GUIDELINES GOVERNING THE APPOINTMENT OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS
IN THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION

A. INTRODUCTION

Graduate assistant appointments at the University of Washington are governed by a contract between the University of Washington and GSEAC/UAW, which is found at the following website: https://hr.uw.edu/labor/unions/uaw/contract. Most graduate assistants in the Department of Communication are classified as Academic Student Employees (ASEs) and both the ASEs and the University of Washington are bound by the terms of the UW/UAW contract. This document, specifically for ASEs in the Department of Communication, is intended as a supplement to the UW/UAW contract.

Graduate assistant appointments constitute the Department’s principal form of financial assistance to graduate students. Assistantships help the faculty carry out the Department’s teaching, research, and service missions. They also provide experience – essentially an apprenticeship – for graduate students as they prepare for careers in teaching and research within and outside of higher education.

Most appointments are continuing commitments, reviewed annually. However, because funding for some assistantship lines runs for a year or less, or is of uncertain duration, the Department also makes some appointments on a three-quarter academic year or even a single quarter basis. The distinctions between these types of appointments are described in Section C below.

The vast majority of appointments in the Department of Communication consist of teaching assistantships, funded by the College of Arts and Sciences to meet undergraduate curricular needs. Graduate assistants are required by the university to enroll for 10 credits of graduate coursework per quarter (or their equivalent). Timely completion of program requirements is predicated upon this course load, so teaching assistant assignments are made on the assumption that students are taking 10 credits per quarter. Additional credits can be taken if they do not conflict with teaching assistant assignments (see Section D below).

The availability of teaching assistantships within the Department in any given year will vary based on several factors: (1) funds provided by the College of Arts and Sciences; (2) funding secured by individual faculty and department centers; (3) funding that becomes available when students on continuing appointments resign their assistantships for a quarter or more to take advantage of other funding opportunities.

The availability of research assistantships within the Department in any given year also varies, based on: (1) allocations made by the Graduate School for recruitment of new students; (2) funding secured by individual faculty and department centers; and (3) curricular needs for teaching assistants. Note that faculty with external funding will sometimes hire graduate students independently as research assistants; these positions are not managed by the Professional Development Committee (the committee that supervises graduate assistants).

The Professional Development Committee and the Graduate Admissions Committee (the committee that admits graduate students and makes initial offers of assistantships) employ the guidelines below when making recommendations to the Chair of the Department of Communication about the offering and assignment of teaching and research assistantships. We refer to these policies and procedures as “guidelines” because the Chair retains the ultimate
judgment on what allocation of assistantships best meets the needs of the Department. Appointment procedures (i.e., how decisions are made about who receives an appointment as an assistant in the department) are described in Section B below; assignment procedures (i.e., how decisions are made about what particular job an assistant is given in a particular quarter) are described in Section D below.

B. REASONS FOR AND CRITERIA USED IN APPOINTING GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

The Department appoints graduate assistants for three reasons: (1) to attract well-qualified students to enter the program with a job that will support them during their time here; (2) to staff courses with able, experienced teachers; and (3) to provide academic work experience for students in the graduate program. Prioritized in the order above, each of these reasons gives rise to criteria used in making appointments.

Financial need is not a criterion for appointment as a graduate assistant. The Department solicits no information about financial need, nor does it consider such information when volunteered.

1. Recruiting and rewarding outstanding graduate students with a paid job in the field of communication.

The Department offers continuing support to incoming students as an incentive for them to enroll at the University of Washington.

Many students applying to the UW Department of Communication have opportunities to go elsewhere. We face competition with other universities that also offer assistantships to incoming students. The Graduate School supports the Department’s recruitment efforts by offering a limited number of research assistantships each year expressly for recruitment; these have to go to incoming students.

For many applicants, a commitment of continuing support determines whether they can enroll at the UW. Thus, in making their decision whether to attend, these students need a commitment of continuous support from the outset. By awarding continuous assistantships to incoming students, we let applicants know where they stand from the outset: they have a clear commitment of continuing support (assuming that they are performing their roles adequately) or they do not have such a commitment. With that information in mind, they can decide whether to enroll.

The Department also, on occasion, offers continuing support to outstanding students who are already in the program but who did not receive continuous funding from the outset. Students already in the program can apply for continuous funding on February 1, and they are evaluated along with those who are applying to the Department for admission and seeking funding for the next academic year.

Students who complete their M.A. degree here and then apply for the Ph.D. program, and who seek continuous support for their time in the Ph.D. program, are evaluated in the same pool as all other applicants to the Ph.D. program seeking continuous support.

