

**Report on funded graduate student contractual issues
within the Department of Arts Administration, Education and Policy**

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Summary

The purpose of this report is to give an overview of complaints that have been reported to both the Council of Graduate Students (CGS) and the University Senate Graduate Compensations and Benefits Committee (GCBC) regarding a policy of assigning mixed appointments to funded graduate students in the Dept of Arts Administration, Education, and Policy (AAEP). This policy will be analyzed and recommendations made based on the findings. This report is supported by Arts Priori, the internal departmental student group of AAEP, as well as CGS. Student testimonials are included at the end of the report.

Background

The issue itself surrounds a policy of requiring all funded GTAs to have 5hrs of the 20hr (50% FTE) work requirement be assigned to a faculty member or a service activity outside of the primary contractual job description. Most often this appears to take the guise of a GTA student being assigned as a research assistant to a specific professor, but can also be in the form of an administrative position, student leadership position, or no requirement at all.

CGS has been fielding complaints about this policy since the Spring of 2014. The complaints originate from both Art Education and Arts Policy/Administration students. The complaints are varied and diverse, often emotional, but some reoccurring themes can be noted.

Primary among these are the following areas of concern:

-Quality of Undergrad teaching being affected

- Time away from teaching prep reduces quality instruction

-Quality of individual Graduate Student research and academics being affected

- Time spent teaching as an instructor and simultaneously as a research assistant reduces time able to be spent on own work, publishing, internships, grant writing, conference prep, etc.

- Students still put in the time to teach at a high level, so the 5hr requirement often results in working more than 20hrs per week

-Serious Health and Wellness Concerns

- Overworked and underpaid graduate students are not healthy students

- Concerns regarding mental health vs workload

-Inequitable distribution of duties within dept and between MA/PhD students

- Some student held to very high standard and large workloads in relation to their 5 hr assignment, others able to avoid the requirement altogether
- MA students report a higher level of stress surrounding teaching, and less experience compared to PhD, therefore require more prep time

-Arbitrary assignments

- Lack of clarity regarding how assignments are made and if students have any influence over assignment
- No real pattern to assignment vs class level (i.e. PhD student assigned light administrative work vs MA student assigned as research assistant)

-Assignment to faculty member outside of academic discipline

- Result is little to no perceived benefit for the student
- Possible lower quality of research for the faculty member
- Students have to spent more time to be effective researching outside of discipline, but this additional time is reported to be not recognized by faculty.

-Possible favoritism

- There are notable assignments that require little or no effort
- Reports of this greatly affecting morale amongst students and toward faculty

-Feelings of becoming a personal assistant to a faculty member

- Numerous testimonials report inappropriate requests or lack of boundaries
- Students pulled between faculty member overseeing teaching assignment and faculty member assigned for research.

-Unreasonable or inappropriate expectations from faculty members

- ”Banking” hours for use later in the term or requiring students to make up hours not used earlier by faculty member
- Use of students as personal labor
- Requiring students to meet or work off campus with faculty member

-Lack of awareness by faculty members of all the many duties required of a GTA

- Unreasonable time restraints, meeting times, deadlines, etc
- Putting serving the faculty member over teaching or the student’s own schoolwork/research

Analysis

The executive committee of CGS and the delegate body, with support from Arts Priori, are all opposed to this 5 hr requirement for the following reasons:

1. There is/was no measurement of the time commitment required of GTAs prior to this 5hr policy addition. Adequate research into just how much time it takes to do the necessary duties of a GTA in AAEP is required before additional duties are written into contracts. Such data would necessarily need to take place over two semesters and the data shared with students before further steps taken.

