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# Graduate Policy Committee

**Request the following edits to provide additional clarification**

(All changes are reflected in red)

## University-Wide Standards for Graduate Teaching Assistants at Florida State University

These are University-wide standards that any graduate student must meet prior to assuming one of the various instructional roles. These are meant to be university-wide minimum standards; departments may adopt additional or more stringent standards. Programs that do not use graduate students in instructional roles would not be affected by these standards. They are meant to cover the formal use of graduate teaching assistants (TAs) in course instruction. Extra help sessions and voluntary tutorials in addition to regular class meetings would not normally fall under these requirements. The companion policy, University-wide Standards for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants at Florida State University details the policies that apply to the use of undergraduates as TAs.

## Certification of General Teaching Competence

Each semester in accordance with guidelines of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and the standards outlined in the following sections, the Academic Dean of each College is required to certify in writing to the Dean of The Graduate School (or designee) that each graduate student who serves as a TA in the classroom or online is competent to teach and for international graduate teaching assistants (ITAs), that they are also competent to teach in spoken English. (See SACSCOC statement below.)

**Note:** Colleges/units need to validate that each TA is serving their designated instructional assignment in the classroom before certifying to the Dean of The Graduate School (or designee) that the TA certification process is complete. TAs serving as the instructor of record (IOR) for an undergraduate-level course need to be qualified to serve in this role prior to the start of the semester, appointed under the correct job code (M9184), and assigned to the course in Student Central as IOR. Students who do not meet the criteria for

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certification should not be appointed as a TA, serve as the IOR for any undergraduate-level course, or receive access to a course management site.

The University monitors faculty teaching loads, class sizes, and TA usage on a regular basis. As such, it is vital that all instructional assignments are properly documented for all students.

## General

Administrative responsibility for the teaching assignment rests within the department/unit in which the student is employed as a graduate TA. Each department/unit is responsible for providing orientation, training, supervision, and evaluation of its graduate student TAs, and for assigning a faculty member to work closely with the individual graduate student to assist the student in carrying out teaching responsibilities and to facilitate professional development. There should be a departmental or unit orientation for TAs prior to beginning their teaching responsibilities. It is also required that all TAs attend the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT), or department/unit equivalent training that has been pre-approved as such by the Graduate School, before beginning their teaching responsibilities. The Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs from CAT is offered each semester/term (Spring, Summer, and Fall). More information on this training can be found here:

<https://teaching.fsu.edu/required-training/>

It is recommended that each program has a discipline-specific teaching manual for its graduate TAs.

## Graduate Assistantship Job Code

To monitor compliance with university policies and Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) requirements, it is imperative that the proper appointment classifications be used for graduate TAs. It is the responsibility of departments/units that employ graduate teaching assistants to establish the appropriate job code according to teaching responsibility. The Graduate School and the Human Resources Office will verify the requirements for each classification and are the offices to contact if there are any questions. Job codes to be used for graduate students can be accessed

at <https://hr.fsu.edu/sites/g/files/upcbnu2186/files/PDF/OPSJobCodes.pdf>.

**Note:** The university's Conflict of Interest policy applies to all teaching assistants.

Generally, job codes should be assigned as described here:

- Categories 1 and 2:
  - W9185 Graduate Assistant (Teaching) – Stipend (FLSA Exempt)

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This Graduate Assistant shall be classified as a degree-seeking graduate student who assists in the teaching function but is not the IOR and does not have primary responsibility for teaching. The appointee must be fully admitted to and meet the requirements of the University, be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, and be under the supervision of a faculty member. Examples: tutors, recitation leaders, laboratory supervisors, assistants to faculty instructors; when assigned to a standalone undergraduate course, duties may include grading of undergraduate-level work.

- Categories 3 and 4:
  - M9184 Graduate Teaching Assistant – Stipend (FLSA Exempt)

This Graduate Teaching Assistant shall be classified as a degree-seeking graduate student and performs primary teaching duties as the IOR that are related to that student's academic program. For Category 3, appointees must have at least eighteen (18) graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline. For Category 4, appointees must have a master's degree or at least thirty (30) hours of graduate coursework in the teaching discipline. The appointee must be admitted to and meet the requirements of the University, be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, and be under the supervision of an appropriate faculty member. Example: A graduate student having full instructional responsibilities for a credit class as IOR.

