

POLICY FOR STUDENT INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS IN GRADUATE (500- AND 800-LEVEL) COURSES

The purpose of this policy is to describe when and how students may assist Graduate Faculty members in the instruction of graduate-level coursework (i.e., 500- and 800-level courses).

When properly supervised, graduate student participation in course instruction is a valuable opportunity for professional development. At the same time, however, graduate student assistance in the instruction of a graduate course must not be allowed to compromise the curricular goals, level of instruction, course environment, student evaluation fairness, or student confidence in the fairness of their evaluation. To insure these things, this policy exists to provide positive guidance to graduate (500- and 800-level) course instructors and graduate program heads on the roles that graduate students may play in course instruction, the qualifications that students playing these roles must have, and the supervision that the graduate course instructor of record must provide when graduate students assist in graduate course instruction.

Under no circumstances are undergraduate students permitted to assist in the instruction or assessment of a graduate course. Undergraduate students may be enlisted to provide clerical support for the Instructor of Record, or assist in the support of special IT infrastructure for a graduate class. When employed in this way, undergraduate students must meet the same qualifications, and be supervised in the same way, as would a graduate student assigned the same role.

For the purpose of this document we refer to graduate students formally assigned or informally requested to assist in the instruction of graduate-level courses as Graduate Student Instructional Assistants (GSIA).

The proposed policy has four elements:

- Responsibilities of the Instructor of Record in courses with GSIA's.
- Qualifications of GSIA's.
- Allowed GSIA roles.
- Responsibilities of GSIA's.

Requests for exceptions to any element of this policy must be made to the Graduate School. Only the Graduate School may grant exceptions to this policy or any of its parts. (<http://www.gradschool.psu.edu/gradcouncil/bylaws/>)

PREAMBLE

This policy applies to the use of graduate students asked to assist in the *instruction* of 500- or 800-level graduate courses. Its purpose is to clarify the limited roles that graduate students may play and the additional responsibilities of the Graduate Faculty members who are the Instructors of Record in these courses.

This policy applies only to the use of graduate students to assist in graduate course instruction. Nothing in this policy is meant to restrict the kind of assignments or coursework asked of students enrolled in a graduate course. For example, this policy does not apply when enrolled students are assigned, as part of the course pedagogy, to lead a class discussion. This policy does apply, however, when a graduate student not enrolled in the course is asked to provide a guest lecture or lead a class discussion as part of the course instruction.

The respective Head of each graduate program is responsible for ensuring compliance with this policy.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD IN COURSES WITH GSIA'S

The Instructor of Record, who must be a member of the Graduate Faculty or approved in advance to teach 500- or 800-level courses, is always fully responsible for all aspects of a course and its instruction. When GSIA's assist in the instruction of a graduate course, the Instructor of Record has additional responsibilities related to the involvement the GSIA's assigned to the course.

- **GSIA Qualifications:** GSIA's must be qualified for their role in any course for which they provide assistance. The Instructor of Record is responsible for verifying the qualifications of all GSIA's relative to their role in course instruction. The necessary general qualifications are described in **Qualifications of GSIA's** below, with additional role-specific qualifications outlined in the **Allowed GSIA Roles** section. The general and role-specific qualifications outlined in this policy are to be considered the minimum requirements for GSIA's. It is the responsibility of the instructor of record to ensure that GSIA's are fluent in the material of the course for which they will provide assistance and, as such, the instructor of record can, at his or her discretion, impose more rigorous qualifications.
- **Supervision:** The course Instructor of Record is responsible for actively supervising all GSIA's involved with the course. Prior to beginning their duties, all GSIA's shall meet with the Instructor of Record, who will

describe the scope and limitations of their duties and set expectations for the course. Additional role-specific supervision is described in **Allowed GSIA Roles** below.

- Managing Conflicts of Interest: The Instructor of Record is responsible for identifying and managing any conflicts of interest between GSIA's, or between GSIA's and enrolled graduate students, that may affect any aspect of the course or its instruction. Conflicts of interest include, in particular, but are not limited to the following:
 - A prior or current romantic relationship;
 - A prior or current friendship;
 - Prior or current roommates;
 - Prior or current lab- or office-mates;
 - A prior or current history of conflict;

In cases where it is identified that a GSIA assigned to a course has a conflict of interest with a graduate student who is enrolled in the course, the Instructor of Record must assign all grading of work for the enrolled student to another GSIA assigned to the course, or grade that student's work him/herself.

To assist in identifying conflicts of interest, graduate students being considered to serve as GSIA's for a graduate course must complete and sign the [Graduate Student Instructional Assistant \(GSIA\) Conflict of Interest \(COI\) Disclosure Form](#) and submit to the head of the unit offering the graduate course at least two weeks prior to the start of the semester in which the course is offered. The head of the unit will ensure that the Instructor of Record has appropriately managed the conflict. If any student with whom the GSIA has a conflict of interest registers for the course (or a conflict arises with any student in the class otherwise) after the start of the semester, the GSIA should immediately disclose the conflict by submitting a Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form as instructed above.