2. Differing duties amongst GTAs are not being taken into consideration. A student that is the *instructor of record* for a writing class has a much larger time commitment than a GTA serving as a grader for a faculty member. However, all GTAs are being given the same additional requirement regardless of teaching load or class ranking.
3. It was reported at a recent AAEP faculty meeting that the 5hr requirement was instituted because it is being assumed that most depts require GTAs to teach two classes. Based on research from CGS, this is technically incorrect. Any student acting as an *instructor of record* is considered a 50% appointment across the University. Students acting as “graders,” however, do often *grade two sections of the same course* in other depts. This is an entirely appropriate level of workload. However, students acting as *instructors of record* in for two sections would rise to the level of a 75% appointment. There apparently is some confusion differentiating between these two levels of teaching, but instructors of record are currently suffering as a result.
4. AAEP is the only dept that CGS has been able to verify, over the past year, that has a requirement such as this 5hr policy. *No other dept has been identified that writes such a policy into GTA contracts at the University.* Therefore GTAs in AAEP are typically assigned a higher level of workload contractually than any other GTA on campus.
5. The current minimum stipend for GTAs is \$13,500 for a 9 month, 50% appointment. Data¹ provided to GCBC indicates that there are 4,539 current GA appointments on campus. Of that number 423 are paid \$13,500 exactly, and 429 are paid between \$13, 501 and \$13,999. The minimum GTA stipend for AAEP is \$13,689 and the mean is \$13,866. The mean for all GTAs in Arts and Sciences is \$16,666. The cost of living for Columbus over a 9 month period was approx \$16,000 in 2012. Therefore, GTAs in AAEP fall into roughly the bottom 15% of compensation for all funded graduate students at OSU and are paid below the cost of living for Columbus, but are being assigned additional duties/time commitments beyond the normal 50% appt of other GTAs.
6. Based on the number of complaints received, and the level of frustration being exhibited, it is likely that this policy is doing more harm than good. Students are reporting that they do not perceive a benefit from the current policy, either personally or for the dept as a whole, and there appears to be a communication breakdown between faculty and students.
7. Students feel that faculty have, at times, abused this policy and the students they oversee. It is unclear that any standard for use of students has been communicated to faculty and there is no clear pattern of expectations as a result. There is no obvious recourse for mediation for either faculty or students.

¹ All data in this section was provided by the Office of Human Resources, Office of Academic Affairs, and/or The Graduate School and will be distributed in an upcoming GCBC report.

8. Fear of retaliation is a repetitive theme reported by students.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the 5hr requirement cease immediately and be researched by faculty before any further expectation be placed on funded graduate students in AAEP.

The following guidelines are suggested;

-It is in the best interest of all involved that contracts become more explicit in the various expectations of duties required. The current typical contract that includes a 5hr requirement is too vague to cover all the possible permutations of what is being asked by student employees or provide guidelines for faculty supervision. Suggested remedies are listed below:

-GTAs serving as *instructors of record* is an appropriate level of workload to equal at least 20hrs, or a 50% appointment. It is the opinion of CGS that *no further work requirement should be placed on these students*. These students have however indicated a willingness to take on 10-15% more students to help generate more income for the dept. It has been stated by the Dean of Arts and Sciences that there is no cap generating from the College level that would block this from occurring. This is a generous offer that should help in planning to adjust to recent guidelines from Arts and Science that indicate a reduction of funded graduate students by 20% beginning in the 2015-16 year.

-GTA students serving as *graders* may appropriately do so for two sections of a class, so long as *no other outside research/administrative requirement be placed upon them*. (Consideration should be taken, however, for the number of students enrolled per section assignment) This policy will also help the dept adapt to the changing budgetary landscape regarding future GTA hires, as fewer GTAs ought to be able to grade for faculty in a greater number of classrooms as a result.

-GTA students serving as *graders* that the dept wishes to also use in a research or administrative capacity can do so appropriately, but *contracts must explicitly state duties* and it is suggested it may be best that these students report to a single faculty member. These appropriately should be broken up contractually based on duties, as well, into the appropriate category and FTE (i.e. 25% GTA and 25% GRA or GAA).

-If the dept otherwise wishes to have 50% FTE appointed GRA or GAAs, these ought to be hired in as such and duties explicitly stated in contracts.

-Training needs to take place with faculty regarding expectations in working with graduate students and the boundaries of supervision. There have been many negative stories related regarding how graduate students have been treated by faculty members that will not be iterated here for fear of identifying a particular student or faculty member.

However, going forward and in the worst of cases, CGS will be recommending these situations be forwarded directly to the Graduate School.

-It is also reasonable that funded graduate students in AAEP should expect to be held to the standards suggested in the the guidelines above and do so professionally. They will be expected to be efficient and dutiful in their contractual obligation as the budgetary climate continues to reduce funding for the dept. As future art educators and administrators, they also hold a responsibility to speak up for themselves and their fellow students when necessary, and to serve the dept with professionalism and the excellence we have come to expect from this program.

