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Introduction

The transition from student to student and teacher is a major one. What expectations do you have for yourself? How will you act in front of class—will you model yourself on a favorite teacher? What kinds of demands will you make upon your students in terms of classwork, discipline, attendance, and grades? How can you ensure fair treatment of all students? What kind of relationship should you establish with your students—distant or friendly, formal or informal? These and a hundred other questions will probably present themselves to you. Hopefully, this handbook can answer some of your questions and put your mind more at ease. In the end, however, time and experience will prove to be your most effective teachers.

Why TAs?

The teaching assistant (TA) at Rutgers, as at other major research universities in the United States, plays an important role in the education of undergraduates. Rutgers depends on teaching assistants to staff undergraduate courses. It is a rare student who graduates without having been taught by a TA. Furthermore, without teaching assistantships the university would be at a disadvantage in competing to attract the best faculty and would have difficulty meeting its obligation to train and develop the next generation of scholars and teachers.

The benefits of an assistantship to a graduate student are considerable. First, there are the financial benefits, including tuition remission. TAs also gain valuable teaching experience. Finally, TAs have an opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of their chosen field, since teaching demands not only a thorough understanding but also a constant rethinking of the subject matter. TAs and professors frequently comment on how much better they have grasped a subject after teaching it.

As graduate students, TAs may feel that they have come a long way from their undergraduate days, but as teachers, they may feel that they have far to go. Although resolving this conflict may not be simple, working hard at professional development will make TAs feel more secure in their status as members of the teaching staff and help accelerate their professional growth.
The ABCs of Being a TA

Appointments

The university awards teaching assistantships to promising graduate students. The individual departments establish their own procedures for appointment and reappointment (consistent with university policy). The department also determines the specific TA assignments, which may include teaching your own class, leading a recitation/discussion/laboratory section, grading, laboratory supervision, or other academic duties as dictated by need. The term of appointment for teaching assistants is from August 25 to Commencement, but for payroll purposes runs from September 1 to June 30; all standard appointments are made for one year only.

Appointment to a teaching assistantship one year does not guarantee reappointment the next year. Since all university appointments are subject to availability of resources, it is essential that TAs reapply each year, according to departmental instructions. All questions about reappointment should be directed to the individual department or graduate program director or administrator.

Quick Facts:
- Assistantship lasts from August 25 to University Commencement
- First check won’t arrive until mid-September
- Paid until the end of June

Hours and Duties

A full-time teaching assistant works normally at the maximum rate of fifteen clock hours per week (average total hours worked for the semester by the number of weeks—some weeks, especially around exams, require more work while other weeks require less). The number of hours varies according to the time of semester. For example, TAs hired as graders should expect to put in more hours when exams or papers are scheduled.
If you are unhappy with your assigned duties or feel overburdened by the amount of work and time you are expected to invest, try talking to other TAs within the department to see if your experience is unusual and your expectations realistic. (It is unrealistic to compare the workload of one department to another; because of the variety of duties and the disparity of disciplinary demands, what is usual in one program is by no means a measure for any other.) Discuss the cause of your displeasure with the department chair to see if changes can be made for the next semester. Most faculty members are sympathetic to the problems of the TA and try to be fair in their assignments.

If you feel, however, that you are being asked to perform duties which are inappropriate, or that you are being exploited or overburdened, do not suffer in silence. Speak to someone. You should not be putting in so many hours as a TA that your graduate work suffers. Your advisor is a good person to begin with, but if you get no satisfaction there, you should make an appointment with the course or department chair. If that does not help, then contact Barbara Bender in the Dean’s Office for assistance. You can say no to a faculty member who is overwhelming you with work—you are a professional and deserve to be treated like one.

**Salary and Benefits**

In addition to a salary, paid every two weeks during the contract year, the full-time TA at Rutgers is entitled to a variety of benefits, such as health and life insurance, dental insurance (an optional benefit for which the TA must pay a portion of the cost), and tuition remission.

Full tuition remission is given to all TAs on standard appointments; this will cover up to twelve credits a semester and six credits during the summer following a full-year appointment. To take advantage of this benefit, TAs must submit a completed RT100 form when registering for summer session. The RT100 must be signed by the department where the assistantship is held.

**E-credits**
A teaching assistantship (standard appointment) carries with it 6 E-credits. (Partial TA appointments have proportionally fewer E-credits.) The E indicates that no credit has been earned toward the degree and no grade computed in the cumulative average. This means that if you are registered for at least 3 other credits of coursework or research you maintain full-time status in the university, thus insuring that you receive all the benefits of a full-time student.

**Getting Paid**

The university must have certain information before a paycheck can be issued; without this information, it is IMPOSSIBLE to get paid. Be diligent in completing, and prompt in returning, the forms the department provides, since it may take up to six weeks to activate a new name in the payroll system. If you have any questions, check with your graduate program administrator.

International TAs must report to the Center for Global Services to complete the proper payroll forms. Contact the Center to learn the scheduled times for processing employment verifications (I-9s); this cannot be done on a walk-in basis. Until international TAs complete employment verifications, their payroll cannot be processed.

Many students already have a United States Social Security number. If you do not, apply for one immediately. This is required by the payroll department, without which you cannot be paid. If a problem arises at the beginning of the semester and your paycheck is delayed, speak to the graduate program administrator to find out whom to contact to trace your check. (If necessary, the graduate program administrator may be able to process a request for an emergency check. Since this entails even more paperwork, however, it is best to try to get everything straightened out before the semester begins.)

Payroll is deposited directly into your bank account on alternate Fridays. (Remember to complete the necessary form.) Payments begin in September. For TAs appointed for the fall term only, payments run from September through January, and for TAs appointed for the spring term only, February through June.

**Health Benefits**
All full-time students are entitled to use Rutgers Student Health services; TAs on standard appointments are considered full-time. There are multiple health centers for New Brunswick/Piscataway students. To make an appointment call 848-932-7402.

Additionally, the university offers a variety of benefit plans from which all full-time TAs may select. To be covered you must fill out the necessary forms at the beginning of the semester. Information on medical plans, the prescription drug plan, and dental coverage is available from the Benefits Office (848-932-3990).

Your Students and Their World

What is it like to be an Undergraduate?

Many TAs feel far removed from undergraduate culture, distant from that way of living and thinking, even when they themselves were undergraduates not so long ago. Although the life of an undergraduate may seem idyllic when looked at through the eyes of an overburdened graduate student, it is not quite as simple as memory may make it. Most undergraduates have a full schedule of classes, carrying at least twelve credits (often sixteen, or more). In addition to this, many undergraduates must work part-time or even full-time jobs to subsidize their education. For many students, a job is a necessity: without it, they would be forced to leave school. Furthermore, many of these students are living away from home for the first time in their lives. Clearly, students who are overwhelmed by work and social life will have difficulties investing the time needed to complete their coursework.

Once TAs recognize the fact that the life of an undergraduate is not always an easy one, they are in a position to adopt proactive teaching strategies. Perhaps the most effective first step TAs can take is to stop thinking about their students as an amorphous mass, “the undergraduates,” and to attempt to see them as individuals. Do not generalize (i.e., undergraduates are lazy, silly, shallow, unmotivated). Most students are sincerely involved with their education and willing to work hard to succeed.

Be understanding when students come to you with problems or with excuses for late or unsatisfactory work; they honestly do have tight schedules and may be under a lot of pressure. Help them if you can; don’t put another obstacle in their way. This does not mean that you
should fall for every line they give you, but do not be so skeptical that you do not accept any excuses. Dealing with students in a fair and honest manner is the best policy. Try to help them find ways to meet their commitments to your class without losing control of other equally important parts of their lives.

**The Student Body**

What expectations can a TA have about a Rutgers student? In a university of approximately 69,200 students—49,577 in New Brunswick alone—you can expect variety. There are more full-time students than part-time students, more women than men enrolled at Rutgers. Most of the students (82%) are from New Jersey.

Numbers and percentiles tell nothing about the ability of a given individual or the scope of knowledge or range of experience a student may bring to your classroom. Avoid stereotyping students, since research has shown that student performance is often directly related to teacher expectation.

**Campuses and Schools**

Try to become familiar with the five New Brunswick/Piscataway campuses; you will feel more comfortable if you do so. Special events of interest are held on each campus—lectures, movies, sporting events, etc., so you will probably have occasion to visit all of them at one time or another. Although the campuses may seem widely scattered, all can be reached with the campus bus service. Knowledge of the campuses and the difficulties sometimes encountered getting from one campus from another will also help you understand the challenges students may have reaching your class on time.

Additionally, recognizing which school your students are matriculated in will give you clues about their goals. There are 12 undergraduate degree-granting schools on the 5 New Brunswick campuses. Each has an administrative code that you will see on rosters next to the student’s name. These codes are listed with the school name below.

- Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy (10)
• Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy (30)
• Mason Gross School of the Arts (07)
• Rutgers Business School (33)
• School of Arts and Sciences (01)
• School of Communication and Information (04)
• School of Engineering (14)
• School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (11)
• School of Management and Labor Relations (33)
• School of Nursing (25)
• School of Public Health (10)
• School of Social Work (09)

Identifying a student's school may help you to understand the focus of a student's interest in your discipline: why he or she are taking your course, why his or her level of interest is so high or so low, and what the rest of his or her program may be like. Of course, more can be learned by speaking with the student.

Beginning to Teach

TA Assignments

Although you may have found out in June that you were awarded a teaching assistantship, you may not know the particulars of your assignment until late August or even early September. Obviously, it is in the best interest of all involved to make assignments as early as possible, but because of variables (such as student enrollment), assignments are sometimes made quite late.

Although a late assignment may not present problems to a TA who will be grading, those assigned to teach may well be worried. Don’t panic—you can still have a successful semester if you get organized. The following sections may help you in doing so. Do not be shy about going to a faculty member for assistance. Every department should have someone to assist and advise TAs.
The more prepared you are on the first day of class, the more secure you will feel. No one, of course, can offer a universal blueprint for how to teach, but the following suggestions for preparation and organization of classes may provide some direction.

**The First Day**

Not surprisingly, many TAs are particularly apprehensive about the first day of class, imagining all the things that could go wrong. Among the common fears expressed are: What if...

- I can't control the class?
- I freeze and am unable to think or speak?
- I lose my train of thought?
- I give a wrong answer or make a mistake?
- a student asks me a question I can't answer?
- a demonstration or experiment does not work properly?

Bear in mind that it is natural to be nervous on the first day; even experienced teachers feel anxious. Taking the time to prepare will help insure that the first class goes smoothly—indeed, it may even be fun.

As you walk into the classroom or lab on that first day, remember that students make certain automatic assumptions about the teacher. The first is that since you are the teacher you must know what you are doing. Your position—the person in front of the classroom—vests you with authority. Use this knowledge to bolster your confidence before you step into the room. And remember, the students are probably feeling more than a bit anxious and worried about how you, the teacher, will judge them.

It is also best to accept the fact that, sooner or later, you probably will make a mistake—it happens. It won't, however, be the end of the world. Consider beforehand how to respond to such a situation, and it will become less threatening.

Although everything may not work out exactly as you planned, and, frankly, some lessons may just fall flat, this does not mean that you have failed as a teacher. Be assured that your errors will not seem as disastrous to the students as they do to you. If you realize that you have
given incorrect information, correct it at once. Do not try to cover up your mistake; this will only make things worse. Admitting that you were wrong will not cause students to lose respect for you—refusing to admit a mistake may. Learn from your mistakes and go forward.

