

## **Graduate School of Education (GSE) Policy Guidance for Graduate Assistants and Mentoring-Faculty**

The following guidance document is designed to provide support to graduate assistants (GAs) and associated mentoring faculty to help ensure mutually beneficial relationships and improved clarity in roles and responsibilities. Recommendations are intended to complement, and not replace, existing school and departmental policies and to offer promising practices to consider for the improvement of existing systems. The Graduate School of Education (GSE) acknowledges the investment by the University at Buffalo (UB), the school, faculty, and students in GA programs, as well as the valuable contributions that GAs provide. Our goal is to facilitate engaging and meaningful professional development experiences, while also attending to the academic and personal well-being of GAs.

It is understood that GAs have diverse relationships and roles with members of the faculty, including their program advisors, course instructors, and their assigned GA mentor. The following recommendations are meant specifically to address the student's GA role, the faculty GA mentor role, and considerations that support their productive work together. Guidance was developed with GSE doctoral appointments in mind and may not apply to short-term, hourly appointments, or other grant-funded assistantships that have specific requirements.

### **Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Statement**

UB is an Equal Opportunity Employer committed to principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Students from historically underrepresented and minoritized groups are encouraged to apply for GA positions and relevant fellowships. Here, *diversity* includes that faculty mentors and GAs work individually, and in partnership, to demonstrate respect for all identity backgrounds (e.g., age, ability, gender, language, nationality, race, sex, socioeconomic status), which can be visible, invisible, and shift relative to research and teaching context. *Equity* includes that faculty mentors work to ensure that GAs have equal access to research and teaching resources, and that faculty mentors and GAs individually, and in partnership, aim to eliminate deficit-oriented perspectives and exploitative practices within research and practice. *Inclusion* means that faculty mentors and GAs individually, and in partnership, will utilize research and teaching protocols that ensure individuals and groups are treated ethically, respectfully, and in a way that permits equitable participation in research and practice-based endeavors. To this end, the GSE Executive Committee is committed to supporting faculty mentors and GAs by fostering an environment, as well as creating and promoting resources that increase awareness, understanding, and application of said principles.

### **Graduate Assistantship Intent and Purpose**

This policy guidance aims to help center student needs and voice at the center of the GA-faculty mentor relationship. To support this relationship, the following subsections provide a series of recommended goals, processes, and resources.

#### **Suggested Core GA Position Opportunities**

- 1) Professional development;

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- 2) Professionalization experiences in observing and participating in faculty functions and academic environments;
- 3) Research process experiences;
- 4) Support faculty research and/or the academic unit's productivity;
- 5) Professional presentation experiences;
- 6) Authorship and scholarship development; and
- 7) Teaching experiences (dependent on course placement availability and professional goals);
- 8) Hands-on experiences and alternative skill-building for careers outside of academia (e.g. non-profits, NGOs, think tanks).

### **Suggested GA Administrative and Training Guidance**

- 1) Administrative personnel, students, and supervising faculty are familiar with scholarship and fellowship requirements if their GAs are funded under one of these awards (i.e., <https://ed.buffalo.edu/admission/scholarships.html>).
- 2) GAs are matched with faculty based on student needs and professional interests (e.g., research topics/teaching), rather than solely based on faculty needs or resource distribution.
- 3) Orientation is provided for graduate assistants at the departmental level. It may be beneficial for incoming GAs have training in communication and management of professional relationships with faculty-mentors.
- 4) Departments may consider a mechanism for GAs to provide feedback on the quality of their experience (e.g., degree of GA-faculty match, opportunities for professional growth, perceptions of learning, reporting of GA concerns). Care should be taken by department chairs to protect student confidentiality and well-being, given inherent power dynamics between faculty-mentors and GAs.
- 5) Administrators and chairs of awards/assistantships are familiar with the standard GA contracts and other provisions that may be considered at the department level. Standard contracts may include:
  - a) appointment period with specific date for start and end;
  - b) GA award and renewal policies, including program performance and progress requirements, including but not limited to maintaining a 3.0 GPA, full-time enrollment, satisfactory performance in GA role and compliance with work policy, funding availability and the department's continued support for the award package;
  - c) terms of graduate assistant package with regard to tuition payment, fees covered, stipend amounts if awarded, insurance coverage and rules;
  - d) NYS residency requirements;
  - e) enrollment status rules (i.e., 9 credit hours is considered the full-time maximum for GAs, and students may be responsible for credits over 9 hours in a semester);
  - f) work hours requirements (i.e., generally conform to the work and holiday schedule for state employees).
  - g) rules in pursuing any additional employment;
  - h) rule that GAs must participate in 2 GSE professional development activities each semester;
- 6) Administrators of awards/assistantships at the departmental level consider including the following in GA training guidance if not already included in the GA contract:
  - a) welcome and introduction to the department and mentors;