-Both students and faculty should familiarize themselves better with the Graduate School Handbook, which dictates all policies for graduate students.

<http://www.gradsch.osu.edu/graduate-school-handbook1.html>

I am hopeful that this report can help the dept transparently correct this issue with a positive outcome for all. In all my dealings with our students to date on this issue I have been incredibly impressed with their professionalism, tenacity, and willingness to adapt. I'd also point out that we would not have one of the best programs in the country if we did not have excellent faculty and students to produce that reputation. It is of utmost importance that all work together to maintain that reputation. I see no reason that this situation need continue on the negative trajectory it is currently on. I'd suggest that the faculty and staff take advantage of this moment to create an open dialogue with students, utilize this report to develop solutions, and move forward amicably.

Testimonials

Faculty hold a great deal of power over our students, a role that requires careful consideration, especially in a dept as small as AAEP. One constant, reoccurring theme in the complaints received was a fear of retaliation. I don't believe that this is the environment the dept intends to cultivate, but it is nonetheless, very real. Included in the following pages are excerpts of testimonials from students upset by the 5hr requirement in principal or as the result of a direct negative experience. They are anonymized due to this fear of retaliation, purposefully broken into parts for emphasis and additional confidentiality, and many were not able to be used due to identifying information contained within the complaint.

Editorial additions for clarity or context are marked with [brackets].

-This work did not benefit me in any way, and in fact took time away from the learning and researching that I came here to do in the first place

-Half way through the semester I was told that I "owed" 40 hours

-I do feel that the additional 5 hours of work beyond my GTA duties negatively impacts both my own personal studies and my teaching. I was assigned this appointment randomly and do not have a strong interest in either the content or format of my work.

-I often put teaching ahead of my studies because I feel a responsibility and obligation to my students. And of course showing up unprepared would be highly embarrassing, so I am make sacrifices in other areas of my life. Being assigned to work for a faculty member 5 hours a week can make preparing and grading even more complicated

-These meetings take 2-4 hours per week, and then this professor assigns me work to do during the rest of the week

-The professor I was assigned to was also one of my instructors. I felt very strongly that my work in the 5 hours affected my grade. If I emailed about a question regarding class the responses I got always included something about working the 5 hours.

-Expectations of the position are very unclear. I want to be helpful and professional in my workings with [X], but this TA relationship and additionally being a student of [X] is difficult to navigate and I am always fearful of not performing well because I do not know what is expected of me and it reflecting poorly on my career in the department

-I was not made aware that this would also include working for a professor 5 hours a week. I was asked to accept the GTA offer without a contract and without being offered a confirmed stipend because the budget was still pending. Had I known about the 5 hour requirement ahead of time I might have rethought my first semester course load.

-I was constantly accused of not working a full 5 hours

-The work I do is frequently disregarded, or the professor forgets what they had assigned me and asks me why I was not working on something else entirely.

-I also don't feel it is ethical to use a Graduate Teaching Assistant as a Research Assistant. They are different positions with different skills sets.

-The department allows students to forgo the 5 hour teaching requirement if they take on leadership roles within departmental student organizations. This has lead to several people taking on positions for the sole purpose of getting out of their 5 hours of work, which causes ineffective student organizations.

-Given that teaching can easily consume the 20+ hours per week, the 5 hours per week I spend assisting a professor is essentially unpaid and unrecognized, but yet still mandatory.

-I feel that the work I am doing is a position that should be filled by a trained, paid [research] employee with an actual interest and investment in the work. As a student

with a heavy course-load and the sole instructor of my class, I have a lot of work to handle, and the additional 5 hours just tips the load into being dangerously overworked.

-I am frequently stuck in the position of putting aside reading for my own classes to work on this professor's research because I feel more personally accountable for this work. After all, I would have to meet one on one with this professor and tell them that I ignored my contractual obligation for the week. This is a professor that I may also be taking a class with, or have on my thesis committee.

-It did not help my mental to health to hear friends talking about extent of their duties such as, "taking attendance," and carrying supplies to class for their teacher. Yes, they completed their 5 hours, but the mental toll was not the same as mine.

