

# GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP MANUAL

## COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROGRAM

College Student Affairs Program  
400 Rackley Building  
University Park, PA  
814-865-3449  
csa-psu@psu.edu

### STUDENT AND SUPERVISOR GUIDE

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Overview of Assistantship  
Assistantship Philosophy  
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Forms & Evaluations

This document is available on line at  
<http://www.ed.psu.edu/csa/Assistantship.html>  
(4-21-08)

## *Overview of Assistantship*

Experiential learning, a required component of the College Student Affairs program, is accomplished through an *assistantship work experience* for two years in one functional area related to student affairs. Through this aspect of the program, CSA students have the opportunity to be involved in the operations of a specific functional area and to develop and refine their skills relative to delivery of services and programs for students, counseling, administration, research, and other professional responsibilities.

By working closely with student/academic affairs professionals, experience-based opportunities enable the CSA student to integrate theory, research, and skills (gained through courses, workshops, and seminars) with his/her own evolving conceptual framework of student affairs.

The assistantship work experience is an **on-site experience** that involves the graduate assistant's interactions with the on-site supervisor and staff, along with weekly work assignments in the functional area. It is expected that the on-site experience involves 20 hours per week during the four semesters of the assistantship.

The assistantship manual is designed to assist the graduate assistant in successfully completing the assistantship experience. The three sections of this manual provide guidelines and responsibilities for the following critical people:

- **Graduate Assistant**
- **Site Supervisor**
- **Faculty Advisor**

## *Assistantship Philosophy*

All full-time students in the College Student Affairs (CSA) program at Penn State University are required to have graduate assistantships in student affairs or related areas within the University. CSA faculty members made this change in 2005 in recognition of 1) the professional nature of the CSA degree and 2) the vital importance of practical training in CSA professional preparation. The faculty operate under the assumption that classroom education is only half the necessary training for a CSA graduate student—practical education in the form of significant and sustained professional experience is also imperative.

This philosophy places the graduate assistantship experience directly within the “curriculum” of our graduate program. As such, we encourage assistantship supervisors to view graduate assistantships as educational experiences. While CSA students should be held accountable for professional expectations in their graduate assistantships, supervisors should also recognize these students are learning, often assuming a professional role for the first time in their careers. We encourage supervisors to consider themselves as teachers in the assistantship experience. Expectations for supervisors include 1) being familiar with the CSA Learning Outcomes, 2) intentionally designing opportunities for students to gain competency in those outcomes, and 3) providing constructive feedback for students throughout the assistantship.

## *Assistantship*

### *Mapping to the Learning Outcomes*

It is expected that the assistantship experience will offer students the opportunity to develop skills in accordance with the six CSA Learning Outcomes. A successful student of Penn State's College Student Affairs program will use oral, written, and technological forms of communication to articulate the following competencies:

#### **Foundations of Student Affairs**

Knowledge of and ability to articulate:

- historical, philosophical, and contextual foundations
- contemporary issues in student affairs
- role of Student Affairs within the broader context of higher education

Experience-based evidence of understanding of multiple functional areas within student affairs

#### **Student Development and Outcomes**

Understanding of:

- psychosocial, cognitive, college impact, and learning theories
- selected counseling theories and practices
- the characteristics of effective educational interventions

Ability to apply theory to practice in both specialized and generalist areas

Ability to apply theory to develop effective educational programs

#### **Professional competencies**

Experience-based evidence of:

- management skills (projects, budgeting, marketing, legal issues, etc.)
- program planning
- program implementation

Demonstration of:

- active listening skills
- empathy, integrity, and compassion in interactions with others
- cross cultural communication skills
- group facilitation
- crisis intervention skills
- mediation skills
- leadership and teamwork skills

Knowledge and demonstration of adherence to applicable professional ethical standards

## **Inter- and Intrapersonal Skills**

Demonstration of:

- self-understanding and commitment to on-going development
- interest in and ability to learn about individuals different than oneself
- interest in and ability to learn about ideas and beliefs different than one's own self-management

## **Commitment to and understanding of issues related social justice**

Knowledge of existing systems of oppression (racism, sexism, ability, homophobia, etc.):

- how they influence students' experiences
- the role of advocacy in student affairs

Evidence of integration of a social justice perspective in professional functions

## **Research and Assessment**

Knowledge of and ability to:

