

Texas A&M University
Graduate and Professional Student Council
**Graduate and Professional Student
Bill of Rights and Responsibilities**

Adopted by the General Assembly September 2, 2014

The Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities was adopted by the Graduate and Professional Student Council in 2014. Work on the document began with a number of surveys of graduate and professional student perspectives on the quality of life at Texas A&M University. Many of the students reported the need for a Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. The document was drafted by the Legislative Affairs Committee with suggestions from the Provost, Associate Provost of Graduate and Professional Studies, Faculty Senate Executive Committee, and Council of Principal Investigators and parallels many of the Graduate Student Bill of Rights of our Vision 2020 peer universities and existing University and System policies. It is meant to provide a concise statement of the academic and social rights and responsibilities of graduate and professional students while they pursue their advanced degrees and to serve as a long-term policy guidance document for the Graduate and Professional Student Council.

These are basic rights and responsibilities common to all graduate and professional students. They form a foundation upon which faculty, administrators, and students can build a genuine scholarly community. This document is meant to serve as a handbook for graduate and professional students to reference policies in matters of advocacy and is not intended to be used as a means of support in a conflict.

The Graduate and Professional Student Council supports the spirit and content of this Graduate and Professional Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. We know that many of the rights and responsibilities claimed by the Graduate and Professional Student Council for the Graduate and Professional Student Body in this document correspond to rights and responsibilities already established in the Constitution of the State of Texas, Texas A&M University Student Rules, Aggie Honor System, University Rules and Standard Administrative Procedures, Texas A&M University System Policy, Graduate Catalog, etc. The Graduate and Professional Student Council regards those rights and responsibilities claimed, but not previously existing, as expressions of desirable goals. To the extent that the faculty and administration implement these goals, our university will be improved.

1. Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System.¹ They are also responsible for being fully acquainted with and complying with the Texas A&M University Student Rules.²
2. Graduate and professional students are to be considered members of a scholarly community, and as such, they have a right to collegial and respectful treatment by and towards other students, faculty, staff, and administrators.³
3. Graduate and professional students have a right to study and work in an environment free of exploitation, intimidation, harassment, and discrimination based on characteristics such as gender, race, age, family status, sexual orientation, disability, religious, or political beliefs and affiliations and will strive to foster an environment free from such things that inhibit the educational experience.⁴
4. Graduate and professional students have the responsibility to maintain records of contact and correspondence with the University.⁵
5. Graduate and professional students have the responsibility to maintain eligible course registration status.⁶
6. Graduate and professional students have the right to clear and specific written requirements for achieving an advanced degree and the responsibility to be familiar with those requirements.⁷
 - a. These requirements should be provided to students upon their admission into a graduate or professional program.
 - b. No changes in degree requirements should affect students previously accepted into the graduate program except at their option.⁸
 - c. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate and professional students have a right to know and should be informed of the normative time to degree and average time to degree within a specific graduate or professional program.
 - d. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate and professional students have a right to statistical information on graduate and professional programs. This should not interfere with the privacy rights of other students.⁹
7. Graduate and professional students have a right to be evaluated by the faculty of their program in accordance with fair procedures, in matters of employment and promotion, solely on the basis of the graduate or professional student's professional qualifications and conduct.¹⁰
8. Graduate and professional students have the right and responsibility to co-author publications involving significant contribution of ideas or research work from the student, as is required when submitting a thesis or dissertation. The student should receive first

authorship for publications which are comprised primarily of the creative research and writing of the student when consistent with the conventions of the field.¹¹

9. Graduate and professional students have a right to confidentiality in their communication with staff, faculty, and administrators, especially for matters of a personal and/or medical nature, except when mandatory reporting rules need to be followed.¹²
10. Graduate and professional students have a right to question assigned tasks that are not closely related to their academic programs or professional development, unless these tasks are established as a requirement or duty of their employment.¹³
11. Graduate assistants have the right to clear expectations of the roles, responsibilities, and privileges that come with their position.
 - a. Graduate assistantships, teaching and non-teaching, should be made available to a qualified student on a competitive basis.
 - b. An assistantship requires service of 20 hours a week.¹⁴
12. Graduate and professional students have a right to tuition assistance as determined by the University, depending on the discipline and student's employment status.
 - a. Resident tuition should be paid from University funds for up to five (5) years for students admitted without a master's degree and four (4) years for students admitted with a master's degree who are employed as:
 - i. Doctoral graduate teaching assistants
 - ii. Graduate research assistants
 - iii. Non-teaching graduate assistants
 - b. Resident tuition for doctoral graduate assistants funded by external grants and contracts will be paid from those grants and contracts.
 - c. The University will establish and publish their respective policies for selecting master's students who receive tuition payments. For master's graduate assistants funded by external grants and contracts, the employing faculty will determine if the tuition payment benefit is paid, on a student-by-student basis.¹⁵
13. Teaching assistants have a right to access appropriate teaching training.¹⁶
 - a. All graduate and professional programs should make available a structured training program for their teaching assistants.
 - b. All graduate and professional programs should outline in writing the duties and responsibilities of a teaching assistant and the ways in which those expectations can be achieved.
14. Graduate and professional students have a right to professional training and career services.¹⁷

