TO:           Supervisors of Graduate Assistants

FROM:     Steve Fetter  
                 Associate Provost for Academic Affairs and Dean, The Graduate School

DATE:       August 20, 2018

SUBJECT: Expectations Setting Meeting

In May 2018, the Graduate Council amended the policy on graduate assistants to require that supervisors hold an expectation setting meeting with graduate assistants at the beginning of each term.  The goal is to increase communication between supervisors and graduate assistants and to minimize misunderstandings and mistaken assumptions by both parties. The policy is attached and can be found in the Graduate Catalog at:

[academiccatalog.umd.edu/graduate/policies/policies-graduate-assistantships/](https://maestro.listserv.umd.edu/trk/click?ref=zvb24p867_1-74dx357ax04403&)

The policy states that each supervisor is to meet with the graduate assistant (TA, RA, and AA) to “review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties.”  The Council has approved three templates to facilitate this conversation; the templates can be found on the Graduate School website under forms: Statement of Mutual Expectations (for Teaching Assistants, for Research Assistants, for Administrative Assistants).  The SMEs are not contracts and will not be collected by the Graduate School.

The supervisor should be clear about what is expected to be performed during the 10 or 20 hour-per-week commitment and what the graduate assistant should do if the activities require more or less time.  The conversation should make clear expectations about schedule and time commitment (i.e., days of the week and time to perform duties) and the process for dealing with illness, conflicts with coursework and other obligations, allowances for professional development, and other absences.  We recommend that regular channels of communication be established throughout the assistantship. Activities that are not acceptable include requiring the graduate assistant to serve as chauffeur, babysitter, personal assistant, etc.

If you have any questions, please consult with your department’s Director of Graduate Studies. The Graduate School will conduct a survey of faculty and graduate assistants in late September to ensure that the meetings have occurred.

**GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

The specific duties of Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) vary across disciplines and departments. For the majority of teaching assistants, however, assignments and responsibilities fall into four categories:

* Assuming teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion session of a course;
* Assuming teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the director(s) of the course;
* Assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, and administrative duties necessary for a course(s);
* Assisting in general departmental administrative duties, such as advising or the administration of community programs, workshops, etc.

Within a department, the particular assignment depends on the department's needs and the experience and academic qualifications of the TA. All graduate TAs serving in any capacity are under the direction and close supervision of a member of the faculty. Prior to the start of the assistantship, supervising faculty member and the TA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a [Statement of Mutual Expectations for Teaching Assistants](https://maestro.listserv.umd.edu/trk/click?ref=zvb24p867_1-74dx357bx04403&) can be found on the Graduate School website.

Time Commitment: For TAs, the 20-hour average should include the time spent in faculty lectures, class preparation, classroom or laboratory teaching, reading and commenting on student papers or examinations, office consultation, and other duties required to carry out the teaching role. Although it is understood that weekly workload will fluctuate during the term of appointment, a Teaching Assistant with a full-time appointment shall be required to work no more than an average of twenty hours per week during the term of appointment on specifically assigned duties related to his/her appointment, excluding non-TA-related activities associated with academic progress toward the degree. A Teaching Assistant with less than a full-time appointment shall work a prorated portion of a full-time appointment on specifically assigned duties related to his/her appointment, excluding non-TA-related activities associated with academic progress toward the degree.

The time that TAs devote to their assignments varies. The proportion of hours spent in preparation, classroom or laboratory time, and grading, for example, differs from one discipline to another. In some disciplines, a new TA may find that a task such as grading initially requires more time than the usual 20-hour weekly average allows. In determining the amount of time expected for a teaching assignment, consideration shall be given to such factors as type of instruction, number of students instructed, and all other factors, including those specific to the course or group of courses to which the instructional duty expectations apply.

TAs may be required to come to campus prior to the actual beginning of classes to participate in orientation and class-preparation duties. TAs usually complete their formal duties when examinations have been graded.

**GRADUATE RESEARCH ASSISTANTS**

The specific duties of Graduate Research Assistants (RAs) vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of the funding. RAs may occasionally be asked to conduct some work at home or to do their research at times when classes are not officially in session. The duties of RAs are also performed under the close direction and supervision of a member of the faculty. Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty member and the RA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a [Statement of Mutual Expectations for Research Assistants](https://maestro.listserv.umd.edu/trk/click?ref=zvb24p867_1-74dx357cx04403&)can be found on the Graduate School website.

Time Commitment: For RAs, the 20-hour average should include the time spent in library and/or laboratory, and on all other research tasks providing assistance to the assigned project.

Graduate students working on research projects funded by grants are often also working on material directly related to their theses or dissertations. It is not unusual in such cases for grant work and personal work to merge and for the work time to consume far more than the usual 20-hour weekly average.

Graduate RAs usually follow the project director's instructions regarding work when classes are not in session.

**GRADUATE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS**

A number of academic and non-academic units employ Graduate Administrative Assistants (AAs), generally to perform administrative support functions in an office setting. Such positions are expected to have a research or professional development component. Some administrative appointments are for less than one academic year. Prior to the start of the assistantship, the supervising faculty or staff member and the AA will meet to review and confirm expectations including a summary of the nature of required duties. To facilitate the discussions, a [Statement of Mutual Expectations for Administrative Assistants](https://maestro.listserv.umd.edu/trk/click?ref=zvb24p867_1-74dx357dx04403&) can be found on the Graduate School website.

Time Commitment: For AAs, the 20-hour weekly average should include all time spent on assigned duties, including mandatory training sessions. Unless explicitly stated in writing, AAs are expected to work no more than the 20-hour average work week. If greater amounts of time are periodically required, the unit must provide the AA with an offer letter that includes a statement of expected duties, approximate dates when extra hours might be necessary, and maximum work hours required. If the AA is required to work more than 20 hours in a given week, the time should be deducted from another week.

Just as the unit may require the AA to work more than 20 hours in a given week to meet peak work periods, the AA may request that he or she be allowed to reduce time in a given week to finish a paper or study for an exam and make up the hours later. Such arrangements are allowed and encouraged and should be made between the student and the student's supervisor within the unit.

AAs follow the staff holiday and vacation schedule. Consequently, if the campus is closed (for any reason) for regular staff, AAs who normally would work those days will receive the appropriate compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed.