

Section II: TA Responsibilities and Expectations

Description of Specific Duties

A Teaching Assistant's assignment will include a wide range of responsibilities. Some of these are: instructing undergraduate lab(s), grading assignments and exams, instructing drill sessions, writing a syllabi for teaching assignments, and holding office hours. TAs are assigned to a professor who is in charge of instructing an undergraduate physics course. The TA(s) for this course are responsible for instructing either several lab sections, several drill sections, or a combination of both and for any grading required by the professor. The TA may also be required by the course instructor to develop a syllabus for the lab and/or drill sessions they are instructing.

Graduate Students are 50% appointed and are expected to work 20 hours a week. When assigned a Teaching Assistantship position you are required by the department to have eight contact hours a week with the students. This means that a TA will teach four two-hour labs a week or an equivalent combination of labs and drill sessions. These eight hours do not include office hours, of which three are required. Grading paper and exams, or preparing for class is not considered as part of your contact hours. However, all of these hours can be counted toward your 20 work week.

The following is a break down of the responsibilities and duties required of a TA when instructing a specific type of course or class.

Teaching Drill Sessions – Drill sessions are no longer part of the physics department curriculum.

Teaching Laboratory Sections – The duties will involve: answering student's questions, working homework problems, giving quizzes, grading exams, and possibly covering some course topics in more detail. Arrive at the lab at least five minutes earlier than the students. Check to see that each lab station has the proper equipment and that it is in proper working order. At this time the TA may wish to write notes on the chalkboard for the students. Although some students enter the room early, try to keep the lab empty until the start of lab. Early arrivals will only distract from the TA's preparations but students wondering about the lab may injure themselves if they are not familiar with the safety rules pertaining to the equipment. Make it a habit to start lab on time. This will give the students plenty of time to complete the lab and gives the TA time to clean up before the next lab starts.

Office Hours – Office hours are important to the students. This is a chance for the students to interact one-on-one with their instructor. Office hours are usually held in the TA's assigned office. TAs are required to have at least 3 office hours a week. TAs are assigned to offices located on the second floor of the physics building near the labs. Please keep office doors open during office hours. This not only makes it easy for the students to find their TA but also allows

the TAs to keep meetings professional. If several students needing are in need of help at the same time, be considerate of office mates and relocate to an empty classroom.

Developing a Lab or Drill Syllabus - There many aspects of the course that the TA needs to be aware of when writing a syllabus. It is important that the students are completely aware of how the lab or drill session is going to be taught and graded; when class will meet and what is expected of them when they walk in the door. Read the syllabus written by the instructor of the course. The instructor may have already set guidelines for the related lab and drill sessions. If the instructor has set guidelines for the related lab or drill, include them in the syllabus. The following is a set of items that all TAs should consider including in a syllabus. (See Appendix C for an example syllabus.)

- **Course name and Section number(s)**
- **Course description** - See appendix A
- **Instructor's Name, Office number, Phone number, and Office hours.** (TAs may choose to set office hours after meeting with students. Set office hours so that all students are able to attend at least one of the hours.)
- **Percent of the course grade the drill or lab is worth** - Be sure to read the course guide, the instructor may have included in the course guide how much of the overall course grade the lab or drill is worth. For some classes the lab is a separate grade; research this information.
- **Grading scale** - Decide how many points each lab is going to be assigned and if students are going to be allowed to drop one of the labs. When teaching a drill section, decide how many quizzes are going to be giving and how many points each quiz is worth. Please put lots of thought and time into developing the grading scale. It is important to the students that a complete grading policy is presented on the first day of class.
- **Make-up policy** – When teaching a lab section, decide if or when students will be allowed to make up missed labs. (Please check with the Laboratory Curator when setting this policy.)
- **Weather policy** - Refer to the weather policy set by the university.
- **Course/Section guidelines** - When instructing a lab, include a written description of how lab reports should be written and an example of a respectable lab report.

Most importantly, arrange a meeting with the course instructor in order for him/her to review the syllabus in advance to classes starting. Schedule a way to distribute the syllabus to the students. Many professors pass their syllabus out on the first day of class; however, a lab or drill instructor may not see the students until the first day of lab or drill. The TA may want the professor to pass out a copy of the syllabus prior to the first time lab or drill meets. Another alternative is posting the syllabus on the class web page. All undergraduates at the university are given electronic mail accounts and have access to the Internet through campus computer labs.

