Guidelines for Teaching Assistants – Approved 6/18/2009

Overview – Students designated as Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) receive stipend and/or tuition from the School of Pharmacy in exchange for teaching assistance. GTAs are School employees who, like any other paid employee, are required to fulfill their duties satisfactorily or risk loss of funding or employment. GTAs are also expected to work with some degree of independence, but faculty supervisors must also be aware that the students, especially in their first year, are inexperienced with regard to teaching and the School’s teaching culture. This document is intended to act as a guide for students and faculty regarding GTA assignments.

Assignments – Teaching assignments are made at the department level. Allocation of duties between students within a department should be as equitable as possible. All concerns about equitable distribution of teaching duties should be addressed at the department level.

GTAs are expected to work 10-12 hours on average per week per semester of funding. The workload should take into account student preparation time and lecture attendance, in addition to other assigned duties such as grading. Generally, we recommend the student should only be required to teach in no more than 2 courses at a time. If this is not possible, time allocations should consider the transition time required to teach multiple courses.

Duties – GTAs are responsible for knowing what is expected of them in terms of their teaching duties. Therefore, open communication with the supervisor throughout the semester is essential, even if the supervisor does not volunteer feedback on the GTA’s performance. Common courtesy is also expected of the GTA in terms of promptness, behaving in a professional manner, adhering to VCU rules regarding laboratory safety, conduct in classrooms and with students, and not contradicting course instructors or coordinators in the presence of students.

Upon receiving the teaching assignment, GTAs should make an appointment to meet with the course coordinator as soon as reasonably possible. The supervisor will provide the student a course syllabus and inform the student of their course duties and other expectations, including pertinent details such as time, location, and duration of duties in the following areas:

1. Lecture attendance – which lectures should be attended
2. Office hours
3. Tutoring
4. Grading and grade management – including when grades are due, and how assignments should be graded
5. Lab set-up, take down and Pharmacy student supervision – including when set-up should be completed, the role of the GTA in teaching labs, etc.
6. Other items relevant to the course
Graduate students should schedule their own coursework requirements, personal and professional responsibilities around their TA duties. Resolution of scheduling conflicts between required coursework and GTA duties should be negotiated at the department level. In the event the student must be absent from assignments, they must inform their supervisor at least 48 hours in advance to make arrangements for make-up, or as soon as possible in the case of illness. In addition, anticipated absences of greater than 24 hours require 30 days notice to the supervisor.

Supervisors – Together with the GTA, supervisors are also responsible for maintaining communication with the GTAs they supervise. Documenting and sharing with students their expectations and the consequences of failing to meet expectations for their teaching assignments may be a useful tool to prevent misunderstandings. Supervisors are also encouraged to offer both positive and negative feedback on performance with the GTAs they supervise in a constructive manner. Negative feedback can improve performance when given in a constructive fashion. Supervisors should also communicate teaching schedules and duties to the students in advance and in a timely manner.

In certain circumstances, GTA teaching assignments occur outside the student’s home department. In this event, course coordinators should submit a report summarizing the quality of the GTA’s performance to the student’s department chair at the end of the semester.