



**Illinois State University**  
Graduate Assistant Handbook

*2020-2021*

Last Updated: January 2021

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## Welcome

This handbook should provide you with answers to many of the commonly asked questions about graduate assistantships at Illinois State University. You will learn how to apply for an assistantship; whether you are eligible for an assistantship; the appointment and reappointment process; the financial and educational benefits of an assistantship; and the expectations and rights of a graduate assistant.

If you can't find the answer to your question in this handbook, please use the contact list at the end of this handbook to contact a staff member who can assist you.

University regulations and policies affecting graduate students are subject to changes and additions. Such changes and additions shall be officially announced and/or posted to the Graduate School website at <http://grad.illinoisstate.edu/>; this shall constitute actual notice to students. The changes and additions shall become effective and binding at the date of such posting or official announcement.

## Introduction

Illinois State University offers graduate assistantships as a means of financial support. Graduate assistantships are highly competitive and are intended to facilitate your progress to degree. Assistantship policies, regulations and procedures promote these academic objectives. Your satisfactory academic progress and time-to-degree are some of the important factors in your initial and continued eligibility for an assistantship.

A graduate assistant (GA) has work responsibilities and consequently must be eligible for employment at Illinois State University. First and foremost, though a GA is a student and work assignments should generally complement or contribute to your academic objectives and should not inhibit your satisfactory academic performance or interfere with the timely completion of your degree.

If your progress to degree will suffer as a result of your work as a GA, then you shouldn't accept the graduate assistantship. Similarly, appointing units not in a position to contribute to the student's academic objectives shouldn't offer a graduate assistantship.

## Accommodations

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to ensure equal employment opportunities and access to University academic programs, services, and facilities in accordance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) as amended, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other applicable federal and state regulations. The process for requesting an accommodation related to your GA appointment can be found at <http://policy.illinoisstate.edu/conduct/1-3-1.shtml>. For further information or to request an accommodation or a modification to an existing accommodation, please contact the following office.

Office of Equal Opportunity and Access  
310 Hovey Hall, Campus Box 1280, Phone: 309-438-3383

The process for requesting an accommodation in your student role can be found at: [www.disabilityconcerns.illinoisstate.edu](http://www.disabilityconcerns.illinoisstate.edu). For further information or to request an accommodation or a modification to an existing accommodation, please contact the following office:

**Student Access and Accommodation Services**  
350 Fell Hall, Campus Box 1290  
309 - 438-5853  
[ableisu@ilstu.edu](mailto:ableisu@ilstu.edu)

## Benefits of a Graduate Assistantship

Subject to eligibility requirements, an assistantship provides:

- a stipend or an hourly wage;
- a partial/full tuition waiver during the time of your contract;
- a partial/full tuition waiver for the summer after a fall or spring assistantship; and
- the opportunity to participate in a 403(b) retirement plan.

You will also have the opportunity to:

- learn the professional culture, language, and ethics of your discipline;
- gain valuable professional experience working with other students, faculty, and staff;
- learn to manage your time and assignments;
- gain experience as a mentor and leader;
- make professional bonds that will serve you throughout your time in the program and often well beyond.

For many students, their time as a GA ranks as the high point of their graduate experience.

Please see the sections below for a description of the amount of the stipend, the amount of the tuition waiver, and the eligibility requirements for the various additional benefits. Other benefits vary by unit and the classification of the assistantship but could include access to services of the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Technology, teacher training and orientation, assigned work space, computing equipment, and lab or studio resources.

Illinois State University offers a 403(b) [Retirement Savings Plan](#) to all its employees, including its graduate assistants. Your years as a graduate student are an excellent time to start saving for your future. These flexible plans can be personalized to your financial and professional needs. To discuss further, please contact Human Resources at 309-438-8311.

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

### **Responsibilities of the appointing unit**

Appointing units are responsible for providing appropriate supervision, training, working conditions, and sufficient resources for GAs to perform their assigned duties. Performance assessment is also an important part of the assistantship process and should be shared by the supervisor with the student.

### **Responsibilities of a GA**

#### *Assigned duties*

As a GA, you are expected to perform your assigned duties in a satisfactory manner, keeping your supervisors informed of special circumstances such as absences.

#### *Academic freedom and academic responsibility*

The policy and procedures articulated in [Policy 3.3.13](#) define your academic freedoms and academic responsibilities. Academic freedom is not unlimited. As a graduate student, your freedom to conduct research, to teach, and to express yourself creatively may be at tension with another student's freedom to learn or to form independent judgments. This tension forms an important dimension of the scholarly process and requires a constant examination of your rights and responsibilities.

#### *Research integrity*

The source of funding for an assistantship may place restrictions on your access to as well as your right to use data collected during your assistantship. Every profession and discipline as well as the University has ethical guidelines and policies and procedures which address the ownership of data, including such things as authorship and data use. You should discuss these issues with your supervisor before you begin work.

Any research activities conducted by any student must meet ethical guidelines established by the federal government. This includes research with human subjects or animals. Federal and state regulations also guide health and safety for university research activities. Any questions about issues of potential misconduct in research should be directed to the [Research Ethics and Compliance Office](#).

#### *Academic Integrity*

Illinois State University upholds the integrity of the academic process as well as providing a community free from disruptions. With the goal of fostering a healthy and peaceful learning community, the [Code of Student Conduct](#) articulates the University's expectations for academic integrity. Their violation may result in disciplinary action.

Students are expected to be honest in all academic work. Detailed expectations are explained at [Student Rights and Responsibilities](#).

#### *Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy*

You should familiarize yourself with Illinois State's [Anti-harassment and Non-discrimination](#) policy. For more information, contact the [Office of Equal Opportunity and Access](#).