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- b) clarifying rules and procedure regarding termination or dismissal, and grievance process;
- c) specifying facilities or GA workspaces;
- d) where questions about work assignments are directed;
- e) payments/salary, tuition/fees reimbursement (i.e., be clear on policies and timelines);
- f) sick, emergency, vacation, summer/winter break policies;
- g) administrative forms and timing requirements (e.g., timesheets, tax forms, etc.).

### **Suggested GA Responsibilities and Roles**

- 1) Seek clarity about expectations early in the GAship, and ongoing. This includes what is expected regarding your duties and tasks, and what you can expect from your faculty mentor. GAs ask questions to ensure you understand the range of tasks you will complete, timelines for completing work, your faculty mentor's level of involvement in the work, what you will do collaboratively, and what you will do independently.
- 2) Share their goals for the GA position and their longer-term academic and professional goals (e.g., consider alignment with Ph.D. excellence goals).
- 3) Share their strengths and areas for development with their faculty mentor. It is suggested that you write these out ahead of time, so you can share them.
- 4) Discuss meeting times, locations, and academic schedule with mentor. GAs are encouraged to be punctual and prepared for meetings with faculty mentors.
- 5) Discuss administrative reports and monitoring of hours with faculty (e.g., due dates for forms or signatures).
- 6) Account for your work hours; this means tracking and reporting your work hours consistently to your faculty-mentor to ensure GA effort expectations are met.
- 7) Embrace your roles as a valuable contributor. It is recommended that you be open to new research and teaching activities, be proactive in offering ideas on how you may contribute, as well as new skills or experiences you would like to engage in, or in requesting work when you have completed your assigned work.
- 8) Communications with faculty are prompt, respectful, and constructive.
- 9) GAs are required to attend at least two (2) GSE/department sponsored professional/scholarship development activities *per semester* (e.g., GSE Colloquium Series, Associate Dean's Doctoral Student Scholarship Development Program, Dimitriadis Professional Development Workshops, GSE Dissertation Bootcamp, Departmental speakers/brown bags).

### **Suggested Steps and Resources When Problems Occur**

- 1) GAs are encouraged to resolve any minor issues or problems related to their assistantship with their GA-mentor. This may involve advocating for your needs to your mentor, appropriate communication, and professional negotiation.
- 2) Issues that are not resolved satisfactorily by mentor-GA discussions, ethical issues, or circumstance when the GA is not comfortable resolving issues directly with the mentor should be addressed with the department chair.
- 3) If there are conflicts of interest with the department chair and/or the issue cannot be resolved at the departmental level, then the GA should contact the GSE Dean's Office at 716-645-6640; staff will direct you to the appropriate party.

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- 4) GAs are familiar with the UB Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/life-on-campus/community/rules.html>), Graduate School Academic Grievance Procedure (<https://www.buffalo.edu/grad/succeed/current-students/policy-library.html>) and additional resources on the grievance process and policies available within the GSE policy library (<https://www.buffalo.edu/grad/succeed/current-students/policy-library.html>).
- 5) GAs are aware of the UB Provost's Graduate School, Principles and Policies for Allocation and Award of Graduate Tuition Scholarships (<https://www.buffalo.edu/grad/explore/funding/tuition-scholarship.html>).
- 6) UB Graduate Student Resources for Current Students (i.e., webpage with numerous resources for graduate students including health & wellness, financial information, academic help, learning resources, getting involved (organizations), and department-specific resources, <https://ed.buffalo.edu/current-students.html>).
- 7) Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) Training in Ethical Research and Conflict of Interest (<https://www.buffalo.edu/research/research-services/training/compliance-training.html>).
- 8) UB Health and Wellness Resources (i.e., medical care, mental health, healthy behaviors, <https://www.buffalo.edu/studentlife/life-on-campus/health.html>).

