

## Guidelines for Instructors and Teaching Assistants<sup>1</sup>

The following is a list of do-s and don't-s governing the role of teaching assistants (TA) in the Economics department, affirmed by the Economics faculty. While these do not cover all aspects of a TA's role, the goal is to lay out some principles that will maintain the overall quality of teaching and guide the TA-instructor relationship.

### **Workload**

A TA's workload can vary with the course, and can fluctuate over the semester, but must not exceed 15 hours per week on average. Courses may vary with respect to number of recitations, graded homework assignments, quizzes, etc. To compensate for additional demands of some courses, the student per TA ratio is lowered in "high work" classes by assigning additional TAs and/or graders.

### **What is expected of teaching assistants**

**1) Attend class:** When a student is assigned to the class the first time with a particular instructor then the student should attend the lecture. If the student has a class/seminar conflict with the class time, then the student can be switched to another course, unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor in advance. It is the responsibility of the graduate student to inform Amy if the student has any conflicts and needs to be switched. When a student has previously been assigned to the same class with the same instructor then they can miss one class per week, if necessary, because of a schedule conflict.

**2) Office hours:** Each TA can be expected to hold 1-2 hours of office hours per week. Office hours are more than a great opportunity for undergraduates to ask course related questions. Since class sizes can be large, office hours provide the best opportunity for establishing a friendly rapport between the undergraduates and the teaching assistants. If there is a class page such as Ed Discussion, etc., that allows students to post questions, then at least one TA must check the class website on a regular (e.g., 1 time daily) basis to answer questions. If such systems are not being used, then TAs must provide students with their email addresses and answer student emails on a regular (e.g., 1 time daily) basis.

**3) Recitations:** Most mid-large sized classes have recitations. Each TA can be expected to give 1 or 2 recitations per week (1 is strongly encouraged), of 1-2 hours duration for a graduate course and 50-75 minutes for an undergraduate course. A TA must prepare for recitation and **never** walk into the room believing that they can just solve problems/teach something off the cuff. Even if the TA has previously taught the class before and has saved the notes, they must take some time before class to look over those notes.

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<sup>1</sup> Last revised 2021-09-30 by NK

**4) Homework and answer keys:** TAs should go over homework assignments before discussing the homework with students in office hours or in recitations. If a TA has any questions about the homework, they should check with another TA or the instructor in advance. TAs can be asked to write answer keys. Answer keys should be provided to the students in a timely fashion (within one week) and should aim to be error-free. TAs can be expected to grade homework. Graded homework should also be returned in a timely fashion (within two weeks). If a TA is having trouble getting the homework graded in time, they should first speak with the instructor. Perhaps additional TAs can be assigned or the instructor can adjust the homework schedule. To lighten the grading load, the instructor may consider whether to have students work in groups or to require that only a selection of the homework questions are graded.

**5) Grading exams:** TAs can grade exams, so long as it is not an undergraduate TA for an undergraduate class, an MA TA for an MA class, or a PhD TA for a PhD class. Instructors must discuss the rubric for grading exams with their TAs.

**6) Contact:** A TA should contact the instructor at least one week prior to the beginning of classes. The TA should remind the instructor to provide them with the course syllabus, a copy of the text book, and discuss expectations and logistics for the course. During the semester the TA should speak with the instructor on a regular (weekly) basis. If a TA is feeling overburdened, or has any other concern at any point, it is their responsibility to bring it to the instructor's attention.

### **What is not expected of teaching assistants**

**1) Writing exams or homework:** A TA is not responsible for writing either exams or homework assignments.

**2) Giving lectures:** In general TAs should not be asked to give lectures. There may, however, be extraordinary circumstances that necessitate a TA stepping in and teaching a lecture (such as a medical issue, but not travel to routine seminars or conferences). In such cases, the professor should provide the TA with maximum possible time to prepare the lecture as well as with the material to be covered in that lecture.

**3) Course grades:** TAs are not responsible for proposing or assigning final (letter) course grades to the students.

**4) Technology:** While it is reasonable to ask TAs to help figure out course technology on occasion or in a pinch, CUIT should be your primary source for technology issues.

### **What is expected of instructors**

**1) Homework and exams:** As noted above, it is the instructor's job to write homework assignments and exams. If an instructor wants a TA to check/provide feedback on

homework or exams prior to giving them to the student, a TA should typically be given at least 2 week days to do so. In particular, TAs should be provided with the homework assignments at least 2 week days in advance of giving those assignments to the students. If a TA is grading exams, the instructor must discuss the rubric for grading with the TA.

**2) Textbooks/Syllabus:** Instructors should obtain desk copies of all of the textbooks for their TAs by the start of the semester, and also provide their TAs with a course syllabus before the semester begins.

**3) Contact:** Instructors should respond to their TAs emails in a prompt fashion.

**4) Multiple TAs:** If a course has multiple TAs, the instructor should strive to ensure that responsibilities are divided up in a way that ensures approximately equal work for all the TAs, regardless of prior experience, seniority, or other factors.

**5) Resolution of student concerns:** While TAs can be asked to expected to handle grading of homework and exams as described earlier, the buck eventually ends with the instructor. A TA can refer any issue they are not able to resolve to the instructor, and it is the instructor's responsibility to resolve it.

### **Frictions**

If a TA or instructor are having difficulties working together despite good-faith attempts, they should bring it to the attention of the DGS and/or Chair.