5.3 Teaching Assistant Policy

In the School of Design and Construction (SDC), students on paid graduate teaching assistantships (TAs) aid in course delivery under the supervision of the instructor for a course, or provide assistance in a designated area (i.e. Fabrication Labs). The TA policy seeks to provide transparency and equitability for faculty members and graduate students relative to the application and selection process. Additional types of graduate assistantships are addressed in point seven (7) below. Unpaid (i.e. practicum/academic credit) teaching assistant policies are addressed in point eight (8) below.

Basic Responsibilities
This TA Policy defines how TA needs are determined, identifies required qualifications of TA positions for each course or academic area, and implements an application process for TA selection. Under this policy, faculty members are given a chance to describe their TA needs and to request TAs who hold the most desirable characteristics. Graduate students are given a chance to apply for TA positions that best match their interests, skills, and abilities.

The TA application and award process is managed by the leadership team to ensure assistantships are awarded as appropriate. The academic program manager provides spreadsheet(s) regarding course needs, faculty requests, and student applications. Program heads are responsible for communicating TA assignments and/or complications to those faculty/TAs for courses within their respective programs. The director is responsible for communication re: SDC courses, but should solicit advice from program heads and/or the SDC Course Curriculum Committee before rendering decisions.

Responsibility Breakdown
Application Process and Responsibility for Students

1) TAs are either full-time (20 hours/week) or part-time (10 hours/week). Some TAs are paid on salary with tuition assistance while others are hourly with no tuition assistance. Position types are determined in part by the nature of the assignment and the hours per week of work. Positions are awarded competitively and on a limited basis per semester.

2) Students must be in/remain in good academic standing (3.0 cumulative GPA or better); enroll full-time (10 credits or more) during the semester they are on appointment; and re-apply each semester for a position.

3) Current graduate students and/or incoming (new) students may apply for a TA position by submitting the following materials electronically (save as PDF files or PDF package):

   a. Application for TA indicating preferences and description/evidence of specialized knowledge or skills required for the courses selected (e.g. specific software skills and level of mastery; example of writing for determination of writing skills; examples of previously graded work or peer review);

   b. For those courses that require it, a mini-portfolio of design work (four to six pages, size 8 ½ x 11 or smaller) demonstrating strong visual communication skills.

4) Fall semester awards: application information is typically posted to the SDC website by April 1 with applications due by April 15. Students are typically notified by May 1 and will have until May 15 to accept or decline an offer.

5) Spring semester awards: application information is typically posted to the SDC website by November 1 with applications due by November 15. Students will typically be notified by December 1 and will have until December 15 to accept or decline an offer.

Application Process and Deadlines for Faculty (see item 9 for additional information)
Faculty desiring TA positions each semester should submit a TA request form addressing the following:

1) Estimated course enrollment, rationale for request; student/teacher ratio, and course delivery method (i.e. lecture, active learning; lab setting);
2) Expectations of the TA (i.e. work tasks and hourly/weekly breakdown of responsibilities);
3) Identification of assignment for longer than a semester (i.e. courses that are part of a sequence such as Arch/CM Structures, SDC Global History of Design, etc., or academic area which requires specialized training such as the Fabrication Labs), if applicable.

All TA request forms will be submitted to the academic program manager. The deadline for fall semester is mid-March. The deadline for spring semester is mid-October.

Upon submission of the TA request forms, the leadership team will review all requests to determine vacancies that will be open for application (typically between March 16 and March 31 for fall semester requests, and between October 16 and October 31 for spring semester requests).

Please note: not all requests may be supported depending upon funding availability; new funding or other models determined by the WSU Graduate School; the nature of request, etc.

Application Review and Award Process
For fall semester TAs, the application review process generally takes place between April 15 and April 30. For spring semester TAs, the review process generally takes place between November 15 and November 30. During these periods, the faculty member for courses approved for TA support will have a chance to review applicants and submit preferences.

Preferences will be reviewed by the leadership team to determine the complete list of approved TA assignments and to send out award notification letters by the deadlines. The academic program manager will also work with the administrative manager to process required payroll documents for students on appointment.

While the intention of this policy is to provide transparency and equitability relative to the TA application and selection process, the leadership team will assign teaching assistants in the best interests of the school and its programs, paying close attention to funding models and fit with instructor(s). Every effort will be made to avoid complications; however, leadership team decisions may result in the following scenarios, including but not limited to:

1) Recommending TAs for positions other than those for which they applied.
2) Denying requests due to lack of available funding and/or inadequate justification.
3) Making appointments or transferring assignments of TAs after the published deadlines.

Summer Session Appointments
The SDC does not have a permanent summer session TA budget, and all summer session courses are self-supporting. As such, any TA needs should be factored into RFP submissions for summer session and will need to be covered within the "to-make" numbers for a course.

Other Graduate Assistantships
Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) and Graduate Staff Assistant (GSA) are additional types of graduate assistantships that may be available. The GRA typically conducts research under the direction of a faculty member who may be a principal investigator on a grant or contract (or who has available start-up funds to support). The GSA usually provides academic and administrative program support such as academic advising, program planning, and assistance with the administration of student services. Requests for these types of graduate assistantships must be made to the leadership team and will be evaluated and awarded on a case-by-case basis, subject to demonstrated need and available funding (with the exception of those faculty who have RA support as part of his/her contract).

Teaching Assistants for Academic Credit
Faculty may recruit students as teaching assistants for supportive elective credit (undergraduate students) or for practicum credit (graduate students). Depending on course needs and rigor of work, students may earn up to four (4) credits per semester. Course materials may require approval from the leadership team to ensure that students in such positions are being treated fairly, that their workload merits the allotted credits, that the students are receiving valuable work experience or training, and that the course merits additional TAs.

Faculty should attempt to maintain an approximate 30:1 student/TA ratio should they recruit teaching assistants for academic credit. Too many teaching assistants can be difficult to manage and challenging to maintain equitable grading standards across-the-board. The leadership team may request a review of the course(s) requesting multiple TAs. No faculty member may appoint a teaching assistant for academic credit without bringing the request to the leadership team.

General Considerations for paid TA requests
Faculty members requesting paid TAs should be aware of the following items prior to submitting their requests:
1) Thirty (30) students or more is the general minimum enrollment in order to justify a request for paid TA support. This neither means that the request will be automatically approved nor that smaller courses may not request a TA; this is merely a baseline recommendation;
2) SDC 100, 120, 140, 350, and other courses with integrated and/or active-learning components, or significant writing in the major requirements, may be given preferential consideration for paid TA support depending upon funding source;
3) Requests that involve paid TAs with content delivery, in-class activities, and/or complex grading components beyond class time (e.g. writing-intensive courses requiring substantial feedback) may be given preference over courses that ask for funded assistance with routine course management and/or multiple choice, true-false, or short answer exam grading as primary duties;
4) Courses with smaller enrollment or program-specific needs may need to establish course fees and/or seek program funds to deliver specialized instructional support (e.g. software instruction, assistance with studio delivery).