

DIVISION OF EPIDEMIOLOGY AND COMMUNITY HEALTH JOB TIP SHEET

Many students admitted to a MPH degree program in the Division of Epidemiology have questions about the process of finding a job that can help support them during their studies. This is a compendium of suggestions from the Major Coordinators and current students to help you in this process.

There are three types of jobs.

- * There are University graduate assistantships [research (RA) or teaching (TA) assistantships] that include some level of tuition remission.
- * There are other positions at the University, which are part-time and well suited for graduate students, and may provide tuition assistance.
- * There are jobs at health departments & other outside organizations that are well suited for graduate students, but most do not provide tuition remission.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

NOTE: These positions are competitive. You may need to spend considerable effort and time to locate one of these positions.

Benefits

- * Resident Tuition Benefit: Graduate assistants who are not Minnesota residents pay the Minnesota resident tuition if their assistantship is for 25% time or more, (25%=10 hrs/week, 50%=20 hrs/week);
- * Tuition Benefit: Graduate assistants who work at least 25% time from the beginning to the end of the official semester appointment dates are eligible to receive tuition benefits (tuition remission and resident rates) during the semester. The maximum tuition benefit is defined by the Graduate School tuition plateau. The maximum tuition benefit is \$5,223.00 (based on 08-09 rates).

EXAMPLE: Jane Students is an MPH student in Epidemiology and also has a 50% graduate assistantship. Since Jane has a 50% assistantship she is entitled to the maximum benefit allowed which for 08-09 is \$5,223.00. The 08-09 MPH tuition rate is \$565.00/credit so Jane's tuition benefit will cover about 9 credits. If Jane registers for more than 9 credits, she will be billed for the remaining credits at the resident tuition rate.

As of November 2008 the rates of pay are:

- \$16.75 for individuals with a Bachelor's level degree;
- \$21.44 for individuals with a Masters level degree;
- \$26.09 for individuals with a Doctoral level degree

The University of Minnesota provides subsidized medical insurance coverage to graduate assistants with appointments of at least 25% time. The University pays a portion of the premium equal to twice the appointment percentage.

NOTE: These positions are competitive. You may need to spend considerable effort and time to locate one of these positions. More information about graduate assistant employment is available at

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/gae/> .

Where Can I Look for an Assistantship?

You can start looking for a position after you have been admitted into a degree-seeking program. There are several central locations to look for an assistantship.

1. In the Division of Epidemiology and Community Health

* Consider contacting one or two faculty with research interests similar to yours. Each Division faculty member has a web page with information about their education, courses taught, research projects and recent publications. The Division's web site is at www.epi.umn.edu and link to "People." In most cases, it really does not work to "blanket" faculty with your resume.

~ *"Rather than wait for a TA to open, I just sent letters and a resume to professors who I perceived as having similar interests. I followed up with phone calls and "interviewed" or talked with a few professors and one offered me a position that had not been previously posted."* (Advice from a Division of Epidemiology student.)

~ *"(I got my position because) my professor made an announcement during class that she was looking for a TA. I forwarded... my resume that day, interviewed the following week and her assistant hired me on the spot."*

* Once you've been assigned an academic advisor, you can also let him/her know you're looking for a job. They may not know of any immediate openings but they can keep this in mind in case they hear of something that would fit your interests.

2. In the School of Public Health: The SPH Career Center office (D305 Mayo) has a central location for assistantship positions in the School. The career center website is <http://www.sph.umn.edu/current/career/home.html> .

3. Other locations in the University

* It is perfectly acceptable to find a graduate assistantship in an area outside your major. Many students have found assistantships in other departments of the University, and they've had very positive experiences. There are many benefits associated with assistantships, and the search for a position will be more difficult if you only look for positions connected to a few specific academic interests.

- * Most departments or divisions in the University hire graduate assistants at some point. Consider your interests, special skills and strengths, both from your previous academic work and professional experience, and contact related departments and programs and find out where their graduate assistant positions are posted. Examples include:
 - ~ Other Schools in the Academic Health Center (Medical School, including the Departments of Psychiatry, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Nursing, Family Practice and Community Health, Pediatrics),
 - ~ Or other departments: Disability Services, School of Social Work, Carlson School of Management, Hubert Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, General College, programs on the St. Paul Campus.
- * Advice:
 - ~ *"... Check with the department that teaches courses in (your) undergraduate major. I've been working in the chemistry department as a TA. Students with a biology degree might be able to find a position in the College of Biological Sciences teaching BIOL 1009 lab. Typically, departments hire grad students from their own department first. But, sometimes they need more students than are available. ...It's not epi experience, but it is a paycheck!"*
 - ~ *"It's a good idea to look outside the Division of Epidemiology and the School of Public Health as well." The truth, unfortunately, is that "...it isn't adequate to rely on the School of Public Health's job posting board."*
 - ~ *Think about longer-range plans: "While a student may have to take an available position which may not be his/her first choice, there are opportunities to make connections which may lead to funded positions in an area of particular interest, later in the degree program."*
 - ~ *"...Other Divisions and Departments have public health trained faculty and positions."*
 - ~ *"In some cases, other departments may have professors who would prefer a Public Health student to give more to the project/grant."*
 - ~ *"Many of the skills you may learn in another department are directly applicable to public health for your own personal growth."*
- * You can also look for positions at the University's Graduate Assistant Office (GAO). The GA Office is located at 319 15th Avenue SE, First Floor, between University Avenue and 4th Street at 15th Avenue, (612) 625-5001. RA and TA positions throughout the University are posted here. All the University of Minnesota graduate assistant positions can be viewed at their web address <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/employment/index.html>. Several current students emphasized that it's important to look for a position here as well:
 - ~ *"Be sure incoming students know about looking in the [University's] Graduate Assistant's Office...That's where I found my position, and that's where many solid, related positions are posted."*
 - ~ *"(We) can start checking (the GAO web site) the moment (we are) accepted... That is how I got my position."*

