Grad Assistant Handbook

University of Idaho

## INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your appointment as a graduate assistant (GA)! Your new position will help develop and improve your professional skills during your time at the University of Idaho.

This handbook is a guide to UI policies and procedures that pertain to your assistantship position. Keep in mind that your department may have further rules and regulations that you should also review.

The University of Idaho offers three different kinds of assistantships: one provides an opportunity to teach and instruct, one provides an opportunity to conduct research, and the other provides an opportunity to put your skills to work in a field of your specialty.

## TEACHING ASSISTANT

Assistants who provide primary teaching responsibilities, grading assignments, assisting with the delivery of instruction through technology, and providing other assistance related to instruction under the active supervision of a member of the university faculty are teaching assistants (TA). A teaching assistant helps students learn and grow at the University of Idaho.

## RESEARCH ASSISTANT

Research assistants (RA) develop competence in performing professional-level work in support of research, scholarship, or creative activity. A research assistant position allows you study the issues you are passionate about as well as receive the chance to publish with renowned faculty. It is UI policy that all research be conducted in an ethical manner. For more information regarding UI's research policy, please visit review chapter five of the Faculty Staff Handbook found online at <https://www.uidaho.edu/governance/policy/policies/fsh/5>.

## SUPPORT ASSISTANT

A support assistant (SA) is an assistant who performs tasks or assignments specific to their degree. Support assistant tasks vary depending on the department or unit that they serve under. A support assistant position allows students to put their skills to work in a specific field.

Assuming the responsibilities of any graduate assistant position is no small task. You were chosen for this position because we believe you have the aptitude to balance your work and education.

## APPOINTMENT POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Graduate assistants are graduate students who are appointed based on a high standard of performance in teaching or research and a significant potential for sustained achievement in their field of study.

## CRITERIA FOR APPOINTMENT

Assistantships are open to domestic and international students who are regularly enrolled full-time students in the College of Graduate Studies (COGS). Full-time is 9 credits or more. Students in the provisional or unclassified enrollment category are not eligible to receive assistantships. Likewise, students in poor academic standing will lose their assistantship. Departments considering selecting a graduate assistant must base the appointment on an evaluation of the student's standard of performance potential and academic credentials. It is UI policy to prohibit and eliminate discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression, age, disability, or status as a Vietnam-era veteran.

## TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

A graduate assistant offer of appointment must be in writing and signed by the student. Examples of GA offer letters can be found on the COGS website. Verbal agreements between a faculty member and student do not constitute official offers of appointment. Students should not conduct any job duties, complete required trainings; attend meetings or orientations, until they have received a Work Authorization Card from Human Resources. You must wait to visit Human Resources until your criminal background check has been approved to complete an I-9 and receive your Work Authorization Card.

You are required to sign the Terms of Employment page of your offer letter to accept or decline the offer.

## TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

### BACKGROUND CHECK

Your appointment is contingent on the successful completion of a criminal background check. Shortly after your department receives a signed offer letter and terms of employment, you will receive an email from [crimcheck@uidaho.edu](mailto:crimcheck@uidaho.edu) with instruction for you to complete a brief online application to initiate the background check. The University pays all background check fees.

It is strongly recommended that you wait for the results of the background check to come back clear before committing any financial resources of your own. The University will not reimburse you for any expenses if the outcome is unsuccessful. Background checks are usually completed within two weeks after you initiate the process.

After your background check has been approved, you will need to present identification at Human Resources to complete an I-9. Please see [this list](#) for acceptable documents. You are not authorized to perform any work-related duties until you have received authorization from Human Resources (this includes trainings, meetings, and orientations). If you have any questions, please contact [hr@uidaho.edu](mailto:hr@uidaho.edu)

### HEALTH INSURANCE

The University of Idaho requires that graduate assistants submit proof of valid personal health insurance coverage as a condition of appointment. If you do not have health insurance, you may enroll in the Student Health Insurance Program (SHIP). You must provide proof of personal health insurance before the first day of the semester through VandalWeb and then OPT OUT of SHIP. Visit [www.uidaho.edu/shs](http://www.uidaho.edu/shs) to learn more.

### PAYROLL

Once you have access to the employee tab in VandalWeb, you should set up your W-4 to ensure correct income tax withholding. International employees should check their residency status to see if they are able make changes to their W-4.

All university employees should have direct deposit set up with Payroll. This can be completed through VandalWeb. The instructions for setting up direct deposit and answers to other questions can be found here: <https://www.uidaho.edu/human-resources/payroll/faqs>. If you have additional questions, please contact [payroll@uidaho.edu](mailto:payroll@uidaho.edu).



## COMPENSATION

Compensation for graduate assistants will vary across departments. Your stipend is provided by your department and if you are an out-of-state student, your out-of-state tuition waiver comes from the College of Graduate Studies.

