

Assessment Plan for Graduate Assistants  
Marta Cieslak, Department of History, UALR  
Edited by Cody Besett, Student Success Archivist, CAHC

## **Assessment Process**

### **1. Initial Assessment and Setting Goals**

**When:** First two weeks of a semester

Each Graduate Assistant (GA) receives an updated syllabus designed for the GAs and signs an Assistantship Agreement tailored to the specific requirements of their assistantship.

- a. The syllabus includes readings, schedule of discussions, and due dates for all the fundamental assignments that the GA needs to complete over the course of the semester (see the existing syllabus for an example). The syllabus overview takes place at the first meeting with GAs.
- b. The Assistantship Agreement is an equivalent of a work contract. It identifies the GA's schedule, what project(s) the GA will work on, responsibilities, learning goals, and GA's individual objectives (see below). The Student Success Archivist (SSA) drafts the agreement. The document should contain the following sections:
  - Assistantship description: A brief description of the assistantship and how it connects to the mission of the CAHC.
  - GA's schedule.
  - GA's responsibilities: These include the responsibilities outlined in the syllabus that all GAs share (e.g., collection processing, social media post, genealogical project, etc.) and specific responsibilities that come with individual projects assigned to each GA individually.
  - Learning goals: These are based on the responsibilities outlined in the earlier section. See the list of potential learning goals below (Appendix 1). The list contains learning goals that are aligned with learning outcomes specified by the Master of Arts in Public History program at UALR and identified through the multiple aspects of training provided to GAs at the CAHC. The SSA may select the learning goals that are relevant to each GA's experience from the list and add unique goals that might tie to individual projects.
  - Professional conduct expectations: A list of basic professional expectations (e.g., punctuality, dress code, communication, etc.) that are evaluated over the course of a semester (see Appendix 2).
  - GA's personal learning objectives: This is the only section that is completed by the GA. The learning objectives should overlap to some extent with the learning goals but the GA should specify them in their own words and should be encouraged to add their own learning objectives. This helps us make sure that the GA understands what is expected of them. If the GA specifies learning objectives that do not align with the projects and

responsibilities outlined in the agreement, the SSA should determine whether the CAHC and the assistantship could address these additional objectives and discuss possible options, or lack thereof, with the GA.

## **2. Midterm Evaluation**

**When:** Around the traditional week of midterm exams

The primary goal of the midterm evaluation is to determine whether any GA should be redirected or needs help. It is also an opportunity for the GAs to reevaluate and revise their individual learning objectives. Most GAs determine their own learning objectives when they most likely have a very limited understanding of their role at the CAHC and archives in general. By the mid-point of a semester, they may better grasp what they want to achieve, what kind of roles and tasks are available at the CAHC, or what aspects of work in archives are of particular interest to them. The midterm evaluation is designed particularly to help identify the GAs that are struggling, have expressed interest in changing the direction of their assistantship, or would like to explore some aspects of work in archives that were not originally specified in their assistantship agreement.

- Because the GA completes different tasks under the supervision of different CAHC staff members, the midterm evaluation is a one-time assessment meeting of all individuals involved in the supervision of GAs.
- During the meeting, each GA is assessed based on a midterm evaluation form (see Appendix 3). The SSA leads the meeting and all the staff members involved in the supervision of respective GAs offer collective assessment. The final evaluation form is based on the average score/assessment proposed by all supervising CAHC staff members.
- If proposed scores are dramatically different across different CAHC staff members for the same GA, it is critical to determine a potential source of the different perceptions of the GA's performance. This discussion should help identify additional strengths and/or weaknesses of the GA (e.g., a GA struggles with collection processing but completes a strong social media assignment).
- The SSA discusses the results of evaluation with each GA individually. These meetings should serve as an opportunity for the GA to revise their own expectations and learning objectives. The SSA might suggest some revisions based on the GA's identified strengths/weaknesses, or the GA's increased understanding of their own objectives and/or workings of an archival institution.
- If necessary, the SSA and the GA revise and update the initial Assistantship Agreement based on the results of the midterm assessment and reevaluated expectations and objectives.

## **3. Final evaluation**

**When:** The last week of the semester and the week of final exams if necessary

In addition to the final assessment of the GA, this step provides an opportunity for the GAs to share their experience and assess their own progress and the CAHC. The biggest challenge is to encourage the GAs to express honest opinions when they know potential employers will likely call the CAHC to ask about their performance when they are on the job market.

