

Mechanical Engineering

Policy on TA Selection and Appointments

October 2018

Background

Teaching assistants (TAs) are graduate students who help faculty with the delivery of courses. Roles and responsibilities of TAs include, but are not limited to, grading, monitoring, proctoring exams, leading lab and/or discussion sessions, offering office hour assistance to students, responding to student emails, and performing clerical tasks associated with course instruction. Teaching assistants are supervised by the course instructor who fully defines their roles and responsibilities.

Historically, the Mechanical Engineering (ME) Department at Northern Arizona University (NAU) has had ample TA positions to fund graduate students. However, as the graduate programs in ME grow, there are more graduate students seeking TA jobs than available positions. Therefore, in the interest of having a fair and transparent procedure for selecting and appointing TAs, we have developed this policy to serve as a guideline for selecting students for TA positions. This policy does not address which classes have TA nor how that is decided, but only how TAs are selected from the pool of graduate students.

Qualifications

To be eligible for a TA position, a graduate student must meet all of the following requirements:

- The student must be a degree-seeking graduate student in ME or a closely related engineering discipline (Materials Science, Civil Engineering, Bioengineering, and Electrical Engineering).
- The student must have an ME faculty member as their advisor.
- The student must be in good academic standing. A student on academic probation will be ineligible for any TA positions in the department.
- If holding a TA appointment during the academic year, the graduate student must be a full-time student, i.e. registered for at least 9 credit hours, during that semester.
- If holding a TA appointment during the summer, the graduate student must have been a full-time student during the previous semester.

Graduate students without a mechanical engineering background or background in a closely related engineering discipline will be ineligible for a TA position unless prerequisite courses are completed and mechanical engineering competency is shown.

For international students, excellent communication in English is required for all TA positions. Therefore, to be eligible for a TA position, we require that international student who do not have English as their

native or instructional language for their BS degree either have: (1) TOEFL score over 100 and IELTS scores over 7.5, or (2) concurrently or previously took an English class at NAU (e.g. ENG 506).

To be considered for a TA position in a writing intensive course (EGR 386W, ME 386W, ME 476, or ME 486), we require either that a student received an “A” or “B” in the course if he/she took the course at NAU or a GRE writing score in at least the 40th percentile (this typically corresponds to a score of 3.5 or better).

Selection and Appointment

Presuming that enough TA positions are allotted to the department, then each tenure/tenure-track (T/TT) faculty in ME wanting to advise students will be *guaranteed one TA position* to fund any eligible MS or PhD student of their choosing. Faculty may choose not to have any graduate students on TA appointments, in which case their one position will become part of the pool of students that will be assigned to TA positions on a competitive basis. If there are not enough TA positions for T/TT faculty in ME wanting to advise students to have at least one TA position, then all TA positions will be assigned on a competitive basis.

After each T/TT faculty has selected one eligible student for a TA position, the remaining eligible graduate students who wish to have a TA position in ME will be assigned on a competitive basis by the ME department’s graduate committee. The ME graduate committee will use the following guidelines to select students for TA appointments:

- First preference will be given to returning MS and PhD students who are in good academic standing and recommended for a TA position by their advisor. This first preference will be revoked, however, if:
 - An MS student has been a student pursuing their degree for more than 4 academic year semesters (unless exceptional circumstances prohibited the student from finishing his/her degree);
 - A PhD student entering with an MS degree has been a student pursuing their degree for more than 8 academic year semesters (unless exceptional circumstances prohibited the student from finishing his/her degree);
 - A PhD student entering with only a BS degree has been a student pursuing their degree for more than 10 academic year semesters (unless exceptional circumstances prohibited the student from finishing his/her degree);
 - A student’s advisor attests that a student is not making good progress towards their degree;
 - A student receives a less than satisfactory review by either a course instructor, the Associate Chair for graduate programs, or the ME Department Chair, in any previous TA position and has not completed the corrective actions requested by the department to improve their teaching; or
 - A student receives more than one less than satisfactory review by either a course instructor, the Associate Chair for graduate programs, or the ME Department Chair, in previous TA positions.
 - A student is on academic probation.

Should there be more eligible students in this category (returning eligible MS and PhD students who have not had their first preference revoked) seeking TA positions than available positions, then students will be selected for TA jobs based on the following, listed in order of importance: (1) the student's performance in prior TA position(s), (2) the student's performance in research and the recommendation and ranking from their advisor, (3) the likelihood of future grant funding for this student, (4) the student's GPA and performance in classes, and (5) how many students an advisor is already supporting on TA positions (with the goal of all ME faculty getting near equal opportunities for TA positions). In some instances, the expertise of the graduate students and the TA needs of the department may be considered by the graduate committee in the selection process.

- Next preference will be given to incoming students who are pursuing research related degrees, such as MS or PhD degrees. Should there be more eligible incoming research-based graduate students seeking TA positions than available positions, then the ME graduate committee should consider all admissions criteria when prioritizing students in this category for TA positions, including, but not limited to grade point average (GPA) from previous degree(s) and institution quality for prior degree(s), GRE tests scores, professional experience, research experience, letters of recommendation, personal statement, interest and motivation for teaching, and, as needed, English proficiency as evidenced by standardized tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS. In some instances, the expertise of the graduate students and the TA needs of the department may be considered by the graduate committee in the selection process.
- Lower priority will be given to:
 - Students pursuing practice-oriented degrees, such as MEng. These students will only be assigned a TA position should they have unique qualifications to fulfill a departmental need or there are not enough MS or PhD students eligible to fill TA jobs.
 - Graduate students who have been conditionally accepted, until regular status is granted (due to completion of prerequisite courses or 9 credit hours with grades of "A" or "B"), will only be given TA positions if there are not enough MS or PhD students eligible to fill TA jobs and they have the expertise needed to be a TA for a particular class.
 - Graduate students with alternative funding sources (e.g. fellowships or scholarships) that include a full tuition waiver will only be considered for a TA position should they have unique qualifications to fulfill a departmental need or there are not enough MS or PhD students eligible to fill TA jobs.

Finally, the graduate committee should have a fair and transparent enough process to be able to justify why any particular student was or was not given a TA appointment.