Graduate Student Bill of Rights

**Preamble**: At the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, 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 are students, first and foremost. A number of policies (http://www.grad.umn.edu/about/policiesgovernance)currently exist at the university to protect graduate students. The purposes 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.

Article I: Graduate Students as Students

1. Graduate students have the right to the best education available.
2. Graduate students have the right to know all degree requirements upon enrolling at the University, and these should be communicated clearly and in writing.
3. Graduate students also have the right to consultation on changes in degree requirements, and to receive notification of these changes in a timely manner, in writing, prior to their implementation. 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.
4. Programs 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:
   1. a generic degree progress plan and average time to degree;
   2. the availability of required courses as described by semester, especially those only offered during certain semesters and those offered on an irregular basis;
   3. the expected total cost of study over a student’s expected tenure, including any other financial disclosures;
   4. 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 loan burden, and the availability of fellowships, grants and other awards;
   5. a commitment to help students find and apply for funding; and,
   6. the general placement outcomes of past program graduates, in accordance with and as a complement to the Graduate Program Goals (grad.umn.edu/goals/).
5. Any advertised courses should be available on a regular basis. Required courses should be offered as often as possible, with sufficient student demand, and their availability should be communicated clearly.
6. Graduate students have the right to enroll in classes offered by other relevant departments, provided space is available and they meet the prerequisites.
7. Graduate students have the right to knowledgeable and responsible advising.
8. Graduate students have the right to a constructive relationship with their advisor in accordance with the resources made available by the Graduate School: www.gradvising.umn.edu/for-students.html.
9. Graduate students have the right to time and attention from faculty members serving as their advisors (wbt.umn.edu/pdf/SUCCESSMentors.pdf).
10. 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.
11. 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 (wbt.umn.edu/pdf/Advising and Mentoring – Worst Practices.pdf).
12. Graduate students have the right to a reasonable procedure for changing advisors without fear of retaliation.
13. Graduate students have the right to pursue excellent research.
    1. Graduate students have the right to a fair procedure when seeking research in a USDOS Travel Warning Country, especially in review of the student’s ITRAAC form.
    2. Graduate students have the right to an open discussion of who will pay for any travel associated with their research, including the availability of fellowships, grants and other awards.
14. Graduate students have the right to excellent training for both academic and non-academic careers.
15. Graduate students have a right to pursue non-academic career focuses without fear of discrimination in evaluation, the availability of resources, receipt of supportive references, or other bases.
16. 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.

Article II: Graduate Students as Employees

1. Graduate student assistants have the right to fair and equitable working conditions and benefits as established in the University’s [Graduate Assistant Employment Policy](http://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), [Handling Graduate Assistant Performance Issues](http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT_PROC02.html), [Hiring Graduate Assistants](http://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)).
2. Graduate student assistants have the right to fair and equitable stipends that at minimum provide a living wage and are adequate as a sole source of support for the entirety of the academic year.
3. Graduate students should not have to seek additional work outside a standard half time university position (TA/RA/GA) under normal circumstances.
4. Graduate student assistants have the right to a formal employment agreement.
5. Graduate student assistants have the right to terms and conditions of employment to be clearly communicated from their employing program prior to the first day of work.
6. Graduate student assistants have the right to expect a clear articulation of their responsibilities as employees in writing prior to the first day of work.
7. Graduate student assistants have the right to training support as employees.
8. Graduate student assistants have a right to expect from their employing programs appropriate training as research assistants, graduate assistants, teaching assistants or instructors both before and during the semester.
9. Graduate student assistants have a right to the necessary resources needed to fulfill their roles as employees. These resources should be made available by their employing programs. These may include 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.
10. Across all of their roles, graduate students have a right 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 and, where appropriate, confidentiality should be respected.

Article III: Graduate Students as Junior Colleagues

1. 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.
2. Graduate students have a right to expect credit for their contributions in accordance with the standards of their field.
3. 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.

Article IV: Graduate Students as Members of the University Community

1. Graduate students have a right to expect that their vulnerability as junior colleagues will not be exploited.
2. Graduate students have a right to participate in the University Community, at all levels, without fear of rebuke or retaliation.
3. Graduate students have a right to participate in all political and governance processes of the academic community without retribution.
4. 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.
5. Graduate students have a right to participate and to receive proportionate representation in the university governance structure and its committees. Furthermore, graduate students have the right to be represented within the joint governance structure of the University, including in the status of a non-voting member.
6. 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 have an obligation to respect and protect those rights.
7. Graduate students have right to academic freedom (<http://www.grad.umn.edu/about/policiesgovernance/academicfreedom/>). 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.” Graduate students have academic freedom rights as students and as employees – as researchers and as teachers.
   1. ITRAAC
8. 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>)
9. 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.
   1. 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.
   2. 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.
   3. Graduate students have the right to an open and honest discussion of their leave of absence options from their advisors, DGSs, and other university administrators to ensure that the leave is of adequate duration and does not jeopardize academic standing or current status of any held fellowship.
10. Graduate students have the right to be free from coercion from their advisors, DGSs or other university administrator 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).