

## **Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTAs) - Guidelines and Responsibilities**

### **Division of Applied Mathematics, Brown University**

**Responsibilities:** Undergraduate TAs should not have responsibilities for teaching classes; instead they focus on marking assignments, holding office hours, and delivering recitation sessions as applicable. Undergraduate TAs must be supervised by the instructor and should meet once per week with the instructor to discuss the class material for upcoming weeks and the plans for marking assignments, office hours, and recitation sessions. Undergraduate TAs can help proctoring exams but only if the instructor is also present. Grading is the exclusive responsibility of the instructor teaching the course. Instructors may ask undergraduate TAs to provide recommendations for homework grades, provided these recommendations are reviewed by the instructor.

**Office hours:** Undergraduate TAs should schedule regular office hours to enable students in the class to meet with them easily. Please see Jean Radican for room assignments for office hours and recitation sections.

**Workload and Compensation:** Instructors are expected to give undergraduate TAs adequate time to complete marking or other assignments. Undergraduate TAs are paid \$10.00 per hour: they should not work for more than 10 hours per week.

**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 during a semester in which you are a UTA, you must obtain **written permission** from both the instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies well in advance of your trip; included in your request should be details for who will cover your grading and recitation obligations during your absence.

**Reading and Finals periods:** Please plan early on for your time commitments during reading and finals period. Make sure you discuss deadlines for the course you are a UTA for early on with the instructor to make sure you have enough time for potential grading obligations, while preparing for your own final exams.

**Evaluation of TAs:** All undergraduate TAs have the right to receive an evaluation of their work, from both the instructor and students enrolled in the class.

**Conflicts of interest:** Undergraduate TAs should not mark, grade, or supervise the work of friends. Undergraduate TAs should inform the instructor of any conflicts of interest.

**Misconduct cases:** Undergraduate TAs should not be involved in the investigation of academic misconduct of fellow students. If an undergraduate TA suspects another student of being in violation of the academic code, they should report this suspicion to the instructor, who will take charge of the investigation.

**Concerns or questions?** If you have any questions or concerns that emerge in fall, please contact your instructor. If you want to discuss your concerns with somebody else, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Kavita Ramanan (Director of Graduate Studies) or Bjorn Sandstede (Department Chair).

## Guidelines for being a UTA

Below are some additional guidelines on how to carry out your teaching duties. Another resource is the Sheridan Center:

[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 for your 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 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 homeworks 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: xxx 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.