



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

Operating Policy and Procedure

OP 64.03: Graduate Students Employed as Teaching Assistants and Graduate Part-time Instructors

DATE: September 3, 2020

PURPOSE: The purpose of this Operating Policy/Procedure (OP) is to define the responsibilities and procedural guidelines for teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors at Texas Tech University.

REVIEW: This OP will be reviewed in November of even-numbered years by the Dean of the Graduate School and the Vice Provost for Academic Innovation and Student Success with substantive revisions presented to the Provost and Senior Vice President (PSVP).

POLICY/PROCEDURE

1. Policy

- a. The teaching assistantship (TA) or graduate part-time instructorship (GPTI) is the university's way of assisting the graduate student in the pursuit of advanced education and in meaningful entry into the professional world. Teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors make an important contribution to the teaching mission of the university. The TA or GPTI is both student and employee. They are continually involved, as students, in the scholarship of their discipline. As students, they have a natural understanding of the needs and perspectives of other students, which enhances their role as employee.
- b. Administrative responsibility for the teaching assignment rests within the college in which the student is employed as a teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor.

2. Qualifications

- a. Every teaching assistant must hold a bachelor's degree or the equivalent and be admitted as a student in the Graduate School. Because Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) regulations require the student to have at least 18 hours of graduate work in the field of teaching responsibilities to be given full responsibility for a class, the university has established this distinction:
 - (1) Teaching assistants are those who have fewer than 18 hours of graduate work in the field of teaching responsibilities and, therefore, do not have sole responsibility for the course or courses they teach. The acquisition of 18 or more hours of graduate work in the field of teaching responsibility does not automatically promote a teaching assistant to a graduate part-time instructor.

- (2) Graduate part-time instructors are those who have at least 18 hours of graduate work in the field of teaching responsibility and who have full responsibility for the class or classes they teach.
- b. Any exceptions to the above policy must be for demonstrably valid reasons and be approved in advance by the Graduate Dean and the Office of the PSVP. Each departmental unit will review the qualifications of all appointees at the time of appointment to ensure teaching proficiency and compliance with existing policies. All justifications for exceptions will be kept on record.
- c. Students in **PGRD** or post baccalaureate status (holding an undergraduate degree but limited to enrollment in undergraduate courses) may not be appointed to teaching or research assistantships or graduate part-time instructorships.

3. English Proficiency

All graduate students employed as teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors in courses offered for credit that are taught in the English language must be proficient in the use of the English language. Any teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor whose first language is not English must be certified in English proficiency and readiness for the classroom. A workshop is held annually in the summer for all prospective new teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors whose first language is not English. The workshop will assess each participant's readiness for the classroom. Those whose English proficiency is not clear or who may have other deficiencies that make success in the classroom doubtful will not be approved. They may, however, pursue further training in English proficiency and be reconsidered at a later date.

4. Affirmative Action

All appointments to positions as teaching assistants or graduate part-time instructors shall be on the basis of qualifications, suitability, and student status without regard to race, color, religion, sex, age, handicap, national origin, or Vietnam veteran status and in keeping with the laws and regulations of the state of Texas and the Board of Regents.

5. Duties

- a. Service assignments for each teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor should be outlined at the time of appointment and should be as specific as possible. Duties may include a range of assignments from directing lab sessions to leading discussion sections and, in the case of graduate part-time instructors, to full charge of classes. The exact duties will depend on the needs of the department, the background and qualifications of the teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor, and professional goals of the student. Work assignments should take into account both the needs of the department and the graduate student's obligation to make satisfactory progress in her/his academic program.
- b. While it is not always possible to be precise in the determination of weekly hours of service, one-half time teaching assistants or graduate part-time instructors ordinarily will be expected to provide an average of 20 hours per week during the employment period. Other levels of appointment will vary accordingly.

6. Appointment

Teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors are normally appointed for one-quarter to one-half-time service. Appointments exceeding half time should be made only under compelling circumstances and with the approval of the relevant academic dean, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Office of the PSVP. Appointments are ordinarily for nine months but, in some instances, may be for only one semester or for one or more summer sessions. Students must be in good academic standing at the time of appointment. Continuation of the assistantship or graduate part-time instructorship is conditioned on satisfactory performance throughout the term of appointment, both as a teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor and as a student.

7. International Teaching Assistants

International teaching assistants or graduate part-time instructors often provide students with valuable perspectives not readily available from other teachers. The international student teacher, therefore, is a decided asset to Texas Tech's educational setting.

