

Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistantships and Instructional Assistants at The George Washington University

Graduate assistantships are merit-based graduate student assistance that provide financial support for academic study, a significant and professional development experience, and an opportunity to provide meaningful service to students and the University community. Funding for graduate assistantships is provided to enable the schools and departments to:

1. Attract highly qualified applicants and enable schools to successfully meet enrollment goals.
2. Provide support for the University's top graduate students.
3. Enhance graduate students' academic program and training, resulting in greater post-graduate opportunities.
4. Meet the academic/teaching, research, and administrative needs of the department.

Although this document is focused on Graduate Teaching Assistantships, the three types of graduate assistantships offered at GW are described briefly below for purposes of differentiation.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are offered targeted academic training opportunities within their field of study, in furtherance of their program objectives, working under the supervision and mentorship of a faculty member or advanced graduate student. In most instances, GTAs are assigned to a particular course or courses. Typical GTA duties may include, but are not necessarily limited to, the following activities:

- Loading and preparing materials or activities relevant to the teaching of a topic.
- Leading discussion or laboratory sections within a faculty-taught course.
- Holding review sessions before exams.
- Proctoring exams.
- Grading homework assignments and exams.
- Holding office hours to consult with individual students.
- Assisting University faculty members in the teaching of lower-level undergraduate course sections.

GTAs are considered to be in practical instructorship training in higher education, consistent with their degree requirements, while also making an important contribution to the educational experience of the students they serve. GTAs normally receive both a fellowship (a stipend and/or tuition credit hours) in support of their education and a salary.

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) are offered targeted research opportunities in furtherance of their academic program objectives, under the supervision of a research mentor. GRAs should not be considered simply clerical support for the research project, but should be involved in activities that help to enhance their research skills, develop professional competencies, and extend their educational experience.

Graduate Administrative Assistants (GAAs) are offered targeted administrative learning opportunities in the management and operation of a department or administrative unit at the University and may report to administrators, faculty, or other University personnel. The GAA experience provides a level of responsibility and breadth of involvement that enhances the GAA's education in general professionalism and managerial competency consistent with academic program objectives.

Graduate assistants are not considered hourly wage account employees and their primary function should not be to provide routine clerical support (e.g., answering the phone, filing, running errands).

Graduate students who perform clerical support functions for a department or are hired on a short-term basis to perform research or administrative tasks should be hired as hourly student workers and should not be called GTAs, GRAs, or GAAs.

It is important that graduate student assistants be given the designation that best describes their PRIMARY function, responsibilities, and academic objectives. The title of Graduate Teaching Assistant should not be given to graduate students who serve primarily as research assistants or administrative assistants. By the same token, although GTAs may engage in library or other research relevant to the teaching of a course, they are not research assistants and should not be designated as either GRAs or Research Assistants (a different type of appointment normally supported by a grant or contract). And, while administrative and clerical activities such as recording and maintaining records of grades or copying course materials may be a part of their practical training, GTAs are not, and should not be designated as, GAAs or student workers to provide secretarial support for departments.

Instructional Assistants (IAs) are part-time instructional staff hired to assist a professor with a specific course or manage a laboratory, discussion or recitation section associated with a course. They receive a salary as compensation for their services rather than the package of support normally offered to Graduate Teaching Assistants and should not be called GTAs. In most respects, however, their responsibilities as addressed in this policy are similar. Responsibilities may vary in scope but are typically less than those of a full GTA, who carries up to 20 hours a week of responsibility.

All assistants are both protected by and responsible for adhering to the University's general regulations and guidelines, including those concerning non-discrimination, equal opportunity, sexual harassment, academic integrity, student privacy, campus security, and appropriate conduct, as described in the Guide to Student Rights and Responsibilities. Moreover, they are subject to relevant University policies such as the copyright, patent, conflicts of interest and commitment policies (see policy.gwu.edu for all major university policies).

