

How Can I Provide a Meaningful Experience to Graduate Assistants?

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The Basics

Graduate assistants are often involved in undergraduate instruction and research. Their training and supervision is critical to the students who they teach, the institution they serve, and to their own professional formation. It is essential to understand the institution's expectations and legal obligations regarding graduate assistants.¹

In Practice

1. Develop a consensus about the role of graduate assistants in the department, and post pertinent policies, procedures, and protocols concerning the graduate student's role as instructor and researcher in a departmental handbook.
2. Develop an appropriate application process and formal agreements about each party's obligations.
3. Provide an orientation to the assistant that includes information about tasks, emergency procedures, ethical conduct with regard to undergraduate students,² and logistical details (lab supplies, photocopying, etc.).
4. Establish specific outcomes for the assistant and monitor his or her progress against the established criteria. Formative assessments, such as reviews, may be helpful in his or her professional development.
5. Where possible, tailor the graduate assistant's responsibilities to the academic and professional goals of the graduate student, and document the individual's work so that recommendations are accurate and thorough.
6. Provide adequate training to graduate students involved in research and ensure that they have met the criteria for the university's institutional review board.
7. Assign graduate assistants tasks for which they are qualified. To preserve the integrity of writing in the course, for example, professors may have to "test" the assistant's proficiency with evaluating compositions, lab reports, bibliographies, etc. Grades of record must be determined only by the instructor of record.
8. *"The Board of Trustees of the California State University recognizes that the right of privacy is an inalienable right protected by Article 1, Section 1 of the California State Constitution. Under the authority delegated to the Chancellor in Title 5, California Code of Regulations, Section 42396.5, Executive Order 796 (January, 2002), was issued for the implementation of the policy for the administration of student records consistent with the federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA, 20 U.S.C. 1232g) and the regulations adopted there under (34 C.F.R.99)."*³ Instructors are obligated to see that students are aware of and compliant with its institution's policies regarding student privacy.
9. Do not use graduate students for personal services and projects unrelated to the institution's agreement.
10. Be flexible in response to the assistant's complaints about stress and workload.

¹ White, J., & Nonnamaker, J. (2011). Supervising graduate assistants. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2011(136), 43-54.

² Oberlander, S. E., & Barnett, J. E. (2005). Multiple relationships between graduate assistants and students: Ethical and practical considerations. *Ethics & Behavior*, 15(1), 49-63.

³ Student Privacy Rights Policy and procedure at San Francisco State University. 2006. San Francisco State University. Retrieved from: http://www.sfsu.edu/~admisrec/reg/sfsu_policy.html.

