

## **Guidelines for supporting Graduate Teaching Assistants for Fall 2020**

Graduate students are an integral part of the teaching community at Virginia Tech, and their well-being should be given consideration equal to that of any other instructor in the planning and execution of courses. Accordingly, the Virginia Tech Graduate Academy of Teaching Excellence (VTGrATE) with help from the [Fall Teaching and Learning Working Group](#) have prepared the following recommendations to support Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in the conduct of their duties during the fall 2020 semester.

1. An agreement (apart from the traditional assistantship contract) should be prepared between the GTA and their faculty supervisor, specifying their respective daily/weekly/monthly tasks along with estimated GTA hours required. We recommend that this include an expectation that GTAs work no more than an average of 20 hours per week per Graduate School policies. GTAs and their supervisors should check in regularly during the semester to ensure that the work is not exceeding these expectations.
2. GTAs should be included in all faculty communications and deliberations related to course planning, standards, and expectations. GTAs should not have to rely on secondary or indirect communication of this critical information.
3. All GTAs, especially individuals who have concerns for their safety, shall be given reasonable accommodations to plan and deliver their in-person instruction in a way that empowers and protects themselves and is equivalent to the accommodations given to those in the faculty ranks. This will not require an authority's note.
4. Each GTA should have the opportunity to acknowledge they have had all their concerns addressed to the extent possible prior to starting the fall semester.
5. GTAs should not be solely responsible for sanitization of classroom spaces and equipment. This will be a group effort among housekeeping staff, laboratory staff, students, GTAs, and faculty.
6. The academic units in which GTAs are employed should provide the technical and financial support GTAs need to do their teaching well and safely this fall.

These supports include personal protective equipment, online-learning platforms, hardware, software, and safe, quiet spaces to teach and hold office hours.

7. GTAs should have the opportunity to discuss with their supervisor intellectual property rights for any teaching materials they create, and the agreement should be finalized in writing. The agreement should abide by Virginia Tech's Policy on Intellectual Property (No. 13000) with respect to rights of the creator and acceptable use of by the University.
8. GTAs should have clear guidelines for enforcing mask and social distancing expectations in their classes. The [guidelines established by the university](#) should be shared with GTAs and discussed in the context of the specific course they will be teaching. GTAs should have the same protection as faculty members when enforcing these university and departmental guidelines.
9. If graduate students believe that these guidelines are not being met, they should have a clear path to voice their concerns and gain resolution. They should start with their supervisor, then as needed proceed to their Graduate Program Director or Department Head, and then if necessary, to the Graduate School Dean or an Associate Dean. The Graduate School Ombudsperson can help students verbalize the issues and serve as an impartial mediator if needed.
10. An online teaching option should be available for all GTAs.

For further information regarding policies and expectations related to graduate students, please see:

1. Guidelines for graduate education during COVID-19: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/fall2020-plan/guidelines.html>
2. Expectations for Graduate Education: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/expectations-for-graduate-education-overview.html>
3. Graduate Student Assembly concerns and requests regarding COVID-19 and the fall semester: <https://gsa.vt.edu/advocacy/covid-19-statement.html>
4. VTGrATE GTA Survey Report: [https://bit.ly/VTGrATE\\_Survey\\_Report](https://bit.ly/VTGrATE_Survey_Report)

5. Contact information for the Graduate School Ombudsperson:

<https://www.graduate.ombudsman.vt.edu/>