**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. 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. 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.

The purpose of this document is to explicate the expectations shared between graduate students and university faculty and staff. To provide such service, this document has been written to call attention to currently existing policies, but also to detail expectations where there is no clear policy. In the future, if certain expectations command a continuous grievance issue, then this document may be used to create policy where it is lacking and evidently needed. However, it should be noted that this document is not to become, itself, policy; rather, it is meant to be a roadmap of existing policy and expectations and should be used as “best practices”.

The main utility of this document is as a means of labeling accountability for individuals in each role (student, faculty, staff). The document should, then, serve as a conversation starter between student and faculty/staff in a frank discussion of expectations or in addressing an alleged transgression, and otherwise serve as a point of reference for identifying grievances. The protocol for reporting grievances is outlined in Appendix I; however, individual cases may vary enough to warrant different routes to resolution.

A number of policies (<http://www.grad.umn.edu/about/policiesgovernance>) and best practices currently exist at the university to protect graduate students. The purpose of the following sections is to explicate policies relevant to graduate student education and link to them, address areas where current policy is lacking by creating agreed-upon guidelines, and serve as a reference tool for University students, faculty, and staff in locating and navigating these policies and practices. Comments: provided in each section are not binding, but instead provide guidance in interpreting these student rights along with sources of relevant policies and best practices.

Article I. Graduate Student Rights as Students and Advisees

# 1.01 Graduate students, as prospective students, have the right to any and all available information about their program before enrollment.

Comments:

(a) Programs, when applicable, will 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:

(i) a generic degree progress plan and average time to degree;

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

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

(iv) 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;

(v) a commitment to help students find and apply for funding; and,

(vi) the general placement outcomes of past program graduates, in accordance with and as a complement to the Graduate Program Goals.

Relevant best practices:

 Graduate Program Goals: <http://grad.umn.edu/goals/>

# 1.02 Graduate students have the right to timely academic achievement.

Comments:

(a) Graduate students will be consulted on changes in their degree requirements, and be provided notification of these changes by the program in a timely manner.

(b) In situations in which changes represent an unreasonable burden upon students in process, programs will offer some procedure to allow those graduate students to request evaluation under previous standards.

(c) Required courses will be offered as often as possible, with sufficient student demand, and their availability will 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.

(d) Graduate students who wish to expand their educational experience by taking classes outside their program requirements will be allowed by their home department to enroll in relevant classes offered by other departments, provided space is available and they meet the prerequisites. This right is intended to provide students the opportunity to attain an interdisciplinary record, which is an essential skill in the current competitive market.

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

Comments:

(a) Graduate students have the right to a constructive relationship with their advisor in accordance with the resources made available by the Graduate School.

(b) Graduate students have the right to time and attention from faculty members serving as their advisors.

(c) 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.

(d) 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.

Relevant best practices

Graduate Student Resources for Advising: <http://www.gradvising.umn.edu/for-students.html>

Working Better Together: <http://wbt.umn.edu/>

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

Comments:

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

#  1.05 Graduate students have the right to pursue safe and ethical scholarly research.

Comments:

(a) U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration has defined the standards of a safe environment for working and doing research and these guidelines will not be overlooked by the principle investigator, lab director, or lab manager.

(b) Graduate students will be provided with a fair procedure when seeking to conduct thesis research in a USDOS Travel Warning Country, especially in review of the student’s ITRAAC form.

(c) Research advisors will 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.

Relevant policies and websites

OSHA Law & Regulations: <https://www.osha.gov/law-regs.html>

Student Travel and Education Abroad: Health and Safety Policy: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Student/EDABROAD.html>

Research Resources: <http://www.research.umn.edu/forresearchers/resources.html#.VOT92-bF8bI>

Article II. Graduate Student Rights to Work and Training

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

Comments:

(a) Fair and equitable working conditions and benefits are established in the University’s “Graduate Assistant Employment Policy” and its associated procedures.

(b) See Appendix II for graduate assistant job classifications as defined by University policy.

