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III. Information for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

A. Introduction

B. General Information

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I. Greetings from the Department Chair

Welcome to the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama. We're glad you're here, and we are committed to making your experience in our program rewarding and productive. This handbook is designed to provide you with information on our graduate programs. While we have worked hard to make this handbook as useful as possible, it is still important that you read the [University's Graduate Catalog](#), as well as all relevant information from the site. As a graduate student in Political Science, you are considered an important part of Department life. Our graduate programs are designed to bridge the gap between your undergraduate education and your future professional life as a political scientist or public administrator. In that sense, you have made an important leap in your academic career. No longer will your classes consist merely of taking notes, writing papers, and passing exams. As a pre-professional, you are expected to contribute to the learning environment by participating actively in seminars, learning the research methods and theoretical perspectives that are relevant to your program of study, and,

where appropriate, contribute original research to your field. In return, we promise to work with you to help you achieve your goals. Your ideas and suggestions are always welcome. Please feel free to visit me during office hours or to make an appointment if there is anything regarding the program that you wish to discuss. Again, welcome. We look forward to working with you over the next several years, and to rejoicing in your professional accomplishments in the future.

Sincerely,

David J. Lanoue
Department Chair

II. General Information about Our Graduate Programs

A. Degree Programs

The Department offers three graduate degrees. The Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree program is designed to train students to become professional political scientists. Students completing this program will generally seek faculty positions at colleges and universities, but might also work as staff researchers for government, private industry, or non-profit organizations. The Ph.D. is primarily a research degree, and students in this program will be trained rigorously in the literature and methods necessary to conduct original research in the discipline. But students will also be given the opportunity to gain valuable experience in classroom teaching, thus improving their prospects on the academic job market and preparing them for life as a full-time faculty member. The Master of Arts (M.A.) degree primarily serves students who plan to work in the public sector, or who intend to pursue a Ph.D. degree at a later date, either at the University of Alabama or at another institution. However, students in the M.A. program will take many of the same courses that Ph.D. students take. While most Ph.D. students take 4-5 years to complete their degrees, M.A. students are rarely in the program for more than 2 years. The Master's in Public Administration (M.P.A.) program is intended to train students for administrative careers in the public sector. While M.P.A. students will take some of the same courses as M.A. and Ph.D. students, their training will be more heavily focused on acquiring the practical skills necessary to succeed in government service. Students in this program may also gain valuable experience by serving in an internship for a government agency.

B. Admission and Financial Aid

Applicants for admission to the M.A., M.P.A., and Ph.D. programs must submit scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) general test.

The Graduate School website (<http://graduate.ua.edu>) is the place to go for application materials and information about the application process. All admission materials are submitted to the Graduate School, except for the three letters of recommendation which

are submitted to the Department. Please have these letters sent to Ms. Kathy Jones, Department of Political Science, Box 870213, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, AL 35487.

The deadlines for receipt of all materials are June 30 for the Fall semester, and October 15 for the Spring semester.

Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) are available through the Department on a competitive basis for Ph.D. students, or, very rarely, for exceptional M.A. or M.P.A. students. All new applicants will automatically be considered for funding. Most GTA positions are awarded beginning in the Fall term. To ensure full consideration for both GTA positions and Graduate School fellowships, applicants must submit all materials by February 15. Funding decisions will begin soon after that, and will continue until all positions are filled.

International students who are awarded GTA positions should be aware that they must enroll in the International Teaching Assistant Program (ITA P) and pass a proficiency exam before teaching their own courses. They must pass this exam by the end of the summer following their second year of funding or risk loss of funding.

C. Transfer Credit

M.A. and M.P.A students may transfer a maximum of 12 hours from another institution and Ph.D. students a maximum of 30 hours, all subject to Departmental approval and the restrictions below.

Students must provide syllabi for all courses for which transfer credit is requested. Decisions on granting transfer credit will be made by the Graduate Director in consultation with the faculty member(s) teaching the most nearly equivalent UA course. In order to receive transfer credit, courses must be judged to have a workload and content comparable to departmental graduate courses.

Core seminars in each field (see the Graduate Catalog) must be taken in residence. Ph.D. students must take a minimum of four courses (12 hours) in their major field and three courses (9 hours) in each of their minor fields in residence at UA.

D. The Ph.D. Program

1. Fields and Specialization

Students will be expected to attain a satisfactory degree of knowledge and competence in three of the following fields of Political Science: American Politics, Comparative Political Systems, International Relations, Public Policy and Administration, and Political Theory. Students will designate one field as the major field of study and the other two as

minor fields. At least eighteen hours above the bachelor's degree (including transferred credit) must be in the major field, with twelve hours in each of the minor fields. Students must take courses from at least two professors in each of their fields. Exceptions can be made only if courses from at least two professors have not been offered in a timely manner, and only with the express approval of the Graduate Advisor.

In exceptional cases, an approved outside field may be substituted for one field within political science. The choice of this field must be approved by the Graduate Studies Committee. All students pursuing the Ph.D. degree must complete nine semester hours of methodology courses, including Political Science 521 and 522, and either 621 or 622. **These courses must be completed within a student's first three semesters in the program, unless an exception is specifically authorized by the Graduate Adviser.**

2. Qualifying Examinations

No student will be admitted to candidacy for the degree until after qualifying (sometimes referred to as "comprehensive") examinations. These examinations will be taken in three fields of Political Science, unless an outside minor has been approved. In the latter case, the student will be examined in two fields and the outside minor. In the three fields of Political Science, the qualifying examinations will have both a written and an oral component. Students may take qualifying examinations only when they have completed not less than two full years of graduate study. The outside minor examination must be taken in the same semester in which the qualifying examinations in Political Science are taken. Students with incompletes may not take these examinations until all incompletes are removed from their records. Students must indicate their intention to take the qualifying examinations well in advance of their administration with notification to the Director of Graduate Studies. (See discussion below regarding specific rules and procedures relating to the examinations.)

Please note that the qualifying examinations are not simply tests of the material students have taken in their coursework. Rather, these are considered comprehensive examinations in each field, and the student is responsible for knowing and understanding the major theoretical approaches and literatures in each field, **regardless of whether or not they have been covered in a specific course.** Students are strongly urged to speak to each potential grader (i.e., faculty member) in the relevant fields to inquire about strategies for studying, reading lists, old syllabi, etc. This is even more strongly recommended for students who have transferred courses from other institutions and may not have interacted with some of the faculty members who might be submitting questions for the examination.

Upon successful completion of the qualifying examinations, students should begin work on their dissertation.

3. Advancement to Candidacy and Dissertation

A dissertation is required for the Ph.D. The dissertation must represent original research and constitute a contribution to knowledge in the discipline. No student may formally declare a dissertation topic or advance to candidacy for the Ph.D. until he or she has passed the qualifying examinations and completed all required coursework, but earlier preliminary inquiry and research on the dissertation topic is encouraged. As soon thereafter as possible, the student should submit a prospectus of the proposal for a dissertation to the dissertation committee, formally established by the Department Chairperson. The dissertation committee must have at least five members, with at least one from outside the Department of Political Science. All members must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. The student must present an oral defense of their prospectus to their committee. Upon approval of the prospectus, the student should submit an "application for admission to candidacy" to the Graduate School.

