UTDPP1075 - University Policies Related to Graduate Assistants Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Student Research Assistants

Policy Statement

Philosophy

Graduate programs, schools, or departments and eligible administrative units are designed to provide the opportunity for individuals to make the transition from students to professional scholars and practitioners. The appointment of a graduate student as a Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate often provides the student with the necessary financial support to facilitate this transformation.

Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graduate Assistants, and Teaching Associates are enrolled, full-time graduate students taking a minimum of nine approved semester credit hours each regular (long) semester and must be in academic good standing each semester they are appointed. Assistants and Associates are also employees of the University and are expected to meet specified teaching, research, or administrative support obligations and receive compensation for contributing to the mission of the University. As employees of the University, Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, and Teaching Associate appointees, when acting in their capacity as employees, are subject to the provisions of policies and procedures relating to employment, including the provisions and requirements governing intellectual property.

Graduate studies and assistantship responsibilities should reinforce each other. The appointments are intended to allow the student to gain valuable in-service experience in teaching, research, administrative functions, and other activities. Research projects should ideally lead to a thesis or dissertation. Teaching assignments should give greater insight into a student's discipline. Administrative responsibilities could include research; in such cases, these duties should give a graduate student an opportunity to apply collaborative communication strategies in planning, executing, and assessing projects or to apply research concepts, practices, and methodologies when conducting institutional research. In all cases, a close relationship between the faculty or administrative supervisor and the student is vital to the promotion of the professional growth of the graduate student.

Types of Graduate Assistantships

A “full-time” Teaching Assistant (TA), Research Assistant (RA), Graduate Assistant (GA) and Teaching Associate is defined as an appointment working no more than 20 hours per week and is considered a part-time employee. An appointment less than “full-time” (i.e., less than 20 hours weekly) is permissible with a commensurate reduction in salary. Aggregate employment at more than 20 hours per week in a combined appointment is not permitted.

Four types of assistantships are offered:

1. Full-time (0.5 FTE personnel appointments) Graduate Student Teaching Assistants (TA’s) are employed a maximum of 20 hours per week to help meet the instructional needs of the university. Appointments and reappointments as Teaching Assistants are subject to: the availability of financial support, satisfactory academic progress, and performance review by their academic program, school, or department on a semester-by-semester basis. In consultation with, and under the direction of, an assigned supervisor, the Teaching Assistant will aid in the teaching of one or more courses or may serve as the instructor of record.

2. Full-time (0.5 FTE personnel appointments) Graduate Student Research Assistants (RA’s) are employed a maximum of 20 hours per week to assist the research efforts of the faculty in a capacity that relates to the student’s educational goals. Research Assistant appointments and reappointments are subject to: the availability of financial support, satisfactory performance in and progress toward specified research assignments, and performance review on a semester-by-semester basis. The Principal Investigator or
Project Director of the award will designate and supervise the research activities of the Research Assistant. Duties may include library searches, field work, laboratory experiments, and preparation of reports. The duties should provide an opportunity to acquire professional skills that complement his/her graduate program and must not be for services unrelated to the student's educational program, school, or department or be clerical in nature.

3. Full-time (0.5 FTE personnel appointments) Graduate Student Assistants (GA's) are employed a maximum of 20 hours per week to assist with administrative support functions and other activities in a manner that relates to the student's professional development. Graduate Assistant appointments and reappointments are subject to: the availability of financial support, satisfactory performance in specified administrative assignments, satisfactory progress in the academic program, and a satisfactory performance review on a semester-by-semester basis. The Graduate Assistant's responsibilities may or may not directly relate to teaching or research while some duties may be both research and administrative in nature, or consist of other activities that do not generally fit within the Teaching Assistant, Teaching Associate, or Research Assistant responsibilities. Depending on the specific job duties, Graduate Assistants may apply research concepts, practices, or methodologies through analyzing data, presenting findings, conducting institutional research, collaborating with co-workers and/or colleagues in preparing reports and/or presentations, and similar activities. In all cases, their duties should not be clerical in nature. The administrative supervisor will designate and manage the activities of the Graduate Assistant. The administrative supervisor will ensure that the Graduate Assistant activities will contribute to the graduate student's professional growth in acquiring professional skills that complement his/her graduate interests and/or discipline, although these skills may not necessarily relate to his/her progression toward a degree. It is required that the administrative supervisor maintains communication with the student's faculty advisor about the student's appropriate academic progress and administrative performance.