2. Staffing classes with able, experienced teachers.
As part of an institution of higher education, the Department of Communication has an obligation to appoint as teaching assistants those graduate students who can do the best job.

In assessing new graduate students for appointment, the Department uses its admission criteria – previous academic record, GRE scores, statement of purpose, writing samples, and letters of recommendation – to evaluate applicants’ teaching potential. In considering students already in the program, the preceding criteria are used along with measures of their performance once here – for instance, satisfactory progress toward degree, grade point average, faculty assessment of their work (including teaching potential), and teaching evaluations (if any).

3. Providing apprenticeship experience for graduate students.

Our third goal is to give our graduate students professional development opportunities that will provide them with a variety of teaching experiences and, when possible, research experience. We are able to work on this goal only after meeting our second goal.

C. LENGTH OF APPOINTMENTS

In accordance with UW/UAW contract guidelines (Article 4-Appointment and Reappointment Notification and Job Description), the Department of Communication awards assistantships for at least three quarters when sufficient funding is available. Most appointments are made on a continuing basis to be renewed annually based on satisfactory performance, and can be held for the maximum number of quarters allowed by the Department’s rules (see Section G below). Where three-quarter academic year (Autumn, Winter and Spring) or single quarter appointments are necessary, the appointment letter will specify the following: “This appointment is for one [or another specified number] quarter only. Please be aware that the receipt of a one-quarter [or another specified number] appointment in no way guarantees, or even increases, the chance of support in any subsequent quarter.” In other words, there is no commitment that it will be possible to award additional quarters of support.

In making three-quarter academic year or single quarter appointments, the Professional Development Committee and Chair apply the second two criteria above, because the recruitment criterion – “to provide continuing support as an incentive to attract well-qualified candidates” -- no longer applies to students already in the program. Furthermore, the Professional Development Committee considers only students who (a) have applications on file for the current quarter or academic year, and (b) are making satisfactory academic progress in the program. Applications for three-quarter academic year and Autumn quarter appointments are due February 1.

Applications for Winter or Spring quarter appointments should be made no later than one week before the PDC deadlines for announcing Winter and Spring assignments (i.e., November 8 and February 8 respectively).

In keeping with our goal to provide academic work experience for students in the graduate program, a list is compiled by ranking students who have not yet reached their maximum support (see Section G below) and are making satisfactory progress toward their degree. Rankings are based on seniority, with doctoral students outranking Master’s degree students (e.g., a fourth quarter doctoral student will outrank a second quarter doctoral student, who will outrank a fourth quarter Master’s degree student). Quarters on leave do not count toward establishing this “seniority.” Further refinements in the rankings are made by noting how much support, if any, a student has received. Thus, where two students are at the same point in their program, the higher ranking goes to the one who has had fewer previous quarters of graduate assistantship appointed to him or her by the Professional Development
Committee. Students who have reached their maximum support will be placed at the bottom of the list (with those who have more recently reached their maximum appearing above those who reached their maximum longer ago).

The resulting ranked list will be used to fill any single quarter or three-quarter academic year openings that become available. The ranked list will be updated each quarter to include any additional applications received. The highest-ranked alternate will be considered first for openings; the second-ranked alternate will be considered next if two openings occur, and so forth. The rankings established determine the order of consideration but cannot by themselves dictate appointments. The Professional Development Committee will have to work its way down the list of ranked alternates until it finds the top eligible candidate with the requisite skills (e.g., course work, professional/teaching experience, technical expertise, and language facility, among other considerations). This means that someone with a lower ranking, but who has skills needed for instructional purposes, may get preference over a higher-ranking candidate. This comports with the Department’s obligation “to staff courses with eligible, experienced teachers.”

All of the preceding, of course, presupposes that the ranked candidates are qualified, are making satisfactory progress toward their degrees and have, in previous assistantships (if any), performed satisfactorily.

D. ASSIGNMENTS TO PARTICULAR CLASSES OR PROJECTS

Teaching assistantships are most often available for classes at the 200- and 300-level. The principal responsibility of TAs in these classes is to work with the professor in charge of the class to provide effective instruction. In some classes, the professor may lecture two to five hours a week, and the TA attends lectures, grades assignments, and meets with students in smaller groups for discussion, review, practice, to guide students as they perform assignments, or to teach research skills. In other classes, TAs will be the only instructor that students in that course will know (i.e., they will be the classroom instructor; but in these cases, a faculty member will be supervising the TA behind the scenes).

