

CLAS GTA Support Model Advisory Group

The purpose of this Project Charter is to provide a description of the who, what, when, where, and why of the CLAS GTA Support Model Advisory Project and serves as a reference of authority throughout the project.

GTA Support Model Advisory Group

Project Title: CLAS GTA Support Model Advisory Group

Project Manager: Matt Swetnam

Project Sponsors: Todd Rosenstiel, Heejun Chang

Project Leads: Heejun Chang

Project Team Members:

Alida Cantor (GEOG/EES)

Anne Johnson (SOC)

Gerardo Lafferriere (MTH)

John Beer (ENG)

John Ott (HIS)

Kim Brown (BIO)

Kyiah Ingraham (PSY)

Lauren Frank (COM)

Rossitza Wooster (Grad School)

Suwako Watanabe (WLL)

Theresa McCormick (CHEM)

Travis Kregear (PHY)

Timeline: January 2024 - June 2024

Purpose: (What need does this project satisfy?)

The aim of the CLAS GTA support model advisory group is to bring together stakeholders from across CLAS graduate programs who will make a recommendation to the CLAS Dean, and collective CLAS leadership (Dept Chairs, etc.) on how to best support thriving graduate student programs, including graduate students' professional development, and the future role of Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The group seeks to research and better understand the current practices of GTA usages college-wide and explore alternative models to create a collective, collaborative, and transformative vision for the future of distinctive graduate program training and support within CLAS.

Currently in Fall 2023, CLAS has 700+ graduate students, around 40% of which are supported by either a GTA or GRA. While CLAS retains the highest number of GTAs at PSU (approximately 200), the current utilization of GA's by units varies greatly from one graduate program to another and even within individual programs. The current CLAS GTA allocation model has largely been inherited from previous eras, though incremental modifications have been made in the past couple of years to align GTA allocation with graduation program outcomes and instructional need. To support the health of vibrant graduate programs within CLAS, we would like to learn more about the specific practices and needs of graduate programs college-wide and assess how best to meet the needs of undergraduate instruction, graduate students' professional development, and faculty/graduate students' research into the future. The group will explore the collective value of GA support to CLAS graduate programs by uncovering current practices and make recommendations about funding priorities in the years ahead.

This group will also explore various alternative ways of financially supporting graduate students in CLAS. A very limited approach has been introduced to date (e.g., creation of a separate graduate tuition remission pool); despite these efforts, some CLAS graduate students are currently unable to complete their degrees on time due to limited financial resources. This group would like to discover specific ways to support these students by researching other universities' practices and exploring alternatives to our historic GTA-heavy model of graduate student support.

Lastly, we would like to strengthen collaborations among different graduate programs to offer a more streamlined, impactful, and distinctive experience for CLAS graduate students. Currently, we have one shared graduate program (e.g., Earth, Environment, and Society) and increased partnerships among units would increase the visibility of CLAS graduate programs and draw more qualified graduate students to CLAS. We seek to discover opportunities to elevate our partnerships campus-wide to improve the experience for our graduate students and for their career development.

Deliverables and Outcomes: (What changes will this project make?)

This project is largely a discovery of the ways CLAS could better support graduate students' academic and career goals while meeting the needs for undergraduate instruction. At the conclusion of the project, we intend to create an action plan for implementing graduate support model changes, focused on these three goals:

1. **Discover current practices:** We aim to research, summarize, and document the current value and practices of GAs. We would like to specifically explore the unmet needs and graduate students' career pathways.
2. **Find mechanisms for supporting graduate students:** We aim to research, summarize, and document various mechanisms to support graduate students in other similar universities or graduate programs.
3. **Strengthen partnership among CLAS graduate programs:** We aim to create a collective vision for CLAS graduate programs that are distinctive, transformative, and sustainable. This could increase our graduate students' population, which could increase research and teaching.

Risks and Constraints: (What are potential risks associated with this project?)

- PSU graduate students' bandwidth and motivation to participate
- Understanding various practices and associated inertia/resistance to change
- Unclear or confusing intentions
- Sustainability of the recommendations

In Scope: (What work will be included in this project?)

The Project Team, with guidance from the Project Leads and Sponsors, will:

- Attend and participate in project meetings
- Conduct focus groups
- Create and distribute surveys
- Research how other universities and educational institutions support graduate students via GTA or GRA or other means (e.g., fellowships, tuition remissions)
- Discover an alternative mechanism for supporting CLAS graduate students
- Create a report of the findings and recommendations for next steps for allocating GTAs

Stakeholders: (Who cares)

- Graduate Assistants
- Graduate School
- College leadership
- Graduate Program Directors
- Graduate Program Coordinators
- Faculty

Out of Scope: (What are the high-level boundaries?)

The Project Team will not:

- Purchase or contract with outside third-party consultants for research/discovery work

Project Sponsors: Todd Rosenstiel

The Project Sponsors hold ultimate authority and responsibility, are the final decision makers for all process changes, and will ultimately approve any recommendations that come from this project.

Date:

Approval (signature of Project Sponsor): _____

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Key Metrics of Outcome: (How will we know if this project is successful?)

- Recommendations are finalized and aligned for implementation **by June 15, 2024**
- **Metrics for allocating GTAs more equitably and better serving the needs of students and departments**