

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY AND BIOCHEMISTRY

GRADUATE STUDENT TEACHING AND RESEARCH ASSISTANTSHIP
POLICIES AND PRACTICES

MOST RECENT MODIFICATIONS:
APPROVED BY THE DEPARTMENTAL FACULTY – January 17, 2013

Graduate teaching assistants (TA) occupy a unique position in regard to overall status within a university since they are both student and staff. Graduate teaching assistantships are often looked upon as a means of support while the student pursues an advanced degree.

Chemistry and Biochemistry graduate students in good standing and making satisfactory progress towards their M.S. Thesis Option of PhD degree are eligible to hold a teaching assistantship. Students in the M.S. Teacher Certification Option are not eligible to hold a TA unless approved by the Graduate Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee. All TAs are subject to Northern Illinois University (NIU) Graduate School regulations and policies.

Teaching assistants in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry perform a number of duties. While a teaching assistant will not perform all of the following duties in a given semester, various assignments include: supervision of teaching laboratories, proctoring and grading of exams and quizzes, directing introductory chemistry recitation sessions, tutoring, holding office hours, and attending weekly teaching assistant meetings overseen by a supervising faculty member. Departmental policies reserve teaching assistantships for full-time students pursuing graduate degree programs in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

Appointment Paperwork and Initial Employment Stipulations

Implementation of a teaching assistantship requires that proper paperwork be filed with the University. The Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) will assist the TA in completing these documents. A contract offer signed by the TA and the DGS must be completed. The Internal Revenue Service W-4 form must be completed. A document designated the I-9 form must be completed by the TA and the DGS to verify employment eligibility under US law. A form designated the DELR must be completed by the TA to verify that the student is not in default of any educational loan from a public source for a period of six months or more and in the amount of \$600 or more. An application for assistantship must be filed the first time assistantship is requested. The second page of this request has a statement about selective service registration. This statement has to be signed as well. The DGS will file the appropriate NIU Personnel Action Form.

Northern Illinois University supports the *Resolution Regarding Graduate Scholars, Fellows, Trainees, and Assistants*, sponsored by the Council of Graduate Schools. This resolution requires a written release from an institution to which a teaching assistant contract commitment has been made and accepted. NIU may require such evidence when awarding an assistantship. Students offered a

teaching assistantship for a fall semester will be given a required response date of April 15 until that date passes. Decision dates in other circumstances will be agreed upon by the prospective TA and the DGS.

Appointment Types

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry awards two types of graduate instructional assistantships, regular (full-time) and grading (three-quarter-time). Only students who demonstrate oral English ability as prescribed by the current State of Illinois law and NIU Graduate School policies may hold regular assistantships.

Primary duties for full-time TAs are described in the introduction of this document.

Duties for three-quarter-time grading TAs consist of assisting full-time TAs in the conduct and preparation of undergraduate laboratories and grading and proctoring of exams and quizzes. They may also be expected to attend weekly laboratory preparation meetings. If a grading assistant is a student with a primary language other than English, the assistant may apply for a full-time position only after satisfying the oral English teaching proficiency requirements.

Students with a primary language other than English who are awarded grading teaching assistantships must attend the English as a Second Language (ESL) Clinic and/or the Speech and Hearing Clinic on a weekly basis until they (a) pass the Test of Spoken English (TSE) examination AND (b) provide satisfactory evidence to the Graduate Student Recruitment and Admissions Committee (GSARC) of oral English competency. If a student is not able to satisfy this requirement within the first two years in the program, their eligibility for a teaching assistantship position will cease.

The GSARC assumes no obligation or responsibility to support students who initially enter the program with a research assistantship and lose that form of support. To be considered for a teaching assistantship, these students must satisfy the same conditions and compete with all applicants for available teaching assistantships.

Teaching Assistant Responsibilities

Graduate teaching assistant's assignments are made by the Director of Graduate Studies. The teaching assistants are responsible for meeting with their class(es) at the appropriate time and place. Assistantship duties and procedure directives will be presented at appropriate TA meetings on a schedule arranged by the supervising faculty member. The initial meetings are normally held the week prior to the beginning of the semester.

Proctoring and grading assignments are normally made just after the start of the semester. Teaching assistants are responsible for reporting as soon as possible to the professor(s) to whom they have been assigned.