- Category 5:
  - M9183 Graduate Teaching Associate (Teaching) – Stipend (FLSA Exempt)

This Graduate Teaching Associate shall be classified as a degree-seeking graduate student who has a master's degree in the teaching discipline, or at least eighteen (18) graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline and assists in the teaching function of a graduate course or co-listed course (4000/5000; 4000/6000), but is not the IOR, PI, or Co-PI. The appointee must be fully admitted to and meet the requirements of the University, be fully admitted to a graduate degree program, and be under the supervision of a faculty member. Examples include: For graduate-level or co-listed courses, tutors, recitation leaders, laboratory supervisors, assistants to faculty instructors, or comparable roles. Limited grading and instruction of graduate students as described under "Description of Duties" are permitted as long as a supervising faculty member retains final authority over grades and provides supervision of instructional content. Category 5 Graduate Teaching Associates may not take on the lead instructor role of a graduate or co-listed course.

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## Description of Duties and Minimum Requirements for Different Categories of Instruction

**Category 1. Duties:** This category may include a variety of duties for undergraduate-level courses. TA responsibilities cannot involve routine direct contact with a group of undergraduate students in face-to-face or online instructional support roles. Limited one-to-one engagement (e.g., office hours) is permissible. Examples of appropriate tasks include grading of multiple-choice type assignments, the setup of laboratory demonstrations, and clerical course management tasks. If routine instructional contact with a group of undergraduates is expected, then the TA must meet the English language competency standard required for a Category 2 appointment.

Required qualifications and training:

- Program-specific guidelines for the specific duties
- Undergraduate degree in discipline or related field
- Some graduate work completed or enrolled in
- Must successfully complete all requirements for Module 1 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) before the commencement of one's TA duties. Module 1 includes required training on the Sexual Harassment Policy, Academic Honor Policy and the Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Module 1 also includes training in the use of Course Management System (CMS) for instruction, time management for TAs, and interacting professionally with one's students. Equivalent preparation offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School) may be substituted for Module 1 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs, and this alternative must include training in the specific policies noted above.
- Supervision by a faculty member in the teaching discipline
- Planned and periodic evaluations of the TA

**Category 2. Duties:** For assignment to undergraduate courses, this category includes a variety of duties (e.g., grading of undergraduate-level work; tutoring; proctoring of computerized exams and laboratories; assisting with or leading laboratory, recitation, or discussion sections; or assisting students with software or equipment use). When grading undergraduate-level work performed by graduate students, potential conflict of interest or grading within the programmatic cohort (as defined in Category 5) should be avoided. Any anticipated grading within the programmatic cohort must be reported to the Academic Dean's Office at the beginning of the semester. This category assumes a greater degree of interaction with undergraduate students than Category 1 and thus, requires a higher level of competency in spoken English.

A Category 2 TA may provide assistance in graduate-level or co-listed courses (4000/5000 or 4000/6000 combined courses). Examples of appropriate tasks for Category 2 TAs in

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graduate-level or co-listed courses include setting up laboratory demonstrations, proctoring exams, moderating a discussion board, distributing assignments, preparing class materials/presentations/visual aids, taking attendance, or recording questions and responses in class, recording lectures, assisting students with software or equipment use, other clerical tasks, and grading of undergraduate-level work. No grading or comparable assessment of graduate-level work for graduate-level credit, and instruction of content not previously introduced by the IOR may be performed by Category 2 TAs assigned to graduate-level or co-listed courses.

Required qualifications and training:

- Program specific guidelines for the specific duties
- Undergraduate degree in discipline or related field
- Some graduate work completed or enrolled in
- Must successfully complete all requirements for Module 1 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) before the commencement of one's teaching duties. Module 1 includes required training on the Sexual Harassment Policy, Academic Honor Policy and FERPA. Module 1 also includes training in the use of the CMS for instruction, time management for TAs, and interacting professionally with one's students. Equivalent preparation offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School) may be substituted for Module 1 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs, and this alternative must include training in the specific policies noted above.
- Supervision by a faculty member in the teaching discipline
- Planned periodic evaluations of the TA

**Note:** The distinction of Categories 1 and 2 recognizes that the extent of interaction with undergraduates, and thus the necessary spoken English competency of the TA, varies across disciplines though the position title is the same.

**Note:** Regarding Category 3 and 4 Appointments, these types presume the graduate TA is the IOR for an undergraduate course only (1000-4000 course level, no co-listed courses). The policy forbids a graduate student from being the IOR or taking on the lead instructor role for a graduate course or co-listed course. Units may apply to the Graduate School for exceptions to this rule. When grading undergraduate-level work performed by graduate students registered in undergraduate courses, potential grading within a programmatic cohort (as defined in Category 5) should be avoided. Any anticipated grading within a programmatic cohort must be reported to the Academic Dean's Office at the beginning of the semester.

