

# **Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistants**

## **College of Agriculture and Life Sciences**

Graduate teaching assistants (TA) make many valuable contributions to CALS courses and to the students in those courses, and they themselves benefit from the TA experience. The Cornell policy for graduate student assistantships is located at the website below.

[http://www.dfa.cornell.edu/cms/treasurer/policyoffice/policies/volumes/academic/upload/vol1\\_3.pdf](http://www.dfa.cornell.edu/cms/treasurer/policyoffice/policies/volumes/academic/upload/vol1_3.pdf)

Information about international students planning to serve as TAs also is at this website and at the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) website <http://www.cte.cornell.edu/programs-services/international-teaching-assistants/index.html>

Other resources for TAs are available from the CTE at <http://www.cte.cornell.edu/programs-services/grads-future-educators-tas/index.html>

The CALS guidelines for working with Graduate TAs are listed below.

### **Selection of a graduate TA:**

- TAs should be interested in the course.
- TAs should have an appropriate background in the subject of the course.
- TAs must have the requisite language skills.
- If possible, TAs should be expected to attend lecture or other class meetings.
- Prospective TA's should be asked what other courses and activities (s)he has committed to for that semester to determine if (s)he will have sufficient time for the TA responsibilities in your course.

### **Suggested functions that TAs may perform:**

- Prepare for lectures (e.g., preparing the classroom, AV equipment, handouts, etc.).
- Attend lecture sessions.
- Attend staff/preparation meetings.
- Provide technical assistance.
- Teach lab or discussion sections.
- Hold office hours for tutoring students.
- Be aware of resources that support student achievement and refer students to them.

- Facilitate study sessions or tutorials.
- Help develop course materials.
- Complete assignments in a timely manner.
- Teach an occasional lecture session.
- Supervise undergraduate TAs.
- Lead review sessions.
- Assist with preparation of assessments (exams, quizzes, etc.).
- Proctor exams.
- Grade papers, quizzes, and exams if the instructor provides clear guidance and rubrics for grading.
- Monitor student performance.
- Be alert to students who have been absent and have not submitted assignments or otherwise have changed their behavior. Unusual behavior should be reported to the instructor, who should contact the CALS Student Services Office (140 Roberts Hall; 255-2257) regarding CALS students (or another college office if the students are not from CALS) so that concerns can be addressed.
- Provide feedback to instructors about the students and the course.

**Functions that TAs should not perform:**

- Provide unauthorized transportation to students.
- Teach lecture sessions on a regular basis (i.e., instructors should limit the number of lectures to a reasonable level, one that was agreed upon at the start of the TAship).
- Assign final grades for individual students.
- Perform work unrelated to the course.

**Suggestions on how faculty instructors should work with TAs:**

- Clearly communicate the expectations and responsibilities of the TA both verbally and with a learning contract (including learning outcomes for the TA experience) before the beginning of the semester.
- Provide a timeline for particular assignments from the TA to be completed.
- Articulate the average number of hours per week expected to devote to this course. Most graduate students officially on a teaching assistantship are expected to spend in this capacity for average of 15 hours per week. A few TAs are 20 hours.
- Discuss professionalism, ethical behavior, academic integrity, and other issues.
- Discuss the TA's role in helping students with assignments.

- Meet and communicate with the TA regularly throughout the semester.
- If the TA will be grading exams and assignments, provide the grading rubrics and grading scale and assure the TA clearly understands them.
- Encourage TAs to respond to student questions and to grade assignments in a timely manner.
- Assure that the TA understands that (s)he should be excused from grading a student's assignment/exam if (s)he currently or has had a relationship with that student.
- Inform the TA that the ultimate responsibility for assigning grades belongs to the faculty instructor.
- Inform the TA that confidentiality must be maintained regarding students with whom they work.
- Ask the TA for feedback throughout the semester so that adjustments can be made in the course.
- Regularly provide feedback to the TA regarding his/her performance.
- Conduct both a midterm and end-of-semester evaluation and discuss the results with the TA (CALS has an online form--available in DUST).

## CALS Learning Contract for Graduate Teaching Assistants

(This form may be revised or recreated as needed)

Items on the Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistantships should be discussed when writing his learning contract.

Student's name: \_\_\_\_\_

Course number: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Average number of hours per week: \_\_\_\_\_

Summary of responsibilities:

Learning outcomes for the TA:

List of deliverables (and deadlines if known at this time):

Methods of assessing the TA's activities related to the learning outcomes:

Instructors are encouraged to ask their students to complete the online TA evaluation form (<http://courseeval.cals.cornell.edu/>) at midterm and at end-of-term to provide feedback for improving TA effectiveness. Instructors should discuss the results with their TAs. Evaluations can be requested in DUST.

Other miscellaneous comments:

FACULTY COURSE INSTRUCTOR

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

signature

\_\_\_\_\_

print

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

STUDENT

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

signature

\_\_\_\_\_

print

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

GRADUATE STUDENT SPECIAL COMMITTEE CHAIR

I approve for my graduate student to serve as a TA in this course.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

signature

\_\_\_\_\_

print

Date: \_\_\_\_\_