Following admission to candidacy, students are expected to remain in continuous registration until completion of the dissertation. Students should register each semester for at least three hours of dissertation research. If a student's dissertation supervision committee has signed his/her dissertation following a successful defense, and the student has submitted the dissertation to the Graduate School after the deadline to graduate that semester, the student will not be required to register for any hours of dissertation credit so long as the Graduate School has approved the dissertation and the Dean of the Graduate School has signed it before the next semester begins. If the dissertation has been signed by the dissertation committee but has neither been approved by the Graduate School nor signed by the Dean of the Graduate School before the next semester begins, the student may register for one hour of dissertation credit in the subsequent semester. A minimum of twenty-four hours of research is required for the Ph.D. under any circumstances.

The Department urges as intensive work on the approved topic as possible. In each case, the student should make a concentrated effort to complete the dissertation within one calendar year after the subject has been approved. Students should familiarize themselves with all Graduate School rules relating to the proper format for dissertations, the required number of copies to submit, and the deadlines for submission. The Graduate School rules are strictly enforced. All requirements for the doctoral program must be completed within the six-year period following admission to the doctoral program.

4. Final Oral Examination (The "Dissertation Defense")

After the four copies of the dissertation have been submitted to the Department and at least six weeks before the date on which the candidate expects to receive the degree, the student will be given a final oral examination. The student will be expected to defend the dissertation and demonstrate competence in the field in which the dissertation lies. After this examination, two copies of the dissertation, as finally approved, must be deposited in the office of the Department and two copies in the office of the Graduate School. Final examinations for candidates for the Ph.D. degree will not be scheduled during summer

school, except in unusual circumstances. In the case of all degrees, a formal application for graduation must be filled out at the Graduate School no later than the end of the registration period, at the beginning of the semester in which the student expects to graduate

E. The Master of Arts (M.A.) Program

A candidate for the M. A. degree in Political Science may follow either of two plans. Plan I requires thirty hours of course work, a written preliminary examination, a thesis, and a final oral examination. Plan II requires thirty-six semester hours of course work and a final written examination. Course work and the written examination will encompass three of the sub-fields of the discipline, which at this University include American Politics, Comparative Political Systems, International Relations, Public Policy and Administration, and Political Theory.

Plan I (thesis option) students must take a minimum of nine hours (three courses) in each of two fields, and six hours (two courses) in a third. Plan II (nonthesis option) students must take a minimum of nine hours (three courses) in each of three fields. Students will also complete the core seminar in each field as stipulated in the Graduate Catalog. Students enrolled under either plan must complete two courses in methodology; namely Political Science 521 & 522.

A student's program at the master's level must provide sufficient association with the Political Science faculty to permit individual evaluation of the student's capabilities and achievement. Normally, such association is exhibited by the student's engaging in full-time continuous residence for a minimum of two semesters.

Admission to the Graduate School does not imply admission of a student to candidacy for a degree. Admission to candidacy is contingent upon the recommendation of the Department of Political Science and the approval of the Graduate Dean, after the student has met the formal requirements for candidacy stated here and in the Graduate Catalog, and demonstrated sufficient preparation to pursue the graduate study and research required for the degree sought. Master's students should complete the Application to Candidacy form after completion of 12 semester hours. Any student obtaining the Master's degree at the University must submit to the Dean of the Graduate School written permission from the Chairperson of the Department of Political Science to be eligible to work toward the doctoral degree.

1. Written Examinations on Subject Matter

A student working toward the Master's degree will be required to take a written examination, confined to three subject matter fields selected in consultation with a designated faculty adviser. The course program should be planned by the student with a view toward preparation for the examination. These examinations are administered at regularly scheduled times during the fall and spring semesters to eligible students (those

with no incompletes). Students planning to take the examinations must register their intentions with the Department at the beginning of the semester during which they plan to be examined.

Both the written preliminary examination under Plan I and the written final examination under Plan II are prepared and evaluated by a committee appointed by the Department Chairperson on recommendation of the Graduate Studies Committee. The student may suggest to the committee those faculty whom he/she would like to have on the examination committee, but there can be no guarantee that these suggestions will always be followed. In preparing for these examinations, students should recall that course work cannot be regarded as the only material likely to arise and that independent library and bibliographical work is both necessary and desirable. Ordinarily, a student following Plan I must pass the written examination before a Master's thesis topic is formally approved.

2. Thesis and Final Oral Examination for Students Following Plan I

Students who have completed the preliminary examination should submit to the Chairperson of the Department three copies of a prospectus for their Master's thesis. The prospectus should contain a narrative statement of the thesis proposal, including hypothesis, methodology, and other supporting materials to justify the thesis, an outline of the proposed thesis, and a preliminary bibliography. When the proposal has been approved, the Chairperson appoints a three-member thesis committee, one of whose members is designated the chairperson. One of the three thesis committee members must be from outside the Department, and all must be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School. Four copies of the completed thesis must be submitted at least eight weeks before the date on which the candidate expects to receive the degree. At least six weeks before the candidate expects to receive the degree, a final oral examination will be given in which the student will be expected to defend the thesis and demonstrate competence in the field in which the thesis was written. After the examination, two copies of the approved thesis must be deposited with the Graduate School and two with the Department. These deadlines may vary, so students are again reminded that they must check with the Graduate School office to learn each semester's specific deadlines for submission of completed and approved theses to the Graduate School, the final dates for the thesis examination, and so forth. Except in unusual circumstances, the final oral examination must be taken during the fall or spring semester and before the beginning of final examination for courses offered in that semester. Other degree requirements are contained under the "Master of Arts" subsection of the Department of Political Science section of the current University of Alabama Graduate Catalog.

D. The Master's in Public Administration (M.P.A.) Program

1. Why Pursue an MPA?

The Master of Public Administration (MPA) program is a professional degree program designed for individuals planning a career in federal, state, or local government. It

appeals to pre-career students seeking to enhance their employability and level of entry into public service. It appeals to students already working in public service who desire to upgrade their skills, enhance promotion opportunities, or deepen their appreciation for the science and art of public administration.

The MPA program at the University of Alabama is a small program that is especially attractive to individuals desiring a *quality* education that can be completed in a reasonable period of time in an intimate learning environment. The MPA program prepares students for leadership and administrative roles in public organizations of the 21st century. Students develop critical thinking skills, enabling them to formulate dynamic policies and creative approaches to management while maintaining the integrity of public service. Through exposure to a rich body of theoretical and applied knowledge, students develop talents for managing personnel, formulating budgets, structuring organizations, and utilizing quantitative methods to analyze management.

2. The Degree Requirements

The MPA can be completed according to two plans. The most commonly followed plan requires 36 semester hours of coursework and a written comprehensive exam. The alternative plan allows students to write and defend a thesis after completing 30 semester hours of coursework and a written comprehensive exam. Both plans require students to complete 18 hours of core courses in public policy and administration, three hours of quantitative methods, and nine to 15 hours of electives. Students who do not write a thesis may receive up to six hours of credit for an internship, whereas students who write a thesis may receive three hours of credit for an internship. Rules governing thesis committees are the same as those discussed above for M.A. students.

3. Core Coursework

Students must complete at least three of the following core courses:

PSC 565-Survey of Public Administration
PSC 662-Organization Theory
PSC 667-Public Budgeting
PSC 562-Public Personnel Administration

To complete the 18-hour core, students must take two or three of the following courses:

PSC 561-Administrative Regulation
PSC 566-Urban Policy
PSC 613-Intergovernmental Relations
PSC 661-Environment of Public Administration
PSC 663-Select Problems in Public Administration
PSC 664-Problems of Public Policy
PSC 665-Urban Administration

4. Concentrations

Enrolling in courses within a concentration is an option for students desiring to develop a specialized set of skills that will enhance their marketability or satisfy personal interests. The concentrations are:

- * Public Budgeting & Finance
- * Public Organization Management
- * Public Personnel & Labor Relations
- * Policy and Management Analysis
- * Urban Administration
- * Generalist Option

Students may also develop concentrations unique to their interests.

