

The Pennsylvania State University

Graduate Student Bill of Rights¹

The Graduate Student Bill of Rights was adopted by the Graduate Student Association in 2012. It is meant to provide a concise statement of the academic and teaching rights of graduate students while pursuing their advanced degree at The Pennsylvania State University.

Preamble: To promote a more productive climate between ourselves and our faculty and to define our role in the university as a whole, we, the graduate students of The Pennsylvania State University, claim the rights enumerated below. These are basic rights common to all graduate students. They form a foundation upon which faculty and students can build a genuine intellectual community.

1. Graduate students are to be considered members of a scholarly community, and as such, they have a right to collegial and respectful treatment by faculty members.
2. Graduate 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.
3. Given that graduate students have the same rights and obligations as all citizens, they are free as other citizens to express their views and to participate in the political processes of the academic community and the community at large.
4. Graduate students have the right to clear and specific written requirements for achieving an advanced degree.
 - a. These requirements should be provided to graduate students upon their admission into a graduate program.
 - b. No changes in degree requirements should affect students previously accepted into the graduate program except at their option.
 - c. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate 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 program.
 - d. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate students have a right to statistical information on graduate programs. This should not interfere with the privacy rights of other students.
5. Graduate students have a right to an accurate description of the availability and source, and likelihood of ongoing financial and resource support within their program.
 - a. Prospective and currently enrolled graduate students should be provided a thorough description of the requirements and qualifications necessary for academic employment, training, and financial support within their departments at the university.
 - b. All graduate programs should have clearly written policies regarding the distribution of financial support and academic employment.
 - c. All policies concerning support of graduate students should be implemented in a consistent and understandable way.
 - d. Graduate students should be provided with appropriate office, study, and lab space. These need not be different rooms if such an arrangement does not impact the productivity of the graduate students in those areas.
6. Graduate students have a right to be judged by the faculty of their department in accordance with fair procedures, in matters of employment and promotion, solely on the basis of the graduate students professional qualifications and professional conduct.
7. Graduate students have a right to respectful mentorship.
 - a. Graduate students should have their progress toward achieving an advanced degree evaluated in an objective manner and based on criteria that are understood by the graduate advisor and students.

- b. Evaluations should be factual, specific, and shared with the student within a reasonable period of time. Annual progress reports should be in writing.
 - c. A thorough written evaluation of performance and deficiencies on qualifying and comprehensive examinations should be provided to students.
 - d. Graduate 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 student's advisor should be met in a timely fashion and feedback should be provided in writing at the student's request.
 - e. Graduate students should be given a fair opportunity to correct or remedy deficiencies in their academic performance with agreed upon timetables for completion.
 - f. Any intent to dismiss a student from a graduate program for academic reasons must be preceded by a warning, which includes special performance information, well in advance of actual dismissal.
 - g. Any intent to discontinue an advisor/chair/mentor relationship with a graduate student must be preceded by a warning within a reasonable period of time.
8. Graduate students have a right to co-authorship in publications involving significant contribution of ideas or research work from the student. 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.
 9. Graduate students have a right to reasonable confidentiality in their communication with professors and administrators. For matters of a personal and/or medical nature, graduate students have a right to strict confidentiality.
 10. Graduate students have a right to refuse to perform tasks that are not closely related to their academic programs or professional development.
 11. Teaching assistants and teaching associates have a right to appropriate teacher training.
 - a. All graduate programs should implement a structured training program for their teaching assistants and teaching associates.
 - b. All graduate programs should outline the expectations of a graduate student teacher, and the ways in which those expectations can be achieved, for their teaching assistants and teaching associates.
 12. Graduate students have a right to professional training and career services.
 13. Graduate students have a right to share in the governance of the University.
 - a. All departments, graduate programs should include graduate student representatives in the decision making process where appropriate.
 - b. Graduate students should have representatives on all campus-wide committees, with voting privileges where appropriate according to the guidelines of shared governance.
 14. Graduate students have a right to clearly defined official grievance procedures and informal complaint procedures at the department and campus-wide levels. Each department should have grievance procedures.
 - a. Consistent with this right, graduate students have a right to procedures appropriate to the nature of the case and the severity of the potential discipline.
 - b. When a formal hearing is required, a graduate student has a right to the following minimum procedural standards to assure a fair hearing.
 - i. The opportunity for a prompt and fair hearing, upon the request of the student at which the University shall bear the burden of proof, and at which the student shall have the opportunity to present documents and witnesses and to confront and cross-examine witnesses presented by the University. No inference, however, shall be drawn from the silence of the accused.
 - ii. A record of the hearing.
 - iii. An expeditious written decision based upon the preponderance of evidence, which shall be accompanied by a written summary of the findings of fact.
 - iv. An appeal.

15. Graduate students have a right to challenge their term grades if those grades are based upon criteria other than course performance as it is specified on the syllabus.
16. Graduate students have a right to be free of reprisals for exercising these rights.

The Graduate Student Association supports the spirit and content of this Bill of Rights. We know that many of the rights claimed by the GSA for its members in this document correspond to rights already established in The Pennsylvania State University codes, policies, and regulations. The Graduate Student Association regards those rights 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 Adapted with permission from UCSB Graduate Student Bill of Rights, 1995