

INTRODUCTION

Research Assistantships are funded through grants or contracts and they are used to support graduate students in performing sponsored research. A graduate research assistant (RA) usually works closely with the faculty member responsible for the grant or contract. However, it should be understood that the RA takes FULL responsibility for his/her conduct while performing the sponsored research. This includes learning how to perform the research and being prepared to perform that research in a timely and professional manner. Gaining the necessary scientific background, technical expertise and/or experience to perform the assigned research is an important part of the RA's growth and continued support. To gain this knowledge, the RA is expected to ask questions of the responsible faculty or associated research team, attend any related meetings or training sessions, read all relevant literature (including textbooks, monographs and research articles) and remain in a self-educating mode throughout the entire term of the assistantship.

GRA appointments are initiated by the faculty member responsible for the grant or contract and are made entirely at the discretion of that faculty member. In general, a GRA appointment provides a significant benefit to the student by allowing an intense focus on thesis and dissertation research. As such, it should be treated accordingly and used productively. It should be understood that **reappointment** as an RA depends on continued availability of grant or contract funding. However, other factors (such as prior research productivity) may affect this decision.

Additional details of Chemistry Department and Graduate School policies governing RA appointments are given in the *Chemistry Graduate Program Policies & Procedures Manual* as well as citations therein. Details regarding the expectations and grounds for dismissal of a RA are given below.

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I. GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

It should be understood that the following guidelines are general. The faculty member/grant holder may implement his/her own guidelines depending on the specific demands of the research project or differences among the disciplines.

I-1 EXPECTATIONS

The following *minimum* research expectations have been established for most projects. The advisors/grant holders may implement their own guidelines which will complement this set.

1. Safety rules and precautions must be enforced *at all times*. As a first approximation, for general safety rules, see the Safety section in the TA manual; general rules of fire, radiation, chemical safety and waste handling are listed in the UND safety manual. However, the RA should be aware of specific safety issues for all of the specific tasks to be performed and implement them thoroughly. **Safety is the first priority in any research project.**
2. Research must be conducted in a professional manner *at all times*. This includes (but is not limited to) coming to work on time and well-prepared, carefully supervising the lab equipment, making inclusive notes in the notebook, performing research based on high technical standards, reporting the values honestly and in a proper way, etc. Your teaching and learning duties or personal problems should not be used as an excuse for poor job performance. The grant holder (research advisor) is the ultimate authority in setting up standards.
3. A student's efficiency as an RA is assessed primarily in producing its *final* product, technically sound and well-presented accomplishments (ultimately leading to peer-reviewed publications). However, it is widely recognized that making accomplishments requires spending considerable time in the lab. Being present in the lab every day is a necessity, but this is not sufficient. Note that the amount of time you spend in the lab to fulfill your research *credits* is not included in the expected time you spend in the lab as an RA. In planning your time, keep in mind that a minimum 3 hours per week per credit is required for undergraduate lab courses; however, for graduate research, given the cap on tuition waivers and requirements on research productivity, it is in your interests to increase this number to *at least* 4-5 hours per credit per week.
4. The rules of scientific/professional conduct apply to RAs without any exceptions. *Honest conduct of research and handling of the obtained data* is one of the most important priorities that cannot be over-stressed. All research must be conducted by the RAs unless the advisor says otherwise. RAs cannot fake any data or make them "look better". These are foundations of science. **The RA must know these and other rules of scientific conduct prior to starting the work and apply them precisely and thoroughly.**
5. Maintaining lab notebooks is absolutely essential; this is a part of the honest academic conduct. The notebooks should be handled properly and legible to others; the experimental results and procedures must be described with the essential level of detail, so they could be reproduced by any other chemist. The notebook is both a legal document and product of the RA's work. Notebooks are the property of UND, not the RA.

6. All meetings set by the advisor must be attended and the assigned tasks must be addressed without reminders.
7. The laboratory must be kept clean and equipment must be maintained. RAs are solely responsible for the equipment they use. Also see the following Housekeeping section.
8. In situations where an RA is unable to perform assigned tasks (e.g., severe illness), it is the responsibility of the RA to inform the advisor, make appropriate arrangements, and perform the assigned tasks at a different time.

I-2 HOUSEKEEPING

Cleanliness of the laboratory space and proper maintenance of equipment is just as important from the standpoint of safety as it is from the standpoints of aesthetics and efficiency. Spilled chemicals, improper disposal of chemicals, broken glassware, and malfunctioning equipment can potentially do great harm. In addition to enforcing overall safety in the laboratory, an RA must ensure that spills and breakages are corrected as quickly as possible, fixing the problem personally. In some situations, the stockroom and Advisor should become involved in the corrective action. Computer must be used in a manner that is conducive to all users' needs.