First Impressions

Teachers can set a certain tone for the semester by their overall behavior and appearance. For example, a teacher who is not punctual sends a clear message to the students. (TAs, however, should not be dismayed during the first week by students who wander in late; they may have registration difficulties, problems finding classrooms, or miscalculating the time it takes to get from class to class. Be understanding.) Instructors should iron out all minor problems beforehand to set a good example—always arrive on time and begin class promptly.

Arriving a few minutes early allows you time to collect your thoughts and reorient your focus toward the class. This also allows you to talk to your students informally, find out what other classes they take, and allows the students who are too shy to talk during class to ask you questions.

You may, of course, dress in any way that you feel is appropriate, but know that students will interpret your dress in certain ways. Dressing a bit more formally than your students, who may be uncomfortably near you in age, makes an important distinction which may help to establish proper authority. This is not to suggest that you should go out and buy a new wardrobe or try to become someone you are not, but to remind you to consider the powerful messages clothing can convey.

The First Class

To begin, you must decide what you intend to achieve with your first class. Do you wish to plunge into the course work almost immediately? Or, do you wish to spend the first day getting to know something about your students and letting them get to know you? Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages—the choice depends upon your style as a teacher and your overall goals.
The most straightforward way to tell the students what to expect during the coming semester is to hand out a syllabus that provides a clear plan for the semester (see Preparing a Syllabus). The syllabus is a preview, presenting an overview of the course that will help students decide during the drop/add period whether or not to commit themselves to the class. This applies to recitation sections as well.

Taking attendance, at least for the first two weeks of class, is an absolute necessity in order to help to establish an accurate class roster. Some departments require a teacher to report attendance numbers to them during the drop/add period (the first week of each semester).

Taking attendance also aids in quickly learn students' names. Learning the names of your students is perhaps the single most effective way of demonstrating to them that the classroom will be a place where their individual ideas are valued. Of course, this is difficult if not impossible in a large lecture class, but in most lab sections, recitations, and smaller classes, it is feasible. Some teachers ask that students take the same seat so that it will be easier to remember names.

Whether you call your students by their first or last names depends upon the relative formality or informality you wish to establish but try to be sensitive to all students. Do not make older students uncomfortable by addressing them as Mr. or Ms. if you are calling the rest of the class by their first names.

How should the students address you? Again, this is your decision. The level of familiarity you wish to establish is something that you, not the students, should determine. Let your openness, humor, sensitivity, and good-will establish a warm rapport with your students while maintaining the distance necessary to the teacher's role.

Whatever you choose, inform students at the beginning of the first class. Do not merely tell them that your name is Ann Smith. This forces them to decide whether to call you Ann or Ms. Smith or Professor Smith. Write your name on the blackboard at the beginning of class in the way that you wish to hear it all semester. Put it on your syllabus and on all other handouts. Tell them your name again when you introduce yourself.

After you have taken attendance, handed out the syllabus, and introduced yourself, you should go over the syllabus, clarifying important points and answering questions. Students have
a right to know what to expect from a course in terms of workload, grading, and other matters. For lab instructors, it is often necessary to open the first class with a discussion of lab protocol and safety procedures.

These preliminaries will not necessarily take up the entire class period. Many teachers like to spend time learning about the students. Some distribute index cards and ask the students to respond to a series of questions designed to give them an opportunity to describe the range of their knowledge in the subject and the outside interests they have that may be of use in planning discussions. Other teachers prefer having the students give information about themselves orally to the class in order to break the ice and accustom the students to speaking in class.

An alternate way of beginning the semester is by presenting a mini-lecture that gives a broad overview of the subject of the course and a general idea of various scholarly approaches to this field of knowledge. There is, perhaps, no better way to give the students an idea of what to expect from the course.

One problem with this approach, however, is that the class will almost certainly change in size or composition by the second or third class, so some students will invariably miss the opening lecture. Some teachers save this lecture for the second class, when the students have already had time to do some preliminary reading in the texts. Students who do not arrive until the second or even third class may be at a slight disadvantage, but they will also understand that time in the class will not be wasted and their regular attendance is required.

Other teachers prefer to begin the semester with a discussion. This takes some of the pressure off the new teacher (although a discussion class presents its own unique challenges—see The Discussion Class) and signals to the students that the course will demand engagement and participation. A discussion can be a valuable way of introducing some of the concerns of the class while allowing the teacher to gauge the levels of knowledge of the students.

All instructors must decide for themselves the combination of practices that will strike the correct balance on the first day. Here, as in all social situations, a number of factors come into play, the most forceful of which is your personality.

Creating the Right Atmosphere
One of the hallmarks of a good teacher is the ability to create a classroom environment where all students feel free to offer opinions and ask questions. This atmosphere will probably develop over the course of the semester, as you and the students begin to trust each other. Before this can happen, you, the teacher, must be comfortable. Both you and your students have things to teach each other, and both you and your students can (and will) make mistakes.

Never belittle or criticize a student for making a mistake. You must, of course, correct the error, but it is best to do this in a kindly and non-judgmental way. Students will only participate freely if they know they will not be castigated for making mistakes. Offer praise whenever possible but only when deserved. Instructors who say "very good" after every student response, brilliant or inane, run the risk of devaluing all praise.

All students in your class should feel they have an equal claim to your attention. Consider your non-verbal behavior. When you look around the class, do you tend to make eye contact only with certain students? Do you teach to one side of the room, thus encouraging students to choose desks on the other side to avoid your gaze? Be on guard against personal prejudices and unconscious stereotyping (see Our Common Purposes). Do you call on women as frequently as you do men? Do you find yourself letting class discussions be dominated by either men or women? Are there certain ethnic or racial groups with whom you feel uncomfortable? In your classroom, do you make eye contact with members of these groups as often as with others? Although teachers may be unaware of these habits, students will notice, so guard against them.

Don't feel obligated to be a stern disciplinarian at all times. Although you should expect students, for the most part, to conform to the rules you have set, be understanding when one comes to you with a legitimate excuse or a request for a special favor—an extended deadline or a make-up test, for example. You do not have to grant every request, and repeated ones by the same student should be looked upon with suspicion but hear them out and then make a decision based on the circumstances, not on some arbitrary rule you have established (see Non-traditional Students).

In conclusion, listen to your students and treat them with respect and courtesy. Unless you do this, it is futile for you to expect the same from them.

Preparing a Syllabus
Before preparing a syllabus, the you should meet with the professor supervising the course to discuss his or her expectations. In many introductory classes with large enrollments, the syllabus is designed by faculty. If you are teaching a lab or recitation section, your syllabus will almost certainly be defined by the work to be covered in the lecture. In some classes, however, you may have sole responsibility for the materials covered and the pace of completion. Although here, too, consultation with a faculty member can be useful, even essential, the final decisions may be left entirely up you.

A syllabus requires careful thought and some skill. Judging the amount of time needed for a given topic, providing the right amount of background reading, and considering the best times of the semester for tests and papers require careful pedagogical and practical consideration. Although it is not necessary to be absolutely rigid about sticking to the syllabus, students appreciate a teacher who is able to organize his or her own and the students' time effectively. A good syllabus should:

- CITE the material to be covered;
- DETAIL all course requirements, exams and papers, and the dates they are due;
- DEFINE all policies on grading, attendance, make-up work, and class participation;
- EXPLAIN policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty;
- INCLUDE your name, email, office location and hours.

The design of the syllabus will be determined largely by the subject matter. For example, some subjects, like history and literature, often lend themselves to chronological arrangement, and others, such as science and engineering, may require organization around general topics. Whichever method you choose, it should be made clear to the students from the beginning. In addition, the overall connection between the class material and the text, the labs, or other elements of the course must be explained to your students. You are the expert in the room and part of your job is helping students understand these connections.

You should strive to create a syllabus that gives a realistic indication of what the class will achieve over the semester. Alter your syllabus as little as possible once the semester has begun.
It is unfair—and, in some cases, against university policy—to change the course requirements after students can no longer switch sections or drop the course.

**Choosing the Text**

You will find that in many of the courses to which you are assigned you have no input about the choice of books. Especially in courses with multiple sections, members of the department will choose what they consider the most useful books for the majority of students. In this case, you are not responsible for ordering books. The department will supply you with a desk copy of each book and, sometimes, with a teacher's guide.

Review each book carefully and decide how you wish to use it. There will certainly be chapters you will want to stress, others you will wish to minimize. Consider how much supplementary material will be necessary for your students to reach the goals you have set.

What should you do if you absolutely hate a chosen text? You may want to speak to the instructor in charge of the course, explaining your reservations, perhaps suggesting another one. (Keep in mind, however, that almost certainly no change can be made for the upcoming semester.) While the instructor may sympathize with your complaints, he or she may still have valid reasons for choosing that book. Controversial texts—including those which you 'hate'—can be useful teaching tools for undergraduates if, and only if, they are explained and contextualized well.

In any event, you will almost certainly have to use the book in the upcoming semester. You may want to share your feelings with the class, giving the students your estimation of both the strengths and weaknesses of the text, but try to stress what you see as positive. If you are wholly negative, students may wonder why you or the department made them waste their time (and money) on what you are telling them is a book of dubious value. Remember, too, that these students do not have your advanced knowledge of the subject and may find the book very useful in helping them to understand the basics.

TAs who are given the freedom to develop their own booklist are confronted with a different set of issues. Among the factors a conscientious teacher will consider are:
• Which book or books can best further my course goals? The more clearly you formulate your plan for the semester, the more surely you can choose the books to help you carry it out.

• How much material can be covered over the semester? Would it be better to choose excerpts rather than assign entire books? How much reading can students be expected to do, taking into consideration the level of difficulty of the texts? Experienced instructors in your department will have a fair idea of how much work students can or will cover. In some fields, for example, there are fairly standard 'rules of thumb' concerning how many pages of reading per class meeting can be assigned.

• How expensive will these books be? Is it better to order one large anthology and supplement it with online materials or to order six or seven smaller books, which may be more expensive? Although cost should not be the only consideration, given the price of books today, this factor should be considered. Note, too, that if you choose to rely heavily on PDFs, copyright laws must be taken into account.

Once you have compiled what you think is a good preliminary list, take this along with your syllabus to the department chair or to an instructor who has already taught this course or a similar one. Ask his or her opinion. Consider all suggestions—remember they have more extensive classroom experience—but, in the end, it is you who will determine the structure and focus of the course.

Once you have decided upon the booklist, you must complete an online course book order form. The graduate program administrator will be able to assist you if you require help. These lists should be completed as soon as possible so that the books will be available at the bookstore by the first day of classes. Delayed book orders can wreak havoc on the most carefully planned syllabus.

**Supplementary Readings**
Many teachers choose to use PDFs and online materials from various sources to supplement the text and their lectures. Usually, such material is placed online via Sakai (or, less often, Canvas). While supplemental readings can be very useful, take care not to overwhelm students—the purpose is to clarify, not to make learning more difficult.

Constructing a “For Further Reading” list is valuable, even in classes where students are not required or expected to do outside reading. Occasionally alluding to these materials in class or choosing interesting examples from them may help to motivate students to read them at a future date.

**Record Keeping**

Consider the kinds of student records that must be maintained and devise a workable system for doing so. The university mandates that all grades be kept on file by the instructor for at least one year—your department may also have its own rules. Many experienced teachers suggest that you keep this information for as long as possible but certainly for at least five years.

