

Graduate  
Assistant  
Handbook

Effective Fall

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Graduate assistantships, which include grader positions except as provided in Section VIII, are available to qualified, full-time, degree-seeking graduate students. An assistantship is awarded to a student to enable him or her to obtain academic or research experience while making progress toward a graduate degree.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are assigned individual duties consistent with the needs of the department and the experience and qualifications of the student. GAs have a professional role (albeit of an apprentice nature) in the University, and the duties of a GA are consistent with the teaching and research missions of the University.

All graduate students wishing financial support from the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships must complete a FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form each year. More information on the FAFSA is located at <<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>>. Any questions related to financial aid or scholarships should be directed to the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships. Its website is <<http://www.umbc.edu/financialaid>>.

GAs should become thoroughly familiar with the academic regulations of the Graduate School published in the Graduate School Catalog and on the Graduate School website <<http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool>>, and with the special requirements of their program. This manual is a compilation of University policies and practices governing graduate assistantships.

## II. QUALIFICATIONS, APPLICATIONS, AND SELECTION

A Graduate Assistant (GA) must be a full-time registered graduate student who is enrolled in a degree program and who is making satisfactory progress toward the degree. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward the degree. Satisfactory progress is defined as a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0 during the entire course of study and a satisfactory progress report by the student's mentor or Graduate Program Director (GPD). Appointments are normally given to those students who have shown superior aptitude in their field of study and who appear likely to render a high quality of service to the University by their teaching and/or research activities.

Applications for assistantships should be made directly to the department in which the applicant desires to study. Offers of assistantships are made contingent on available funds and admission of the student to a degree-granting graduate program.

Selection of GAs is made by the chairperson of the department and/or the GPD, with the recommendation of a graduate student recruitment committee or those responsible for graduate studies in that area. Selection of Research Assistants can also be made by individual faculty members who have external research grants.

### **UMBC Non-Discrimination Policy Statement**

The University of Maryland, Baltimore County does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, ethnic background, genetics, disability, age, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, and/or veteran status in admission to and participation in education programs and activities, or employment practices in accordance with federal laws, including, but not limited to Titles VI and VII of the Civil Right Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended, as well as state laws, and regulations. GAs are selected in compliance with this non-discrimination policy.

### **The Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Statistics**

In accordance with the guidelines established by UMBC and pursuant to federal law, identified as the “Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act of 1998,” all currently enrolled students, campus employees, and all prospective students and prospective employees are entitled to request and receive a copy of the UMBC Annual Campus Security Report. The report contains crime statistics about certain specified crimes/incidents that have been reported to the UMBC Police Department and/or Campus Security Authorities over the past three years and have occurred either on-campus, in off-campus buildings or property owned or controlled by the University, or on public property adjacent to campus. The report also contains policies and practices pertaining to campus security, crime reporting, alcohol and drugs, victims’ assistance programs, student discipline, campus resources, community safety alerts, crime prevention, access to campus facilities/properties as well as personal safety tips. The report encourages the reporting of all crime occurrences. The report describes how and to whom to report crimes. Copies of this report may be obtained by calling (410) 455-5555, in person from the UMBC Police Department, or on-line at the UMBC Police Department’s website, which is <<http://www.umbc.edu/police>>.

## **III. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS**

International students are subject to additional rules articulated by the federal government. Differences between international students and domestic students include tax status, duration of stay at UMBC after graduation, and the ability to have additional on-campus employment. International students are strongly advised to direct any questions they have to International Education Services (IES). Its website is <<http://www.umbc.edu/ies>>. Where there are contradictions or differences between this manual and information provided by IES to international students, IES is, in all instances, the prevailing authority.

## **IV. CATEGORIES AND DUTIES**

There are five (5) categories of employment for graduate students with assistantships: Teaching Assistant, Research Assistant, Administrative Assistant, Residential Assistant, and Peaceworker Assistant. All students employed through a graduate assistantship are known as Graduate Assistants (GAs). The category of Grader is identical to a GA except as provided in Section VIII.