In assigning students to particular classes, the Professional Development Committee adheres to the criteria set forth in Section B. It should be noted that as employees of the university, ASEs are being paid to do a job. The particular job assignments available in a given quarter are based on the department’s curricular needs. Assignments are often constrained by such things as ASE qualifications, and time conflicts between the ASE’s own course schedule and the meeting times of particular classes that require TAs. Teaching assistants should examine the undergraduate course schedule each quarter when enrolling in their own graduate classes, keeping in mind that time conflicts between their own coursework and teaching opportunities will work as a constraint when assignments are made.

Each summer, the Committee surveys those students who have been guaranteed funding for the following academic year and those students seeking three-quarter academic year appointments. Students are presented with a list of all courses that year that are likely to need TA support, and asked (1) which of those courses they are qualified to teach; (2) their expertise for each course (e.g., previous teaching experience in the area, coursework in the area, research in the area, relevant professional experience); (3) their research skills (information that is especially important for assigning those who received the year-long recruitment RAships, but also necessary for the distribution of any single-quarter research assistantships that may become available); and (4) what courses they perceive as most important to their professional
development. Students’ responses to the first three questions, coupled with the Committee’s review of their files, will provide the basis for determining qualifications for particular TA and RA assignments. Updates of this list of qualifications are encouraged as students go through their program. Students’ responses to the final question help guide the Professional Development Committee in its efforts to ensure that students gain a variety of teaching experiences and the opportunity for improvement afforded by teaching courses more than one time.

Some courses require more TAs than others, and there are some assignments that are more rare (for example, serving as a TA in a course that is not taught very often or is not taught with a large enrollment, or serving as an RA after entering the program with a TAship). For this reason, we are not able to provide everyone with all of the teaching and researching experiences that they might want. To ensure fairness in a system with such inherent limits, the Professional Development Committee does not accept requests for particular assignments from students in any given quarter, nor does it accept requests for particular assistants from faculty in any given quarter. (The one exception is the case of lead TAs for large lecture courses; faculty are asked to identify their top two or three choices for this leadership position.)

To minimize the constraint created by time conflicts between ASE course schedules and work assignments, and to ensure that assignments are not unfairly influenced by students who take a larger course load than others, an ASE who is funded as a teaching assistant will be asked each quarter to identify the ten credits in his/her own course schedule that are most important to his/her program of study. The PDC will ensure that the class meeting time for the ASE’s teaching assignment does not conflict with these ten credits of coursework. If another course beyond these 10 credits in the ASE’s planned course schedule conflicts with the class meeting time for the teaching assignment that has been made, the ASE is expected to drop that course.

Like teaching assistantships, research assistantships can vary widely. RAs often help with library research, surveys, statistical computations, and content analyses. There are three types of RA positions: (a) those funded by the Graduate School to help with recruitment; (b) the occasional quarterly RA position that is available when we have more funded TAs in a given quarter than we have needs for assistance in the classroom; and (c) those acquired by faculty (usually with external funding) to help with specific projects. The first type is awarded only to a small number of incoming students, generally for a full year; these RAs usually work with different faculty each quarter. Faculty members submit competitive requests for research assistance, specifying the qualifications required in any RA assigned to them. The first two types of RA are assigned by the Professional Development Committee in response to these requests. In making these assignments, many factors are taken into considerations, including faculty research needs, students’ qualifications and professional development needs, and time schedule conflicts. For most RA positions acquired by faculty from external funding, the individual faculty member chooses his or her RA without the assistance of the Professional Development Committee. If someone on an ASE appointment is offered and wants to accept such a position acquired by faculty from external funding, s/he must submit a resignation for that quarter of department funding. If the resignation comes less than 30 days prior to the beginning of the quarter, the chair of the Professional Development Committee will consider teaching needs in that quarter before accepting the resignation. (Note that a quarter of resigned funding does not get added to the end of an ASE’s funding clock; see Section G below.)

**E. ASSIGNMENT AS INSTRUCTOR OF RECORD**
Students have an opportunity to apply to become an Instructor of Record, an assignment qualified by experience rather than graduate status. The Professional Development Committee recognizes that these teaching opportunities are valuable experiences for students making the transition to their own faculty careers and that they enhance a student’s prospects on the academic job market.

The Professional Development Committee will give priority consideration for these assignments to students who have passed or plan to take their general exams before beginning an assignment as Instructor of Record. But when necessary, the assignments may be made to qualified students who have not yet reached this stage in their program of study. As a general rule, graduate students may not teach a course with an enrollment of more than 40 students. In exceptional situations, students in the latter stages of their dissertation work may be asked to teach a larger class. Under no circumstances may a graduate student teach such a course if: 1) the student’s dissertation proposal has not been formally approved by his/her supervisory committee; and 2) the student does not agree to a larger class size. All Instructor of Record applications must be endorsed by the student’s supervisory committee chair.