Throughout their assistantships, GTAs must be enrolled full-time (or be certifiable as full-time) in a GW graduate degree program. Both GTAs and IAs must:

- Not be on academic probation.
- Have no grades of Incomplete within their current degree program.
- Be making satisfactory progress toward degree completion and have not exceeded school or department time lines for completing degree requirements, including comprehensive exams, dissertation proposal submission and approval, etc.

NEW GTA/IA ORIENTATION AND EVALUATION

New GTAs and IAs (those who have not previously served as a GTA or IA at GW and/or have not participated in the GTAP Orientation) are required to meet several conditions of award:

1. They must participate in the GTAP Orientation the week before the beginning of their first semester of appointment. The Orientation includes an Instructional Presentation in which the student gives a brief teaching demonstration and receives feedback on it. [Additional information on the Orientation and the Presentation are included in the section on Graduate Teaching Assistant Program.]

2. They must enroll in and complete the one-credit-hour, tuition-free Graduate Teaching Certification Course, offered primarily through distance education (UNIV 250.DE).
3. If their native language is not English, they must complete an Oral English Proficiency Screening in the Speech and Hearing Clinic.

New GTAs and IAs who fail to meet these conditions may have their assistantships withdrawn. Based on the student's participation in GTAP Orientation and evaluation activities, the University reserves the right to declare a GTA or IA as unready for service involving contact with students and to require that remedial steps be taken before the GTA/IA is assigned these duties (e.g., referral to the Speech & Hearing Clinic for weekly accent modification sessions). While a GTA is completing remedial activities, the award will not be reduced or withdrawn, but responsibilities should not involve more than minimal contact with students (e.g., he/she could proctor tests). IAs cannot be hired until their remediation is complete. GTAs who do not successfully complete remediation during their initial award period are not eligible for subsequent awards.

Upon successful completion of the Orientation, the Instructional Presentation portion of the Orientation, the Oral English Proficiency Screening (when required), and the certification course, a notation will be added to the student's transcript, indicating that he/she has completed GTA certification requirements.

The schools and departments are responsible for supplementing these University-wide activities with orientation and training on aspects of the GTA role that may be specific to the discipline, the school/department, or the course(s). Included in the school/department orientation should be:

- Clear instructions about the GTA's scope of responsibilities.
- Methods by which the GTA will be evaluated and provided feedback.
- Information on department policies and procedures (e.g., lab safety rules).
- Information on facilities and equipment (office space, computer access, etc.).

GTA AWARD RENEWAL

Each school establishes its own policies concerning the number of years an individual may be eligible to continue as a GTA and the number stated in particular students' award letters. Generally, in deciding whether or not a student should receive a subsequent award, the following criteria should be considered:

- A minimum cumulative grade-point average of 3.0.
- Satisfactory progress toward degree requirements (timely completion of course work and qualifying/comprehensive exams, progress toward completion of thesis or dissertation, etc.).
- Evaluation of prior performance as a GTA.
- The needs of the department/program.
- The student's academic career goals.

IA APPOINTMENT RENEWAL

IA reappointments are dependent on departmental evaluations and instructional support needs.

ASSIGNMENT OF RESPONSIBILITIES

Each GTA/IA should be informed in sufficient time to permit any required preparation – normally before the semester begins -- of his or her specific GTA/IA assignment. Each should be assigned one (or in some cases, more than one) designated faculty mentor. The mentor is responsible for communicating clearly to

the GTA/IA his or her specific responsibilities, ideally in writing, and for ensuring that the GTA/IA has any resources necessary to carry out these responsibilities. The suggested responsibilities are conditioned on the needs of the mentor and remain subject to his or her review and approval. Mentors should be aware of the time commitment implied by a Graduate Teaching Assistantship/ Instructional Assistantship (up to 20 hours a week) and assign tasks that can reasonably be completed in the time available.