E. Procedures for Conducting Comprehensive Qualifying and Preliminary Examinations

1. M.A. and Ph.D. Examinations

In August and January of each academic year, the Graduate Adviser will determine the dates for the coming semester's comprehensive examinations and send out a notice asking graduate students to indicate if they plan to take their exams during that semester. Graduate students must give such notice in writing, and these notices will indicate the field(s) in which the student plans to take his or her examinations and provide a listing of the courses the student has taken in each field as well as the professors who taught those courses. No later than two weeks before the first examination, the program adviser will appoint one faculty member from each appropriate field to serve as the exam coordinator for that field.

Ordinarily, the coordinator will be chosen from the ranks of senior faculty (Associate or Full Professors), and it is expected that these assignments will rotate over time. Each adviser is free to select himself or herself to serve as coordinator. In any case in which a subfield has no senior faculty, a junior faculty member will be asked to coordinate the exam.

The examination coordinator for each field will be responsible for developing the examination itself. He or she will consult with relevant colleagues in the field (and, where necessary, outside the field) and solicit questions from them. The coordinator will submit a draft of the examination to the proper graduate adviser no later than one week prior to the examination date. The graduate adviser will then pass it on to the appropriate member of the Department staff so it can be administered to the student on the proper day.

The examinations will be “in-class” and closed book in format. Students will have four hours to complete the M.A. examination as well as the Ph.D. examinations in the two minor fields. Students will have eight hours to complete the Ph.D. examination in the major field. The Graduate Coordinator will determine the starting time for each examination. For the eight-hour exam, students are allowed one hour to leave the Department offices for lunch, if they so choose. The day after the examination (or as soon as practical thereafter), the designated staff member will make a copy of all exam materials and then give the original copy of the exam to the field coordinator. The coordinator will then distribute the exam to appropriate faculty in the field for their evaluations. Faculty members will be asked to evaluate only those questions on which they have sufficient expertise to make informed decisions. Thus, the number of faculty members grading various questions on the same exam may differ. However, at least two faculty members will participate in the grading of every M.A. examination.

In the case of Ph.D. exams, at least three faculty members will participate in the grading, except where there are only one or two full-time faculty members in a given field, in which case the exam will be graded by at least two faculty members. Once all graders have had an opportunity to read and evaluate each student’s answers, the exam coordinator will convene a meeting of all faculty members who participated in grading the exam. After discussion, these faculty members will vote on whether to give the student an overall grade of High Pass, Pass, or Fail. If a majority of these faculty members vote to pass the student, the student will pass; if a majority vote to fail, the student will fail. Tie votes will constitute a decision to fail, except in cases where there are only two graders. In cases with only two graders, a third faculty member (to be chosen by the appropriate adviser) will be asked to read the examination and break the tie. The final vote of the graders will be the sole factor determining whether or not the student has passed the written examination.

At the conclusion of the graders’ meeting, the exam coordinator will provide the M.A., Ph.D., or M.P.A. adviser with a report indicating whether or not the student has passed the written examination, which will include a report of the final overall vote of the graders. Once the appropriate adviser has received reports from all of the relevant exam committees, he or she will inform the student as to whether or not the student passed the written examinations. In the case of the Ph.D. exams, if the student passes, an oral exam will be scheduled, and final passage of the comprehensive examination will depend on passing both the written and oral exam.

If a student fails any or all of the written or oral examinations, he or she will be provided with an opportunity to re-take the exam(s). This will occur during the next regular semester (i.e., fall or spring). All rules stated above will also apply to any re-take. If a student fails any or all of his or her exams a second time, he or she will be dismissed from the graduate program at the conclusion of that semester.

2. M.P.A. Examinations

M.P.A. examinations over the core coursework will be in-class, closed book, and administered on a Monday. Students will be allowed eight hours to complete the examinations. M.P.A. examinations over concentration coursework will be take-home and open-book. They will be distributed on Monday of examination week and due by the end of the business day on Friday of the same week. Other than these differences, the policies for M.P.A. exams will be identical to those for M.A. exams.

F. Other Useful Information

1. Advising

All graduate students are required to meet with the appropriate graduate adviser (Ph.D., M.A., or M.P.A.) prior to registering for classes each semester. Your adviser must approve your proposed schedule before you will be allowed to register. Not only does this allow the Department to anticipate enrollments in our graduate courses and seminars, it also ensures that students take the right courses and “stay on track” toward the degree. Some fields (e.g., American Politics and International Relations) have required courses or specific course sequences that must be followed, and we have found in the past that students who do not receive advising are often unaware of these requirements, thus jeopardizing their ability to complete their programs in a timely manner.

2. Socialization Courses

The Department provides an opportunity for graduate students to learn more about the profession by offering a socialization course each semester of the first year. PSC 500 (in the Fall) and PSC 501 (in the Spring) are offered on a pass/fail basis for .5 credit each. These courses, which are required for M.A. and Ph.D. students, will discuss numerous issues of interest, including: effective teaching strategies; attending and participating in political science conferences; publishing your work in professional journals; the academic job market; and ethical issues facing instructors and researchers. These courses will meet approximately once each month, with a faculty member coordinating the discussion.

3. Graduate Student Committee Representatives

Each year, graduate students will elect non-voting representatives to serve on the Graduate Studies Committee and on any faculty search committees that may exist during the year. These representatives will participate in important discussions involving rules and procedures governing the graduate program, as well as the qualifications of applicants for new faculty positions. The representatives’ major responsibility will be to seek and aggregate graduate student opinion, so that other committee members can consider the views of students in their deliberations. In the case of the Graduate Studies Committee, the student representative will not be involved in confidential discussions dealing specifically with individual students or prospective students.

4. Conference Participation

The Department encourages its graduate students, particularly those in the Ph.D. program, to attend and participate in professional conferences. Participants at conferences may present original research on a panel with faculty and graduate students from other institutions, or they may serve as panel “discussants”, critiquing papers given by other scholars. There are a number of conferences, ranging from national meetings, such as those of the American and Midwest Political Science Associations, regional meetings, such as those of the Southern and Western Political Science Associations, and even statewide conferences. In addition, a number of different subfield organizations also hold conferences, e.g., the International Studies Association and the Latin American Studies Association. A listing of forthcoming conferences can be found in the APSA publication, *PS: Political Science and Politics*.

Each conference has its own rules for submitting proposals to present a paper or serve as a discussant, and it is best to learn those rules before preparing a submission. In addition, the deadline for such submissions is often several months prior to the conference, so it is important to plan well in advance. Please be aware that it is not unusual for conferences to have more proposals than they have room for on their program, so one should not feel insulted or discouraged if his or her offer to participate is declined.

For those who have never presented research at a professional conference, it may be difficult to know what the standards are for an “acceptable” research paper. The Department strongly urges students to get feedback from their peers and especially from relevant Department faculty prior to submitting a paper for a conference presentation. As a general rule, conference papers are expected to report the results of research that contributes original theoretical insights, interpretations, and/or analyses. Faculty members can help guide you as you prepare for your presentations, and can give you advice as to what potential questions and criticisms you might receive.

Unfortunately, the Department is unable to provide funding for graduate student travel. However, there are alternative funding sources available, including those provided by the UA Graduate Student Association. You can find their web site at <http://bama.ua.edu/~gsa/>.