### *Drug-Free Workplace*

Illinois State maintains a [Drug-free Workplace](#) policy. Please familiarize yourself with the policy before you begin any assistantship appointment.

## **Types of Assistantships**

Each graduate assistantship is assigned both a *classification* and a *full-time equivalency* (FTE). [Human Resources](#) assigns the classification; the appointing department or unit assigns the FTE. The job duties determine the classification; the FTE is determined by the amount of time it should generally take to perform the duties assigned. GAs are usually engaged in professional activities. The nature of those activities, the output produced, and the results accomplished cannot be precisely standardized or measured in relation to a given period of time.

### **Classifications**

The University offers five GA classifications:

- graduate teaching assistantship
- graduate research assistantship
- pre-professional assistantship
- external practicum
- administrative/operational assistantship (on 01/05/2021 this classification was eliminated effective summer 2021. No further GA positions will be posted or offered starting 01/05/2021. All current offers as of 01/05/2021, for spring 2021 will be honored).

### *Graduate Teaching Assistantships*

A graduate teaching assistant's primary duties should be in support of instruction in a classroom or laboratory, including but not limited to responsibilities such as serving as a primary or secondary teaching instructor in a class or laboratory, assisting a faculty member with teaching-related tasks, grading student assignments which require knowledge of subjects taught in a class or laboratory, meeting with and/or tutoring students, holding office hours, preparing instructional materials, and assisting during class and/or lab, etc.

### *Graduate Research Assistantships*

A graduate research assistant is generally assigned to assist individual faculty members with their research. The nature of the assistance varies by discipline and can involve a variety of activities such as library work, proposal writing and publications, data gathering, data analysis, field work and/or studio work, etc.

### *Pre-Professional Assistantships*

Pre-professional assistantships are intended to provide valuable on-campus professional development for students working outside of the classroom and research arena. Graduate assistantships whose job assignments are closely aligned with their programs of study may be classified as pre-professional assistants. In consultation with the hiring unit, the Office of Human Resources assigns a student to this classification after a potential candidate has been identified.

### *Graduate Practicum*

Specially qualified graduate students under the sponsorship of an external sponsor as well as under the supervision of a faculty or full-time staff member may participate in the University's Graduate Practicum Placement Program. Typically, faculty/staff make initial arrangements for graduate student placements with an external sponsor while the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs administers the contract and the student assistantship process. These assistantships are not the same as Professional Practice courses taken for credit and bearing the number 498.

### *Administrative/Operational Assistantships*

Many graduate students perform administrative support functions that contribute to the smooth functioning of campus units. The duties of these graduate administrative/operational assistantships vary and may include, for example, administrative support, computer and digital media support, program planning, or any duties that do not meet the criteria of the other assistantships.

### **Full-time equivalency**

A full-time equivalency is based on 40 hours of work per week being equal to 1.0 FTE. A graduate assistantship is assigned a full-time equivalency between .25 FTE and .70 FTE. For example, a GA with a .50 FTE assistantship should normally expect to devote on average about 20 hours per week throughout the assistantship period performing the assigned duties. GAs at other full-time equivalency levels would be expected to work a proportionally larger or smaller average amount; for example, students with a .25 FTE assistantship should normally expect to work about 10 hours per week; those with a .70 FTE assistantship should expect to work about 28 hours per week.

A student will not be appointed to more than a .70 FTE assistantship or be assigned duties that will exceed 28 hours during any given week. Exceptions to these policies must be sought in writing from the Director of the Graduate School before any assignments.

The time necessary to accomplish the assigned tasks will vary from person to person and from assignment to assignment. Deviations from the average can be expected as part of acquiring the skills of each student's profession or from exceptional off-campus activities (e.g., field trips or conference participation), but the total assigned duties for the contract period should not exceed the averages given above.

### **Part-time Graduate Assistantships**

Several programs at ISU are primarily designed as part-time programs that may appeal to students who are employed full-time or part-time in the field and wish to pursue advanced degrees. The structure of these programs and its audience virtually assure that these students never take 9 credit hours in the fall or spring semesters. In the past this has made them ineligible for graduate assistantships. However, ISU now has a part-time graduate assistantship option.

The part-time GA program allows part-time students to be granted an exception to the minimum registration requirements for graduate assistants so that they may apply for graduate

assistantships. Being chosen for a part-time graduate assistantship allows the students to receive a tuition waiver at a rate proportional to the typical minimum registration requirement of 9 credit hours per semester; for example, students carrying 6 credit hours received a waiver for six-ninths of their tuition. In addition, if the appointment is for a fall or spring semester, the student will also receive a partial tuition waiver for the summer at a proportional rate. This rate is calculated by adding the total number of credit hours enrolled for the combined fall and spring semesters and dividing by 18 (i.e. number of credit hours enrolled by a full-time graduate assistant); for example, students carrying 6 credit hours in the fall and 4 in the spring will receive a waiver for ten-eighteenthths of their tuition. There are no reduction in fees for any GA's regardless of full- or part-time status.

The following are guidelines for a part-time graduate assistantship:

- All provisions of the GA Handbook will apply with the exception of those referring to minimum registration requirements and tuition waivers. In particular, all students must carry health insurance, and they are guaranteed the same minimum stipends as students with equal FTE appointments.
- Part-time GAs are limited to purchasing up to 4 semesters of health insurance (only Fall & Spring semesters count toward limit). They would also need to request/purchase for summer to keep it in force, but summer would not count toward the limit of four.
- A minimum of 6 credit hours per semester are required to be in the program.
- Because financial aid and student accounts information is not an automated process and with the implementation of the new Campus Solutions system, the number of part-time graduate assistants on campus will be limited to 20 students per semester. The request for a part-time GA must be made to the Graduate School. If approved, the Graduate School will forward the information to Human Resources so the process may begin. These positions need to be a separate posting in Human Resources.
- The part-time assistantships cannot replace existing civil service positions in order for the department/school to save money.
- Once a student holds one of the 20 available part-time graduate assistantships, he/she will maintain the assistantship until graduating or being dismissed for reasons outlined in the Graduate Assistant Handbook.
- International students cannot hold a part-time assistantship because they must be enrolled as full-time students.