- Analogously to the midterm evaluation, all the CAHC staff members meet to evaluate each GA collectively under the leadership of the SSA (see Appendix 4).
- The SSA meets with each GA individually to discuss the results of the final assessment.
- Separately from the evaluation process above, each GA is asked to reflect on their experiences in writing, following general questions provided by the CAHC (see Appendix 5). These reflections serve as not only an important source of feedback but also potential recruitment materials.
- After the individual meetings, where the SSA discusses the final assessment results with GAs, are complete, all GAs meet at a collective exit interview to share their experiences with each other and with a discussion facilitator. In a group setting, the GAs should be more comfortable providing honest feedback, both positive and negative. A group session might also open a more productive discussion since each GA would have a chance to hear and respond to their peer's comments. Ideally, someone who is not a CAHC staff member should facilitate the collective exit interview meeting, for example the Public History Program coordinator at the UALR History Department, or any other History Department member that is familiar with the basic principles of graduate assistantships at the CAHC (former Public History Program coordinators, faculty members who work with graduate students, etc.). This would allow to convey the GAs' comments to the CAHC in the form of an anonymous collective voice and the GAs should be more willing to express honest opinions. Alternatively, the SSA is the discussion facilitator but that might present certain challenges. If the SSA establishes strong positive relationships with a GA cohort, the discussion can be very productive. If the SSA experiences some challenges with several GAs or an individual GA throughout the course of the semester, the SSA-led exit interview might be less productive. See Appendix 6 for proposed exit interview questions.

### **Appendix 1: Learning Goals**

The list of learning goals is aligned with the learning outcomes specified by the Master of Arts in Public History program at UALR and with learning goals identified through multiple aspects of the training provided to Graduate Assistants at the Center for Arkansas History and Culture.

While some of the learning goals listed above will apply to all Graduate Assistants at the CAHC (e.g., assisting patrons at the research room, getting familiar with the Library of Congress Classification system, collection processing, etc.), others will be relevant only to some, depending on the project assigned to individual GAs.

1. Plan, design and execute a research project using technology available at the CAHC (e.g., family history, mock grant)

2. Locate and evaluate primary and secondary sources
3. Conduct sophisticated historical analysis (i.e., character collections)
4. Identify and define public history projects (e.g., mock grant)
5. Write proposals for public history projects
6. Develop digital initiatives that embody the ethics, methods, tools, and standards of the fields in public history
7. Create artifacts (exhibits, websites, lesson plans) targeted at a nonacademic audience and/or organize events targeted at a nonacademic audience
8. Demonstrate knowledge of archival principles, practices, and values
9. Identify and apply the Library of Congress Classification system to reference activities
10. Provide complete assistance to patrons at the research room
11. Apply fundamental principles and practices of genealogical research
12. Apply fundamental principles and practices of digital preservation
13. Plan and execute a collection processing plan
14. Plan and execute a research project using public property records [e.g., National Register of Historic Places]
15. Plan and execute a social media project popularizing archival records to the general audience
16. Practice using available archival platforms at the CAHC

## **Appendix 2: Professional Conduct**

Over the course of the semester, Graduate Assistants are expected to meet basic professional standards. As a Center for Arkansas History and Culture GA, you are expected to:

- Be punctual: Arrive on time and leave when scheduled. If unforeseen circumstances prevent you from being on time or completing your shift as scheduled, email or call:  
Cody Besett, Student Success Archivist [clbesett@ualr.edu](mailto:clbesett@ualr.edu) 501-320-5774  
Laura McClellan, Assistant Director [lmcclellan@ualr.edu](mailto:lmcclellan@ualr.edu) 501-320-5780
- Communicate in a respectful and professional manner, both in person and via email, with other CAHC staff members, patrons, and CAHC guests. Remember that more casual behavior might be appropriate when you communicate with someone in person and more formal rules may apply to email communication. You might also communicate more informally with a person that you know personally than with a

person you don't know/haven't met. Ask if you're not sure or don't know what professional communication implies in particular cases.

- Communicate with the SSA about unexpected events that affect your schedule. Let the CAHC staff know as soon as you can about factors that might change availability or future schedule.
- Dress professionally: Graduate Assistants are expected to wear business-casual clothing when working. Occasional duties may require more or less formal attire (e.g., event assistance or moving boxes).
- Be respectful towards your coworkers, CAHC patrons, and CAHC guests.
- Be reliable and collegial. Remember that the success of a team depends on the efforts of each team member.

