

Procedures for Appointments and Reappointments to Teaching and Research Assistantships in the Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences.

Abbreviations:

TA = Teaching Assistant

RA = Research Assistant

GPD = Graduate Program Director

VASCI = Veterinary and Animal Sciences

I. Typical requirements for candidates for TA/RA positions.

PhD students are supported by three means: Teaching Assistantships provided by the Department, Research Assistantships funded by individual Principal Investigators through grant support and by external sources, such as government scholarships and other non-departmental University-based sources. The selection of TA appointees is made by the graduate faculty of the Department, whereas 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.

Master students are sometimes eligible for TAs but they are usually supported by their advisers, or may be accepted into the graduate program only under the condition that they support themselves.

Students who have adjunct faculty dissertation advisers are not eligible for departmental teaching assistantships, and must be financially supported by their advisers.

II. Guarantee of support for five years.

PhD students who are recruited into the Department on Teaching Assistantships are guaranteed support for a 5 year period provided that they maintain satisfactory academic progress and (as relevant) perform their required teaching and research duties satisfactorily. Support will consist at the minimum, of the two academic semesters in each year. In some cases, if sufficient funding and need for TA appointments is present, students beyond 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 departmental support. Further details of degree requirements may be found on the Veterinary and Animal Sciences Department Web site. In most instances students who are recruited into the Department as TAs, are awarded RA positions after they select a dissertation advisor.

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. Appointment 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 department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences 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.

Similarly, any student that is to be involved in animal research must undergo training in animal handling and care. The office of Research Compliance conducts periodic training sessions. Training has to be re-certified every year in order to continue animal experimentation. The student must also be included in an approved animal protocol prior

to the beginning of activities that involve animal use. An email memo to the office of compliance is enough to comply with this requisite. The student must also be trained in specific animal handling techniques as described in the approved protocol. It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to oversee that the student complies with these requisites.

V. Typical availability of positions.

Typically, about 2 to 7 graduate students are admitted into the Veterinary and Animal Sciences Department graduate program each year, but the number can vary greatly according to the applicant pool and availability of total funding to support TA and RA appointments. The total number of available TA positions varies somewhat from year to year, but typically is about 6-8 at any one time. Two of these positions are guaranteed for new students. The allocation of the other positions varies from year to year. The number of RA positions available varies with the amount of funding available to faculty, and recently has ranged between the equivalent of 15-20 positions (including in this case both master and Ph.D. students). 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 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.

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) Descriptions of research projects posted in the individual web page of each faculty from our graduate group.

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Lists of available departmental grants for which employment opportunities are available will be maintained within the main 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 VASCI Department staff. The information is accessible upon request of graduate student employees of VASCI Department, in the manner described by GEO Contract Article 23, Section 6.A (July 1999- June 2003 version).

VIII. 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.

IX. 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.

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