

# Guidelines for Mentoring Teaching and Research Assistants in the Graduate School

## 1. Remember that TAs and RAs are Students First

Loyola University Chicago categorizes Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants as Student Trainees, not as Student Employees or Student Workers.

*Professional Development:* The rationale for supporting teaching and research assistants is centered on the role that the experience plays in the graduate student's professional and educational development. Mentorship of a TA or RA is centered on the student not simply completing assigned tasks but gaining an understanding of and engagement in the broader rationale for, design of, and execution of the instructional activity or research project. Manage the tension of your seniority and supervision with the mutual goal of the student's trajectory towards independence and autonomy.

*Assistantship Hours and Period of Appointment:* A full-time RA or TA position should average between 16 and 19.5 hours per week. Hours per week may vary due to the precise nature of the position but it cannot exceed an average of 19.5 hours per week over the course of the sixteen weeks of the semester, excepting University holidays. There may be exceptional circumstances where graduate assistantship activities must be conducted during University holidays/closures and/or immediately prior to or after the end of a semester/session and those tasks cannot be delegated to other individuals. In such circumstances, the equivalent amount of compensatory time away from the assistantship position on a non-holiday weekday during the semester/session must be arranged in exchange. During the academic semester, faculty mentors should recognize and respect that graduate students have other obligations (coursework, research, and wellness, for example) in addition to their role as a RA or TA.

*Accommodations:* The status of TAs and RAs as Student Trainees has consequences for any graduate student with disabilities. All TAs and RAs with disabilities should work with the Student Accessibility Center to request reasonable accommodations for their role as a TA or RA that will be shared with you as their mentor. Faculty mentors must respect those reasonable accommodations. Faculty mentors are not in a position to determine what qualifies as a disability requiring accommodation and they should not request documentation and/or cannot seek information about the disability status of a RA or TA.

## 2. Set expectations

You and the TA/RA should be clear on preferred modes of communication (telephone, meeting, email, etc.) as well as ideal response times for both of you. Make sure you let the student know how you would like to be informed of unplanned absences due to illness or emergency and how you will be informing them likewise when you will not be present.

You should be clear about your preferred style of communication. Do you prefer a more formal communication style with your trainees? Make that clear to them rather than allowing resentment to build if they implement another style of communication. They need to know how to communicate in many styles, and this is an opportunity for them to build on that.

If practical, schedule regular meetings, but if a regular meeting schedule does not work at least make sure that there are planned check-ins throughout the semester.

A semester review form is available at the end of this document. At the start of the semester, read the document with the TA or RA, answer any questions, and clarify as needed so that everyone is on the same page. Upon completion of the semester review form, please share and discuss the review with the TA or RA.

Faculty mentors are expected to engage in assessment of and provide feedback to TAs and RAs of their performance throughout the semester. Be clear at the start of the semester/year how and when this process will take place.

Remember that the process of negotiating expectations not only helps you to have a productive relationship with your TA or RA, but it also teaches them how to have similar conversations as they proceed towards their professional goals.

### 3. Share University resources

Taking on the position of a Research Assistant or Teaching Assistant entails a new set of responsibilities for graduate students, often involving authority over undergraduate students. Be sure to orient TAs and RAs to the University resources available to them in this role, including pedagogical and/or research support and the offices and services available to undergraduate students so that a RA or TA can share with undergraduate students in their class or lab as needed. We have posted a list of relevant University resources on our website at

<https://www.luc.edu/gradschool/currentstudents/orientation/>.

### 4. Support Graduate Students in Crisis

If you become aware that the RA or TA is experiencing a crisis, a faculty mentor is expected to ensure that the graduate student is knowledgeable of and has access to the appropriate resources. Consult with the Graduate Program Director or reach out to the Dean of Students' Office for guidance and direction. You are obligated [to report Title IX violations](#) as a responsible campus partner.