

March 18, 1997: Graduate Council Policy on Appointments and Mentoring of GSIs

Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate

1996–97 Graduate Council

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There are two reasons to improve the education and training of GSIs at Berkeley. First, we need to prepare our students better for their roles as teachers as they take positions in academic institutions. Second, we need to ensure that the undergraduates on this campus are receiving the best possible education. GSIs, along with faculty, play a central role in that endeavor.

It appears that too many GSIs experience a lack of clarity in the departmental process of recruitment, selection, and preparation of GSIs. GSI workload expectations are often unclear. While a number of departments are doing an admirable job in their preparation and mentoring of GSIs, it is apparent that a more explicit policy on this topic is long overdue.

At its meeting on December 2, 1996, the Graduate Council unanimously passed the following policies regarding faculty mentoring of GSIs.

Mentoring of Different Types of GSIships

Preparation and guidance of GSIs in their teaching roles depends in part on a GSI's level of experience and the level of responsibility for teaching a particular course. In trying to describe these levels, we have found that there are often substantial discrepancies between the level of appointment (GSI 1 to 4) and the function of the GSI in the course. Here we provide a brief description of four general types of GSIships, each giving the GSI a different level of responsibility for the course.

(a) Beginning GSI; first appointment – no previous undergraduate teaching experience; primarily leads discussion sections or labs;

(b) More experienced GSI; leads discussion sections or labs;

(c) GSI who functions as the instructor of one of a number of courses in which the curriculum and texts are prescribed, but the GSI is primarily responsible for how the material is presented and for grading students;

(d) Graduate students who have sole responsibility for curriculum, textbook, and grading students.

These types, rather than GSI appointment levels are referred to in Sections A-E below.

Policies

A. Recruitment and appointment.

The process of recruiting and selecting GSIs should be open and centralized, rather than controlled by private arrangements between course instructors and GSIs. In the following statement of principles, our definition of “fairness” refers to the clarity and equity of the process, not to the equal distribution of GSIs to all graduate students.

1. The responsibility for making GSI appointments rests with the Chair. He or she may delegate this responsibility to a faculty committee, but the Chair should make certain that fair recruitment and selection processes are in operation in the department.
2. All departments should post notices about available GSI positions in the following ways: (i) A well-marked notice on a bulletin board indicating that GSI positions are available, see [designated person] in the department office for information; (ii) notices in department email; (iii) notices on the department web site. Information should state whether the unit is willing to consider appointing students from outside the department. When appointments outside the department are acceptable, bulletin-board and electronic notification of openings should be provided and an announcement and description should be forwarded to Career and Graduate School Services, 2111 Bancroft Way, MC4350.
3. GSI vacancies that occur during the first week of instruction and that must be filled on an emergency basis should be posted for at least two full working days, unless the department is prepared to fill them on the basis of a previously established waiting list of GSI applications.

4. Criteria required for appointments to GSIships, and criteria involved in determining selection of students must be made available to graduate students in advance of the appointment. Different criteria may be appropriate for different types of GSIs. At the beginning GSI level (Type a above), if the department can assume that all entering graduate students have basic preparation in the course material, issues of distributing student support may be primary. For appointments that involve more active planning and teaching responsibilities, issues of previous experience in teaching and competence in the subject matter may be primary.

B. Guiding principles determining workload.

1. Clear descriptions about the nature of the GSI position (leading discussions, grading homework, lecturing, etc.) and the expected workload should be conveyed to the graduate student before he/she is appointed.

2. All students appointed as GSIs should receive an appointment letter specifying the title, the beginning and ending date, and the percent time. Many departments do this. For those that do not, we recognize that it will be an additional burden on administrative staffs, but it is an important step in the appointment process. Appointment letters should also describe in detail the responsibilities of GSIs, including expectations, including the number of sections to be taught by each GSI, and the maximum expected number of students in each section.

