Guidelines for Managing Teaching Assistantships

This document contains guidelines to help ensure that TAs and instructors perform their duties and that a successful working relationship between the TA and course instructor is maintained. Each of the following sections outlines both the TA’s role and the instructor’s role in the TA-instructor relationship.

1 Duties

This section lists duties that are normally included in a TA’s duties. Note that some (especially senior) courses may not include all of these duties and may include other duties. However, significant exceptions from the description below must be described on the course web pages at least one month before the course begins. In the event that this is not possible the appropriate information must be communicated (in writing) to potential TAs with reasonable lead time.

If the instructor perceives that TA duties are not being adequately performed, the instructor should take action according to the Teaching Assistants Evaluation Policy, Section 3.

If the TA perceives that instructor duties are not being adequately performed, the TA should first attempt to discuss the issues with the instructor. The TA/Instructor Interim Report may be useful for this discussion. If this does not resolve the issue, the issue (together with all TA/Instructor Interim Reports) should be brought to the attention of the Associate Head – Graduate Affairs1.

1.1 Lab/Tutorial Preparation and Presentation

TAs must know the course material and be competent within the course domain. TAs must also have adequate communication skills; this includes English fluency, presentation, and interpersonal skills.

Courses are available for TAs if they do not have sufficient English language fluency.

Adequate presentation skills include being organized and able to use appropriate visuals to present the lab material. Courses are available for TAs wishing to improve their teaching.

Adequate language and interaction skills include the ability to give an understandable presentation, and to understand and respond to student queries. In the event that a potential TA or their supervisor anticipates a potential difficulty in language, the TA should contact the Associate Head – Graduate Affairs to discuss the concern.

TAs should come to labs prepared, and should cover the material outlined by the instructor. TAs are not required to cover additional material in labs, but if they choose to, this material must first be approved by the instructor. For example, a TA may wish to

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1 In all cases of reference to “Associate Head – Graduate Studies” this role may be delegated to another depending upon the Department’s organizational structure. Currently this is delegated to the Assistant Graduate Head – Existing Students.
present material from a previous course exam during a lab. This should be first approved by the instructor.

**Instructors** are responsible for outlining, in a regular and timely manner, what material should be covered by the TA in labs. If an instructor suspects that a TA has inadequate knowledge or communication skills, the instructor should attend and observe at least one of the TA’s labs. Instructors should discuss with TAs any perceived deficiencies and should help them find ways of remediying such deficiencies by directing them to appropriate resources. If it appears that the problem cannot be solved in a timely enough manner to adequately carry out the current TA assignment, instructors should consult with the Associate Head – Graduate Affairs.

1.2 **Marking Assignments**

TAs should have assignments marked, returned to the students, and marks submitted to the instructor prior to the deadline of the next assignment to be submitted (or earlier, depending on the relationship between the assignments: consult the instructor). If assignment deadlines are less than one week apart from each other or assignments are very large, the TA and instructor should negotiate an appropriate marking deadline.

**Instructors** should provide TAs with a marking guide that describes the merits assignments should be marked on, the weightings for each merit, and the solution(s) for the assignment where appropriate and practical. The marking guide should be provided to TAs in a timely manner (eg. or assignments at least 3 days prior to the submission deadline) so questions about the marking scheme can be clarified and consistently applied in all relevant lab sections.

1.3 **Marking Exams**

TAs may be asked to assist in marking exams but this must be done within their allocated hours.

**Instructors** are obliged to ensure they follow University policy regarding “instructor of record” marking guidelines.

1.4 **Continuous Tutorials**

TAs assigned to cover continuous tutorials are obliged to attend all hours assigned or to find an approved substitute.

1.5 **Student Contact**

TAs should, at a minimum, provide students with timely email contact. Appropriate additional student/TA contact is typically arranged in consultation with the instructor. These may include email lists, newsgroups, or other contact forums. If instructors require TAs to hold student meeting hours:

- these hours must be included in the 12 hour/week time budget;
- these hours must not be held in the grad student’s office/lab space (to avoid disturbing other grad students) but may be held in department-designated space.
Instructors may ask TAs to hold student meeting hours. These must fall within a TA’s time commitment as outlined in Section 3 and the instructor should arrange for appropriate space.

