



**NOAA Office of Education
Educational Partnership Program
with Minority Serving Institutions**



Graduate Sciences Program

PROGRAM POLICY

The NOAA Educational Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions (EPP/MSI) Graduate Sciences Program (GSP) is designed to offer candidates currently enrolled full-time in a Bachelor's, Master's or Doctoral degree program in math, science, economics, social science, and engineering, and who have been accepted into a graduate program at an MSI when possible, entry level employment and research experience at NOAA that relates to their academic field of study. Qualified students must have and maintain a grade point average of 3.0 on a scale of 4.0 cumulatively and each term in major area of study related to NOAA's mission. Students participating in the program are required to conduct graduate level research in subject areas integral to the research conducted at NOAA facilities. This requirement assures that the participants and the MSIs are introduced to science, research, and technical processes related to NOAA's mission. An integral component of this program is to improve NOAA's outreach and recruitment efforts of under-represented individuals in NOAA scientific mission-related occupational fields, i.e., fishery biology, ecology, computer science, meteorology, cartography, oceanography, environmental planning, hydrology, oceanography, naval architecture and archeology, etc.

Qualified candidates are competitively selected by NOAA management and are given an excepted service appointment where the first year of service is probationary. The first two years are probationary for students selected for research positions. NOAA determines the number of Graduate Scientists hired, their trainee/target positions, and the placement of the Graduate Scientist at NOAA research facilities. NOAA will assign a supervisor during the training period. All participants are required to have an academic advisor who will work with the NOAA mentor and supervisor to ensure that the research undertaken meets a time schedule and the overall requirements of the university and the NOAA research facility.

Program participants will have allowable tuition, fees, and health insurance paid directly to the university. The Graduate Scientists are Federal government employees in a student trainee position, and therefore, will receive a salary, travel, expenses, and earn sick and annual leave only while conducting research at NOAA research laboratories during their 16 week work commitment per year. Participants enter a non-pay status when in academic training on campus, and therefore do not receive a salary or fringe benefits, and do not earn sick or annual leave. However, in the non-pay status during academic training, the program participant will receive a housing and meal allowance. Funding for the Graduate Sciences Program is subject to appropriations.

All program participants are expected to fulfill the requirements of their fields of study within two years for master's degree candidates and four years for doctoral candidates. Upon successful completion of each term of training the program participant must submit paperwork demonstrating that requirements of the program have been met in order to obtain approval for the next term.

Section 1. Terms of Appointment

1. Eligibility: Participants must have:

- U.S. Citizenship;
- An undergraduate degree in the NOAA sciences, including but not limited to, biology, chemistry, physics, physical science, geology, geography, mathematics, law, social science, environmental science or engineering with a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0 in all undergraduate courses;
- Acceptance to an accredited graduate program directly related to NOAA's scientific mission in the United States or U.S. Territories;
- A 3.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale (or equivalent on other identified scale) cumulatively and each term of enrollment in all completed courses **and** the major field of study;
- Majors in NOAA-related disciplines, including, but not limited to, oceanic, environmental, and atmospheric sciences, mathematics, engineering, remote sensing technology, physical and social sciences, including geography, hydrology, geomatics, or teacher education that support NOAA's programs and mission.
- Progressed in coursework such that required course work and assignments for targeted position must be completed within two years for a Master's degree and four years for a Ph.D.

2. Orientation: All participants are required to attend the annual EPP sponsored one-week NOAA orientation at NOAA Headquarters in Silver Spring, MD, held the last week in May once during their appointment. All participants are also required to attend the one-day NOAA new employee orientation where the participant will be sworn in as a Federal employee and meet with the GSP manager. NOAA will travel the participant to and from the orientations. Participants are also required to visit their Line Office (LO) or Staff Office duty station for 2-3 days to meet their NOAA advisor to discuss the position into which they have been hired, performance expectations, and their research schedule and to understand their work environment.

3. Position: Program participants are competitively selected into a trainee position in NOAA's Office of Education, Educational Partnership Program. Upon completion of their academic requirements, program participants are transferred non-competitively into their appointed LO. Position descriptions for the trainee and target positions are provided to the participant upon their acceptance to the GSP.

