



SUNY Oswego

Policy for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants

Developed by the

Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Task Force

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Modeled after the policy of SUNY Fredonia

At SUNY Oswego we pride ourselves on excellence in teaching and give greater priority to policies that contribute to this excellence. The appropriate engagement of Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) enhances learning and teaching for our instructors, our students, and for TAs themselves. We believe that TA experiences should be rich, rewarding experiences for student and faculty alike, with partnerships characterized by communication and reasonable expectations. We are committed to protecting TAs by ensuring our campus TA practices are fair and consistent. This policy document defines the potential roles and responsibilities of an undergraduate TA and identifies best practices for faculty and departments wishing to engage undergraduate students in these roles. This document is applicable to undergraduate TAs in traditional, distance-learning, and hybrid educational settings.

Definition of Undergraduate Teaching Assistant:

An Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (TA) is an undergraduate student who, by virtue of an agreement with the course instructor, assists in a class for which they have advanced knowledge of the course materials. A TA experience should involve mentoring, including reflection, discussion, and performance feedback between the instructor and TA. TAs qualify to assist in courses by performing well in the designated course or similar coursework or by permission of the instructor.

Advantages to having Undergraduate Teaching Assistants:

Serving as an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant is a valuable experience for not only the student who elects to TA, but for students enrolled in the classes in which they serve and for the instructor of that class.

Advantages for TAs:

- demonstrates leadership and initiative for job and graduate school applications
- introduces students to the responsibilities of teaching and prepares for life in academia or other professional capacities
- enhances student resumes
- allows students to have professional experiences similar to those they would have in an internship without having to leave campus or incur expense
- promotes active learning
- increases mastery of content
- enhances communication skills (presentation, reading, writing)

- develops time management, networking, professional ethics, and other related skills
- allows the TA to get to know students with diverse backgrounds
- enables mentoring experiences: serving as a mentor to students, as a student mentored by their instructor, or in a combination of the two

Advantages for Instructors:

- TAs may increase instructor ability to utilize group learning experiences and projects
- TAs may assist with discussions and “flipping the classroom” activities
- TAs may provide feedback on the clarity and delivery of instruction
- TAs may function as a liaison to students, fostering increased student communication and engagement
- TAs offer different perspectives on issues and current events
- TAs may bridge generational and cultural gaps between instructors and students
- TAs may become teaching resources post graduation as guest speakers, panel guests, presenters, etc.
- Offering feedback on TA-student interactions leads to more opportunity for reflective teaching
- Training a TA can lead to self-reflection on teaching philosophy and practice
- Working with a TA can enhance mentorship, networking, and professional development within the classroom

Advantages for Students Working with TAs:

- TAs provide additional content area support to students
- TAs model appropriate behaviors and dispositions in a way that students can relate to
- TAs provide additional support within the classroom for activities and instruction
- TAs may provide rapid, informal feedback to students
- TAs may be perceived as more approachable than the instructor and may, when appropriate, serve as a mediator within the classroom
- TAs may offer peer instruction or peer review on high-stakes assignments
- TAs contribute to a dynamic, engaging, and enthusiastic learning environment
- TAs help to set the tone in the classroom; if a TA has a positive attitude student attitudes tend to be positive as well.
- During “down time” and at other times TAs may engage students in conversations about academic or professional opportunities and interests

Roles and Responsibilities:

A TA experience should be a partnership between the instructor and the TA. In addition to selecting and training TA candidates, instructors are closely involved in ensuring that the learning experiences of their TAs incorporate learning outcomes, goals, and objectives for TAs, and meaningfully measure how well the TA has met these outcomes. Instructors should provide regular feedback to the TA related to their progress in meeting the goals of the experience; additionally, instructors may provide advice relating to matters of professionalism, attitude, affect, and other characteristics that relate to the TA experience.