### **Faculty Mentor Intent and Purpose**

Though this policy guidance aims to center student needs and voice within GA-faculty relationships, UB faculty have research, teaching, and service obligations. To support this relationship, the following subsections provide a series of recommended goals, processes, and resources.

### **Suggested Core GA Position Goals**

- 1) A rich experience based on the GAs academic, professional, and personal needs/goals. When possible, aim to align the experiences, (e.g., research and teaching) with the GAs program requirements.
  - a) Examples of diversity of experiences: research idea generation, collaboration with research and community partners, data collection and cleaning, data analysis, interpretation, the authorship submission and review process, academic faculty roles/responsibilities, instruction and evaluation practices, etc.).
- 2) Help orient the GA to core responsibilities through a schedule and format for supervision, the duties and responsibilities of each party, method of GA evaluation, and consequences for not meeting GA expectations, including remediation plans or scholarship termination.
- 3) Co-develop GA goals and provide a written description or contract to the GA that outlines roles, expectations, and priorities tied to GAs identified strengths and areas for development.
- 4) Understand and honor the short and long-term needs of GAs (i.e., completing GA tasks versus the apprenticeship of the GA position).
- 5) Establish a clear and consistent meeting schedule (e.g., weekly, bi-weekly) that works for both parties, so that any changes to the originally-outlined priorities can be discussed and clarified.

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- 6) Provide a weekly structure for GAs duties and responsibilities with estimates of amount of time needed, due dates for individual projects, communication channels, and submission procedures.
- 7) Try to establish consistency in the amount of effort weekly and match this effort to the number of hours in the GA contract. Reasonable flexibility may be needed to accommodate student and faculty needs, such as typical fluctuations in activity based on research and teaching timelines, and student needs, may be appropriate. Consider student school loads and peak times during the semester in setting work schedules and that work that varies substantially from established hours may be detrimental to student academics or well-being.
- 8) Outline a format for evaluation and feedback for the GA to support ongoing professional development. The assessment need not be overly extensive or time consuming for the faculty mentor, but it can ensure clarity and consistency in offering continuous feedback.
- 9) Encourage GAs to take initiative and provide support and guidance to help them develop as independent scholars and leaders.
- 10) Provide mentorship to GAs that helps them understand that one faculty mentor may not possess all the skills and resources needed to be successful, but that additional skill sets and resources are available within and across departments and the university as a whole. Such mentorship also can include being mindful that GAs are colleagues, who also might have limited and/or a beginning understanding of how they fit into academic life.
- 11) Mentor GAs in a manner that helps provide the basic structures described in this section, but also with the understanding that academic workloads ebb and flow (e.g., peer review tied to conferences, grant applications, and publishing) and at times may include concentrated work and designated hours to accomplish tasks with tight turn arounds, but at other times lulls in academic work might occur (i.e., weekly hours might shift).

### **Examples of Inappropriate Roles or Duties for GAs**

Mentors are encouraged to consider the hierarchical relationship when making requests of students that are beyond the scope of the GAship, even when the student agrees or offers (e.g., research work during vacations or working beyond hours). Modifications to roles/expectations should be scrutinized to ensure they are not substantially outside the scope of the GAship. (Note that short-term, temporary administrative tasks are a typical part of research and academic roles and thus may be included in GA work).

Examples of inappropriate duties include:

- 1) Personal services for a faculty-mentor (e.g., running personal errands);
- 2) Cleaning responsibilities;
- 3) Extensive administrative work that does not advance professional development (e.g., receptionist work, solely clerical duties);
- 4) Extensive solitary duties/tasks that do not advance professional development (e.g., solely data entry functions, busy work).

