

May 11, 2020

Dear Mary Jo,

Attached is the report of the CGS Subcommittee on Policies and Student Petitions (PSP) written in response to Dean Colombo's charge to recommend actions to be taken by the College to improve the learning outcomes of GTAs and ensure their development as teachers in two key areas: (1) mentoring and (2) evaluation. Some words of explanation are in order. The Subcommittee chose to consider part (2) (evaluation) first since we believed that coherent recommendations in that part would inform how we addressed the mentoring portion of the charge. We completed that part of our response before the major disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it is listed first in the report below. We suggest that this fall, this Subcommittee reconsider how to adapt our current recommendations, since at this point it may be clearer how COVID-19 will affect the University. For the part of the Dean's charge concerning mentoring of GTAs, which was written more recently, the Subcommittee chose to address more broadly how to mentor GTAs in the current time of crisis.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Martin (PSP Subcommittee Chair, 2019-2020)

For CGS-PSP: Profs. Bartholomew Dean (S'20), Jeremy Martin, Emma Scioli, Margot Versteeg, David Weis, Alesia Wozidlo (F'19)

1. Evaluation of GTAs

Guiding principle: Evaluation of GTAs should be viewed as an extension of faculty mentoring of graduate students.

Each unit should establish its own evaluation and post-evaluation procedures according to the unit and/or discipline standards and KU requirements, in keeping with the KU policy on [Performance Evaluations for Graduate Teaching Assistants](#). We recommend different evaluations and targeted feedback keyed to different GTA positions/roles. Unit procedures should acknowledge that evaluation is not necessarily just a one-time visit to the classroom - it may include one or more visits, or none at all, depending on the format of class (discussion/recitation sections, lab, online, etc.), the specific role/experience of the GTA, the skills being evaluated, etc. An effective evaluation may also include reviewing course materials, discussing teaching practices with the GTA and/or directing the GTA to relevant resources. Evaluations should encompass both "hard skills" (knowledge of the material, carrying out responsibilities,

compliance with unit and KU policies) and “soft skills” (e.g., interpersonal skills and effective communication). In addition, feedback should focus primarily on specific observations and suggestions for improvement, rather than on quantitative evaluation (e.g., “Outstanding/Exceeds Expectations/Meets Expectations/Needs Improvement/Unsatisfactory”). The evaluation process should include input from the GTA.

Units should be able to give negative evaluations to GTAs for constructive purposes, without fear of drastic consequences. Negative feedback may fall into three categories of seriousness: (i) areas that need improvement; (ii) seriously unacceptable performance according to unit and/or discipline standards; (iii) serious violation of professional conduct according to the [Student Rights & Responsibilities Policy](#), the [Memorandum of Agreement \(MOA\)](#) between KU and GTAC, and other [KU policies](#). Units should determine for themselves the boundary between (i) and (ii), and should clearly specify outcomes in each of the three cases. It is important that policymakers, administrators, and evaluators at the unit level understand HR’s role in GTA appointments and know what does and does not need to be reported to HR. Feedback of type (i), which typically should comprise the majority of negative feedback, can be handled at the unit level and need not be reported to HR or elsewhere. Units should document in writing such feedback and steps for improvement. For feedback in (ii), the unit may choose to consult with and/or report to HR to lay a foundation for further action if the behavior persists. Feedback in (iii) must be reported to HR.

2. Mentoring and Supporting our GTAs in a Time of Crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed drastic and unexpected demands on all instructors: converting in-person classes to teaching remotely; increased difficulty in communication with students, peers and supervisors; unfamiliarity or lack of access to helpful technology; and new time-management challenges, among others. These circumstances are difficult for all, **but especially so for GTAs, who are uniquely vulnerable**: they are first and foremost students responsible for their own education, and in general, they have much less experience and resources (financial and otherwise) than faculty members. Right now, mentoring GTAs must include not only actively protecting their rights as junior colleagues, but also ensuring that they are not disproportionately affected by the burdens of these extraordinary conditions. The circumstances created by the COVID-19 crisis have thrown into relief the uniquely precarious status of GTAs; mentors of GTAs need to be aware of this and should tailor their mentoring to keep this awareness at the forefront of their practices going forward

as long as we are being asked to adapt to any teaching situation that disrupts our traditional mentoring practices.