Absences from any duties must be approved in advance by the faculty member in charge of the course to which the TA is assigned. These correspondences must be written and copied to the DGS. In the event of TA illness, the supervising faculty member should be notified immediately and informed later by a memo copied to the DGS.

Failure to discharge duties and obligations in an appropriate manner can result in the cancellation of an assistantship contract and/or in denial of reappointment for subsequent terms.

Research

Although TA assignments are often viewed as instructional service rendered for the stipend received, vigorous pursuit of an advanced degree through course work, departmental examinations and thesis/dissertation research is an integral part of any assistantship appointment and intimately part of any service rendered and expected. Research may be the only duty of the teaching assistant during the summer term. Research advisors, the GSARC, and the DGS expect students to avail themselves of every opportunity to accomplish research. Absences from research duties except for official university closures should be approved by the research director and documented. Excessive absences may result in termination of the appointment.

TA Eligibility Period

Support for a graduate student in the M.S. program will be limited to a continuous time period of five semesters. This time period begins at the time of initial admission into the graduate program. The continuous time period includes summers. Summers are regarded as terms, not semesters. If the fifth semester is a spring semester, support will normally be awarded for the following summer term.

For students in the Ph.D. program (*i.e.*, following successful completion of the qualifying examination), the continuous support period will include a maximum of ten continuous semesters from the initial semester of admission into the graduate program. If the tenth semester is a spring semester, support will normally be awarded for the following summer term.

The GSARC may offer a term exceeding these limits if it finds that extenuating circumstances exist. For students who have taken a leave-of-absence or a break in the NIU chemistry graduate programs, the GSARC will determine if circumstances warrant an extension of the time limitation.

Adequate progress in the students' graduate program is required to maintain the status of a teaching assistant. Adequate progress includes completion of required tasks (exams, *etc.*) within the time-frames defined by the M.S. and Ph.D. Chemistry and Biochemistry program requirements.

Within the last two calendar months preceding the end of finals week of the graduate student's third semester, the students shall present written and verbal research progress reports to their research advisors and the Graduate Program Committee (GPC). The advisor and GPC should receive the written report one week prior to the verbal presentation. Following consultation with the research advisor, the GPC shall deem whether that student will be supported by departmental teaching assistantship funds beyond 24 months from date of entry into the program.

Appointment Dates

Initial teaching assistantship appointments are normally scheduled to begin on August 16 or January 16. Contracts for continuing students will normally begin July 1. The contracts will stipulate the time period for which they are effective, but under normal circumstances ending dates of May 15, June 30, August 15, or December 15 will be used. The Graduate School does not normally allow

reappointment processing for students on academic probation; therefore, a student on academic probation at the end of the spring semester with a contract date ending June 30 may be terminated on May 15. Resignations occurring prior to the date stipulated in the contract are subject to acceptance by the GSARC and the DGS.

Course Loads

Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry graduate *teaching and research* assistants are required to register for a minimum of nine credit hours each semester and six hours during the summer term. Registration must be in course work relevant to their degree program. Any increase or decrease from these amounts must be approved in advance by the DGS. All graduate students must obtain approval of the Graduate Program Committee for any course withdrawal. In the first two semesters of their assistantship, students will register for 2 hours of Chemistry 690. In the second year of their assistantship, students will register for 1 hour of Chemistry 690. Chemistry 690 registration is not required thereafter.

Stipends

The number and type of stipends will be determined by the GSARC and DGS based upon the resources available from the college, the number of laboratory sections projected for the year, and other factors related to the instructional mission of the department. Stipends are usually adjusted on a yearly basis by the GSARC as instructional requirements and resources dictate.

Tuition Scholarships, Fees and Health Insurance

A tuition waiver/scholarship is granted to all students who hold teaching assistantships for half-time (10 hours) or greater time appointments. (Normal full-time appointments are designated as 20-hour appointments.) For entering students without assistantship support, the GSARC recommends tuition waiver scholarships only under exceptional or extraordinary circumstances.

Teaching assistants are required to pay university fees. Additionally, the University requires students to have appropriate health insurance. This insurance may be obtained from an external agent, but it is also available from NIU.

Outside Employment

Graduate assistants in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry are not permitted to engage in employment outside the department or university without specific written consent of the DGS. Contracts issued to graduate assistants specify that the appointment may be terminated if this stipulation is not met.

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