Student attendance and performance should be accurately detailed in these records. All letter or number grades for quizzes, exams, homework, and in-class work must be properly recorded. In addition, many teachers find it useful to reserve a space next to each student's record for a brief final evaluation of his or her strengths and weaknesses (one or two sentences at most). This brief note may assist you in the future if the student asks for a letter of recommendation.

Take time to record all information clearly and accurately. You will have to refer to this information several times in the course of the semester—at mid-semester when it is time to issue warning notices, at semester's end when you are calculating final grades, and at any time during the semester when you meet with students to discuss their progress. These tasks will be much less time-consuming if your grade information is in order. If your records on stored on a computer, it is essential to keep a backup copy. Also keep in mind the possible security risks—who else will have access to your records? If you lose your records, the burden of proof for a grade is on you, and the resulting problems could become a bureaucratic nightmare.
Rosters and Drop/Adds

The online class rosters are updated as students change their registration. Do not attempt to add the names of students who do not appear on your roster and do not attempt to delete the names of students who have not attended.

Some students do considerable 'shopping' for courses during the first weeks of a semester; others will be deregistered after the first two weeks of classes because they have not paid their term bill. (Once these students pay their term bill, their courses are automatically restored; they do not have to reregister for their classes.)

During the first week students may add classes. During the first two weeks students can drop courses without incurring any penalty, however, for the following six weeks a 'W' will be recorded on the student's transcript. After eight weeks, a student can drop a course only with the permission of the college dean; after the twelfth week of classes, a student can drop a course only with the permission of both the college dean and the instructor. Hence, course rosters are often in considerable flux.

When you submit final grades for the semester, you will have an opportunity to indicate that a student has “never attended” or add a student's name and RUID number to the roster. Yet another reason to keep careful records throughout the semester.

Warning rosters are generally available between the fourth and seventh week of the semester. You will be notified of the specific due date for warning rosters. The first hourly exam or some substantial graded assignment should be scheduled and graded before the seventh week of classes so that students who do poorly and are in danger of failing can be notified. Comments should be entered next to the warning grades. The Warning Roster will list all of the students registered for your class. If a student's name is not listed, please send the student to their dean's office to properly register. Warning grades are as follows:

- **W1** = Warning for poor performance;
- **W2** = Warning for poor attendance;
- **W3** = Warning for both poor attendance and poor performance;
The final roster is the Grade Roster. Grades must be submitted within 48 hours of the final exam as scheduled by the university. Instructors are expected to submit final grades using REGIS (Rosters and Electronic Grading Information System).

For undergraduate students, you may submit a grade of either A, B, B+, C, C+, D, F, NG, TZ, or TF. (Note that minus grades are not permitted.) Assign a grade of NG (no grade given) to a student who has not attended the course. The NG will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA; however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the NG will convert to an F, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of TZ when a student is unable to complete the semester's course work due to a verifiable emergency situation; reach an agreement with the student as soon as possible as to how the course should be completed. The TZ will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA, however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the TZ will convert to an F, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of TF if the student does not complete the course work required or has not taken the final exam. The TF will be calculated into the GPA immediately. If the course work is not made up within the following semester, the TF converts to an F. (Similarly, instructors can submit TD, TC, TC+, TB, or TB+ grades if the instructor believes that the student should receive that letter grade even if the student completes no further work for the course. T grades can never be lowered.) Please consult with your department regarding procedures for submitting changes of grades after the semester has ended.

The Classroom

You will be assigned a specific classroom or lab when you are given your first roster at the beginning of the semester. If possible, go and look at the classroom before the first class to judge its suitability. The logistics of scheduling an enormous number of classes make it almost impossible to get a class location changed, but if the classroom is totally inappropriate for the course (in size, available facilities, etc.) report the problem at once to the graduate program administrator or to someone at Scheduling and Space Management.

Digital Classroom Services
Information regarding the size, location, and permanently installed equipment in a classroom is available on Digital Classroom Services’ website. Instructions and videos explaining the operation of the systems and equipment are also available.

**Facilities Maintenance**

Although what happens in the classroom is naturally much more important than the physical appearance of the room, no one should have to spend a semester in an unpleasant environment. When you look at the classroom or lab for the first time, take note of its physical condition.

- Is the classroom clean?
- Do all of the lights work?
- Does the heat/air conditioning work?
- Are there enough desks?
- If you will need a podium, does the room have one?
- Is there an adequate supply of chalk/markers and erasers?
- Are there broken windows or locks?

In most cases the classroom will be at least adequate. If there is a problem, however, act at once to remedy it. An annoying buzzing light will distract even the most interested students, just as an overheated classroom will lull even the most attentive to sleep.

Facilities Maintenance should be notified in the event of problems with plumbing, air conditioning, repairs, maintenance, classroom supplies, or broken locks. If it is an emergency, the operator can radio to one of the workers to respond immediately.

**Getting an Office**

The university requires that all teachers make themselves available to their students outside of class. Office assignments are usually made before classes begin or during the first few weeks of the semester. Because of the shortage of office space in many departments, it is likely that
you will have to share your office with several other TAs. Teaching and class schedules are so varied that this presents fewer problems than may seem probable at first.

Unfortunately, in some departments, space is at such a premium that TAs who grade or teach labs and recitations may be without office assignments at the beginning of the semester. If you find yourself without an office, act as soon as you can. First, ask your graduate program administrator for suggestions about what to do. If no help is received from this quarter, speak to the instructor with whom you are working. Some faculty members allow TAs to hold office hours in their own offices at times when they will not be using them.

If you are unable to coordinate times with a faculty member, try to find an unused classroom where you can meet students undisturbed or an area in one of the libraries where conversation is possible. Be sure to announce in class where and when you will be available, and then be there faithfully at the appointed time.

Problems

If a student comes to you with personal problems, you should listen; but remember that you are not always qualified to help. Do not attempt to be a counselor or psychiatrist. You can best assist the student by knowing where to find help and by urging the student to make an appointment with a more qualified person. If possible, walk the student over to the appropriate office. Always be supportive and understanding but recognize your limitations (see Troubled Students.)

A problem some TAs encounter is the student who comes once a week for office hours and wants to just sit down and chat. Although this may not always cause a problem, at times it can be very frustrating. Other students may see this student in your office and assume that you are busy, possibly putting off students who have valid reasons for seeing you. Be frank in a case like this. Kindly, but firmly, tell the student that although you would like to talk, other students should also have the opportunity to discuss the class. Stress the fact that you will be more than willing to discuss any legitimate problem. Of course, if you suspect that the student's frequent visits are symptoms of an emotional problem, you will want to help the student to receive the proper counseling (see Troubled Students).
Another possible concern is the student who comes to your office at times other than your office hours. If you are not engaged in any particular work, you may decide to see the student. If the student is one who generally seems apprehensive or appears to be under some stress, you should welcome the opportunity at any time to open up the lines of communication. Use your own judgment about the student's needs. But, if you have budgeted your time carefully and set this period aside for your own work, your students should be expected to respect your decision about office hours, except in extreme cases. Explain to these students that you cannot speak to them now, but that you will gladly see them during your regular office hours or perhaps sooner at an agreed-upon, mutually convenient time.

Scheduling Hours

The importance of maintaining regular office hours cannot be overemphasized—students must feel that they have access to their teachers. No matter how good a teacher you are, if the students feel that you are inaccessible, too busy to meet with them, they will feel cheated and may lose interest in the class.

The amount of time an instructor schedules for office hours is a decision to be made by the individual, based on the needs of the students. Student schedules are so varied, with classes spread around five campuses, that meetings may sometimes be very difficult to arrange. Some teachers find that scheduling office hours before or after class works out well because many students try to avoid scheduling back-to-back classes.

As a rule, it is probably best to establish a minimum of two periods a week for office hours while letting students know that you are available for conferences at other times by appointment. Sometimes you may set up appointments with the students in the library, if that is more convenient for both of you, or in one of the student lounges. If you are teaching a large section, you must expect to set aside more than two periods to accommodate all students who wish to speak to you.

Making the most of your office hours is a fundamental way of ensuring that your students make the most of your class. An instructor who is able to establish personal contact with students not only helps the individual students but the class as a whole.
You may wish to supplement these face-to-face office hours with “virtual” office hours on Skype, Google Hangouts, etc. Alternately, you can use the chatroom function in Sakai. This chatroom is available only to your students and the conversations are archived online. This feature makes it particularly useful for review sessions so that students who were unable to participate in real time are able to read the transcript of your answers to questions posed by other students. (It is vital to remember that, since the chatroom is viewable by all students, it is not suitable for personal discussions about grades, makeup work, etc.) Students often appreciate online office hours because they can 'attend' regardless of where they are (home, dorm, between classes, break at work, etc.).

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**Uses of Office Hours**

If you sit back and wait for the students to appear at your door, you are letting a great opportunity pass by. Some students will finally materialize (usually late in the semester when they are worried about their final grades), but for the most part you will spend some quiet and undisturbed hours in your office over the semester. Some suggestions for getting students to come to your office:

- Remind the students frequently of the scheduled hours and other appointment possibilities;

- During office hours, keep the door open to let the students know that you are there and available;

- When students do come into your office, put your work aside and make them feel like welcome guests, not intruders;
• When you meet with students, look at them and listen. Let them do the talking. Pay attention. Look interested. Be interested;

• Establish a friendly relationship with them in the classroom so that they will be less hesitant about coming to see you later.

A few students coming in with the same problem should suggest to you the topics that need to be explained more clearly. Many teachers require that all students schedule an appointment before or after the first paper exam, so that their progress can be discussed. Once students find your office for this required appointment, they are more apt to make a return visit.

Additionally, if you write a comment on an essay—"Why not come and talk to me about this in my office?"—most students will interpret this as a command rather than a suggestion. Many students who would not initiate this contact are, nevertheless, grateful for the opportunity to meet. And, again, once the ice has been broken, the second visit becomes much easier.

Attendance Policy for TAs

If for any reason you are unable to conduct a class for which you are scheduled, notify the department or the appropriate person as soon as possible. Missed classwork must be made up at some point in the semester, placing a future burden on the TA and on the students. If the TA is in charge of a lab section, a substitute must be found because in most cases the students will not be able to make up the lab. Students would be justified in complaining about a TA who misses classes or who is regularly late just as you have a responsibility to speak to a student with these problems.

Everybody, of course, becomes ill at one time or another or has an emergency which prevents him or her from attending to duties. In these situations, do what you can to make your absence cause as little disruption as possible in both your own life and in that of your students. Know beforehand the department's policy on absences and the appropriate person to notify about them.
Attendance Policy for Students

Official university policy is that attendance "shall be expected." This is generally interpreted by faculty and administration to mean that attendance is required. How closely should you monitor the attendance of individual students? Clearly, in a large lecture class, taking attendance is time-consuming and difficult to manage unless a sign-in sheet is circulated at every class. Even in smaller classes, however, where it is possible to monitor attendance, some teachers are reluctant to establish a strict attendance policy because they feel that college students should be allowed more freedom than high school students and should be free to attend or not attend as they choose. Many teachers do not want to waste class time in taking attendance.

There are, however, compelling reasons for requiring attendance and more or less painless ways of managing the necessary recordkeeping. Perhaps the most important reason for regulating attendance is that it forces you to learn your students' names very quickly. You may be surprised at how soon you recognize students by name, and at that point you can take attendance quickly and silently at the beginning of the class period.

In addition, by setting a limit on the number of absences, the teacher is signaling to the students that what takes place in class is important. You are not merely rehashing what the professor said in the lecture class, or restating the material found in the text, but you are using your recitation, lab, or lecture to enlarge the students' understanding of the topic.

