

Guiding Language for Graduate Student Offer and Assistantship Letters

Graduate Administrators' Council

Spring 2017

LETTER 1 FOR OFFERING ACCEPTANCE ONLY AT FIRST POST-DECISION CONTACT

OPENING:

- Congratulatory and other welcome comments.

NEXT STEPS:

- Give information about what follows this letter via funding decisions, class schedules, orientations, etc.; getting an ODU ID, email address; reading program handbooks.
- The University's English proficiency requirement (<http://www.odu.edu/content/odu/admission/proficiency.html>) must be satisfied for admission.
- If funding is not being given (e.g., for MS students) then no language on funding is required (unless the student requested information, the department ran out of funding and knows already who is being funded, and that notice can be given, etc.).
- If funding decisions are still being made, give students a timetable for when they will hear about their funded status.
- If funding is known at this juncture, department can segue to contractual language and combine funding offer with acceptance into one letter (funding letter template for assistantship is below).
- Other next steps to consider adding into an acceptance only letter:
 - For non-native English-speaking students who are receiving a teaching assistantship at admission or will eventually be offered one, English proficiency must be demonstrated prior to appointment to and work in that assistantship. Proficiency is demonstrated by a variety of test score options detailed at <http://www.odu.edu/content/odu/admission/proficiency.html>.
 - Additionally, non-native English speakers must also satisfy the University's English-speaking proficiency requirement prior to a teaching assistantship appointment. Students can satisfy the English-speaking proficiency requirement by passing the SPEAK Test or scoring a 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the TOEFL iBT. The SPEAK Test and schedule are detailed at <https://www.odu.edu/cepd/esl/speak-toefl>. A passing score is at least 50 out of 60 points. Students who score 45, but not 50, are eligible for the Retake Presentation.
 - All teaching assistants must attend and complete the Graduate Teaching Assistant Institute (GTAI).

THEN CHOOSE ONE OPTION BELOW:

Closing:

- If this letter is only for acceptance, and no funding will be given - or not given at this point in time - close letter.
- If no funding will be given at all, have place for student to sign this letter at bottom as intending to accept offer, and return by due date.
- If funding decision to be made later, the department may hold off on student signature until that second contact.
- Department signs and sends.

OR

Transition:

- If funding is known and to be awarded, department can transition to details in LETTER 2 for Offering Funding. Merge information above with below into a combined letter.
- The more detail a student can have at any contact is better.

LETTER 2 FOR OFFERING FUNDING

OPENING:

- If this is a second letter sent by the department, have opening language.
- Skip if the funding details are in the same letter as acceptance (transitioned from Letter 1).

ASSISTANTSHIP:

- Type of appointment (GTA, GRA, GAA); if not known can indicate to student what options are involved (mostly likely GRA or GTA).
- **Required: Amount of \$ offered:** funding listed by semester is important for health insurance eligibility (needed for Academic Affairs to indicate subsidy eligibility).
- Important to indicate dates of funding if known; these differ depending on source (university funds are paid out August 25 to May 9 for the academic year, and May 10 – June 9 for the summer; grants can be paid out across the full 12 months).
- **Required: hours of work per week;** *must not exceed 20* (the letter cannot say “average of.” A maximum of 20 per week is the limit).
- Length of assistantship: departments differ. But give details here. If the funds are guaranteed for a length of time (pending contingencies below), put it here.

TUITION:

- If student is receiving a waiver or some other means of tuition support (some departments subsidize tuition by other means, such as with grants) say so here.
- **Required: language about number of credits covered per semester** (for domestic students: 9 is full time if on university funds; 6 if on grants; 1 if doctoral student advanced to candidacy; for international students, consult the Graduate Catalog for conditions to be full time and consult with and notify the VISA office of your offer plans).
- Language that covers what will not be paid for: more credits than promised, funds not used (if a student takes fewer than required/covered).

STIPULATIONS:

REQUIRED: For international, non-native English-speaking students:

- For non-native English-speaking students who are receiving a teaching assistantship at admission or will eventually be offered one, English proficiency must be demonstrated prior to appointment to and work in that assistantship. Students who will be teaching assistants can fulfill the proficiency requirement by passing the SPEAK test offered by the English Language Center or by having a score of 26 or better on the Speaking portion of the iBT TOEFL. The proficiency requirements to be eligible for an assistantship are higher than the proficiency requirements needed for admission.
- Additionally, non-native English speakers must also satisfy the University’s English-speaking proficiency requirement for Teaching Assistants prior to appointment. Students can satisfy the English-speaking proficiency requirement by passing the SPEAK Test or scoring a 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the TOEFL iBT. The SPEAK Test and schedule are detailed at <https://www.odu.edu/cepd/esl/speak-toefl>. A passing score is at least 50 out of 60 points. Students who score 45, but not 50, are eligible for the Retake Presentation.

*For all students (**strongly** encouraged to include some or all of the items below; required items noted):*

- **Required:** The University’s English proficiency requirement for teaching assistants must be satisfied prior to offering a teaching assistantship.
- **Required:** Teaching assistants must attend and complete the Graduate Teaching Assistant Institute (GTAI) before their assignments begin.
- Information on student health insurance (<https://www.odu.edu/life/health-safety/health/monarch-wellness/physical-wellness/student-health-center/billing/insurance>).
- 3.0 minimum GPA (University requirement).

- Performance requirements to remain funded (e.g., progress on milestones, research activity, writing ability, class performance).
- Consequences of withdrawing from program on tuition pay-backs.
- Limits of tuition funding (e.g., departments may only pay in-state tuition rates, leaving balance to student if the student is out-of-state).
- Acceptance of master's degree from other universities (or evaluation), and other such screenings of previous credentials.
- Notes about Intellectual Property (IP) policies as relevant.
- Full-time assistantships (20 hours/week) prohibit pursuit of additional on-campus employment. Pursuit of outside-university additional employment is usually discouraged, and if undertaken the GPD should be consulted. The VISA office should be consulted before international students pursue outside-assistantship employment. Academic progress must not be adversely affected. See the Graduate Catalog for more details regarding "additional employment" by graduate assistants.

For all students (**required** statement):

- "According to the provisions of the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, it is the responsibility of Old Dominion University to examine original documents, provided by new employees (including students who are to receive assistantships), which demonstrate the individual's identity and employment eligibility. Documents must be presented in person. Domestic students can present documents to the department. All international students must visit Visa and Immigration Service Advising, Dragas Hall Room 2006 (757) 683-4756 or intlstu@odu.edu to discuss visa arrangements **and complete the *Employment Eligibility Verification Form*** (commonly referred to as the *Form 1-9*)."

OFFER ACCEPTANCE DEADLINE:

- We are a member of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS).
- Accepted deadline for offer acceptance is April 15, after which departments can rescind the offer.
- Departments can have later deadlines --- but not earlier.
- *Strongly suggested language in the letter:* Old Dominion University adheres to the "Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants" of the Council of Graduate Schools of the United States. Please read the attached copy of this resolution to make yourself aware of your responsibilities." (Then attach the resolution with the letter; contact Bryan Porter, bporter@odu.edu, if you need a copy).

CLOSING:

- Any final comments.
- Segue to student agreement and instructions for return.
- Sign.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

- **Required:** Have student confirm decision by signing this letter accepting admission and offer.
- Send letter back to GPD.
- **Required:** If an international student, notify VISA (VISA should also be informed that the initial offer was made; send a copy of the offer and signed acceptance once returned).