

# **Guidelines for Proper Conduct of Graduate Student Assistantship Duties**

The success of undergraduate students is most important to the Chemistry Department's teaching mission and Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are an essential component towards fulfilling this mission. Furthermore, Student Operators ("trainers") ensure a smooth operation of departmental laboratories and training of graduate students and are therefore vital for graduate education and research. GTAs and trainers are employees of the University of Tennessee and have a professional responsibility to ensure proper support of undergraduates in their studies as well as researchers utilizing the departmental facilities.

## **1 General Expectations of GTA/Trainer Performance**

Work assignments are expected to be conducted such that a fair, equal, respectful, and productive working environment is ensured. Being on time for discussions and labs as well as punctual grade submissions are mandatory. While it cannot be expected that all undergraduate students under a TA's guidance will receive a passing grade, a realistic assessment of the students' performance is a critical part of a TA's duties. Similarly, a trainer's technical support provided to researchers will aim for timely user training and conducting research productively within experimental limits.

It is understood that under exceptional circumstances, such as medical or family emergencies, a TA/trainer is, on short notice, hindered or unable to perform their duties. In those situations, the TA/trainer is required to immediately inform their supervisor who will then explore options to cover the assignment. Situations which require a foreseeable absence of a TA/trainer need to be discussed with the supervisor in a timely manner and a substitute has to be implemented prior to the TA's/trainer's leave. However, substitute TAs are a disruption of instruction style and thus a disadvantage to the undergraduate students. Trainers have been carefully selected for the task and have accumulated specific knowledge which cannot easily be provided by a substitute. Therefore, TA/trainer substitutions need to be kept at a minimum.

In particular, taking vacation during teaching periods is not acceptable, even if another TA is willing to be a substitute. International TAs/trainers who plan to leave the US are required to meet with UT's Center of International Education (CIE) *prior* to their trip and to allow for enough time for a visa to be issued. Every TA/trainer is expected to be back at the beginning of the semester (spring/summer/fall) so that they can fulfill their assigned TA/trainer responsibilities; this explicitly includes presence at the pre-semester TA meeting and safety instructions. Failure to be present for the work assignment will invoke the disciplinary actions listed under section 3. Delays in visa renewal or international travel are not an acceptable reason for absence from GTA/trainer responsibilities.

## **2 Speak Test Performance for Non-native Speakers**

Before being eligible for TA assignments, non-native speakers of English are required to pass a university-administered speak test which is offered in January, May, and August. The department will continue to sign up international graduate students for these tests until they receive unconditional permission to teach in a classroom setting (rating 'S'). The cost of the first three attempts at the speak tests will be covered by the department. Beginning with the fourth attempt, the student is required to pay the cost of the test. A no-show for such a speak test will be counted towards the three department-funded attempts. Should a student not be able to

secure at least conditional permission to teach in a classroom setting (rating  $\geq$ 'AM'), the department will provide a non-teaching job assignment. However, such unanticipated and non-essential alternative positions are only available in very limited numbers and can only be generated in rare cases to bridge limited periods of time. Nonetheless, the department will fulfill its commitment and will cover a student's salary for at most the end of this student's first 12 months as a department member. After this 1-year grace period, the department's financial obligation will end. The student will then need to be moved to a full Graduate Research Assistant position paid for by his/her research advisor's accounts or he/she will have to provide UT-independent, sufficient financial means as specified by the Center for International Education.

### **3 Correction of Unsatisfactory Performance and Appeal Processes**

Usually, TAs and trainers meet or exceed the expectations and outstanding TA performances may be rewarded during the department's Honors Day. In a few cases, however, the expectations are not met which then requires corrective actions by the department's administration. In case of unsatisfactory performance or misconduct, his/her immediate supervisor will discuss the matter and indicate to the TA/trainer what corrective measures are needed. Should this discussion not result in an immediate correction of the issue, the supervisor will consult with Chemistry's department head and/or associate head to generate a second assessment. The student's research advisor will be notified. Grievous acts of misconduct can be reason for immediate suspension and potential dismissal. If warranted, disciplinary actions will be implemented depending on a TA's/trainer's previous failures to meet expectations:

- a) In case of a first unsatisfactory performance evaluation, the student will meet with the department head and/or associate head and a written reprimand will be entered into the graduate student's personnel file. The offender will not be given the opportunity to earn summer salary as a TA during the following summer semester. Therefore, unless the student's advisor provides financial support, the reprimanded student will not receive summer salary.
- b) A second written reprimand will be entered into the graduate student's personnel file and the TA's/trainer's tuition fee waiver will be revoked for that semester.
- c) A third written reprimand will be entered into the graduate student's personnel file and the TA's/trainer's tuition fee waiver will be revoked permanently.

Appeals: The reprimanded person has the right to appeal any disciplinary action. If the reprimanded person wishes to appeal the disciplinary action, it is the responsibility of the reprimanded person to initiate the appeal process with the College of Arts and Sciences Associate Dean for Graduate Studies.

*These guidelines are intended to broadly ensure a satisfactory level of TA/trainer performance with the understanding that some day-to-day fluctuations of TA/trainer performance are acceptable. The Department recognizes that the vast majority of the TAs/trainers are performing adequately. Disciplinary actions will be reserved to severe cases of underperforming or intentional misconduct – a productive and enjoyable work environment will not be impacted by these guidelines.*