

AI Contracts Subcommittee 2019-2020 Final Report

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Subcommittee Overview:

The Associate Instructor Contracts subcommittee was created to review any nebulous elements of the UC Davis Associate Instructor policies in the Academic Personnel Manual (APM) in order to provide recommendations for improvements to these policies. This subcommittee grew out of last year's GSR/TA contracts subcommittee, which made several recommendations to improve equity for GSRs and TAs across campus. While we restricted our initial scope to those two positions, a growing number of committee members felt it important to turn our attention specifically to policies and practices regarding Associate Instructors, from ambiguous designation requirements to work hours.

Summary of Objectives:

In line with our goals for this academic year, the subcommittee completed three primary objectives:

First, we identified and met with the administrative staff who oversee AI policies. Second, we organized and hosted a focus group and accompanying survey to collect qualitative data on the AI student population. Third, and finally, we designed and administered a quantitative survey to collect demographic data and more precise responses based on the qualitative results of the focus group and earlier survey.

We break our findings into three further categories: First, changes desired and recommended by graduate students that pertain to the AI contract negotiated by the Union and are outside of the scope of this body. Second, changes recommended both by graduate students and also members of the UC Davis administration that pertain to AI institutional support mechanisms and practices, and thus could be developed into a UC Davis best practices document. And third, future directions for this committee.

Meetings with Administration:

In Fall quarter, Tara Caso and Sam Pizelo from our subcommittee met with Dr. Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, and Tracey Pereida, the Academic Human Resource Analyst in Graduate Studies. Ellen and Tracey are the two staff in charge of Associate Instructor policy in Graduate Studies. We were also put in touch with John King, director of the office of research in Graduate Studies, but were unable to successfully contact him for this academic year.

Our meeting with Dr. Hartigan-O'Connor is summarized as follows:

- 1) It became clear that improving support for TA/GSR/AI positions is a current priority of Graduate Studies and Academic Affairs. This suggests an avenue for future collaboration for our subcommittee.
- 2) Because definitions for AI positions are set by the UC Office of the President (UCOP), Dr. Hartigan-O'Connor recommended we contact both the research and the policy arms of the UCOP for more information on the history and future of AI policy.
- 3) Each UC administration has its own Graduate Studies division, and the use of AI positions is not standardized across campuses. Potential future changes might already be modeled on different campuses.
- 4) Dr. Hartigan-O'Connor delineated between AI contracts on the one hand and AI institutional support mechanisms and practices on the other. She specifically mentioned that she is interested in developing best practices for the latter, which suggests a future objective of this subcommittee.

Our meeting with Tracey Pereida is summarized as follows:

- 1) After investigation, Tracey concluded that Graduate Studies does not systematically collect demographic data on AIs. This became one of the primary objectives of our end-of-year quantitative survey (see below). Tracey estimated that there are approximately 150 AIs employed each quarter, with 90% of them being hired by the College of Letters and Sciences.
- 2) All non-contractually negotiated information regarding the AI position is covered in the Academic Personnel Manual (APM). Any future policy changes will likely be in dialogue with this manual.

AI Focus Group:

The subcommittee set out to gather qualitative data to inform subsequent survey design. In consultation with subcommittee members, particularly Amanda Lawrence and Sam Pizelo, Jill Huynh and Breanne Weber prepared open-ended focus group discussion questions to help identify topical areas of concern. Whether or not students attended the focus group, they were able to provide comments on the Google RSVP and Input Form.

The focus group was advertised via social media (e.g., Chancellor May's Twitter account and UC Davis Graduate Studies' Facebook page), email (e.g., Graduate Student Association's Weekly Announcements and Graduate Coordinator listserv), Slack (e.g., CGPSA and UC Davis workspaces), and word of mouth.

Thirteen individuals completed the Google RSVP and Input Form, which provided insight both for our eventual quantitative survey, and also into the lack of participation in the focus group itself. The survey demographics matched the distribution suggested by Tracey Pereida. The substantive feedback suggested the following:

First, we had not established a trust relationship with graduate students, who were wary of our intentions. This appeared to be the largest driver for non-participation in the focus group. We

addressed this concern more overtly in our end-of-year quantitative survey, and were able to obtain a much higher buy-in from graduate students.