Taking attendance may also assist you at the end of the semester when compiling grades. Your decision about a student with a true borderline grade could be influenced by the student's attendance and participation; in cases such as this, being able to match a face with a name is helpful.

A clearly established attendance policy will avoid many problems, but to be effective any policy must be enforced consistently and equally. This is not to suggest inflexibility—exceptions can and, at times, should be made.

The Craft of Teaching

The Lecture
The most traditional form of college teaching, and still the most common, is the formal lecture. Contemplating their first lecture often frightens many new instructors and causes much unnecessary anxiety. Thoughts of abject failure—losing one's train of thought, omitting vital material, boring the class—plague many TAs. As with so many other aspects of teaching, careful preparation can at least lessen the problems that lecturers may encounter.

Before beginning to compile material for a lecture, it is useful to pose a few questions, the answers to which will help to determine your focus:

- What is the purpose of the lecture?
- Is it meant to introduce entirely new material, or is it intended to summarize material already covered?
- Is the lecture an expansion of materials covered by the text, or is it a review?
- How is the substance of the lecture related to the text or the lab materials?

One of the toughest problems faced by new instructors is in judging the abilities of their class. The material presented must be challenging enough so that students are not bored, yet not so difficult that they are lost, overwhelmed, or discouraged. Striking a reasonable balance between these two points takes practice—and even experienced faculty sometimes misjudge.

Many new instructors tend to over-prepare because they think they must know everything written about a topic before they can teach it, or they are afraid that the students will ask difficult questions. TAs should realize that it is always possible to say to students, "I don't know, but I'll find out."

In addition, remember that students are probably not as interested as you in the current scholarly debates and controversies. Later on, when they have a fuller understanding of the field, they may be interested, but first give them the basic information. On the other hand, you do not wish to insult your students by presenting a lecture so elementary that the students barely need to listen (and certainly won't as the semester progresses). You should assume that your audience is composed of intelligent, interested adults who, while they may not have deep knowledge of the field, are capable and desirous of learning.
Once you have decided upon the depth of material to be covered, you can begin to prepare your notes. Perhaps the worst way to give a lecture is by writing out the entire "script" beforehand and reading it to the class. Unless you are an exceptionally gifted speaker, this will alienate and bore your students. Beginning instructors may feel more confident with a typed text in front of them, but this confidence is gained at the loss of some excitement and much spontaneity.

Instead, prepare a good outline for yourself, including all the main topics, sub-topics, sub-sub-topics, illustrations, examples, and anecdotes, detailed enough so that you will not unintentionally omit anything of importance. For some teachers, four to five pages are more than enough for an eighty-minute class, while others may need more or fewer. Using an outline rather than a prepared text allows you to pace your lectures. If a point at the beginning produces a flood of questions, time can be made up later in the lecture by eliminating some of the less important points. This is almost impossible to do if you are reading a tightly organized lecture/essay.

Do not try to cover too much in one lecture. Thoroughly explaining two or three points may be considered a real achievement. During the second half of the semester, when the pressures of time are more felt, you may be tempted to try to cram two lectures into one. This usually does not save time in the end because the students rarely absorb it all, and you will probably end up spending time in the following weeks answering questions and clearing up the confusion caused by this double lecture.

Although instructors are discouraged from presenting an essay as a lecture, a lecture should be modeled on the basic elements of a good essay, with a clearly identified beginning, middle, and end. Students need to understand very specifically what you propose to talk about and how it relates to other course materials. One piece of advice, found in almost every text on teaching, offers three steps to preparing a successful lecture:

1. Tell them what you are going to say;
2. Say it;
3. Tell them what you said.
Many teachers like to begin class with an amusing story, an anecdote, or a news item that is related to materials already covered or about to be covered in the class. This works as an effective transitional device for the students, easing them gently from whatever they have just left—their previous class, their job, their friends—to the work at hand in your class. Beginning the class in this way helps students to relax and makes them more receptive to the work that follows.

In editing your lecture so that it fits into the allocated time, avoid cutting out illustrations, examples, and anecdotes. A successful lecture is one that helps students comprehend the point—often an apt illustration or example can make the difference between merely covering the material and actually teaching it. People remember well-chosen examples and vivid illustrations.

It is a good idea when planning a lecture class to reserve some time for students' questions and responses. If you plan to cover two main topics, pause midway to give the students a chance to ask questions or make comments. Reserve time at the beginning of each class for questions. Remember that the purpose of a good lecture is to make students think, to raise questions, and to provoke responses. A successful lecture does not remain a monologue but develops into a dialogue.

Give your students an outline of each lecture. Write the outline on the board, use PowerPoint, or provide a hardcopy or digital handout. This outline can be a distillation of your own outline, perhaps listing only the main ideas. The benefits of this handout outweigh the small amount of time that it will take you to prepare it. The students can follow your lecture more easily and identify the major and minor points without difficulty. In addition, just having a piece of paper in hand gives many students a feeling of confidence in the instructor's organization.

Teachers, like any other public performer, must work on their delivery and movements. If your speech is difficult to understand or if your delivery unanimated, you may soon lose the class' interest. At least at first, check and evaluate yourself regularly. Below are some of the things you should be aware of when you begin to lecture:

- Use natural hand gestures as you speak and move around a bit;
• Make eye contact with the students;
• Speak loudly enough and enunciate distinctly;
• Avoid filler words and phrases like "er," "uh," "oh," "hum," "you know;"

Use the blackboard/whiteboard or other audio-visual aids to break up the monotony of one voice speaking. Even the most exciting public speaker knows that visuals are a sure way to regain an audience whose attention is fading.

The Discussion Class

Leading an effective discussion group often requires more skill, preparation, and perceptiveness than lecturing. Relying upon the students’ participation, the discussion class will sink or swim at the level of student involvement. It is up to the instructor to insure as full participation as possible, something which can be fostered through careful planning, unflagging enthusiasm, and a little bit of luck.

It may seem contradictory to suggest that planning is needed for a kind of learning that seems based on a spontaneous exchange of ideas. However, there is always the possibility that class discussions may degenerate into a listless and undirected conversation.

The shape of any discussion class is determined in large part, of course, by the kind of class you are teaching. In some courses—many humanities courses, for example—lively exchange of ideas is the very heart of the class, with most class time devoted to a discussion based on assigned readings. The students are assigned material to read, and they then come to class prepared to talk, to question, analyze, or offer opinions. In other courses, discussion forms a less central but no less important function. Often, a discussion class is an adjunct to a larger lecture class, allowing students to investigate crucial points in more depth than is possible in the lecture hall. In between these two types of classes are a whole range of classes which use discussion to a greater or lesser degree. Not all subject matter lends itself to a discussion. A teacher interested in conveying specific information and facts would do well to give the students the information in a lecture or a handout and then, perhaps, use that material as the basis for a discussion.
All instructors who make use of the discussion format—and, at one time or another, that is almost every instructor—must begin with a few basic questions. These questions will simplify and define the aims of your class and help you to begin to plan your class.

The pivotal question is: what is the purpose of the discussion? Is it meant to reinforce ideas introduced during a lecture or reading or to explain them in more detail? Is the purpose to allow students to make connections between the abstractions presented in the text and their own lives, or are discussions meant to introduce new material, to start the students thinking in a new direction? How are the topics under discussion related to the overall aims of the course? In some cases, these questions will be answered by the course supervisor, so it is necessary for the TA to consult with him or her before the semester begins and to maintain regular contact over the semester.

Before conducting a discussion class, instructors should make an outline of what they hope to cover in the class. This outline need not be written in stone—be flexible in moving from topic to topic and allow the students some latitude in the range of their discussion. With as much thoroughness as is required in preparing a lecture, an instructor should go through the details of the discussion, deciding which points are absolutely necessary, which are less important, and which can be omitted entirely. Once these priorities have been established, the instructor should formulate thought-provoking questions that may lead the students toward the decided-upon topics without dictating responses.

Do not panic if your first question fails to produce the desired response. Give the students time to think and formulate an answer. If students seem lost, recap a bit so that they may better see what you are proposing with the question. Like a good conversation, a good discussion must evolve naturally.

In spite of all your preparations, a discussion class will only limp along unless the students are motivated to participate. Occasionally, a teacher will encounter a class that for one reason or another never catches fire, but most classes, with a little encouragement and planning, profit from discussions.

If the class seems reluctant to join in the discussion, try placing the chairs in a circle. Having the students face each other forces them into making eye contact, into involvement with the
rest of the group, rather than leaving them feeling isolated and disconnected. The other benefit is that the importance and the authority of the instructor seems temporarily minimized.

Be encouraging to your students. Show them that you are paying attention to what they are saying. Make eye contact. Offer an appropriate comment when they finish speaking. Do not just allow them to speak and then go on to another topic without acknowledging their contribution. Make positive comments about their responses if possible. Use discretion, however; do not say 'very good' if the answer was not very good. Students dislike this type of dishonesty and will begin to distrust and devalue all that the teacher says. It is important to establish a classroom climate conducive to the free exchange of ideas. Students should feel able to give wrong answers without being humiliated, to explore ideas without being censored.

The enthusiasm of the teacher for the topic will almost always spark student interest. If a teacher's manner is uninterested and uninteresting, even the most exciting topic will fall flat. A quiet, reserved teacher is as capable of projecting intensity for a subject as an outspoken one. Express your ideas and feelings honestly, and your students will soon follow your example.

The Recitation Class

A recitation class is a small sub-group of a larger lecture class which meets regularly as a supplement to the weekly lectures. The lecture sections are usually taught by faculty who supervise TAs responsible for their recitation classes. The faculty member will generally determine the purpose of the recitation class, although the TA will shape the class in an individual way.

In these classes, as in all other discussion classes, the ends dictate the means. What is the class meant to do? Is the class period a review session meant to further explain material already covered in the lecture? Is the TA meant to introduce new material or to broaden the students' ideas of specific aspects?

Running an efficient recitation requires the TA to have a firm grasp of the course material and to keep up with the course readings, labs, and lectures. Most departments require TAs to attend all lectures for the course, an extremely useful practice. Although the syllabus may give TAs a general idea of what is being covered in class, only attendance at the lectures will show if
all points were clearly and comprehensively explained. The TA is also aware of any potentially confusing event in the lecture (e.g., a misinterpreted word or phrase or a poorly designed PowerPoint).

Let the students know at the beginning of the semester that the recitation class is not just a rehash of the lecture but an opportunity for the students to grapple with problems they may not thoroughly understand, to broaden their knowledge of concepts, and to give them some practice in applying the things they have learned.

A good way to involve everyone in the class is to ask the students to be ready at the beginning of class with a question that they would like to have answered. You might start the class by writing all of these questions on the board (in your own shorthand). This takes only a few minutes and will give you an idea of the areas where students are having problems and give them a sense of participating in the shaping of the class.

An alternate way of involving students is by outlining on the board the topics that you think need to be covered and having the students rank them. This method has the advantage of giving you more control over the contents of the class while still allowing the students some voice.

The Laboratory Section

A lab instructor must know the materials of the class, which means working closely with the lecturer, attending lectures, and keeping up with the course readings. Those who also teach recitation classes will have a good idea of how much the students know. If you are not teaching a recitation, however, speak to some TAs who are; they will be able to give you a realistic idea of what the students understand and where their weaknesses lie.

