

# **Graduate Assistantships:**

## **Student and Faculty Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Philosophy**

The Political Science Department seeks to maintain assistantship environments for graduate students that both contribute meaningfully to the students' professional development and effectively serve the mission of the Department, the Graduate College, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and the University.

We believe that, in order to accomplish these dual goals, graduate students and faculty should work together in a collegial way, respecting one another's rights and responsibilities. Clear understandings of these roles are important.

The graduate assistant experience is an integral component of the Department's graduate studies program. The assistantship experience is designed primarily as an opportunity to develop teaching and research skills, and to engage in substantive collaboration with faculty members.

This document is intended as a set of guidelines. It treats the principles followed in assigning tasks to graduate students; responsibilities and rights; evaluation; and recourse and appeal.

Both faculty member and graduate assistant are responsible for familiarity with this document

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## **Principles of Assignment**

1. The Department attempts to find congruence or complementarity between the teaching and/or research interests of a faculty member and that person's graduate assistant. Graduate assistant(s) are asked to submit statements of preference regarding any aspect of the assistantship experience (including student's anticipated scheduling of course work) to the Department Head no later than two months before the beginning of the period of service. Faculty members are required to describe in writing the nature and magnitude of the professional support services they expect to need, including anticipated scheduled times of courses for which assistance is sought. Faculty statements are to be submitted before the end of the instructional period of the academic-year semester preceding the beginning of the assistantship assignment.
2. Considerations of equitable distribution of teaching support among faculty, as well as of reasonable breadth of experience for graduate students, sometimes will qualify the effort to have similarity of interests between graduate students and faculty.
3. It is Departmental policy that split assignments -i.e., assigning a graduate student to more than one faculty member in the same semester will be avoided as far as possible in all assistantship assignments. (Faculty and students should be aware, however, that the large number of courses requiring GAT(s) makes it difficult for the department to implement this policy.)

4. As far as possible, assistantship assignments should reflect an equitable division of effort among graduate assistants. This implies being sensitive, among other things, to the total number of students for whom the graduate assistant will be in some sense responsible, the number of sections to be taught or managed, the number of students per section, and the time demands of the specific tasks. The Department Head and Director of Graduate Studies will consider both relative evenness of work loads among students, and the reasonableness of the absolute work load level, in meeting this guideline. Current guidelines used when making assignments are that a .50 assistantship, or 20 hour per week assignment, will entail: 1) teaching 3 discussion sections of approximately 25 students each; 2) teaching one's own course of 35-40 students and grading for one class for seven hours per week; 3) grading for two courses for twenty hours per week; or 4) an otherwise generally comparable assignment.
5. Assistantship assignments will be made with cognizance of the faculty member's teaching schedule and the probable course schedule of the graduate assistant. As far as possible, graduate assistants should not be assigned classroom responsibilities that would conflict with their scheduled courses.
6. In the extremely unusual case that either a graduate assistant or a faculty member should feel it necessary to request a change in an assistantship assignment, the request must be made in writing to the Department Head not later than the end of the third calendar week of the semester. Consideration of any such request is at the discretion of the Department Head.

7. Unless required otherwise by changes from one semester to the next in the nature or amount of a faculty member's teaching responsibilities, where appropriate, graduate students normally will be assigned to a given faculty member for a full academic year.
8. Continued assignment of a graduate assistant to a given faculty member for a period of longer than one year requires consent of both graduate assistant and faculty member. Additionally, graduate assistant may not be assigned to the same faculty member for more than two consecutive years.

### **Responsibilities and Rights**

1. The graduate assistant's primary responsibility at the university is to perform at the highest attainable standards as a student. Students and faculty alike should respect this primary role. This role distinguishes the compensated services performed by graduate assistants from those performed by salaried staff employees, for example.
2. Both the significance of the roles of graduate assistants in the Department's activities, and the importance of avoiding inconsistent expectations, require that faculty member and graduate assistant develop at the beginning of each semester a reasonably specific set of understandings concerning their respective responsibilities and rights.
3. Contract dates for GAT(s) are based on a 9 month contract and (mid August to mid May).

4. The graduate assistant is responsible for contacting the faculty at least one week before the beginning of classes for the purpose of setting up an initial meeting.
5. Faculty members are responsible for formulating the graduate assistant's tasks for each semester. At a minimum, faculty are obligated to be explicit about any of the following elements of the assistantship that are relevant:
  - a. approximate anticipated distribution of committed hours among grading, classroom instruction, classroom attendance, student contact, course record keeping and administration, proctoring or administration of examinations, and preparation for any of the proceeding,
  - b. usual distribution of hours of work across the week,
  - c. any anticipated scheduling "squeezes" during the course of the semester (i.e., periods of time when task requirements will be unusually heavy or intense),
  - d. method of time accounting,
  - e. any expectations regarding prior preparation/training,
  - f. how performance monitoring and mutual feedback are to be handled,
  - g. times at which each party should be available to be contacted outside of scheduled on-campus work times, and
  - h. conditions under which any informal "banking" of assistantship hours, at the request of either party, might be considered acceptable.
6. Within the framework of agreement between graduate assistant and faculty member covering 5.a. through 5.h. above, as relevant, Departmental policy calls for

- a. conscientious, professional performance of agreed-upon tasks,
  - b. diligent observance of all scheduled responsibilities,
  - c. a willingness to further develop appropriate professional skills, including formal training if needed, and
  - d. knowledge of, and conformity with, all University and Graduate College regulations.
7. It is the Department's intention to encourage flexibility in work agreements between faculty members and graduate assistants, with the goal of making the assistantship responsive both to specific teaching and professional support requirements, and to particular skills of individuals. At the same time, experience and common sense suggest the usefulness of written guidance concerning some of the categories of responsibilities outlined in 5.a. through 5.h.
- a. Grading. Graduate assistants should be asked to grade undergraduate student work only on the basis of explicit, thoughtful criteria established by the faculty member. In the case of essay or short-answer questions, consultation should take place between the faculty member and graduate assistant regarding the criteria for grading. This consultation may include a review by the faculty member of the graduate assistant's initial grading of a subset of the examinations. Alternatively, the consultation may include sample answers supplied by the faculty member. The average length of time required for the grading of an examination should be discussed explicitly so that expectations of completion dates for the grading are reasonable and mutually understood.