15. Graduate and professional students should be provided with appropriate office, study, and laboratory space.
16. Faculty, staff, and students have a responsibility to become informed and participate in the shared governance of Texas A&M University.
 - a. Shared governance is characterized by transparency, mutual respect, open and timely communication, and a widespread availability of appropriate information.¹⁸
 - b. All graduate and professional programs and departments should include graduate and professional student representatives in the decision making process where appropriate.¹⁹
 - c. Graduate and professional students should have representatives on all campus-wide committees, with voting privileges when appropriate.
 - d. Selection of eligible graduate and professional students to serve on University committees should be made in consultation with the Graduate and Professional Student Council.²⁰
17. Graduate and professional students have a right to respectful mentorship.²¹
 - a. Faculty members should maintain respect for the student and for the student's role as a learner. Faculty members should evaluate students on the true merit of their academic performance. Faculty members should be available at reasonable intervals to students for consultation on course work.²²
 - b. Graduate and professional students should receive regular feedback and guidance concerning their academic performance through a mutually agreeable schedule of conferences with their advisor/chair/mentor. Requests for meetings with a graduate or professional student's advisor should be met in a timely fashion and feedback should be provided in writing at the student's request.
 - c. Graduate and professional students should have their progress toward achieving an advanced degree evaluated in an objective manner and based on criteria that are understood by the advisor and students.
 - d. Evaluations should be factual, specific, and shared with the student within a reasonable period of time. Annual progress reports should be in writing.
 - e. Graduate and professional students should be given a fair opportunity to correct or remedy deficiencies in their academic performance with agreed upon timetables for completion.
18. Graduate and professional students have a right to clearly defined official grievance procedures and informal complaint procedures at the program, department, and university levels.²³
 - a. Graduate and professional students have a right to appeal their term grades if those grades are based upon criteria other than course performance as it is specified on the syllabus.²⁴

- b. Graduate and professional students have the right to the hearing of a grievance through the Ombuds Services and the Graduate Appeals Panel.²⁵
- c. Ombuds Services for Graduate Education are available to assist a graduate student when they:
 - i. Have an issue or a concern that others cannot resolve, or the student would prefer not to address through formal channels
 - ii. Have a matter to explore “off the record,” or those for which the student needs informal consultation
 - iii. Have a problem and is unsure with whom to speak or what options are available to address it
 - iv. Believe that a University policy, procedure, or regulation has been applied unfairly, or is itself unfair or ambiguous
 - v. Have a problem that requires an outside party to negotiate a solution or facilitate the student’s communication with others.²⁶

19. Graduate students have the responsibility to maintain academic standards.

- a. If a student’s cumulative GPR or the GPR for courses listed on the degree plan falls below the University-acceptable minimums, they will be considered to be scholastically deficient. If the minimum GPR is not attained in a reasonable length of time, the student may be removed from graduate or professional studies.
- b. Graduate and professional students must show acceptable proficiency in such requisites for their degree as may be assigned by his or her graduate or professional committee, department, or the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies such as qualifying and preliminary examinations, research, writing of a thesis or dissertation, etc.²⁷
- c. Scholastic probation is a conditional permission for a student to continue in the University after they have become scholastically deficient.²⁸

20. Graduate and professional students have a right to mental and physical health services. Graduate and professional students should have equal access to Student Health Services, recreational centers, insurance, and medically-necessitated leave.²⁹

21. Graduate and professional students have a right to an accurate description of the availability, source, and likelihood of the continuity of financial and resource support within their program based on historical data.³⁰

- a. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate and professional students should be provided a thorough description of the requirements and qualifications necessary for academic employment, training, and financial support within their programs.
- b. All graduate and professional programs should have clearly written policies regarding the distribution of financial support and academic employment.

- c. All policies concerning support of graduate and professional students should be implemented in a consistent and understandable way.

22. Graduate and professional students have a right to be free of reprisals for exercising explicit rights and responsibilities.

¹ Graduate Catalog 211; Aggie Honor Code

² Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

³ Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 07.01, 08.01, 13.02; Texas A&M University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination; Texas A&M University Student Rules 21, 23.3, 23.5, 24, 31, Faculty Handbook 22, Faculty Rules 3.2.1

⁴ Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 07.01, 08.01, 13.02; Texas A&M University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination; Texas A&M University Student Rules 21, 23.3, 23.5, 24, 31

⁵ Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog; Texas A&M University Student Rules 1

⁶ Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog; Texas A&M University Student Rules 1

⁷ Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog; Texas A&M University Student Rules 14

⁸ Texas A&M University Student Rules 5.5

⁹ Texas A&M University – Accountability

¹⁰ Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 07.01, 08.01, 13.02; Texas A&M University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination; Texas A&M University Student Rules 21, 23.3, 23.5, 24, 31

¹¹ Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 15.99.03; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog 35

¹² Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

¹³ Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog; Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 31.01.02, 33.99.08

¹⁴ Graduate Catalog, 216; Office of Graduate and Professional Studies Guideline for Employing Student at Greater than 50%

¹⁵ Office of Graduate and Professional Studies Tuition Payment Guidelines

¹⁶ Office of Graduate and Professional Studies New Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

¹⁷ Texas A&M University Student Learning Outcomes; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

¹⁸ Texas A&M Shared Task Force Governance Report, 2010

¹⁹ Texas A&M Shared Task Force Governance Report, 2010

²⁰ Texas A&M University Student Rules 44; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

²¹ Texas A&M University Statement on Harassment and Discrimination; Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

²² Texas A&M University Faculty Rules 3.2

²³ Graduate Appeal Process; Texas A&M University Student Rules 45, 46, 47, 59; Aggie Honor System

²⁴ Graduate Appeal Process; Texas A&M University Student Rules 59

²⁵ Texas A&M University Student Rules 59

²⁶ Texas A&M University Graduate Catalog

²⁷ Texas A&M University Student Rules 12.3

²⁸ Texas A&M University Student Rules 12.7

²⁹ Texas A&M University System Policies and Regulations 26.99.01; 31.03

³⁰ Vision 2020: Creating a Culture of Excellence Report