

Best Practices, Guidelines, and Policies for Use of Undergraduates to Provide Academic Support

Opportunities for Dietrich School undergraduates to provide meaningful academic support to faculty have increased tremendously over the past ten years. Undergraduate roles now include, but are not limited to undergraduate teaching, mentoring, tutoring and advising. This paper documents recommended best practices, guidelines and policies for working with these undergraduate students. This paper does not address student workers in serving in other capacities such as clerical support.

Selection. Students selected to fill these roles should be highly qualified, in good academic standing, enrolled in their second year of study at the University, and have appropriate disciplinary coursework and experience for the position they assume. It is recommended that students be personally known by the faculty member working with them or have been referred by a faculty member who knows them well. Students should not have violated any University student code of conduct. It is highly recommended that faculty interview the student and request references.

Training and Supervision. Faculty (or departments) must provide adequate training for students. Students should receive training in both disciplinary-specific information and pedagogy along with expectations for professional, appropriate behavior. Topics including academic integrity, types of harassment and FERPA should be addressed.

Job Description and Expectations. Students should be provided with a clear job description. The job description should include days and times of work, duties performed, specific workload, and so on. Undergraduate students may assist the faculty member in secondary activities of teaching and should not routinely instruct a class or recitation session. Undergraduate instruction should be limited to supplementary instruction and tutoring. Faculty should honor the job description as should the student. Students should not be asked to “help out” with, for example, large photocopying projects and enthusiastic students should not be permitted to extend their authorities or responsibilities. If students are expected to maintain office hours, that should be clearly defined. Expectations should be quantified whenever possible. Students should not serve as a UTA in a class for which they are currently registered.

Confidentiality. Students must respect the privacy and confidentiality of all aspects of their work with peers. Students must understand that no academic or personal information they gain concerning the peers with whom they work should ever be shared except as related to the student’s academic support responsibilities. Students should be informed that if, through interaction with their peers, they believe a peer is in physical or mental distress they should refer them to the Counseling Center or other appropriate medical unit.

Supervision and Mentoring. Students should benefit intellectually from the experience. As such, the faculty member hiring the student is responsible for supervising and mentoring the student. This could include weekly or bi-weekly meetings to discuss disciplinary trends and issues as well as reviewing performance; updating the student on deadlines, any changes in policy, curriculum, or other relevant matters. The faculty member should also serve as a mentor providing academic and career guidance. The faculty member may also gain valuable information from the student about how well the other students are doing. If the student’s work is directly overseen by someone other than the faculty

member – such as a laboratory manager or graduate student – that individual should assume the same responsibilities described above.

Grading. Grading is the exclusive responsibility of the faculty. Students should not evaluate the work of their peers if that evaluation becomes part of the peers' final grade.

Risk Management. Undergraduates should not be responsible for high-risk laboratory experiments or other similar activities. Undergraduates should not be placed in charge of other undergraduates on a field trip. Students should have a thorough understanding of all safety procedures including how to exit the building in an emergency and where the nearest telephone is located.

Conflict of Interest. Students should be asked by their faculty supervisor if they are aware of any potential conflict of interest with the group of student with whom they will be working. This could include someone whom they are dating or have dated, a roommate, a fraternity or sorority friend and so on. Faculty members should discuss with students the types of conflict of interest they might encounter.

Compensation. Undergraduates may be paid an hourly rate or receive academic credit. They may not receive both. If a student receives academic credit, the credit should be aligned with existing University policy regarding number of contact hours per credit and a Learning Agreement should be completed between the student and the faculty member that clearly delineates the academic expectations and academic evaluation of their work.

Evaluation. The student should be routinely and systematically evaluated in writing by their supervisor and, when appropriate, by the students they served at the end of the term regardless of whether the student is receiving pay or academic credit.