

Materials Science & Engineering 2002 TA Workshop

Do All TAs have the same responsibilities in this department?

Specific duties of a TA will vary according to the particular course and course instructor. You are advised to meet with the instructor of the course prior to the beginning of instruction in order to clarify his or her expectations for your role. In addition to this, you may want to set aside a regular time when you can meet with the course instructor during the quarter to discuss any organizational concerns and provide feedback on students' performance and attitudes towards the course.

What do I need to know if I'm teaching a laboratory section?

Generally speaking, TA's responsible for laboratory sections are expected to:

- Train students on the proper and safe use of laboratory equipment used in the course.
- Coordinate students' activities and facilitate students' learning within the lab
- Grade all student laboratory reports and maintain the appropriate student records.
- Acquire the necessary laboratory materials prior to the scheduled lab activity.
- Ensure that the laboratory is always maintained in a neat and clean state.
- Give a copy of each completed lab exercise to **Bob Smith**.

In order to feel confident in your role during the actual laboratory session, you will want to have a good 'working' knowledge of each laboratory exercise prior to the lab. It is a good practice to go through a dry run prior to each lab in order to troubleshoot problems with the exercise, instructions and/or equipment *before* students are introduced to the activity.

Some TA's may find that some lab development work is necessary or merited in order to arrive at a laboratory exercise that is both well organized and maximally illustrative of the concepts involved. Any development work that you wish to do should be discussed with the course instructor, if for no other reason than to simply provide communication. Any improvements made to laboratory exercises should be documented (on paper) and submitted to the course instructor in order to establish a record of course development efforts.

Your training on the appropriate laboratory equipment and information on standard lab procedures may be obtained by scheduling a time with **Bob Smith**, Departmental Engineering Technician. Bob may be reached in person at 164 Mueller Hall, by phone at 685-7290 or by email at ras7@u.washington.edu. Instructional tips may be obtained by talking with experienced TA's within the department. Information on formal TA training and instructional resources may be acquired through the Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR) located in 396 Bagley Hall, 206-543-6588, Email: info@cidr.washington.edu.

NOTE: TA's are expected to provide safety instructions and information to all students enrolled in laboratory sections *prior* to performing any lab work. You should receive Lab Safety training through the University and the Department. Kevin Soderlund and Bob Smith, the department's Safety Coordinators, are available to address any additional questions or concerns you may have regarding safety issues in the laboratory.

Do TA's have to attend lectures for the course?

You are highly encouraged to attend course lectures. Some instructors require it, others make it an optional part of your TA responsibilities. You should clarify the particular course instructor's expectations regarding this prior to the beginning of instruction. In any event, you are advised to

attend at least several of the instructor's lectures at the beginning of the quarter to familiarize yourself with the particular content of the course, the instructor's teaching style, and how students seem to be receiving the course material during the lecture section.

In many instances, your knowledge of the students' lecture experience can help you better identify needs you might wish to address during your time with students during discussion/quiz and/or lab section. Also, being familiar with where instructors are at in their lecture sequence allows you to prepare in advance for students' questions related to difficult concepts and make students feel as though you are 'in sync' with them while they are navigating the course.

What about grading?

The policy regarding grading varies from course to course and instructor to instructor. If you are responsible for a discussion/quiz section or laboratory section, you are, at minimum, expected to grade all homework, quizzes (if applicable) and laboratory reports for your section.

In addition to grading, you are expected to maintain the appropriate student records for your section. It is a good idea to set up a worksheet using a spreadsheet program where you can enter the grades for your section. Prior to doing this, you may want to coordinate with the course instructor to make sure you are using a software format (IBM vs. Macintosh, EXCEL vs. Lotus, etc.) which is readily compatible with his or her own grade worksheet file. It is a lot easier to deal with end of quarter grading if you can provide the instructor with a hard copy of your grade worksheet and a floppy containing the file so he or she can import into a master worksheet file on his or her computer.

It is a good habit to back up your work onto an additional floppy in case there are problems with the hard drive or your original floppy becomes damaged or misplaced. If you choose to set up a file on the hard drive of a computer, you are advised to use the Roberts Hall 4th floor computers or your own personal computer if you have one. No documents should be placed on the computers in the Graduate Computing Lab in Roberts 131. Avoid using the computers in Mueller Hall as undergraduates have access to these computers, thereby making student confidentiality difficult to maintain.

Some instructors will grade their own midterm and final exams. Others will expect the TA's to grade them. You should confirm the instructor's expectations regarding this prior to the beginning of instruction in order to arrange your schedule appropriately or negotiate for a different arrangement.

As a general rule, course instructors are responsible for the determination of final course grades. If possible, you should ask to review the final course grades before they are sent to the Academic Records Office. This will allow you an opportunity to discuss any cases where you might believe an inappropriate grade is being given to a student or students with whom you have had direct experience.