**Category 3. Duties:** Instructor of record in lower-level undergraduate courses (1000–2000 level).

Required qualifications and training:

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- A minimum of eighteen (18) hours of graduate coursework in the teaching discipline
- Must successfully complete all requirements for Modules 1 and 2 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) before the commencement of one's teaching duties or an equivalent offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School).
- Modules 1 and 2 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs address the following policies which are required for this category: Sexual Harassment Policy, Academic Honor Policy, FERPA, American with Disabilities Act (ADA), Grading Policies, Textbook Adoption Procedure Policy, Syllabus Policy, Class Attendance Policy, Final Exam Policy, Copyright Law Regulations (Copyright Revision Act of 1976 "fair use"), and Course Evaluation Policy. Modules 1 and 2 also include training in a number of topics that are of value to TAs, e.g. the use of the CMS for instruction, time management for TAs, interacting professionally with one's students, dealing with distressed students, diversity in the classroom, grading and assessment.

**Note:** Alternative "equivalent training" that is provided by an academic unit must include training in the specific policies indicated above.

- Student participation in a "teaching in the discipline" course or equivalent academic unit orientation
- Direct supervision by a faculty member in the teaching discipline
- Planned and periodic evaluations of the TA

**Category 4. Duties:** Instructor of record in upper-level undergraduate courses (3000–4000 level).

Required qualifications and training:

- Master's degree or at least thirty (30) hours of graduate coursework in the teaching discipline
- Must successfully complete all requirements for Modules 1 and 2 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) before the commencement of one's teaching duties or an equivalent offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School).
- Modules 1 and 2 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs address the following policies which are required for this category: Sexual Harassment Policy, Academic Honor Policy, FERPA, ADA, Grading Policies, Textbook Adoption Procedure Policy, Syllabus Policy, Class Attendance Policy, Final Exam Policy, Copyright Law Regulations (Copyright Revision Act of 1976 "fair use"), and Course Evaluation Policy. Modules 1 and 2 also include training in a number of topics that are of value to TAs, e.g. the use of the CMS for instruction, time management for

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TAs, interacting professionally with one's students, dealing with distressed students, diversity in the classroom, grading and assessment.

**Note:** Alternative "equivalent training" that is provided by an academic unit must include training in the specific policies indicated above.

- Student participation in a "teaching in the discipline" course or equivalent academic unit orientation
- Direct supervision by a faculty member in the teaching discipline
- Planned and periodic evaluations of the TA

**Category 5. Duties:** Providing assistance to lead instructors of graduate-level or co-listed courses. In addition to duties described for Category 2 TAs, Category 5 TAs may perform limited grading and instruction. Grading is supervised by the IOR and should be based on faculty-created criteria (e.g. rubrics, point-breakdowns, sample solutions, etc.). Final assignment of grades is reserved for the IOR.

Category 5 TAs must defer to the IOR for all final decisions. When interacting with students, Category 5 TAs should communicate their support role to the students enrolled. They should explain that grading is based on faculty-provided criteria, is reviewed by the IOR, and can be discussed with the IOR.

Category 5 TAs may provide limited instruction in graduate-level and co-listed courses. In addition to reviewing material previously introduced by the IOR, Category 5 TAs may present new material on their own in rare instances, and only after discussing the planned lecture with the IOR first. They may present new material several times throughout the semester if the supervising faculty member is in attendance at each of these sessions. At a minimum, a super-majority of class sessions that introduce new material should be led by the IOR.

Category 5 TAs may not assign final course grades, but may assign grades on daily work, quizzes, laboratory participation, etc. Category 5 TAs may not develop course material unless it is in direct consultation with and review from the IOR. Furthermore, Category 5 TAs may not grade students who fall under the university's Conflict of Interest policy or within the TA's programmatic cohort. For the purposes of this policy, a TA's programmatic cohort is defined as the group of graduate students in the unit where the TA is pursuing a degree or certificate who are enrolled in many or most of the same courses as the TA within the same times frame as the TA. Units must ensure that no conflict of interest or no grading within their programmatic cohort will exist.

