

UW Academic Affairs:
GA Job Descriptions and Time Limits

August 2011

As part of the initiative to raise the stature of graduate education at UW, Academic Affairs will be instituting expectations for 1) time limits and 2) job duties on state-funded graduate assistantships (GAs). These expectations will be implemented starting with GA assignments for 2012-13.

Time limits on state-funded GAs

UW is committed to encouraging timely completion of graduate degrees. Lengthy times to degrees contribute to attrition rates within graduate programs and represent lost investment of scholarly talent and of institutional resources. They also delay a young scholar's subsequent professional growth and most significant contributions to the discipline. One incentive to encourage students to finish degrees in a timely manner is to limit the number of years of state-funded graduate assistantship support. This measure also promotes the effective cycling of graduate assistantships to facilitate the recruitment of new students into graduate programs.

Starting with new students enrolling in UW graduate programs in 2012-13:

- Masters students will be allowed up to two (2) years of state-funded support.
- Masters students who enroll in a double major, ENR for example, will be allowed up to 2.5 years of state-funded support.
- PhD students will be allowed up to three (3) years of state-funded support if they enter the PhD program after having completed a master's degree.
- PhD students will be allowed up to five (5) years of state-funded GA support if they enter the PhD program after completing only a bachelor's degree.*

** Academic Affairs will entertain exemption requests to the above time limits on an individual basis. Exemption requests should document academic performance to date including progress to degree along with any notable contributions to the field of study.*

Note that these guidelines do not apply to other sources of graduate student financial aid, such as research assistantships from external research grants or various scholarship funds, which may be subject to other restrictions. Moreover, departments and programs may have access to various sources of university funds to extend financial support to GAs who have exhausted their Section I state GA support, e.g., indirect cost returns, department and college discretionary accounts, and release time accounts.

Job duties for state-funded GAs

Graduate study advances UW's goal of exploring, creating, and sharing knowledge. Graduate students inject enthusiasm, imagination, and commitment, all of which energize the university's research enterprise. As teaching assistants, they link the laboratory to the classroom and inspire and enhance undergraduate education. Every graduate student supported on a state-funded GA deserves the opportunity and experience of participating in the cascade of knowledge through academic instruction. This instruction may occur in a host of unique settings. Examples include, but are not limited to, traditional classroom or laboratory settings, assisting in professional clinics, and providing educational support in state facilities such as museums, archaeological sites, etc.

Starting with new students enrolling in UW graduate programs in 2012-13, all Section 1 state-funded GA job assignments must include one or more of the following topics:

- Notable contributions to traditional teaching related activities. These may include a mixture of the following:
 - Teaching independent classes
 - Teaching labs or leading discussion sections
 - Mentoring students individually or in groups, including holding office hours
 - Supporting instructional labs, for example the Math Lab or Writing Center
 - Supplementary instruction sessions
 - Administrative support for large classes
 - Preparation of course materials such as tests or study guides
 - Assisting or leading field trips
 - Involvement with assessment
 - Grading

Note: Whereas grading is an essential aspect of teaching, this duty should not be the sole responsibility of a state-supported GA. Higher teaching needs certainly exist across the campus. Moreover, a GA whose job consists entirely of grading is not being afforded the opportunity for meaningful face-to-face pedagogical interactions with students. For these reasons, state-supported GAs should spend no more than half-time (9 hours) in support of grading.
- Development of new courses, laboratories, or experiments and demonstrations for inclusion in courses and laboratories
- Support for professional clinics
- Support for educational and outreach facilities; for example museum docents

Departments or programs with unique GA needs that do not fit the traditional duties and assignments described above should contact Academic Affairs to ensure there is a clear understanding of the role of their state-supported GAs.

A notable topic missing from the above list of activities is that of research support for individual faculty members. As a general principle, the Office of Academic Affairs will not allocate state-funded GA positions for use as full-time de facto research assistants. This exclusion in no way implies that research by our state-funded graduate students is not an important aspect

of their education. Indeed, with the possible exception of professional programs, UW expects that all graduate students will perform research for their master's thesis or doctoral dissertation. The exclusion of research from accepted state-supported GA duties is simply a reflection of the scarcity of this valuable resource and the high instructional demands of the university.

Finally, teaching assignments may be in the graduate student's home department or in another department or college. For example, engineering students could be assigned to teach sections of entry-level mathematics; geophysics students could teach sections of physics or physics labs; and history students could teach sections of the first-year English course.

Performance evaluations for state-funded GAs

Departments should evaluate the performance of their state-funded GAs at least annually. Students are expected to be making adequate progress towards their degree and fulfilling their teaching duties responsibly. An assistantship may be terminated if the student does not perform adequately in either of these areas. Departments may reassign the remaining portion of the assistantship if another qualified student is available; otherwise the GA reverts to the relevant dean for reallocation.

Implementation

For Academic Affairs to coordinate cross-department and college teaching assignments, it will be necessary for departments to develop a list of their teaching needs and GA resources and submit this information to their deans by 31 January 2012. Academic Affairs will then coordinate with deans to seek global GA assignments.

Departments and programs are encouraged to seek out, in advance, partnerships with other units if they have excess GA instructional capacity—a move certainly appreciated by Academic Affairs. We note that relationships like this already occur across the campus; students from Botany, Zoology and Physiology, and the Program in Ecology routinely provide instructional support for LIFE 1010, for example. Competitive GAs currently allocated to Kinesiology, Renewable Resources, Botany, and Plant Sciences are also providing LIFE 1010 instructional support.

We believe there are ample opportunities to follow the LIFE 1010 instructional model and further develop cross-college and cross-department GA assignments. Departments with high service loads in lower division courses provide the best opportunities for collaboration. Improving the quality of the GA teaching experience will strengthen the instructional mission of the university while providing graduate students with truly valuable teaching experience.