### **Teaching Assistant**

The specific duties of a Teaching Assistant (TA) vary from one department to another, but for the majority, assignments and responsibilities will fall into the following five categories:

- a) teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion section of a course;
- b) teaching responsibility for a classroom section of a multi-sectional course, under the close supervision of the director or directors of the course;
- c) assisting a faculty member in the grading, advising, proctoring, and administrative duties necessary for a course or courses;
- d) assisting with the administration of community programs, workshops, etc.;
- e) assisting with general departmental administrative duties.

All TAs serving in any capacity are under the direction and close supervision of a regularly appointed member of the faculty. Graduate students functioning as TAs will not be permitted to be solely in charge of a course, but will be given an appropriate degree of responsibility in a classroom or laboratory so that they may be introduced to teaching activities gradually and effectively. The final responsibility for material covered, grades, and other formal course responsibilities must remain with the supervising faculty member. Distribution of responsibilities among TAs is in the hands of the department and should reflect both the interests and skills of the TA and the desire of the department to further his or her professional development.

### **Research Assistant**

The duties of Research Assistants (RAs) vary according to the nature of the research project in which they participate and the source of funding. RAs may or may not be assigned to work on research which is directly applicable to their thesis or dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the master's or doctoral degree. The duties of the RA are performed under the direction and supervision of a faculty member.

### **Administrative Assistant**

A number of campus offices employ GAs in administrative roles. Responsibilities vary, as do the durations of appointments. Usually Administrative Assistants with such appointments perform administrative support functions but should not perform the duties of or replace a non-exempt Administrative Assistant.

### **Residential Assistant**

A Residential Assistant aids in the administrative support functions for Residential Life. He/she receives accommodations in an on-campus apartment and board. These positions are usually offered to students who have had previous residential life employment experience. A specific description of the position and qualifications may be obtained from Residential Life. Its website is <<http://www.umbc.edu/reslife>>.

### **Peaceworker Assistant**

A Peaceworker Assistant participates in the Shriver Center Peaceworker Program. Students whose primary focus is community service that addresses the economic, social and/or cultural problems confronting urban America are eligible for a peaceworker assistantship. Supervision for these assistantship recipients is arranged by the Shriver Center. Its website is <<http://shrivercenter.umbc.edu>>.

## **Grader**

A Grader provides support in a teaching program by grading student assignments.

## **V. APPOINTMENT, REAPPOINTMENT, AND DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT**

An assistantship appointment may be full-time (20 hours per week) or half-time (10 hours per week). Appointments may not be for less than half-time. One-quarter, two-thirds, three-quarter, or other fractional appointments are not permitted.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) are generally appointed for either a regular academic year (9.5 months) or a 12-month period. The appointment may be for a shorter period if so specified in the official offer. The academic year appointment begins in the summer and may end late in the spring semester or early summer. Starting and ending dates each year are determined by the department based on the University payroll schedule. Students may be reappointed one or more times at the discretion of the department. In order to allow a larger number of qualified students to benefit from these positions, some departments have limited the number of years in which a student may serve as a GA.

Each department is responsible for determining and communicating its own specific criteria, consistent with University policy, for assessing student qualifications for appointment and reappointment to graduate assistantships. In general, reappointment is dependent upon satisfactory performance, adequate progress toward a graduate degree, and the needs of the department. As with all faculty and staff positions, appointment and reappointment are contingent on the availability of funds.

The continuation of an assistantship will be evaluated at the end of each semester and is contingent on the student's quality of work, academic standing, and registration in appropriate courses.