4. Full-time (0.5 FTE personnel appointments) Graduate Student Teaching Associates will be appointed, with prior written approval of the Chief Academic Officer, as the primary instructor of record for a course. The Teaching Associate serving as a primary instructor will work closely with an assigned faculty supervisor. To be eligible for appointment as the primary instructor of record for a course, Teaching Associates must be in the last phase of their doctoral program and be unconditionally enrolled in graduate study. Appointments and reappointments as Teaching Associates are subject to: the availability of financial support, satisfactory academic progress, and performance review by their academic program, school, or department on a semester-by-semester basis.

Qualifications/Eligibility for Assistantship Appointments

To be eligible for appointment as a full-time Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate students must be unconditionally admitted to a graduate program/school and be enrolled full-time in a graduate program/school at UT Dallas. Students appointed as Assistants and Associates are required to maintain academic good standing as defined in the graduate catalog. Students on academic probation may not be appointed to, or remain on, an assistantship. Exceptions may be approved by the Graduate Dean upon recommendation of the School Dean and/or the administrative supervisor.

For teaching appointments, proficiency in spoken and written English is required. At the time of their initial appointments as Teaching Assistants or Teaching Associates, international students will be required to take an oral screening test designed to establish their English communication skill level. The outcome of the test will establish if the student will be required to enroll in, and subsequently pass, an English as a Second Language (ESL) course designed to prepare them for classroom duties and interactions with students. Students who are not excused from taking the ESL course by the Graduate Dean must pass the ESL course within two semesters of enrollment to qualify for continued appointment as a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Associate. Additional information about the screening test and the ESL course may be obtained from the Office of Graduate Studies.

A faculty committee in each program, school, or department must screen, rank, and recommend the appointment or reappointment of Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Teaching Associates in that academic unit.
Evaluation criteria for entering students must include, but not necessarily be limited to, previous academic record (degree, GPA), TOEFL scores if applicable, standardized examination scores if required by the program (GRE, GMAT), applicable teaching or work experience, letters of recommendation, and the Committee's judgment that the student has the potential for sustained achievement in the chosen field of graduate study. Eligible administrative units may follow their current personnel practices in screening, ranking, and recommending the appointment or reappointment of Graduate Assistants in consultation with faculty in the student's academic discipline.

Reappointment of students will also require: completion of a required assistantship orientation training program; a demonstrated high standard of performance in the areas of assigned duties in teaching, research, and/or administrative support; and satisfactory progress toward the graduate degree.

Appointment Procedures

The appointment of a Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, or Graduate Assistant requires recommendation by the program, school and/or department head (if applicable) or the administrative supervisor and the Dean of the School and approval by the Dean of Graduate Studies. Teaching Associate appointments must also be approved by the Office of the Chief Academic Officer. In the case of an administrative unit, the appointment of Graduate Assistants requires the recommendation by the supervisor and his/her manager. All requests for initial appointment, reappointment, or change of status of Assistants or Associates must be initiated on the appropriate Human Resources forms, and must include the academic level of the student in the degree program at UT Dallas (Master's or Doctoral). For Teaching Assistants, the course or courses for which assistance is to be rendered should be specified on a semester-by-semester basis. For Research Assistants, the name of the faculty member whose research is to be assisted should be specified. For Teaching Associates, the name of the course and the name of the faculty member who will supervise the Teaching Associate should be specified. In addition, all Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, and Teaching Associates must complete, sign, and return to their program, school and/or department head a statement confirming the receipt, understanding, and acceptance of the conditions contained in the form entitled "Responsibilities of UT Dallas Graduate Student Teaching Assistants, Teaching Associates, and Research Assistants". Graduate Assistants must complete, sign, and return to their program, school, department head, and/or the administrative unit supervisor a statement confirming the receipt, understanding, and acceptance of the conditions contained in the form entitled "Responsibilities of UT Dallas Graduate Assistants". A copy of the completed form must be submitted in the semester of initial appointment and at the beginning of each fall semester thereafter. These copies should be maintained by the program personnel or the administrative unit for an appropriate time period as defined by the records retention policy.