### **International Students**

If you are an international student the rules/laws for your visa status may place limits on your employment eligibility and the total hours you are eligible to work (typically no more than 20 hours per week). The responsibility for knowing and following all applicable visa status rules/laws lies with you. If you are not certain whether your visa status allows you to accept an



assistantship, to work over 20 hours a week, or to work additional hours, contact [International Student and Scholars Services \(ISSS\)](#) immediately for clarification. The University does not have the authority to grant exceptions to visa status rules/laws.

### **Eligibility Criteria**

Graduate assistantships are highly competitive and you must meet minimum requirements for obtaining your first assistantship and for being appointed to subsequent ones. Having and maintaining a good graduate GPA, having good language skills, and making satisfactory progress to degree all play critical roles in holding an assistantship. As a GA, you are an employee of the University, but you are first and foremost a student and a GA position should not interfere with your progress to degree. If you have any questions about your eligibility for an assistantship, talk with your graduate coordinator or visit the [Graduate School](#).

### **General eligibility criteria**

To be eligible for an assistantship you must meet the following criteria:

- Be admitted unconditionally as a degree student into a graduate academic program with an official transcript verifying an undergraduate degree, or have a minimum of 120 undergraduate hours if in an integrated degree program;
- Have a minimum 2.8 GPA in the last 60 hours of undergraduate work if you have less than 9 hours of graduate credit; or have a minimum 3.0 cumulative graduate GPA if you have 9 or more hours of graduate credit; (Note: Graduate GPA includes *all graduate courses* you may have taken, including graduate courses taken as a student-at-large or at other universities.);
- Be in good-standing at the university;
- Be enrolled full-time during the entire contract period. (Note: You must generally take at least 9 credit hours during the fall or spring semesters to be enrolled full-time. Exceptions exist for students in their last semester, who have completed all their doctoral course work, or during summer.) Exceptions are also made for those participating in the part-time GA program described on the previous page.
- Pathway students must have successfully completed the Pathway program to hold a graduate assistantship.
- Visiting or certificate-only students are not eligible for assistantships without the written approval of the Graduate School. University employees other than student employees are not eligible for assistantships.

You must be covered by a health insurance plan during each semester you hold an assistantship. The University offers a [student health insurance plan](#).

### **Contract length and reemployment of GAs**

Each GA contract should be less than 12 months in length. A fall or spring assistantship of less than 12 weeks requires exceptional circumstances and must be approved by the Graduate School in advance of the offer. Employment is only for the dates specified in a contract unless you have been offered and accepted a new contract with subsequent dates.

You must meet all the general eligibility criteria listed in the previous section to be eligible for reemployment. In addition, any subsequent graduate assistantship offers will depend upon factors including, but not limited to, your previous job performance, satisfactory progress to degree, availability of funds, and unit priorities.

### **Language requirement**

State law requires oral proficiency in the English language among all classroom instructors at public institutions of higher education in Illinois (110 ILCS 675/20-70). Procedures have been established to address student concerns about faculty or teaching assistants who may not be communicating effectively through the use of oral English language. Please read the details on the [Oral English Proficiency](#) requirements.

Certain teaching assistants are required to provide documentation of English language proficiency through an acceptable TOEFL or IELTS score when applying for admission and must either:

- have a currently valid minimum speaking score of 26 on the TOEFL iBT;
- submit the results of a passing score on the Test of Spoken English (TSE) prior to arrival on campus; or
- be evaluated on campus (directly through the department/school interview or through the campus English Language Institute).

### **Employment verification**

A GA must verify eligibility to work at Illinois State University by completing a Form I-9 within three days of starting work. Domestic students complete this form at their department/school and should contact their graduate coordinator for further instructions; international students complete this form in the [Human Resources](#).

## **GA Compensation**

In this section we address your minimum compensation, the maximum number of hours you can work, and about other benefits.

### **Stipends and hourly wages**

Administrative/operational GAs earn an hourly wage, all other GAs are paid a monthly stipend. The monthly stipend for an assistantship varies and depends upon classification (e.g. RA, TA, PP), its FTE (generally from .25 FTE to .70 FTE), the source of the funding (e.g., general revenue, external grants), your program level (e.g., masters, doctoral), and the nature of the assignment.

The tables below list the minimum compensation for GAs beginning January 1, 2021.

<b>TA, RA, Practicum, Pre-Professional by FTE appointment</b>	<b>Minimum monthly stipend</b>	<b>Hours generally worked</b>
<i>Master's student</i>		
<b>.25 FTE</b>	<b>\$477</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>.26-.50 FTE</b>	<b>\$954</b>	<b>11-20</b>
<b>.51-.70 FTE</b>	<b>\$1335</b>	<b>21-28</b>
<i>Doctoral student who is enrolled in the first or second year of study</i>		
<b>.25 FTE</b>	<b>\$525</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>.26-.50 FTE</b>	<b>\$1050</b>	<b>11-20</b>
<b>.51-.70 FTE</b>	<b>\$1407</b>	<b>21-28</b>
<i>Doctoral student who has completed 2 years of full-time graduate study</i>		
<b>.25 FTE</b>	<b>\$625</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>.26-.50 FTE</b>	<b>\$1250</b>	<b>11-20</b>
<b>.51-.70 FTE</b>	<b>\$1675</b>	<b>21-28</b>

<b>Administrative/Operational</b>	<b>Minimum hourly wage</b>
<i>All students All FTE</i>	\$11.00 per hour
<i>Doctoral student who is enrolled in the first or second year of full-time study</i>	\$12.12
<i>Doctoral student who has completed 2 years of full-time graduate study</i>	\$14.42

Precise rates vary by posting and are detailed on your offer letter.

