# Graduate Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

# Preamble: At the University of Minnesota, graduate students touch on every aspect of the institution's daily operations: as students, employees, junior colleagues, and members of the university community. Across these various roles, graduate students have the right to expect that their responsibilities in other roles will be respected. For the purposes of this document, the term “graduate student” is used to represent all master’s and doctoral students who are under the purview of the Graduate School.

# A key aspect of graduate education is the process of transition from students to scholars in training to junior scholars. However, graduate students, in any stage of their tenure at the university, have basic rights as students. A number of policies (<http://www.grad.umn.edu/about/policiesgovernance>) currently exist at the university to protect graduate students. The purpose of the following sections is to explicate policies relevant to graduate student education, address areas where current policy is lacking, and serve as a reference tool for University students, faculty, and staff. Comments are provided in each section, as necessary, to further explicate the specifications of student rights.

# Graduate Student Basic Rights

## Graduate students have the right to the best education available.

### Comments

### All degree requirements should be made known to the student upon enrolling at the University, and these should be communicated clearly and in writing.

### Graduate students should receive consultation on changes in their degree requirements, and notification by the program of these changes should be provided in a timely manner, defined as a reasonable opportunity to discuss as a group, in writing, prior to implementation of such changes. In situations in which changes represent an unreasonable burden upon students in process, programs should offer some procedure to allow those graduate students to request evaluation under previous standards.

### Programs, when applicable, should make a good faith effort to provide prospective students with the best data available regarding the general experience of graduate students in that particular program, including but not limited to:

#### a generic degree progress plan and average time to degree;

#### the availability of required courses as described by semester, especially those only offered during certain semesters and those offered on an irregular basis;

#### the expected total cost of study over a student’s expected tenure, including any other financial disclosures;

#### an explicit discussion of any potential financial burden that the student may incur, including the amount of guaranteed funding, the duration of guaranteed funding, the potential academic loan burden, and the availability of fellowships, grants and other awards;

#### a commitment to help students find and apply for funding; and,

#### the general placement outcomes of past program graduates, in accordance with and as a complement to the Graduate Program Goals (<http://grad.umn.edu/goals/>).

### Required courses should be offered as often as possible, with sufficient student demand, and their availability should be communicated clearly. For example, requiring students to take an additional year of classes in order to satisfy a program requirement because of a lack of availability is a violation of this right.

### Graduate students should be allowed to enroll in relevant classes offered by other departments and should be allowed by their home department, provided space is available and they meet the prerequisites.

## Graduate students have the right to knowledgeable and responsible advising.

### Comments

### Graduate students have the right to a constructive relationship with their advisor in accordance with the resources made available by the Graduate School: <http://www.gradvising.umn.edu/for-students.html>.

### Graduate students have the right to time and attention from faculty members serving as their advisors (<http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/SUCCESSMentors.pdf>).

### Graduate students have the right to academic and professional advice from their advisor that is in the best academic and professional interest of the student.

### Graduate students have the right to have their time and dignity respected by their advisor and committee, and, when necessary, to pursue the appropriate channels for grievances ([http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/Advising and Mentoring–Worst Practices.pdf](http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/Advising%20and%20Mentoring–Worst%20Practices.pdf) ).

## Graduate students have the right to a reasonable procedure for changing advisors, without fear of retaliation.

### Programs or departments should provide students with the adequate resources for finding a new advisor and students should be protected from direct or indirect retaliation.

## Graduate students have the right to pursue excellent research.

### Comments

### Research advisors should provide access to resources and training in regard to ethical research conduct, the appropriate use of equipment or software, and navigation of the appropriate boards and committees that govern research (IRB, IACUC, IBC, etc.), when applicable.

### Graduate students should be provided with a fair procedure when seeking research in a USDOS Travel Warning Country, especially in review of the student’s ITRAAC form.

### An open discussion of who will pay for any travel associated with student’s research – including the availability of fellowships, grants and other awards – should be available at the student’s request.

### U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration (<https://www.osha.gov/law-regs.html>) has defined the standards of a safe environment for working and doing research and these guidelines should not be overlooked by the PI, lab director or lab manager.

