Guidelines for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Undergraduate teaching assistants (TA) make valuable contributions to CALS courses and to the students in those courses. The TAs may either accept pay for their work or enroll to receive credit. Guidelines for working with undergraduate TAs are listed below.

Selection of an undergraduate TA:

- Undergraduate TAs previously (not simultaneously) should have taken the same course or an equivalent and earned a grade of B+ or higher if (s)he will work directly with students.
- If possible, students should be expected to attend the lectures or other class meetings.
- Ask the student what other courses and activities that (s)he has committed to for that semester to determine if (s)he really will have enough time for the TA responsibilities in your course.

Suggested functions that TAs may perform:

- Lead lab or discussion sections.
- Facilitate study sessions or tutorials.
- Help develop course materials.
- Develop and/or maintain course websites.
- Teach a class session during the lecture period (it is recommended to provide some opportunities for TAs to have visibility and to develop competence in their teaching).
- Grade papers, quizzes, and exams if the instructor provides clear guidance and rubrics for grading. Grading assignments with clear-cut, objective answers (e.g., true-false, multiple choice) vs. subjective answers (e.g., essays) is more appropriate for undergraduate TAs to grade, although they could grade subjective answers if provided with sufficient rubrics.
- Assist in other activities related to the course (e.g., making copies, preparing lab materials).
- 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.
Functions that TAs should not perform:

- Grade papers, quizzes, and exams when no answer key or grading rubric is available.
- Teach lecture sessions on a regular basis (i.e., more than one time per semester).
- Assign final grades for individual students.
- Work unrelated to the course.

Suggestions on how faculty instructors should work with TAs:

- Faculty instructors should clearly communicate the expectations and responsibilities of the TA both verbally and with a learning contract (the latter especially if the TA is enrolling for course credit) before the beginning of the semester.
- Articulate the number of credits or wages to be earned.
- Articulate the average number of hours per week expected to work on this course.
- Discuss professionalism, ethical behavior, academic integrity, and other issues.
- Discuss the TA’s role in helping students with assignments.
- Meet with the TA regularly throughout the semester.
- If the TA will be grading exams and assignments, discuss the rubrics and grading scale.
- Encourage TAs to respond to student questions and to grade assignments in a timely manner.
- A TA should inform you 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 you, 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.
- Do both a midterm and end-of-semester evaluation (CALS has an online form--available in DUST--that can be used for either graduate or undergraduate TAs) and discuss the results with the TA.
Earning credit:

- Students may earn credit for their TA responsibilities by enrolling in the 4980 (Undergraduate Teaching) course in the appropriate department.
- Below are the approximate number of hours per week to earn various credits for the TA’s activities (attending class, meeting with the faculty instructor, preparation, and other course activities):
  - 1 credit = 3 hours per week
  - 2 credits = 6 hours per week
  - 3 credits = 9 hours per week
- Learning outcomes and an assessment process for receiving credit should be established with the TA. They should be part of a learning contract.
CALS Learning Contract for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

(This form may be revised or recreated as needed)

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

Student’s name: __________________________________________________________

Course number: ____________  Department: ____________________________

Number of credits: ______  Average number of hours per week: _________

Summary of responsibilities:

Learning outcomes for the TA:

Methods of assessing the TA’s work related to the learning outcomes and rubrics for assigning the TA a grade:

FACULTY COURSE INSTRUCTOR  STUDENT

Name: ______________________  Name: ______________________

_________ signature  _________ signature

________________________  ______________________

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Date: ______________________  Date: ______________________