

Guidelines on Training, Monitoring, and Evaluating Graduate Teaching Assistants

I. Introduction

The University has an obligation to produce effective, dedicated, well-trained teacher-scholars to fill faculty ranks in the future. Graduate teaching assistants are a major means by which the University introduces young scholars to the professoriate.

Graduate teaching assistants are chosen from highly qualified students who have been accepted into the graduate programs of the University. The number and role of these assistants varies from institution to institution depending on the size of the graduate program, the particular culture of the institution, and the resources available to the institution for their training and support.

By supporting graduate students with assistantships, the University is able to compete in the recruitment of the very best applicants to our nationally recognized programs. The presence and service of bright and promising graduate students make our constituent institutions more valuable resources to the state and the nation.

Guided and supported by senior members of the profession, graduate students can grow in understanding and appreciation for the craft of their discipline through supervised practice and application of teaching and research methodologies.

In September 1993 the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina adopted a report entitled *Tenure and Teaching in the University of North Carolina*, which included the following recommendation:

That greater efforts be made to develop and strengthen the teaching skills of graduate students, and that the Board of Governors ask the President to prepare, in consultation with the University-wide Graduate Council, a report with specific guidelines and recommendations for the training, monitoring, and evaluation of graduate students who teach courses in UNC institutions.

In the years since the Board adopted this recommendation, UNC campuses have established or enhanced procedures to develop and strengthen the teaching skills of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and have reported annually to the President and, through the President, to the Board of Governors on these efforts. In light of the procedures established by UNC institutions to ensure that GTAs are well-trained, supervised, and evaluated, the President issues the following guidelines.

II. Guidelines

The use of graduate teaching assistants within the university is subject to the principles and standards of the regional accrediting body, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Institutions employing graduate teaching assistants should consult the current SACS standards, including Comprehensive Standard 3.7.1, *Credential Guidelines*:

Graduate teaching assistants: master's in the teaching discipline or 18 graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluation.

(Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, *The Principles of Accreditation*, 2004.)

In addition, the following University guidelines have been established to ensure that graduate teaching assistants receive the appropriate training, monitoring, and evaluation.

1. Graduate teaching assistants must possess a demonstrated competence in the subject matter that they will be teaching as determined by experts in the field. They should have an appreciation for the theory and practice of the subject matter as well as an appreciation for the teaching and learning enterprise by means of required and optional teaching seminars, symposia, workshops, publications, and access to university staff resources. Competency to teach includes an effective command of the language of instruction, usually American English, and an appreciation for the culture of the American university classroom.

Appropriate procedures to assure competence include the following:

- GTAs will be offered a Teaching Contract from the hiring department or institution which outlines (a) educational requirements, (b) job requirements, (c) duties, and (d) performance standards. A logical and effective match must be established between the level and requirements of the teaching assignment and the experience and knowledge of the prospective GTA.
- In departments where teaching assistantships range from grading and discussion-group leadership to full-course responsibility, GTAs will be assigned to independent classes only after they have performed effectively in a less independent setting.
- Formal training and evaluation programs will be provided for GTAs who are assigned the responsibility for teaching an undergraduate class. At the beginning and during that assignment, the hiring department will provide resources and opportunities for continued growth and development of the GTAs in the theory and practice of teaching. These resources may be school-wide programs, departmentally based programs in discipline-centered pedagogy, programs developed by several participating departments, off-campus programs offered by other institutions or professional associations, or individual mentoring with faculty.
- Departments will provide GTAs and their faculty supervisors with appropriate written guidelines on academic procedures and provisions for formal training and evaluation. The information should include a directory of other university resources available for the further development and training of the GTA.
- The hiring department will verify that GTAs whose first language is not English possess adequate English language proficiency and communication skills. This verification will be in the form of a standardized test which includes an evaluation of verbal skills, supplemented by a personal review by the department's supervising faculty mentor. English as a Second Language courses and other activities, or alternative assignments for assistantships, will be provided to the GTA who does not meet adequate standards of English language proficiency.
- Offices that work with international students will be requested to cooperate with campus and departmental programs for international teaching assistants (ITAs) to facilitate their awareness of the culture of the American university classroom and approaches to communicate effectively to undergraduate students.
- Faculty members who train, supervise, mentor and evaluate GTAs do so as a component of their academic assignment. Such faculty will be recognized for their work and accorded opportunities for additional training and professional development.

2. Graduate teaching assistants must be graduate students in good standing in their programs, as defined by the employing institution.

3. Universities will honor effective graduate teaching assistants by establishing appropriate awards and honors to recognize them for outstanding teaching.
4. Universities must establish and maintain effective channels for communication and dialogue between all populations of the university community affected by the work of graduate teaching assistants. This communication may be facilitated in a number of ways, including appropriate representation of GTAs on campus-wide and departmental student-faculty committees and the preparation of a brochure which discusses the role, selection, preparation, and supervision of GTAs, to be distributed to students, their families, and other groups as appropriate.
5. The chief academic officer (CAO) will designate the Graduate School or another appropriate administrative unit to oversee and facilitate the training, mentoring, supervision, and evaluation of graduate teaching assistants. At institutions which use graduate teaching assistants to teach undergraduate courses, the graduate dean or other appropriate administrative unit will report annually to the CAO on the effectiveness of GTAs, their utilization on campus, compensation, training, and the impact of their teaching on the overall teaching mission of the school. In addition, the report will document the impact and effectiveness of teaching by graduate students on their learning and professional development. The report will certify that an evaluation is on record for each GTA by a faculty member to whom the GTA is assigned.
6. Each program that utilizes graduate teaching assistants must develop, regularly update, and file with the appropriate administrative unit, as determined by the CAO, a plan for graduate teaching assistants including a definition of teaching tasks and responsibilities, provisions for support, supervision, and training for each type of teaching assignment, and provisions for feedback and evaluation. The plan should specifically address the selection, funding, training, mentoring, supervision, and evaluation of graduate teaching assistants. Programs must provide for a formal training program, classroom observations, explicit procedures for supervision and evaluation of GTAs. Formal evaluations of each GTA by an assigned faculty member must be kept on record.
7. Each campus shall report to the President every year on the number of GTAs (including ITAs) appointed and every three years on the implementation of these guidelines. Format requirements for the report will be transmitted directly to the chief academic officers by the Office of the President.

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