## Graduate students have the right to pursue non-academic careers.

### Comments

### Whether at the university, college or department level, graduate students should be provided appropriate resources to assist them in pursuing non-academic careers should they choose to explore non-academic career options. Programs and the university should be prepared to assist graduate students in locating these resources.

### Pursuit of non-academic career focuses should not incur discrimination or retaliation in the following forms:

#### in evaluation,

#### the availability of resources,

#### receipt of supportive references,

#### research and publication opportunities,

#### or other bases.

# Graduate Student Employees

## Graduate student employees have the right to fair and equitable working conditions and benefits.

### Comments

### Fair and equitable working conditions and benefits are established in the University’s [Graduate Assistant Employment Policy](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT.html) (www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT.html) and its associated procedures ([Calculating Graduate Assistant Tuition Benefits](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT_PROC01.html): www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT\_PROC01.html, [Handling Graduate Assistant Performance Issues](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT_PROC02.html): www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT\_PROC02.html, [Hiring Graduate Assistants](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT_PROC03.html): www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT\_PROC03.html, [Obtaining Tuition Benefits for May and Summer Sessions/Terms](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT_PROC04.html): www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT\_PROC04.html).

## Graduate students have the right to seek outside employment if they choose due to their particular circumstances.

### Comments

### If required by the department or program to agree not to seek outside employment, it is the responsibility of the department or program to provide a stipend that is reasonable and adequate as a sole source of support for the entirety of the accepted employment term as defined by minimum wage standards for a full-time employee, of which the student should be considered as a full-time employee regardless of the actual hours worked per week that is laid out in the employment terms.

## Graduate student employees have the right to a formal employment agreement by the appointment start date.

### Comments

### Terms and conditions of employment should be clearly communicated from the employing program prior to the first day of work.

### A clear articulation of the general responsibilities included in the employment should be provided prior to the first day of work. The articulation should include the following:

#### a discussion between the employer and student regarding what the expected duties are and the extent of work expected including of hours worked per week and number of projects. Any additional work requested should be discussed in terms of the added burden to the student and feasibility of accomplishment, and

#### when possible, the terms should be provided in writing.

## Graduate student employees have the right to training support as employees.

### Comments

### Graduate student employees have a right to expect from their employing programs appropriate training as research assistants, graduate assistants, teaching assistants or graduate instructors both before and during the semester.

### The necessary resources needed to fulfill students’ roles as employees should be provided. These resources should be made available by their employing programs and may include the following:

#### access to labs or research equipment,

#### access to computer servers,

#### access to needed data,

#### the ability to print teaching materials,

#### timely access to electronic resources such as Moodle or UMreports,

#### and/or other appropriate tools necessary to complete expected duties.

### Across all of their roles, graduate students should have access to regular, timely, objective, consistent, and impartial evaluation of their performance from their employing programs. As much of this evaluation as possible should be:

#### in writing,

#### accessible to the student,

#### and, where appropriate, confidentiality should be respected.

# Graduate Students as emerging Junior Colleagues

## As junior colleagues, graduate students have a right to clear and direct discussions of the ownership of work product at the outset of any research project.

## Graduate students have a right to expect credit for their contributions in accordance with the standards of their field.

## Graduate students should be provided clear procedures to seek objective arbitration when necessary, without fear of retaliation, within their department or program of any disputes over standing with regards to authorship.

### Comments

### Grievances can be sent to conflict resolution center.

## Graduate students have a right to expect that their potential vulnerability as junior colleagues will not be exploited.

### Comments

### Graduate students have a right to participate in the University Community, at all levels, without fear of rebuke or retaliation.

# Graduate Students as Members of the University Community

## Graduate students have a right to participate in all political and governance processes of the academic community without retribution.

### Comments

### Graduate student government organizations at the program, department, school, and college levels are essential entities within the University Community, and these organizations have the right to consultation in all matters affecting graduate students.

### Graduate students should receive representation in the university governance structure and its committees, where applicable, including in the status of a non-voting member.

### Graduate students have individual rights of personal conscience, freedom of expression, and political association. The University as an institution, colleges, and programs of employment and of academic membership has an obligation to respect and protect those rights.