### **Suggested Supervision Guidance Recommendations for Faculty-Mentors**

The following guidance reflects best practices in supervision (Borders et al., 2014) and is meant to offer recommendations to consider in the continuous improvement of faculty supervision practice when mentoring GAs. Not all recommendations may be relevant to the given faculty-mentor role and/or GA:

### **Suggested Supervision Agreement Recommendations**

- 1) Establish a GA supervision agreement that includes GA expected roles, tasks, and responsibilities;
- 2) Establish faculty-mentor role, responsibilities, and goals (e.g., provide mentorship, instruction, experiential or research activities, publication needs);
- 3) Co-developed, individualized student professional development goals; these are fluid over time, so GAs and mentors can review and make changes periodically (e.g., on a semester basis);
- 4) Consider a “shared,” and “revisable-over-time” checklist that the GA and faculty-mentor can reference, so both are clear on ongoing faculty and GA goals;
- 5) Schedule of supervision meetings and work (e.g., number of hours weekly, banking hours) that include flexible work hours to consider student and faculty academic loads, personal needs, and the nature of academic work;
- 6) Criteria for evaluation;
- 7) Expectations for communication, problem solving or dispute resolution strategies, and grievance procedures;
- 8) Administrative expectations not outlined in the graduate assistantship contract (e.g., length of the appointment, vacation/sick/emergency policies and notifications, forms to be filled out by the GA and the mentor, self-evaluation documentation).
- 9) Expectations about calendars, vacation, and sick time is recommended to be identified in advance and discussed as needed.

### **Suggested Supervision Relationship Recommendations**

- 1) Faculty-mentors aim to reflect on power dynamics and how that affects the working relationship with the GA, with respect to role power (i.e., inherent supervisor-supervisee power) and the influence of identity (i.e., respective of privilege and disadvantage).
- 2) Faculty-mentors aim to reflect on and continually enhance their awareness of characteristics that may influence the GA-mentor relationship including racial and gender identity, cultural capital, (dis)ability, language and communication style, and personality dynamics.
- 3) Faculty-mentors establish regular meetings with appropriate boundaries, including choosing a professional meeting location and establishing timing and format; weekly or biweekly meetings are suggested.
- 4) Faculty-mentors aim to provide opportunities for GA feedback on their duties, activities, and communication with the mentor.
- 5) Faculty-mentors modify their supervision and GA responsibilities and tasks based on the skills, needs, and developmental level of the student.

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- 6) Faculty-mentors stay aware of the student's well-being, offering appropriate support or referrals when needed.

### **Supervision Evaluation Recommendations**

- 1) Faculty-mentors discuss evaluation methods, consequences of not meeting expectations, and grievance procedures, at the start of the GA position and reinforced as needed.
- 2) Faculty-mentors aim to be transparent in their evaluations of the GA.
- 3) GA goals are co-developed, goal feedback is provided on a regular basis, and goals might need to be adjusted over time (i.e., semester basis).
- 4) To support ongoing learning, supervision may consider regular, scheduled basis to provide ongoing, formative feedback (i.e., feedback given on weekly basis).
- 5) Faculty-mentors encourage self-evaluation by the GA on their work and progress.
- 6) Summative written evaluation completed and processed each semester.
- 7) Faculty-mentors strive to ask for feedback from the GA on a regular basis on their level of effort, areas that could be improved within their GA position, and on their academic and general state of well-being.
- 8) Faculty-mentors aim to maintain documentation of the GAs work, feedback, and necessary GA forms.
- 9) If expectations are not being met by the GA and remediation is necessary, the faculty-mentor notifies the GA and develops a remediation plan in writing; the plan is discussed with the GA so questions can be addressed.

### **Supervisor Ethical Behavior Recommendations**

- 1) Faculty-mentors discuss professional ethics with the GA, according to ethical standards of the given field (e.g., see suggestions in this document).
- 2) Faculty-mentors appropriately document GA work, evaluation, and supervision.
- 3) Faculty-mentors seek peer consultation or supervision when needed to resolve mentor-GA ethical dilemmas.
- 4) Faculty-mentors aim to balance the needs of GAs with their own.
- 5) Faculty-mentors reflect on the influence of identity and cultural differences between the faculty-mentor and GA, and how these factors might exist within the GA-mentor relationship.
- 6) Faculty-mentors aim to be aware of power dynamics and to maintain appropriate boundaries in the professional relationship with the GA.
- 7) Faculty-mentors address identity and multicultural considerations within research practice, including interpretation of the impact of findings on diverse communities.
- 8) Faculty-mentors attend to the protection of clients and/or research participants, in overseeing GAs work.

### **Suggested Considerations for GA Feedback**

- 1) To improve experiences, it is recommended that students have the opportunity to provide feedback on the quality of their experience and the appropriateness of the GA-faculty match on a semester or yearly basis.

