

University of Illinois at Chicago Rights, Responsibilities, and Best Practices of Graduate Students and Trainees

Graduate Student Council
University of Illinois at Chicago
750 South Halsted Street
Room 380K Student Center East
Chicago, IL 60607
Email: gsc-officers@uic.edu
Phone: (312) 355-5102
Fax: (312) 355-5101

June 2009

1 Rights

UIC Graduate Students are first and foremost students and trainees, and as such they have the following rights.

1.1 Graduate students have a right to the best education available from UIC.

1.1.1 Upon admission to a program, graduate students have a right to documentation informing them of specific degree requirements, as well as anticipated timelines, if they exist, to complete those requirements. These minimum requirements can be found in the Graduate College Catalog [1].

1.1.2 Graduate students have a right to have all required and optional coursework, examinations, and other requirements necessary to complete the degree clearly outlined. Any changes or updates to the requirements shall be provided to the students in a timely manner.

1.1.2.1 If graduation requirements for a specified program are changed after a graduate student has been admitted, the student has a right to choose which guidelines to follow (grandfather clause), as per the Graduate College Catalog [1].

1.1.3 Graduate students have a right to information on the availability of individual courses required for graduate studies and such information shall be readily accessible.

1.1.4 In cases where academic performance is deemed unsatisfactory, graduate students have a right to be given a fair opportunity to correct deficiencies.

1.1.5 Any intent to dismiss a graduate student from the program for academic reasons must be accompanied by specific and timely written communication.

1.1.6 A graduate student has the right to appeal the decision to be dismissed from the program. The appeal should be performed as outlined in Department or College guidelines.

Students also have a right to address the grievance via the Academic Grievance Procedures [2].

1.2 Graduate students have the right to the best career preparation.

1.2.1 Students have the right to an objective review of progress and development in a specific field by a mentor, advisor, or other equivalent supervisory figure or committee on a regular basis. Whenever possible this review should be presented in written form.

1.2.2 Students have the right to confidentiality concerning feedback and evaluations with professors. A professor should not discuss an individual student's academic performance or behavior with other students except when it directly affects that other student. Discussion of a student between faculty and administrators should be of a professional nature only [3].

1.3 Graduate students have the right to an accurate description of the availability and the likelihood of ongoing financial and resource support within their program/emphasis.

1.3.1 Prospective and enrolled students should be provided with a thorough description of the requirements and qualifications necessary for student employment, training, and financial support within their departments.

1.4 Graduate students have the right to co-authorship in publications involving significant contributions of ideas or research work from the student consistent with generally accepted standards of their field of study.

1.5 Graduate students have the right to fair representation on issues that directly affect them.

1.5.1 The Graduate Student Council (GSC) is the recognized government body representing graduate students at UIC. All actions concerning graduate students as a whole by the University should be addressed with the GSC first.

1.5.2 Students have the right to address their general grievances with the University via the GSC, which will act as an advocate on the students behalf. In instances of individual student grievance, the GSC will aid in navigating the student through the University grievance system [2].

1.5.3 Students have the right to be represented at the department level via a student-faculty liaison, or representative. Representation shall be determined by a democratic election process.

1.5.4 Students have the right to address their grievances with the department through their DGS or faculty-student representative without fear of repercussions.

1.5.5 Procedures to address grievances at both the departmental and University level shall be outlined to the student upon admission to the program and shall include reasons for dismissal, informational on available legal counsel, etc.

1.6 Graduate students have the right to know all costs associated with graduate school prior to enrollment at UIC.

1.6.1 Upon admission to a program, graduate students should be presented with information detailing all costs, including tuition, fees, tuition differential (if any), and any other expenses that the student is expected to pay.