## Graduate students have the right to academic freedom.

### Comment

### Graduate students have academic freedom rights as students and as employees – as researchers and as teachers.

### Academic freedom is defined by the Board of Regents as “the freedom, without institutional discipline or restraint, to discuss all relevant matters in the classroom, to explore all avenues of scholarship, research, and creative expression, and to speak or write on matters of public concern as well as on matters related to professional duties and the functioning of the University” (www.grad.umn.edu/about/policiesgovernance/academicfreedom/).

### Any grievances should be directed to the Graduate School.

## Graduate students have a right to an environment that is free from discrimination (<http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Code_of_Conduct.pdf>)

## Graduate students are protected under Title IX (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/reg/ocr/edlite-34cfr106.html>) from discrimination on the basis of their actual or potential marital, family, or parental status.

### Comments

### According to UMN policy (<http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Leaves/PARENTALLEAVE.html>), as employees of the university graduate students who meet eligibility requirements have the right to both paid and unpaid leave related to the birth or adoption of children. The requirement includes that an employee be on at least a 20 hour a week appointment and have been employed by the university for at least 9 months.

### As not all students meet the requirements of the university employee policy, non-qualifying students shall be protected under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and allowed up to the maximum leave for which they are eligible according to part 106.40 of the regulations.

### An open and honest discussion of student leave of absence options should be provided by the student’s advisors, DGSs, and other university administrators to ensure that the leave is of adequate duration and does not jeopardize the student’s academic standing or the current status of any held fellowship.

## Graduate students have the right to be free from coercion from their advisors, DGSs or other university administrators or staff in matters of taking a leave of absence and in filling out the proper documentation (<http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Leaves/FMLA.html> ; <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADSTUDENTLEAVE.html>).

**Section 4.06 Graduate students have the right to redress of concerns brought under the Articles of this Bill of Rights and any appropriate university policy.**

# Graduate Student Responsibilities

## In conjunction with the aforementioned rights as students, UMN Graduate students have the responsibility to respect and uphold all relevant University policies regarding professional conduct as outlined by the Student Code of Conduct (<http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Code_of_Conduct.pdf>).

### Comments

### According to the Student Code of Conduct, graduate students have the responsibility to, among other things:

#### respect and uphold all of the aforementioned rights of other fellow graduate students including, but not limited to, the responsibility to conduct themselves, in all educational and professional activities, in a manner appropriate of an academic colleague.

#### not discriminate against students, faculty, staff, or administrators on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation including gender identity, unfavorable discharge from the military or status as a protected veteran.

#### provide accurate and honest reporting of research results and to uphold ethical norms in research methodology and scholarship.

#### report suspected Violations to supervisors or other University officials.

#### maintain open channels of communication with their advisors, DGS, and/or other relevant administrators and staff.

DEFINITIONS

**Academic Program**: Undergraduate, graduate, and professional credit-bearing degrees, majors, minors, free-standing minors, and certificates that may appear on official University transcripts.

**Graduate students**: Students enrolled in post baccalaureate degree programs with the exception of "first professional" degrees. (The first professional degrees are: the J.D., M.D., Pharm.D., D.V.M., D.D.S, and L.L.M. degrees.)

APPENDIX

Job classifications (www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr\_53518.pdf) and descriptions (available at http://onestop2.umn.edu/jobclass/EnterJobClassSearchForm.do)

III. GRADUATE ASSISTANTS (selected 95xx)

9510 Graduate Assistant Coach

9511 Teaching Assistant

9515 Graduate Instructor

9517 Ph.D. Candidate Graduate Instructor

9518 Advanced Masters Teaching Assistant

9519 Ph.D. Candidate Teaching Assistant

9521 Research Assistant

9526 Graduate Research Project Assistant

9527 Ph.D. Candidate Graduate Research Project Assistant

9528 Advanced Masters Research Assistant

9529 Ph.D. Candidate Research Assistant

9531 Administrative Fellow

9532 Advanced Masters Administrative Fellow

9533 Ph.D. Candidate Administrative Fellow

9571 Summer Term Teaching Assistant w/o Tuition Benefit

9572 Summer Term Research Assistant w/o Tuition Benefit

9573 Summer Term Administrative Fellow w/o Tuition Benefit

9574 Summer Session Teaching Assistant w/ Tuition Benefit

9575 Summer Session Teaching Assistant w/o Tuition Benefit