Responsibilities should be appropriate to the GTA's/IA's level of skills, experience, and content knowledge. The suggested responsibilities listed below for each GTA/IA level are cumulative, with lower-level roles often being included in the responsibilities of more experienced GTAs/IAs. All GTAs are generally expected to attend class meetings and/or do readings related to labs or discussion sections over which they have responsibility.

Beginning GTA (first year – no previous teaching or GTA experience):

- Helps to prepare and grades tests and other assignments.
- Holds office hours to provide individual guidance.
- Conducts labs or structured discussion sections.
- Works closely with faculty and/or more experience GTAs.

Experienced GTA (successful completion of all GTAP requirements; at least one year of GTA experience or teaching experience at non-GW institutions):

- Designs and leads discussion sections or labs.
- May be responsible for individual lectures.

Advanced GTA (at least two years of GTA experience at GW, with progressively more responsibility; significant content knowledge; must have at least a master's degree of the equivalent course work completed toward the doctorate):

- Subject to departmental approval, and with faculty mentorship, can function as the primary instructor for a course section, with responsibility for decisions on presentation of material, development of evaluation methods, and assignment of grades.
- May assist the faculty in course development (syllabi, the selection of texts and other resource materials).

Instructional Assistants (all levels)

- Conducts lab sections
- Administers and monitors exams
- Submits grades for laboratory work to lead professor
- Holds office hours
- Other duties as faculty mentor assigns.

Graduate Lecturer

Advanced GTAs who teach independent courses or course sections with supervision are appointed as GTAs and designated as Graduate Lecturers. To be appointed as a Graduate Lecturer, the student must:

1. Be a doctoral student in good standing (i.e., on track to complete within six years, with satisfactory grades, no incompletes, etc.).
2. Intend to teach at the college/university level.
3. Have completed the University's certification requirements for new GTAs (i.e., orientation, online course) and have had at least three semesters of GTA experience with good student evaluations *every time*.
4. Be assigned to teach a small independent course or course section, one that does not have its own GTA support.

5. Have an assigned faculty mentor who assists in designing the course; reviews syllabi, handouts, exams, and other instructional materials; and regularly observes and gives feedback to the GTA.
6. Work no more than 20 hours a week (and hold no other positions at the University).
7. Have Dean's office approval before appointment.

Teaching Fellows

Teaching Fellows are very senior former GTAs who teach three or four courses a year with faculty supervision. They are appointed as Teaching Fellows rather than as GTAs and are chosen competitively to help meet teaching needs in particular departments. All Teaching Fellow appointments must have the Dean's office approval before appointment.

Department Chairs and Program Directors are responsible for monitoring the distribution of duties to ensure responsibilities are equitably distributed among GTAs and for ensuring that a GTA's assignment is appropriate given his/her level of experience, thereby creating a meaningful educational experience for GTAs.

TIME COMMITMENT

A full-time Graduate Teaching Assistantship should involve an average of no more than 20 hours of time per week. It is recognized that the time required may vary from assistantship to assistantship and from week to week within a given assistantship. It is to be expected that the load may be particularly heavy at the end of the semester; however, recognizing that GTA responsibilities are a component of the student's educational experience, mentors should take care to ensure that GTA responsibilities do not unduly interfere with the GTA's ability to prepare for and complete other academic requirements.

GTAs are expected to make satisfactory academic progress. Outside employment while holding a full GTA award is generally discouraged due to the significantly increased level of educational responsibility required of GTAs and requires the approval of the Dean's office.

Instructional Assistants' duties and time commitments will vary, but normally will be less than 20 hours a week.

FINANCIAL AWARD AND GTA BENEFITS

Each college or school should establish appropriate guidelines for GTA and IA support and apply them across departments and programs in an equitable manner. All GTAs and IAs should be reasonably compensated.