- ~ When you obtain a University of Minnesota graduate assistantship, make sure to review the policies and benefits for these positions carefully. They are located at the GAO website listed above.
- * The University posts many types of jobs separate from graduate assistants; these may not have tuition benefits, but they have paychecks and may have medical coverage. Some may also provide experience relevant to your professional aspirations. The University's Human Resources Information Services is located at 319 15th Ave SE. The Human Resources Office has a web site: <http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/employment/index.html>.
- * If you currently work at the University in a staff position, consider asking if your current position can be converted to a graduate assistantship or another type of position that would allow flexibility to go to school full- or part-time.

NON-UNIVERSITY POSITIONS

- * Depending on your professional background and interests there are job possibilities to consider other than graduate assistantships. Job experiences outside the University, and non-graduate assistant University positions can also help you get through graduate school! Current students gave us some valuable ideas from their experiences:
 - ~ *"I was actually investigating whether to return to graduate school or not, and in the process spoke to an investigator at a Foundation. He passed on my info to another investigator who was looking for some organizational help. Make a long story short, I signed on and enjoy a flexible schedule and good benefits. Network and use any contacts you might have in the community."*
 - * Job experiences outside the University can be rewarding, and lead to an assistantship within the Division. For example, there are many public health and social service agencies located in the Twin Cities.
 - ~ *"I know that at some of the local public health agencies that I have worked at, they are really looking for people with 'real world' public health experience, not just research experience. (They) are looking to hire individuals to administer many grants that they have. The grants that need administering are part-time positions and are helpful in learning the way public health works at the local level in the State of Minnesota."*
 - * There are student worker positions available at the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH). At the MDH there is the classification of Student Worker/Paraprofessional Senior, which are graduate level positions. Currently, MDH jobs are posted in two places:
 - ~ At www.health.state.mn.us/divs/hrm/jobs.html;
 - ~ The central Personnel office at the St. Paul Metro Square building, phone number (651) 215-1240.
- * A student suggests checking area hospitals:

- ~ *"Although they don't offer jobs directly in the field, they have many well paid jobs that are flexible enough to fit a student's schedule. ...Ask about the flexibility of the (specific) position."*
- * Notices sent out via e-mail from the School of Public Health (SPH) Career Center or your major coordinator for part time jobs that would fit a grad student's schedule. Sign up for e-mail announcements at www.sph.umn.edu/career/.

<p>HOW CAN I PREPARE MYSELF FOR THE PROCESS OF FINDING AN ASSISTANTSHIP?</p>
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- * Have a draft resume and cover letter ready to customize.
- * Be prepared for interviews.
- * Have writing samples on hand to demonstrate writing ability.
- * Be prepared to be persistent, and try not to get discouraged--finding a graduate assistantship is not usually an easy process because the benefits are quite good and therefore it is a competitive market.
- * Look frequently for postings in several locations.
- * Previous quantitative coursework and statistical computing skills can be helpful for finding an assistantship within the Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, but not every job requires these skills--play to your particular strengths and qualifications.

More advice from our students:

- ~ *"I would definitely emphasize to incoming students that there is no guarantee they will find a job right away. They have to apply like they would for any job, and it's quite competitive. It depends on grant cycles, etc. Encourage them to meet with faculty, learn about possible upcoming grants, RA's that are leaving, and pass their resume around."*
- ~ *"When I began my job... I was not very interested in the services that I was delivering, however, as I established myself in the agency I was then able to move around and develop new interests and skill areas."*
- ~ *"As far as finding RA jobs, from my experience I learned that I had to pursue RA jobs on my own, and that I had to learn how to sell myself. This was a very valuable lesson!"*
- ~ *"Be persistent even when nothing is working out. What worked for me was the fact that I kept on applying, and as soon as (my future boss) showed interest, I kept in touch by doing follow up, calls and thank you notes."*
- ~ *"...The student really needs to be proactive and persistent. They may not get the first position they want, but they will make contacts. ...Jobs outside the University have the advantage of giving the student contacts and experience in an organization they may end up working for after graduation."*
- ~ *"...(Make) a good assessment of your time commitment. Sometimes it is better to start out working fewer hours, let's say a 25% position rather than*

a 50%, given that the first few semesters are supposed to be the most demanding."

- * Talk to other students in your major, in the Division, in the School, and students you meet in classes.
 - ~ *"...Talk to current students with a (graduate assistantship) as many times these positions work in teams and know when another TA or RA will be leaving and when a position will be open."*
 - ~ *"...Talk to others about tips for finding a job, and (about) what to expect once a position is obtained."*

We wish you the best of luck in your search for the perfect graduate assistantship. Let us know if you have any questions or concerns, and please utilize the SPH Career Center and its staff (www.career.sph.umn.edu).

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