4. Performance: Each participant is required to submit a performance plan annually which describes the duties to be undertaken for the fiscal year. Participants will be evaluated on

their programmatic performance, i.e. meeting the objectives and requirements of their academic degree including maintaining the required 3.0 GPA, and their performance at their duty station. Participants are evaluated by their NOAA supervisors and the EPP Director. Performance evaluations are the basis for promotions and bonuses/cash awards.

See Power Verbs in Section 16 of 2009 GSP Handbook.

5. **Benefits:** Successful candidates become Federal employees upon acceptance of the position. Tuition, mandatory fees, meal allowance, books, travel costs, and campus housing allowance are provided to each program participant. Each program participant is furnished with a laptop which is provided through an academic allotment. NOAA pays a salary at the GS 7 or 9 level (Pay Band II) or equivalent to each participant for each 16 week period of work and research experience at NOAA research laboratories. Participants will earn annual and sick leave while on a pay status. Participants have an option to purchase health benefits and life insurance as an employee of the Federal government. Travel expenses to and from the NOAA research facility will be provided by EPP.
6. **Tuition:** Each participant is required to pre-register for classes and labs to maintain full-time student status and obtain an invoice from the college or university. The participant must send (email, fax or mail) the invoice to NOAA, for payment to the participant's college or university only for the amount of the invoice, up to \$20,000 per academic year. NOAA will cover a maximum of \$20,000 per academic year for tuition, mandatory fees, and health insurance, as listed on the tuition invoice. Participants will not be reimbursed directly for tuition and/or laboratory fees. Tuition invoices must be received by NOAA at least two weeks prior the due date. If the tuition invoice is submitted less than two weeks prior to the due date, the participant will be responsible for payment of all associated late fees. In some instances, the original invoice may be requested for tuition payment. Please note that it can take up to 30 days for tuition payments to be processed.
7. **Books:** Each participant is allowed to purchase books for corresponding course work and research during their training period. Books may be purchased at the campus bookstore, over the internet or from sources other than the campus bookstore. NOAA will reimburse the participant for preapproved purchase of books after receiving proof of purchase. As an alternative, NOAA can purchase books if participants provide the complete book selection information including title, copyright year, edition, and website to the GSP program manager at least one week prior to requiring the book.
8. **Housing:** Participants receive a campus housing allowance while attending classes on campus as a full-time student. To receive this reimbursement participants are required to fax a copy of their Lease Agreement signed by the landlord and participant within two weeks of their enter-on-duty date to EPP. Each month, the participant is required to submit a receipt from their Landlord and a copy of the front and back of the canceled check for housing payment to NOAA. The participant will be reimbursed for an amount up to the average cost of an on-campus one (1) Bedroom unit, not to exceed a maximum of \$1000.00 per month. Students are required to submit all housing reimbursement requests to NOAA within 60 days

of payment of the housing fee. Housing reimbursement requests received after 60 days will not be honored.

Participants receive a salary when he/she enters into a full-time pay status at a NOAA facility. The following rules apply to housing:

- If the participant is scheduled to return to school within 16 weeks of entering the full-time pay status, NOAA will continue to pay campus housing. However, the participant will not receive a housing allowance from NOAA for their duty station housing.
- Participants are responsible for housing while working and receiving a salary at the NOAA research facility (duty station).
- Once NOAA relocates GSP participants and their household goods to their duty station, NOAA will no longer provide a housing allowance for campus housing.
- When the participant conducts research in the field, NOAA will travel them to and from the site where they will receive transportation, lodging, meals, incidentals (i.e. tolls), and expenses per Federal Joint Travel Regulation.
- If the participant changes Landlords or addresses for any reason, a newly signed Lease Agreement with the Landlord and participant's signatures on it must be faxed to NOAA before any housing reimbursements will be initiated.

9. Utilities: As part of the campus housing allowance, participants are eligible to receive reimbursement for utilities costs while attending classes on campus in a full-time student status. Utilities include water, gas, and electricity service when these services are not part of the lease agreement. Participants requesting reimbursement of utilities must provide copies of the utility services which have been billed directly in the participant's name. Participants who share housing will only receive reimbursement for a percentage of the utilities bills equivalent to their percentage of living space.

10. Meals: Each participant will receive a \$3000 meal allowance which will cover a 4 month period (up to 2 times per year) while attending courses and living in campus housing. This amount will be paid directly to the participant. A participant may not receive a meal allowance when receiving a salary.

