The Auburn CSSE Policy on Graduate (Teaching) Assistants

Proposed by
The CSSE Graduate Programs Committee and
The CSSE Undergraduate Programs Committee

Approved by the CSSE Faculty

Effective Term: Spring Semester 2020

1. General Information

1.1 Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) and Graduate Assistants (GAs)
For a student to be classified as a GTA, at least 50% of the student’s responsibility as a teaching assistant must be devoted to the direct instruction of students, typically in a classroom or laboratory setting. International graduate students must pass the test of spoken English to be qualified GTAs (see Section 2.2 for details); otherwise they will be categorized as a GA, whose role is limited to assisting the instructor (e.g., grading and assignment creation), with no instructional responsibilities.

1.2 Duties
GTAs and GAs work with the CSSE faculty, supporting instructors in a variety of ways. For example, GTAs may teach lower-level undergraduate courses; GAs may assist professors in grading homework assignments. GAs may assist course instructors with proctoring (but not lecturing) large classes, particularly when there is overflow and a few students need to be accommodated in the other places (e.g., the CSSE library).

Kickoff Meeting. GTAs/GAs are responsible for scheduling a kickoff meeting with the instructor(s) of their assigned course(s) prior to the first day of classes of each semester. The GTAs/GAs must be present on campus from the first day of classes until the day of commencement in each semester; any absences require prior permission of the course instructor(s) of the assigned courses.

Working Hours. The number of hours worked per week depends on the FTE (i.e., Full-Time Equivalent) percentage GTAs/GAs are employed. For example, 1/2-FTE students are obligated to work 20 hours per week; 1/3-FTE students are responsible for 13.3 hours per week including exam weeks. GTAs/GAs should be on campus from the Monday of the first week of classes or earlier until and including the last day of the final exam or later in each semester. It is of importance for GTAs/GAs to balance educational requirements with the pursuit of the graduate degrees and teaching assistantship requirements.

1.3 Credit Hours
GTAs/GAs must maintain office hours, perform service assignments, and during Fall or
Spring Semester must be enrolled in at least nine (9) graduate credit course hours at Auburn University. In summer semesters, GTAs/GAs must be enrolled in at least three (3) graduate credit course hours at Auburn University. Although exemptions may be approved by CSSE’s Graduate Program Director (GPO), the absolute minimum number of credit hours is three (3) per semester.

Please note that graduate students must be enrolled for at least nine (9) hours per semester. A graduate student may be exempt from being full time in three circumstances: 1) during the summer, if summer is not the student’s first semester at Auburn University, 2) if the student has been authorized to drop below a full course of study, 3) be certified as pursuing a full course of study with fewer than 9 credit hours due to special circumstances. If a graduate student is an international student, the student will have to file the “Full Course of Study Gold Form” to the Office of International Programs, after obtaining signatures from his/her advisor and Mr. Clint Lovelace, to be exempt from being full time. The form is available here: http://www.auburn.edu/academic/international/isss/docs/full_course_of_study_instructions.pdf

1.4 The Maximum Departmental GTA/GA Support

The maximum combined duration of all one’s departmentally funded GTA/GA appointments is four (4) academic semesters (i.e., Fall or Spring semesters) for a master student and eight (8) academic semesters for a PhD student. An exception to extend support under extenuating circumstances must be approved by the student’s advisor, the graduate committee, and the department chair. Doctoral students who transfer to a master’s degree program without pursuing the PhD degree will lose teaching assistantship awards.

1.5 GTA/GA Orientations

GTAs/GAs are required to attend all graduate-student-orientation sessions scheduled at the beginning of Fall and Spring semesters by the department and the Graduate School.

All new GTAs/GAs are required to attend a new GTA orientation conducted by the Biggio Center in the semester in which the GTAs/GAs are assigned the GTA appointments.

Vacations, internship plans, and the like are not excuses for nonattendance. Nonattendance can result in revoking a GTA/GA appointment.

1.6 Business and Personal Trips

GTAs/GAs are Auburn employees and, therefore, GTAs/GAs are expected to be in Auburn and come to work from Monday to Friday every week. If GTAs/GAs plan to be away from campus due to a business or personal trip within a semester, the GTAs/GAs must obtain permissions from all instructors the GTAs/GAs are working for prior to the trip.

1.7 Parking Permits

The department generally does not provide justification to the Parking Office for B zone permits for graduate students. Graduate students are eligible for C zone permits. Tiger
shuttles (and on-call safety shuttles during evenings and nights) are available to go to/from CSSE to the C parking lots.