The Professional Development Committee assigns Instructor of Record positions as follows: highest priority will go to qualified applicants on continuous appointments who have not exhausted their support. If the funds are available, the next consideration will go to other qualified applicants (those not on continuous appointments) who have not reached their maximum support. Beyond that, the Committee will consider qualified applicants who have reached their maximum support.

Because of the special benefits of assignment as Instructor of Record, the Professional Development Committee reserves the right to cap the number of terms a student serves at two quarters. This will allow the committee to spread these opportunities among eligible students. Also, because of the level of responsibility associated with these assignments, instructional needs may outweigh the strict ranking. In short, the next ranked doctoral candidate might not get an assignment as Instructor of Record unless the student’s skills and experiences match the class.

The particular Instructor of Record courses offered each quarter are selected by the chair of the Undergraduate Program Committee, in consultation with the Undergraduate Advising Office and the chair of the Professional Development Committee. Curricular needs and the availability of qualified instructors are the two primary factors used to determine which courses will be offered. Graduate students are encouraged to complete an Instructor of Record Proposal and submit it to the chair of the Undergraduate Program Committee if there is a course in the curriculum that they would like to see offered as an Instructor of Record course. Please note that having an Instructor of Record Proposal accepted does not necessarily mean that you will be chosen to teach that class; if a course that you proposed is chosen to be offered in any given quarter, you must still apply to teach it as an Instructor of Record, and you will be given the same consideration as anyone else who applies to teach it.

The Professional Development Committee will make every effort to announce Instructor of Record opportunities to graduate students at least four months before the class starts, and graduate students will have the chance to apply to teach the particular class. Final decisions will be announced at least three months in advance of the course start to provide adequate preparation time. There are circumstances, however, when exceptions to this occur. Past situations have included last-minute course approvals from the College to relieve student overloads or sudden illness of a faculty member. In those cases of short notice, announced selection criteria may
favor doctoral candidates who have already taught a particular course, so less preparation would be necessary to meet instructional needs.

Besides seeking valuable guidance from faculty about their course plans, all graduate students accepting Instructor of Record positions are required to get approval of their textbook choices and syllabus from a faculty member who has taught the course. This person will serve as the Instructor of Record’s “faculty supervisor” for the course. An Instructor of Record also needs to submit a final syllabus with the Graduate Program Assistant and front office.

F. APPOINTMENT CALENDAR AND PROCEDURES

The Professional Development Committee (PDC) will endeavor to abide by the following deadlines established by the UW/UAW contract and/or the Department of Communication. If in exceptional circumstances it becomes impossible to meet a deadline, we will announce the delay and give a new deadline.

Nov. 1 PDC announces spring quarter instructors of record opportunities.

Nov. 15 PDC publishes winter assignments and spring instructor decisions.

Feb. 1 PDC announces summer instructors of record opportunities.

To receive full consideration for a continuing, three-quarter academic year, or Autumn quarter only assistantship, students need to file an application form with the Graduate Program Assistant or update their current form by this date. Students are encouraged to update their applications throughout the year.

Feb. 15 PDC publishes spring assignments and summer instructor decisions.

mid-March Offers are made to new students and MAs anticipating going on to the Ph.D. (but decisions for the latter are not final until a student has successfully been accepted into the doctoral program).

April 1 New appointment letters and reappointment letters for the following year are sent to students. Students who have applied for continuing or three-quarter academic year assistantships by February 1 will be notified as well. Reappointment letters will be sent no later than June 1.

April 15 This is the earliest date on which the Department can require new students offered assistantships to notify us of their decision.

PDC announces fall quarter instructors of record opportunities.

May 15 PDC publishes fall instructor decisions.

June 1 PDC announces winter quarter instructors of record opportunities.

PDC surveys students about their teaching qualifications.

Aug. 15 PDC publishes fall TA assignments and winter instructor decisions.
G. LIMITS ON GRADUATE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

Upon admission, a Ph.D. applicant who did not receive an M.A. in the Department of Communication may be offered no more than twelve (12) quarters of support over four consecutive academic years, not including summers. Upon admission, a Master’s candidate may be offered no more than six (6) quarters over two consecutive academic years, not including summers. If a student who received an M.A. from the Department is accepted into the Ph.D. program, support may be continued for an additional nine quarters over three consecutive academic years, not including summers. (If this student had been supported as an M.A. student, the student would have received support for a total of fifteen [15] non-summer quarters over five consecutive academic years.) Summer appointments do not count for or against these limits.