Second, all survey respondents specifically highlighted financial concerns. The issues raised in the survey were as follows: The gap between Summer and Academic Year AI pay, growing discrepancy between pay scales and cost of living in Davis and the surrounding areas, lack of mentorship and training, lack of online resources regarding AI positions, the unique difficulties facing international students serving as AIs, the lax regulations around class size restrictions, and the disproportionate increase in workload compared with the modest increase in pay for AI positions.

End of Year Quantitative Survey:

Our subcommittee efforts culminated in a widely disseminated quantitative survey intended to provide more reliable demographic information to Graduate Studies to better serve the unique needs of AIs as well as actionable priorities for future policy changes and Best Practices. The construction, dissemination, and preliminary descriptive analysis of this survey were led by Amanda Lawrence, with assistance from Jill Huynh, Breanne Weber, Slande Erole, and Sam Pizelo.

The survey was advertised on the GSA weekly email, and was disseminated by the department administrators listserv. The Office of the Chancellor provided \$1,000 in funds to randomly award fifty different respondents with \$20 Amazon gift cards.

The modest financial incentive of the gift cards, in addition to adjustments to our messaging, resulted in a much higher level of participation in this final survey, and makes us optimistic for further engagement by AIs in the future. 124 graduate students opened the survey, and 110 answered at least one question. 99 students completed the entire survey.

Of the 110 students who answered at least one question, 107 were doctoral students and 3 were Master's students. 109 answered what program they're in; 12 first year, 14 second year, 10 third year, 31 fourth year, and 42 fifth year or beyond. 109 answered the advanced to candidacy question: 31 hadn't, 77 had, and one was NA. 108 answered the international status question; 23 said yes. 108 answered what their affiliation was: 15 for CAES, 4 for CBS, 3 for CoE, 81 for CLS, 2 SoEd, 3 other. 106 answered the gender question: 65 women, 38 men, and three who marked other (one person wrote in non-binary). 109 answered the first-gen status question: 75 said no, 32 said yes, and 2 weren't sure. 109 answered whether they had held an AI position: 79 said yes, 5 said no but had applied, and 25 said no but interested in doing so in the future.

While an exhaustive summary of the results of the survey exceeds the scope of our subcommittee for this school year due to COVID-19 shutdowns, future analyses will be based on the topics covered in the survey questions. These topics include: Educational status; college affiliation; gender, race, disability, and first-generation demographics; level of prior involvement with AI positions; training, mentorship, and institutional support for said position;

workload estimates; level of satisfaction with AI teaching experience and interest in future involvement.

Findings and Future Directions:

While the primary difficulty graduate students mentioned with the AI position – financial compensation – is contractually negotiated and outside the scope of this subcommittee, we have identified a number of related concerns that could help improve conditions among AI instructors: Lack of online resources, lack of training and mentorship, potential abuse of lack of administrative regulations around workload, lack of international student support, and lack of administrative standards around class sizes. We have also identified an area of concern in the lack of standardized definition of the AI position at the UC Davis campus level, and lack of institutional safeguards ensuring a commensurability between AI duties and the AI position designation.

Our subcommittee recommends a centralized online resource page through Graduate Studies for AI information and resources. In addition, we recommend, as Dr. Hartigan-O'Connor suggested, that Best Practices be outlined for the remaining concerns. The goals of these Best Practices should include university-wide definitions, standards and expectations for the AI role, and a clearly elaborated system of handling workplace concerns. As mentioned earlier, improving TA/GSR/AI conditions is an ongoing priority both for Graduate Studies and Academic Affairs, so this subcommittee looks forward to areas for future collaboration with these offices.

Looking ahead to the next academic year, this subcommittee intends to: Analyze, interpret, and summarize the quantitative survey responses and present on our findings to Graduate Studies and the Office of the Chancellor in Fall Quarter in the service of informing the Best Practices document recommended by Dr. Hartigan-O'Connor; reach out to the UCOP for definitions and history behind the AI position; contact various other UC campuses for alternative models of the AI position; and finally, assist Graduate Studies in the consolidation of AI resources. We want to thank the Office of the Chancellor, Slande Erole (GSADC), and the other subcommittees in the CGPSA for their active support.