### Appendix 3: Midterm Evaluation Form

**Student's name:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Rating scale**

5 = Excellent: Performance exceeds expectations and requirements

4 = Very good: Performance meets expectations and requirements, with minor areas of excellence

3 = Average: Performance meets expectations and requirements

2 = Improvement needed: Performance mostly meets expectations and requirements with some areas of improvement

1 = Unsatisfactory: Performance fails to meet expectations and requirements

NA = Not applicable: This assistantship does not include training in this particular area or does not require application of the particular skill

#### **I. Performance**

1. Does the GA complete the assigned tasks?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

2. Does the GA complete the assigned tasks in a timely fashion?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

3. Does the GA perform their tasks in a professional fashion (i.e., applying best practices)?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

4. Does the GA plan and organize their work efficiently?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

- |  |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 5. Does the GA transition from one <u>familiar</u> task to another without additional instruction?   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 6. Does the GA seek guidance when necessary?   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 7. Does the GA respond to the feedback in a productive manner?   | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 8. Does the GA demonstrate a proactive attitude (i.e., takes up/completes responsibilities and tasks out of their own initiative and/or asks for assistance without being prompted)? | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 9. Does the GA progress towards the completion of their project/projects in a timely fashion?  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 10. Does the GA progress towards achieving their learning goals and objectives as specified in the Assistantship Agreement?  | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |

## II. Skills

Evaluate the level of skills demonstrated by the GA. Mark only those that apply, i.e., the GA was able to demonstrate them while working on the assigned project/projects:

- |                          |   |   |   |   |   |    |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Written communication | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 2. Oral communication    | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 3. Reading               | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 4. Writing               | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 5. Listening             | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |
| 6. Research              | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | NA |

7. Use of technology	5	4	3	2	1	NA
8. Team work (collaboration)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
9. Planning/organization	5	4	3	2	1	NA
10. Problem solving	5	4	3	2	1	NA
11. Time management	5	4	3	2	1	NA
12. Interpersonal skills (i.e., interacting with coworkers, assisting patrons)	5	4	3	2	1	NA

### III. **Professional conduct**

1. Is the GA punctual?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2. Does the GA communicate in a professional manner in face-to-face interactions?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3. Does the GA communicate in a professional manner in writing (email)?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4. Does the GA communicate with their supervisor about unexpected events that affect their schedule in a timely fashion?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5. Does the GA dress in an appropriate manner?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
6. Is the GA respectful towards coworkers, patrons, and guests?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
7. Is the GA reliable?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
8. Is the GA collegial?	5	4	3	2	1	NA

#### IV. General feedback

Reflect on the GA's overall performance. Consider their professional performance and professional conduct. Is the GA progressing towards all the specified goals and objectives in a timely fashion? What are the GAs' strengths? What areas would you suggest the GA could improve and how?

### Appendix 4: Final Evaluation Form Proposal

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Rating scale

5 = Excellent: Performance exceeds expectations and requirements

4 = Very good: Performance meets expectations and requirements, with minor areas of excellence

3 = Average: Performance meets expectations and requirements

2 = Improvement needed: Performance mostly meets expectations and requirements with some areas of improvement

1 = Unsatisfactory: Performance fails to meet expectations and requirements

NA = Not applicable: This assistantship does not include training in this particular area or does not require application of the particular skill

#### I. Performance

1. Did the GA complete the assigned tasks?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

2. Did the GA complete the assigned tasks in a timely fashion?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

3. Did the GA perform their tasks in a professional fashion (i.e., applying best archival practices)?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

4. Did the GA plan and organize their work efficiently?

5                      4                      3                      2                      1                      NA

5. Did the GA transition from one <u>familiar</u> task to another without additional instruction?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
6. Did the GA seek guidance when necessary?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
7. Did the GA respond to the feedback in a productive manner?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
8. Did the GA demonstrate a proactive attitude (i.e., took up/completed responsibilities and tasks out of their own initiative and/or asked for assistance without being prompted)?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
9. Did the GA complete their projects as outlined in the syllabus?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
10. Did the GA achieve the learning objectives and goals as specified in the Assistantship Agreement?	5	4	3	2	1	NA

## II. Skills

Evaluate the level of skills demonstrated by the GA. Mark only those that apply, i.e., the GA was able to demonstrate them while working on the assigned project/projects. Compare to the midterm evaluation to determine which skills strengthened as a result of the assistantship.

