

Commission on Graduate and Professional Student Affairs

Resolution to Clarify Graduate Teaching Assistantships, Graduate Assistants, and Graduate Research Assistants, Relationships with Students they have Academic or Professional Supervision Over

CGPSA 2024-25B

Resolution Proposal Sent to University Council Cabinet	11/19/24
University Council Cabinet Review	11/21/24
First Reading by Commission	03/26/25
First Reading by Senate	04/03/25
Approval by Commission	Date
First Reading, University Council	Date
Second Reading, University Council	Date
President Review	Date
Effective Upon Approval	Date

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech relies on Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), and Graduate Assistants (GAs) to help with instruction, grading, proctoring, and general academic supervision tasks.

WHEREAS, Virginia Tech also relies on Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) to serve as mentors and advisors to undergraduate students seeking to do research.

WHEREAS, other R1 institutes such as the University of Michigan, Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and more [1-6] have clear explicit language outlining that engaging and or initiating any sort of romantic relationship with any student (graduate or undergraduate) with who you have academic or professional supervision over is strictly prohibited.

WHEREAS, the current language in the graduate student catalog for the expectations for graduate education and graduate students has no language regarding this [7].

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the graduate student catalog under the section regarding Assistantships and Financial Support be updated to include the following language:

- **Academic supervision** is defined here as teaching or being an assistant for a course, holding office hours that are paid for by an assistantship, grading for a course, proctoring for a course, formal mentor research or academic responsibilities, or other formally designated educational responsibilities associated with GTA, or GA duties.
- **Professional supervision** is defined here as overseeing another student's research progress, whether it be by serving as their mentor/advisor or supervising the tasks

expected of them, providing feedback, and being directly involved with their professional review as part of expectations of their GRA duties.

- *The relationship between someone with paid (by GTA or GA) **academic supervision** and/or **professional supervision** (GRA) and the student they have supervision over plays an important part in achieving an “inclusive community of knowledge, discovery, and creativity” as outlined by the university’s mission statement [8].*
- *Those with **academic supervision** and/or **professional supervision** have a responsibility to encourage the pursuit of learning and maintain a respectful and supportive environment where applicable for their students.*
- *In order to maintain a respectful and supportive environment:*
 - *No GTA, GA, or GRA shall attempt to initiate or engage in an intimate or sexual relationship with any student they have **academic** and/or **professional supervision** over, be it a graduate student or undergraduate student before the **academic** and/or **professional supervision** has concluded and, if applicable, a final grade on the student’s academic performance has been submitted to the Registrar.*
 - *No GTA, GA, or GRA shall attempt to initiate or accept amorous or sexual advances with a student they have **academic** and/or **professional supervision** over, be it a graduate student or undergraduate student, before the **academic** and/or **professional supervision** has concluded.*
- *In the event of a pre-existing relationship the GTA, GA, or GRA is expected to disclose the existing relationship in writing to the relevant department supervisor or department chair. The department supervisor or chair must respond back in writing to acknowledge the relationship and adjust positions appropriately so that a conflict of interest no longer exists in the **academic** and/or **professional supervision** role.*
- *Failure to follow the above procedures to ensure a respectful and supportive environment for students will result in loss of GTA or GA funding if applicable, and/or possible formal action including but not limited to removal from the program.*

References:

[1] 9.9 Consensual Sexual or Romantic Relationships in the Workplace or Academic Environment. Policies. <https://policies.mit.edu/policies-procedures/90-relations-and-responsibilities-within-mit-community/99-consensual-sexual-or>

[2] Consensual Amorous or Sexual relationships with Students. https://hr.msu.edu/policies-procedures/faculty-academic-staff/faculty-handbook/consensual_relationship_students.html

[3] Graduate Assistants Handbook-Teaching Assistants-Boundaries. Graduate Assistant Handbook. <https://uwm.edu/graduate-assistants/handbook/teaching-assistants/boundaries/>

[4] Policy on Romantic and Sexual Relationships with Undergraduate Students | University Policies. <https://universitypolicies.columbia.edu/content/policy-romantic-and-sexual-relationships-undergraduate-students>

[5] Sexual Harassment: Faculty of Arts and Sciences Information for Faculty. Harvard University. <https://infoforfaculty.fas.harvard.edu/book/sexual->

[harassment#:~:text=Furthermore%2C%20no%20FAS%20Faculty%20member,including%20a%20graduate%20student%20or](#)

[6] University of Georgia Human Resources Office. (2008, September 1). Amorous Relationships.

https://www.usg.edu/hr/assets/hr/hrap_manual/HRAP_Amorous_Relationships_Employee_Relations.pdf

[7] *Expectations for Graduate Education, Graduate Students*. Assistantships and Financial Support

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/expectations-for-graduate-education-overview/expectations-graduate-students.html>

[8] *Facts About Virginia Tech*. Mission Statement.

<https://www.vt.edu/about/facts-about-virginia-tech.html#:~:text=Mission%20statement,Virginia%20and%20throughout%20the%20world>.

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April 3, 2025

To: Vice President of Policy and Governance

The Staff Senate Committee on Policy and Issues has reviewed and by majority, approves CGPSA Resolution 2024-25B. However, we do have some additional feedback and questions.

First, we feel that the wording on the fifth red bullet point could be stronger. Could the bullet point say ethical, proper, principled, reproachless, unimpeachable (or something along those lines) in addition to or in place of “respectful and supportive”? We would suggest identical language be used at the end of the two sub-sections of the fifth bullet point for consistency (portion to be added to the second sub-section is highlighted in the following quote). “...before the academic and/or professional supervision has concluded and, if applicable, a final grade on the student’s academic performance has been submitted to the Registrar.”

The sixth bullet point states “...the GTA, GA, or GRA is expected to disclose...”. To further clarify and reenforce the requirement, we would suggest “must disclose” or “are required to disclose” as alternative language.

The last two bullets of the proposed changes outline expectations for disclosure and consequences for the student if the procedures are not followed. What happens if the department supervisor or chair fails to respond in writing and/or make adjustments so that a conflict of interest no longer exists? It does not seem right that the consequences of failure to follow procedures should be borne entirely by the student.

The final bullet point states “...will result in loss of GTA or GA funding if applicable...”. Why are GRAs not included in this statement? As the proposed changes read, there are no consequences for a GRA who does not follow the proposed procedures.

Finally, it is our understanding that Title IX and the Civil Rights teams will need to review and approve this resolution before it can go forward. Additionally, we believe that the last bullet of the proposed change could present an issue because a Graduate Student would need to go through Student Conduct in order to be removed from their program/funding. Consequently, this point may need revision.

We have no further comment.

**Thank you,
Amber Robinson, Chair Staff Senate Policies and
Issues Committee**