Relevant policies

Graduate Assistant Employment Policy: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Hiring/GRADSTUDENTEMPLOYMENT.html>

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>

Academic Job Codes and Policies: [http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr\_53518.pdf](http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/ohr/%40pub/%40ohr/documents/asset/ohr_53518.pdf)

Academic Job Code Classification Search: <http://onestop2.umn.edu/jobclass/EnterJobClassSearchForm.do>

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

Comments:

(a) Terms and conditions of employment will be clearly communicated from the employing program prior to the first day of work.

(b) A clear articulation of the general responsibilities included in the employment will be provided prior to the first day of work. The articulation will include the following:

(i) 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 will be discussed in terms of the added burden to the student and feasibility of accomplishment; and

(ii) when possible, the terms will be provided in writing.

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

Comments:

(a) 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.

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

(i) access to labs or research equipment;

(ii) access to computer servers;

(iii) access to needed data;

(iv) the ability to print teaching materials;

(v) timely access to electronic resources such as Moodle or UMreports;

(vi) and/or other appropriate tools necessary to complete expected duties.

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

(i) in writing;

(ii) accessible to the student; and

(iii) where appropriate, confidentiality will be respected.

Relevant Best Practices

Tips for RAs and Research Faculty: <http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/RAs%20and%20Research%20Faculty.pdf>

Tips for TAs and Instructors: <http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/Tips-for-TAs-and-Instructors.pdf>

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

Comments:

(a) 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. The student worker will be considered to be a full-time employee regardless of the actual hours worked per week laid out in the employment terms.

Article III. Graduate Student Rights to Recognition and Credit

# 3.01 Graduate students have the right to clear and direct discussions of the ownership of work product at the outset of any research project.

Comments:

(a) Before the project begins, a shared vision regarding the scope of the project should be developed.

(b) During the project, team members should recognize shifting roles and responsibilities and level of contribution of project personnel and discuss any potential changes in authorship or author order.

Relevant best practices

 Working Better Together: [http:/wbt.umn.edu](http://www.wbt.umn.edu)

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

Comments:

(a) Collaborators may also wish to follow the author requirements specified by the journal in which they intend to publish, when available.

# 3.03 Graduate students have the right to clear procedures to seek objective arbitration when necessary, without fear of retaliation, within their department or program of any disputes with regards to authorship.

Comments:

(a) See Appendix I for a flow chart outlining the suggested grievance procedure.

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

Comments:

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

Article IV. Graduate Student Rights as Junior Colleagues

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

Comments:

(a) 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.

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

(c) 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.

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

Comments:

(a) Whether at the university, college or department level, graduate students will be provided appropriate resources to assist them in pursuing non-academic careers will they choose to explore non-academic career options. The university will be prepared to assist graduate students in locating these resources.

(b) Pursuit of non-academic career focuses will not incur discrimination or retaliation including but not limited to the following forms:

(i) in evaluation,

(ii) the availability of resources,

(iii) receipt of supportive references,

(iv) research and publication opportunities.

Relevant policies

Reporting Discrimination, Harassment & Retaliation: <https://diversity.umn.edu/eoaa/reportingdiscriminationandharassment>

# 4.03 Graduate students have the right to academic freedom.

Comment

(a) Graduate students have academic freedom rights as students and as employees – as researchers and as teachers.

(b) 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”.

(c) Any grievances will be directed to the Graduate School.

Relevant policies

Academic Freedom & Responsibility: <http://www.grad.umn.edu/policies-governance/academic-freedom-and-responsibility>

Article V. Graduate Student Rights as Parents and Caretakers

# 5.01 Graduate students are protected from discrimination on the basis of their actual or potential marital, family, or parental status.

Comments:

(a) According to UMN policy 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.

(b) 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.

(c) An open and honest discussion of student leave of absence options will 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.

Relevant policies

Parental Leave for Academic Employees Policy: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Leaves/PARENTALLEAVE.html>

14 CFR Part 1253 – Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance: <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/rights/reg/ocr/edlite-34cfr106.html>

# 5.02 Graduate student mothers have the right to appropriate break times and private space for lactation.

Comments:

(a) According to both FMLA and Title IX, mothers must be provided a clean, private space within reasonable distance from their work station that is NOT a restroom.

# 5.03 Graduate students have the right to take appropriate leave/sick days for sick children or other dependents.

Comments:

(a) As stated in the University of Minnesota official student attendance policy, missing class or work for a sick dependent is a recognized absence excuse.

