



**A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING  
HOW TO BECOME A  
GRADUATE ASSISTANT**

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# UNDERSTANDING GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

As you consider investing in a graduate degree, you have a lot to think about. Of course, you want to *know* that the decisions you make will result in a well-rounded and worthwhile graduate school experience.

One of the most important aspects of obtaining a graduate degree is ensuring that you receive hands-on, practical experience in your field of interest.

One strategic option for making sure that you do exactly that? By securing a graduate assistantship position.

If you're a prospective or current graduate student, you've probably heard a little bit about graduate assistantships — but you also probably have questions:

- *What is a graduate assistantship exactly?*
- *What does a graduate assistant do?*
- *What are the benefits of a graduate assistantship?*
- *Do graduate assistants get free tuition?*
- *What about how to become a graduate assistant?*

West Virginia University's admissions professionals are here to answer your questions and educate you on the value of a graduate assistantship — like how securing one can help you [finance graduate school](#) and augment your professional resume with real-world, transferable professional experience.

Allow us to help you sharpen your competitive edge by giving you the necessary information regarding how to research, pursue, secure, and make the most of a graduate assistantship.





# WHAT IS A GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP?

[Graduate assistantships](#) are a form of academic employment for which students must apply and be accepted based on academic excellence and faculty referral.

Most graduate assistants receive a tuition waiver and small stipend for the tasks they perform for faculty members or departments.

In addition, graduate assistantships are a strategic way for master's and doctoral degree students to gain practical field experience, deepen academic understanding, and network with thought leaders and students in their field.

**“THE FACULTY HELPED ME DEVELOP HOLISTICALLY AS A SCHOLAR AND PERSON, WITH HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND A STRONG DESIRE TO ACHIEVE. WHILE AT WVU, I WAS OFFERED A STRONG CLASSROOM EDUCATION, MENTORED PRACTICUM, RESEARCH TRAINING AND TEACHING EXPERIENCE [GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS].”**

**— LINDSEY BLOOM,  
SPORT AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY PH.D.**

## **REQUEST MORE INFORMATION**

Are you interested in learning more about the graduate programs offered at West Virginia University? Connect with us by [requesting more information](#).





# GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS VS. FELLOWSHIPS

While many universities and colleges offer graduate assistantships and fellowships, it's important to understand the differences between the two.

**“MAKE SURE YOU FIND A PROJECT YOU ARE GENUINELY INTERESTED IN. GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS ARE VALUABLE! DON'T CHOOSE SOMETHING JUST TO FULFILL YOUR GRADUATION CHECKLIST. IN TURN, YOU WILL HAVE A HIGHER UNDERSTANDING AT A FASTER RATE ... WHICH CAN BE USED AS A FOUNDATION TO HELP SHAPE YOU INTO THE PERSON YOU HOPE TO BECOME.”**

**— CULLEN BOYLE,  
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT, PH.D.  
IN MECHANICAL & AEROSPACE ENGINEERING AT WVU**



**Fellowships** — are a form of financial aid similar to scholarships in that they are granted to cover a variety of student costs. Fellowships are typically sponsored by associations and generally provide money in exchange for short-term professional development opportunities.

While fellowships are incredibly helpful when it comes to financing graduate school, fellowships are simply a gift of money and do not provide opportunities for real-world work experience.

At West Virginia University specifically, doctoral students must be nominated for fellowships and may not apply directly.



**Graduate Assistantships** — are institution specific and offer a tuition waiver for work completed on campus; assistantships are considered a salary as opposed to financial aid.

While the money awarded to graduate students during an assistantship definitely offsets the cost of graduate school, the real value of a graduate assistantship is in the experiential, practical professional experience that graduate students gain by working alongside expert industry leaders and researchers.

West Virginia University offers a variety of graduate assistantship positions, and graduate students — both master's and doctoral — are encouraged to apply for the positions that align with their field of study and professional ambitions.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of





**DISCOVER THE BENEFITS OF  
ATTENDING ONE OF THE BEST  
RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES IN THE U.S.**

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OUR RESEARCH  
COLLABORATION GUIDE!**

Higher Education has classified approximately 146 U.S. institutions as having R1 status. R1 institutions are recognized as the best research universities in the country — and WVU is one of the 146 R1 status institutions in the nation and the *only* R1 institution in the state of West Virginia.

Download the Research Collaboration Guide to learn more!

Here are a [Click the Digital Resource](#) about,



# WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING A GRADUATE ASSISTANT?

applying to, and working towards — no matter your field of study.

**A graduate assistantship will deepen and enrich your education.**

Graduate assistantships provide students with the opportunity to augment their educational experience by allowing them to reach a deeper level of subject comprehension. Students can then apply the skills they build and the knowledge they gain in the classroom, and beyond.

You will be encouraged to use your graduate assistantship to gain a range of new perspectives, gain deeper insight into your field, and choose what particular area of study aligns with your career goals.

**A graduate assistantship will give you quality, practical work experience.**

While time in the classroom is important, in order to advance your knowledge and skill set, you need focused, applicable work and/or research experience in your field. A graduate assistantship can offer you this experience because you'll have the opportunity to work with and learn from professors and other industry experts.

Further, in a graduate assistantship, you'll have the responsibility of balancing multiple tasks with deadlines. You'll learn valuable time management and organizational skills that are transferable to the workforce.

### **A graduate assistantship will grow your professional network.**

From an educational standpoint, the benefits are clear, but graduate assistantships can also provide you with a valuable network of contacts to look to for references and advice post-graduation.