### **Tuition waivers, loans and taxability**

A GA receives an instate tuition waiver during the semester or term of the assistantship. Internal Revenue Service regulations consider anything of value provided to an employee by an employer to be a form of compensation. This regulation may have the effect of reducing your student loans and increasing your tax liabilities.

Your tuition waiver may count as income, and therefore the amount you may be eligible to receive in student loans may go down. If your loans have been disbursed before you have been awarded the waiver; you may even have to repay some or all of the loans depending on the total loans received and the amount of financial aid you are eligible to receive. Additional information

on your loan eligibility is available from the [Financial Aid Office](#). For more information on taxation see the Tuition Waiver Taxation section of this document.

### **In-state and out-of-state tuition**

Per [Policy 2.1.17](#), graduate assistants are treated as residents. This means tuition is charged and waived at in-state rates. Once an out of state student is no longer a graduate assistant, they will be charged at out of state tuition rates.

### **Fees**

You are required to pay student fees for any semester during which you receive a tuition waiver. Your student bill will contain a description of the fees and their amounts. The fees are set each year by the Board of Trustees. You can find a detailed description of these fees at: <http://studentaccounts.illinoisstate.edu/tuition/graduate.php>.

### **Emergency loans**

If you have a graduate assistantship but the paperwork is unable to be processed in time to be issued a payroll payment, you may request an interest-free emergency loan from the Graduate School for up to 80 percent of the pay due you for that pay period. If your loan is approved, this loan amount must be repaid from your first issued payroll payment. To request a loan, contact the GA Employment Consultant in [Human Resources](#). Emergency loans are not disbursed until the date which would normally have been the student's pay date.

### **Retirement plan and savings**

A 403(b) [Retirement Savings Plan](#) is available to all Illinois State employees, including GAs. Starting and contributing to this plan is a great way to save for your future. To discuss further, please contact [Human Resources](#).

## **Applications and offers**

### **Applying for an assistantship**

Your academic department/school should be your primary source for an assistantship. Your graduate program coordinator will be able to provide you with assistantship information. Graduate assistantships are also available through administrative units, such as athletics, student services, and through various administrative offices on campus. Search and apply for assistantships through the [online recruiting system](#). This system provides a central location to search for all open assistantships.

### **Graduate assistantship offer**

If you are offered a graduate assistantship, the appointing unit will make you the assistantship offer via email. After receiving the offer, you should accept or decline the offer via email following the directions provided in the offer letter.

International students may be required to verify and document sufficient funding for one year of educational and living expenses. Assistantship offers can greatly affect the amount the student must document.

In 1965, the Council of Graduate Schools approved the following [resolution](#) regarding offers of financial assistance such as graduate assistantships and tuition waivers. The resolution places certain responsibilities on both the student and the institution. The ISU Graduate School endorses this resolution.

*“Acceptance of an offer of financial support (such as a graduate scholarship, fellowship, traineeship, or assistantship) for the next academic year by a prospective or enrolled graduate student completes an agreement that both student and graduate school expect to honor. In that context, the conditions affecting such offers and their acceptance must be defined carefully and understood by all parties.*

*Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15; earlier deadlines for acceptance of such offers violate the intent of the Resolution. In those instances in which a student accepts an offer before April 15, and subsequently desires to withdraw that acceptance, the student may submit in writing a resignation of the appointment at any time through April 15. However, an acceptance given or left in force after April 15 commits the student not to accept another offer without first obtaining a written release from the institution to which a commitment has been made. Similarly, an offer by an institution after April 15 is conditional on presentation by the student of the written release from any previously accepted offer.”*

Address questions regarding this resolution to the [Graduate School](#).

## **Graduate Assistantships**

### **Administrative and academic calendars**

Your GA contract will ordinarily follow either the academic calendar or the administrative calendar. On the academic calendar, a GA normally works when classes are in session; this includes finals week. On the administrative calendar, a GA is normally expected to work any weekdays the university is open and possibly weekends, and holidays. For example, a GA who cares for lab animals may follow the administrative calendar.

Teaching assistants generally follow the academic calendar, the same schedule as faculty. This ordinarily will require a TA to be on campus for orientation and training for at least one week before the start of classes, and to remain on campus through the final exam period; if this is required this will be the length of your contract. Responsibilities for some assistantships, for example, research or administrative/operational GAs, could include being available when the University is open during academic program break periods, and on weekends and holidays by arrangement.

You and your appointing unit should agree ahead of time on work hours, time-off, absences, etc.

The GA does not come with paid time off; for circumstances that require unpaid time off please contact your graduate coordinator who will then contact the Office of Human Resources. See the section below for information on work options outside of your GA contract.

## **Summer Graduate Assistantship**

To be eligible for a graduate assistantship over the summer, you must:

- be admitted to the Graduate School at ISU for the summer term in a degree seeking program or an active student within an ISU degree seeking program for one academic semester (Fall or Spring term).
- meet all eligibility requirements to hold a graduate assistantship, including enrollment in a minimum of 6 credit hours/maximum of 12 credit hours of graduate coursework;
- have submitted to Human Resources all completed assistantship paperwork; and
- Not have graduated from the graduate program.

If you are not eligible for a summer graduate assistantship, you may be eligible to be hired as a student employee.

## **Summer tuition waivers**

If you hold a summer graduate assistantship, you are eligible for a tuition waiver for that summer up to 12 hours. If you do not hold a summer graduate assistantship, you may still qualify for a summer tuition waiver under the following circumstances listed below.