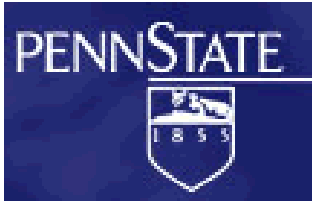
- employ good practices that focus on the effectiveness of programs and services
- design and implement thorough assessment efforts, including:
  - the identification of new key questions, resources, and target populations
  - create instruments and/or protocols for assessing important questions
  - identify, evaluate, and utilize existing instruments and protocols
  - analyze and utilize multiple sources of data to reach useable conclusions
  - credibly convey key findings/recommendations to stakeholders and constituents

### *Overview of Assistantship Calendar*

- Within first month of first semester
  - Agreement due to CSA Professor-In-Charge
- Monthly
  - Recommended Reflections
- End of Each Semester
  - Site supervisor evaluation
  - Student Self -Evaluation
  - Student Evaluation of Supervisor
  - Reflection
- End of each year
  - Student Evaluation of Assistantship

The chart below indicates what forms/evaluations need to be completed at the end of each semester

	First year- FALL	First year- SPRING	Second year- FALL	Second year- SPRING	Submit to Professor- In-Charge
<b>Assistantship Information Sheet</b>	X				X
<b>Assistantship Agreement</b>	X				X
<b>Site Supervisor Evaluation of Student</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Self- Evaluation</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Evaluation of Supervisor</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Evaluation of Assistantship</b>		X		X	X



# **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP**

## **COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROGRAM**

### **STUDENT GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

## ***Guidelines for College Student Affairs Graduate Assistants***

The College Student Affairs Program at Penn State recognizes the importance of students having ample opportunity to put the theory they learn in the classroom into practice outside of the classroom. For CSA students, assistantships, internships, and employment in higher education are the avenues through which theory is applied to practice in a professional setting. Each full-time CSA student must hold a graduate assistantship during the duration of the graduate program.

Each assistantship is unique not only because of the functional setting but also because of the relationship between the assistantship supervisor and the graduate assistant. Graduate assistants are encouraged to make the most of their assistantships by building on existing knowledge and skills through engagement in new experience and tasks. By approaching graduate assistantships with an open mind and a set of goals personal and professional development goals, students are bound to have an enriching learning experience.

Finally, in the course of CSA studies, students will have an opportunity to develop a personal philosophy. An assistantship is one forum through which students gather information to contribute to their personal philosophies of student affairs. Students may find that the philosophies they develop is different than that of the office in which work. Therefore, students should view the office in which they work within its organizational context keeping in mind that the mechanics and reasoning of a particular office are often more salient for learning purposes than the content. Despite occasional emerging or perceived inconsistencies between students and staff members with whom they are working, it is imperative that their behavior remains professional, ethical, and supportive of the office. At the same time, students are encouraged to discuss these inconsistencies with their site supervisor(s), faculty advisors and others as appropriate.

### **Securing an Assistantship**

The process of obtaining an assistantship begins when students apply to the CSA program. The CSA website lists the offices which are funded to support graduate assistants and detailed descriptions of the graduate assistant positions, duties, and selection criteria. In addition, it specifies which assistantships are available in any given year. Given that graduate assistantships are generally two years in duration, each assistantship is available every other year. Because not all of the assistantships are available in a given year, applicants are discouraged from contacting the offices directly. Instead, CSA applicants who are invited to Interview Day will be provided with a list of open assistantships and recommended procedures for communicating with offices. For some assistantships, applicants will be encouraged to submit a resume and a cover letter prior to Interview Day so interviews can be scheduled before prospective students arrive on campus. During interviews, applicants are encouraged to ask assistantship providers questions to clarify their understanding of the graduate assistantships for which they are interviewing.



### **Initial Assistantship Agreement (see FORMS Section)**

Within the first month of the assistantship, the site supervisor and graduate assistant collaboratively create and sign a specific learning agreement that applies to the assistantship experience. The assistantship agreement should include all tasks, projects, and activities associated with the assistantship and should be mapped to the CSA learning outcomes. Submit this agreement to the CSA Professor-In-Charge.

### **Professional Behavior**

Student graduate assistants are expected to conduct themselves as professionals at their assistantship sites. They should familiarize themselves with the expectations of staff at their site and adhere to these expectations. At all times, graduate assistants are expected to maintain appropriate confidentiality with regard to activities at the assistantship site and to adhere to the ethical guidelines appropriate to the functional area in their work with students and colleagues (e.g., ACPA, NASPA, ASJA, NACADA).