## ENROLLMENT

Typically, graduate assistants are responsible for paying for their in-state tuition fees, but some assistantship cover these. Read your offer letter carefully. Full-time graduate assistants are required to pay the uniform student fees and tuition charged to full-time students, regardless of the number of credits for which they register (9-20 credits are covered on this fee). Part-time assistants need to be enrolled as full-time students (minimum of 9) to accept any assistantship. Nonresident tuition will be waived in full for persons holding full appointments and a pro rata portion of nonresident tuition will be waived for persons holding partial appointments. Assistantships do not cover web-based or special course fees.

Students on an assistantship cannot use a staff or staff spouse fee waiver or senior scholar waiver.

Research fellowships are awarded by various colleges. Research conducted on fellowships may or may not be used for dissertation purposes. Credit enrollment and stipends vary according to the fellowship. Fees and tuition are charged, but in some cases may be remitted, depending on the type of fellowship and the availability of funds. Inquiries should be addressed to the department in which you receive your assistantship from.

## TRAININGS

As a requirement of the College of Graduate Studies, your full-time or part-time assistantship position is contingent upon completion of the **mandatory Graduate Assistant Institute**. The Institute is designed to improve the quality of your teaching and assistantship experience. The Institute will be held every year on the Moscow campus the Thursday before Fall classes. A related Canvas course accompanies the Institute. If you have not been added to this course, please reach out to [cogs@uidaho.edu](mailto:cogs@uidaho.edu). *If your first offer is in the Spring, you will be added to the Canvas course in Spring and strongly encouraged to attend the live sessions in the Fall.*

Exceptional or emergency circumstances that preclude attendance at the Fall workshop must be petitioned to the College of Graduate Studies, (call 208-885-6244 or email [cogs@uidaho.edu](mailto:cogs@uidaho.edu)).

**All graduate assistants** must complete the annual University of Idaho all-employee required training course. The course will be assigned to you by the U of I Employee Development and Learning office within 2-3 days of your first day on the job through your university Canvas account.

You will receive enrollment notification and directions on how to access the training via your email address, which is set to receive official university communications. If you need assistance with the annual all-employee required training or have questions, please contact [edl@uidaho.edu](mailto:edl@uidaho.edu).

**All international TA's** must register for INTR 508, Teaching and Learning Strategies for International Teaching Assistants. There will be required workshops attached to this course throughout the semester.

## INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

The University of Idaho is committed to providing a community free of discrimination or harassment. We want to ensure a positive learning, working, and living environments for all members of our university community. University employees are federally mandated under Title IX to learn about their responsibilities as mandatory

reporters of gender-based harassment. Part of our institutional responsibility is to provide training to understand our responsibilities to help recognize, prevent, and respond to situations like sexual or other types of harassment or discrimination of any kind.

## RESPONSIBILITIES

**Teaching Assistants** may be responsible for lecturing, tutoring, proctoring exams, grading assignments, leading discussion groups, creating engaging class activities, holding office hours, answering student's questions, or assisting in a lab. TAs will work under the direct supervision of a UI faculty member and provide any instructional assistance they might require. Your department or faculty supervisor will provide more information on what exactly will be expected from you.

**Research Assistants** are primarily responsible for conducting research, but they may also administer experiments or carry out other creative activities, depending on the needs of the department and faculty supervisor. Please contact your department or faculty supervisor for more information regarding your specific requirements.

**Support Assistants** tasks may vary. Check with your department for specific requirements.

## WORKLOAD

Graduate assistants are appointed as a .50 FTE. This means your teaching or research responsibilities are 50% of your total effort, allowing for the remaining 50% dedicated to your personal coursework and academic responsibilities. By policy (FSH 1565H2), the duties of a TA or RA should not exceed, on average, 20 hours per week.

The time devoted to the assistantship may vary from day to day and week to week, given the fluctuation of demands during the typical semester, but the total workload for the semester should not exceed the cumulative average. Furthermore, a TA or RA should never work more than 8 hours a day or more than 40 hours a week, and deviations to the 20-hour standard should be kept to a minimum. If you find that you are consistently working more than 20 hours a week, consult with your faculty supervisor or department administrator. It is important that you have adequate and sufficient time to focus on your degree pursuits.

## SATISFACTORY PERFORMANCE

Continuation of the assistantship after the first semester is contingent upon satisfactory academic performance, satisfactory teaching and/or laboratory performance, progress toward your degree, and abiding by the program and University's policies and procedures. Satisfactory performance will be determined by your faculty supervisor. UI policies are available on-line in the Faculty-Staff Handbook. Department policies are available on your department's webpage.

## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

To avoid crisis situations, begin the semester by creating some rules for yourself. Below are some examples but feel free to come up with your own priorities and make sure to write them down so you will stick to them.

- ★ Be willing to ask for help as the semester progresses. If you find yourself consistently behind with both your graduate work and your teaching/research responsibilities, it is time to reassess your methods. Speak to your faculty advisor or TA/RA supervisor about your problem.
- ★ Don't forget that your greatest responsibility is to your academic program. Thinking practically, you must realize that your TA or RA position is dependent upon the successful completion of your own courses.

