A Guide for a Successful Graduate Assistantship

Fall 2012 Semester
Graduate Assistantships

• An opportunity to take on a more professional role in your graduate career
• You are here because we believe in you and think you can succeed
• We need you to succeed because the work you do is the only way our programs are offered and our research gets done!
• Resources are available to help you succeed in your position
For All GAs & TAs

• Duties and Obligations
• Work schedule and obligations
• Confidentiality
• Stress Management
• Cubicle and Kitchen Etiquette
Duties and Obligations

• To other people
• To yourself

• Four Principles for Ethical Work Relationships
  – Respect for Autonomy
  – Beneficence
    • Doing good for people
  – Non-maleficence
    • Not harming people
  – Justice
Negotiate your work schedule up front

• Same # of hours each week or variable?
• Don’t spend so much time on work that you can’t work on your own courses; your first responsibility is to be a good student
  – You owe that to yourself
• If you can’t finish your course work, negotiate for an incomplete with your instructor or negotiate with your work supervisor or both! Don’t let things get out of control!
Privacy and Confidentiality

• Confidentiality is important
• Don’t violate privacy as it shows respect for an individual’s autonomy and builds trust among your co-workers
• Your privacy is important too; don’t provide personal information to students; you are not obligated to share personal information to students
• You owe confidentiality to faculty and staff as well; don’t tell stories about what you have heard or seen in your department or assignment area
Inappropriate Behavior

• Discrimination because of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability, is illegal or not CSU policy
  – If you feel you are being discriminated against or harassed by your supervisor, you should go to the Affirmative Action office; don’t go to chair or dean, go directly to Affirmative Action Office. They will reach out to your Chair/Dean
Time and Stress Management

• Stress is a biochemical reaction to a perceived threat
• Stress is an inner process caused by what you THINK about something
• Signs and symptoms of stress:
  – Physiological: increased heart rate, upset stomach, muscle tension, headaches, etc.
  – Psychological: negative thoughts, inability to focus, disorganization, panic, anger, depression, etc.
What are common responses?

- Sleep more/sleep less or fidget
- Bite nails
- Drink more/use drugs
- Avoid confrontation
- Ignore the problems causing the stress
- Or......
- Do something about your feelings, response, etc.!!!! Focus on finding a solution, not worrying!
What to do about stress?

• Examine what you are doing to aggravate the situation and make a change
• Examine your thoughts, your actions and the changes that might make things better
• Common negative thoughts:
  – You have to do it all yourself
  – You have to be perfect
  – It will get better if I ignore it
What Can You Change?

• Your perceptions
• How you react to feeling stressed

• Develop a strategy (write it down) and practice new ways
Stress Reduction Strategies

- Change your breathing: use your diaphragm, not your chest; slowly, through your nose, controlled
- Take time to relax! Body, mind, spirit
- Exercise regularly (really) at least 3 times per week
- Redirect negative thoughts: replace with other positive thoughts
- TALK TO YOUR SUPERVISOR AND SHARE YOUR CONCERNS AND STRESS
Research GAs

• Ethics governing human subjects research
  – Know what this entails by checking out CSU Research Office guidelines

• If you are doing research with a faculty member, talk ahead of time whether or not the work is substantial enough that you will be a co-author for the work or mentioned as a participant
Teaching Assistants

• Our students
• Your responsiveness matters
• Power
• Bad situations
Our Students

• Most are adults; don’t be paternalistic
  – Give them options, guide them, make suggestions
  – The work is up to them; they are responsible

• Cut them some slack when it is warranted (for professional, grown up reasons)
  – You are setting expectations for them that they will need to know for professional practice after they graduate
Grading

• Be sure you understand the expectations of the faculty member for your work
  – Grading: take it seriously
  – If you don’t think a student is capable of writing what you see in a paper, use *turn it in* or talk to your supervisor
  – Report plagiarism or other cheating issues immediately to your supervisor
Be Responsive

• To all students, not just the ones you like
• Provide an equitable amount of time and attention to all students that need your assistance
• If your supervisor notifies you that a student is eligible for an accommodation from the Office of Disability Services, *make sure you understand what that means and what to do*
• These are issues of justice!!!
Power Inequity

• You have power over the students
  – Don’t abuse your power toward your students
  – Beneficence and non-maleficence

• Your supervisor has power over you
  – Don’t let yourself be abused
  – Report concerns about work hours to the Dept. Chair
Inappropriate Behavior

• Discrimination because of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or disability, is illegal
  – If a student tells you he or she feels discriminated against or harassed by your supervisor or someone else in the college, don’t try to handle this yourself.
  – Send the student directly to the Affirmative Action Office; the student should no go to the chair or dean, but go directly to Affirmative Action Office. They will reach out to your Chair/Dean.
Bad situations

• Your interaction with students should be in confidence

• EXCEPT when you feel the student is threatening, might harm himself or others, etc.
  – For situations that you are unsure of or uncomfortable with please consult with your supervisor as soon as possible
  – You may *not* provide information about students to other students, parents, and non university staff
  – You *may* provide information to university personnel who have a legitimate interest in your welfare and the welfare of all students
Tips to Avoid “Issues”

• Meet the student on campus, not at home or at a social setting
• Keep the door open if you meet here in an office
• Sit with a desk between you
• Don’t stand to close or touch
• Don’t get involved romantically or sexually---absolutely not!!!! Not with students or faculty
• Try to understand the language and cultural differences we have and be respectful
General Expectations

• Provide your supervisor with your class schedule
• Work out when you will work and show up or check in
• Notify your supervisor when you are ill, have to take care of business or any other reason you will not be able to work
• Alert your supervisor immediately if you will not be able to complete assignments on time
• Communicate on an ongoing basis with supervisor
• Be proactive: ask if you are doing a good job, meeting his/her expectations; do a good job on your assignments
• Treat all department and student service staff with respect; please do no expect staff to drop everything to help you with a problem at a moments notice
• Please print work for your classes or your personal use in the labs, not on departmental printers. These should be used for the work you do for your GA/TA assignment exclusively; do not print in color except for the very final, final version of a report
• Your contract renewal depends upon meeting these basic expectations
• If you have a concern about your assignment or your supervisor see Rachel Singer or Dr. Jones; don’t let things get worse
• If you have concerns about your courses, see your academic program director or Joan Demko first
Cubicle Expectations

- You are one of many students working near your supervisor—be respectful of the space around you.
- No smoking, no heavy perfumes or colognes please as some of your colleagues and others in the building are probably sensitive.
- Please contain your belongings within the confines of your cubicle: not on the very top, not on the floor along the walkway, etc. This is a safety issue and is good to create a professional work environment.
- Do not store opened food in your cubicle (to avoid pests). Seal all food in zip bags or containers.
- Do not eat other people’s food in the refrigerators or leave food to spoil in the refrigerators.
- Clean up after yourself in the kitchens RIGHT WHEN YOU USE THEM; do not leave dirty dishes in the sink or cook food in the microwave that get’s it dirty.
- Please let Valerie Hicks know immediately if you computer is not functioning properly.
- NEVER prop open the doors to your suites; this creates an unsafe environment for everyone; never leave your valuables on your desk—use your storage areas and lock things up!!!