

## **GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING ASSISTANT APPOINTMENTS**

### **Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute**

The purpose of this document is to describe the guidelines, rights, and responsibilities of graduate students, faculty and departments with regards to graduate student teaching at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. The goals of these guidelines are to ensure that teaching assistants are adequately prepared, given appropriate teaching assignments and workloads, and that there is appropriate oversight and mentoring by the department and faculty. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute recognizes that the primary objective of a teaching assistant is to make steady progress toward an advanced degree. Teaching assistant employment status is dependent upon student status. The primary responsibility for all courses taught at the Institute is and will continue to rest with the faculty.

#### **Definitions**

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a registered full-time graduate student chosen as a result of excellent scholarship and promise as a teacher. The GTA minimally holds a baccalaureate degree in a field that is closely related to the one in which he/she will be assisting.

Under faculty supervision, the duties of a GTA may include providing help sessions; leading discussion, recitation, laboratory or quiz sections; holding office conferences with students; preparing materials for faculty-guided classroom or laboratory instruction; assisting professors in the design of a course; assisting in the design and/or preparation of exams or quizzes; proctoring examinations; and grading student papers and/or examinations to faculty guided standards.

TA's are not and should not be held responsible for the intellectual or instructional content of a course, for the selection of student assignments, for planning examinations and/or defining policies that determine final course grades. The GTA is not to be assigned responsibility for instructing or lecturing the entire enrollment of a course, or for providing the entire instruction of a group of students in a course for a prolonged period.

#### **Responsibilities**

Students holding a teaching assistantship share a responsibility for promoting the scholarly and educational objectives of the department in which they are employed. Graduate Teaching Assistants, like faculty, should treat students with respect, do their best to get to know the students assigned to their class, and to have a genuine interest in their academic progress. Graduate Teaching Assistants are subject to policies and procedures of their departments and of the Institute and should respect and conform to the rules and procedures of the department or laboratory/center to which they are assigned.

Graduate Teaching Assistants are not permitted to hold appointments that require an average of more than 20 hours per week, therefore the GTA responsibilities should be consistent with this rule.

Each semester, departments are expected to provide all appointees with timely notification of specific assignments clearly outlining their duties and responsibilities for

a given term. A reasonable effort should be made to take into consideration the competencies and preferences of the graduate teaching assistant, as well as try to accommodate her/his course schedule when determining assignments.

The department is expected to carry out a review of the graduate assistant's performance each term. This review will be conducted jointly by the faculty instructor(s) to whom the GTA is assigned and the appropriate department chairperson. Also, it is expected that adequate work space and access to needed equipment be provided, as well as a place for receiving mail.

Each department is responsible for providing orientation, training, and supervision for all graduate teaching assistants. All GTA's are required to attend scheduled orientations; failure to do so can result in termination of the appointment. At least one faculty member needs to be assigned to work closely with each graduate assistant to assist he/she in carrying out his or her assignments and to help facilitate professional development. The faculty member and the graduate assistant should meet on a regular basis throughout the term. If the GTA is instructing a laboratory, or recitation section for the first time, the faculty member should arrange to observe the instruction several times.

In the event of a GTA's serious illness or physical incapacitation, the department chair or his/her designee will arrange for completion of the teaching assignments. In this event, the GTA shall receive salary and health benefits for the remainder of the academic term.

### **Appointment Guidelines**

The following guidelines must be used in appointing Graduate Teaching Assistants. Exceptions to these requirements must be made individually and in writing to the Dean of Graduate Education. A Graduate Teaching Assistant must:

- Be a full-time, degree seeking graduate student at Rensselaer without existing registration problems imposed by the Registrar, Dean of Students, or Dean of Graduate Education.
- Have a GPA of at least 3.3 in previous academic work and have a demonstrated background in the course that they will be assisting.
- Have no more than one grade of I (Incomplete).
- Be under the mentorship of a faculty member who has responsibility for course content.
- A teaching assistant must register for at least 9 credits per semester.

The GTA must receive a letter that states the general conditions of the appointment and that specifies the salary, general duties, duration, any fringe benefits, and other pertinent terms of appointment. A copy of this document should be included with the letter. The appointment letter is sent in duplicate to the student. To accept the appointment, the student signs the copy and returns it to the designated authority. The student should retain the original.

GTA positions are not assigned to individual faculty, nor are they assigned for research

work, but rather are to support the teaching function in an assigned course or courses. However, part of the TA's assigned responsibility will be to conform to departmental policies and guidelines for graduate study.

When a student accepts an appointment in writing, that appointment shall be binding and in accordance with the University's graduate tuition policies. However, a GTA, after accepting an appointment for the semester, may resign in writing four (4) weeks before the beginning of a semester. A department may, during the term of appointment, transfer a student, with the student's consent, from a teaching assignment to another assignment as a Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) or to another appropriate assignment, which provides for essentially equal financial benefits and professional opportunities.

### ***Duration of Appointment***

Appointment dates for GTA's shall be consistent with academic year of the Institute. For those given a two semester assignment at the beginning of the academic year, the term will be consistent with faculty academic year appointments (August 15 to May 16). For those given fall semester only appointments, their terms shall begin with the start of the academic year appointments (August 15) and be completed two days after the last day of final exams at the end of the fall term. For those given spring semester only appointments, their terms shall begin one week before the start of classes and end two days after the last day of final exams at the end of the spring term. These dates can be modified by the department for special cases where responsibilities may extend beyond these dates (e.g. Distance courses).

A student will be supported on a teaching assistantship for a maximum of two years for PhD students and one year for Masters students, (except for MArch students for which a different policy will pertain).

### ***Immigration and ESL Requirements***

Immigration laws require employers to verify that a job applicant is authorized to be employed in the United States. Each new GTA is required to verify that he/she is either a U.S. citizen or authorized to be employed in this country.

All international GTA's who are involved in student contact must possess adequate English language fluency for effective communication with students. GTA's who are non-native speakers of English must be evaluated by the Institute ESL specialist and possess the recommended level of English fluency consistent with their teaching assignment. Any GTA's not meeting the recommended levels of fluency must enroll in language enhancement courses. If a GTA does not obtain a satisfactory score by the time of reappointment, it is sufficient cause for non-renewal.

### ***Termination***

A GTA appointment can be terminated for non-performance. Termination proceedings can only be initiated if the GTA has been evaluated on a regular basis and has received appropriate written warning of his/her performance, or has violated one or more Institute policies. The GTA must be informed in writing by the dean of school in which they are enrolled of the reasons for the termination, and the appeals procedure.

### ***Grievance Situations***

Any GTA who believes that they are being treated unfairly according to the guidelines set forth here should first discuss the problem with the course supervisor, and then, if resolution cannot be achieved, with the appropriate department chairperson. If resolution

cannot be reached at the department level, the grievance can be presented to the Dean of the GTA's school for further evaluation, adjudication, and advice on additional grievance procedures.

Appeals must be submitted within one week of notice to the Dean of Graduate Education. The Dean of Graduate Education can decide to convene an appeals panel of two faculty, or handle the appeal by him/herself. Final determination of the appeal should occur within 21 days of receipt of the formal appeal.

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