11. Salary: Participants earn a salary while conducting field research at least 50 miles from the campus and during the 640 hours of career work experience each year at their duty station. Participants earn sick and annual leave while in a pay status. Participants enter a pay status when NOAA travels them to and from NOAA research facilities, field research opportunities, conferences to present research, and during off campus training. Participants will not receive a salary while attending class. It is mandatory for participants to complete 640 hours of career work experience per year, which may be conducted during school breaks.

12. Time and Attendance: The standard hours of work per week are five eight-hour days (plus 30 minutes for lunch) for a total of 8.5 hours per day. Each participant should consult with their NOAA supervisor to determine the core hours, flextime, or flex-hours for their duty station. Each participant must complete a time and attendance (T&A) worksheet in the Web T&A system at the end (last Thursday) of each pay period and sign it to report the hours

worked. NOAA supervisors must verify the time worked by viewing the T&A over email and then replying to NOAA EPP. Include all the hours worked in the office or research facility on the worksheet. Overtime, compensatory, or credit time must be approved by the GSP manager in advance. If the T&A is not completed online by the due date and time, there will be no issuance of pay for that period. Participants who are in a full-time student status, attending courses on campus are required to submit a T&A worksheet indicating 80 hours of Leave Without Pay (LWOP).

Participants may request to telework on a case-by-case basis. All requests for telework must be pre-approved by the GSP manager.

See Section 5 (Web T&A) and Section 6 (Telework) of 2009 GSP Handbook.

13. Leave: Program participants earn four hours sick and four hours annual leave each pay period while they are on a pay status. Annual leave increases to 6 hours per pay period once the participant has completed three years of Federal service. They may use the annual leave for vacations, rest and relaxation, personal business or emergencies. They may use the sick leave for medical appointments, illness, injury, or appointments associated with adoptions. A participant who takes planned leave (such as a vacation or doctor's appointment), must submit a Leave Request through the Web T&A system at least five business days in advance of their planned leave. In the case of unplanned leave (such as an emergency, sick child, etc) participants must immediately notify EPP and their NOAA on-site supervisor of their absence, and complete the Leave Request upon return to the office. During the pay period when leave was requested, an approved Leave Request must accompany the T&A worksheet in the Web T&A system.

14. Travel: Program participants are encouraged to present their research at conferences, meetings, NOAA research facilities, etc., however, appropriate travel paperwork must be prepared in advance for all travel. A travel authorization is required whenever the participant travels more than 50 miles from their duty station for a conference, meeting, etc. Participants are required to get prior approval from EPP (at least two weeks in advance for domestic travel and eight weeks in advance for international travel) before making a commitment to travel.

To request permission to travel, participants must complete the following:

1. Contact ADTRAV, the NOAA travel agency, at (301) 713-2407 to make travel arrangements including rental car and airline reservations. The participant must request ADTRAV email their trip itinerary to EPP Administrative staff support and the GSP Program Manager for a government travel authorization to be prepared for their travel.
2. Contact SATO or the hotel directly to make hotel reservations (request the government rate).
3. Submit a Travel Request form to the GSP Program Manager to obtain prior approval for travel including the hotel, car, and airline reservations.
4. If the GSP Manger approves the travel request, the EPP Administrative staff will prepare a Travel Authorization for clearance by the Budget Analyst and EPP Director.

5. Once cleared, the participant will receive a copy of the approved travel authorization for their travel.

Upon completion of travel, all original receipts (except for meals) and boarding passes must be sent to EPP within five business days for participants to receive timely reimbursements. In addition, copies of receipts should be emailed or faxed to EPP at (301) 713-9465 within 3 business days to ensure the reimbursement process is begun for prompt reimbursements. The NOAA Travel Office requires Travel Vouchers be completed within three days of completion of a trip. Upon completion of travel, the participant must complete and submit a Trip Report within 3 business days.

The Joint Travel Regulation specifies which expenses incurred while on official government travel are eligible for reimbursement. The Joint Travel Regulation is available at: http://www.gsa.gov/Portal/gsa/ep/contentView.do?contentType=GSA_BASIC&contentId=9831

See Section 7 (Travel Guidelines) and Section 9 (Travel Manager Forms) of 2009 GSP Handbook.

