

Guidelines for Duties and Evaluation of Graduate Assistants

I. Introduction

The Office of Graduate Studies offers this set of guidelines to recommend appropriate roles and responsibilities for graduate teaching and research assistants, departments, and academic units. Graduate assistants provide a valuable service to the American University academic community; their professional, academic, and personal well-being is a top concern. It is our hope that these guidelines will serve as a framework to develop and shape mutually beneficial relationships among graduate students, their faculty supervisors, and the university.

These recommendations are designed to complement academic or teaching unit or policies for graduate assistants, as well as to provide additional guidance where needed and appropriate. Questions concerning the information in this document should be directed to the Office of Graduate Studies.

II. Types of Graduate Assistants and their Duties

A. A graduate assistant (GA) is a graduate student who is given financial support, either with tuition remission and/or a stipend, for work in a teaching unit or academic unit. There are two types of GAs: teaching assistants and research assistants.

i. A teaching assistant (TA) is a GA whose work predominantly involves an instructional assignment. TA responsibilities vary greatly and may include, but are not limited to:

- Teaching a small section of a course
- Tutoring individual or small groups of students
- Holding office hours and meeting with students
- Assisting with the grading of homework or exams or written assignments
- Administering tests or exams
- Assisting a faculty instructor with a large lecture class by teaching students in recitation, laboratory, or discussion sessions
- Helping software users in a computer laboratory

ii. A research assistant (RA) is a GA whose work predominantly involves assisting a faculty member or members with academic research. RAs are not independent researchers and are not directly responsible for the outcome of the research. They are responsible to, and report to a research supervisor or principal investigator (PI). RA responsibilities vary greatly and may include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting literature reviews or library research
- Collecting, coding, cleaning or analyzing data
- Preparing materials for submission to funding agencies and foundations
- Preparing materials for IRB, IACUC, or IBC review
- Coding computer programs to automate processes
- Writing reports or designing conference presentations

B. All graduate assistantships should be beneficial to both the graduate student and the academic or teaching unit. The unit receives assistance from the supported graduate student and the GA receives experience and mentorship in research or teaching, which is intended to facilitate professional development. As a general rule, GA duties should be limited to tasks that benefit both the academic unit and advance the professional development of the GA. Examples of inappropriate duties for a GA may include, but are not limited to:

- Personal services for a supervisor
- Administrative work that doesn't advance professional development, such as receptionist work
- Maintaining the personal computer of a supervisor
- Cleaning up after a department function or research colloquium

C. In general, students with RA assignments should not be responsible for any instructional duties and students with TA assignments should not be responsible for any research duties. In certain cases, a GA may be assigned both research- and teaching-related duties, but all assignments should be specified clearly at the beginning of the semester. Precise research and teaching duties should be described in the evaluation plan for each GA (see Section III) and not overload the GA's time commitments (see Section IV).

III. Duties and Evaluation Plan

A. Before the beginning of each semester for which a graduate student receives a funding award, the teaching or academic unit should produce a Duties and Evaluation Plan (DEP) for each GA. This document should include:

- Precise research or instructional duties that the GA is to perform each week
- An estimate of how many hours per week should be needed to complete the assigned duties (estimated work hours should be equivalent to the weekly total associated with the graduate assistantship assignment– see Section IV.)
- A method of assessment by the supervisor for the assigned duties, to be completed at the end of the semester. The methods of assessment should not be overly extensive nor time consuming for the faculty supervisor.

The DEP should be signed by the GA and the supervisor before the semester. It is highly recommended the Chair of the department or the graduate program director also agrees

with the assigned duties and signs the DEP. It is preferable that academic units develop a common form and a common set of evaluation metrics that can be tailored to each teaching unit. All assigned duties need to be performed or completed by the end of the semester (see Section IV). At that time, the supervisor should assess the GA's performance. At a minimum, the supervisor should assess whether the GA did or did not complete the assigned tasks in a satisfactory manner. A sample DEP is provided in Section VI.

B. "Catch-all" duties should not be included in the DEP. Assigned duties should be specific and measurable (e.g. "TA grades weekly homework") and not open-ended or ambiguous (e.g. "RA completes all tasks not finished by the research group"). With rare exceptions, the duties delineated in the DEP should be the only tasks the GA performs that semester in fulfillment of the assignment.

C. Graduate program directors should collect and review copies of DEPs for all GAs at the end of each semester to facilitate the evaluation of GAs. The academic units can use this data to analyze effective uses of GAs and monitor expenditure of graduate financial aid (GFA) funds. This information should be shared with the academic unit and the Office of Graduate Studies for the campus-wide review of the effective use of GFA.

D. GAs who do not perform their assigned duties to a satisfactory level or who are not making adequate academic progress should not continue to be funded as a GA. Prior to any discontinuation of a funded assistantship, the teaching unit should inform the student of shortcomings in performance or academic standing. The teaching unit should offer suggestions for performance improvement and a timeline for addressing deficiencies, offer additional assistance and/or mentoring, as well as recommend resources to facilitate improvement in performance. If no improvement occurs in the timeline provided, the teaching unit should request that the Chair or graduate program director send the student a written notification that the award will be terminated on a specific date.