Graduate Assistants (not IAs) who enroll in the University's Student Health Insurance Plan will receive an additional \$500 per semester enrolled upon proof of enrollment or \$1,000 if enrolled for the entire year. GTAs and other graduate assistants are also eligible for reduced-rate parking; they must complete a form for this purpose provided through the GW Parking Office. Both GTAs and IAs are eligible to use the services of the Center for Innovative Teaching and Learning, with their faculty mentor's endorsement.

GTAs and IAs are not required to perform duties on any holidays or other days (e.g., emergency snow days) on which University offices are closed for business. GTAs and IAs do not accrue vacation or sick leave, but may need to be absent from their duties at times. Reasons for such absences may include professional opportunities outside the University (e.g., conferences), military obligations, jury duty, or other personal considerations. GTAs and IAs are responsible for notifying their faculty mentor as soon as they learn they may need to take time off and for working with the mentor to ensure their responsibilities are fulfilled during

the absence. If the length and timing of the leave puts an undue hardship on the department, a GTA may be required to resign from an assistantship or an IA to resign his/her job. Departments may have their own policies and processes for handling such absences and are responsible for providing them to GTAs and IAs.

TERMINATIONS AND RESIGNATIONS

GTAs and IAs who do not perform their responsibilities satisfactorily should not be continued, as they diminish the quality of education at GW. Assistantships may be terminated at any time if poor academic progress or unsatisfactory performance in the GTA or IA role warrants it, as judged by the faculty mentor and concurred with by the Department Chair and Dean. Generally, prior to terminating a GTA or IA, the department should endeavor to inform the student of his/her inadequacies, provide suggestions for improvement and a timeline for addressing deficiencies, offer additional assistance and/or mentoring, and/or suggest resources to aid the student's improvement. If no improvement takes place within the time allowed, the department should request the Dean's office to send the student a written notification that the award will be terminated, with a stated effective date. However, the University reserves the right to terminate a GTA immediately and without prior notice if, in the judgment of the Department Chair and with the concurrence of the Dean, such action is warranted. If a GTA or IA finds it necessary to resign his/her assistantship before the end of the appointment period, he/she should submit a letter of resignation at the earliest opportunity to the Department Chair or Program Director so that steps can be taken as soon as possible to find alternative coverage of the GTA's or IA's responsibilities.

THE GW GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT PROGRAM (GTAP)

The George Washington University Graduate Teaching Assistant Program is intended to impress upon GTAs and IAs the importance of their roles and responsibilities, equip them with the basic information and skills they need in order to perform their roles effectively, ensure that they contribute positively to the quality of their own education as well as that of undergraduates at GW, and help prepare them for roles as faculty members or trainers in the future. The GTA Program also tracks the results of new GTA evaluations, coordinates the GTA certification course, helps identify outstanding GTAs, and assists in collecting data on the GTA experiences and needs. The various components of the GTA Program are described below.

GTAP Orientation. Held the week before the start of the fall and spring semesters, this day-long workshop is required of all new GTAs and IAs. The Orientation includes presentations and panels to help prepare GTAs and IAs for their roles and responsibilities and distributes materials on University policies and campus resources.

The Instructional Presentation, an important component of the GTAP Orientation, is a microteaching experience in which each GTA and IA presents a brief educational session for fellow students and a faculty member and receives written feedback on his/her presentation and communication skills.

Oral English Proficiency Screening. Prior to beginning their first semester as a GTA or IA, GTAs and IAs whose native language is not English must complete an Oral English Proficiency Screening with the clinicians of the GW Speech and Hearing Clinic. Based on the results of the oral interview, a GTA or IA may be required to attend weekly remediation sessions at the Speech and Hearing Clinic and/or participate in other experiences designed to improve their oral English skills. They may also be assigned GTA or IA responsibilities that involve reduced levels of interaction with students until their communication skill improve.