5. Fellowships and Scholarships

The primary source of departmental funding for graduate students comes in the form of Graduate Teaching Assistantships (see below). However, the University also provides a number of sources of additional funding, including Graduate Council Fellowships, National Alumni Association Graduate Scholarships, and special programs for minorities and women. Further information on these and other programs may be found at the Graduate School’s web site: <http://graduate.ua.edu/financial/index.html>.

6. Applying for Academic Jobs

As Ph.D. students near completion of their dissertations, they will almost certainly be interested in applying for academic positions. The best listing of positions available in political science may be found in the APSA's *Academic Personnel Newsletter*, which is available on line for APSA members at the Association's web site. If you are planning on entering the job market in the near future, it is highly recommended that you consult this important resource. The APSA lists job openings by subfield (American Politics, Comparative Politics, etc.), and provides information on what materials should be included in the application, to whom the application should be sent, and what the application deadline is.

Generally, hiring institutions will request a letter of application, three letters of recommendation from faculty with whom you have worked, a graduate transcript, teaching evaluations, and a sample of your written work. While you are responsible for sending most of this information, the Department will send letters of recommendation for you under separate cover, providing that the recommendations are written by UA faculty. While there is no official limit on the number of such packages we will send, we expect students to apply only for those jobs for which they qualify, and reserve the right to limit the total number that we send. Once you leave the University, it is advisable to sign up with the APSA's placement service, which will, for a fee, provide your application materials to any institution you select.

When collecting letters of recommendation from faculty members in the Department, it is important that you request such letters well in advance of the application deadline. Ordinarily, it is best to get letters from your major dissertation adviser, as well as from others who have served (or are serving) on your dissertation committee, because they will be best able to speak to your promise as a scholar. Some faculty members may ask you to sign a statement waiving your right to have access to these letters at some future date. You are free to choose whether or not to do so, but some faculty members will not write letters without such a waiver.

Most major professional conferences have space set aside for a placement service, in which representatives of institutions that are hiring can meet and speak to potential job candidates. These meetings are often a good place to sell yourself to a potential employer, but you should be aware that even seemingly successful meetings at conferences do not necessarily lead to invitations for on-campus interviews. Nevertheless, these one-on-one discussions can give you valuable practice in dealing with the kinds of questions and discussion topics that you will face during a "real" job interview.

If an applicant makes an institution's "short list" of top candidates, he or she may participate in two kinds of interviews. First, as a preliminary screening device, faculty members from the hiring institution may call the candidate, and ask questions regarding teaching and research interests, career goals, etc. Second, the applicant may be invited to the campus for a "full" interview, in which he or she will meet with faculty members,

make a research presentation, and/or give a lecture to one or more classes. Should you be invited for an on-campus interview, your advisors here at UA will be happy to help you prepare.

As you may know, the academic job market in Political Science is tight, but we have been successful in placing nearly all of our Ph.D. recipients in academic positions, most of them on the tenure track. But you should be aware that jobs are not plentiful, and you will not necessarily be able to choose the exact state or region of the country in which you would like to work.

7. Sexual Harassment Policy

The Department is committed to creating and maintaining a pleasant and safe working environment for all of its faculty, staff, and students. We do not tolerate sexual harassment of any sort, and offenders will be reported to the proper University authorities. The following is from [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*](#) put out by the Graduate School:

“The University is committed to maintaining a positive and productive environment in which the dignity and worth of all of its members are respected. Sexual harassment is damaging to this environment and will not be tolerated. Sexual harassment is defined for purposes of this policy as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: (1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual’s employment or education; (2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for academic or employment decisions affecting that individual; or (3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of substantially interfering with an individual’s academic or work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive learning or employment environment. Sexual harassment is unacceptable conduct within the University and shall subject the offender to possible disciplinary action up to and including suspension or dismissal. Student complaints may be filed with the Affirmative Action Coordinator for the college/school (or administrative division), the Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs, or the Office of Equal Opportunity Programs. Employee complaints should be directed to the Affirmative Action Coordinator for the college/school (or administrative division), the Director of Human Resources, or the University Compliance Officer. Institutional policy also prohibits amorous or sexual relationships between instructional personnel and students for whom they have professional responsibility, even though both parties might seemingly consent to the relationship. Such a relationship may lead to a charge of sexual harassment or make the objectivity of the instructor questionable and his or her evaluations suspect.”

III. Information for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

A. Introduction

Graduate Teaching Assistants and other graduate students play an important role in the Department of Political Science at the University of Alabama. They contribute to the academic life of the Department, even as they enrich their own educational experiences. The Department of Political Science welcomes the participation of its Graduate Teaching Assistants and is committed to helping them fulfill their dual role as students and professionals.

This guide is provided for that purpose. It is not intended to be either comprehensive or formal. Rather, it is designed to provide, in an informal manner, information that GTAs and other graduate students in the Department of Political Science may find useful. It supplements [The Graduate Assistant Guide](#), the [Graduate Catalog](#), other University documents referenced therein, as well as materials distributed in both the University's and the Political Science Department's own teaching seminars and workshops. Please read these other important documents, as well.

B. General Information

1. Qualifications of Graduate Teaching Assistants

Graduate Teaching Assistantships are available to graduate students who have been admitted to a graduate program in the Department of Political Science. Prospective graduate students should indicate their interest in an assistantship on their application for admission. Currently enrolled graduate students should indicate their interest in a memorandum to the Department's Director of Graduate Studies.

The Department awards teaching assistantships on the basis of academic excellence and potential for achievement as a college instructor. Ph.D. students are given preference in the awarding of teaching assistantships. General factors that are taken into account in the application process include grades, GRE scores, letters of recommendation, and relevant teaching experience. GTAs who will teach their own courses must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in Political Science courses prior to the beginning of their teaching appointments. Normally, they will have served as a GTA in a non-instructional role for at least one semester before being assigned an independent section of a course.

2. Duration of Appointment

Graduate Teaching Assistants are appointed for a term of either one semester or one academic year. Assistantships are renewable for up to a total of four years, but renewal should not be considered automatic. Factors affecting renewal include maintenance of an exemplary academic record, progress toward the degree sought, and successful conduct of GTA duties. To remain eligible for continuing appointment, the Graduate School requires that a student's overall grade point average must remain at or above 3.00 at all times. The computation of grade point averages includes treating incompletes as grades of "F" if they are not removed within 2 weeks of the semester following that in which the incomplete grade was given. If such a computation occurs, a GTA will have the assistantship removed by action of the Graduate Studies Committee, unless acceptable

arrangements are made or the grade of incomplete is removed. The Department maintains an alternate list of eligible candidates for assistantships if vacancies occur during the academic year.

Each spring semester, the Department will send out a memo asking currently employed teaching assistants if they wish to be re-appointed during the next year. It is important that all students who wish to remain as GTAs inform the Department of their interest by the deadline specified in that memo. In a few cases, the Department will commit to providing an assistantship to a student for more than one year. In such cases, the student does not have to apply for re-appointment so long as that commitment is in force. All commitments of this type are contingent upon the student's remaining in good standing in the graduate program, and performing all GTA duties in keeping with the Department's specifications and standards. As with other GTAs, multi-year GTAs must meet all Department and Graduate School requirements, including those relating to minimum grade point averages.

Depending on budgetary and other considerations, opportunities for teaching in the Interim and summer terms may also exist. The Department Chair, in consultation with the Graduate Director, will determine who will be chosen to teach such courses. Preference will be given to students on the basis of academic record, performance of GTA duties, and, particularly, a student's competence to teach the course(s) that are being offered

3. Memorandum of Appointment and Teaching Assignments

GTA appointments are usually made in spring of the academic year preceding the date of the beginning of the appointment. At that time, the appointed GTA will be given a memorandum of appointment authorized by the Department Chair that will specify the type of assistantship, a brief description of its job requirements, the amount of its remuneration, its beginning and end dates, and other relevant information. Course assignments for the Fall Semester are usually made at the time of the appointment or shortly thereafter. Assignments for the Spring Semester are usually made during the preceding fall. Some GTAs will be assigned to assist a Political Science faculty member with grading and/or other tasks determined by the faculty member. Most will eventually be assigned to teach their own courses. Currently, Political Science GTAs are responsible for teaching sections of several lower division (100- and 200-level) courses.