E. In rare cases, a DEP may need to be modified mid-semester because of unforeseen circumstances, such as cancelation of a class or additional funding for a laboratory. All parties, including the GA, the supervisor, and the graduate program director should agree upon the new assignments and sign a modified DEP. The GA should be assessed for their work up to that point on the old DEP and assessed on their work for the remainder of the semester with the new DEP.

IV. Dates of Employment and Weekly Workloads

A. All graduate assistantships range from 10 to 20 hours for a 15 week semester. A 0.5 FTE translates to 300 hours of work per semester. A 0.25 FTE translates to 150 hours of work per semester. All FTEs in between 0.5 and 0.25 have a proportionately scaled weekly work assignment. The total number of hours a GA works in a semester should be close to the hours specified by the FTEs of the graduate assistantship.

B. Although there may be weekly variation in the workload of a graduate assistant, the workload should not be too heavy or too light in any week. For example, a 0.5 FTE GA assignment averages 20 hours of work per week. There should be no week where the GA is expected to work more than 35 hours. Similarly, extreme underuse (less than 5 hours a week) of GA work provides evidence that GA resources may merit re-allocation by the academic unit. This example scales proportionately for FTEs below 0.5.

C. The dates that a TA can be expected to work are regulated by the academic calendar. If the TA's assignment is connected to a course, the TA must be ready to start work by the beginning of the semester of the instructional assignment. This might involve a small amount of preparation before the start of the semester. When the TA is finished with all assigned duties for the course, no more work should be expected.

D. The dates that an RA can be expected to work are regulated by the payroll dates of the assignment. RAs are paid bi-weekly. Work begins two weeks before the first pay period of the semester and must end by the final pay period. For example, in Fall 2013, the first pay date is September 13, 2013 and the final pay is December 20, 2013. Therefore, an Fall semester RA can work from August 31, 2013 until December 20, 2013. Payroll dates can be found on the Office of Graduate Studies website at <http://www.american.edu/provost/grad/upload/GFA-Stipend-Schedule.pdf>.

E. GAs work hours should not be "banked." That is to say, no agreements should be made that a GA is to work less during the semester so that remaining work in the assignment could be done later over Winter break or during the summer. All work should be completed by the time the GA is evaluated.

F. GAs do not receive paid vacation or sick leave. GAs should not be required to work (or make up work) during designated University holidays or periods when the University is closed for business. In unusual circumstances, such as the GA being involved in a medical emergency with long-term implications, arrangements for workload modification and a change in the DEP should be arranged with the Chair or graduate program director of the teaching unit and the faculty supervisor.

V. University Policies and Additional Resources

A. RAs who contribute to a research project which leads to publication need to be given proper credit and acknowledgement. All research involving RAs is covered by [American University's Scholarly Misconduct Policy](#) and [American University's Scholarly Misconduct Procedures](#). RAs have a responsibility to report research dishonesty or misconduct.

B. Graduate Assistants, faculty supervisors, and academic units are all subject to the rules and regulations of the university. These include, but are not limited to, American University's policies on [Sexual Harassment and Discrimination](#), the [Student Code of Conduct](#), and the [Graduate Academic Regulations](#). For a more complete list of regulations and resources about teaching and research, please visit the [Office of Graduate Studies](#) website.

This document uses language and ideas from the following documents:

<http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/RightsPrivilegesResponsibilities.pdf>

<https://provost.gwu.edu/files/downloads/gtaandaguidelines.pdf>

<http://www.washington.edu/admin/rules/policies/PO/EO28.html>

<http://www.policies.utexas.edu/policies/teaching-assistants>

<http://www.policies.utexas.edu/policies/graduate-and-undergraduate-research-assistants>

<https://ga.soe.ucsc.edu/sites/default/files/GradRightsResponsibilitiesFinal.pdf>

VI. A Sample of a Duties and Evaluation Plan (DEP)

Duties and Evaluation Plan for Graduate Assistant

GA Name: John Doe

Supervisor Name: Jane Someone

Teaching Unit and Academic Unit: Mathematics and Statistics, CAS

Semester and Year: Fall 2013

Circle GA Assignment: RA TA Both

FTEs with Assistantship: 0.25

Hours of work per week: 10

Performance Rating Scale

- Exceeds Expectations – Surpasses requirements of position
- Meets Expectations – Fulfills requirements of position
- Fails to Meet Expectations – Falls below requirements of position

Duty	Weekly Hours	Assessment	Rating			Comments (if any)
			Exceeds	Meets	Fails	
Grades weekly homework in a timely fashion	4	Instructor spot checks graded homework and addresses student questions about the grading.			✓	The grading was late three times and we found some inconsistencies in the grading among student papers. More attention and planning is needed next time.
Holds office hours	3	Discussion of office hours through weekly meetings with me about the course		✓		
Works in the computer lab with students	3	Discussion of lab through weekly meetings with me about the course	✓			Joe developed new curricular materials for students to help understand the software.

GA Signature: _____ Date: _____

Supervisor Signature: _____ Date: _____