Because the terms of individual awards may vary from program to program, and even within a single program, the program, school, and/or department head (if applicable) and/or School Dean, and the administrative supervisor or his/her manager are responsible for forwarding to each prospective Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant or Teaching Associate an official letter of appointment specifying complete information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

1. title, fraction of effort, and length of appointment;
2. level of assistantship financial support;
3. minimum student course load;
4. description of duties;
5. name of supervisor;
6. information concerning the required assistantship orientation program and sessions for teaching appointees; and
7. deadline for acceptance.

If specific information on items 4 and 5 is unavailable at the time of appointment, the information should be furnished in writing no later than the first class day of the semester. Specific program, school, and/or department or administrative unit policies, if any, governing Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Graduate Assistants and/or Teaching Associates should be communicated in writing.
Length and Terms of Appointment and Reappointment to Assistantships

Initial appointments starting in the fall semester may be for an academic year or for a single semester. Initial appointments starting in the spring or summer semester will terminate no later than the end of the summer semester.

Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant or Teaching Associate reappointment is not automatic. Students may be reappointed if it is determined that reappointment is to the benefit of the institution. Reappointment may be for an academic year or for a single semester. Failure to maintain qualifications for the appointment and/or meet the conditions of service, including performance standards may lead to the termination of an assistantship.

The maximum duration of assistantship support provided to students pursuing master's degrees is normally four semesters, whether regular (long) or summer semester. An additional semester of support may be provided for qualified students in degree options requiring more than 36 semester credits. It is recommended that students confer with their program, school, or department head and/or School Dean or the administrative supervisor to clearly establish/define such limits and other restrictions that may apply. Appointments and reappointments are subject to the availability of funds.

Subject to the availability of funds and continued reappointment by the program, school, or department, the maximum period of teaching assistantship support of students enrolled in a doctoral program is 12 semesters, whether regular (long) or summer semester or 100 doctoral level semester credit hours (whether taken at UT Dallas or another public institution in Texas). It is strongly recommended that students confer each semester with their program, school, or department head (if applicable) and/or School Dean to clearly establish/define the status of their appointment, the number of doctoral hours of eligibility remaining for the student, and other restrictions that may apply.

Conditions of Service

As conditions of service (appointment and reappointment) the graduate student must:

• be in good academic standing with the program, school, and/or department and the University;
• be making satisfactory and timely progress toward the appropriate degree;
• be enrolled on a full-time basis (minimum of 9 credit hour enrollment each regular (long) semester); the required course load in the summer session will be designated by the Dean of the School;
• have been evaluated by supervisor as having performed satisfactorily on assigned tasks in accordance with program, school, department, and University policies and procedures; and
• have been in compliance with all requirements specified within one of the appropriate forms, "Responsibilities of UT Dallas Graduate Student Teaching Assistants, Teaching Associates, and Research Assistants" or "Responsibilities of UT Dallas Graduate Assistants."

Termination Within Appointment Period

If any of the qualifications for the appointment and/or the conditions of service, including performance standards are NOT satisfied, the program, school, and/or department head (if applicable) and/or School Dean (in the case of Teaching Assistants or Teaching Associates) or the research supervisor (in the case of Research Assistants) or the administrative supervisor (in the case of Graduate Assistants) will inform the student that grounds exist for termination of his/her assistantship, the nature of the grounds for termination, an explanation of the evidence to support the grounds, and provide the student with the opportunity to respond to an intent to terminate the assistantship.