1. Written communication	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2. Oral communication	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3. Reading	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4. Writing	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5. Listening	5	4	3	2	1	NA

6. Research	5	4	3	2	1	NA
7. Use of technology	5	4	3	2	1	NA
8. Team work (collaboration)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
9. Planning/organization	5	4	3	2	1	NA
10. Problem solving	5	4	3	2	1	NA
11. Time management	5	4	3	2	1	NA
12. Interpersonal skills (i.e., interacting with coworkers, assisting patrons)	5	4	3	2	1	NA

### III. Professional conduct

1. Was the GA punctual?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
2. Did the GA communicate in a professional manner in face-to-face interactions?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
3. Did the GA communicate in a professional manner in writing (email)?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
4. Did the GA communicate with their supervisor about unexpected events that affected their schedule in a timely fashion?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
5. Did the GA dress in an appropriate manner?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
6. Was the GA respectful towards coworkers, patrons, and guests?	5	4	3	2	1	NA

7. Was the GA reliable?	5	4	3	2	1	NA
8. Was the GA collegial?	5	4	3	2	1	NA

#### **IV. General feedback**

Reflect on the GA's overall performance. Consider their professional performance and professional conduct. What were the GAs' strengths? What areas would you suggest the GA could improve and how?

#### **Appendix 5: Questions for GAs** (\*To be answered by GAs in writing)

Each GA is asked to reflect on the questions below in writing. These are designed to be neutral in order to provide GAs with an opportunity to offer specific feedback without concerns that they cannot express honest opinions given that the CAHC will likely be one of their references on the job market. More open, opinion-based questions are suggested for the more informal atmosphere of the group exit interview (see Appendix 6).

1. Did this assistantship help you meet/get closer to meeting your professional goals? Alternatively, did this assistantship help you determine or specify your professional goals if you were not sure what they were at the beginning of this assistantship?
2. Which tasks and/or aspects of your training did you find most helpful?
3. What did you not understand about the CAHC when you first started your assistantship? Is there anything that you still do not understand about the CAHC?
4. If you could start your assistantship over, what would you have done differently?
5. What advice would you give to other GAs as they consider an assistantship at the CAHC?

## Appendix 6: Exit Interview Questions

The person that leads the exit interview meeting should select relevant questions from the list below and/or add their own questions based on their experience of working with GAs/graduate students.

### A. Questions about training

1. Were your responsibilities clearly identified throughout the course of the semester?
2. Were your responsibilities the same as those identified at the beginning of the semester?
3. Was the syllabus clearly explained at the beginning of the semester?
4. Did the syllabus help you understand what tasks you would be expected to complete throughout the course of the semester?
5. Did the Assistantship Agreement that you signed at the beginning of the semester help you understand what to expect throughout the course of the semester?
6. Did you know what your responsibilities were throughout the course of the semester?
7. Did you receive sufficient support/training to meet the expectations as determined by the Assistantship Agreement?
8. Did you receive sufficient support/training to complete your tasks?
9. Did you receive sufficient support/training to complete your tasks in a timely fashion?
10. Did you receive sufficient support/training to smoothly transition from one task to another?
11. Were the individuals that were supervising various components of your assistantships usually available when you needed their assistance/guidance?
12. Were you able to seek assistance/guidance whenever the Student Success Archivist was not available?
13. Did you receive sufficient support/training to complete your project/projects in a timely fashion?
14. Was the feedback you received clearly communicated?
15. Was the feedback you received sufficient?
16. Was the feedback you received productive?
17. Did you receive sufficient support/training to achieve your learning goals and learning objectives as specified in the Assistantship Agreement?
18. What skills has this assistantship helped you strengthen?
19. What skills do you wish this assistantship helped you strengthen but didn't (see the list of skills used to evaluate GAs for suggestions)? Note that not all assistantships are designed to strengthen all the skills but do you think there were some missed opportunities during your assistantship to focus on particular skills?

20. Which assignments did you find particularly useful and which did you think were less productive or useless?

B. General questions about the experience at the CAHC

1. Was your assistantship a productive use of your time?
2. In comparison to your first days at the CAHC, how much have you learned about the daily experience of archivists/archival institutions?
3. Could you always ask for help if you needed it? Was it clear whom to ask for help if you needed it?
4. Have the training and experience provided by the CAHC made you a more confident professional?
5. Was there anything that was not covered that you think should have been covered during your assistantship?
6. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve this assistantship?
7. How would you describe the overall atmosphere at the CAHC?
8. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the CAHC as a professional environment?
9. What did you like most about working at the CAHC?
10. What did you dislike about working at the CAHC?