Mentorship is crucial, whether you're in school or already in the workforce — and it's a built-in part of becoming a graduate assistant. Not only does networking with experts who have on-the-ground experience provide a fantastic learning opportunity, it is also valuable once you graduate and as you navigate the workforce.

### **A graduate assistantship will help you to finance your degree.**

While the academic and networking benefits far outweigh the monetary gains, many graduate assistantships are also paid positions. So, in addition to augmenting your academic experience, a graduate assistantship position will help you to fund your graduate education.

**“I KNOW THAT MANY OF THE LEADERS AT WVU THAT I HAVE MET AND WORKED WITH WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THIS WORLD, IN PARTICULAR WITH THE OPIOID CRISIS. I AM CONFIDENT THAT THE SKILLS I HAVE GAINED IN MY GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP AT WVU WILL HELP ME CONTINUE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE.”**

**—SARA WARFIELD,  
GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANT,  
PH.D. IN PUBLIC HEALTH AT WVU**



# 10 TIPS FOR APPLYING TO A GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP

Graduate assistantship positions are competitive to secure. Not only do you have to demonstrate academic excellence in your program, you will be competing for the position among many other qualified and dynamic applicants. How can you set yourself apart and give yourself a competitive edge? Following a list of [recommended tips](#) might help you to do just that.

- 1. Cover Your Bases:** Before starting the application process, start by checking your institution's website for available graduate assistantship positions and figure out if you meet the requirements to apply.
- 2. Focus On Your Studies:** The higher your GPA, the more attractive you'll be to a hiring department. Students should also establish strong relationships with professors in the department in which they'd like to be employed.

- 3. Collaborate with Other Graduate Assistants:** Chat with other graduate assistants and ask them for their insight. Ask for advice, add them to your professional network, and they may be able to refer you to a department that you're interested in!
- 4. Know the Requirements:** Before applying to a GA position, make a list of necessary application requirements, which might include course load, GPA, available working hours, immigration authorization (if applicable), letters of recommendation, etc.
- 5. Customize Your Application(s):** If you're applying to more than one GA position (and even if you're not), make sure your GA application and resume contain up-to-date information and position-appropriate information.
- 6. SPELL CHECK:** Do yourself a favor. Don't turn in an application without conducting a thorough editing process. If your application contains errors of any kind, the likelihood of you landing the GA position is low.
- 7. Provide References:** Don't list your friends or family as references. Have 3-4 references ready to list on your application: These can be previous employers, current or past professors, or an admissions professional with whom you have a good relationship.
- 8. Prepare for an Interview:** If you are invited for an interview, this is a good sign. Make sure to dress the part, BE ON TIME, and conduct yourself in a way that is professional, friendly, socially aware, and intelligent.
- 9. Understand the Expectations:** Speaking of the interview, once you're in the door, make sure to [inquire about the expectations](#) for the position and the working hours. Be sure you can meet those hours and expectations.
- 10. Follow Up Respectfully:** If you are offered a graduate assistantship position, you should be proud of yourself! You've proven yourself to be a qualified asset to the department and institution at large. Be sure to follow up with the department in a timely manner.



# GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS AT WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY

## **WVU's graduate assistantship options:**

West Virginia University awards approximately 1,700 graduate assistantships annually to incoming and continuing graduate students. These graduate assistantships are supported by state appropriations, federal funds, and private grants and contracts.

All graduate assistants must be accepted into a graduate degree program and are required to be enrolled full-time while employed during the fall and spring terms (9 credits or more).

***Here are the types of graduate assistantships offered at WVU:***

- Graduate teaching assistants teach courses, laboratory sections, and recitation sections, or provide other forms of instructional assistance.
- Graduate research assistants help faculty members with their research activities.
- Graduate service assistants typically work in one of the administrative or service offices of WVU in positions related to their program of study and that contribute to their educational experience.



**GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP**

students teach courses, laboratory sections, and recitation sections, or provide other forms of instructional assistance

**GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP**

students help faculty with specific research initiatives

**GRADUATE SERVICE ASSISTANTSHIP**

students typically work in one of the university's administrative or service offices

Regular graduate assistants work an average of 20 hours per week and partial graduate assistants work an average of 10 hours per week as teaching, research, or service assistants.

For additional information on Graduate Assistantships visit the [Graduate Education and Life](#) website.

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The graduate admissions team is proud to bring you research news, industry expert interviews, and noteworthy student stories on our newest form of media: The Summit Ahead Podcast.

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# HOW TO APPLY FOR A GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP AT WVU

At WVU, each program has a limited number of Graduate Teaching Assistantships and Graduate Research Assistantships, so *the process for securing one can be competitive.*

Talk to your program representative to learn what might be available and to see if you are a good fit for available positions.

Graduate Service Assistantships are housed across the university, assisting a number of different departments and programs. These positions are posted and students must apply to be considered. For information on these assistantships, [please visit our website.](#)

# LEARN MORE ABOUT WVU'S GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS — CONNECT WITH US!

Here at West Virginia University, we know that for driven and ambitious graduate students, obtaining a graduate assistantship is truly a rewarding experience.

Serving as support to some of the best in your field, getting a glimpse of what it is like to be a working professional, and building a network with those who are thought leaders in your area of study are just a few reasons a graduate assistantship is a strategic and excellent way to augment your graduate education.

We hope that this guide has been helpful to you as you make a decision regarding this very exciting phase of your academic journey. The admissions team at WVU is here to help you in whatever capacity you need — don't hesitate to reach out!

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