Careful planning is essential in teaching a successful lab section. Preparing a brief lecture to begin the lab, one that helps to focus the students on the problem at hand and covers all of the points that need to be articulated without overwhelming the students, is a difficult task. So that students understand the end goal of the lab and do not feel that they are merely repeating a meaningless exercise, prepare handouts or use PowerPoint or the blackboard/whiteboard to provide them with a clear overview of the demonstration.
Many instructors like to use a few minutes at the beginning of the section to review the lab from the previous week and establish some connections between that lab and the current one. (It is rarely worthwhile to review a lab at the end of a period; by then, many students have gone off, some are still working, others cleaning up.)

Most lab courses have a supervisor who is responsible for the labs, holds weekly lab preparation meetings, and is available to help with problems. The instructor, however, is ultimately responsible for the success and safety of the lab. A lab instructor should always go through all the steps of the demonstration at least once before conducting each lab. This alerts the instructor to possible problems the students may encounter. If you teach a lab later in the week, you may wish to ask other lab instructors where their students encountered difficulties. (You can be sure that every lab presents its own difficulties.) For labs that necessitate the use of unfamiliar equipment, the TA is required to take time to demonstrate its use, thoroughly and carefully. In some labs, students may be reluctant to handle the required materials because of squeamishness or fear; in others, they are just so confused by the topic that they are unable to interpret the results in any meaningful way. Knowing beforehand where trouble can be expected saves valuable time.

Lab safety must always be a major concern. All TAs need to be informed about the necessary safety precautions, since the lab instructor is responsible for the safety of the students. Although vigilance is necessary in all labs, extra caution must be exercised in introductory courses. Inattentive students pose a real danger to themselves and the entire class. Clowning around in the lab can cause serious trouble, and it is up to you to see that order is maintained. Warn students at the beginning of class about any potentially hazardous materials they will be handling. Write warnings on the blackboard/whiteboard and repeat them often throughout the class. Make sure that students wear safety goggles and other equipment as necessary. If you are not sure about the possible dangers of a material, ask the professor in charge of the course. You cannot be too careful. Students who refuse to comply with safety regulations should not be allowed to continue with the lab.

Lab instructors should arrive early to make sure that all equipment is in working order and the needed supplies are available. Although instructors should make their students clean up
after the lab, you will want to double-check before your class begins to make sure that all equipment is intact. Do not depend on someone else to do this for you. When something goes wrong, as it invariably will, it is you who must salvage the lab for the students.

Before the students begin work, it is often necessary to organize them into groups. Do not leave this to chance. Take charge. Demonstrations that require the students to move from table to table should also be planned carefully; otherwise, chaos will almost certainly reign as all the students rush to the first table.

While the students are working, your presence should be felt in the room. Do not just sit in the front of the class. Circulate around the room, making sure that all students are making progress. Take an active role, offering suggestions and assistance when needed.

**The Foreign Language Class**

Most foreign language departments in the university have already established ongoing training and support programs for their TAs. As language courses, especially introductory ones, require the mastery of certain lessons in a set sequence, the course outline is often determined beforehand and is common to all instructors teaching that course. Within these limits, however, the TA will certainly find room for individual creativity.

New TAs would do well to recall their first foreign language class and the feelings they had at that time. A situation where a person is suddenly unable to communicate coherently can be profoundly disturbing. The task of the instructor is to enable the students to get beyond their fears to a state where language acquisition is possible.

To a large extent, the climate that the TA establishes determines the success of the class. The TA must be sensitive to the inhibitions and embarrassments experienced by someone first learning a language, yet he or she must still be able to facilitate conversation. Give the students time to answer your questions and to respond to your statements. Do not help them before they need it; let them make mistakes and then gently correct them. Beginning to learn a language must be seen as a series of small steps and minor victories. Language teachers should cheer these victories and make an extra effort to give encouragement, confidence, and support to their students.
In the Field

In many disciplines, work in the laboratory or classroom is enriched by trips into the field to explore the subject matter of the class in a hands-on way. Amy Clifton, a former TA who received her Ph.D. from the Geology Department, offers the following guidelines to consider when planning to take students into the field:

- Introduce whatever skills or techniques necessary beforehand (if that is the goal of the trip);

- Field trips should be "hands-on" rather than "show and tell."

- Make sure you know what to do in case of an emergency or accident;

- Make sure there are enough TAs for the class size;

- Make sure you plan for bad weather (i.e., have a "rain date" or go "rain or shine").

How Students Learn

Teaching cannot be merely a matter of imparting a quantity of facts but must provide students with a way of understanding and integrating the materials into their own experience. Teachers who are alert to the ways students learn can endeavor to structure their courses to meet these needs. Two techniques that influence student learning are frequent tests and the use of study groups.

Students perform best in classes where they are frequently checked on their knowledge. This means that courses which have only a midterm and a final do not provide the students with as effective a learning environment as courses where tests are more frequent. The use of weekly low-stake quizzes and writing assignments help students focus on the material and to quickly discover in which areas their understanding is weak. Of importance here is quick turn-around time. Whenever you give a quiz, make sure that you return it to the students by the next class. There is no need for lengthy comments or analysis on your part—a sentence or two
noting the good and bad points is all that is needed. If you procrastinate and give back quizzes or other minor assignments only after you have gone on to another topic, the results do not help the students in any meaningful way.

Another way of regularly checking up on student progress is by asking students to come up with a question about the assigned readings to be handed in before each class, or to have them answer a single question about the material at the end of class. Again, in order for the students to gain maximum benefit from these assignments, it is essential that these small exercises be returned as quickly as possible. You don't have to write long comments on these quickie quizzes. If students do not do well, they know the areas where they are weak and will have time to seek help before a major exam or paper (see Testing).

Additionally, students learn better when they work and study in groups. Students who work in groups are more inclined to go through every question or problem they need to know; it is more likely that they, as a group, have a range of knowledge that covers all of the necessary problems. Students studying alone may have gaps in their knowledge, causing them to skip over complicated problems, or they may get stuck and spend far too much time struggling with a single difficult problem. Teachers cannot force students to study together, but they can use certain strategies to encourage students to adopt this effective study habit (see Students in Groups).

**Active Learning**

Modern educational theory has emphasized the fact that education is not a passive process. According to Dewey, Piaget, and many others, learning takes place most effectively when the learner enacts the process of acquiring information rather than merely receiving that information. When active learning occurs, the student is able to assimilate the subject matter into his or her overall way of perceiving the world, rather than having it remain isolated from other ideas and concepts. This makes the learning more meaningful and enhances retention.

In many academic fields, active learning is the norm. One would not think of teaching most sciences without a lab section or mathematics without problems to solve. Similarly, even
historically-oriented musicologists would be expected to have gained some degree of competence in performance.

For example, instead of merely regurgitating the current literature on an historical problem, students might work directly with primary sources—perhaps relating to an aspect of local history—to understand the historical process. It is not to be expected that students will make a real contribution to the field, but they will gain a new understanding of the overall processes of investigation of the field. They will achieve an awareness of the difficulties that are involved in the production of knowledge. Student historians, for example, will come to realize that the historical narratives they read are constructed from interpreted documents and recognize the limitations of such interpretations.

This is not to say that you should ignore the function of conveying information. College is merely the first stage in a habit of learning, so a major function of a teacher's work must be helping students acquire the tools of learning, an area in which the techniques of active learning can play a major role.

**Asking Questions**

Whether designing an exam, leading a discussion class, directing a lab, or even lecturing a large section, the quality of the questions that you ask determines the quality of the response. Asking the right questions forces students to take a more active part in the class, leading them to formulate their own opinions based on the materials presented.

Avoid closed-ended questions that require a “yes,” “no,” or any other single word answer. They do little or nothing to raise the interest level of the class or encourage student engagement. Better to ask questions with answers that indicate that the students are following the arguments presented, that advance the arguments, and invite the students to expand upon them. This not only provides a welcome break from the monotony of a lecture, but also tells the students that they are expected to listen, think, and participate.

**Students in Groups**
In group situations, the teacher's role is one of unobtrusive guide: determining the final destination and guiding the way. With careful preparation, a teacher can provide strong support while allowing students the freedom to make discoveries. For example, at the beginning of class, the instructor can provide each group with an outline of the materials that need to be covered. This outline should reflect the same degree of preparation that a lecture on the topic would demand. The job of the students then is to work together to fill in the blanks in the information, to go through the process that leads to the conclusion you are suggesting.

Establish groups with care. The easy way to divide up the class would be to separate the students according to where they are sitting; this is not, however, the best way. These groups too often will contain students who are friends and have very similar backgrounds, or students with the same level (high or low) of motivation and commitment. Try to be creative in matching students.

Work to overcome students' natural reluctance to participate in group activities. Students often resist working in groups. Over the years, they have been conditioned to look to the teacher alone for all the answers and so perceive group work as a waste of time. Teachers often find it difficult, even in class discussions, to persuade students to talk to each other—more often than not they look at and speak to the teacher, even when they are directly responding to a statement by a fellow student. Work to have the students listen and speak to each other. In class discussion, ask them to relate their answers to other students' answers, thus guiding them to attend to the responses of others. Be patient. Students cannot unlearn old behavior overnight. Trusting their own ideas or the ideas of their fellow students may be a new experience for them, but it can, in the end, be a rewarding one.

Testing

Tests act as a kind of broad mirror of the work done over the semester. They should present no major surprises for the student who has attended class and kept up with the readings. Consider providing students with a written proportional breakdown of areas to be tested—that is, a pre-test handout indicating how many points of the test correspond to a particular area of focus. Even if you do not do this for students, such an exercise may help you prepare tests. Test
yourself: do your questions foci faithfully mirror your class time foci? If not, plan your class better so that your tests are not surprises for students. If tests seem totally divorced from classwork, students may have little inclination to attend classes from that first test onward.

TAs can help students do well on exams by offering extra review sessions—either in person or online, for students who are interested, giving them a chance to go over materials about which they feel unsure. Another way to assist students is by providing them with study questions and/or sample problems that show them what they can expect from the exam.

Although each exam will be different—its final form determined by subject matter and course goals—some commonalities confront all instructors. Three crucial issues that influence the composition of any test are raised below.

First and foremost, the instructor should be clear about what they wish to test. Is the test meant to measure knowledge of specific facts? Is it meant to demonstrate the students’ ability to deal with certain facts or theories in an original and comprehensive way? Or make connections among a group of texts or ideas? The answer to these questions will usually determine the type of test, objective or essay (or possibly a combination of the two). Test questions should reflect the kinds of assignments the students have been doing all semester and should never be something entirely new. The teacher should also try to determine beforehand the value of each answer and the range of acceptable responses to each question.

How important should each exam be, and how much weight should each carry in the course grade? A midterm exam will seem most threatening to students for whom this exam and the final exam will largely determine their grade for the class. Many educators feel that it is more beneficial to students to give several tests over the course of the semester, making each test equally important, thus eliminating the "do or die" element of only one or two significant grades. Tests given on a regular basis are also aids to the teacher who wishes to know if the majority of students are keeping up with the class.

How can the teacher make sure that the exam will be beneficial to the student? Tests can be an effective way of providing feedback to the students, but, in order for this to happen, the student must be motivated to look beyond the letter grade assigned. Arrange for students to come speak to you in your office about the exam. Use class time to go over those questions
that a large number of students answered incorrectly. Be aware of the fact, however, that this may be less an indication that the students do not know the material than that your question was ambiguous or misleading.