For TA's with laboratory sections, you are expected to inform students of the departmental lab report format, which should be used for all student lab reports. Consult with the course instructor to determine which format will be employed with the course (long or short form). Grading of laboratory reports should account for students' adherence with the stipulated report format.

Generally speaking, undergraduates are not 'graded' on attendance at discussion/quiz or laboratory sections. However, students should be told that students who regularly attend lab and quiz sections usually perform better in the course. Students who demonstrate responsibility in their personal habits towards coursework also positively influence the attitude of the TA who, in the end, can make a direct impact on the grade the student receives for the course.

Do I need to have office hours?

You are expected to hold regularly scheduled office hours so that students can contact you regarding problems or questions regarding the course. There is a TA Consultation area located just off the

elevator on the 4th floor. Other TA's schedule time there, so you will need to coordinate schedules with other TA's who need to use the space. You should post a schedule of your office hours on the bulletin board just outside the Consultation Office. This provides students with easy access to your hours and helps to eliminate scheduling conflicts with others wishing to utilize the consultation room.

How do I arrange to put course material on reserve?

Typically, the course instructor will handle this administrative task. However, if you are called upon to put materials on reserve, you will want to go to the Circulation Desk at the Engineering Library with the Title and Author of each book or resource you wish to put on reserve. The process of getting materials on reserve may be facilitated if you locate the books within the library yourself and take them to the Circulation Desk when you are requesting the reserve service. At the beginning of the quarter, the turn around time for placing materials on reserve can be quite lengthy (1-2 weeks) so it is better to start the process as soon as possible. Also note that the Engineering Library holds two reserve lists: temporary and permanent. Most materials are placed on the temporary list, which means they would be available for the current quarter only.

Can I copy library materials for my course?

Laws regarding copyright infringement are firmly established and held by the University. As such, none of the University Copy Centers will copy copyrighted published materials unless official written consent is given by the author of the book or journal and submitted to the Copy Center. You can obtain copyright consent forms from the Engineering Library Copy Center located on the 2nd floor of the Engineering Library. You are free to copy published materials at self-serve copiers for your own personal use without much concern. However, if you plan to distribute any published materials to your students without having first obtained the appropriate consent, you should be aware that in doing so you are violating copyright laws.

What is the policy on preparing and posting homework solutions?

This will vary according to the particular instructor for the course. You should confirm the instructor's expectations regarding this prior to the beginning of instruction. In some cases, instructors will prepare homework solutions. In other instances, you will be expected to do so.

Some instructors choose to post homework solutions in the secured glass case located just outside 153 Mueller Hall. You should discuss with the course instructor in advance which member of the course team (instructor or TA) will be responsible for maintaining the homework solution bulletin board. Other instructors prefer to place homework solutions in the Engineering Library Copy Center (2nd floor Engineering Library) so students may obtain personal copies.

Prior to taking material to the Copy Center, prepare a legible original or copy of the solution set. Verify that the deadline for students' submission of homework does not succeed the date you plan to indicate for availability of the material. It is possible to post-date the availability date with the Copy Center (i.e., you can take the material into the Copy Center prior to the date you want it made available to students). A Copy Center form (available at the Copy Center) must be completed and submitted with all course materials placed with the Copy Center. It is a good idea to make sure you have at least one additional copy of the solution set in the event of mishandling by the Copy Center (a rare occurrence). The Copy Center can provide you with one or two complimentary copies if you request them at the time of submission. For large jobs, it is preferable that you give the Copy Center staff at least three or four days lead-time in order to have the material prepared for distribution to students.

How am I evaluated as a TA?

Students evaluate teachers

TA's are evaluated using standard University evaluation forms distributed at the end of the quarter. You will receive the appropriate evaluation forms in your mailbox, prior to the time when they are to be completed by students. You should schedule a time during your lab or quiz/discussion section (preferably at the beginning of the section) when students may be allocated approximately 15 minutes to complete the evaluation forms. You are not to be present in the room while students are completing their evaluation forms. You should delegate one of the students in your section to collect the evaluation forms, have him or her place them in the accompanying envelope and forward to the appropriate campus location either in person or by campus mail.

Instructors evaluate teachers

The course instructor evaluates the TAs by observance performance at about mid-quarter. Instructors complete an evaluation form, which they review with you. Toward the end of the quarter, The Graduate School generates an evaluation form that the TA and the instructor fill out.

What do I do if I have more questions?

You may have any additional questions regarding your role as TA. For questions regarding labs and equipment, contact Bob Smith or Kevin Soderlund. Current graduate students in the department with extensive TA experience are also an excellent source of support and information. The department Chair and Administrator are also available to assist you.

Although your TA responsibilities are important, your work as a TA should be balanced with your other needs and obligations. If you find that you are having difficulty fulfilling your TA responsibilities in your present arrangements, you can arrange a time to meet with Dr. Bordia, Department Chairperson, in order to discuss your concerns.