- 1.6.2 Graduate students have the right to be informed immediately when tuition, fees, tuition differentials, or any costs associated with graduate school are increased. Such information should come from the office or program that initiated the increase, or from the University itself. As with changes to graduation and course requirements, if the cost to a graduate student for a specific program is changed after the student has been admitted, the student shall not have to pay the increased charge.
- 1.6.3 Graduate students have the right not to pay unreasonable, arbitrary, or unannounced increases in fees, tuition, or tuition differentials, or any other increase by any name; and may appeal all such increases to the Graduate Student Council, the Graduate College, and the Provost, and shall not pay until such appeal has been settled.
- 1.7 Graduate students are financially vulnerable and should never be taken advantage of by the University or specific programs. Graduate students are not to be treated primarily as revenue generators for UIC or individual departments.
- 1.8 Graduate students have the right to an education free from discrimination based on 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 [4].

2 Responsibilities

In conjunction with the aforementioned rights as students, UIC Graduate Students have these accompanying responsibilities:

- 2.1 Graduate students have the responsibility to respect and uphold all relevant University policies regarding professional conduct as outlined by the Student Code of Conduct [5] and the Dean of Students' Campus Policies.
- 2.2 Graduate students have the responsibility to 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 befitting an academic colleague.
- 2.3 Graduate students have the responsibility to 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.
- 2.4 Graduate students have the responsibility to provide accurate and honest reporting of research results and to uphold ethical norms in research methodology and scholarship.

3 Best Practices

In addition to the above, the following Best Practices are strongly recommended.

- 3.1 Graduate students deserve the fullest consideration from the University and from their programs. Graduate Students should receive timely communication from the University, College, and Department.

- 3.1.1 Whenever appropriate, students should be consulted prior to program changes concerning curricula, requirements, and all other areas affecting degree progress.
 - 3.1.2 Academic progress should be judged in accordance with accepted criteria that have been made known to the student in advance. Evaluation should be truthful, concise, and available to the student. Written evaluations should be provided to the student following major program milestones (preliminary exams, pre-thesis, etc). Any grade of unsatisfactory should also contain a detailed explanation for the grade.
 - 3.1.3 Academic departments should offer training and education that is applicable to a range of career paths, including both academic and non-academic. The education provided by faculty should be consistent, regardless of a student's projected career path.
 - 3.1.4 Required courses should be offered frequently enough so as to not delay students' ability to complete all academic requirements.
 - 3.1.5 Departments should provide graduate students with information that will help them to be successful in their desired fields; i.e. grant writing workshops, article publication requirements, etc.
 - 3.1.6 Students should be presented with their programs' acceptance and attrition rates at major program milestones.
 - 3.1.7 Courses offered outside of students' specific disciplines, but relevant to their graduate work, should be open and available to them if they meet all prerequisites and space is available.
- 3.2 The University and its individual programs deserve the fullest consideration from graduate students.
- 3.2.1 Graduate students should devote a sufficient amount of time and energy to making progress towards achieving their advanced degrees, where it is acknowledged that exceptions may be made under special circumstances that include, but are not limited to, the particular nature of the research, financial hardship, physical or mental illness or disability, civil obligations, and religious obligations.
 - 3.2.2 Graduate students should communicate with individual faculty, departments, and the University administration in a timely manner, and should also communicate regularly with faculty mentors and advisors, especially in matters related to research, progress, concerns, and problems within the graduate program.
 - 3.2.3 Graduate students should demonstrate an awareness of the time constraints and other demands imposed on faculty members and program staff, and should take the initiative in asking questions that promote their understanding of the academic requirements and the financial particulars of their specific graduate programs.
- 3.3 Graduate students should contribute to the public service aspects of the mission of this public university, at a level appropriate to their ability and graduate program.
- 3.3.1 Graduate students in teaching positions should endeavor to provide high quality instruction to students. When providing such service, graduate students will do so with the same care, consideration, diligence and professionalism demonstrated by their faculty colleagues.
 - 3.3.2 Graduate students should endeavor to provide valuable research and support to faculty and fellow graduate students.

3.3.3 Graduate students should endeavor to contribute to the academic development and the social environment of the department or program in which they are pursuing their advanced degree.