Appropriate Roles for TAs:

Roles and responsibilities for TAs will vary widely across departments and across classes. Ultimately, each individual TA will have specific responsibilities outlined in the syllabus/contract from their instructor. The following are a selection of appropriate potential TA tasks and responsibilities grouped together by type of TA experience.

All TAs will:

- Maintain student confidentiality at all times
- Maintain open communication with their supervising instructor at all times
- Report to their supervising instructor any situation that may be hazardous to the learning environment
- Complete FERPA/Confidentiality, Title IX, and other government or institutionally mandated trainings

Lecture TAs may:

- Attend lectures so that they are familiar with materials covered
- Answer student questions about course policies and practices
- Answer student questions about assignments
- Provide peer review for larger assignments
- Present content to class with instructor supervision and guidance
- Assist in the design of instructional materials
- Assist in the integration of technology into course presentation
- Assist with taking attendance
- Assist with proctoring exams
- Aid in distribution of course materials

Lab or Studio TAs may (in addition to the tasks above):

- Assist with class set-up/ tear-down
- Assist with managing lab or studio activities
- Assist students in their use of course technology
- Observe class participation
- Engage students in Socratic questioning related to course content

- Ensure that procedures are followed properly
- Demonstrate techniques or use of equipment to students

Inappropriate Tasks for TAs

Grading: TAs may not make final grade or score determinations for any graded student work that impacts the students' course grades.

We recognize that learning how to grade can be a legitimate learning experience, particularly for students who are interested in going into teaching. Evaluating student responses and seeing first hand where difficulties arise in comprehension and application of content better prepares students to teach, and may enhance TA understanding of the content material or how to teach it.

The list below outlines some acceptable ways that TAs can have similar learning experiences:

- TAs may help with exam question design, discuss exam format and design with the instructor, and may provide feedback to the instructor on assignments and exams.
- TAs may design ungraded "quizzes" or assignments as review activities in which the TA provides feedback to the students about answers.
- It may be appropriate for an instructor to give anonymized student work to a TA as a learning exercise: ("How would you grade this paper?": What are the strengths, what are the weaknesses, what comments would you make on the paper?)- but TAs **may not** make the final determination of the student's score.

Child care: TAs should be involved in learning activities specific to the content area of the course for which they serve as a TA. Child care or other personal care tasks should not be undertaken by a TA.

Personal chores/errands: A TA experience may involve professional errands related to the delivery of the course (running copies, etc.) as a part of the learning experience. Errands or chores of a more personal nature do not relate to the TA experience and should not be performed by a TA.

Lecturing: The instructor of the class is responsible for delivering material/instruction. Students may, with appropriate feedback and oversight from their instructor, occasionally present a mini-lecture, demonstration, or other instructional experience; however, this should be an irregular occurrence.

Classroom Control: Faculty are required to be present and in control of their classrooms. TAs should not "substitute" or run a class without an instructor present.

Implementation

A TA experience is a credit bearing experience. TAs will be required to enroll in a TA course. Individual departments may, if they wish, offer TA courses; alternately TAs may register for GST3XX. In addition to enrolling in the TA course each TA will have a signed learning agreement developed between the instructor and the TA. The TA learning outcomes for the TA task force are those that are identified on the learning agreement and a grade will be assigned at the end of the semester based on how well the TA has met those outcomes.

TA Course and Registration

Registration for the TA course (either GST or individual department) will occur with a paper registration form. The registration form shall include the student's name and ID number, the number of credit hours for the TA experience, and the instructor's name and signature and the department chair's signature (see sample TA registration form, page 9). The signed TA form will be carried to the registrar by the student prior to the end of the add period each semester along with a signed "Teaching Assistant FERPA Acknowledgement Form." Prerequisites for TA experiences shall be permission of instructor.

Learning Agreement

The learning agreement will be developed and signed by the TA and the supervising instructor. The Department Chairperson will review and sign the agreement after it is developed so that the Chair is aware of all and accountable for all TA experiences within the department.

