A RECENT STUDY OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS

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University administrators, college deans, department chairpersons and directors, faculty members, graduate assistants, and undergraduate students were mailed questionnaires concerning the roles of and attitudes toward graduate assistants at the University of Minnesota. Basic agreement was found to exist among the six groups surveyed with regard to many aspects of graduate assistantships. Graduate assistants were found to have little knowledge of many departmental concerns that directly affect them. The number of formalized policies regulating graduate assistantships was found to vary with the classification of assistantship.

Key words: graduate assistant, teaching assistant

This article summarizes a study of graduate assistants at the University of Minnesota completed by Anderson and Berdie (1972).

INTRODUCTION

The roles and functions of graduate assistants are often not clearly defined by the universities that employ them. In 1965, the Association of Teaching and Research Assistants (ASTRA) was founded at the University of Minnesota to act as spokesman for graduate assistants in matters related to graduate-assistant status at the University. During the next six years, ASTRA representatives dealt periodically with a number of specific issues relevant to graduate assistants. As ASTRA became increasingly more active, the need for more data concerning the status of graduate assistants was recognized.

Copies of the complete report may be obtained from Measurement Services Center, University of Minnesota, 9 Clarence Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55414.
In March 1971, members of ASTRA met with the University of Minnesota president and other key administrators to discuss the status of graduate assistants, as well as reported instances of misuse of graduate assistants. A decision was made at this meeting to appoint a task force on graduate assistants and subsequently to conduct a comprehensive study of graduate assistants. The specific goals of the study were:

1. To describe present roles and functions of graduate assistants at the University of Minnesota.
2. To describe attitudes toward graduate assistants held by specified groups within the University.
3. To describe how various groups believe the University should administer graduate assistantships.
4. To discuss problematic situations relevant to graduate assistants as seen by various groups within the University.
5. To make recommendations regarding policies relevant to graduate assistants.

**PROCEDURES**

**Populations and Samples**

In order to obtain the most complete information concerning graduate assistants at the University, the following groups of people were contacted: college deans, department chairpersons and directors of units, faculty, graduate assistants, undergraduate students, and University administrators. A total of 3,627 people were contacted. Only people at the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth campuses were contacted as these were the only campuses at the University of Minnesota that have programs for graduate students. The recommendations contained in Berdie and Anderson (1974) were carefully followed to ensure that nonresponse bias would be minimal. Usable responses were received from 3,208 people, representing an 88% response rate.

**College Deans.** The dean population consisted of the 20 deans (or acting deans) on the Twin Cities campuses and the four division chairpersons (whose roles were seen as equivalent to those of deans) on the Duluth campus. Associate and assistant deans were not contacted. The total population of 24 were mailed questionnaires and 22 (92%) responded.

**Department Chairpersons and Directors of Units.** The population of department chairpersons and unit directors was defined as all those chairpersons of departments and directors of units that employed at least one graduate assistant continuously from October 15, 1971 through February 15, 1972 (N = 168). Chairpersons of academic departments made up 87% of the population and directors of nonacademic units made up 13%. All the chairpersons or directors in the population were included in the study. In those cases where chairpersons or directors were on leaves of absence, the acting chairpersons or acting directors...