- 2) Mentors may consider adding GA-feedback discussions to their regular GA meetings.
- 3) Departments may consider a mechanism for GAs to provide feedback (i.e., GA-evaluation) on the quality of their experience (e.g., degree of GA-faculty match, opportunities for professional growth, perceptions of learning, reporting of GA concerns). Care should be taken by department chairs to protect student confidentiality and well-being when providing feedback, given inherent power dynamics between faculty-mentors and GAs.

### **Suggested Resources**

- 1) American University, Office of Graduate Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.american.edu/provost/ogps/graduate-studies/upload/ga-guidelines.pdf>
- 2) Borders et al. (2014). ACES best practices in supervision. Retrieved from <https://acesonline.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ACES-Best-Practices-in-Clinical-Supervision-2011.pdf>

### **Authorship, Acknowledgment, and Copyright in Research**

Mentoring faculty may use established principles of their profession and ethical decision-making regarding academic research and writing decisions. *Authorship* confers credit, implies responsibility for the publication, and has important academic implications. Authorship should be based on significant contribution to research conceptualization and design, analysis, writing and approval for publications, and agreement to be accountable to most aspects of the work; it should not be assigned based on academic or professional hierarchies or status.

*Acknowledgments* recognize lesser contributions to research, such as minor technical editing and professional mentoring, and typically are included within footnotes or an acknowledgment statement/section at the end of the publication. *Copyright* refers to a form of intellectual property law that grants legal protections to the creator of original works, such as a published dissertation, article, or book. Copyright excludes others from using or selling the work and can refer to your rights as author and/or the rights of other authors in the copyrighted materials you use. Contracts in the form of publication agreements, licensing, and third-party rights have a role in copyright. Faculty thus, are encouraged to discuss these factors with students, particularly if research and writing involves mixed or multidisciplinary teams

Discussing authorship, acknowledgement, and copyright (where relevant) at the start of academic research projects may help the team with contribution expectations and reduce misunderstandings later in the process. As authorship does not communicate precise author contributions, faculty members are encouraged to have study and/or publication team members keep track of individual contributions, and as some journals request and publish information on such contributions. In mixed or multidisciplinary research teams, faculty, in consultation with students, also should discuss disciplinary differences in authorship and acknowledgement standards and guidance. Finally, faculty may reflect on power differentials between established scholars and scholars-in-training and thus should take the lead in addressing issues related to authorship and acknowledgement, modeling appropriate professional standards and processes for students.



### **Suggested Authorship and Acknowledgement in Research Projects Resources**

- 1) APA. (2015) Tips for determining authorship credit. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper>
- 2) APA. (2022). *Publication practices and responsible authorship*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/research/responsible/publication>
- 3) APA Science Student Council. (2006). *A graduate student's guide to determining authorship credit and authorship order*. Retrieved from <https://www.apa.org/science/leadership/students/authorship-paper.pdf>

### **Suggested Copyright and Intellectual Property Guidance Resources**

- 1) UB. (2022). Protecting intellectual property. Retrieved from <http://www.buffalo.edu/research/research-services/commercialization/protecting-your-ip.html>
- 2) UUP. (2021a). Copyright and intellectual property: Your rights as a SUNY employee. Retrieved from <https://uupinfo.org/reports/reportpdf/IntellectualProperty2021.pdf>
- 3) UUP. (2021b). Protect your course materials. Retrieved from <https://uupinfo.org/reports/reportpdf/IntellectualPropertyPiracy2021.pdf>
- 4) UUP. (2021c). Campus course development agreements that relinquish faculty copyright ownership. Retrieved from <https://uupinfo.org/reports/reportpdf/IntellectualPropertyBulletin2021.pdf>

### **Document Credit**

This policy guidance was drafted and authored by the GSE Executive Committee. It also was vetted through the GSE Graduate Student Association and each GSE department. By alpha, Executive Committee members who contributed to this policy text includes: Sameer Honwad, Namsook Kim, Sunha Kim, Tiffany Karalis Noel, Melinda Lemke, Suzanne Rosenblith, Scott Sabella, Michele Shanahan, and Ying Sun; special thanks for Dr. Melinda Lemke, Dr. Scott Sabella, and Dr. Tiffany Karalis Noel for contributions.