4. Remuneration

Currently, Graduate Teaching Assistants are paid a stipend (salary) of approximately \$10,291 per academic year for 6 semester hours of teaching per semester, or the equivalent. GTAs are paid in full for the months of September through April and receive partial paychecks for the months of August and May. Paychecks are drawn at the end of each month, August through May. Teaching Assistants who are assigned duties of .5 FTE (Full-Time Equivalency) receive a grant equal to their in- and out-of-state tuition charges (but limited to the full University charges for 9 graduate hours or the student's actual

tuition costs). As specified in [The Graduate Assistant Guide](#), assistants who are assigned duties of less than .5 FTE receive proportionally reduced grants. THE GRADUATE ASSISTANT GUIDE also specifies the tuition grant implications of early termination of assistantship appointments.

GTAs who teach during the Interim or summer terms are paid an additional salary, but do not receive tuition grants. GTAs should be aware of the tax and financial aid (student loan) implications of their assistantship awards. Their GTA stipends (salaries) are taxable income. Their tuition grants are not taxable income. However, if GTAs apply for student loans, the amount of their tuition grant is used in the calculation of their loan eligibility.

5. Academic Enrollment

Graduate Teaching Assistants must be enrolled as full-time students in the Department of Political Science. [The Graduate Assistant Guide](#) specifies how assistantship assignments affect the determination of full-time status. GTAs who are assigned duties of .5 FTE (the typical assignment) must enroll for at least 6 hours of graduate credit (normally two graduate courses or equivalent dissertation credit hours), and it is recommended that they enroll for no more than 9 credit hours (normally three graduate courses or equivalent dissertation credit hours). In general, Graduate Teaching Assistants should be careful not to overload themselves with courses—especially when they are first assigned responsibility for an independent section of a course. Teaching usually makes great demands on both the time and energy of a GTA. An overloaded schedule of classes is likely to have an adverse effect on academic performance, as well as the personal well being, of a GTA. For the same reason, GTAs should not devote so much time and effort to their teaching assignments that they allow their own graduate course work to suffer. GTAs should attempt to strike a balance between these two endeavors.

6. Office Space and Mailboxes

Political Science GTAs are provided with office space on the third floor of ten Hour Hall. Offices are shared by two or more GTAS. GTAS are also provided with their own mailboxes in the Department's mailroom on the third floor of ten Hour. The Department's mailing address is: Department of Political Science, University of Alabama, Box 870213, Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0213. The main Department number is (205) 349-5980. Office supplies and classroom equipment, including overhead projectors and videocassette recorders, are also available in the mailroom. GTAs should indicate their intention to use these pieces of equipment by placing their names on the sign-up sheet that can be found in the mailroom.

C. Teaching Responsibilities

1. General Information

As they progress through their academic (normally Ph.D.) programs, GTAs will generally be assigned to teach independent sections of one or more lower division courses. Such

assignments augment departmental offerings, provide valuable experience for you as classroom teachers, and enhance your employability in the future. They also convey a considerable responsibility to the University, the Department, and students. If you are assigned a 100-level (especially 101) section, you may well be the first college-level political science instructor many of your students have seen. If you do well, you may be the first of several political scientists your students will experience; if you perform poorly, you may be the only political scientist your students ever care to see.

Each semester, students teaching their own sections will be assigned a faculty mentor, normally someone who has taught the course in the past. Each GTA is expected to consult with his or her faculty mentor in developing a syllabus and preparing materials for the course. The GTA should meet with the mentor periodically to discuss the progress of the course, as well as any questions or problems the GTA encounters in the classroom. The mentor will usually visit the GTA's course at least once during the semester and provide feedback to the GTA. At the end of the semester, the mentor will provide a report to the Department Chair and Graduate Director discussing the GTA's performance. That report may be used by the Department in determining whether or not to renew a GTA's assistantship, as well as in determining future assignments.

Do not confuse an independent section with total autonomy. Your assignment to a course is not unlike an apprenticeship. While you will have a great deal of discretion in developing your lectures, grading systems, attendance policies, and other class procedures, this will always be done with the oversight of the mentor and the Department. In rare cases where a GTA's rules and procedures are contrary to the Department's interests, the Department may ask the GTA to make changes. Please always remember: your assignment to teach a course is a collaborative effort among you, your students, and the Department.

Please note that you are expected to meet your class on **every** scheduled day of instruction, to keep all of your office hours, and to be in the classroom during the entire class period (i.e., you should neither arrive late to class nor leave early). If illness prevents you from getting to class, please call the Department staff as soon as you are able, so that an appropriate notice can be posted on the classroom door. If you intend to cancel a class meeting for **any** other reason (including to replace it with a "library day" or "study day", or to allow you to attend a conference), **you must have the prior permission of the Department Chair**. There are no exceptions to this rule

2. Course Syllabi

Political Science GTAs who teach their own courses are responsible for drawing up syllabi and ordering books for their courses. Both of these tasks are an important part of the teaching process and should be undertaken in consultation with the mentor and other appropriate faculty advisors. Course syllabi can be considered not only as a description of a course, but also—especially in today's litigious academic environment—as an implied "contract" between instructors and their students. Instructors should, therefore, be extremely careful in drawing up course syllabi.

In general, course syllabi should be as thorough and comprehensive as possible. At the same time, they should contain enough flexibility to allow instructors to make adjustments if they find it necessary to do so later in the semester. As a general rule, however, significant deviations from the syllabus are discouraged, and should only occur when 1) they are necessary to serve some important course objective; 2) they either have a beneficial effect on students' grades, or have a neutral effect; **and** 3) they apply to all students in the class, or at least all those facing identical circumstances.

Course syllabi should begin with a listing of the course number, course title, class times, classroom, and instructor's name. The instructor's office address, office telephone number, and office hours should follow. The syllabus should contain an informative, but concise, description of the course. The educational goals of the course, teaching method(s) to be utilized, and topics to be covered should be clearly stated. Prerequisites or recommended preparation, major/minor requirements, and core curriculum designations should also be noted. Textbooks and other readings should be listed. Syllabi should indicate where textbooks can be purchased, and where other readings, such as those placed on reserve, or on web sites, can be located. If the instructor intends to supplement the reading material with other resources, such as films, these should be listed as well. A detailed description of course assignments is of critical importance. The number, nature, times, and grade implications of examinations, quizzes, and papers should be clearly stated. If there are other assignments, or opportunities for extra credit, these should be described. Above all, students should have no doubt as to how their course grades will be determined. The syllabus should tell them how much each piece of course work will "count" toward their final course grade. Should it be necessary to change the dates for any assignments, but especially exams, students should be warned of the change several times in advance during class. As a general rule, dates should be changed only when absolutely necessary. **Please note that any change in the final exam schedule, including changing the time and date of the exam, or canceling it altogether, must be approved beforehand by the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.**

It is also critical that syllabi unambiguously specify the attendance and make-up exam policies of the instructor. Syllabi should inform students whether attendance is required or optional, what role it will play in the calculation of course grades, what the precise penalties will be for absences, and how excuses will be handled. In cases where instructors do not require attendance, but, as usually happens, present material in class that is not covered in course readings, they may wish to note that it will be in the interest of their students to attend class, regardless of the amount of credit that they may receive for doing so. Misunderstandings with regard to make-up exam policies are one of the main sources of potential problems with students, and it is, therefore, incumbent upon instructors to clearly explain those policies in their syllabi. Students must be informed of the circumstances under which they may be allowed to take make-up examinations. They must be informed of the procedures that they need to follow in taking the make-up examinations.