Graduate assistants should carry out the duties and responsibilities of their assistantship agreements to the best of their ability and meet with their supervisor(s) at least weekly to modify aspects of the agreement as appropriate to reflect revisions in those duties and responsibilities. Graduate assistants are expected to keep their supervisor(s) informed of their activities, needs, concerns, and accomplishments with regard to the assistantship.

### **Evaluations and Reflections**

Graduate assistants are responsible for completing meaningful evaluations and reflections of their experiences. Reflections should be completed at the end of each semester and are encouraged to be completed monthly. Reflections should incorporate achievements and areas of growth associated with the CSA learning outcomes and the assistantship agreement. It is important to note that semester reflections are helpful for completing the Learning Portfolio. The student is also encouraged to share these reflections with the site supervisor and his/her/hir CSA faculty advisor. Reflection guidelines can be found in the FORMS section of this document.

Evaluations are important for professional growth and development. Students will be evaluated by their assistantship supervisors and will be given the opportunity to evaluate their supervisors and the assistantship site. Students will also evaluate themselves to reflect upon strengths and areas for improvement. Evaluation forms can be found in the FORMS section of this document.

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# **GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIP**

## **COLLEGE STUDENT AFFAIRS PROGRAM**

### **SITE SUPERVISOR GUIDELINES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

## ***Site Supervisor Responsibilities***

### **Introduction**

Graduate assistants should apply certain general principles in order to ensure optimal experiences. An assistantship that does not challenge or lead to professional or personal growth will be of little long-term value. For some students, this is their first professional student affairs position, and it is important that it is an intentional and positive experience. Ideally, graduate assistants are engaged in a variety of tasks and opportunities. It is important that site supervisors understand their role in facilitating the professional growth of graduate assistants. Therefore, it is crucial that they strive to balance a graduate assistant's responsibilities with opportunities for meaningful learning.

The assistantship experience is also a blend of a student's knowledge, skills, attitudes, and philosophy. Since it draws from a variety of associated subject areas, student affairs is truly an interdisciplinary field. During the course of their assistantships, students will develop personal philosophies that integrates these diverse perspectives. Therefore, students should view the office in which they work within its organizational context keeping in mind that the mechanics and reasoning of a particular office are often more salient for learning purposes than the content.

Finally, as students develop their own philosophies and compare them to their assistantships' organizational philosophies, they may discover that the two philosophies are different. Despite emerging or perceived inconsistencies between the students and the staff members with whom they are working, it is imperative that the graduate assistant's behavior remains professional, ethical, and supportive of the office. At the same time, students are encouraged to discuss the perceived discrepancies with their supervisors, their advisors and CSA faculty members.

### **The Site Supervisor**

The cooperating professional who has direct responsibility for the graduate assistant at the workplace is designated the site supervisor. Although graduate assistants potentially perform a number of tasks and frequently work with different staff members, it is necessary that one individual be designated as the site supervisor for each student's entire assistantship for purposes of continuity, overall supervision, and final evaluation.

### **Developing the Initial Assistantship Agreement**

Within the first month of the assistantship, the site supervisor and graduate assistant collaboratively create and sign a specific initial learning agreement that applies to the assistantship experience. It is recommended that this agreement be updated at the beginning of the second year. The assistantship agreement should include all tasks, projects, and activities associated with the assistantship and should be mapped to the CSA learning outcomes. The site supervisor should provide suggestions and guidance to

the graduate assistant in terms of realistic goals and activities. Submit this agreement to the CSA Professor-In-Charge.

### **Orientation**

The site supervisor is responsible for providing an orientation to the assistantship position. This orientation should include general information about the assistantship site, an overview of the administrative structure, and the role of the department or office in which the assistantship is located. The site supervisor should also see that the graduate assistant is formally introduced to other staff in the assistantship site and to individuals in other areas with whom the graduate assistant will interact.

### **Supervision**

The site supervisor is expected to conduct a weekly, one-on-one meeting with the graduate assistant during the course of the assistantship. Initially, sessions may cover such topics as review of the assistantship agreement, orientation to the workplace, and start-up work on outlined activities. As the assistantship experience progresses, this time should be spent reviewing the student's progress in meeting the specific requirements of the assistantship, consultation on tasks undertaken, discussion of professional concerns as they affect the workings of the assistantship site, or other relevant topics. This time is designed to provide the graduate assistant with feedback on his/her performance and to enable the practicing professional to share insights and experience with the student.

