

***Procedures for Appointments and Reappointments to Teaching and Research Assistantships in the Department of Geosciences.***

**I. Typical requirements for candidates for teaching assistantship (TA) and Research Assistantship (RA) positions**

The Department of Geosciences endeavors to provide financial support for all enrolled graduate students, but limitations in funding sources make this support competitive. For most students the support takes the form of an assistantship provided by the Department, but some students are supported by external sources, such as government scholarships and other extra-departmental University-based sources.

It is common for graduate students initially to have teaching assistantship appointments, and later to move into research assistantship appointments, if funding is available for the latter. Appointments as research assistants are normally funded by faculty grant support. The selection of RA appointees, specific terms of contract, and other details of RA appointments are at the discretion of the faculty member who is the principal investigator on the grant or contract which financially supports the RA appointment, subject to departmental and university regulations, and terms of the financially supporting grant or contract.

**II. Maintenance of support for two years**

Provided that students maintain satisfactory academic progress and (as relevant) perform their required teaching and research duties satisfactorily, departmental support is normally guaranteed for four academic semesters corresponding to the first two years of enrollment in the program. In some cases, if sufficient funding and need for TA appointments is present, students beyond the limits may receive TA support.

**III. General limitations on appointments**

Appointments as teaching assistants for either M.S. or Ph.D. candidates are limited to the two years of enrollment. Re-appointments to a teaching assistantship is not guaranteed beyond the end of a given semester when (a) course performance is substandard (failure to maintain a 3.0 grade point average), (b) insufficient progress is being made on other degree requirements (e.g. establishing thesis/dissertation committees, negotiating preliminary comprehensive examinations, etc., or (c) teaching duties are performed unsatisfactorily (as measured by teaching evaluations performed by the TA's supervisor). Students who are beyond the normal period for TA appointments may request consideration for available appointments in writing to the graduate program director. In general, those students who are in earlier stages in their studies will receive preference for TA support, and it will only be guaranteed for one semester.

Graduate students appointed as teaching assistants or research assistants are discouraged, in general, from accepting current employment elsewhere, except for modest tutoring commitments. Approval both by the graduate program director and dissertation advisor prior to acceptance of any other employment must occur. Concurrent employment is strongly discouraged by the department, and students should note that there are University regulations governing the number of hours that a student may be employed while being a graduate student (calculated as the number of hours for the assistantship plus the number of credit hours, and excluding dissertation or thesis credits). International students may not exceed twenty hours of employment per week, in compliance with their visa requirements.

Teaching assistantship appointments include the January intersession period. Details of public holidays, personal leave, and vacation entitlement can be found in the Graduate Appointments Policies and Procedures document issued by the graduate school. While the department has some flexibility in setting working conditions, any proposed departure from the terms of the contract should be discussed with the student's supervisor well in advance.

International graduate student applicants are expected to provide documentation of spoken and written English proficiency in advance of admission. The department reserves the right to make TA or RA employment conditional upon further training in English, by procedures set forth by the GEO contract and University policy.

Students appointed as teaching assistants or research assistants are governed by the conditions of the agreement between the University and Graduate Employee Organization (GEO).

**IV. Safety training requirements**

Prior to conducting any work in a research or teaching laboratory, students must undergo safety training as prescribed by the Department's Safety Officer. Students who will be driving Department or University vehicles for field trips must receive driver safety training as specified by the Department Head. Documentary evidence of the satisfactory completion of the safety training requirements must be filed with the departmental GPD. This safety training includes the Laboratory Safety Course provided by the University environmental health and safety organization. If a TA or RA is informed in writing or by electronic mail about a need to comply with specific safety requirements by a specific deadline, failure to comply by the deadline is grounds for being barred without further warning.

from employment under circumstances that require those safety protocols. If documentation of safety compliance is presented after such an occurrence, reinstated permission to resume normal duties will be automatic, so long as the appointment has not been terminated in the meantime. This policy reflects the department's commitment to workplace safety guidelines.