Required qualifications and training:

- Minimum of eighteen (18) hours of graduate coursework in the teaching discipline
- Must successfully complete all requirements Modules 1,2, and 3 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs sponsored by the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) the commencement of one's teaching duties or an

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equivalent offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School).

- Modules 1,2, and 3 of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs address the following policies which are required for this category: Sexual Harassment Policy, Academic Honor Policy, FERPA, ADA, Grading Policies, Textbook Adoption Procedure Policy, Syllabus Policy, Class Attendance Policy, Final Exam Policy, Copyright Law Regulations (Copyright Revision Act of 1976 "fair use"), and Course Evaluation Policy. Modules 1,2, and 3 also include training in a number of topics that are of value to TAs, e.g. the use of the CMS for instruction, time management for TAs, interacting professionally with one's students, dealing with distressed students, diversity in the classroom, grading and assessment.

**Note:** Alternative "equivalent training" that is provided by an academic unit must include training in the specific policies indicated above.

- Student participation in the Category 5 TA Training; must complete Module 1 and 2 prior to the semester, and Module 3 either prior to or during the semester of a student's first Category 5 assignment. The training covers, among other topics, potential conflict of interest situations and how to resolve them, navigating professional and student roles within the same program, and more.
- Direct supervision by a faculty member in the teaching discipline
- Planned and periodic evaluations of the TA

## Certification of Spoken English for Graduate Teaching Assistants

As noted above, Academic Deans are required to certify to the Dean of The Graduate School (or designee) that the TAs in the college are competent to teach. This statement should also include certification that all graduate TAs whose native language is not English are competent to teach in spoken English.

All international graduate students who are not native speakers of English, and who are going to be TAs, should take the SPEAK test when they arrive on campus (as noted below, students who scored 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the IBTOEFL may be exempted from taking the SPEAK test). The Center for Intensive English Studies (CIES) administers and scores the SPEAK test, CIES also offers courses in spoken English (EAP courses). The SPEAK test is administered several times in the week(s) prior to the beginning of each semester, and the scores are available within three to four days of the date the test is administered. Scheduling and registration information can be found at <https://cies.fsu.edu/programs/english-academic-purposes/speak-exam-information>. Departments/units are urged to take advantage of this opportunity to receive an initial estimate of speaking ability. In addition, the SPEAK is routinely administered as an end-of-term evaluation for students enrolled in EAP courses. TAs not enrolled in EAP courses may



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also take the test at that time. Course offerings, as well as test dates for SPEAK tests, are distributed periodically to departments via e-mail to TA coordinators. This information is also available on the CIES Web site at <https://cies.fsu.edu/programs/eap>.

The standards for certification of spoken English are as follows:

- A score of 50 or higher on the SPEAK test, or 26 or higher on the speaking portion of the IBTOEFL, certifies a student to serve in all categories.
- A score of at least 40 on the SPEAK test is acceptable for a TA appointed in Category 1. Appointment in this category is appropriate if there is no or limited direct contact with undergraduate students e.g., is responsible for grading tests and/or only providing direct support to an instructor. If there is to be any routine direct communication with a group of undergraduate students whether face-to-face or online, the higher standard applies. Limited one-to-one engagement e.g., office hours is permissible.
  - A score of 45 on SPEAK, or 23-24 on the Speaking section of TOEFL iBT, certifies a TA to serve in Categories 1; and in Category 2 for up to two semesters if also concurrently enrolled in an appropriate EAP course(s). If, by the end of these two semesters, the student's skills have not improved sufficiently to achieve a score of 50 on the SPEAK exam, the student will be eligible to teach only in Category 1. The student will be allowed to continue to serve in Category 2 or serve as IOR in Category 3–4 by meeting at least one of the following two criteria:
    - Achieve a score of 50 on SPEAK. Enroll in Advanced Spoken English for ITAs (EAP 5835) and score 90 or better in the course.
  - Student's scoring 40 or below on SPEAK should enroll in the appropriate EAP course if the goal is to serve in Categories 2-4. Once a 45 on SPEAK is achieved such a student will be certified to serve in Category 2 for up to two semesters if also concurrently enrolled in an appropriate CIES English language course(s). If, by the end of these two semesters, the student's skills have not improved sufficiently to achieve a score of 50 on the SPEAK exam, the student will be eligible to serve only in Category 1. The student will only be allowed to continue to serve in Category 2– or serve as IOR in Categories 3-4 by meeting at least one of the following two criteria:
    - Achieve a score of 50 on SPEAK. Enroll in Advanced Spoken English for ITAs (EAP 5835) and score 90 or better in the course.
  - Students serving in Category 5 must achieve a score of 50 on the SPEAK exam before assuming their duties or score a 90 or better in the Advanced Spoken English for ITAs course (EAB5835) offered by CIES.