Syllabi should offer students with disabilities the opportunity to make special arrangements, and should explain how those arrangements should be made. An example of an appropriate statement would be: "If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services (ODS), please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any course accommodations that may be necessary. If you have a disability but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, please call 348-4285 or visit the ODS office at 220 Research Drive to register for services." Please note that only the Office of Disability Services can verify disabilities and determine reasonable accommodations. Once those decisions are made, they **must** be followed by the instructor. In addition, disability issues are considered confidential and should not be discussed with the student in the presence of other students, nor should the instructor inquire of the student about the specific nature of the disability.

Syllabi should also state the instructor's policy on academic misconduct. This should be in conformance with the standard statement: "All acts of misconduct in any work constitute academic misconduct. The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event that academic misconduct occurs." If you suspect a student of academic misconduct (e.g., plagiarism), it is best to contact the Department Chair. **At this University, instructors are asked not to make final determinations about guilt or innocence in cases of academic misconduct, or to determine or carry out punishments.** Instead, the instructor and/or Department will provide information about the alleged misconduct to the Arts and Sciences Dean's office, where the appropriate Associate Dean will investigate the case and determine a resolution. Should an instructor or student be dissatisfied with the Associate Dean's resolution of the matter, he or she may appeal.

Finally, the syllabus should include a detailed outline and schedule of class meetings, the topics to be covered during those meetings, and the assignments that students need to complete prior to the meetings. If any assignments are due on days other than those on which class meets—which is generally not advisable—this should be stated clearly. Holidays and/or other occasions when class meetings will not be held should also be noted. Instructors must schedule final examinations on the dates and at the times specified in the schedule of classes. They may choose when to schedule all other examinations, papers, and assignments. Generally speaking, it is advisable to allow sufficient time to elapse between examination dates, to schedule paper due dates that will allow adequate time for grading, and to avoid scheduling examinations or other extended assignments immediately after holidays or other major campus events. Too, instructors should be cognizant of the University's "Dead Week" policy; they must not schedule examinations and extended assignments during the last week of the semester. A good rule of thumb is to avoid any required assignments during Dead Week.

In addition to the information above, you should also consult the [guidelines for course syllabi](#) that are discussed in the faculty handbook.

GTAs will be informed of the dates when they are required to submit their syllabi to the departmental secretaries for photocopying. They must, of course, do so in sufficient time

for copies to be made before the first day of classes. Normally, the staff will provide deadline dates. Turning in syllabi before the deadline is never a bad idea. The Department strongly urges all instructors to save paper by putting their syllabi on line. Should you do so, however, *please make sure students can access your syllabus through the Department web site or through another official University of Alabama site.*

3. Textbook Ordering

Selecting and ordering textbooks is another important matter that instructors must take care of before the beginning of classes. Textbook orders must normally be placed in April for the succeeding Fall Semester, in March for the succeeding Summer Terms, and in October of the succeeding Spring Semester. GTAs who teach their own courses may familiarize themselves with the range of textbook choices by placing their names on the mailing lists of various publishing companies and meeting with representatives of those companies when they visit on campus. Instructors should also consult with their faculty mentors before ordering, or especially changing, textbooks. If instructors wish to utilize a large number of diverse readings in their course, they may opt to have the University's Academic Publishing Service (APS) put together an individual readings packet for them. Instructors who are interested in doing this need to make arrangements with the Ferguson Center's "Supe Store" (Tel. 348-6168). **Whatever you choose to do, please be aware that you are personally responsible for upholding all laws relating to copyrights.**

Instructors may also place books and other readings "on reserve" at the Gorgas Library. In order to do this, they need to complete a "Reserve List" and submit it to the Reserve Desk on the second floor of the library. Each instructor will have his or her own criteria for selecting textbooks and other course readings. Among the factors that should be taken into account are the extent to which the texts are clear, well-organized, comprehensive, interesting, challenging yet understandable by undergraduates, supportive of the instructor's teaching methodologies and approaches, and reflective of the themes to be emphasized in the course.

4. Class Rolls and Course Enrollments

Class rolls and course enrollments are available on line, and may be accessed through <http://mybama.ua.edu>.

5. Teaching Tips and Strategies

As the instructor of relatively large introductory 100- or 200-level classes, you will primarily use the lecture method in your teaching. It is expected that you will come to your lectures well prepared, that you will present them in a well organized, coherent, and understandable manner, and that your lectures will convey your mastery of the subject matter (to the extent that your expertise allows). There is no set formula for accomplishing these goals; each teacher will develop his or her own lecture style and strategy. In crafting your lectures, however, you may find the following general

suggestions useful: Lectures should not merely restate or paraphrase what is in the textbook, and should never consist of reading passages from the textbook.

Lectures should not only amplify and elaborate what is in the textbook, but should present new material as well. Teachers should strive to be creative and imaginative in designing their lectures. Good lectures will not only help students to understand the course material, but will engage their minds and spark their interest, too. There are a variety of devices that can be used to do this, including spicing lectures with interesting stories and anecdotes, relating course themes and concepts directly to students' own experiences, and illustrating those themes and concepts with videotape excerpts from documentaries or motion pictures.

Teachers should also encourage student inquiries and class discussion, to the extent that it is possible to do so in a large lecture class. They should strive to maintain a classroom environment in which students feel comfortable asking questions and expressing their opinions. Although student questions and comments may sometimes seem to disrupt the flow of a lecture, a good teacher can gracefully incorporate them into the lecture. In no event should a teacher overtly lose patience with a student who is asking a question or making a comment in class (no matter how mistaken or misguided it is).

Teachers should also make sure that they always treat students who contribute in class with respect and consideration. If students ask questions, teachers should attempt, to the best of their ability, to answer them. If students make comments in class, teachers should respond to them. Some students may opt not to "talk" in class. Of course, they, too, should always be treated with respect and consideration. Instructors who attempt to force these students to talk in class by calling on them involuntarily should do so cautiously. Some students may prefer to talk to the instructor before or after class. It is not a bad idea for instructors to arrive a little earlier than the beginning of class, and stay a little bit after class, to insure that they are available to such students. For further information on how to craft and present effective lectures and lead fruitful class discussions, please see [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*, pp. 20-31](#).

6. Testing and Grading

This subject is treated thoroughly in [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*, pp. 31-35](#). Once again, each GTA will have his or her own preference and approach as to how best to examine and evaluate students. Ideally, teachers should try to utilize more than one kind of examination format during the course of the semester. For example, exams might consist of an essay portion, and a section of identification, short-answer, or multiple-choice questions. Please note that although multiple choice exams are the easiest and least time consuming to grade, they are very difficult to design fairly. Many textbooks have "test banks" of proven test questions, either in Instructor's Manuals or electronically stored, that may be of assistance.

Each teacher will have his or her own approach to grading, as well. Some instructors are rigorous graders; others grade more generously. While tough grading for its own sake is never a good idea, instructors who truly respect their students generally try to hold them to high standards, and to grade accordingly. Whatever approach you take, the important thing is that you treat all of your students fairly in your grading. You cannot apply rigorous standards to some of your students and grade others leniently. In addition, you cannot give any student the opportunity for extra credit without providing same opportunity to all other students in the class.

