

American Association of University Professors

Statement on Graduate Students

The statement which follows was approved by the Association's Committee on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication in October 1999. It was adopted by the AAUP's Council in June 2000 and endorsed by the Eighty-sixth Annual Meeting.

PREAMBLE

Graduate programs in universities exist for the discovery and transmission of knowledge, the education of students, the training of future faculty, and the general well-being of society. Free inquiry and free expression are indispensable to the attainment of these goals.

In 1967 the American Association of University Professors participated with the National Student Association, the Association of American Colleges, and others in the formulation of the *Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students*. The *Joint Statement* has twice been revised and updated, most recently in November 1992. The AAUP's Committee on College and University Teaching, Research, and Publication, while supporting the Association's continuing commitment to the *Joint Statement*, believes that the distinctive circumstances of graduate students require a supplemental statement.

The statement which follows has been formulated to reflect the educational maturity and the distinguishing academic characteristics and responsibilities of graduate students. These students not only engage in more advanced studies than their undergraduate counterparts, but often they also hold teaching or research assistantships. As graduate assistants, they carry out many of the functions of faculty members and receive compensation for these duties. The statement below sets forth recommended standards that we believe will foster sound academic policies in universities with graduate programs. The responsibility to secure and respect general conditions conducive to a graduate student's freedom to learn and to teach is shared by all members of a university's graduate community. Each university should develop policies and procedures that safeguard this freedom. Such policies and procedures should be developed within the framework of those general standards that enable the university to fulfill its educational mission. These standards are offered not simply to protect the rights of affected individuals but also to ensure that graduate education fulfills its responsibilities to students, faculty, and society.¹

RECOMMENDED STANDARDS

1. Graduate students have the right to academic freedom. Like other students, they "should be free to take reasoned exception to the data or views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled."² Moreover, because of their advanced education, graduate students should be encouraged by their professors to exercise their freedom of "discussion, inquiry and expression."³ Further, they should be able to express their opinions freely about matters of institutional policy, and they should have the same freedom of action in the public political domain as faculty members should have. Graduate students' freedom of inquiry is necessarily qualified by their still being learners in the profession; nonetheless, their faculty mentors should afford them latitude and respect as they decide how they will engage in teaching and research.
2. Graduate students have the right to be free from illegal or unconstitutional discrimination, or discrimination on a basis not demonstrably related to job function, including, but not limited to, age, sex, disability, race, religion, national origin, marital status, or sexual orientation, in admissions and throughout their education, employment, and placement.⁴

Graduate students should be informed of the requirements of their degree programs. When feasible, they should be told about acceptance, application, and attrition rates in their fields, but it is also their responsibility to keep

themselves informed of these matters. If degree requirements are altered, students admitted under previous rules should be able to continue under those rules. Graduate students should be assisted in making timely progress toward their degrees by being provided with diligent advisers, relevant course offerings, adequate dissertation or thesis supervision, and periodic assessment of and clear communication on their progress. Students should understand that dissertation or thesis work may be constrained by the areas of interest and specialization of available faculty supervisors.

If a graduate student's dissertation or thesis adviser departs from the institution once the student's work is under way, the responsible academic officers should endeavor to provide the student with alternative supervision, external to the institution if necessary. If a degree program is to be discontinued, provisions must be made for students already in the program to complete their course of study.

3. Graduate students are entitled to the protection of their intellectual property rights, including recognition of their participation in supervised research and their research with faculty, consistent with generally accepted standards of attribution and acknowledgment in collaborative settings. Written standards should be publicly available.
4. Graduate students should have a voice in institutional governance at the program, department, college, graduate school, and university levels.
5. Under the Association's *Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure*, graduate student assistants are to be informed in writing of the terms and conditions of their appointment and, in the event of proposed dismissal, are to be afforded access to a duly constituted hearing committee.⁵ They should be informed of all academic or other institutional regulations affecting their roles as employees. Graduate student employees with grievances, as individuals or as a group, should submit them in a timely fashion and should have access to an impartial faculty committee or, if provided under institutional policy, arbitration. Clear guidelines and timelines for grievance procedures should be distributed to all interested parties. Individual grievants or participants in a group grievance should not be subjected to reprisals. Graduate student employees may choose a representative to speak for them or with them at all stages of a grievance.
6. Good practice should include appropriate training and supervision in teaching, adequate office space, and a safe working environment. Departments should endeavor to acquaint students with the norms and traditions of their academic discipline and to inform them of professional opportunities. Graduate students should be encouraged to seek departmental assistance in obtaining future academic and nonacademic employment. Departments are encouraged to provide support for the professional development of graduate students by such means as funding research expenses and conference travel.
7. Graduate students should have access to their files and placement dossiers. If access is denied, graduate students should be able to have a faculty member of their choice examine their files and, at the professor's discretion, provide the student with a redacted account. Graduate students should have the right to direct that items be added to or removed from their placement dossiers.
8. As the Association's Council affirmed in November 1998, graduate student assistants, like other campus employees, should have the right to organize to bargain collectively. Where state legislation permits, administrations should honor a majority request for union representation. Graduate student assistants must not suffer retaliation from professors or administrators because of their activity relating to collective bargaining.
9. In order to assist graduate students in making steady progress toward their degrees, the time they spend in teaching or research assistantships or other graduate employment at the institution should be limited in amount—a common maximum is twenty hours per week—and should afford sufficient compensation so as not to compel the student to obtain substantial additional employment elsewhere.
1. Graduate student assistants, though they work only part time, should receive essential fringe benefits, and especially health benefits.

Endnotes:

1. We recognize that the responsibilities of graduate students vary widely among individuals, courses of study, and institutions. Some provisions of this statement may not apply to students in professional schools who may have different types of responsibilities from students in other disciplines. [Back to Text](#)
2. "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students," AAUP, *Policy Documents and Reports*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C., 2001), 262. [Back to Text](#)
3. *Ibid.* [Back to Text](#)
4. "[On Discrimination](#)," *Policy Documents and Reports*, 185. [Back to Text](#)
5. "[Recommended Institutional Regulations on Academic Freedom and Tenure](#)," Regulation 13, *ibid.*, 29. [Back to Text](#)

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