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- The standard for international students serving as ITAs in Modern Language and Linguistics is 45 (SPEAK) or 23 (TOEFL) if the student is teaching a course in their native language.

## Exceptions

If a new or existing graduate student is unable, due to extenuating circumstances, to complete the required modules of the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs prior to commencing their first semester of being a TA, then the department/unit and academic dean's office may petition the Graduate School for an exception. If the exception is determined to be acceptable, then the student must complete the online required policy modules for their designated TA assignment that are available through CAT or undergo equivalent preparation offered by the academic unit (that has been approved by the Graduate School).

In unique instances, a Department Chair or Dean may appeal the application of these standards by submitting a request to the Dean of The Graduate School (or designee).

## Equivalent Previous Experience and Emergencies

Except for the minimum of 18 hours of graduate coursework in the teaching discipline for primary instruction, and in accordance with guidelines provided by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), the following options will be available to deal with special circumstances:

- A graduate student who through previous preparation or teaching experience has demonstrated knowledge and strong teaching skills can be exempt from some of the requirements, as appropriate, by certification of the program chair.
- In an emergency, a department/unit may appoint a graduate TA who has not met all the University-wide requirements for that category of appointment if there is an assurance that the student will meet the requirements by the end of the semester/term in which the student is teaching.

## Instructor of Record (IOR) Policy

FSU defines the "Instructor of Record" as the individual designated by the academic unit as responsible for a course, including developing its design, delivery, assignments, and assessments. All IORs, regardless of rank or type, must meet the appropriate standards for credentials and appointment. (FSU Policy 3A-6)

Normal policy forbids graduate students from serving as an IOR and teaching a graduate course. This includes co-listed undergraduate/graduate sections. Exceptions can be made by requesting approval from the Vice President for Faculty Development and Advancement

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through the Dean of the Graduate School. Please refer to FSU's Faculty Handbook (Section 5, under Graduate Teaching Status) for more information on this.

## Graduate Students Appointed as Adjuncts

Any graduate student, regardless of job code under which they are appointed, must complete the minimum training appropriate for the level of course and instructional role.

Under unique and extenuating circumstances, an active graduate student (not enrolled in full-time hours) may be approved by their unit and HR to be appointed as an adjunct. If an active graduate student is approved by their unit and HR to be appointed as an adjunct and has not completed the Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs through CAT, then such trainings (Modules 1, 2 and 3) will be required to be completed prior to their first semester of being an adjunct.

## SACS Statement

Graduate Teaching Assistants: master's degree in the teaching discipline or eighteen graduate semester hours in the teaching discipline, direct supervision by a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, regular in-service training, and planned and periodic evaluations. [Reference: Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACSCOC); Commission guidelines "Faculty Credentials" (Adopted Dec. 2006)].

## Sexual Harassment, Academic Honor Policy, and FERPA Policies and Equivalency

University policy on sexual harassment training is provided by the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance (EOC) within Human Resources (<https://www.hr.fsu.edu/>), the Academic Honor Policy training is offered by the Office of the Vice President of Faculty Development and Advancement (<https://fda.fsu.edu/>), and the FERPA training is offered by the Office of the University Registrar (<https://registrar.fsu.edu/>). These offices provide training during all Essential Policies and Practices Training for TAs instances.

## Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT)

The Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) supports and complements departmental/unit TA training programs. To prepare TAs for immediate undergraduate classroom responsibilities, CAT offers online modules each semester. CAT also offers a wide variety of other services to support and assist graduate students in learning about best practices in teaching and learning, including year-round teaching workshops, reading groups, peer teaching observations, a teaching newsletter, office hours, the CAT Teaching Associate program and an online training series the "Basics of Teaching @ FSU.") CAT

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also highlights and rewards graduate student TAs whose performance is extraordinary with the annual university-wide Outstanding Teaching Assistant Awards (OTAA) program, and by highlighting TA excellence in social media posts and the teaching newsletter. In addition, CAT also assists departments/unit in developing TA departmental/unit training programs.

## Approval of Equivalent Training

The Graduate School is responsible for collating and approving the equivalent training options provided by academic programs and entering the information into an online database to facilitate the certification of graduate teaching assistants each semester.