8. Stipends and Benefits

- a. Teaching assistants are appointed at a salary rate established by the department or college at or above the minimum level established by the university for graduate student employees. The salary level will take into account the appointee's training, prior experience, and level of responsibility. Graduate part-time instructors are appointed at a salary rate above that for teaching assistants in the corresponding department or college because the graduate part-time instructorship requires a higher level of training (at least 18 graduate hours) and, frequently, full responsibility for the course or courses taught.
- b. All student employee appointments are considered temporary appointments and are not currently eligible for participation in the regular employee benefit programs made available to regular employees. Social Security and Workers' Compensation insurance benefits are provided to all student employees. Students employed 50 percent time or more for a period of at least four and one-half months per year in occupations that require graduate student status as a condition of employment are eligible to participate in the regular employee group insurance programs. (See [OP 64.11, Insurance Coverage of Graduate Student Employees](#), and [OP 70.05, Eligibility for Insurance and Other Benefits](#), for additional information.)

9. Rights and Responsibilities

- a. Student employees are defined in [OP 70.11, Appointment of Staff Employees](#), as follows: An employee performing part-time work incidental to his or her academic training in an occupational category that requires all incumbents to be students as a condition of employment. Accordingly, the first priority of all teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors should be satisfactory progress in their academic programs. At the same time, the acceptance of a teaching assistantship or graduate part-time instructorship involves responsibilities for satisfactory performance of the duties related to that appointment. The appointment and its acceptance involve the understanding that duties of both graduate student and teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor roles can be balanced with mutual benefit to both roles. Teaching assistants or graduate part-time instructors and their advisors need to work together to ensure that both roles are carried out successfully.

- b. The teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor is responsible for becoming familiar with general academic procedures, published or online, in such documents as the *University Catalog*, the *Faculty Handbook*, and the *Student Handbook*. The university's *Operating Policy and Procedure Manual* may be accessed online at <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual>.
- c. In situations where teaching assistants or graduate part-time instructors think that they have a legitimate grievance regarding any aspect of their service duties, they have a right to exhaust all proper channels in resolving the complaint. In order, these channels are the immediate supervisor, the department chair, the dean of the academic college, and the Dean of the Graduate School.

10. Enrollment

- a. Each teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor is expected to be making steady progress toward the completion of an advanced degree and be in good academic standing. Certain levels of enrollment are, therefore, mandatory. Students must be enrolled full time (at least 9 graduate hours in each regular semester [fall or spring]; at least 3 graduate hours in each relevant summer session) to be eligible to hold teaching assistantships and graduate part-time instructorships.
- b. It is the responsibility of the teaching assistant's or graduate part-time instructor's major department to see that the terms of the enrollment policy are carried out. If a student is employed as a teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor in a department other than the student's major area, the major department should be kept informed and, in general, approve the work duties required by the employing department.

11. Orientation and Training

- a. All new teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors will undergo a period of orientation before beginning work. This orientation should include an overview of procedures, facilities, duties, and university policies.
- b. In addition, each department employing teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors will provide systematic, ongoing training. Such training may take the form of a course in teaching the subject involved, which the teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor will take during the first semester of work. In some cases, it will also involve mentoring assignments with opportunities for observation of senior faculty in the classroom and frequent conferences to review such elements as course syllabi, grading, classroom decorum, and lecture styles.
- c. The nature of orientation and training activities will vary between departments, but each unit will be responsible for a plan that ensures each teaching assistant and graduate part-time instructor receives sufficient support to provide maximum opportunity for the development of teaching ability and professional perspectives.

12. Evaluation and Supervision

- a. Departments employing teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors will conduct an annual evaluation of each assistant and graduate part-time instructor. The results of the evaluation will be made available to the assistant or part-time instructor and placed in that person's file. Appropriate follow-up should occur to ensure that the teaching assistant or

graduate part-time instructor receives full benefit of the evaluation. The evaluation and supervision of teaching assistants and graduate part-time instructors should be conducted with two criteria in mind:

- (1) The quality of work connected with the specific assignment and departmental tasks;
and
 - (2) The training value of the assistant's or graduate part-time instructor's performance for future employment and professional development.
- b. In cases where remedial measures are indicated to improve the teaching assistant's or graduate part-time instructor's performance, the teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor should be informed in writing of the recommended changes to resolve the problem. Situations leading to a recommendation of dismissal for cause must be provided in writing to the assistant or graduate part-time instructor with a copy to the department chair.
- c. The identity of the supervisor and the chain of command within the unit should be made known to each teaching assistant and graduate part-time instructor. There should be a clear understanding of the sources of advice and assistance. The person who is to receive any complaints should be identified to the teaching assistant or graduate part-time instructor.