

## Biology Department Graduate TA Best Practices

This document covers best practices with regard to graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) in Biology Department courses. Undergraduate teaching assistants are addressed in a separate document.

### Core Principles:

- Ensure excellent undergraduate education.
- Train and mentor graduate students to teach because many of them will pursue careers that include teaching.
- Clarify departmental norms for instructors overseeing graduate TAs.
- Support a positive culture of TA teaching and mentorship in the department.

### All Classes:

- TA workload can be no more than 20 hours per week during the term of the appointment. TAs should never be expected to work more than 20 hours in a single week. This includes preparation time, class attendance, office hours, clerical work, meetings, proctoring, grading, review sessions, and field trips.
- TA responsibilities can include:
  - direct student support through office hours and review sessions
  - grading with guidance (see below)
  - logistical support such as photocopying, delivering scantrons, arranging and proctoring make up quizzes/exams, email management, and managing minor student issues.
  - proctoring exams. If evening exams will be used, the exam schedule must be made clear to TAs at the beginning of the semester.
  - teaching discussion and lab sections.
- Graduate TAs may be asked to work with undergraduate TAs.
- Time allotted for preparation will vary by the individual TA's expertise and experience. Please remember that your graduate TA will likely require more preparation time than you would, and this must be taken into consideration when reckoning the 20 hour per week workload.
- Instructors must make clear whether TAs are required to attend lectures or watch recordings of lectures.
- Prior to the start of the semester, the TA and faculty member will discuss and sign a responsibility statement (see attached) that describes responsibilities and weekly time commitments.
- Instructors will provide TAs with keys and/or rubrics for graded activities and will work with TAs on the proper and consistent application of the rubrics.
- TAs should not design or write major assignments without close supervision. TAs may be asked to write quizzes, but quizzes should always be vetted by the instructor with feedback given in plenty of time for changes to be made.
- TAs who would like to gain experience in teaching may be provided the opportunity to take a more active role such as designing or providing lectures, labs or discussion activities, but ultimately the instructor is responsible for vetting and approving all course material.
- The syllabus, including the grade breakdown, will be designed by the instructor.

**Lab classes**

- Instructors are ultimately responsible for all lab activities.
- In courses that have a lecture and a lab component, Instructors will regularly check in on lab sessions.
- In courses that only have a lab component, the instructor will be present during all lab sessions even if the TA is present.
- In multi-section lab courses like the introductory biology lab the instructor should make an appearance in as many labs as is reasonable each week.
- Instructors will prepare and provide both a lab manual (for TAs and students) as well as a prep manual (for TAs who will prep labs. If the TA is not responsible for lab prep, there is no need for this document.)
- Instructors will ensure that supplies are ordered and all equipment is available and in good condition.