If, after providing the student with an opportunity to respond, the program, school, and/or department head (if applicable) and/or School Dean or research or administrative supervisor determines that the termination should
proceed, he/she will then make a written request of the School Dean to proceed with the termination of the appointment. Upon review and concurrence, and in consultation with the Office of Human Resources, the School Dean will inform the student, in writing, of the decision to terminate the appointment. The termination will take effect on the date specified in the notification to the student from the School Dean.

**Appeal of Termination of Assistantship**

Any student holding a graduate student appointment at UT Dallas has the right to appeal a decision leading to the termination of an assistantship within the appointment period.

The appeal by the student must be made in writing to the Graduate Dean within 10 working days of the date of the notification of the termination of the student's assistantship. The request for reconsideration must be concise. The student is encouraged to attach copies of all relevant statements, documents (written or electronic material) on the matter in support of his/her appeal. The student should also include a clear statement of the student's desired outcome of the appeal process.

The Graduate Dean will convene a review panel consisting of a School Dean and/or an administrative Vice President and a faculty member from schools other than that of the student and the Graduate Dean. The panel will review all submitted materials, will meet with the supervisor who terminated the assistant or associate and the student to provide the opportunity for additional clarifications as appropriate. The student will be notified in writing of the outcome of the appeal within 10 working days of the date the student's written appeal is received by the Graduate Dean. The decision of the review panel will be final.

**Responsibilities**

The Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate is expected to work closely with the faculty, research, or administrative supervisor in carrying out assigned teaching/research/administrative duties and also to make good progress toward the completion of his/her degree program. The Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate is obligated to maintain and enforce standards of academic honesty and integrity and to report violations of these to the faculty/research/administrative supervisor. The Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate is expected to keep well informed of program, school, department, and University regulations and follow them consistently. The Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate is expected to maintain all records pertinent to his or her assignment and to transfer them as and when requested by his or her supervisor.

**Evaluation**

Evaluation of performance is a critical part of the assistantship experience and should involve ongoing communications between the Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate and faculty/research/administrative supervisor(s). The School, or, if delegated, program and/or department or administrative unit, is responsible for establishing appropriate procedures for a formal annual evaluation which will help the student identify strengths and weaknesses. This evaluation will be a part of the graduate student's employment record. This evaluation will also provide an avenue for assistants/associates to assess their work from their own perspectives.

**Supervisor's Responsibilities**

The supervisor of a Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate is expected to inform and advise the Assistant/Associate directly in matters which pertain to performance. The supervisor should inform a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Associate specifically of all curricular matters in the course (e.g., content, methods, objectives, and standards) and provide advice in teaching techniques and teacher/student relations.
The supervisor of a Research Assistant should establish research goals with the assistant which assures that the assistant has the opportunity to learn proper research procedures and techniques and which contribute to the assistant's growth as a scholar. The administrative supervisor of a Graduate Assistant should inform the assistant by outlining the administrative and/or research duties and other activities to be carried out which contribute to the professional growth as a practitioner.

The supervisor is responsible for apprising the Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate of the nature of records to be kept in the course of performance of the assigned duties and of the disposition of these records required at the termination of the assignment. For Teaching Assistants and Teaching Associates, such records may include grade sheets, copies of quizzes or examinations, and student reports. For Research Assistants, they may include laboratory notebooks, primary data, and computer runs. For Graduate Assistants, they may include pertinent university information, files, emails, and institutional research data. These examples are not all-inclusive.

The supervisor is responsible for ongoing communication regarding the quality of the Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Graduate Assistant, or Teaching Associate performance. The supervisor is the primary evaluator of this performance.

Policy History

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Policy Links

- Permalink for this policy: https://policy.utdallas.edu/utdpp1075
- Link to PDF version: https://policy.utdallas.edu/pdf/utdpp1075
- Link to printable version: https://policy.utdallas.edu/print/utdpp1075