### **Role Modeling**

The site supervisor is expected to serve as a professional role model for the graduate assistant in job performance, personal growth, and professionally ethical behavior. As such, site supervisors are expected to possess appropriate training and knowledge in their respective fields through appropriate professional credentials and/or significant professional experience.

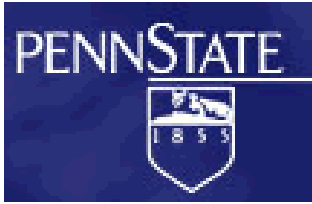
### **Evaluation**

The site supervisor is expected to provide on-going feedback to the graduate assistant concerning performance of agreed upon duties, overall performance and behavior at the assistantship site, and how the student's experiences map to specific learning outcomes (see LEARNING OUTCOMES in Section 1 of this document).

Site supervisors should complete the site supervisor student evaluation form (see FORMS section) at the end of each semester and submit to the CSA Professor-in-Charge. Submit this form to the Professor-In-Charge. The Professor-In-Charge should also be notified of any concerns the site supervisor may have at this time about the graduate assistant's general performance.

Evaluations are important for professional growth and development. Site supervisors should use the student evaluation as an opportunity for providing their graduate assistant with constructive feedback. Graduate assistants are also required to complete a self-evaluation. Both evaluations should be discussed between the site supervisor and his/her/hir graduate assistant.

If site supervisors have concerns at any point during the assistantship process, they are encouraged to contact the CSA Professor-In-Charge.



**GRADUATE  
ASSISTANTSHIP**

**COLLEGE  
STUDENT AFFAIRS  
PROGRAM**

**FORMS  
AND  
EVALUATIONS**

## **Assistantship Information Sheet**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

#### **Graduate Assistant**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Assistantship Site (Office) \_\_\_\_\_

Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Office Email \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate Phone Number (Cell phone) \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Direct Supervisor**

Name and Title \_\_\_\_\_

Office Address \_\_\_\_\_

*(if different from above)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Office Email \_\_\_\_\_

Office Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

## **Assistantship Agreement**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

**The graduate assistant and his/her/hir supervisor should collaboratively construct the Assistantship Agreement. Map specific tasks, projects, and activities associated with your assistantship to the Learning Outcomes. Feel free to refer to your assistantship position description. Sign the agreement upon completion and submit to the Professor-In-Charge.**

#### **Mapping to the Learning Outcomes**

1. Foundations of Student Affairs
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Student Development and Outcomes
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Professional Competencies
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Inter- and Intrapersonal Skills
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Commitment to and Understanding of Issues Related to Social Justice
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. Research and Assessment

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Graduate Assistant                      Date

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Site Supervisor                                      Date



## **Reflection Guidelines**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

1. With what specific tasks, projects or activities were you involved? Please include any meetings attended.
2. What did you learn? Please explain how this new knowledge maps to the learning outcomes?
3. Reflect upon strengths and areas in need of improvement.
4. Please provide any concerns, reactions, or feelings:

# Site Supervisor Evaluation of Student Cover Sheet

## College Student Affairs Program

### Student evaluated:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Site supervisor/evaluator\*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Office/Unit: \_\_\_\_\_

**\*The person conducting this evaluation should be the student's direct supervisor.**

We request that you, as an evaluator, discuss this evaluation with the student. This evaluation is to be used for the student's benefit. It should indicate strengths and identify weaknesses so that you and the graduate assistant may address them appropriately during the time remaining in the student's assistantship. **Please include narrative comments on the second page of this document for a thorough evaluation of your graduate assistant's performance.** Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

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## Site Supervisor Evaluation of Student College Student Affairs Program

Rate your graduate assistant's performance on the factors below (check the appropriate box).

