

UC DAVIS: ACADEMIC SENATE
GRADUATE COUNCIL
PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE

April 28, 2008

TO: John Gunion, Chair
Graduate Council

FROM: André Knoesen, Chair
Program Review Committee



RE: Proposal to Improve the Status of Graduate Group Students Employed as
Teaching Assistants

The purpose of this memo is to describe several related problems that the Program Review Committee has recognized regarding the current Teaching Assistant practices and to recommend actions to remediate the problems.¹

Problem #1: TA positions are solely given to undergraduate departments. Those departments which also have a departmentally-based graduate program give the departmentally-based graduate students higher priority than affiliated graduate group students when assigning TAs. In addition, departmentally-based graduate programs commonly use expected TA positions over several years as part of funding packages when recruiting graduate students. This type of recruitment tool is not available to many Graduate Groups. It is a common practice that TA positions are promised to an incoming group of departmentally-based students several years in advance. These TA positions are not open to graduate group students until one or more of the departmentally-based students turn them down which is often at the last minute. Thus many graduate group students do not know from quarter to quarter whether they will be supported as a TA or not. There is a need for a mechanism which would enable graduate groups to offer their students TAs over time. This would give the Graduate Groups a recruitment tool which is not available to them at the current time and the graduate students in these programs a means to know how they will be supported over any given Academic Year.

Recommendation #1: We recommend to Graduate Council that they ask the Dean of Graduate Studies to work with the Provost, Vice Provost of Undergraduate Instruction, and the College Deans to find a mechanism which would give individual graduate groups a number of TAs for each academic year for their students. We also recommend that these TAs would be consistently available so that graduate groups can use them in recruitment packages for incoming students. Graduate groups would be expected to use the TA funds for students with skills clearly matched to departmental needs, coordinating placement in advance of making the awards.

¹ The issue emerged from discussions in PRC meetings. Professor Rose Kraft prepared a written response, which was then reviewed and commented on by PRC, and that resulted in this correspondence.

Problem #2: Graduate Group students report that they spend an inordinate amount of time making repeated ‘rounds’ of their contacts in departments, checking on the possibility of TA openings. These often come up irregularly and at the last minute.

Recommendation #2: We recommend to Graduate Council that they ask the Dean of Graduate Studies to work with the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Instruction, College Deans, and Departments to find a mechanism to centralize a timely listing of all TA positions across campus. This “clearinghouse” could be an on-line page where departments are mandated to post potential positions as soon as they know which classes will need a TA or TAs. It is further recommended that when possible departments list these positions for the academic year as soon as they know their TA funding for the year.

Problem #3: While as many as three quarters of graduate group students do serve as TAs, many of them several times, they report a high level of dissatisfaction with their training. The root of this problem occurs because most TA training is managed by the departments holding TA funding: when graduate group students do teach, they serve opportunistically in any one of many departments. Thus there is a need for a mechanism to offer consistent TA training opportunities to graduate group students.

Recommendation #3: We recommend to Graduate Council that they ask the Dean of Graduate Studies work with the Vice Provost of Undergraduate Instruction and the TRC to set up a mechanism for consistent TA training for graduate group students. This training could involve students from related Graduate Groups (e.g., Animal Behavior, Ecology, and Population Biology).