## **V. Typical availability of positions**

Typically, about 10 to 15 students are admitted into the graduate programs of the Department of Geosciences each year, but the number can vary greatly according to the applicant pool and availability of total funding available to support TA and RA appointments. The number of available TA positions varies somewhat from year to year, but typically there are 12 at any one time. The number of RA positions available varies with the amount of funding available to faculty. Due to the uncertainties in obtaining outside funding, it is not possible to predict with certainty the number of RA positions that will be available in any given future semester.

## **VI. Mechanism for announcing availability of positions and notice of renewal.**

In the spring proceeding an academic year, all continuing graduate students are asked to confer with their research mentors about the availability of research assistantships for the upcoming year. Such RA positions may be for either fall or spring semesters or both, and may be full or partial appointments. Students who wish to request TA appointments are asked to apply for them at this time. As the TA listing for a given semester becomes firm, the needs of the courses, the academic preparation, previous experience levels, and the current academic schedule of TA appointees are considered in making actual TA course assignments several weeks in advance of the start of classes for the semester. As funding becomes available at times that are not certain in advance, some fine-tuning of position availability is carried out as a Fall semester is ongoing, for the following Spring semester. Once a student has committed to a TA appointment by signing a contract, the student is expected to fulfill that commitment even if other support becomes available, unless released from the commitment by the Department Head.

The timing and availability of RA appointments is completely governed by availability of funds to individual principal investigators. In the vast majority of cases, RA appointments are made by principal investigators to students whom they are mentoring, and are only advertised beyond the research group of the principal investigator in cases where there are insufficient personnel. This policy is consistent with typical grant and contract conditions, and with a necessity for principal investigators to work with students who have appropriate professional and safety backgrounds. The call for principal investigators to appoint RAs happens on the same schedule as TA appointment calls (see previous paragraph). Typically, students are informed in writing or verbally about successful RA application at least two months in advance, although occasionally the late arrival of funding allows appointments to be made at shorter notice by agreement between a RA applicant, a principal investigator, and the department. Consultation with the department in the latter case is important to assure that all teaching duties are properly covered.

Students interested in finding out about available research projects may find out about them in two ways:

- (1) direct conversation with professors/principal investigators,
- (2) attendance at the weekly "Professional Seminar", which highlights the research projects currently being conducted within the Department of Geosciences.

Lists of available departmental grants for which employment opportunities are available will be maintained within the main Department office. The information is accessible upon request of graduate student employees of the Geosciences Department, in the manner described by GEO Contract Article 23, Section 6.A and B.

## **VII. Satisfactory performance**

The standard University forms and mechanisms are employed to evaluate the performance of TAs. Both evaluations by students being taught and faculty supervisory evaluations are carried out during the final two weeks of classes each semester. In general practice, if TA performance is unsatisfactory during the semester, faculty supervisors inform the TA in question, first verbally, then, if necessary, in writing with copies to the main department office. Unsatisfactory performance typically involves absence from assigned work periods, late performance of assigned work duties, or unsatisfactory interactions with students being taught. If performance is particularly and chronically unsatisfactory in the opinion of the faculty supervisor, the department reserves the right to decline to offer TA assistance to a poorly performing individual, consistent with the department's aim to offer the highest possible levels of teaching quality. Any student denied TA reappointment for poor performance would be informed of this before the end of the semester during which the evaluation was carried out.

The performance of RAs is primarily determined by the principal investigator of the grant or contract which provides financial support. Principal investigators are expected to communicate dissatisfaction with RA performance to the student involved, first verbally, then (if deemed necessary) in writing with copies to the departmental GPD. In cases where a principal investigator has striven over period of time to improve job performance in consultation with the student involved, and remains dissatisfied, the principal investigator may decline to renew the appointment. In cases where a principal investigator declines reappointment, the student involved will be informed in writing at least a month in advance, and the departmental GPD will be informed at the same time.

## **VIII. Other opportunities**

Occasionally, other forms of graduate employment opportunities become available within the department. Examples include summer teaching, tutoring, and special need appointments for various programs. Such opportunities are typically announced on the departmental Web page, by announcement to graduate students by electronic mail, or by hard copy posting by the prospective employer.

#### **IX. Notification**

At the end of each academic year, each TA and RA will receive written notification concerning the status of their appointment for the succeeding academic year. TA notifications will come from the Department Head or Graduate Program Director, and RA notifications will be made by the relevant grant or contract supervisor.