- 15. Government Travel Card:** All participants are encouraged to apply for a government travel card for use during official travel. The government travel card may only be used for hotel, transportation, meal expenses and cash advances associated with authorized official government travel. Participants must complete the application and online training and send the original signed application, signed certification statement and a copy of the completed training certificate to EPP. The application is available at: <http://www.corporateservices.noaa.gov/finance/JPMC.html> and online training is available at: <http://fss.gsa.gov/webtraining/trainingdocs/traveltraining/index.cfm>

GSP Participants who do not obtain a government travel card will be required to use their own credit card or cash for travel related expenses. Reimbursements will be provided

See Section 8 (Government Travel Card) of 2009 GSP Handbook.

- 16. Conditions and Obligations:** All contingencies of an excepted appointment must be met before an offer of employment is extended to selected candidates. Once selected, NOAA must implement a formal agreement with the college or university and each selected graduate student. All participants must sign the Training Agreement, SF-182, requiring three years of Federal service for each year of university/college level training funded by NOAA. If the participant fails to meet the conditions of the training agreement, all Federal funding provided during the training period must be reimbursed to the Federal government.
- 17. Extension of the Training Period:** The established training period may be extended up to a maximum of one year (in six month intervals) after consultation with the GSP Manager and upon the recommendation of the NOAA supervisor and academic advisor to allow for extenuating circumstances (i.e family or personal medical emergencies which require

extended absence from school and/or suspension of research work). The decision to amend a training plan will be made only after taking into consideration the trainee's current program progress and ability to progress at an accelerated pace.

- 18. Transitioning to the Duty Station:** Participants will be relocated to their duty station upon completion of all coursework. NOAA will pay for a one-time permanent change of station (PCS) move for the participant, not to exceed \$7000.00 for moves within the Contiguous United States (CONUS). To begin the PCS process, participants should contact the EPP Administrative Support Staff. All PCS moves must be completed by August 15th of the fiscal year. All receipts from the PCS move must be submitted within 3 days of reaching the final destination. Any delay in submittal of receipts may result in the participant being responsible for all or some of the costs of the PCS move.

See Section 10 (Relocation Entitlements) of 2009 GSP Handbook.

- 19. Taxes:** NOAA strongly recommends participants consult a tax professional in order to determine whether the items received as part of the GSP are subject to federal or local taxes.
- 20. Failure to Meet Requirements:** Graduate Scientists serve on a probationary period and will be terminated if they fail to complete the program requirements, fail to maintain a 3.0 grade point average per semester/quarter and cumulatively, and/or do not have full-time student status. Program participants who are career or career-conditional NOAA employees and hold a competitive permanent position within NOAA at the time of application and acceptance to the GSP, and who fail to successfully complete the academic training, will be reassigned to a position outside the program that is comparable to the duties and grade held prior to entering the program. The participant may not be reassigned to another position in the same series as the target position.

Section 2. Responsibilities

1. **Graduate Sciences Program Manager** is responsible for:
 - (a) overall development, implementation, management, administration, and evaluation of the policy and program;
 - (b) monitoring Graduate Scientists' progress in meeting program requirements;
 - (c) identifying the appropriate Administrative Officer to handle T&A and travel requirements;
 - (d) supervising Graduate Scientists during the two or four-year developmental training period coordinating with the NOAA Line Office supervisors and mentors as required;
 - (e) arranging for students to report to duty station during winter and/or spring break and summer months for on-the-job training; and,

(f) arranging for students to report to permanent duty station upon completion of research and studies;

2. **NOAA Supervisors/Mentors** are responsible for:

(a) participating in the orientation program as required, and providing on-the-job orientation for the graduate student upon their arrival to permanent duty station;

(b) ensuring the graduate student has adequate workspace; a computer; printer; access to the internet, a telephone, fax, and copying machine; research supplies needed for project; and fulfills a tour of duty consisting of 8.5 hours each day at the NOAA site;

(c) supervising graduate scientists while on the job, and coordinating with the Graduate Sciences Program Manager on training-related issues;

(d) participating with the graduate scientist's academic and research advisor to provide guidance on research project for thesis or dissertation (the NOAA advisor must be a career or career-conditional NOAA employee)

(e) participating with the Graduate Sciences Program Manager to assess students' progress during the form of mid-term and final performance evaluations;

(f) ensuring that candidates rotate through assignments, as needed;

(g) ensuring that candidates time and attendance record is an accurate reflection of time worked by signing the T&A worksheet, and approving or disapproving leave requests; and

(h) ensuring the assignment of the Graduate Scientist to a position in their office upon completion of training.

