

Department of Mechanical Engineering

Teaching Assistant Guidelines

Teaching Assistants (TAs) play a critical role in supporting undergraduate engineering courses. Duties typically include running laboratory sessions, grading lab reports, reviewing course topics and assignments, proctoring exams, planning final project demonstrations, coordinating activities with course instructors, etc.

TAs appointments may be full time or part time depending on the quarterly needs of the Department. A full-time TA typically receives full time tuition support (8 units of tuition/qtr plus quarterly fees) and a stipend (\$4,000 during the 2016-17 AY). The stipend is roughly equivalent to working at a specific hourly rate for 11 weeks (\$19.00 during the 2016-17 AY). Part time appointments are typically pro-rated in terms of the level of tuition and stipend support received.

Being a full-time TA is a full-time educational commitment. The department employs TAs for 19/hours per week as a method of providing financial assistance and an opportunity for professional development. Concurrently, a TA is engaged in full-time graduate studies, spending 8 hours/week in class and potentially several tens of hours per week engaged in course-related study/project activities. Because of the combined time commitments associated with working as a TA and studying as a graduate student, off-campus employment is discouraged for full-time students. It should be noted that current work policies specifically prohibit students from being employed by the university for more than 19 hours/week. As a result, full-time TAs may not accept additional on-campus employment opportunities, and part-time TAs must ensure that the combined number of hours/week worked in any combination of campus jobs does not exceed a total of 19 hours/week.

Students interested in serving as TAs must be cognizant of several issues/requirements relating to their work. Students unable to meet these requirements should not accept a TA position, and those serving as a TA who fail to meet them may have their appointment terminated.

1. A typical academic quarter is 10 weeks. This means that there is one extra equivalent week of funding in a typical TA appointment. This is done for two reasons. First, there is an expectation that a TA may have some duties to perform prior to the first week of class in order to configure lab equipment, prepare lab exercises, etc. Second, the TA may be asked to perform some duties during finals week relating to continued grading, lab cleanup and inventory activities, etc.
2. TAs are required to undergo orientation and training activities in order to be eligible to work. This includes attendance/participation in appropriate campus/lab safety training classes, completing a sexual harassment prevention training course, etc. Additional training may also be required relating to typical TA duties, etc. TAs with appointments starting in the Fall quarter must attend a full-day TA orientation class that covers much of this material; this course is traditionally held during the week immediately prior to the first week of the Fall quarter. TAs should plan on being available for this course. Additional versions of these classes will be

arranged later in the year for TAs who begin their duties in the Winter or Spring quarters. TAs who do not complete these classes will have their position terminated.

3. TAs are hired to work a designated number of hours each week (19 hours/wk for full time positions, and pro-rated accordingly for part time positions). The timing of these hours may change on a week-to-week basis given the needs of the instructors and the activities being conducted in the course(s). Therefore, TAs are expected to be available to work during any possible lab time, which includes afternoons and possibly mornings and/or evenings during the normal work week. TAs who wish to enroll in courses that fall during these times must discuss their schedule with the appropriate instructor(s) to make sure that enrollment in such courses can be suitably managed with required TA responsibilities. Instructors are asked to be flexible if possible in accommodating conflicts with graduate courses given the educational nature of the TA position. TAs with external jobs, however, must ensure that the demands of such jobs do not conflict with the need to support any possible requests to support TA duties, even if the timing of TA duties shifts on a week-to-week basis throughout the quarter.

Concerning the manner in which duties are performed, there is a general set of expectations regarding how a TA conducts activities. These include but are not limited to:

- Be available to meet with the instructor given the constraints of his/her schedule;
- Be responsive to communications from the instructor, to include routine and timely checking of SCU email, the TA folder in the department office, etc.
- Take notes regarding assigned duties, ask for clarification as appropriate, and complete tasks (such as grading lab reports, etc.) on time as per arrangements made with the instructor;
- Follow instructor guidelines and curricular procedures regarding the manner in which labs are conducted, grading is implemented, etc. If changes are required or desired for any reason (e.g., equipment failures, uncertainty, etc.), notify the instructor immediately and work with the instructor to establish workarounds, if appropriate;
- Remain focused when conducting labs, executing the designed laboratory program and assisting students; TAs should not check personal email, make phone calls or interact with people external to the lab during these sessions;
- Reinforce course policies as appropriate with students, to include policies for attendance, grading, academic integrity, etc.;
- If no grading rubric is provided for reports or assignments, it is appropriate to ask that one be provided.

TAs should remember that, while they are a critical element of the teaching team, the instructor is primarily responsible for the learning environment of a course. The role of the TA is to assist the instructor in establishing this environment through a cooperative attitude and the quality execution of assigned tasks. TAs are encouraged to discuss performance expectations with the instructor, the department TA coordinator, and/or the department chair.