- b. Classroom teaching. The Department encourages periodic lecture or discussion-section presentations by graduate assistants. These opportunities should be planned well in advance; should reflect the capabilities, experience, and interests of the graduate assistant; should include explicit substantive guidance by the faculty member; and should be followed by review and joint evaluation, as appropriate.
- c. Weekly work schedules. Graduate assistants normally are expected to be available during the class meeting times of the course(s) to which they are assigned. Faculty members should recognize the possible importance of graduate assistants being unavailable during periods immediately prior to seminars in which the graduate assistants are enrolled. Consistent respect on the part of both parties for the weekly work time obligation of the graduate assistant is important.
- d. Record-keeping. The formats and/or media in which course records (e.g., undergraduate student performance scores) and the graduate assistant's time accounting are maintained at the discretion of the faculty member, provided that any required infrastructure (personal computer, appropriate software) is reasonably available to the graduate assistant.
- e. "Banking" of hours. Graduate College policy discourages the "banking" of graduate assistant hours. Any exceptions to this guideline should have clear justification and should be planned well in advance. Any "banking" of hours is to be agreed to explicitly by both faculty member and graduate assistant.

- f. Skill development. As a general rule, when a faculty member asks a graduate assistant to acquire new capabilities that would be useful in the performance of the graduate assistant's responsibilities, the time reasonably required to acquire these new capabilities is included in the graduate assistant's weekly time commitment.
8. Graduate assistants have the right to petition in support of their conviction that specific duties assigned to them are inconsistent with the guidelines provided in this document, or are otherwise improper. The Director of Graduate Studies, in consultation with the involved faculty member, the graduate assistant, and the Head of the Department, shall determine whether the challenged tasks should be performed pending recourse and appeal. (See procedures, below.)

### **Socialization/Orientation**

The Arizona Board of Regents has mandated a one-day orientation and training program on University policies and procedures for all first time GATs. This is currently sponsored by the Graduate College and the University Teaching Center.

Graduate assistants are also required to attend the departmental orientation series. The Director of Graduate Studies and the President of the Graduate Student Association speak at this session and the graduate program is reviewed. As part of the departmental orientation, graduate students meet by themselves to hear from representatives of the graduate students with experience in the department and program.

### **Recourse and Appeal**

We hope that clarifying expectations at the beginning of each semester and

scheduling opportunities to share valuative feedback during the semester will enhance communication generally and minimize misunderstanding, which seems to be the most frequent source of discord.

When problems arise (and unless the particulars of a situation indicate otherwise), resolution should be sought first through mutual clarification of expectations/concerns. If this is neither an appropriate or successful strategy, guidance/intervention may be sought:

- from the Director of Graduate Studies and/or the Department Head;
- the Ombudsperson Committee (phone number from Faculty Senate: 621-1342);
- the Graduate College, which has an established grievance procedure, a copy of which is available in the departmental office from the Graduate Secretary;
- the Graduate and Professional Student Association may be helpful in clarifying options for addressing GAT problems.

### **Evaluation**

Both faculty members and the graduate students assigned to faculty to assist in teaching are asked to evaluate and comment upon their experience. A memo to both parties is sent out approximately two to three weeks prior to the end of the semester. The memos stipulate general criteria by which to evaluate the GAT-faculty experience. The graduate student evaluations may remain anonymous if requested.

Graduate students teaching independent sections, discussion sections, or computer labs sections will be evaluated by their students with the University's Teacher-Course Evaluation. The Department also will assign one faculty member to evaluate a typical

class session for graduate students teaching independent sections. This faculty member will provide written comments to the graduate student on their teaching performance.

The Director of Graduate Studies in conjunction with the Department Head when making future GAT assignments reviews the evaluations.

## Appendix A: Faculty and Graduate Student Evaluation Forms

### **Memo to Faculty**

As the end of the semester approaches, it is an appropriate time to evaluate your experience with your assigned GAT for this semester. Please use this form and any additional documents to do so and to indicate whether or not you waive the expectation of confidentiality. In evaluating your experience, please consider the following:

- quality of GAT's work,
- efficiency of GAT's work,
- GAT's preparation,
- GAT's dependability, and
- GAT's initiative.
- Were your expectations met? How or how not?
- Was there adequate communication between you and the GAT?
- How would you have modified your experience?
- Have the GAT Guidelines facilitated or hindered this working relationship?
- Would you request this GAT in future semesters?

### **Memo to Graduate Teaching Assistants**

As the end of the semester approaches, it is an appropriate time to evaluate your experience as a GAT this semester. Please use this form or any additional documents to do so and indicate whether or not you waive the expectation of confidentiality. In evaluating your experience, please consider the following:

- appropriateness of work tasks,
- status of communication with faculty member,
- clarity of expectations, and
- value of your experience.
- Did you benefit from this assignment? How so?
- What would you alter about your experience?
- Was this assignment related to your own professional goals?
- Would you request to work with this faculty member in the future?
- What is your preference for next semester's assignment?

**Amendment I:**

This document will be reviewed at least once every five years when the Department rewrites its Strategic Plan.