		Poor	Marginal	Average	Good	Excellent	N/A
1	Ability to accept constructive criticism and feedback						
2	Ability to accept direction						
3	Ability to build rapport with staff						
4	Ability to build rapport with students						
5	Ability to learn in the assistantship setting						
6	Ability to make good use of time						
7	Commitment to diversity						
8	Demonstration of a mature attitude						
9	Demonstration of initiative						
10	Dependability in fulfilling assigned duties						
11	Knowledge of university resources						
12	Oral communication skills						
13	Problem solving ability						
14	Professional appearance and habits						
15	Punctuality						
16	Quality of student's work						
17	Receptiveness to take on additional responsibilities when asked						
18	Reliability						
19	Use of good judgment						
20	Willingness to learn new skills						
21	Written communication skills						
22	Overall, how would you rate the student's job performance?						

See next page for additional comments and observations.

1. Please comment on the graduate assistant's strengths.
2. What skills do you believe the student will need to improve for future work in this graduate assistantship and the field of student affairs?
3. What recommendations do you have for the student to further her/his/hir professional development? Please list any specific opportunities.
4. Additional comments:

## **Student Self - Evaluation of Student Cover Sheet**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

**Student evaluated:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Site supervisor/evaluator\***

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Office/Unit: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Student Self-Evaluation College Student Affairs Program

Rate your performance on the factors below (check the appropriate box).

		Poor	Marginal	Average	Good	Excellent	N/A
1	Ability to accept constructive criticism and feedback						
2	Ability to accept direction						
3	Ability to build rapport with staff						
4	Ability to build rapport with students						
5	Ability to learn in the assistantship setting						
6	Ability to make good use of your time						
7	Commitment to diversity						
8	Demonstration of a mature attitude						
9	Demonstration of initiative						
10	Dependability in fulfilling assigned duties						
11	Knowledge of university resources						
12	Oral communication skills						
13	Problem solving ability						
14	Professional appearance and habits						
15	Punctuality						
16	Quality of your work						
17	Receptiveness to take on additional responsibilities when asked						
18	Reliability						
19	Use of good judgment						
20	Willingness to learn new skills						
21	Written communication skills						
22	Overall, how would you rate your job performance?						

See next page for additional comments and observations.

## **Student Self-Evaluation**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

1. Please evaluate yourself in terms of the Assistant Agreement form and any additional tasks, projects, or activities undertaken.

2. Please comment on your strengths.

3. What skills do you believe you need to improve for future work in this graduate assistantship and the field of student affairs?

Additional comments:

## Student Evaluation of Supervisor College Student Affairs Program

It is recommended that the graduate assistant complete an evaluation of the supervisor. It is beneficial to discuss this evaluation with your supervisor.

		Poor	Marginal	Average	Good	Excellent	N/A
1	Created a climate of trust and mutual respect						
2	Demonstrated a positive attitude toward the student and the graduate assistantship position						
3	Encouraged self-motivation, autonomy, and creativity in work						
4	Maintained focus on goals, expectations, and desired learning outcomes set forth by the student						
5	Offered advice and insight into projects/duties						
6	Provided on-going performance feedback for the student						
7	Provided organization and direction for the graduate assistant						
8	Supported open and effective communication						
9	Supportive of commitments to academic coursework						
10	Was available and approachable						

Additional comments:



## Student Evaluation of Assistantship

### College Student Affairs Program

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Semester: \_\_\_\_\_

Assistantship Site: \_\_\_\_\_

Please evaluate your assistantship experience with regard to the following areas:

		Poor	Marginal	Average	Good	Excellent	N/A
1	Amount of supervision						
2	Interaction with other professionals on site						
3	Involvement in meaningful projects						
4	Involvement in overall operation of office						
5	Opportunity for skill development						
6	Opportunity to complete CSA Learning Outcomes						
7	Opportunity to gain new knowledge						
8	Quality of supervision						
9	Overall evaluation of experience						

Additional comments:

## **Checklist for Completion of Evaluations and Forms**

### **College Student Affairs Program**

- Within first month of the assistantship, complete the assistantship information form and the mapping to learning outcomes form
- It is recommended that students complete the reflection guideline form on a monthly basis.

**The chart below indicates what forms/evaluations need to be completed at the end of each semester**

	<b>First year- FALL</b>	<b>First year- SPRING</b>	<b>Second year- FALL</b>	<b>Second year- SPRING</b>	<b>Submit to Professor- In-Charge</b>
<b>Assistantship Information Sheet</b>	X				X
<b>Assistantship Agreement</b>	X				X
<b>Site Supervisor Evaluation of Student</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Self- Evaluation</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Evaluation of Supervisor</b>	X	X	X	X	
<b>Student Evaluation of Assistantship</b>		X		X	X