## **VI. LETTER OF APPOINTMENT**

The official letter of appointment for a graduate assistantship comes from the vice-president, dean, department chairperson, program director, or faculty member whose research project funds the assistantship. Students must be provided with a letter of appointment/reappointment annually. This letter will provide pertinent information on the terms of the assistantship, including:

- a) biweekly pay rate;
- b) remission of tuition for permissible level of course registration per semester;
- c) UMBC GA Health Insurance benefits;
- d) specific beginning and ending dates of the appointment;
- e) date on which the Graduate Assistant is expected to report to the department;
- f) indication of the expected type(s) of duties;
- g) indication of approximate time commitment to fulfill departmental responsibilities;

- h) acceptance deadline date.

The Graduate School must be copied on all letters of acceptance. For international students, the Director of International Education Services must also be copied.

A sample *Letter of Appointment* is available on the Graduate School's website at <[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad\\_assist/award\\_letter.doc](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad_assist/award_letter.doc)>.

## VII. SALARIES AND STIPENDS

Stipends are set by the supporting department, but must be at least equal to the minimum stipend levels for Graduate Assistants and hourly employees published by the Graduate School. The minimum stipend levels are available on the Graduate School's website at

<[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum\\_stipend\\_levels](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum_stipend_levels)>.

## VIII. BENEFITS AVAILABLE

### Tuition Remission

Tuition remission benefits are typically based upon whether an assistantship is full-time or part-time.

- a) Full-time Assistantship (20 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that full-time Graduate Assistants, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 10 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional credit hours.
- b) Part-time Assistantship (10 hours per week): It is the expectation of the Graduate School that part-time Graduate Assistants, excluding Graders, will receive tuition remission equal to the total enrollment of the student up to 5 credit hours per semester, Fall and Spring. Departments may, at their discretion, provide tuition remission for additional credit hours.

For courses that are billed at a differential rate<sup>1</sup> (i.e., 799, 898, or 899), departments may base the tuition remission benefit on the number of credits for which the student is charged, not the number of credits in which the student is enrolled. Alternatively, tuition remission for these courses can be specified in the appointment letter.

Graduate Assistants (GAs) appointed to a 12-month assistantship may also be eligible to receive tuition remission during the Summer session, in addition to the credit hours each Fall and Spring semester. Teaching Assistants supported by the Office of Summer, Winter, and

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<sup>1</sup> Discussed in more detail in Section IX.

Special programs are eligible for up to 3 credit hours of tuition remission during the Summer session.

There is no tuition remission for Winter session.

For each semester GAs are eligible for remission, they must complete and submit the appropriate tuition remission form by the first day of class. Tuition remission is not automatically applied to a student's account. Tuition remission will be granted only for those courses deemed necessary for the completion of the student's degree as determined by the student's mentor and Graduate Program Director.

### **Student Fees**

Payment of student fees is mandatory and is the responsibility of the GA unless it is provided as an additional benefit to be paid by the supporting department. The appointment letter will state if the supporting department is providing this additional benefit.

### **In-State Billing Status**

During the semesters of the performance of the assistantship, GAs are billed at the in-state rate for tuition in excess of the allotted remission. Upon termination of the assistantship, students revert to their original billing status unless they are granted in-state re-classification through the formal petition process for change of residency. Copies of the in-state status residency petition are available from the Office of the Registrar <<http://www.umbc.edu/registrar/residency>>.

### **Health Insurance**

GAs are eligible to enroll in the GA health insurance program. Additional information is available from University Health Services. Payment for enrollment in the GA health insurance program is the responsibility of the student or is considered an additional benefit to be paid by the department.

### **Retirement, Unemployment, and Social Security**

Retirement contributions are not withheld from the salaries of GAs, and GAs are not entitled to retirement benefits. FICA, comprised of Social Security and Medicare, and unemployment insurance are not withheld during the academic year when a GA is registered as a full-time<sup>2</sup> student or during the Summer session when a student is registered for at least three (3) credits at all times. Registration requirements are discussed in more detail in Section IX. GAs are not eligible for unemployment benefits.

International students are never subject to FICA withholding.