3. **Graduate Scientists** are responsible for:

(a) attending the NOAA Orientation Program in Silver Spring, MD;

(b) completing required security training and badging paperwork;

(c) completing the Government Ethics training available through the Learning Management Systems;

(d) selecting an academic research and NOAA advisor to provide guidance on their NOAA related research and participate on their review committee;

(e) creating an Individual Development Plan (IDP, in coordination with the GSP Manager,

academic advisor and NOAA Supervisor) and timeline for successfully completing research and course work

- (f) ensuring that the NOAA supervisor and academic/research advisor have a face-to-face meeting once per year to discuss the status of their research, time-line for completion, and thesis or dissertation writing;
- (g) signing the continued service agreement;
- (h) ensuring full-time registration is complete at the selected university, and attaining a minimum of a B or 3.0 grade point average each term and cumulatively in all course work;
- (i) attending classes at the selected university, and requesting approval from the Graduate Sciences Program Manager for any course changes prior to registration;
- (j) requesting research supplies or other resources needed to complete their research project at least three months in advance of requirement;
- (k) keeping the Graduate Sciences Program Manager, NOAA supervisor, and mentors apprised of progress quarterly with Quarterly reports and Quarterly conference calls;
- (l) accurately reporting T&A and travel requirements to the EPP Administrative Officer at least two weeks prior to travel date for domestic travel and two months prior to travel date for international travel;
- (m) successfully completing on-the-job training (a minimum of 640 hours per 12 month period);
- (n) participating in Quarterly GSP conference calls with all current GSP participants and the GSP Manager; and,
- (o) reporting to the duty station for the target position as assigned for work experience.

Section 3. Definitions:

For the purposes of this program, the following definitions apply:

1. **Campus Housing:** Campus housing is defined as the participant's place of residence while attending classes full-time at the graduate school.
2. **Continued Service Agreement:** An agreement signed by an employee who is scheduled for non-government training that exceeds 80 continuous hours within a 12-month period. The agreement is a statement that the employee will continue in service after completion of the

training, computed at three times the length of total training hours.

3. Duty Station: Duty station is the city/town, county, and State in which the employee works. For most employees, this will be the location of the employee's work site.
4. Enter-on-duty (EOD): The enter-on-duty date is defined as the date the employee entered on his/her current appointment with the Federal government.
5. Excepted Appointment: Excepted appointments are used to fill positions that are exempt by law from the competitive system. Examples of employees under excepted appointments are Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP), Student Career Experience Program (SCEP), people with disabilities, and positions filled by veterans under the Veterans Readjustment Authority (VRA). Excepted employees under permanent appointments must complete a 1-year trial period.
6. Known Promotion Potential: The highest grade (full performance level) of the Target position.
7. On-the-job Training: This training may be provided during the trainee position, in the target area, or by rotational assignments in NOAA, but must assure consistency and conformity to target position requirements.
8. Student: A Graduate Sciences Program participant who possesses at least a bachelor's degree in a NOAA related scientific field and is enrolled in an accredited graduate school, an MSI when possible, for the purpose of taking additional credit hours and perform NOAA related research in order to qualify for a specified position in a NOAA scientific mission related field. The course work and research must be approved by the Graduate Sciences Program Manager and the Workforce Management Office (WMO).
9. Student Career Experience Program (SCEP): The SCEP enables the student to gain work experience which is directly related to the student's academic program and career goals. Students in the SCEP may be noncompetitively converted to term, career or career-conditional appointments following completion of their academic and work experience requirements. A formal agreement is required with the agency, the university, and the student.
10. Trainee Position: The position a student selectee is assigned to while he/she receives the required training.
11. Target Position: The position the student selectee is being trained for and will be transferred to upon completion of the training.

Section 4. Acceptance of Graduate Sciences Program Policy

I have carefully read the above Graduate Sciences Program Policy and accept the terms of the Policy with full understanding that these terms are binding. I understand and agree that if the Administrator of NOAA determines that a participant, in obtaining or using the scholarship, engages in fraudulent conduct or fails to comply with any term or condition of the appointment, that participant will be terminated and will be required to repay the full amount of Federal funding received to date to NOAA. With full knowledge that this appointment is granted subject to said Policy, and that by accepting the appointment, I am bound by said Policy, and the general program guidance, I do hereby accept the appointment, effective of the date I was sworn in as a Federal employee.

Printed Full Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant

Date