Another important issue concerning the syllabus for lab and drill sections is whether or not the students completely understand the guidelines set. One such way to check the student's understanding of the guidelines is to give a quiz over the guidelines for the drill or lab.

Teaching Preparation

Preparation is one of the most important aspects of teaching. If a TA is well-prepared and present himself/herself professionally, the students will respect the TA. If a TA is not prepared the students will feel that the TA does not know the material and the students will distrust you and not respect the leadership of the TA. Once trust is lost it is hard to regain. In order to help the TA prepare for instructing assigned labs and/or drills, a list of suggested preparation activities has been compiled.

Preparing to Teach Lab – A TA will be required to instruct at least one new lab every week with the possible exception of weeks that include holidays and exams. TAs should be prepared to spend a few hours each week preparing for lab. Each TA will have a weekly meeting with the professor in charge of the course. At this meeting the purpose of the lab and the procedure will be discussed. The lab curator will attend these meetings in order to give the TAs instructions pertaining to safety, procedures, and operation of equipment. The following suggestions should help TAs to be prepared to teach lab. For further information, see Appendix D, Guidelines for Lab Instructors.

- Be very familiar with the lab, homework exercises, and the lab equipment. This means that the TA will need to schedule time in advance to perform the lab experiment, **including the data analysis**. The TA will need to read the lab manual and be familiar with all aspects of the equipment involved. (Check with the Lab Curator for times to practice the labs.)
- Ask TAs who have taught the lab before for advice about instructing the lab.
- Arrive a few minutes prior to the students.
- Check each lab station for proper equipment and check the equipment for proper function.
- Make sure that the safety equipment provided for the students is in proper working order and is ready for use.
- The TA may wish to write a few notes on the chalkboard prior to starting lab.
- Be sure to check the AV equipment to see if it is functioning properly. If not, contact the lab curator.
- Check to see if the lab curator requires equipment to be checked out by the students using a photo ID.
- **Always straighten up the lab room for the next TA.**

Preparing to Teach a Drill Session – Drill sessions are a good time for students to ask questions about concepts that are confusing to them and to discuss the homework assignments with their TA. As a TA there are several things that can be done to make sure that the drill session runs smoothly.

- Arrive at the classroom several minutes earlier than the students.
- Be familiar with the textbook and use the same notation as the book when solving problems.
- The TA should work the entire homework problem set in advance in order to be familiar with the problems and the subject matter. **The students are there for help and reinforcement, not to watch the TA attempt the homework for the first time.**
- Be prepared to discuss the physical concepts behind the homework problems.
- Have the quiz prepared in advance and make it relevant to the current topics in lecture.
- Plan on giving the quiz the last part of the class to give the students time to ask questions that relate to the quiz material. This will also keep students from leaving right after the quiz.

Preparing for Office Hours – Office hours are important to the students. We have listed several tips that will help office hours go smoothly.

- **Keep the door open at all times.**
- During office hours do not involve your self in a project that cannot be interrupted when a student stops by with a question.
- Have a copy of the course guide and textbook handy. Many of the questions asked during office hours pertain to the course structure.
- All TAs share an office with other TAs so space is very limited. When meeting with more than two students at the same time, move to an empty classroom. Do not forget to place a note on your door so that other students can locate you.

Preparing to Grade Lab Reports and Homework - This topic is covered in more detail in section V of this manual. The following suggestions will help TAs save time when grading assignments.

- Set the value of assignments prior to assigning them to the students. This should follow the grading scale set in the syllabus for the course.
- Developing a grading format, see section V.
- Stick to the format. If a TA does not grade consistently, the students will want to know why.
- Post a formal solution after papers are returned to the students so that the students can check their work.

Preparing to Grade Tests – How and where tests are graded are left up to the instructor in charge of the course.

Proctoring Tests – TAs are required to help the instructor in charge of the course proctor all exams. As a proctor, the TA will answer students' questions pertaining to the exam, and act as an extra set of eyes in the room, which will help deter students from academic dishonesty. The instructor for each course sets the time and place for the exams.