### **Credit Union**

GAs are eligible to join the Maryland State Employees Credit Union (SECU). For more information, please visit <<http://www.secumd.org>>.

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<sup>2</sup> FICA requires that a student be registered half-time, but a half-time student is not eligible to be a Graduate Assistant. Hourly workers may be registered half-time and still retain FICA-exemption.



**Sick Leave**

If a GA becomes ill, sick leave should be supported collegially, up to 40 hours during the contract year (this includes summer term for GAs supported during the summer session). After four consecutive days of sick leave, the supervisor may require the GA to provide a letter from a physician or other licensed health-care professional that states (1) the nature of the illness; (2) that the GA can or cannot return to work for health reasons; and, (3) the duration of the required sick leave. This letter can be submitted upon the GA's return to work. Sick days should be recorded on time sheets using standard leave codes.

**Maternity Leave**

Maternity leave is not regarded as sick leave. If maternity leave is required, it should be discussed with the GA's Graduate Program Director or supervisor as soon as possible. Whereas maternity leave arrangements should be made to fit the individual circumstances, all arrangements must include a 6-week minimum post-birth recovery period. Examples of leave arrangements that have been used in the past are available from the Office of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. All maternity leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. A central pool of funding will be available to reimburse, upon request from the department, the cost of stipends of GAs on maternity leave.

**Vacation**

Academic year (9.5-month) GAs are not eligible to earn credit towards vacation. All GAs with 12-month appointments will be allowed time away from their duties during the course of the appointment. A full-time assistantship over a 12-month period carries with it the expectation that the student will be allowed 40 hours of paid leave. This time away from duties must be taken during the current appointment and may not be accumulated or transferred, nor does it include time when the University is closed. It may be taken following reasonable prior notification and with the approval of the student's supervisor. These days should be recorded on time sheets using standard leave codes. Excess leave, unused at the end of the contractual appointment, will not be "paid-out" or financially compensated, but instead will be forfeited by the GA.

**Other Long-Term Leave**

Other long-term leave that is not discussed here will be handled on an individual basis. All leave agreements must be approved by the Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

**Holidays and Snow Days**

When the University is closed for a recognized holiday, due to inclement weather, or for any other reason, GAs will not be required to come to work. GAs who would normally work those days will receive their normal bi-weekly compensation and will not be required to make up the hours missed with increased hours on other days. These days should be recorded on time sheets using standard leave codes. Holidays, inclement weather days, and other campus closures do not excuse GAs from completing work on-time. For example, homework assignments must be graded by the previously agreed-upon date. Further, to ensure instructional continuity, Teaching Assistants are expected to be available via e-mail or Blackboard. Under certain circumstances, selected GAs can be classified as essential personnel through the regular University process to maintain sensitive equipment and laboratory animals.

### **Library Privileges**

Faculty-level library privileges may be obtained by presenting a copy of the assistantship letter of appointment to the Albin O. Kuhn Library and Gallery each instance of use. Additional information can be found on the Library's website for borrowing information and privileges at <<http://aok.lib.umbc.edu/circulation/borrowing>>.

## **IX. REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS**

### **Academic Year**

Graduate Assistants (GAs) must be registered as full-time students whether they hold a full-time appointment or a half-time appointment. To be considered full-time, a student must be registered for a minimum of 9 credits in each Fall and Spring semester. The student must be registered in courses that lead toward his/her degree.

In addition, GAs must register for one of two graduate assistantship courses. These courses are GRAD 600 and GRAD 601.

- a) Full-time GAs, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- b) Part-time GAs in two different departments, whose total commitment is 20 hours per week, register for GRAD 601. GRAD 601 is fixed at five (5) credits, so students must register for a minimum of four (4) credits in addition to this course.
- c) Part-time GAs, whose total commitment is 10 hours per week, register for GRAD 600. GRAD 600 is fixed at three (3) credits, so students must register for a minimum of six (6) credits in addition to this course.