3. Given that GSI appointments ordinarily do not exceed half time, the expectation should be that, **on the average**, GSIs should not spend more than 20 hours per week in conformity with Academic Personnel Manual (APM) and Graduate Council stated policy. Many GSIs believe that they cannot do justice to their students within this time frame. The issue of hours worked is made more complex because circumstances vary depending on whether the GSI has taught the course before. We believe that the faculty member in charge of the course should advise and support GSIs in balancing their teaching responsibilities with other responsibilities involved in graduate education.

4. Each department should specify, in advance of the first class, maximum limits on sections appropriate to the discipline and the specific course. If prospective enrollments are higher than expected, additional GSIs should be hired, the enrollment should be limited to specified section size, or the workload of the GSIs (e.g., number of assignments to be graded) should be adjusted accordingly.

For procedures to resolve issues concerning workload see Section E.

C. Preparation of GSIs for teaching.

In this section we define policies and procedures that describe the mutual responsibilities of faculty and GSIs in making certain that undergraduate students receive the best possible educational experiences, and GSIs receive the best possible pedagogical training.

1. Because leading discussion sections or teaching stand-alone sections requires complex teaching skills, first-time GSIs require training in both the logistics and pedagogical issues of how to teach undergraduates. Resources for this purpose include campuswide GSI orientations, department GSI orientations, and ongoing department 300 courses. The Graduate Council in collaboration with the GSI Teaching and Resource Center will circulate a list of resources available for preparing new GSIs.

Each department must inform the Dean of the Graduate Division and the Graduate Council about the specific ways in which it provides GSIs with appropriate preparation before they enter the classroom for the first time and during their first year of teaching.

2. New and continuing GSIs (GSIship types a and b) are entitled to regular meetings with faculty who are responsible for the course to discuss the logistics of curriculum, selection of topics, assignments, tests, grades etc.

3. New and continuing GSIs (GSIship types a and b) are entitled to regular meetings with faculty who are responsible for the course to discuss pedagogic matters related to their teaching of the course or sections of the course.

4. GSIs with primary responsibility for the course content are entitled to regular meetings with a faculty member designated by the Chair to discuss course logistics and pedagogical issues.

5. Co-incident with faculty responsibilities to prepare GSIs are GSI obligations to prepare themselves for teaching roles. Included in these obligations are: attendance at classes, lectures, and GSI meetings, meeting with faculty mentors to discuss more effective ways of teaching undergraduates, seeking out opportunities for guidance and feedback concerning teaching, attending courses on pedagogy offered in the department or in the University.

D. Increasing faculty incentives to play a central role in mentoring graduate students as teachers.

1. Departmental reviews should include an assessment of GSI mentorship, when applicable, in their assessment of faculty teaching performance.
2. Budget Committee reviews should include an assessment of GSI mentorship, when applicable, in their assessment of faculty teaching performance.
3. Faculty using GSIs should be provided with a copy of these policies along with specific department guidelines at the beginning of each semester that they teach courses with GSIs. Assistance in development guidelines for mentoring GSIs can be obtained by consulting the GSI Teaching and Resource Center.
4. Students should be provided with a copy of these policies along with specific department guidelines at the beginning of each semester of their appointment.

E. Mechanisms to resolve issues arising in the appointment and mentoring of GSIs.

Individual GSI concerns:

1. Once the semester has begun, GSIs with concerns about their workload or other aspects of mentoring should discuss them with the instructor of the course (Types a and b) or with faculty designated by the Chair (Types c and d).
2. If Step 1 does not produce satisfactory results, the GSI should meet with the Chair or with the Faculty Advisor for GSI Affairs, or with a department committee of faculty and graduate students designated to oversee GSI issues.
3. If Step 2 does not produce satisfactory results, the GSI can use the grievance procedures outlined in Section 140 of the Academic Personnel manual. Students should observe all stated time limits on grievance procedures.

Department-wide GSI concerns:

4. If GSIs feel that the department as a whole is not abiding by these new guidelines, they should try Steps 1 and 2 above. If these do not produce satisfactory results, the GSIs should outline their concerns to the Chair of the Graduate Council and to the Dean of the Graduate Division.

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