#### TIME MANAGEMENT TIPS

- ★ Do not let the work pile up. Free time is often difficult to find once the semester gets underway. Keep a steady pace so you won't be overwhelmed.
- ★ Rank all tasks in their order of importance, which will give you a realistic perspective.
- ★ Make an outline of all deadlines you must meet during the semester. This way you can determine what is due and what you can delay quickly.
- ★ Enter all tasks and deadlines in a date book or calendar. Looking at this date book daily will allow you to maintain a realistic notion of what remains to be done. Flag important dates in the calendar and write a reminder in your calendar before the due date for each task, allowing yourself enough lead-time to complete it.
- ★ Each evening, make up a prioritized "to-do" list for the next day. Each morning, before you begin your work, go over this list to plan your day, starting with the most critical tasks first.
- ★ Consider creating a wall chart with critical tasks and dates marked. Post it over your desk so that you can read it every day.
- ★ Use project-management software on your computer to schedule critical tasks and dates.

#### BE ACCOMMODATING

Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have documented temporary or permanent disabilities. All accommodations must be approved through Disability Support Services, located in the Idaho Commons Building, Room 306, in order to notify your instructor(s) as soon as possible regarding accommodation(s) needed for the course. Contact DSS at 208-885-6307, email [dss@uidaho.edu](mailto:dss@uidaho.edu) or go to [www.uidaho.edu/dss](http://www.uidaho.edu/dss).

#### CONDUCTING LABORATORY SESSIONS

A laboratory session encourages active learning. These sessions give students a chance to work with and talk to each other, experiment, explore, discuss, reflect, and draw appropriate conclusions from their work. Some lab sessions aim to acquaint students with practical skills and techniques relevant to the discipline whereas others may focus on the development of skills in scientific inquiry. Graduate assistants may be required to hold a laboratory session. If you are required to hold one, please keep the following tips in mind.

## Prepare Ahead

- ★ Get notes and other preparatory materials together ahead of time.
- ★ Preview textural materials and lab manuals.
- ★ Discuss lab session expectations with lecturer beforehand.
- ★ Find out where essential supplies are stored and ascertain who is responsible for ordering them.
- ★ Know how to cope with equipment breakdown.
- ★ Perform any experiments at least once in advance to ensure they work correctly and safely.

## SAFETY PROCEDURES

- ★ Familiarize yourself with proper emergency and safety procedures for the lab. Note where to go in case of a fire alarm.
- ★ Sign up for the University of Idaho emergency notification system, Vandal Alert on VandalWeb. For more information, please call 208-885-2254.
- ★ Seek help when you are unable to deal with an emergency or potential danger.

## COACHING

- ★ Provide clear and complete instruction at the very beginning of the lab session
- ★ In case of difficulties, avoid jumping right in and completing the task for the students. Instead, use process questions to help students identify their own problems and solve them. This will help students develop vital scientific inquiry skills.
- ★ Get the whole group together for debriefing
- ★ Avoid lecturing, but instead summarize what the students have learned and highlight major discussion points
- ★ Try to break down the demonstration (of equipment, the experiment process or both) into several meaningful steps
- ★ Explain and emphasize the main points. It is very desirable to check understanding from students by asking relevant questions or inviting a few to try on the equipment
- ★ During the session, you may ask process questions like:
  - How did you begin?
  - Where did you first have trouble?
  - Are there other options available to you?

## POST-LAB FEEDBACK

- ★ Jot down notes for future improvement
- ★ Share notes with faculty, technicians, and other researchers

## CAMPUS RESOURCES

- ★ Academic Support Programs: I-SUB 306: (208) 885-6307
- ★ Campus Copy Center: I-SUB, 1st floor: (208) 885-7377
- ★ College of Graduate Studies: Morrill 104: (208) 885-6243
- ★ Counseling and Testing Center (CTC): Mary Forney Hall, 3rd Floor; (208) 885-6716
- ★ Dean of Students Office: I-SUB 232: (208) 885-6757
- ★ Center for Disability Access and Resources, Pitman Center 127: (208) 885-6307
- ★ Information Technology Services Help Desk: TLC 128; (208) 885-4357(HELP); [helpdesk@uidaho.edu](mailto:helpdesk@uidaho.edu)
- ★ POLYA Math Learning Center: Brink Hall 300: (208) 885-6742
- ★ Registrar's Office: Pitman Center 119: (208) 885-6731
- ★ Statistics Assistance Center: 2nd Floor Library and ZOOM: (208) 885-4683
- ★ Student Computing Labs: There are over 500 computers in 15 labs.
- ★ Student Health Center: UI Campus: 831 Ash Street: (208) 885-6693
- ★ Student Support Services: I-SUB 306: (208) 885-6307
- ★ Tutoring and College Success: I-SUB 306: (208) 885-6307
- ★ University of Idaho Library Services: (208) 885-6584
- ★ Women's Center: Memorial Gym Room 109: (208) 885-6616
- ★ Writing Center: I-SUB 323: (208) 885-6644