Some teachers suggest letting the students participate in creating the exams. The ability to form a good exam question is an indication that the students have a full understanding of the course material and of the goals of the course. Their input may also give them a greater investment in the exam. You may not wish to do this on the midterm, but certainly by the time the final exam comes around, your students should be prepared to help write the exam. Essay exams lend themselves to this kind of pre-test exercise. Some teachers even use this as part of the exam itself, asking the students to formulate what they consider a good exam question and then answer it.

After composing an exam, put it aside for a day or two and then reconsider your work. Is the wording of all the questions clear and unambiguous? Is it realistic to think that students can complete the exam in the time allotted? Have you covered all of the material you need to cover? If after re-examining the test you still feel that the exam is sound, then carefully consider and write out your 'ideal' responses to all questions. This exercise is doubly useful. First, by checking your answers with the questions, you can see if they truly elicit all the information you desire. If your responses added more information than the question demanded, you may wish to rewrite the question to be more inclusive. Second, this exercise will help you when grading the exams if you use your own responses as a model for student answers.

Once the students have taken the exam, evaluate it again. Was it too difficult or simple? Did students misunderstand any of the questions? Do you see areas where the class as a whole missed some vital piece of information? No matter how satisfied you are with the exam, there is a good chance that not all the students will feel the same way. Listen to your students. Although you are not obligated to agree with them, you will discover where your expectations and theirs did not coincide, information that you can use to your own and your students' advantage in future semesters.

Grading
Like it or not, testing and grading are integral parts of the educational process and central elements of most courses to many students. Decisions about grading should be made with care since your grading policy, more than anything else, will be scrutinized, discussed, and, sometimes, contested by your students. Many TAs worry at the beginning about whether they should be a 'hard' grader or a 'soft' one, but, in fact, this is not the question. Rather, TAs should worry (if they must worry about something) about whether or not they grade fairly and consistently. Do not be surprised to find out that fairness is foremost in the students' minds too.

How can a teacher insure fairness in grading? This begins by establishing a clear standard of grading at the beginning of the semester. Students should be told what quantity and quality of work is necessary to get an “A,” “B,” “C,” etc. If the grade will be determined strictly by numerical grades awarded on a series of tests, the student should know how each one will be weighed in the final grade and what material the student must master to achieve the highest grade. The weight of class participation, lab work, attendance, and the possibility of make-up work and exams should be laid out. If a class is to be graded on a curve, the method should be explained to the students at the beginning. This is all part of the contract that a good teacher makes with a class. Remember too that first-year students may need more detailed explanations of grading practices and standards than more advanced students. All students, however, will be less anxious if they feel that the system their teacher uses is fair and sensible.

Remind students that there are certain acceptable standards of written English to which they must comply. Students might argue that it is not fair to penalize them for their writing in classes other than English, since all that really matters are the facts (i.e., what they say, not how they say it). By emphasizing high standards for written English early in the semester, those students with writing problems will be encouraged to seek help. Consequently, reading and grading exams will be a less difficult task for the teacher.

A TA who is grading for another professor must discuss these issues with the professor at the beginning of the semester so that there will be no later misunderstandings. The faculty member and the TA (or TAs) must agree on the grading criterion for that class.
Many teachers tell students at the beginning of the semester that they should feel free to come to them during office hours to discuss grades. If a student does come to you with questions about a grade, listen carefully. Although you may decline to change the grade, you might discover that exam questions were more ambiguous, or essay assignments less clearly defined than you thought.

If students feel that they merited a higher grade on an essay or term paper, you should always offer to reread it. The possibility exists that you did not read as carefully as you should have the first time. Do not be intractable: you are, after all, human and can make mistakes. But do not allow yourself to be manipulated or bullied into giving another grade. Fairness to all your students demands objectivity and equal standards. If you cannot resolve a grade problem with a student, do not allow yourself to get into an argument. Offer to have the appropriate person in the department read the paper, perhaps the course supervisor or the department chair. Know ahead of time the name of the person in your department to whom you can refer these kinds of problems.

A TA should, of course, consult with members of the department to discover that department's special policies on grades. TAs must be clear on the department's policy and develop a system in conformity with it.

Instructors should post grades (using a secure system like SAS Gradebook or the gradebook features in Sakai or Canvas) as soon as possible. Additionally, all instructors should schedule at least one final office hour after the semester ends to allow students to discuss their final grade. Occasionally students will come in to challenge their final grades. If large numbers of students complain, you will need to review your own performance. Listen carefully to each student's complaint and then show the student how you arrived at the grade. Remind students what would have been necessary for a higher grade. If you cannot reconcile a student to his or her grade, he or she must register the concern in writing to the department chair or other appropriate person and to the office of the dean of the faculty offering the course.

The bottom line is that students must be protected from arbitrary or capricious treatment. Be clear on what is expected, fair in evaluation, and articulate in pointing out the pros and cons of any piece of graded work.
**Students' Rights to Privacy**

All students in the university have a basic right to privacy, and it is the responsibility of the instructor to respect and safeguard that privacy. The [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_Educational_Rights_and_Privacy_Act), commonly known as FERPA or the Buckley Amendment, dictates that information about students cannot be released without their express permission. Although this ruling most directly concerns staff members working in offices that deal with academic transcripts, disciplinary records, psychological files, and placement office credential files that contain letters of recommendation, TAs too must take care that student grades, records, and identifiable information are handled in a confidential manner.

**NEVER** discuss one student's grades with another student or with any other person. Of course, you may discuss students with those who have a professional need to know, such as other faculty members involved with that student.

When returning exams or papers, do not allow other students to pick up papers for their absent friends. Return written work only to the student concerned—not even email is a secure way to report grades to students. Remind students that the university is prompt in releasing grades. Students may visit [my.rutgers.edu](http://my.rutgers.edu) to find their grades shortly after the instructor is required to submit them if you—or the faculty member—decided not to also post grades via SAS Gradebook, Sakai, or Canvas.

**The Chalkboard/Whiteboard**

The chalkboard and whiteboard, used with care and forethought, can be valuable classroom aides: to illustrate an argument or demonstration, to outline or organize material, or to work out complicated problems. Instructors should consider how to use the board to its best advantage.

- Start with a clean slate. At the beginning of every class, erase all material from the previous class even if you do not plan to use the board.

- Do not write everything on the board, only the essentials. Clearly label all diagrams, problems, and sections of an outline.
• If your handwriting is difficult to decipher, print slowly and carefully. Come to class a few minutes early if you must, to write out long outlines or assignments.

• Do not stand in front of the board, blocking the students' view. Give them a chance to copy what they need before going on with the lecture.

• After writing the entire equation on the board, turn fully to the class and point out the steps as you describe them.

• Do not erase anything before the end of the class if you can avoid it. Before erasing, ask the students if they have copied everything.

• Although some instructors like to use colored chalks, avoid them unless you are sure that the chalks are visible from the back of the classroom.

**Teachers’ Aids**

The Rutgers Libraries offer workshops introducing students to a research library. This orientation will focus directly on the specific types of material that the students will need for their research projects.

The Language Center contains materials for all languages studied at the university. Their services are available to anyone in the university.

The Learning Centers provide academic support programs for undergraduates. Services include: peer tutoring, study groups, and academic and writing assistance.

The Math and Science Learning Center provide support services to students in introductory math and science courses.

**Helping Yourself**

**TA/Faculty Relations**
Although all programs may not officially designate someone by the title "faculty advisor," they all should designate a person to whom TAs may go with questions or problems. Your assignment as a TA will determine the nature of your relationship with your advisor. If you have been assigned to teach a recitation or lab section, or to grade papers, the faculty member who teaches the lecture section of the class will usually be the person to whom you go with your problems. In courses where there are multiple TAs, it is absolutely necessary to work closely to coordinate class methods and goals—how the class will be shaped, what kinds of exercises and tests will be used—so that each TA’s assignments will be consistent with the rest. If you are a section teacher in a multi-sectioned course, there may be a course coordinator who can help you.

Those TAs teaching single-section upper level courses for which there is no apparent advisor should approach the department chair, who will act as advisor or may recommend another faculty member more knowledgeable about that particular course. Establish a link between yourself, your course, and the department at the beginning of the semester to insure yourself of the assistance you require throughout the semester and to let the department know that you are interested in doing everything possible to make the course a good one. Clearly, your TA assignment will determine how much contact you have with your advisor; some TAs will be fairly independent while others will work very closely with him or her.

By talking to your advisor before the beginning of the semester, clear guidelines about responsibilities can be established. Decisions about testing, grading, content, and division of work may be made at this time. Discussing these issues beforehand eliminates what could develop into serious problems later in the semester. A TA telling the class one thing and the faculty member telling it something different can lead to confusion in the class and tension between the TA and faculty member.

At times, you may find yourself in the middle, between the students and the advisor. Do not feel that you have to relay every critical statement that one makes to the other. This is not your job. However, you should be prepared to act as a liaison when there are serious complaints. The instructor should be informed when a majority of students have what seem to be valid complaints about the way the course is being conducted. A word to the instructor can defuse
what could turn into an explosive situation. Be tactful, of course. No one wants to be told that he or she is a bad teacher.

Constructive criticism from your advisor can help you in your professional development; accept this criticism gracefully and maturely. Course advisors recognize that TAs are apprentice teachers and may benefit from their greater experience. They are a valuable resource which should not be overlooked.

**Graduate Program Administrators**

There are few people in the university who can help you as much on a day to day basis as your graduate program administrator. They are the people who best understand those university procedures through which you will have to wend your way. If you are not sure about something—whom to call, when a deadline falls, or how to get some needed information—in most cases, the graduate program administrator will have the answer or know where to find it. Of course, do not burden the administrators with problems that you can figure out for yourself as most of them already have their hands full, but when you are really at a loss, they will almost certainly steer you in the right direction.

**International TAs**

Most of the problems faced by international TAs are the same as those faced by native-born TAs. However, because international TAs are not only new to Rutgers and to teaching but also to this country, there are some unique concerns that may trouble them, such as language. An international TA may worry that they will not be able to understand their students or that their students will not be able to understand them. This is, of course, a very real concern and one that can lessen only as the TA gains experience as a speaker of English. To hasten the process, TAs should try to immerse themselves in the language by watching videos and television, listening to podcasts and the radio, reading American newspapers and magazines, and, of course, speaking English as often as possible. Seek out native speakers with whom to practice speaking and listening skills.
Be aware of the fact that your accent may be unfamiliar to many of your undergraduates, so you should speak slowly to give them a chance to get used to your accented English. When you introduce yourself on the first day (being sure to write your name on the blackboard/whiteboard), you may wish to tell the students what country you are from and why you are here at Rutgers. Students who understand a little about a person's culture and background are more willing to give that person a chance and make the small exertion necessary to understand an unfamiliar accent.

Let your students know that you care about them and are interested in them. You may wish to explain that you hope the classroom will be a kind of partnership where both parties have something to offer. You look to them for help with correcting any initial difficulties you may have with the language. They can look to you for expertise in the subject you are teaching. Working together, you can both benefit.

Make it clear to the students that you expect them to let you know when they don't understand something you say and promise to do the same for them. If a student asks you a question you do not understand, ask the student to rephrase it. Don't worry that saying you don't understand will compromise your authority; pretending to understand when you clearly do not will do much more to undermine your authority and lose your students' respect. To avoid having students use your accent against you (i.e., telling you that they misunderstood you, so they did not complete their homework or study for a test—do not worry, very few students will do things like this) your syllabus should list all assignments.

During the first few weeks at least, pause often to ask students if they are following you, if they have any questions, and wait for an answer. Let them know that you really do want them to tell you when they are having difficulties. Make sure that during your lectures you write all key words on the board (or use PowerPoint or similar presentation software) so that you are sure the students are understanding them correctly.