### **Summer Session**

GAs with appointments during the Summer are required to register for the graduate assistantship course, GRAD 603. In order to retain FICA-exemption during the Summer, domestic GAs must be registered for at least three (3) credits at all times during the Summer. GRAD 603 provides two (2) credits towards the three (3) credit requirement.

International Students with F-1, J-1, M-1, or Q-1 immigration status are already FICA-exempt. Students with these statuses are only required to register for GRAD 603 during Summer.

### **Notes Applicable to Fall, Spring, and Summer**

- a) GAs are not billed tuition or fees for GRAD 600, GRAD 601, or GRAD 603;
- b) GAs receive credit towards full-time status from GRAD 600 and GRAD 601;
- c) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 are not eligible for financial aid, nor are they considered when determining financial aid eligibility;
- d) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 do not appear on transcripts;
- e) GAs are required to register for their respective course, GRAD 600, GRAD 601, or GRAD 603, for each semester;

- f) GRAD 600, GRAD 601, and GRAD 603 will appear at registration to be for 0 credits. However, GAs are receiving the proper number of credits (3, 5, and 2, respectively);
- g) Class numbers for the GA courses are posted on the Graduate School's website at <[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/grad\\_assist\\_course](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/grad_assist_course)>. Students must register for GA courses by class number.

Master's thesis research (799) is a variable (2-9) credit course (billed at 1/2 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Pre-candidacy doctoral dissertation research (898) (for students who have not reached the doctoral candidacy stage) is a variable (3-9) credit course (billed at 1/3 rate), based on the amount of involvement in the University research program.

Doctoral dissertation research (899) for students who have reached the doctoral candidacy stage carries 9 credits (billed at 2/9 rate).

## **X. ADMINISTRATION OF THE ASSISTANTSHIP**

The Graduate Assistant (GA) works directly under the supervision of the department that offers the appointment. The department determines the assignment, supervises the work, and makes the recommendation for continuation, reappointment, and promotion. The department is the primary source of information about any of the details of the assistantship. The responsibility for the GA's work is determined by the department chair or program director, any duly-appointed executive committees and assistants to the chair, and/or the faculty member assigned to supervise a particular course, laboratory session, or research project.

## **XI. ADDITIONAL ON-CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT**

### **Fall and Spring Semesters**

Graduate students awarded a full-time assistantship are not eligible to work for the University beyond the 20 hours per week associated with the assistantship. Any exceptions must have the prior approval of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The mechanism by which to request this approval is at

<[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad\\_assist/Request\\_for\\_GA\\_Overage.doc](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/docs/grad_assist/Request_for_GA_Overage.doc)>.

Graduate students awarded a half-time assistantship are not eligible to work for the University for more than 10 additional hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with the assistantship.

### **Winter and Summer Sessions**

Full-time Graduate Assistants (GAs) are eligible to work for the University up to an additional 20 hours per week beyond the 20 hours associated with their assistantship during Winter and Summer sessions. Part-time GAs are eligible to work up to an additional 30 hours per week beyond the 10 hours associated with their assistantship. However, employment may not exceed a 40-hour work week.

## **XII. PERFORMANCE REVIEWS**

Each department employing Graduate Assistants (GAs) is responsible for developing clear descriptions of the duties required of students employed in these positions; these descriptions should be sufficiently specific to make meaningful evaluation of performance feasible and permit external evaluation of the approximate equity of the workloads associated with the different varieties of duties assigned. Each GA should be provided with the appropriate job description prior to commencing each semester of appointment<sup>3</sup>, and with clear information regarding supervising authority and the criteria and structure of how performance will be evaluated.

Each department is responsible for determining and implementing procedures for review and evaluation of GAs. Therefore, the process of evaluation will vary; it may include written assessment of work by an individual faculty member, classroom visitation by designated faculty members, and written student evaluations. The results of reviews and evaluations should be discussed with the GA.