As GTAs with some teaching experience know, students take their grades very seriously (and, unfortunately, many of them are more interested in getting a good grade than learning the subject matter of a course). Students who are dissatisfied with a grade will not hesitate to make their dissatisfaction known. Instructors must, therefore, keep good records and be prepared to justify their grades. Once again, consulting with (or emulating) senior faculty may prove useful.

The University has a policy of providing “mid-term” grades to all freshmen students. Since most GTAs will be teaching introductory courses, it is very likely that they will have freshmen in their classrooms. Since mid-term grades are assigned fairly early in the semester, they may be based on very little information, perhaps just a single exam. Do not worry about this: these grades are informational in nature, and do not go on the student’s permanent record. Simply assign each student a mid-term grade based on the best information you have at your disposal. While the Department will try to provide you with advance warning of the time “window” and deadlines for submitting mid-term grades, it is your responsibility as an instructor to keep track of this information. Mid-term and final grades are assigned on-line. The process is actually quite easy, and even the computer-phobic seem to adjust to it very quickly. Veteran GTAs will generally be happy to show you how to negotiate the system, as will most faculty members.

At the end of each semester, every GTA is required to provide the Department with a copy of his or her grade book, which includes not only the final grades each student received, but also all of the criteria (exam and paper scores, attendance grades, penalties, etc.) that were used to calculate them

7. GTA-Student Relations Inside the Classroom

Entering the classroom and facing students, especially for the first time, can be one of the most terrifying experiences of your life. Ultimately, however, it will be one of your most fulfilling experiences. Getting from the terror to the joy is an odyssey we all have to travel. A major problem is that you are making a significant role adjustment. Yesterday, you were sitting on the same side of the podium, staring up at the podium; suddenly, you are on the other side of the podium, staring out at the students. In your new capacity, you are no longer one of them; you are now one of the instructors.

The problem is that, for many purposes, you may still feel like one of the students. The first rule of the classroom is to recognize and accept that change; you are no longer a

"buddy"; you are the instructor who assigns grades. You may also be the first Political Science instructor that many of your students are likely to encounter. As such, you will be introducing your students to the Department, and to the field as a whole. Make the experience a good one for your students (and if it is good for them, it will be a good one for you).

You should strive to make your class as worthwhile, as interesting, and as enjoyable for your students as possible. As one who has elected to pursue a graduate program in Political Science, you obviously have a strong interest in the field. Try to convey that interest to your students. If you are excited about the field of Political Science, you should try to make your students excited about it, too. It goes without saying that students will respond better to an instructor who teaches with enthusiasm, than to one who is merely "going through the motions." You should come across to your students as someone who is teaching because you really enjoy it, not because it is a way to fund your graduate studies.

Each instructor will have his or her own approach with regard to matters of classroom discipline (including attendance, which is discussed above). Instructors should not lose sight of the fact that discipline is a means to the end of learning, not an end in and of itself. Instructors would do well to take a moderate approach to running their classrooms. They should not be too informal, nor should they be overly accommodating of their students. On the other hand, instructors should avoid coming across as arrogant, condescending, or overly stringent towards their students. If students may be inclined to take advantage of the former, they will certainly resent the latter. Students especially resent being talked to like they are young children, and being forced to submit to draconian penalties for no apparent reason. **College students are young adults who deserve to be treated with respect, and the Department insists that all of its instructors act accordingly.** As [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*](#) states, "if you respect your students, they are most likely to respect you as a teacher."

While not underestimating the importance of maintaining an orderly classroom environment, [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*](#) concludes that "students learn best in a fairly relaxed atmosphere in which the emphasis is on enjoying the material, and the instructor seems excited to be there." Ideally, your excitement in teaching will engage your students, motivate them to take further courses from you or other faculty in the Department, and leave them with the life-long impression that politics is an interesting and important subject for them to know and care about.

8. Student Complaints

Students can bring a complaint or grievance about any aspect of an instructor's conduct at any time, and for any reason. The most likely spur to a student complaint is dissatisfaction over a grade, and most complaints are, indeed, brought after the semester's grades are reported. The student may also voice his/her concern directly to an instructor during the course of the semester. The student may go over the head of the instructor and file a grievance with the Department. Some students may leapfrog the Department

altogether and make their complaint directly to the Dean's Office. Instructors should familiarize themselves with the "University-Wide Academic Grievance Procedures," referenced in [*The Graduate Assistant Guide*](#) under the heading, "[Official Handling of Complaints](#)."

It is important, even in the face of student grievances, to maintain a professional demeanor. Never yell at or speak abusively to a student. Never "punish" a student in any way for making a complaint or filing a grievance. You can be assured that in any such case, the Department, College, and University will work to make sure your rights and the student's rights are protected.

By the same token, you are under no obligation to take abuse from students. If students yell at you or use foul language in the course of their complaint, you should ask them to stop. If they do not, you should feel free to end the conversation immediately. If you ever feel threatened by a student in any way, please contact the Department Chair and/or the University Police without delay.

9. Teacher Evaluation

Toward the end of each semester, teacher evaluations are administered. Students have two opportunities to evaluate their instructors. One set of forms is designed by the College of Arts and Sciences, and consist of a series of short questions to which students respond by darkening the appropriate "bubble" on the computerized "bubble sheet." The other set is designed by the Department of Political Science, and consists of more open-ended questions, to which students respond discursively. These evaluations can provide instructors with valuable information on the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching, and they would do well to carefully consider them.

10. Accepting Gifts or Favors from Students

All instructors must strive to avoid any conflict of interest, or even any **appearance** of a conflict of interest. Therefore, they should not solicit or accept gifts or any items or services of value from students (this includes cases where your students offer to buy you a drink when they see you at a local tavern). Obviously, common sense should prevail here. There is no need to refuse a "thank you" card from a student (unless there is money inside!). But almost anything beyond that should be politely refused. So as not to hurt students' feelings, you might want to make this policy clear at the beginning of the semester. You should also feel free to make reference to this section of the handbook if you must turn down a gift.

Occasionally, students will leave a gift in your mailbox or in your office, often at the end of the semester. If this is the case, it is probably best to donate the gift to the Department. Remember that even gifts accepted after the semester is over can create the appearance of impropriety. Instructors are also discouraged from accepting any favors from students, including such things as washing your car, helping you move, or babysitting your children. Even if you pay for the students' services, you might still

create an appearance of favoritism. Again, common sense should be used. If your car breaks down on the side of the road, and the person who stops to help happens to be one of your students, you do not need to refuse his or her assistance. But in most other situations, you should neither ask nor allow your students to serve you in any non-professional capacity.

11. GTA-Student Relations Outside the Classroom

Some of the most difficult and complicated issues that Graduate Teaching Assistants must face involve the manner in which they relate to their students outside of class. Although most teaching, of course, takes place inside the classroom, significant interactions between teachers and students also occur outside the classroom. Teachers must be aware of the complications and problems that may result from these interactions. This awareness requires sensitivity and vigilance on the part of teachers. The purpose of this section of the Political Science Graduate Teaching Assistant Guide is to contribute to that awareness. In so doing, it is intended, once again, to supplement, not supplant, relevant University policy statements. In particular, it is designed to amplify and elaborate, in concrete terms, some of the abstruse and abstract language in those policy statements.

a. Office Hour Availability

Exemplary teachers are accessible and available to their students for assistance outside of class. Inadequate, erratic or inconvenient office hours deprive students of valuable learning opportunities. They also convey the harmful impression to students that the instructor is insensitive to their educational needs and interests, and wishes to have as little contact with them as possible. Therefore, instructors should make it a point to be accessible and available to their students outside of class, and should make sure that their students know how to reach them. They should attempt to schedule their office hours at times that are reasonable for their students, specifically sometime after 9:00 A.M. and before 5:00 P.M. Instructors should also be available to assist their students on the telephone by giving out their office telephone numbers.