Relevant policies

Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences Policy: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html>

Paid and Unpaid Leaves of Absence for Graduate Assistants: [http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/president/@pub/@policy/@hr/documents/policy/gradstudentemployment\_appf.pdf](http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/president/%40pub/%40policy/%40hr/documents/policy/gradstudentemployment_appf.pdf)

Article VI. Graduate Student Rights to a Positive, Supportive Environment

# 6.01 Graduate students have the right to an environment that is free from discrimination.

Relevant policies

Code of Conduct Policy: <http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Code_of_Conduct.pdf>

# 6.02 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.

Relevant policies

Family and Medical - FMLA Leave Policy: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/Leaves/FMLA.html>

Leave of Absence and Reinstatement from a Leave: Graduate Students: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADSTUDENTLEAVE.html>

# 6.03 Graduate students have the right to a fair and equitable working environment that is free from harassment.

Comments:

(a) Sexual harassment will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Relevant policies

Sexual Harrassment Policy: <http://www.policy.umn.edu/Policies/hr/HRMisc/SEXUALHARASSMENT.html>

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

Comments:

(a) See Appendix I for suggested grievance procedures and relevant policies.

Article VII. Graduate Student Responsibilities

# 7.01 Graduate students have the responsibility to respect and uphold all relevant University policies regarding professional conduct as outlined by the Student Code of Conduct.

Comments:

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

(i) 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.

(ii) 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.

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

(iv) report suspected Violations to supervisors or other University officials.

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

Relevant policies

Code of Conduct Policy: <http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Code_of_Conduct.pdf>

# 7.02 Graduate students have the responsibility to clarify any questions regarding expectations of their employment assignment.

# 7.03 Graduate students have the responsibility to participate in required training.

# 7.04 Graduate students have the responsibility to perform their assigned duties and seek feedback.

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 and other 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; “other” professional degrees are defined by the Provost’s office)

**Graduate School**: Refers to both the Graduate School as an entity and any specific employee of the school to whom questions should be directed (which is specific to the query). The employee title may include “associate to Graduate School” or “assistant to Graduate School”.

**Timely manner**: A timeframe which allows for reasonable opportunity to discuss an issue as a group and prior to implementation of any change.

**Scholarly research**: (as defined in tenure code) includes significant publications and the development and dissemination by other means of new knowledge, technology, or scientific procedures resulting in innovative products, practices, and ideas of significance and value to society.

APPENDIX I

Most grievances should try to be settled at a local level: with the advisor, DGS or department head. Only after a local intervention has failed or for severe grievances should conflict resolution be sought from the following offices: Office of Conflict Resolution for employee-employer related issues, Student Conflict Resolution Center for student-related issues, or the Graduate School for all other issues.

Relevant contacts or links:

Student Conflict Resource Center: <http://www.sos.umn.edu>

Graduate School Office: <http://www.grad.umn.edu>

Office of Conflict Resolution: <http://ocr.umn.edu>

“Preparing for a Difficult Conversation”: <http://wbt.umn.edu/pdf/Difficult%20Conversations%20-%20Preparing%20for%20a%20Difficult%20Conversation.pdf>

APPENDIX II

Graduate Assistants are defined by University policy (Employee Group Definitions, available at <http://regents.umn.edu/sites/regents.umn.edu/files/policies/Employee_Group_Definitions.pdf>) as “Graduate assistants are student employees registered in a graduate or post‐baccalaureate professional degree program at the University and employed in a position covered under this employee group. Graduate assistants may be engaged in teaching, research, or administrative functions of the University under the direct supervision of faculty, academic professionals, or administrators.”

Graduate job classifications are listed in the “Academic Job Codes & Titles” (available at [http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/ohr/@pub/@ohr/documents/asset/ohr\_53518.pdf](http://www.policy.umn.edu/prod/groups/ohr/%40pub/%40ohr/documents/asset/ohr_53518.pdf)) and are reprinted below from section III of that document:

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

Descriptions for each job code are available through OneStop at <http://onestop2.umn.edu/jobclass/EnterJobClassSearchForm.do>.