Students on quarter-to-quarter appointments are subject to the same limits.

An offer to an applicant will specify whether the appointment is for the upcoming quarter only, or is for a specific number of quarters in the upcoming academic year, or a continuous appointment to be renewed annually based on satisfactory performance.

The support “clock” generally keeps running throughout the year even if a student turns down an appointment in any quarter or decides to take an unpaid leave of absence. The Professional Development Committee will consider requests to stop the support clock for a compelling reason. The Committee recognizes as valid reasons the necessity to take time off for maternity or paternity leave; to take advantage of research opportunities; or to recover from a serious illness. In such cases, a letter spelling out the conditions should be given to the student and placed in the student's personnel file. For paid leaves of absence during a current quarter, UW/UAW contract specifications will be followed as outlined in Article 16-Leaves of Absence.

After a student’s support limit has been reached, further appointments depend solely on the needs of the Department in staffing courses. Thus, it is possible that a student may receive additional support even after reaching his or her limit, although a student should not plan on such additional support being available.

A continuing offer can be ended if the student fails to make satisfactory progress toward his or her degree (defined in the next section) or fails to perform satisfactorily as a graduate assistant. Beyond assessments of TAs and RAs by supervising faculty, each TA’s teaching effectiveness is reviewed quarterly by taking into account teaching evaluations and/or other appropriate evidence. For UW/UAW contract rules governing discipline or dismissal, see Article 6-Discipline or Dismissal and Article 11-Intellectual Property and Scholarly Misconduct.

H. RENEWAL OF ASSISTANTSHIPS AND SATISFACTORY PROGRESS TOWARD DEGREE

To expect renewal of an assistantship, a graduate student must meet minimum standards as follows:

1. A GPA of 3.30, computed on the most recent three academic quarters;
2. For TAs, teaching reviews by the supervising faculty member that indicate satisfactory performance, and teaching ratings that demonstrate at least good performance and improvement where it is required;

3. For RAs, faculty assessments that indicate satisfactory RA performance;

4. A judgment by the supervisory committee or graduate committee that the candidate is making satisfactory progress according to graduate program guidelines specified on the department’s website at www.com.washington.edu; and

5. Evidence of scholarly commitment and promise as demonstrated by completed research, research papers, and involvement in scholarly activities (attendance at symposia, conferences, discussion groups, or scholarly meetings).

The Graduate Committee reviews all students on a regular basis to assess their progress. Students who are not in compliance with one or another requirement will receive a letter from the Graduate Program Coordinator or, in some cases, the Graduate School. Students holding graduate appointments who are not meeting program requirements may find their assistantship in jeopardy. Students who are seeking appointments generally will not be considered until problems have been rectified. Academic discipline or dismissal of a student is completely separate from job-related discipline, and is not covered by the UW/UAW contract. The Department of Communication retains the right to follow standard procedures concerning academic discipline or dismissal (Article 6-Academic Discipline or Dismissal).

I. APPOINTMENT LEVELS AND PROMOTIONS

Assistants are appointed at one of three UW pay levels -- Teaching/Research Assistant (TA or RA), Predoctoral Teaching/Research Associate I (PDTAI or PDRAI), and Predoctoral Teaching/Research Associate II (PDTAII or PDRAII).

M.A. students will be paid at the starting TA or RA level. Ph.D. students will be paid at the PDTAI or PDRAI level until they achieve candidacy (successful oral defense of the general exam). Doctoral candidates will be paid at the PDTAII or PDRAII level. Promotion to PDTAII or PDRAII level will become effective at the beginning of the academic quarter following the quarter in which the general exam was successfully completed.

Appointment periods differ slightly from the academic calendar. Appointments run September 16 to December 15 for Autumn quarter, December 16 to March 15 for Winter quarter, and March 16 to June 15 for Spring quarter. In accordance with the UW/UAW contract, all appointments are made at 50% (an average of 20 hours per week).

J. PERSONNEL FILES

Each graduate assistant (ASE) in the Department of Communication will have a personnel file located in the Graduate Program Office, Communications Building Room 221. The custodian of the personnel files is the Graduate Program Assistant. Personnel files contain information pertaining to the ASE’s appointments, including but not limited to: letters of appointment, supervisory job performance evaluations, and student course evaluations. No academic records, academic applications, or reference to grievances will be placed in an individual’s personnel file, in accordance with UW/UAW Article 21-Personnel Files.
Approved by Department of Communication Faculty 6 June 2007.