



Student Employee and Internship Pay Guidelines

University of Nebraska at Omaha

Guidance for Setting and Documenting Student Employee Wages

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Context

When pay varies for substantially similar student work, the University must explain the decision using job-related factors and apply its approach consistently. NU guidance requires departments to consider the nature of the work, responsibility level, and required education and experience when setting pay. This guidance helps UNO units determine wages within the NU scale, document pay rationales, and prevent arbitrary differences among students in similar roles. Departments must also ensure equitable pay among students and consider internal equity with comparable non-student positions.

This guidance is intended to help UNO units set student employee wages within the NU wage scale, document the basis for pay decisions, and avoid ad hoc pay differences for students performing substantially similar work.

Scope and core NU wage rule

All student employees are paid in accordance with the NU Student Employee Wage Scale, regardless of fund source, except for graduate teaching assistants, graduate research assistants, UCARE undergraduate research assistants, health aides, and residence hall student assistants. No student employee appointment may be paid above the applicable wage scale maximum without Human Resources approval. (Student Employee Wages, 2025)

For 2026, the standard student roles have a minimum pay of \$15.00 and a maximum of \$16.50 per hour. (Student Employee Wages, 2025) Given the narrow range, these factors usually guide rate decisions within \$15.00-\$16.50, rather than justifying rates above that range. If work nature, responsibility, or qualifications require higher pay, confirm whether the job fits as an undergraduate or graduate internship or another HR-approved exception before exceeding the maximum. Do not call a job an internship just for higher pay. Departments must explain how duties, learning goals, qualifications, independence, and supervision justify an internship. Student Employment may review postings for consistency, and Human Resources should be consulted if classification or pay is unclear or if it exceeds the maximum.

2026 NU Student Employee Wage Scale

Appointment Type/Category	ESG Code	Job Class Code	2026 Min/Hr	2026 Max/Hr	UNO pay-setting note
Student Temporary	S2	49095500	\$15.00	\$16.50	Default range for most student worker roles.
Student Work Study	S2	49019559	\$15.00	\$16.50	Same wage range as student temporary; FWS status is not a basis for a higher or lower rate.
Undergraduate Internship	S2	49095506	\$15.00	\$20.50	Use only for bona fide undergraduate internship roles with duties and learning outcomes that support the classification.
Graduate Internship	S2	49095507	\$15.00	\$26.10	Use only for bona fide graduate internship roles with duties and specialized requirements that support the classification.

Source: NU/UNL Human Resources, Student Employee Wages:

<https://hr.unl.edu/nu-values/market-relevance/staff-compensation/student-employee-wages/>

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) Internship Guide: <https://cdn.uconnectlabs.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/175/2023/08/NACE-Internship-Guide.pdf>

How to identify an internship

Indicators of an internship include duties closely aligned with a student's academic or professional field, clear, structured learning outcomes, project-based or discipline-specific responsibilities, and roles that require specialized qualifications. Internships also feature supervision designed to promote and develop professional competence. Positions that primarily involve routine office, customer service, clerical, event support, food service, facilities, or general student-worker tasks - regardless of valuable experience gained - are unlikely to meet internship criteria unless these responsibilities are directly tied to and necessary for achieving the role's defined learning objectives.

Records retention and wage transparency

The University of Nebraska sets minimum retention standards for records. A pay-justification record supporting a student wage decision should be kept with the student's employment or pay documents, such as with the PAF or in a personnel file in an approved system. The record must be accessible for review or audit and kept for the standard retention period, or longer if required for legal or audit reasons.

Federal law protects employees who discuss compensation. (Team, 2025) Student pay decisions should assume that rates and rationales may be questioned. Clear documentation supports transparency, consistency, and defensible decisions.

Current UNO practice aligned to NU guidance

UNO Student Employment expects student employees to be hired and paid appropriately, regardless of fund source. Units should consider the nature of the work, responsibility level, education and experience required, and internal equity. Student employees should not be paid more than regular employees doing equivalent work, and are generally paid less because student roles are temporary, part-time, or schedule-limited, often flexible around academic needs, and commonly performed in a learning capacity with less responsibility than comparable non-student work. (Student Employee Wages, 2025)

Posting a single hourly rate rather than a broad range remains the recommended UNO practice for most student worker postings. Posting a single hourly rate is often an effective approach for student worker roles with standardized duties, as it provides clarity to applicants and supports consistent starting pay among students performing substantially similar work.

Federal Work-Study (FWS) wage and program requirements

Federal Work-Study employees must be paid at least the applicable minimum wage, and the rate should be based on the type of work performed and the skills required. FWS eligibility or fund source should not be used to justify paying a student less than a similarly situated non-FWS student performing the same work.

FWS is intended to provide employment to help students finance their education. Departments must record only hours actually worked; it is not appropriate to record hours not worked or to treat studying on the job as paid work time unless the student is performing assigned work duties.

Departments must provide a supervisor to monitor FWS work. The supervisor must be a permanent University employee and cannot be another FWS student. (Federal Work-Study Rights and Responsibilities, 2023)

Student employment scheduling and hour limits (all student employees)

Student employees typically work 10-20 hours per week during the academic year. University policy limits student employment to no more than 20 hours per week during the academic term, regardless of funding source.