1.6 Regular Meetings
TAs should meet with the course instructor on a regular basis, as determined by the instructor.

Instructors should decide the frequency of TA-instructor meetings at the onset of the semester. The suggested meeting schedule is once per week throughout the semester, and should not normally be more frequent than this.

1.7 Other Duties
TAs may be required to perform duties related to the course they TA in addition to, or in place of, those described above. For example, TAs may be asked to participate in exam marking subject to university and department regulations. All these duties should not exceed a TA’s time commitment outlined in Section 3.

Instructors may ask TAs to perform other reasonable course-related duties in addition to those described above. Duties that are neither listed above nor on the course web page should be negotiated with the TA. All duties should not exceed a TA’s time commitment outlined in Section 3.

1.8 Duties Beyond the Normal Time Commitment
TAs may be requested to perform duties related to the course they TA in addition to those described above, which fall outside of the normal time commitment.

Instructors may ask TAs to perform reasonable duties in addition to those described above. Additional duties that exceed the TA time commitment must be optional. If these duties are accepted, both parties must agree upon fair compensation.

1.9 Academic Misconduct
TAs must report all suspicions of academic misconduct, e.g., plagiarism, to the instructor. The TA must not deal with these issues.

Instructors should deal with issues of academic misconduct according to university policy (http://www.ucalgary.ca/VPA/acaddoc/ under “Plagiarism / Cheating / Other Academic Misconduct”).

1.10 Completion of Duties
TAs must complete all assigned duties before their TA assistantship is considered complete for the semester. They must also read and sign the TA Performance Evaluation Report for the term.

Instructors must check that a TA’s duties have been completed for the semester. Instructors must file a TA Performance Evaluation Report which indicates whether all duties were completed and provides a performance evaluation.
Final pay cheques may be withheld if this is not completed in a timely way.

2 Work Priorities

TAs should maintain a balance between their thesis research, any courses they may be taking, and their TA commitments. TAs are expected to be prepared for and attend regularly scheduled labs that they teach, stay current on the marking of assignments, and maintain regular contact with the course instructor. TAs unable to do so should seek alternate forms of funding.

Instructors should check that their TAs are staying current with their TA commitments; if they are not, the instructor should discuss this with the TA. It is the responsibility of each TA’s thesis supervisor to ensure that his or her student is maintaining their research commitments.

3 Time Commitments

The normal teaching load is three lab sections per term for those holding a full teaching assistantship.

TAs should work no more than 12 hours per week on average. It is understood that the TA’s job is inherently bursty so that periods of high time consumption must be offset correspondingly as negotiated between the TA and instructor.

This time does not include additional preparation time due to a lack of familiarity with the course subject material. An example weekly time breakdown for an assignment of three lab sections for the same course could be:

- 6 hours teaching
- 2 hours preparation
- 2.5 hours marking
- 1 hour outside contact time (i.e.: email or office hours)
- 0.5 hours meeting between the instructor and TA

An example weekly time breakdown for an assignment of two lab sections for the same course could be:

- 4 hours teaching
- 2 hours preparation
- 2 hours marking
- 3.5 hours of outside contact time (i.e.: email or office hours)
- 0.5 hours meeting between the instructor and TA

A TA’s time commitment is a weekly average; some weeks will require more time commitment than 12 hours, while other weeks will require fewer than 12 hours. Large

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These examples reflect only a typical situation as might be found in a junior course. Some courses, particularly senior courses, might involve different breakdowns of duties, omitting some and including others.
deviations from 12 hours per week must be negotiated in advance between the TA and course instructor.

Instructors should ensure, during a regularly scheduled meeting, that the TA’s time commitment to the instructor is not regularly being exceeded. If an instructor expects large weekly deviations in a TA’s time commitment, these should be posted on the course web page and reasonable efforts must be made to ensure all TAs are aware of this requirement.

4 Exchanging Duties between TAs

TAs may exchange duties with other TAs. Any exchange must first be approved by the instructor. TAs should seek this approval as early as possible. TAs exchanging duties should have comparable background knowledge for the duties they are exchanging.

For example, a TA may be away at a conference for one week during the semester and require another TA to perform his or her duties for that week. Both TAs may agree to exchange duties such as marking or labs to compensate the other.

Instructors should approve the exchanging of TA duties only if the instructor deems it acceptable and that it will not have a negative impact on students in the course.