3.4 Graduate students are encouraged, but not required, to provide service to their program, their department, school or college, and the University community to the extent that each is able.

3.4.1 This may include, but is not limited to: the recruitment and retention of fellow graduate students and faculty members; the hosting of, attending, and participating in colloquia and conferences; and other relevant decision-making committees.

3.4.2 Graduate students should endeavor to contribute to the administration and ongoing improvement of their graduate program, graduate student government, and the University.

4 Rights of Graduate Student Assistants and Fellows

UIC Graduate Students may be trainees, and as such they have the following rights.

4.1 Graduate trainees in the positions of Teaching Assistant and Graduate Assistant have the right to have terms and conditions of employment made in compliance with the Collective Bargaining Agreement [6] between the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois and the Graduate Employees Organization.

4.2 Graduate trainees in the position of research assistant have the right to benefits currently provided to TA/GA.

4.3 Graduate trainees have the right to a letter of appointment or contract at a reasonable time before the start of the appointment. This letter shall specify the appointment title, stipend amount, effective dates of service, supervising official in the department, the full time equivalence (FTE) of the appointment and the major components of the assignment.

4.3.1 Graduate trainees in receipt of a letter of offer or contract have the right to timely written communication of any changes to the appointment, funding, or availability of resources. Departments may not rescind letters of offer or revoke contracts.

4.4 Graduate trainees have the right to engage in academic or non-academic activities, including associations, political activities, publications or communications, during personal hours, except as provided by the Personnel Record Review Act, 820 ILCS 40/1 et seq [7].

4.5 Graduate trainees have the right to unfettered access to appropriate offices, laboratories, classrooms, and resources necessary to complete work obligations.

4.6 Graduate trainees have the right to be evaluated objectively for job performance and to expect that any recommendation or disciplinary action from that evaluation will be confidential and will first be addressed to the employee.

4.6.1 Graduate trainees have the right to be informed in writing when disciplinary or evaluative material is added to the employment file, and to review the file and add explanatory material as allowed by the Personnel Record Review Act, 820 ILCS 40/1 et seq [7].

- 4.7 Graduate trainees have the right to object if duties consistently require hours that exceed the terms of appointment, if duties conflict with other responsibilities, or if tasks are inappropriate or appear unrelated to the employee's job description. Employees may decline to perform tasks not closely related to their appointment responsibilities or professional development program and cannot be disciplined for such refusal without a meeting between the employee, supervisor, and department/unit contact person. Any discipline shall only be administered according to the University grievance procedures [2].
- 4.8 Graduate trainees have the right to hold additional employment so long as it does not affect the performance of duties related to employment at UIC.
- 4.9 Graduate trainees have the right to use legal services that may be available to students as set forth under the University of Illinois Liability Self-Insurance Plan [8].
- 4.10 Graduate trainees earning stipends and/or receiving waivers from departments or the University have the right to financial security and cannot be dismissed, compelled to resign, or have their compensation revoked without just cause, which includes full documentation provided to the department, the student, and the Graduate College. Such action must be announced and documentation provided in a timely manner such that the student, the Graduate Student Council, the department, and/or the Graduate College may request a review of such action prior to termination of support.
- 4.11 Graduate trainees have the right not to be discriminated against due to 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.

5 Responsibilities of Graduate Student Assistants and Fellows

In conjunction with the aforementioned rights as trainees, UIC Graduate Students have these accompanying responsibilities.