Departments should make reasonable efforts to schedule work around class schedules and should allow students to adjust schedules, when possible, provided the student communicates in advance.

Pay-setting framework

The following framework helps units stay within the NU wage scale and prevents undocumented or inconsistent pay differences.

Step one: classify the appointment category first

Before setting a rate, confirm the appointment category and job class code. The hiring department is responsible for selecting the appropriate student appointment category when creating the position. Student Employment reviews student job postings for consistency with student employment practices and may provide guidance or request revisions if the selected category does not align with the duties described. Human Resources provides oversight for classifications that affect wage limits, including internship categories or any request to exceed the standard student-worker maximum.

The wage maximum depends on the appointment type. For 2026, place a standard student worker, work-study student, or student from another institution within \$15.00-\$16.50, unless Human Resources approves a rate above the maximum. Undergraduate and graduate internship maximums are higher, but the role should be structured and documented as an internship, and the classification should be confirmed before those ranges are used.

Step two: classify the position level within the applicable range

Within the applicable appointment range, classify the position by duties, not by the individual student. For standard student temporary, work-study, and student other-institution appointments, the levels below must fit within the \$15.00-\$16.50 maximum unless HR approves an exception.

Level	Typical 2026 rate placement	Indicators	Documentation expectation
Level I	\$15.00-\$15.50	Routine or standardized duties; substantial on-the-job training; close supervision; limited independent judgment.	A job posting or job description supports a routine role.
Level II	\$15.51-\$16.50	Some prior knowledge or experience; general supervision; varied work; moderate responsibility; moderate independent judgment; may access confidential or sophisticated systems; may direct Level I students.	Job posting, job description, or supervisor memo identifies Level II duties.
Level III / Internship / HR-approved exception	Above \$16.50 only when the appointment category allows it or HR approves an exception.	Specialized skills, internship structure, broadly skilled tasks, minimal supervision, considerable independent judgment, or lead responsibility.	Guidance on internship design is available through the NACE Internship Guide . Requests to exceed the standard wage maximum or use a higher-paying classification may require review by Human Resources; departments should follow existing HR consultation or request-for-approval processes.

Step three: Set a default hiring rate and stick to it

Departments should set and document a default hiring rate for each student position, or each clearly defined level of student position, each academic year or hiring cycle. That default rate becomes the baseline for internal equity comparisons. A student should not receive a materially different rate from another student in the same job unless the difference is supported by a predetermined, consistently applied, job-related factor.

Step four: allow higher placement through defined, job-related pathways

The \$15.00 rate is the 2026 NU minimum for student employee wage scale categories. Departments may set higher default rates when the role and budget support it, but rates must remain within the applicable maximum unless HR approves an exception.

Pathway A - The position is higher-level by design. If the job duties align with Level II criteria or an internship category, hiring above the base rate may be justified as a job-based decision. The position description should identify the higher-level duties, not merely the preferred qualities of a single student.

Pathway B - The student is placed higher within the range due to verifiable, job-related qualifications. Prior directly related experience, a relevant credential, demonstrated technical skill, or documented experience performing the same work may justify higher placement when the same standard is available to similarly situated students.

Pathway C - A documented change in role scope occurred. If a student takes on real and ongoing additional duties such as training new hires, scheduling, quality control, lead responsibility, or independent operation of a specialized process, a pay increase may be appropriate when the duties correspond to Level II, an internship category, or an HR-approved exception.

Pathway D - An equity adjustment is needed. If an earlier hiring decision created compression or inconsistency, an equity adjustment may be used to correct it. The documentation should make clear that the purpose is internal consistency rather than preference for an individual student.

Pathway E - Market or retention pressure is documented and limited. Market or retention adjustments should be tied to specific evidence, such as competing wage information or documented recruitment difficulties. They must still respect the applicable NU maximum and the rule that student employees should not out-earn regular employees performing equivalent work.

Step five: complete equity checks before finalizing pay

Before offering one student a higher rate than another, the supervisor should complete three checks. First, compare student-to-student equity: are students performing substantially the same duties under the same expectations and supervision? Second, compare student-to-staff parity: would the student rate exceed the rate paid to a regular employee doing equivalent work? Third, review posting and selection integrity: if the posting listed a fixed rate, any post-hire variation must be explainable and documented.

Step six: document the rationale and retain it

When pay is set above the unit default rate, differs among students in substantially similar roles, uses an internship wage maximum, or requests an exception above the applicable NU maximum, the supervisor should complete and retain a pay justification record with the employment/pay documentation.

Source notes

Primary source guidance used for this revision:

- NU/UNL Human Resources Student Employee Wages page, including 2026 wage scale and equity guidance.
- UNL Office of Scholarships & Financial Aid Federal Work-Study page, including FWS eligibility, scheduling, hour limit, supervision, and time-reporting guidance.
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), Internship Guide, used as a national best-practice reference for defining and structuring internships:

<https://cdn.uconnectlabs.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/175/2023/08/NACE-Internship-Guide.pdf>

This guidance reflects NU system requirements where applicable and incorporates national best practices where system-level guidance is limited, such as internship structure. Additional NU campus practices may be considered over time to support consistency across the system.

Student Employee Wage Scale reference: <https://hr.unl.edu/nu-values/market-relevance/staff-compensation/student-employee-wages/>