

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

Reviewed by Chemistry Department Head, 5/4/2000  
Reviewed by Chemistry Department Graduate Program Committee 5/3/2000  
Revised by Chemistry Department Head, 4/23/2002

### **Abbreviations:**

TA = Teaching Assistant  
TO = Teaching Associate  
RA = Research Assistant  
GPD = Graduate Program Director

*In all descriptions below, the term TA will be used to denote both TA and TO duties.  
In general, the Department of Chemistry rarely appoints at the TO rank.*

### **I. Typical requirements for candidates for TA/TO/RA positions.**

Students are normally admitted to the Chemistry Graduate Program only if they have acceptable financial support. 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 non-departmental University-based sources. Students who have adjunct faculty dissertation advisers (non-departmental faculty) are not eligible for departmental teaching assistantships, and must be financially supported by their advisers.

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. Guarantee of support for five years.**

Provided that students maintain satisfactory academic progress and (as relevant) perform their required teaching and research duties satisfactorily, departmental support is guaranteed for a five-year period consisting, at the minimum, of the two semesters and a summer in the first year, and two academic semesters in second and subsequent years. In some cases, if sufficient funding and need for TA appointments is present, students beyond the two-year (M.S.) or five-year (Ph. D.) limits may receive TA support. In the first year, a teaching assistant is required to maintain a minimum course load of nine graduate credits each semester in order to retain chemistry departmental support. Further details of degree requirements may be found on the Chemistry Department Web site, as well as in the document "The Graduate Program in Chemistry: Policies, Requirements, and Guidelines".

### **III. General limitations on appointments.**

Appointments as teaching assistants are limited to the first five years for Ph.D. candidates, or to the first two years for M. S. candidates. Appointments to a teaching assistantship is not guaranteed beyond the end of a given semester when (a) academic progress is unsatisfactory (failure to maintain a 3.0 grade point average), or (b) teaching duties are performed unsatisfactorily (as measured by teaching evaluations performed by the TA's supervisor), or (c) if a dissertation adviser from faculty of the chemistry department has not been appointed by the end of the second semester of graduate residence. Interruption of the student's graduate study at the University of Massachusetts for at least two semesters for other than academic reasons will make it possible for the student to be eligible for one extra semester of departmental support.

Graduate students appointed as teaching assistants or research assistants may not, in general, accept current employment elsewhere, except for modest tutoring commitments. Exceptions must be approved both by the graduate program director and dissertation advisor prior to acceptance of any other employment. 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 Committee. Documentary evidence of the satisfactory completion of the safety training requirement must be filed with the departmental GPD. This safety training includes the Web-based OWL program 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 20 to 25 students are admitted into the Chemistry Department graduate program 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 total number of available TA positions varies somewhat from year to year, but typically is about 45-50 at any one time. The number of RA positions available varies with the amount of funding available to faculty, and recently has ranged between the equivalent of 40-50 positions. 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. Faculty research mentors are at the same time asked to furnish a plan for the financial support of graduate students whom they are mentoring. A comprehensive support plan for all graduate students is then generated for the coming academic year, within the framework of the 5-year support guarantee made to students in good standing. This support plan is revised by multiple iterations of this request mechanism as the start of the new academic year approaches (based upon updates to availability of research funding for individual faculty), and is finalized several weeks in advance of the start of each semester. As the TA listing for a given semester becomes firm, the areas of chemical expertise and previous experience levels of TA appointees (as well as the needs of courses being offered) 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. This multi-iteration mechanism constitutes the departmental mechanism for notice of reappointment or non-reappointment for a RA, insofar as knowledge exists at that point for any given financially supporting grant or contract.

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 research seminars offered by members of the Chemistry Department graduate faculty (at which opportunities for joining research groups are described).

Lists of available departmental grants for which employment opportunities are available will be maintained within the main Chemistry Department office, in order to assure that the data is as current as may be achieved by coordination of the University Office of Grants and Contracts, and Chemistry Department staff. The information is accessible upon request of graduate student employees of the Chemistry Department, in the manner described by GEO Contract Article 23, Section 6.A (July 1999-June 2003 version).

### **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. In practice, it has been rare for performance to be so bad as to cause TA reappointment to be declined.

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. If it happens that a student leaves the research group of his/her mentor, he/she is free to seek to join the research group of another faculty member in the department. The Department does not guarantee placement in another research group.

### **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.

## **Graduate Research Assistantship (RA) Statement of Duties**

1. The appointee shall carry out original and fundamental research in chemistry, as directed by the principal investigator or designate. This research may be applied to the degree requirements of the student.
2. A full-time appointment is for 20 hours per week throughout the appointment time.
3. Graduate research assistants are not permitted to accept other employment either within or without the University, without the express consent of their research adviser and the graduate program director.
4. International research assistants are not permitted to exceed 20 hours of employment per week during the academic year, in compliance with these restrictions.

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Paul M. Lahti, Head, Department of Chemistry

(Date)

## **Graduate Teaching Assistant (TA) and Associate (TO) Statement of Duties:**

1. Graduate teaching assistants will be assigned to either the general, inorganic, analytical, organic, biological, or physical divisions. Insofar as is consistent with the needs and best interests of the department, the divisional assignment will be in the area of the assistant's major interests. Within the division, the assistant will be assigned specific duties which may include teaching of laboratory sections, review classes, examination proctoring, paper grading, experiment development, instrument servicing and usage, and laboratory oversight. The nature of the duties is such that a high-level professional background is required. A member of the faculty will serve as the main supervisor over the assigned duties, and is the evaluator for the performance of the assistant.
2. A full-time appointment is for 20 hours per week, no more than ten of which are scheduled, leaving ample time for preparation, grading, proctoring, etc. The academic year will be assumed to include the registration at the start of the fall and spring semesters, and the final examination period at the close of each semester.
3. Graduate teaching assistants are not permitted to accept other employment, either within or outside the University, without the express consent of the graduate program director.

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(Date)