### *Summer after tuition waivers*

If you hold an assistantship in the fall or spring, you are eligible for a tuition waiver during the summer after the assistantship. You receive a “summer-after” tuition waiver for up to 12 credit hours as long as you have not yet graduated; and are in good standing for the summer term.

A summer stipend or hourly pay does not accompany the “summer-after” tuition waiver unless you also hold a graduate assistantship during the summer term.

### *Summer before tuition waivers*

Instead of a “summer-after” tuition waiver, a department/school may request that you receive a tuition waiver of up to 12 credit hours during the summer *before* a fall assistantship. In order to be eligible for a “summer- before” tuition waiver, you must satisfy the following:

#### Eligibility

- be admitted to the ISU Graduate School for the summer term in a degree seeking program.
- be enrolled in at least one summer course,
  - International students need to be enrolled for at least 6 hours if this is the first or last semester of enrollment unless a reduced course load waiver is approved
- meet all eligibility requirements to hold a graduate assistantship, including Fall pre-registration for at least 9 credit hours of graduate coursework; and
- have completed and submitted to Human Resources all assistantship paperwork

#### Implications

- if a summer before tuition waiver is used and you resign or are separated prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of October, 100% of summer tuition must be repaid.
- A summer after tuition waiver is not available even if you are appointed as a GA this Fall and/or next Spring.

To request a “summer before” tuition waiver the student must send an e-mail with the text below to their department graduate coordinator, Human Resources and the Graduate School before the end of the second week of the class for which you seek the tuition waiver:

Student’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
UID: \_\_\_\_\_  
GA Classification (Teaching, Research, etc) \_\_\_\_\_  
Begin date of Fall GA appointment: \_\_\_\_\_  
End Date of GA appointment: \_\_\_\_\_  
Last 60 hours GPA (incoming student) or Cumulative Graduate GPA (returning student): \_\_\_\_\_

I, (student name), would like to request a “summer-before” tuition waiver for summer of 20XX. I certify I meet all the following requirements:

- I am admitted to a degree-seeking graduate program starting this summer.
- I am enrolled in at least one course, but no more than 12 credit hours.
- If applicable, I am enrolled in at least 6 hours as an international student in my first or last semester.
- I am registered for at least 9 hours of fall coursework at the graduate level.
- I have completed and submitted all assistantship paperwork to Human Resources.

I understand the following implications of using a summer before waiver:

- If I use a summer before tuition waiver and I resign or am separated prior to the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of October, I must repay 100% of summer tuition.
- I will not be able to use a summer after tuition waiver even if I am appointed as a GA this Fall and/or next Spring.

### **Exceptions to minimum academic load requirement**

If you wish to hold an assistantship while enrolling in less than 9 hours in a fall or spring or less than 6 hours in summer, you must be granted a written exception by the Graduate School to these minimum registration requirements. Exceptions for students wishing to accommodate a preference for part-time enrollment, in anticipation of especially demanding courses or assistantship duties, for shortage of sufficient course offerings in a given semester, or for scheduling of other employment are very rarely granted. However, if you are in the final semester of your program, have filed for graduation, and need less than 9 credit hours to complete your course of study, you may seek a one-time waiver to reduce the load to the number of hours required for your degree completion.

To request an exception, ask your graduate coordinator to complete and approve the [Graduate Assistant Course Load Waiver Form](#). If your appointment comes from outside of your department/school, ask your appointing unit to complete the form and have them forward it to your academic department/school for approval and signature. Once complete, the department/school will forward the form to the Graduate School for review. You and your department/school will receive written notification of the review from the Graduate School.

### **PERS 938 (GA Course Load Waiver)**

The Payroll Office requires form PERS 938 for those student employees who are in their last semester of classes in order to properly apply the student FICA exemption to their paychecks for the term. If the form is not received by the HR cutoff date, then the student employee may have FICA taxes withheld from his/her paychecks. The employee does not have use of these funds until it is identified and refunded on the next payroll. HR & Payroll have established the following deadlines for the PERS form: Summer: 4/25; Fall: 7/25; Spring: 12/14. **Tax withholding caused by late form submissions will not be reimbursed to the student.**

Note: Students not registered for 9 hours will **not** be automatically assessed ISU insurance fees. Late forms may preclude students from purchasing their own ISU insurance due to the deadlines.

If you are an international student, please discuss this with International Student and Scholars Services prior to completing the form.

### **Graduate additional pay**

You may be employed for more than the maximum number of hours allowed by your contract only in case of an exceptional, temporary, or one-time circumstance. Your employing unit must request the graduate extra pay for you. In order to receive graduate extra pay, you must meet all of the following conditions:

- you agree to the assignment
- you are in good standing
- you are legally eligible to work the proposed extra hours;
- your graduate coordinator approves the extra assignment;
- your total university employment from all sources, including the proposed extra assignment, does not exceed 28 hours during any week.

In an emergency situation, the Graduate School may exempt a unit from the last of these requirements. Units should be aware that approvals for such exceptions are limited to extraordinary emergencies. No such emergency assignment may be made or work begun unless and until the exception has been approved by both the Graduate School and Human Resources.

### **Other employment**

If you have a graduate assistantship for less than .70 FTE, you may be able to accept limited on-campus employment in addition to your assistantship. However, this is possible only under the following conditions:

- International students: your total on-campus employment does not exceed a total of 20 hours of work per week during the fall and spring semesters or 28 hours during the summer semester
- Domestic students: your total on-campus employment does not exceed a total of 28 hours of work per week during any semester



An example for fall and spring semesters would be a graduate assistant with a .25 FTE assistantship (for which you are expected to work 10 hours per week), may accept a second .25 FTE assistantship or some other form of on-campus work for up to 18 hours per week. The Graduate School and Human Resources must approve any exceptions to this policy in writing *before* you work any extra hours. Working on-campus outside of your assistantship and in excess of the limits above without prior approval from the Graduate School and Human Resources is a violation of assistantship policy and may be cause for termination.

