

## Teaching Assistants (TAs) - Guidelines and Responsibilities

### Division of Applied Mathematics, Brown University

Being a Teaching Assistant (TA) typically includes the following general obligations:

- Holding a **minimum of four hours** of combined office hours and recitation section hours per week. This is usually broken down into two hours of office hours and two hours of recitation sections, but this may vary from course to course. It is essential that you be present both at your announced office hours and recitation section hours, irrespective of whether or not students are present.
  - If the instructor asks you hold less than four combined office hours and recitation section hours per week, then you must inform the Director of Graduate Studies about this.
  - The total number of hours of your TA work should not exceed 20 hours per week.
- Helping with grading homeworks, quizzes and exams.
- Helping with providing answer keys for homework sets.

Please make sure to notify your advisor as soon as you are assigned to be a teaching assistant for a course.

**Absences:** If you cannot fulfill your duties in any given week, please inform the instructor immediately and make alternative arrangements for marking, office hours, and recitation sessions (e.g. by scheduling alternative hours or asking another TA to substitute for you). If you plan to be **absent for more than two days** at any time, including finals period, during a semester in which you are a TA, you must obtain **written permission** from both the instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies well in advance of your trip; included in this request should be details for who will cover your grading and recitation obligations during your absence.

Below are some additional guidelines on how to carry out your teaching duties. Another resource is the Sheridan Center that offers many useful certificate and consulting programs for TAs:

[http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan\\_Center/](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/)

#### A. Basic Information

1. Set your office hours and recitation section hours at a time that is convenient to you as well as the students. To find out student availability, you could set up a doodle or google survey to find out when the most number of students are available amongst the slots that are convenient to you.
2. Contact Jean Radican to book a room for your recitation section, and also for your office hours if, for some reason, your office is not suitable for holding office hours.
3. Communicate your office hours and recitation section hours to Jean Radican and Stephanie Han so that they can post it on the website. If, for some extenuating circumstances, you need to change office hours midway through the semester, inform Jean Radican and Stephanie Han of the change, and also inform your students in advance of the change.
4. If you set up a website for the course, you should also include this information on the webpage. You may also want to prepare an information sheet containing the above details, what you plan to do at recitation session, your contact information, class policies regarding homework assignments, etc., and also set expectations regarding your response time to e-mail queries, etc. Do not promise quicker response times than what you can achieve.
5. If you encounter any serious problems with your course during the semester, please contact your instructor, the Director of Graduate Studies (Kavita Ramanan), or the Chair (Bjorn Sandstede).

#### B. Coordination with the Instructor

1. Discuss your responsibilities with the instructor in the first or second week of classes.
2. Clarify the instructor's class policies regarding issues such as late homework submissions, missed exams, etc. Also, clarify which student issues you can handle yourself (e.g. totaling errors in homeworks) and which you should refer to the instructor (e.g. getting permission to take an exam at another time, suspected plagiarism or cheating, etc.). You may find it useful to count the number of homeworks as soon as they are received and make sure they

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match the number of grades entered immediately after marking. This will help ensure that homeworks are not lost or misplaced during grading, and also help with verifying students' claims that they submitted homeworks.

3. Request the instructor to send you weekly updates on what was covered in class, what homework problems were assigned, and possibly anticipated subjects that students are likely to find difficult. Feel free to send a reminder e-mail if the instructor forgets to send you an update in a particular week. If possible, get access to the course website (Banner, MyCourses) with the permission of the instructor.
4. Request the instructor to introduce you to the students in the class as an "assistant instructor" at the end of the shopping period. You can also hand out your information sheet at this time to the students in the class.
5. Go over the first homework together with the instructor so that the grading policy is clear and consistent.

#### *C. Interaction with Students*

1. Always treat your students with respect, no matter how they behave, and in a non-discriminatory fashion. Do not display impatience if they do not understand something immediately.
2. Make sure you accommodate students that have disabilities.
3. Tell students about other resources that may be available to them such as  
Math resource center: <http://www.math.brown.edu/mrc/>  
Group tutoring: [http://brown.edu/Administration/Dean\\_of\\_the\\_College/tutoring/](http://brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/tutoring/)  
Science center: <http://brown.edu/academics/science-center/study-groups-tutoring>  
Supported courses include APMA 0330, 0340, 0650, 1650 and possibly 0350, 0360.
4. In large classes, creating a website and maintaining an "FAQ" (Frequently Asked Questions) list may help reduce the number of individual e-mails that you have to reply to.
5. To increase attendance, e-mail students about special sessions on difficult topics, or special review sessions. (There is an easy way to send e-mails to all students in a course using gmail, and you can include "Attn: xxxx section" with the name of your section in the subject line.)

#### *D. Preparing Recitation Sessions*

1. Prepare a "lesson" for each recitation session, comprising sample problems that use similar concepts to those required to solve homework problems, and illustrative examples to illuminate more difficult concepts.
2. First, ask the students if they have any questions and clarify their doubts to the best of your ability. If they do not have any questions, then deliver your prepared lesson.
3. If students ask about homework problems, first ask questions to identify what their approach to the problem was, and identify the concepts they are having difficulty with. Go over the relevant background concepts and also solve analogous problems, but not the homework problems themselves. On the other hand, if students have worked out most of a homework problem and bring it to you to ask for help, then you may guide them on how to complete their solution.
4. You may encourage students to solve homework problems on the board to make the recitation session more participatory.