- 5.1 Graduate trainees are responsible for fulfilling their teaching and research obligations to the best of their knowledge, training, and ability; to carry out their job responsibilities in a conscientious and timely manner; and to perform their duties in accordance with all relevant University, state government, and federal government rules and regulations.
- 5.2 Graduate trainees have a responsibility to obtain permission from their current faculty advisor or supervisor before changing appointments or assignments. If a graduate employee cannot reasonably fulfill the obligations of employment, the employee has a responsibility to communicate this to a faculty advisor or supervisor in a timely and conscientious manner.
- 5.3 Graduate trainees have a responsibility to be available to work on the days and at the times outlined in the letter of appointment or contract, or at times explicitly discussed and mutually agreed to by the employee and supervisor.
- 5.4 Graduate trainees have the responsibility to report any observed unethical behavior related to graduate employment to their supervisor, unit contact person, department head, or the Graduate College.
 - 5.4.1 When making a formal report, graduate employees are responsible for following the university grievance guidelines [2] or other official procedures as applicable.

- 5.5 Should additional employment be desired, graduate trainees have the responsibility to only accept such employment as does not affect performance and does not conflict with financial aid rules.

6 Best Practices of Graduate Student Assistants and Fellows

In addition to the above, the following Best Practices are strongly recommended.

- 6.1 Graduate trainees should be treated as valued employees and junior colleagues.
- 6.1.1 Graduate trainees should be invited to hold regular meetings with a supervisor to receive feedback and guidance concerning work performance.
 - 6.1.2 Whenever possible, evaluation of graduate trainees should be positive, constructive, and collegial, and should include recommendations for further training and improvement. Employees who receive recommendations from a supervisor for improving deficiencies should be given fair opportunity to remedy such deficiencies.
 - 6.1.3 Graduate trainees should expect reasonable confidentiality in their communications with any supervisor. Discussion of an employee by faculty or staff members should be of a professional nature and limited to the employee's performance of job duties.
 - 6.1.4 Graduate trainees should not be asked or compelled to perform duties unrelated to their employment, especially such tasks as conflict with ethical and professional norms as commonly held at UIC, within an academic discipline, or as specified by the Illinois State Officials and Employees Ethics Act [9], or the University Ethics Officer [10].
- 6.2 Graduate trainees should have employment with well-defined parameters and relevance to the student's educational experience.
- 6.3 Graduate trainees should be made aware by employing programs of grievance procedures [2] available at the University, Graduate College, and departmental level.
- 6.4 All classroom, office, and laboratory spaces provided to graduate trainees should be secure and safe environments.
- 6.5 Graduate trainees should receive reasonable stipends that will not compel them to seek further employment.
- 6.6 Departments and the University should monitor faculty relationships with graduate trainees to ensure that graduate trainees are treated fairly, are not being used inappropriately, and that all faculty/graduate trainee interaction rises to the level of ethical excellence for which UIC is known.

References

- [1] The Graduate College Catalog.
<http://grad.uic.edu/cms/?pid=1000209>
- [2] University Grievance Guidelines.
http://www.uic.edu/depts/oaa/faculty/FINAL_VERSION_STUDENT_PROCEDURES.pdf

- [3] Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>
- [4] UIC Nondiscrimination Policy.
<http://grad.uic.edu/cms/?pid=1000048>
- [5] Student Code of Conduct.
http://www.vcsa.uic.edu/MainSite/departments/dean_of_students/Links/UIC+Discipline+Code.htm
- [6] Collective Bargaining Agreement.
<http://www.uic-geo.net/cba.pdf>
- [7] Personnel Record Review Act, 820 ILCS 40/1 et seq.
<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=2395&ChapAct=820\%C2\%A0ILCS\%C2\%A040/&ChapterID=68&ChapterName=EMPLOYMENT&ActName=Personnel+Record+Review+Act>
- [8] University of Illinois Liability Self-Insurance Plan.
<http://www.legal.uillinois.edu/images/SIP.pdf>
- [9] State Officials and Employees Ethics Act.
<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=2529&ChapAct=5\%26nbsp\%3BILCS\%26nbsp\%3B430\%2F&ChapterID=2&ChapterName=GENERAL+PROVISIONS&ActName=State+Officials+and+Employees+Ethics+Act>
- [10] University Ethics Officers.
<http://www.etcc.illinois.gov/officers.htm>