It's important not to let your employment interfere with the completion of your degree. The Graduate School encourages you to limit your work hours to a minimum. However, the University does not monitor off-campus employment of GAs. International GAs should contact [International Student and Scholars Services \(ISSS\)](#) for any additional restrictions on employment related to visa status.

### **Professional Practice**

If you are enrolled in a professional practice or other course for credit from the professional practice experience (e.g., 400, 498) course, you may accept compensation ONLY if you are NOT performing the work at/for Illinois State University. You cannot receive compensation for work performed at/for the University and be given credit for the course. A professional practice on campus must be unpaid and not in the same area as your graduate assistantship. For example, an athletics GA in marketing cannot do a professional practice in marketing but may do an unpaid one in media relations.

Your paid assistantship hours cannot exceed 28 hours per week. The total paid on campus hours and non – paid professional practice hours cannot exceed 40 hours per week.

### **Resignation and termination**

Your resignation or termination from your assistantship may have tuition, enrollment, tax, and visa consequences; in particular, you may lose all or part of your tuition waiver. Hiring units need to inform the [Graduate School](#) and [Human Resources](#) by email within 24 hours of any termination so the relevant on-campus and off-campus offices can be informed.

#### *Resignation*

If you need to resign your GA appointment, the resignation should be in writing or e-mail to the responsible administrator in your appointing unit indicating your last day of work. It is customary to provide as much notice as possible, but no less than two weeks, if you cannot fulfill your assistantship.

### *Termination*

You may be terminated from your assistantship for any one of the following reasons:

1. failure to remain in good standing;
2. failure to maintain enrollment in 9 credit hours of course work for each fall or spring semester or 6 hours for summer while on an assistantship unless an exception to the minimum academic load has been approved; (See the section on Exceptions to Academic Load above.);
3. be in default on a student loan which has not been cleared within 6 months of the date the GA appointment begins;
4. failure to make satisfactory progress towards degree completion in a timely fashion;
5. failure to meet the performance criteria expected by the unit providing the assistantship;
6. failure to uphold Graduate School, unit/department, and/or University policies, including, but not limited to, policies on academic integrity in your own academic work;
7. failure or refusal to perform assigned duties or attend mandatory meetings;
8. violation to any Federal or State law or regulation in the performance of the employee's duties or that has a negative impact on the University; or
9. engagement in any other misconduct in the performance of University duties or academic activities.

The appointing unit, in coordination with the Graduate School, may terminate the assistantship for reasons 1-4. If your assistantship is terminated for reasons 5-9, the department works with [Human Resources](#). If you are terminated, you will be provided with a reason in writing and be provided an opportunity to respond before the termination becomes final.

Terminations for reasons listed in 5-9 are carried out by Labor Relations at [Human Resources](#). Units begin by contacting the Labor Relations Director, who will advise and assist the unit in the following:

- framing a notification to the GA, outlining the reasons for the potential termination, and informing the GA of the process and deadline for any response;
- reviewing the GA's response (if any);
- reaching a decision on the termination; or
- notifying the GA of their decision.

Termination for any reason other than those listed above can only be carried out with the approval of the Graduate School and Human Resources; furthermore, the student must be afforded due process.

### *Loss of tuition waiver*

If you resign or are terminated from your assistantship before completing the full term of your contract, you may lose the corresponding tuition waiver benefit. Effective January 1, 2015, you may be required to pay a percentage of the full amount of the appropriate tuition for the semester. The percentage varies depending on the date of your resignation or termination:

- if you resign or your contract is terminated on or before the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of October (fall semester) or the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of March (spring semester), you must repay 100% of the appropriate tuition at the in-state rate;
- if you resign or your contract is terminated after the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of October or the 4<sup>th</sup> Wednesday of March you are allowed to keep your tuition waiver.
- Note: any subsequent semesters without an assistantship will be charged at rates based on residency status.

If you are withdrawing from the University, please refer to the withdrawal schedule on the [Student Accounts](#) website in regards to the potential adjustment to your tuition and fee charges.

### **Stipends**

You should make arrangements in person with the University [Payroll Office](#) or online via [MyIllinoisState](#) to have your paychecks directly deposit with participating banks. If you don't make direct deposit arrangements, you will pick up checks on campus at University [Payroll Office](#).

### **Tuition Waiver Taxation**

Under current applicable state and federal tax regulations this section only applies to administrative/operational, pre-professional, and practicum graduate assistants. Generally, tuition benefits offered to graduate assistants are excluded from taxable income under section 117(d) of the Internal Revenue Code (IRC). However, section 117(d) only excludes from taxable income tuition benefits for graduate students who are engaged in teaching activities or research activities at the University.

Tuition benefits for graduate assistants not engaged in teaching or research activities at the University may be excluded up to \$5,250 each calendar year under section 127 of the IRC relating to Educational Assistance Plans.

Section 127 provides an exclusion of employer-paid tuition benefits from taxable income for employees enrolled in graduate level classes, up to a maximum annual amount of \$5,250 for those not engaged in teaching or research activities. As a result of the operation of the above code sections, the part of the total tuition benefit provided to a graduate assistant that exceeds \$5,250 in a calendar (January-December) year will be added to income as a taxable fringe benefit.

If the total tuition benefit related to a graduate assistant appointment does exceed \$5,250 in a calendar year, the graduate assistant will be notified separately, and the applicable taxes withheld. Caution must be utilized in projecting future calendar years. If the tuition benefit does not exceed the IRS limit in a calendar year, it might exceed the limit at some year in the future if appointed as a graduate assistant for more than one semester within the calendar year.