Consult the Assistant Dean for Graduate Student Affairs in the Graduate School for advice about managing conflict

QUALIFICATIONS OF GSIAS

All GSIAs, regardless of the role they play in course instruction, must meet the qualifications described in this section. In addition to these qualifications there may be other role-specific qualifications. These additional, role-specific qualifications are described in the ALLOWED GSIA ROLES section of this policy.

- No GSIA may be enrolled in the course to which he/she is assigned, or with which he/she is asked to assist.
- Prior to beginning their duties, but no less recently than one year prior to the end of their course assignment, all GSIAs shall review the FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) Tutorial provided by the Office of the University Registrar, and pass the associated FERPA quiz.
- In general, a graduate student considered to serve as a GSIA should ideally be an advanced or senior doctoral student who has completed the required coursework for his/her degree program, to assure mastery of the discipline, as well as to avoid conflicts whereby a peer enrolled in a course in which the GSIA will be grading assignments/assessments might then have the roles reversed and be in a position to grade the work of the former GSIA.

ALLOWED GSIA ROLES

Qualified GSIAs may provide limited assistance in the instruction of a course while under the active supervision of the course Instructor of Record. General qualifications required of all GSIAs, regardless of the role they play, are described in policy section QUALIFICATIONS of GSIAs. This policy section describes the roles GSIAs may play, the required supervision, and any additional qualifications that a GSIA filling a specific role must have.

The roles that GSIAs may play are limited to the following:

- Performing clerical tasks, research, or IT support associated with course instruction.
- Marking course assignments and examinations for later review by the Instructor of Record or other designated member of the Graduate Faculty.
 - Role specific qualifications: GSIAs who mark assignments or exam shall have previously passed the course or equivalent with a 'B' or better.

- Supervision: The Instructor of Record is responsible for meeting with GSIA's assigned this role to provide and discuss the grading rubric or its equivalent, and for verifying that the rubric has been correctly applied.
- Restriction: A GSIA cannot grade any single assignment constituting more than one-third of the entire course grade, with a recommendation that no single GSIA be responsible for grading more than 50% of the entire course grade for any individual student in the course.
- Drafting a contribution to an assessment instrument (e.g., assignment, exam question, laboratory report) for review by the Instructor of Record or other designated member of the Graduate Faculty.
 - Role specific qualification: GSIA's who draft assignment or exam questions shall have previously passed the course or an equivalent with a 'B' or better.
 - Supervision: When a GSIA is assigned this role, the Instructor of Record is responsible for providing the GSIA with the specific goals associated with the assessment instrument and expectations for the GSIA's contribution to it.
- Supervising or conducting course discussion sections, laboratory sections, or quiz or other non-lecture sections associated with the course.
 - Role specific qualifications: GSIA's assigned this role shall have previously passed the course or an equivalent course with a 'B' or better.
 - Supervision: GSIA's assigned to supervise or conduct course discussion sections, laboratory sections, quiz or other non-lecture sections shall meet with the Instructor of Record weekly to review the previous week's meetings and discuss course goals for the following week's meetings.
- Consulting with enrolled students and answering their questions (e.g., during office hours).
 - Role specific qualifications: GSIA's assigned this role shall have previously passed the course or equivalent course with a 'B' or better.

- Supervision: GSIA's assigned to any of these roles shall meet with the Instructor of Record weekly to review the previous week's meetings and discuss course goals for the following week's meetings.
- Preparing and delivering one or more guest lectures as part of the course curriculum.
 - Role specific qualifications: GSIA's asked to prepare or deliver any guest lectures as part of the course curriculum must
 - Be expert, at the level of the course, in the material for which they are responsible. For 500-level courses, expertise is determined by virtue of the GSIA's research. For 800-level courses, expertise is determined by appropriate professional experience.
 - Have formal experience in teaching (for example, in an undergraduate course).
 - Supervision: When a GSIA fulfills this role, the Instructor of Record is responsible for meeting with the GSIA and defining the scope and level of the lecture(s) to be delivered.
 - Allowance: No more than 10% of the total lectures for a course may be provided by GSIA's.
 - For purposes of professional development of the GSIA delivering guest lectures in a graduate course, within the parameters described above, student feedback, as well as evaluative feedback by the instructor of record or other graduate faculty member with expertise in the course content, should be provided to the GSIA wherever possible.

The roles described above are the only roles that GSIA's may play in the instruction or support of a graduate course. For the purpose of clarification only, the following are *examples* of duties for which GSIA's may not be assigned responsibility:

- The instructional content of the entire course.
- Selection of student assignments for a course.
- Planning a course examination.

- Unsupervised or un-reviewed grading of any evaluation instrument
- Determining the final course grade for students.
- Adjudicating any conflict of interest or concerns regarding grading or guest lecturing by another GSIA.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF GSIAS

GSIAs are responsible to the Instructor of Record for the tasks assigned to them.

Prior to beginning their duties, GSIAs are responsible for meeting with the Instructor of Record, or another designated member of the Graduate Faculty affiliated with the course, to clarify their duties and associated expectations.

GSIAs are responsible for informing the Instructor of Record of any conflicts of interest that might interfere, or be perceived to interfere, with the performance of their duties.

Approved by Graduate Council, February 18, 2015