Included within the learning agreement are specific goals and objectives for the TA experience, along with a plan for measuring attainment of these goals and objectives. The learning agreement is also where compliance with training requirements (Title IX, FERPA/Privacy, etc) is documented. A sample learning agreement is found on pages 7-8.

The learning agreement is the syllabus of record for each individual TA experience. Departments will be required to archive copies of signed learning agreements.

Credit Hours

A teaching assistant qualifies under Department of Justice regulations as an unpaid intern because the assistantship meets the following 6 criteria:

1. The TA experience involves training given in an educational environment
2. The experience is for the benefit of the TA

3. The TA does not displace college employees but works under the supervision of a college employee
4. The instructor derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the TA and on occasion operations may be impeded
5. The TA is not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the experience
6. The TA and instructor understand that the TA is not entitled to wages for time spent in the TA experience.

Any experience that does not meet these regulations is NOT a TA experience and is not covered by this policy. TA experiences are academic experiences. Non-academic experiences should be undertaken by paid student employees only.

Credit hours are awarded based on the number of hours of active learning by the TA. Merely sitting through a class is not sufficient activity to earn credit for being a TA; rather credit is assigned based on the amount of time that the TA spends working toward their learning outcomes.

TAs may earn 1, 2, or 3 credit hours according to the guidelines below:

1 credit hour is earned for the equivalent of 45 50-minute sessions of student learning activity over the course of the semester.

2 credit hours are earned for the equivalent of 45 110-minute sessions of student learning activity over the course of the semester.

3 credit hours are earned for the equivalent of 45 160-minute sessions of student learning activity over the course of the semester.

When credit hours are calculated for the TA experience all learning activities in and out of class should be considered.

Resources for Implementation

A BlackBoard learning group will be implemented prior to the beginning of the fall 2015 semester with resources for instructors and TAs including training modules for FERPA/privacy policies, Title IX training, and general orientation information.

Sample TA Learning Agreement

Name _____ Email _____

ID# _____ Major _____ Graduation Date _____

This learning agreement has been developed and agreed to on (date) _____

_____ (Student) will be a TA for: _____ (Course #)

with Supervising Instructor: _____. The student will earn

(circle one) **1 2 3** credit(s) for successful completion of the learning objectives

set forth in this agreement.

Approval Signatures: (Required)

My signature below means that I agree that this TA learning agreement was developed collaboratively between the student and the supervising instructor and that I agree to adhere to the terms of the agreement. I understand that a grade will be assigned for the TA experience based on whether the learning objectives outlined in this document have been satisfactorily met according to the measure set forth in this agreement. I agree that the expected TA roles and responsibilities have been clearly defined.

Student

Date

Instructor

Date

My signature below means that I have reviewed the terms of this learning agreement and agree that the experience is an appropriate TA experience as defined by SUNY Oswego's Policy for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants.

Department Chair

Date

Completion of Required Trainings:

Training	Date Completed	Instructor Initials/TA Initials
FERPA/Confidentiality		
Title IX		
Other _____		

Position Responsibilities: What will the TA do? Be specific.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Learning Outcomes: What are the goals and objectives of this experience?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Assessment: How will the TA be evaluated/graded? Include specific measures of how the TA grade will be calculated.

Sample TA Registration Form

**Teaching Assistant Registration Form
For Course: GST 3XX**

Student ID: _____

Term: _____

Last Name: _____

First Name: _____

Subject Code: GST Course: 3XX Credit: _____

Instructor Name: _____

Approved: Instructor Signature _____

Chair Signature _____

Instructions:

Signed learning agreement must be completed. Credit hours should be assigned using guidelines in SUNY Oswego Policy for Teaching Assistants.

Course Description: An experience in the classroom, teaching laboratory, or studio under the guidance of the above named faculty member. Teaching Assistant (TA) roles and responsibilities are defined in the signed learning agreement between instructor and TA.

Registrar's Office Use Only

CRN _____

Section Code _____