American students may seem very different from students in other countries. International TAs are sometimes shocked at first by what they perceive as a lack of respect toward them as teachers. Understanding some of the differences in American students may help to alleviate this shock. One way of doing so would be by sitting in on some undergraduate courses in the
An important part of TA work is attending any required orientation at your university during your first weeks as a TA. This will allow you to see the varieties of accepted classroom behavior and the kinds of student/teacher relationships common in this country.

In the United States, students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some of your students may be older than you expect; many will be holding part-time, or even full-time, jobs. The dress and manner of your students may be quite casual; do not interpret this as a sign of disrespect. Classrooms are sometimes quite informal. American students will often question or even disagree with something the teacher says. This is accepted classroom behavior and is not meant hostiley or as a challenge to the teacher's authority; the class is perceived as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

**Workload Management**

Class preparation, grading, and your own graduate work will all place competing demands on your time. To avoid a crisis situation, draw up some general rules at the beginning of the semester. You may not always be able to keep them, but you should try to adopt them as general guides.

Remember your own graduate work. Your first responsibility at the university is your graduate work, and, thinking practically, you must realize that the assistantship is dependent upon successful completion of your own courses.

Do not let work pile up. When you receive a set of papers to be graded, don't toss them into a corner until the time comes when you can do them all at once—that time will never come. Instead, calculate how many papers you would have to read every day in order to return them within a reasonable time (perhaps one week), and then find that much time.

Be ready to ask for help. If, as the semester progresses, you find yourself consistently behind in both your graduate work and your teaching, it is time to reassess your methods. Speak to your faculty advisor about your problems.

Stephanie Donato, a career development and placement specialist, offers the following helpful hints:

- Rank all tasks in their order of importance. This will give you a realistic perspective on the tasks you face;
• Make an outline of all deadlines you must meet before the end of the semester. This relieves pressure; rather than worrying about all of the deadlines, you can focus more sharply on the imminent ones;

• Enter all tasks and deadlines in a calendar and flag them;

• Set a reminder for two weeks before each deadline;

• Make a daily "to-do" list. Every day, before you begin your work, look at this list. Handle the most critical tasks first;

Teaching Evaluations

A good idea for all instructors is an evaluation during the first third or half of the term. Waiting until the end of the semester for an evaluation of your teaching performance is to put your students at risk. What the students say on the final evaluation or how they do on their final exam or paper may permit you to draw some conclusions about your teaching, but if the conclusion is that your teaching was ineffective, it is certainly too late to repair the damage.

It is generally useful to have students' opinions about your teaching as the semester unfolds. Consider preparing your own evaluation form, or using or modifying TAP's mid-semester evaluation form, to give to the students during the first third or half of the semester.

Do not view evaluations as an intrusion or a punishment but as a means to enable you to become a better teacher. A single comment should not be given too much weight, but several that focus on the same issue should be given serious thought. Negative comments can be a means of helping you to become a better teacher.

The Teaching Portfolio

An increasing number of colleges and universities are using teaching portfolios to help them make hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. A teaching portfolio provides a profile of you as a teacher. It is a solid collection of evidence detailing the effectiveness of your teaching and
reflections on that evidence. It can also help you apply for teaching awards and research grants as well as assist faculty members write reference letters for you, as they will be able to read exactly how and why you've been teaching and tailor their reference letters accordingly.

For every course you teach, you should take notes that describe the course, how you taught it, and why you taught it the way you did. Gather syllabi, copies of any assignments you created, including exams and paper topics, and any materials you created. Your portfolio should also include evaluations of your teaching. In addition to student ratings or evaluations, you can ask a faculty member to observe your teaching and write an evaluation.

If you attend a workshop, take a course related to teaching, or participate in any other activities to improve your pedagogical skills (such as a TAP workshop or seminar), document it in your portfolio. Evidence of an interest in teaching and efforts to develop your teaching skills may make you stand out as a job candidate.

**Other Considerations**

**Non-traditional Students**

The non-traditional student, often an older student with a career or a family, or both, has become a strong presence on American university campuses over the last several decades. Non-traditional students must meet the same standards as all students, but, often, because they are only attending part-time, they will take more time to complete their degree requirements. Unlike the lives of many 'traditional' Rutgers students, those of non-traditional students will probably not be centered around the university. Their schoolwork is important to them, but they are equally committed to their jobs and families. This is not to suggest that they are less interested in their education; for the most part, they are dedicated and demanding students, often more actively involved in their education than other students. Many of these students have responsible jobs that have accustomed them to carrying out assignments independently. This experience may make them more demanding as students, less tolerant of wasted class time, poorly-prepared lectures, and careless grading. Changing requirements, policies, or due dates mid-semester, while never a good idea, could cause severe hardships for these students
whose time is necessarily carefully budgeted. Always be clear about requirements, whether work is voluntary or required, extra or no credit.

Your policies on deadlines and attendance may have to be more flexible than is usual. A student may have to travel occasionally for her job. A sick child may prevent another from completing his paper. All the work, of course, must be completed, but deadlines should not be totally inflexible.

**Student Athletes**

Some of your students will be committed to one or more varsity sports or in the band or on the cheerleading squad. Because travel is often involved in such activities, these students may sometimes have to miss class or even an exam. One of your responsibilities as a teacher is to ensure that these activities are not allowed to interfere with the progress the students make toward a degree.

As most people are aware, there have been some notable scandals in college athletics over the past several years—student athletes exempted from normal college requirements, teachers pressured to alter grades or lighten coursework, etc. Students who participate in such programs at Rutgers understand that they must meet certain academic standards, or they lose eligibility.

Students who are involved in a sport at the university should inform you of this at the beginning of the semester and give you their travel schedule. If there will be serious conflicts over the semester, it is best to discuss how to resolve them at the very beginning. Approximately a week before each trip, the student will bring you a letter, signed by the coach and an athletic academic advisor, to remind you of the upcoming absence. Students who tell you that they are unable to attend class but fail to produce such letters should not be officially excused. A NCAA regulation says that students may not miss class for practice, only for official games.

Student athletes are responsible for making contact with their instructors as soon as they return from a trip. Although they have been excused from class, they are still responsible for finding out what went on in the class and completing the assignments. If a student athlete in your class seems to be having a difficult time keeping up, be sure to speak to the student. Given
the often difficult schedule of classes, practices, and games, it is not surprising that some students may need some extra help.

**Students with Disabilities**

Any institution that receives federal funding must make its programs accessible to those with disabilities. You, as an instructor at Rutgers, have a responsibility to see that the rights of these students are not violated.

Some TAs may feel uncomfortable at first with a disabled student because they have never had contact with a person with a disability. Once they have a disabled student in their class they will realize that in nearly all respects they are just like the other students. Be careful to treat these students fairly: neither avoid them nor single them out for special treatment.

Remember that while in some cases the student's disability will be obvious, in many others you will never know about it unless the student tells you. Make it easy for a student to tell you. At the beginning of the semester, make a general announcement inviting students to come to your office or to speak with you privately after class about any questions or problems they may foresee in your course.

As a member of your class, the disabled student should be held responsible for the same material as the others. You may and should, however, make any reasonable accommodations you can to assist the student in completing the course requirements.

What kinds of assistance or accommodation should you expect to arrange? This will vary according to the student and should be determined and confirmed by the Office of Disability Services. All disabled students have a coordinator to assist them in securing the proper accommodations. For students who have not yet met with their coordinator, they should be directed to the Office of Disability Services and their coordinator to secure the proper documentation.

After meeting with the student, the disability coordinator will write to you verifying that the student has a disability and describing the necessary accommodations. A student with a hearing problem may simply ask you to reserve a desk near the front of the classroom. Some students may need to record lectures or to have a scribe take notes for them. Others may require longer
times for exams or labs. By working together—you, the student, and the coordinator—a solution will be found that works best for all involved.

**Difficult Students**

New TAs will soon discover that, for the most part, Rutgers undergraduates are hard-working, courteous, and well-behaved. Occasionally, however, instructors will find themselves faced with a student whose behavior threatens to at least sidetrack if not disrupt the course entirely. Taking swift and firm action early on, before your authority is seriously compromised, is the best policy for all concerned. Being able to identify problems before they escalate will help you to maintain control of the class and the materials being presented.

Prevention is always better than cure. Establish certain standards at the beginning of the semester, adhere to them as the course goes on, and many problems can be averted. Explain to your students on the first day that attentiveness and participation are required. (Although most students understand this without being told, a brief discussion of expectations at the beginning of the semester leaves you standing on firmer ground if problems do develop.) Make it clear that students are not only expected to attend class but to be there mentally. Browsing the web, listening to music, texting, chatting with classmates, shouting out comments, doing homework for other classes are activities that disturb others and signal a disregard for classmates. Again, setting these ground rules will not guarantee a problem-free class, but they discourage some kinds of behavior before they begin.

Perhaps the most common problem a teacher faces is the student who, for any variety of reasons, feels the need to monopolize class discussions or to blurt out answers before anyone else has a chance to respond. These students inhibit the quieter students, dampen the enthusiasm of the less shy, and cause resentment and anger against themselves and the teacher who allows them to dominate the class.

One such student is the very bright student, who usually sits near the front of the classroom where it is easiest to make eye contact with the teacher. What this student contributes to the class is generally worthwhile, but the student soon begins to dominate the discussions. At the beginning of the semester at least, the student is often implicitly encouraged in this behavior
both by the other students and the teacher. The other students in the class are relieved that they do not have to respond because they know that this vocal student will; the instructor—especially the new and nervous instructor—will be happy that someone is responding, that questions do not fall flat upon a wall of silence.

Soon, however, problems may develop. Students will never become wholly engaged in the materials if they feel that the class is a dialogue between the teacher and one or two students. They will soon resent the fact that the course focuses upon a single student rather than on the class, and this resentment can easily turn into hostility. Because there is no necessity for responding, other students will invest less time in the class, often coming unprepared, thus excluding themselves from any chance of future participation. The end result is a class which is disengaged, a course which lacks the depth that it could have derived from a full range of student responses, and a teacher whose class has failed to excite the students.

From the beginning of the semester, a teacher must work hard to engage all students. Give the students a minute or two to formulate an answer after asking a question. Do not be afraid of silence. Look around the entire class, making eye contact with as many students as possible, to let them know that they are visible and valuable members of the class. Call on students who have not raised their hands. If they are unable to answer the first time that you do this, almost certainly they will be better prepared the second time. If a student gives an incorrect or vague answer, work with this student awhile; do not merely pass on quickly to the dominating student from whom you know you can get the desired response. The dominating student should certainly not be ignored, but others must also be given the opportunity and the encouragement to participate.

If, in spite of these precautions, the student continues to monopolize the class, take the student aside after class. Explain that although you recognize the value of the student's contributions and the depth of the student's knowledge in the subject, you also see the value of involving the whole class in the learning process. You may wish to involve this student in your attempts to make the rest of the class more responsive. Many bright students readily acknowledge their own over-eagerness and are willing to give the other students in class an
opportunity to respond before they do, especially if their teachers make it clear that they appreciate the student's ability and intelligence.

If a student interrupts others or shouts out the answer without waiting to be called on, make it clear immediately that this behavior is not acceptable. Even in a class discussion, where spontaneity is desirable, students should recognize the rights of others and treat them with courtesy. A discussion should never turn into a free-for-all, and you, the instructor, should act as moderator of the debates, exercising some control over the students, directing the discussion and its participants.