2. GTA Qualifications and Applications

2.1 Eligibility

GTA/GA appointments are available to graduate students in the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering (CSSE) on a competitive basis. All international students who apply for a teaching assistantship are required to score a minimum of 79 on TOEFL or a 6.5 on the IELTS (i.e., International English Language Testing System).

2.2 Test of Spoken English for International GTAs

International GTAs are required to pass the test of spoken English or TSE, and must meet the following minimum standards:

- TOEFL, 23 or higher on speaking section
- IELTS, 7 or higher on speaking section
- SPEAK Test administered at AU, 4.4 or higher

If you have any question regarding the SPEAK test, please contact Ms. Diamond – the Coordinator of International Scholars English Center. Ms. Diamond’s phone number is (334) 844-2747; you may also reach her through email at diamoms@auburn.edu


2.3 Applications and Evaluations

CSSE GTA/GA appointments are awarded on the basis of undergraduate GPA, GRE scores, TOEFL (for International Students), letters of recommendation, Statement of Purpose, and interviews (optional). Assistantships can only be awarded after a student has completed their Graduate School application. All CSSE GTAs/GAs must satisfactorily pass a University background check, the cost of which is covered by the GTAs/GAs.

CSSE GTAs/GAs are required to have an annual evaluation each semester. The renewal of GTA/GA appointments is contingent upon satisfactory performance as well as availability of GTA/GA funds.

3. Communication

3.1 Emails

Email is Auburn University’s official form of communication. You are expected to check your email daily during each semester, in which you perform a GTA/GA role. During working days, you are expected to respond to student emails concerning homework or project assignments by the next business day.

GTAs/GAs are required to use their Auburn TigerMail accounts for communications regarding any GTA/GA matter.
GTAs/GAs are Auburn University employees, who are not allowed to work more than 20 hours from Monday to Friday. University employees are not required to work on weekends or holidays. Nevertheless, it is recommended that on weekends or holidays GTAs/GAs make their best effort to be responsive to emails.

3.2 Mailboxes
Each GTA/GA has a mailbox located in Shelby Center room 3101J. All the GTAs/GAs must check their assigned departmental mailboxes at least twice per week during the official university semesters. The mailing address for GTAs/GAs is the Department of Computer Science and Software Engineering, 3101 Shelby Center, Auburn University, AL 36849-5211.

3.3 Social Media
When you post comments and videos/photos on social networks (e.g., FaceBook and Twitter), you should avoid any remark about students and classes you are enrolled in. Please note that your inappropriate photos and comments on social media may reflect badly on our department and/or our graduate program.

You are strongly encouraged to interact with students through Canvas and Piazza. You should avoid interacting with students via social networks like FaceBook or Twitter; don’t be a “Friend” of your students on social networks other than Canvas and Piazza.

4. Interacting with Students
4.1 Conflict of Interests
GTAs/GAs should work together with the course instructor to avoid any conflict of interest during grading. GTAs/GAs have conflicts of interest in grading any family member, close friend, boyfriend, or girlfriend. In case of any conflict of interest, GTAs/GAs should make this information known to course instructors and GPO.

One practical way of solving conflict-of-interest problems is, if there are two or more GTAs/GAs for a course, to re-balance who grades which student. If there is just one GTA/GA for the course, the course instructor should grade those students who have a conflict of interest with the GTA/GA.

4.2 Office Hours
GTAs/GAs must, with the approval of the instructors of their assigned courses, establish office hours and locations, by the first week of classes (in smaller classes it may be both practical and useful to poll the students at the start of the semester on which hours work best for them). Locations must be in a publicly accessible AU office or lab (one available location is a desk in the space provided by the CSSE department for GTA office hours). Office hours must be scheduled on weekdays between 7:45 AM and 10:00 PM. The office-hour schedules should be communicated to the students (e.g., via Canvas, the syllabus), the GPO, and the departmental administrative staff. GTAs/GAs must be present during their scheduled office hours in their assigned location; any exceptions must be granted by the
course instructors. Substantiated student complaints of non-availability during office hours can result in revoking the absent GTA/GA’s appointment. GTAs/GAs are expected to treat their students courteously and respectfully.

5. Interacting with CSSE Faculty and Staff

GTAs/GAs are expected to courteously and respectfully treat our CSSE staff members, whose play a vital role in assisting the faculty and directing CSSE students.

GTAs/GAs are considered employees of Auburn University. Like the faculty and university personnel, GTAs/GAs should adhere to all the policies including a policy concerning sexual harassment and romantic relationships. Inappropriate behaviors will result in the loss of the graduate teaching assistantship. You will, of course, be treated with respect by CSSE faculty and staff.

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