GAs are encouraged to document work-related experiences for future employment. Faculty members should agree to provide letters of reference for work done which will be included in the student's departmental file.

## **XIII. MEANS OF RESOLVING COMPLAINTS**

Several departments have formal or informal structures for handling complaints of Graduate Assistants (GAs) and graduate students. An attempt should always be made first to resolve difficulties at the departmental level. In addition, the University has in effect procedures for orderly action on specific issues such as race discrimination, sex discrimination, academic misconduct, sexual harassment, arbitrary and capricious grading, and student academic and non-academic misconduct. A mediation procedure is also established to try to resolve conflicts that are not covered by other grievance policies. These policies may be found under Graduate School Policies on the Graduate School website at <<http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/essentials/procedures>>.

### **Informal Consultation**

If a GA is having unusual difficulties with his or her assignment, the situation first should be discussed with the individual faculty member who serves as the supervisor. If the problem is not resolved, the GA should discuss the matter with the Graduate Program Director and/or the chairperson of the department.

### **Formal Complaints**

If a GA does not receive satisfaction at the departmental level, the matter should be brought to the attention of the Associate Dean of the Graduate School. The Associate Dean is available to mediate any difficulties, whether they are related to work as a GA or as a

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<sup>3</sup> 9.5-month and 12-month graduate assistantships only require annual job descriptions unless duties change during the appointment contract. Teaching Assistants require job descriptions for each course.

graduate student. The Dean and Associate Dean are directly concerned with all academic problems of graduate students that require mediation beyond the department.

#### **XIV. CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINE**

In their teaching and research activities, all Graduate Assistants (GAs) are subject to the ethical precepts and code of the academic profession, to federal laws such as immigration status, to the laws of the State of Maryland regarding its employees, and to the University policies which govern their institutional obligations. Violation of any of these constitutes the basis for disciplinary action. The minimum expectation of GAs includes behavior in compliance with the UMBC Code of Student Conduct located at <<http://www.umbc.edu/sjp/articles/code>>.

#### **XV. TERMINATION**

An appointment may be terminated before expiration of the specified time under unusual and compelling conditions that include, but are not limited to:

- a) incompetence, inefficiency, or neglect of duty;
- b) misconduct that is job-related;
- c) delinquency in academic work;
- d) moral turpitude;
- e) discontinuance of the work in which the appointment is made;
- f) academic misconduct;
- g) enrolling in courses unrelated to the degree being pursued;
- h) violation of the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities for Academic Integrity;
- i) voluntary mutual agreement;
- j) budgetary appropriations;
- k) violation of federal or state law;
- l) misrepresentation or false data given on graduate application material;
- m) violation of the UMBC Code of Student Conduct.

Except in the most egregious instances the Graduate Assistant will receive written notice of termination at least two weeks prior to the effective date of termination. The amount of the stipend and the tuition remission benefit will be prorated according to the termination date.

#### **XVI. TAX STATUS**

As a result of the U.S. federal tax code revisions effective January 1, 1987, all graduate students must pay income tax on stipends received for graduate assistantships.

Reductions in tuition received by Graduate Assistants (GAs) are tax-exempt provided that such reductions are not received in lieu of compensation for performance by the recipient of past, present, or future service.

If a GA has any questions, it is best, in every case, to consult tax counsel or the U.S. Internal Revenue Service.

## **XVII. HOURLY EMPLOYMENT**

A graduate student whose primary responsibility is to assist with the administrative and support functions within the needs of a department or University office may be paid as an hourly employee. An hourly employee may work a maximum of 20 hours per week. An hourly employee is not a Graduate Assistant (GA) and is not entitled to any of the benefits provided for GAs. Hourly wage rates may vary, but no student can be paid less than the equivalent hourly rate of the minimum hourly stipend posted on the Graduate School website at <[http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum\\_stipend\\_levels](http://www.umbc.edu/gradschool/funding/minimum_stipend_levels)>.