A related problem is the student who is forever volunteering answers that do not really respond to the questions you have asked or that tend to move the class away from the topic under discussion. This is not to say that there is only one answer to any question, but that some students have learned in high school that the best way to get high grades is by bluffing their way through a class. Rather than discussing the text or the issue under consideration (about which they often know very little), the student will relate long stories based on personal experiences or introduce material from another class, neither of which have relevance to the topic at hand. The result is to get the class off track and cause a carefully planned syllabus to fly out the window.

It is always preferable to try to avoid this situation in the first place, by formulating questions carefully in class so that students are forced to relate the answer to the text or the matter under discussion. If the student ignores your pointed question, as such students often do, ask the student to relate the answer to the question more specifically. If the student is unable to do this, you should ask him or her a direct question about class preparation: “Have you read the text?” or “Have you worked out all the steps of the solution?” If not, suggest that the student see you after class and at that time you should kindly, yet firmly, explain the inappropriateness of that student’s responses and the necessity of paying attention to the assignments and class focus. When once informed point-blank that bluffing is not useful, the student will usually stop this behavior.

Another problem is the genuinely disruptive student. You will sometimes encounter students who sit together (usually in one of the back corners of the classroom) and talk and
laugh throughout class. Directing a pointed comment at this group may remind them of the expected behavior. "Did you wish to add something to the discussion, Mr. X?" will let them know that their behavior has been observed and that they are not behaving in an acceptable manner. You should also speak to them after class, individually whenever possible. If you wish, you can ask that they no longer sit together during your class. Most students will not persist in this kind of behavior once you have very clearly let them know that you will not allow it.

Other students may signal their lack of interest in the class by browsing the web, texting, or doing homework. Try to catch the eye of these students, letting them know in a non-verbal way that you do not approve of their behavior. Or, if the students are so engrossed in the activity that you cannot catch their eyes, ask a direct question of these inattentive students, and they will certainly not be able to answer. Often this is enough to discourage such behavior. If this doesn’t work, however, ask them to stop at once and tell them to see you after class. Do not ignore these students for to do so only encourages others to participate in this kind of behavior.

Students who make offensive remarks in the classroom must be informed at once that their behavior is unacceptable. Make it very clear from the beginning of the semester that this can never be tolerated in a university classroom. Sexist, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic remarks should be confronted on the spot. If the student seems genuinely not to understand the problem, explain why the remark is unacceptable. But if the student clearly means to offend, you should respond sternly and quickly. If, after being spoken to, the student persists in such behavior, you may have to appeal to the dean's office of that student’s particular school for further action (see Our Common Purposes).

In most situations, however, the basic rule is not to embarrass the student in class. Embarrassment does little to help change the student's behavior and may inhibit the other members of the class from contributing. Never let a student feel 'put down' as this intimidates and usually turns off future participation.

**Academic Integrity**

No student should be allowed an unfair advantage through the use of dishonest methods. Examples of academic dishonesty cover a wide range of behaviors, including:
homework, plagiarizing, buying term papers, and cheating on exams. Some students are fully aware they are cheating, while others may not identify their actions as such. Some teachers deny that their students cheat because it seems to be a personal affront, and some realize that students do cheat, indeed even suspect certain students of cheating, but refuse to act upon their suspicions. They may worry about causing the student irreparable damage, of ruining the student’s life, or they may just wish to avoid an unpleasant scene, or the process involved in going through a university hearing. So, for whatever reason, they remain silent, but to remain silent is to participate in the student’s dishonesty.

Before the semester begins, instructors should read the Academic Integrity Policy, and at the beginning of the semester, spend a few minutes talking about academic integrity with their students. Reading aloud from the university policy on academic integrity is often a sobering experience, for the students learn that the teacher is obligated to report all violations for investigation. Explain very carefully that plagiarism does not merely mean copying someone's words without properly crediting them but copying their ideas also. Many students have a limited idea of what constitutes plagiarism. Correct this misperception. Set limits for your students on the first day of the semester. Explain the meaning of group work and where and when it is appropriate.

The research paper can be an opportunity for students to become familiar with the process of original scholarship, or it can be an occasion for dishonesty. Everyone by now is familiar with the term-paper mills (if you are not, do an online search for "term paper") where a student can buy a paper. Some suggestions for prevention follow.

- Take time to develop a good topic. Set very definite parameters to the assignment.
- Don't use the same essay topics every semester.
- If practical, insist that the students hand in outlines and working bibliographies.
- If possible, meet with the students before they hand in their thesis statements. Discuss the papers they plan to write. Make recommendations of sources for the papers. Tell
students that they may be expected to discuss their papers and its sources at a later meeting.

If you suspect that a student has cut and pasted parts of a paper you need to follow through on your suspicions. When particular phrases strike you as unusual, for example, (they sound overly polished or technical or academic), do an Internet search on it. You may also want to search Amazon or Google Books or to use turnitin.com (available through Sakai). Whatever you do, document your searches, writing down or book-marking the relevant URLs and keeping screenshots or printing out pages which contain matching text.

If the paper, as a whole, doesn't quite conform to your assignment or in some way seems suspicious to you (too many sources, sources that you don't trust, footnotes which don't seem to go with the text, a complete lack of footnotes), the student may have acquired the entire paper online, either from a free site or from a paper mill which sells term papers. For more tips, visit Plagiarism and Anti-Plagiarism by Professor Heyward Ehrlich.

If you cannot pinpoint the author, but you still have serious doubts about the paper's source, speak to the student. You might ask some specific questions about the paper, what the student means by certain words and phrases, or ask questions about some of the sources cited. Do not accuse the student directly of cheating. Explore the situation with such questions as "I was interested in your statement . . .?" or "I don't understand how . . .?" or "Can you tell me how you came to this conclusion?" etc. In the absence of a satisfactory response, you are left with no alternative but to refer the matter for review.

Likewise, make it difficult for students to cheat on exams.

• Don't use the same exams every semester.

• Give the students multiple small tests and papers rather than one or two large ones.

• If possible, use short answer or essay exams rather than relying solely on true/false or multiple-choice questions. If you do use multiple choice or true/false, make several different versions of the exam, with the order of the questions scrambled. Printing the exams on different colors of paper also helps.
• On the day of the exam, ask the students to seat themselves in alternate seats and rows so they will not be tempted to cheat.

• If the exam is held in a large, crowded classroom, make sure there are enough proctors. Some departments will hire them for you—ask your graduate program administrator or advisor.

• Walk around the classroom during the exam. If you sit down, do so in the back of the room.

• If you see a student cheating during the exam, take action immediately. A student who seems to be trying to look at another student's paper may be stopped with a meaningful look. If the student continues to look, insist that the student move to another part of the room.

If you do find evidence that a student has engaged in plagiarism or any other form of cheating, don't take action on your own, like failing the student or tearing up his or her paper. Following university procedures protects you and ensures fairness for your students. Make sure you speak with your department chair.

**Information Literacy**

Depending on the topic and your goals for the class you should discuss strategies for identifying reliable Internet sources with your students. Make sure students understand that the information they find online probably hasn't gone through a filtering process like editing or peer review. Let students know that they need to ask the following kinds of questions to begin to evaluate information they find online:

• Who is the author and what are their credentials?
• Does any institution (corporation, organization, university, government body, etc.) support this website?

• Does the institution exercise quality control over the content?

• How might the content of the website be biased by the author's affiliation with the supporting institution?

• When was the content created, and how recently was it updated?

• What is the apparent purpose of the information (to persuade, inform, entertain)?

• Who is the intended audience?

Troubled Students

For a variety of reasons, students often confide in TAs during personal crises. Listen to your students. Keep the lines of communications open. Even if the problems of the students seem trivial to you, do not treat them lightly. Remember that many of your students are living on their own for the first time and trying to cope with increased academic and social demands. Your compassion and understanding could make a big difference in their lives.

Some students won't come directly and ask for assistance but may send you signals about their difficulties in other ways. There are a number of signs which can alert you to the fact that a student may be in distress. These include:

• Marked decline in quality of course work or class participation;

• Increased absence from class or failure to turn in work;

• Prolonged depression, suggested by a sad expression, apathy, weight loss or gain, sleeping difficulty and tearfulness;

• Nervousness, agitation, excessive worry, irritability, aggressiveness or nonstop talking;
• Bizarre, strange behavior or speech;

• Extreme dependency on faculty or staff, including spending much of their spare time visiting during office hours or at other times;

• Marked change in personal hygiene;

• Talk of suicide, either directly or indirectly such as, "I won't be around to take that exam anyway" or "I'm not worried about getting a job, I won't need one."

• Comments in a student's paper that arouse concern.

If you are unsure about the severity of the student's problem, or the steps which should be taken, contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) or Senior Associate Dean Barbara Bender (barbara.bender@rutgers.edu or 848-932-7747. Always remember that you are not a licensed counselor or psychologist, so the extent to which you can directly help students may be limited.

Never try to force a student to go to counseling. Inevitably, this is counterproductive. Encourage the students in whatever way you can and let them know that you are concerned and willing to help, but do not try to strong-arm them. Too much pressure will make them retreat, perhaps cutting them off from their only avenue of assistance. If, however, you suspect the student will harm themselves or others, you should contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) immediately or call 911. They will be able to guide you through the process of making sure the student and their classmates are protected.

Undergraduates are not, of course, the only people subject to depression and anxiety; graduate students are just as likely to suffer from these problems. Instructors should acknowledge the fact that they are human and may sometimes need help. They should also recognize the fact that their unique position in the university—both teacher and student—produces special problems. There is no need to wait until the pressure is unbearable. The sooner you seek help—for yourself or your student—the better.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) provides personal counseling and psychological services for students at Rutgers. All university students, including those in the graduate and professional schools at Rutgers, are eligible for this free and confidential service.
Matters involving counseling are kept strictly confidential. No information about a student is released without the student's permission, not even the fact that he or she consulted a counselor. No record of his or her visit to the Counseling Center is retained on permanent university records, so it cannot appear on a transcript or any official record.

Our Common Purposes

Most of us recognize the need to exhibit sensitivity to our students and colleagues on very delicate subjects. We would not make jokes in class about serious matters like religion or death; neither would we make personal remarks about someone's physical appearance. In general, we try to treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated, with sensitivity and respect.

Since many TAs are still taking courses, they are able to empathize with their students as students, to understand what it feels like to be on the other side of the desk. But treating students as you would like to be treated does not necessarily mean that you should assume that they are all exactly like you. In fact, it is vital that you recognize, acknowledge, and respect each student's individuality. A thoughtless joke or a careless word can cause discomfort, even pain, to someone in your class. Be aware of the power you have to wound others and guard against doing so.

Students must also be held to the same standard of behavior, and one of the responsibilities of the TA is to help students understand this—it is a necessary part of their education. A large number of Rutgers students are from New Jersey and have little experience with people outside of their own race or ethnic group. Others have come from countries where cultural attitudes are radically different. Lack of experience, however, does not excuse intolerance. As TAs we must address problems when they arise, to help our students learn to understand and accept people who are different. Education should be a process which opens the students up to a wider range of experiences and possibilities, not one which narrows or hardens old attitudes and prejudices.

Perhaps the most important point is that the TA should always treat the students with respect and try to be sensitive to their individual needs. Placing a student in an uncomfortable position either through words or actions is unnecessary and cruel. Understand that the
relationship between a student and a teacher is a professional one; respect that bond and refuse to exploit it.