I-3 TIME AND EFFORT GUIDELINES

The job of an RA is assisting the advisor/grant holder in conducting important (usually externally funded) research. Therefore, RAs are expected to make a major effort in obtaining solid and reliable results, use his/her background and skills, and acquire whatever skills are necessary to perform the assigned task. We expect our RAs to be **professional**, which implies doing whatever is necessary to get the job done in the best, most appropriate way. Gaining both the background scientific knowledge and research experience is an RA's responsibility. RAs are welcome to ask their research mentors, other professors, and/or more experienced RAs questions. However, they are ultimately expected to run their projects efficiently and relatively independently (with the degree of independence dictated by their advisors). Remember that an RA is not a "stipend" or nine-to-five job, although a *minimum* of 20 hours per week for a half-time position is implied. This time has nothing to do with research credits, even if the research for credits and for money is the same: research for credits requires *additional* time (see item 3 in Section I-1. This job is not about spending a certain amount of time in the lab, it is about getting your work done. We expect RAs to remain on a self-educating mode throughout the entire semester, picking up the essential background to run their projects more efficiently.

According to the Department policy, RAs get 1 week (5 days) for sick leave per semester. This time cannot be used for vacation or any other reason (you can use it for family emergency). The advisor may ask you to provide a physician's document. However, even if you were sick, you need to get the job done, and this is what you are paid for. If you feel that your health problems interfere with your job duties, you should talk to your supervisor immediately. You may consider signing a document stating that you will make up for your absence during vacation time, or ask for a non-paid leave of absence.

You cannot quit your RA position in the middle of semester without a good reason: this may result in your dismissal as a graduate student. Generally, graduate students supported for 12-months are allowed to take up to four weeks of vacation per year. *The specific dates and duration of vacation or other absences from campus must be planned and explicitly approved by the faculty advisor well in advance.* Remember that graduate students are professionals, and it may require effort during the University “break” times (note that neither Spring/Christmas breaks nor “no school” days apply to RAs).

I-4 ACCIDENT PROCEDURES

Copies of these procedures should be kept in the laboratory *at all times*, along with attached Incident Reporting/Investigation Forms.

Accidents that occur between 8:00 AM and 4:30 PM:

1. If the accident is an EMERGENCY (i.e., a person cannot move or the accident is otherwise life-threatening), dial **911** IMMEDIATELY. Once this call is complete, notify a faculty member (preferably the research supervisor) IMMEDIATELY. Once emergency personnel have arrived, fill out an **Incident Reporting Form**. Give this form to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.
2. All other injuries should be treated at **Student Health Services**, which is located in McCannell Hall. *The person should NOT walk to Student Health Services alone; be certain that they have an escort.* Before the person leaves, fill out Part A of an **Incident Reporting Form**.
3. Except in emergencies, the injured person needs to fill out the **Incident Reporting Form** as they leave the laboratory. The person **MUST** complete Part B and return this form to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.
4. If the research supervisor is not already aware of the accident, notify him/her as soon as possible. Have the research supervisor complete an **Incident Investigation Form** and give it to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.

Accidents that occur AFTER 4:30 PM:

1. If the accident is an EMERGENCY (i.e., a person cannot move or the accident is otherwise life-threatening), dial **911** IMMEDIATELY. Once this call is complete, notify a faculty member (preferably the research supervisor) IMMEDIATELY. Once emergency personnel have arrived, fill out an **Incident Reporting Form**. Give this form to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.
2. All other injuries should be treated at **Altru Urgent Care Clinic**, which is located next to the emergency room at Altru Hospital on South Columbia Road. The phone number for this facility is 780-5968.
3. Except in emergencies, the injured person needs to fill out the **Incident Reporting Form** as they leave the laboratory. The person **MUST** complete Part B and return this report form to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.
4. Complete an **Incident Investigation Form** if this involves students or resulted in an accident or equipment damage. Give this form to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.

5. If the research supervisor is not already aware of the accident, notify him/her as soon as possible. Have the research supervisor complete an **Incident Investigation Form** and give it to the Chemistry Office as soon as possible.

II. GROUNDS FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANT DISMISSAL

- An unapproved absence may result in student's *immediate* dismissal (for instance, for taking off in the middle of the semester without prior approval).
- Failure to perform research duties will result in RA dismissal. The decision will be based mostly on the professional opinion of the supervising professor.
- Failure to fulfill any of the safety duties may result in the dismissal of the RA either *immediately* or after a first warning.
- Failure to fulfill the lab maintenance duty repeatedly may result in the RA dismissal.
- Failure to conduct and report research in a wholly honest/professional manner may result in the RA *immediate* dismissal.