GTA Certification Course. GTA and IA training continues during part of the student's first semester through the largely web-based certification course UNIV 250.DE, offered each fall and spring semester. This one-credit-hour, credit/no credit course is mandatory (and tuition-free) for new GTAs and IAs. The course focuses on areas relevant to the roles that GTAs and IAs typically play: basics of instructional design and planning, teaching strategies and techniques, student motivation and effective instructor-student interactions, assessment and grading, and instructional technology. To avoid interfering with students' other academic work and GTA/IA duties, the course normally consists primarily of web-based readings, exercises, and peer interactions, along with one or two required workshops.

Elements of GTAP for GTAs Only:

GTA Evaluation. In order to improve the orientation and the web-based course and to ensure that GTAs receive appropriate feedback about the performance of their duties, the GTA Program collects and maintains first-semester evaluations of new GTAs by their faculty mentors.

GTA Survey. To collect information about GTAs' experiences and needs, the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment every other year distributes a survey about the fall cohort's experience. The results are shared with University faculty and administrators and are used to improve GTA training and support.

Teaching Assistant Award. The Philip Amsterdam Graduate Teaching Assistant Award has been established in recognition of the value of Graduate Teaching Assistants' contributions to the quality of education at GW. Given yearly to up to three GTAs and based on department/program nominations, the Award includes a \$1,000 prize.

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT/FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to the school/department-specific orientation and training described above, the schools and departments are required to:

1. Inform all new GTAs and IAs about the mandatory GTA Orientation and certification course.
2. Ensure that all GTAs and IAs have a clear explanation of expectations, the breadth of their responsibilities, and the department policies and procedures under which they will function.
3. Assign each GTA or IA a faculty mentor who provides consistent interaction and oversight. Each GTA or IA should be mentored by a faculty member or members. Faculty mentors should view themselves as responsible for helping GTAs/IAs to master the content of their fields and develop their skills as instructors. Faculty mentors should provide their GTAs/IAs with the following: (1) a clear statement of responsibilities and expectations, (2) advice and instruction on aspects of the professorial role, and (3) feedback on performance.
4. Provide appropriate facilities and equipment. GTAs/IAs should have access to shared office space, computers, copiers, and any other equipment or facilities that are necessary for the completion of their duties.
5. Provide on-going formal and informal evaluations of the GTA/IA performance. Each department should have its own procedures for evaluating GTA/IA performance on an ongoing basis each semester, based on student evaluations of the GTA/IA and observations of the GTA's/IA's presentations and interactions with students, reviews of homework and exam grading, and

confirmation that other duties (e.g., office hours, review sessions, etc.) are being conscientiously and satisfactorily handled by the GTA/IA. These evaluations should be shared with GTAs/IAs, with the goal of giving them the feedback they need in order to improve and further develop their teaching skills. Evaluations should also be used to determine who should be awarded or denied an assistantship in subsequent semesters and/or what sorts of assignments are appropriate given the GTA's/IA's skills. In addition, as part of the University's on-going efforts to evaluate the GTA Program and the needs of Graduate Teaching Assistants, the department/program is required to submit an evaluation of each GTA's/IA's first semester performance to the Associate Vice President for Graduate Studies and Academic Affairs.

6. Monitor the academic standing of all GTAs and IAs. GTAs should be enrolled full-time (or be certifiable as full-time). Both GTAs and IAs should maintain a 3.0 GPA and be making satisfactory progress toward degree completion.
7. Establish and distribute procedures for resolving any problems that may arise. GTAs/IAs need to have a mechanism to resolve conflicts with the faculty mentor or other GTAs/IAs, discuss workload issues, and so on. These policies and procedures are best established at the departmental level, as long as they are consistent with relevant University policies such as the Policy on Sexual Harassment.
8. Monitor the performance of International GTAs and IAs. Departments must monitor the performance of any international GTAs and IAs who receive a "Department Monitor" rating as a result of the Speech and Hearing Department's Oral English Proficiency Screening.

These guidelines are intended to make the experience of being a Graduate Teaching Assistant or Instructional Assistant at The George Washington University as rewarding as possible for all concerned.

Office of Graduate Studies and Academic Affairs
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