-...see students assigned to the front desk for only 2-3 hours a week, doing their homework, while I work diligently to aid the professor I am assigned to at 5 hours a week.

-Lastly, I do not feel that there is atmosphere within the department that allows students to speak up about these concerns. Many students are afraid of retribution such as being given the most tedious 5 hour assignment for voicing their concerns.

-Many of us have little/no experience with the subject matter we are teaching before arriving on campus, which can be incredibly nerve-wracking. To compensate I spend hours trying to learn about various topics, so I can appear knowledgeable and answer any unexpected questions that come up. Even though I have taught the class several times I am still constantly reevaluating and updating my lesson plans and assignments based on student feedback and knowledge I have made the effort to acquire. I feel strongly that teaching is a 20 hour a week commitment and the 5 hour requirement detracts from that.

-I eventually had to put my foot down and explain that I am a student first, an instructor second, and that the 5 hours were my last priority.

-Faculty do not seem to understand the heavy workload we already have, that our positions [re: the 5hrs] are ones that do not have any distinguishable benefit to us as learners or teachers, that our positions vary widely in the amount of work required and our treatment by the faculty, and that the 5 hour system seems like a way for the department to exploit the students.

-I have rearranged my class schedule to avoid ever taking a class with this instructor ever again because this experience was so bad.

-The distribution of 5 hour assignments is also inequitable. Some students are assigned to faculty members who don't require them to put in any time, others are assigned to man the front desk where they can work on various school work while they are sitting there and others are used as research, project and class assistants. It appears that not

all of the faculty members understand what can and can't be accomplished in 5 hours and are upset when projects aren't finished and expect students to work until they are complete.

-The field of work the professor I was assigned to was completely unrelated to my program. I had to learn new jargon and take extra time to educate myself on the topics. As a result, my five hours of work did not always produce the results the professor wanted. I was talked down to, and my work ethic was questioned at times. This, along with the additional stress of school resulted in deflation of my spirit and confidence.

-I assumed that the role of "TA" would mean leading a discussion section or some grading capacity, but there was no negotiation available when I accepted the contract. I could not have afforded to get my MA without this funding. When I arrived on campus, I found out that I would be teaching a second-level writing course to a class of 25 by myself. I was given the textbook about 3 days before the first class.

-The professors in the department seem to have very different ideas about how to use the 5 hours. I know some make students come in to the office for 5 hours and then assign them homework, which is clearly the student working for more than 5 hours. The professors do not seem to have any concept of the amount of work students, who also teach, lesson plan, and grade have to do.

-Each semester, I independently prepare lesson plans (4 hours a week to structure the week's classes, read the textbook, find readings and prepare them, create powerpoints and discussion questions, etc.), find media to present (4 hours to find, watch, and form activities), write/edit assignments (2 hours per week to edit paper assignments and create 15 homework assignments per semester), grade assignments and papers (5 hours per week on average to read 2 homeworks per week and an approximately 5 page paper every 2 weeks), lecture for an hour and 20 minutes twice a week (about 3 hours of actual teaching), meet with the supervising professor (3 hours every two weeks), respond to student emails (2 hours, including time to create accommodations for students with disabilities), and coordinate field trips (1 hour per semester). While 20 hours per week to teach one class may sound like a lot at first, this estimate of my time is actually fairly conservative.... I was also required to take a companion class to teach me how to TA effectively, which added 4 more hours of class time and assignments per week.

-Although the time required to prepare for teaching has lessened with each semester, the responsibilities of my own course of study have increased. I am currently writing my thesis, conducting research, applying for jobs, preparing to graduate, and taking a full load of classes. I have not had time to pursue an internship this year, although I think it would have made my resume stronger. All of these things are time consuming, and some of them have hidden expenses that are quickly adding up. I feel that I have essentially been performing a TA appointment and a research assistantship appointment for years, and that it has increased my stress level and often taken priority

over my own classes. I am thrilled and thankful to have been funded for my Master's degree, but I think the so-called "5 hour" responsibility has lessened the quality of my education here.

-I was averaging 20 hours a week of work, not including additional grading of papers, answering emails from students, etc. Many times, I still felt very unprepared for my classrooms, and the 5 hours of work for a professor took away time for preparation. Compounding this with regular course work was extremely challenging for a first semester grad student.