

## **APPOINTMENT AND RE-APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS IN ASTRONOMY**

In general, graduate students in the Astronomy Ph.D. program are appointed either as Teaching Assistants (TAs), or as Research Assistants (RAs). Typically, a new Ph.D. graduate student in Astronomy will be appointed as a TA and later move into a RA position when their interest becomes focused on a specific research topic. However, because RA positions are supported by external funding and are not readily available in all research areas, some graduate students remain on TA appointments for the duration of their graduate studies.

The appointment of TAs in Astronomy is closely linked to graduate admissions into the Ph.D. program. Admission into the Ph.D. program is by competitive application following procedures published by the University Graduate Admissions Office in the Graduate School Bulletin. The Astronomy Graduate Admission Committee currently consists of four faculty members. These recommendations of this Committee are passed on to the University Graduate Admissions Office that makes the final decision on all graduate admissions. Successful applicants into the Ph.D. program are usually offered Teaching Assistantships for their first year of study. However, occasionally students are admitted without an offer of a TA because they have private resources or other funding support, or because they were admitted provisionally.

While the department attempts to admit 4-5 students each year, which allows for all students in good academic standing to be supported by a TA or RA, it is possible for too few positions to be available. If there are not enough positions to support all graduate students, the priority for awarding TAs is as follows:

- (1) First-year students who were offered a TA,
- (2) Students making good academic progress toward the degree as detailed in the "Ph.D. requirements" document,
- (3) Students before their original "Statute of Limitations",
- (4) Students whose teaching is satisfactory.

At the start of their first semester, successful applicants receive this information in writing from the Chair of the Graduate Admission Committee or from the Chair of the Graduate Assistantships Committee.

The Department of Astronomy defines satisfactory progress toward a Ph.D. according to the attachment. A copy of this document is given to each new graduate student. Particularly important milestones are admission to Ph.D. candidacy and defense of thesis proposal. If circumstances permit, students who do not pass these requirements in a timely fashion may receive TA appointments, but such support is not assured. TAs in peril of being denied reappointment for reason of unsatisfactory progress are reminded of the conditions to be met for reappointment by the Graduate Program Director.

For any graduate student beyond their original Statute of Limitations date, a TA appointment is only possible if written approval to extend the Statute of Limitations date has been received from the Graduate School. Even in such circumstances, support is not guaranteed and, moreover, if provided, may be for a fixed duration, and/or at a lesser stipend.

A graduate student may be denied reappointment for failure to satisfactorily execute teaching duties. This may occur when there are, for example, repeated instances of absenteeism, lateness, or ill preparedness with regard to teaching duties. Appointments may also be terminated in cases where a TA fails to submit on-time grading records to the course instructor as requested, or who, without written approval from the

Chair of the Graduate Assistantships Committee, is absent from campus during the semester when duties require their presence.

Students working toward a terminal M.S. degree are not normally considered for TA positions. However, if funds remain after all commitments to Ph.D. students are met, M.S. candidates may be offered full or partial TA appointments. Such appointees are selected primarily on the basis of teaching performance or potential; grades in 600- and higher level courses may also be taken into account. There is no guarantee of continuation of such support in subsequent semesters.

In all cases it is University policy that assistantships can be offered only to degree candidates; non-degree graduate students are restricted to hourly or contract employee appointments, made by completing a Graduate Student Personnel Action form. Non-degree students are therefore not entitled to tuition or fee waivers.

The Graduate Program Director notifies all TAs of their teaching assignment at the start of each semester. Requests by graduate appointees to teach specific courses are always welcome, but the final TA assignments depend on various manpower issues including class schedules, the needs of specific courses, and the experience and strengths of individual appointees.

Funds for RA positions are derived from various external sources and are awarded to individual Principal Investigators (PIs) who are responsible for administering their grants. Decisions regarding appointment and reappointment of RAs are therefore made by PIs, who have much freedom in this process. Graduate students seeking RA appointments may make direct application to PIs at any time. Frequently, before receiving an RA appointment a graduate student would spend some initial time working on a research project under the PI's supervision. Graduate students previously on Teaching Assistantships continue their appointments during this period provided they continue to progress towards the Ph.D. and adequately fulfill their teaching duties.

All graduate students in Astronomy are eligible for RA appointments, irrespective of whether they are enrolled in the Ph.D. or the M.S. program. All Ph.D. graduate students admitted with the initial promise of financial support and who meet all other conditions for TA support are assured a total stipend that is not less than the prevailing departmental TA stipend. Thus any graduate student on a RA appointment at less than the prevailing Teaching Assistantship stipend may seek a partial TA appointment to supplement the RA stipend.

From time to time, other opportunities for graduate student employment become available, for example, teaching during the summer session or teaching in institutions such as Community Colleges. Information regarding such positions is distributed electronically to graduate students.