Typically, taxes on taxable tuition waivers in excess of \$5,250 are withheld from the graduate assistant’s paychecks in the last two months of any given semester: in November and December for the fall semester, in April and May for the spring semester, and in July for the summer term. If no paycheck is available in the given month, the taxes will be withheld on the next available paycheck. You will receive correspondence from the University Payroll Office mid semester outlining the exact taxable amount. Additional information on tax withholding is available from the University [Payroll Office](#).

Below is a chart showing potential tuition waiver values based on 9 credit hours (Fall 2018 rates). The semester(s) bolded indicate when a student exceeds the \$5,250 taxation threshold. It is in these semesters that you will be assessed taxes on all tuition waivers above that threshold.

**First Year Student Sample Taxation Thresholds:**

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Tuition Costs (9 hours)</b>	<b>Total Tuition for the Year</b>
Fall 2018	\$3632	\$3632
Spring 2019	\$3632	\$3632
<b>Fall 2019*</b>	\$3632	\$7264 (taxable threshold reached)

\* Tuition rate based on Fall 2018 rates & may increase.

**Second+ Year Student Sample Taxation Thresholds:**

<b>Semester</b>	<b>Tuition Costs (9 hours)</b>	<b>Total Tuition for the Year</b>
Spring 2018	\$3501	\$3501
<b>Fall 2018</b>	\$3632	\$7133 (taxable threshold reached)

Because this is a federal law, there is no solution to alleviate this taxation. However, there are some strategies you can use to help alleviate the stress of reduced paychecks.

1. You may change your Form W-4 to adjust the amount of income tax withheld. To reduce the amount of tax withheld, the number of allowances will need to be increased. Adjusting your W-4 may have implications when you file your personal tax return. You may wish to consult your tax advisor before choosing this option. If you choose to change your Form W-4, you may do so using the Self-Service functionality within iPeople at <https://tools.illinoisstate.edu/> (Self Service – Payroll & Compensation – W-4 Tax Information) or submitting a hardcopy of Form W-4 to the University Payroll Office.

2. If you are an international student please contact The International Tax Specialist at 309-438-3106 regarding W-4 changes.

### **Sample Paycheck**

GA's can check the Graduate Assistant Pay Check Calculator on the Payroll Office site to determine the impact a taxable tuition waiver will have on their net pay.

<https://payroll.illinoisstate.edu/employee-information/my-paycheck/>

For additional information, please contact the University Payroll Office at (309) 438-7677 or [payroll@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:payroll@IllinoisState.edu).

### **Income Taxes**

Graduate assistant wages/salaries are subject to federal and state income taxes. Income taxes are withheld from each paycheck in accordance with the gross pay and the number of exemptions claimed on your W-4 Withholding Allowance and Certificate. For additional information, please see the University Payroll Office website. At the time of hire, a Federal and State Form W-4 (Employee's Withholding Allowance Certificate) should be completed.

### **Employment Taxes**

Generally, graduate assistants do not have to pay FICA taxes. The University follows IRS rules in determining a student's exemption from FICA withholding. FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act) refers to taxes for Social Security (OASDI) and Medicare. When eligible, OASDI is withheld at 6.2% and Medicare at 1.45%, for a total tax of 7.65%.

To be considered a student, an employee must be enrolled and regularly attending classes in pursuit of a course of study. In addition, the employee's services must be "incident to and for the purpose of pursuing a course of study", which means the relationship between the employer and the employee must be primarily educational.

Graduate student will be exempt from FICA taxes if they meet the minimum criteria for a half-time student:

Fall/Spring Terms	5 credit hours
Summer Term	3 credit hours

If the academic term begins or ends at any point within a pay period, the entire pay period is eligible for the exemption from FICA.

If the student is registered for the following semester, the student will be eligible for the FICA exemption if the break is less than five weeks. If the student works during a school break of more than five weeks (over the summer, for example), the student will not be eligible for a FICA exemption if the student is not attending classes during the break.

A student in the final semester required to complete the requirements for obtaining a degree, certificate, or other educational credentials offered by the institution, shall be deemed to meet the

half-time threshold, regardless of the number of credits. For Graduate Student employee classes - When completing a Course Load Waiver Form (PERS 938), Code "B" under Rationale should be used if the student is in his/her final semester. For Undergraduate Student employee classes - The Request for Student Employment Exception will be utilized to identify students in their final semester.

There are also FICA tax implications regarding the course load waver (PERS 938). Please see that section for more details.

### **International Student (Visa Status)**

Federal tax law contains special income tax withholding and reporting rules and restrictions unique to individuals present in the U.S. on a visa status. To comply with these rules, individuals present in the U.S. on visa status should schedule a meeting with the International Tax Specialist, College Place Uptown, Suite E, 438-3106.

### **Social security numbers**

You must obtain a social security number from the Social Security Administration for proper reporting to state and federal government. Upon receiving a social security number, take the social security card to Human Resources (Nelson Smith, room 101).

International students should also make an appointment to see The International Tax Specialist, located in College Place Uptown, Suite E, 309-438-3106.

### **Student loan default**

An appointment notification can be issued if a student is in default on a student loan, but the default must be cleared in 6 months or the appointment will be terminated. If you are in default on a student loan, you must present to [Human Resources](#) a letter from the loan institution stating that you are making regular payments on the loan and present such proof to [Human Resources](#). You won't be considered in default if your educational loan has been deferred until you complete your graduate studies.

## **Health Insurance**

You are required to have health insurance coverage in effect during your entire appointment, either by way of private coverage through the University's [Student Health Insurance](#) plan. For further information, visit the [Student Health Insurance](#) office.