If they wish, they may also choose to give out their home numbers. However, this practice is not encouraged because of the problems that may arise from it. Instructors may be inundated with telephone calls from their students, and they may not wish to have their evenings taken up with answering student inquiries. It is also likely that certain students may opt to call them more than others, possibly creating the impression that the instructor is more available to these students than to others. Instructors should carefully consider whether they should give out their home telephone numbers, taking into account the nature and dynamics of the class, the needs and interests of their students, as well as their own needs and interests.

When students visit your office, treat them with professionalism and decorum. If they have questions, answer them. If they need referrals, provide them. Treat them the way you want faculty to treat you. Avoid the pitfalls. Unless you are a trained counselor, do

not provide psychological or other advice beyond your capacities. Do not let the office visit become, or appear to become, too personal. As a rule of thumb, for instance, leave your office door open to avoid any possible imputation of impropriety, unless there is good reason to do otherwise.

b. Study/Review Sessions

Instructors may also wish to supplement their classes with extra out-of-class study/review sessions for students. Students are likely to request such sessions, especially in the days prior to examinations. Instructors who take the time to hold such sessions are to be commended for their extra effort, but at the same time, they should be aware of the potential pitfalls of such undertakings. First, instructors may become exasperated and frustrated when they are repeatedly asked at these sessions, "Do we have to know that for the test?" Instructors who are willing to hold review sessions need to plan them carefully so that they do not degenerate into this kind of discussion. If students come unprepared for the sessions (for instance, lacking questions), be prepared to terminate them.

The timing and location of such sessions is also important. Since the sessions supplement the regular class, it is likely that not all students will be able to attend them. It is probably not possible for instructors to schedule a time that is convenient for every single student in a class. In general, therefore, instructors should not provide any "additional" information during review sessions that has not been previously made available either in regular class lectures or assigned readings.

Instructors should make every effort to set up a time that is convenient for as many of their students as possible. They should also make sure that all students in the class are apprised of the time, as well as the location, of the session, and have equal access to the session. Review sessions should be held in a vacant ten Hour classroom, preferably the same room in which the class is normally held. GTAs may reserve a room, and obtain the key for it, from the Department office. GTAs are advised not to hold review sessions at other on-campus locations, such as libraries. **IN NO CASE SHOULD A REVIEW SESSION BE HELD AT AN OFF-CAMPUS LOCATION, OR AT ANY TIME OR PLACE WHERE ALL STUDENTS DO NOT HAVE KNOWLEDGE AND FREE ACCESS.**

c. Mentoring and Advising

Students may seek general academic advice and counsel from GTAs. They may ask for advice in regard to their courses, their overall academic program, extracurricular activities, job ideas, etc. They may also request that GTAs write recommendations on their behalf. GTAs who are asked for this kind of advice should exercise due caution in giving it. First, they should make sure that they are equally available for advice and assistance to all students who seek it. Second, in giving this advice and assistance, they should not assume an expertise that they do not have. Where appropriate, they should refer students to other University offices or faculty.

Students may also seek an instructor's advice and assistance on non-academic matters. If a student is familiar and comfortable talking with an instructor, it makes sense that the student might do this. The instructor can obviously be helpful, to a certain extent. Instructors should take the student's concerns seriously, maintain their confidentiality, and be responsive to the extent that their expertise allows. However, instructors should be aware that in the process of giving a student personal advice, they may become involved in a student's personal life in a manner that could compromise their professionalism, as well as exceed their competence. GTAs must analyze, on a case-by-case basis, whether they can and should give such advice without avoiding these pitfalls. Once again, it is generally best to refer students to other University offices, such as the Counseling Center.

d. Combined Graduate/Undergraduate Classes

GTAs who are new to the Department will notice that some of their classes include both graduate and undergraduate students. This is unavoidable in a department of our size. Graduate students who are used to the typical graduate seminar may find that the experience of taking classes with undergraduate students provides a welcome change of pace. GTAs in particular may appreciate the additional insights that it may give them into the nature of undergraduate learning. Such classes, however, put GTAs into a very anomalous position. A GTA who instructs a student in one class, may find himself or herself as a colleague of the same student in another class. Undergraduate students may also seek the GTA's assistance in the combined class (i.e., in a "study group"). GTAs should carefully consider whether they should give such assistance. They should be cognizant of the possibility that other students may perceive favoritism or improper "fraternization" from such endeavors (some of the issues that are raised by this possibility are treated in the section below). If GTAs do decide to assist undergraduates in combined classes, they should carefully consider how they should do so. If they are in doubt on the matter, they should consult with the instructor of the combined class. The best rule-of-thumb is to ask whether any accusation of impropriety or favoritism could possibly be inferred from such collaboration. If at all possible, the collaboration should be avoided.

e. Off-Campus Interactions with Students

GTAs who are new to the University of Alabama—especially those who live in Tuscaloosa—will readily notice that Tuscaloosa is a relatively small college town. This means that teachers are more likely to encounter their students than they would if they were teaching on a large urban campus. Teachers who live in Tuscaloosa are likely to shop at the same stores as their students, eat at the same restaurants, perhaps even live at the same apartment complexes. It is quite possible that the more socially active ones may even find themselves at the same tavern as their students.

GTAs need to be aware of the potentially serious problems that may arise from such off-campus interactions. Teachers are, of course, free to spend their leisure time wherever they wish. The University does not have the legal right to tell them where they can and cannot go. It does, however, have an interest in the way in which teachers conduct themselves during their leisure time. Of greatest concern is how teachers act toward

undergraduate students who are currently in their classes. Saying hello and exchanging pleasantries with students at off-campus locations are, of course, to be expected; indeed, it would be unusual and rude for teachers not to do so. However, teachers should avoid going beyond this to socialize with their students. Such behavior may complicate the teacher's professional relationship with his or her students and is, therefore, considered to be inappropriate.

In particular, teachers must be sensitive to the invisible boundary that must exist at all times between teachers and students. They must be vigilant about making sure that they do not cross—or be perceived to cross—this boundary. A shorthand way of describing where this boundary may be located is: teachers may be "friendly" to their students, but they should avoid becoming "friends" with them. This is, of course, a special concern with regard to interactions between teachers and students that is of a romantic nature. GTAs are, no doubt, aware the institutional policy "prohibits amorous or sexual relationships between instructional personnel and students for whom they may have professional responsibilities, even though both parties might seemingly consent to the relationship." To put it simply: Teaching Assistants should not date students in classes they teach. Dating complicates the proper teacher-student relationship, calls into question the instructor's objectivity, makes his or her evaluations suspect, raises concerns among other class members about undue access and favoritism, and may lead to a charge of sexual harassment.

Policies and guidelines with regard to off-campus interactions between teachers and former students, and/or undergraduates who have never been in their classes, are ambiguous. For example: may a teacher have an "amorous or sexual relationship" with such students? These types of relationships are not prohibited by University policy. Nevertheless, for the reasons discussed above, if teachers choose to have such relationships, they should exercise caution in doing so. They should also be aware of the possibility of negative consequences arising from such relationships, whether these consequences are deserved or not. The University does not, and cannot, prohibit teachers from maintaining friendships with former students or undergraduates who have never been in their classes. However, once again, if teachers choose to have such relationships, they should do so cautiously.