### **Health insurance fee and enrollment**

#### *Automatic coverage*

A student health insurance fee is automatically assessed on all graduate students registered for 9 or more credit hours by the 15<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the fall and spring semesters or registered for 6 or more credit hours by the 8<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the first summer session. By paying this fee, you are purchasing coverage under the University's student health insurance plan. You can find the amount of the current fee at [Student Accounts](#). The charge will appear on your tuition/fee bill under General Fees as Student Insurance on your [MyIllinoisState](#) account.

### *Optional coverage*

If you are not registered for enough credit hours to be automatically assessed the student health insurance fee, graduate assistants, interns, and professional practice students, may still purchase this plan on an optional basis. As a GA you are eligible for the optional purchase for no more than four terms. Insurance eligibility information can be found on the [Student Health Services](#) website. You must complete this purchase through your account on [MyIllinoisState](#) by the 15<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the fall and spring semesters, or by the 8<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the first summer session. These dates are contractually set by our health insurance provider and cannot be extended or waived. Published enrollment dates can be found at [Student Health Insurance](#).

### *Late or early start dates*

If your contract has an early or late start date, you can purchase the student health insurance coverage by contacting the [Student Health Insurance](#) within 15 days of your start date and paying the appropriate semester fee. New fall students whose assistantships begin prior to the start of the fall semester's coverage can contact the [Student Health Insurance](#) office before their start date and arrange to pay a pro-rated summer fee.

### *Cancellation of policy*

If you are assessed the insurance fee but *don't* want to be covered by the ISU policy, you need to complete a request to cancel the policy and submit evidence of other insurance to the [Student Health Insurance](#) office or make arrangements to accomplish this by mail, email, or fax.

Cancellation requests will not be honored after the 15<sup>th</sup> calendar day of the fall and spring semesters, or the 8<sup>th</sup> calendar day of ISU's first summer session.

### **Certification of insurance coverage**

You must complete and sign a semester-specific [Graduate Assistant Health Insurance Certification](#) during every semester that you hold a graduate assistantship. On this form you certify that you understand that you must have health insurance coverage and declare how you intend to procure it. You must return this form to your appointing department before you begin work. **It is your responsibility to complete and submit the form to your appointing department each semester.**

### **Student health insurance fee reimbursement**

If you meet the following criteria, the University will refund to you the amount of the health insurance fee you have paid during a fall or spring semester, minus any applicable taxes:

- have paid the student health insurance fee; and
- have been appointed for a fall or spring assistantship for a total of more than .25 FTE.

You are not reimbursed this fee for any summer appointment. The fee is automatically reimbursed to all eligible students through their paychecks, typically during the final two months of each semester.

### **Where to call**

Insurance coverage can be complicated. We're here to help. For questions about insurance eligibility or coverage, please contact the [Student Health Insurance](#) office

## Financial Aid

Students may need enrollment verification for loans, insurance, or other purposes. Below is a table that outlines what constitutes full time enrollment.

### Academic Course Load

For enrollment verification purposes, Illinois State University defines a student's enrollment status based on the number of credit hours for which he or she is currently enrolled. Courses that are withdrawn from during the semester, do not count as enrolled hours. Credit hours needed to be considered full-time for enrollment verification purposes may differ from that of financial aid. It is the student's responsibility to determine the number of credit hours needed to maintain his or her financial aid eligibility. For more information regarding financial aid eligibility, please contact the [Financial Aid Office](#).

### Enrollment Status by Credit Hours-Undergraduate

	Fall/Spring	Summer
Full-time	12.0 or more hours	6.0 or more hours
Half-Time	6.0-11.9 hours	3.0 to 5.9 hours
Part-Time	Less than 6.0 hours to .5 hours	Less than 3.0 hours to .5 hours

### Enrollment Status by Credit Hours-Graduate

	Fall/Spring	Summer
Full-time	9.0 or more hours	6.0 or more hours
Half-Time	4.5-8.9 hours	3.0 to 5.9 hours
Part-Time	Less than 4.5 hours to .5 hours	Less than 3.0 hours to .5 hours

<http://registrar.illinoisstate.edu/contact/>

## Contact List

### Admissions

Applications, I-20s  
Bridget Langdon  
(309) 838-8635  
[bmlangd@ilstu.edu](mailto:bmlangd@ilstu.edu)

### Copyright Assistance

Sarah Dick  
(309) 438-2860  
[sdick@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:sdick@IllinoisState.edu)

### Financial Aid

Scholarship, tuition waivers  
Shawn Rigsby  
(309) 438-2744  
[scrigsb@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:scrigsb@IllinoisState.edu)

### Human Resources

GA's, tuition waivers, contracts, employment issues  
101 Nelson Smith Building  
Amanda Brown  
[avbrow3@ilstu.edu](mailto:avbrow3@ilstu.edu)



**International Student Services**

Immigration, visas, I-20s

Aubrey Wagoner

(309) 438-5276

[internationalstudents@ilstu.edu](mailto:internationalstudents@ilstu.edu)

**Graduate School**

Graduate School Director

Noelle Selkow

(309) 438-2583

[nselkow@ilstu.edu](mailto:nselkow@ilstu.edu)

**Office of Equal Opportunity and Access**

Employment accommodations

310 Hovey Hall, Campus Box 1280

(309) 438-3383

**Payroll**

College Place Uptown, Suite E

(309) 438-7677

[payroll@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:payroll@IllinoisState.edu)

**Registrar Service Center**

107 Moulton Hall (309) 438-2188

[registrar@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:registrar@IllinoisState.edu)

**Student Access and Accommodation Services**

Accommodations in your GA role

(309) 438-5853

[ableisu@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:ableisu@IllinoisState.edu)

**Student Accounts**

607 W. Dry Grove

(309) 438-5643

**Student Health Insurance**

Student Services Building 303

Jason Hartzler

(309) 438-2515

[jehartzl@IllinoisState.edu](mailto:jehartzl@IllinoisState.edu)