Last Details

It's that time again: the end of the semester, a stressful period for both students and faculty. Students are worried about their papers, finals, and grades. They are distracted, anxious about getting a summer job, concerned about spending the summer back home after nine months of "freedom" on campus, sad to be leaving their friends. This is not an easy time for anyone, so TAs should try, in whatever ways they can, to help their students, to ease the end of semester stress. TAs have their own problems, of course. They are suddenly facing as many, if not more, deadlines than their students, and, suddenly, students seem to come out of the woodwork with problems that only the TA can handle. TAs should be prepared for these inevitable end of semester problems because it is better for all if they are resolved quickly and finally.

Extra Credit: Do not be surprised when students who did not put much effort into the course all semester suddenly start flocking to your office to ask to be allowed to do some additional assignments for extra credit. Before you give in to their tearful pleas, however, you must ask yourself whether or not it would be fair to the other students in the class to allow one or two students to bring up their grades in this way. (Realistically, students who are doing poorly in the class will probably not do much better on the extra work either; they may be better advised to put the extra effort into a class where it will really count.) If you decide to give the students the opportunity to bring up their grades, also consider the burden of extra work on yourself. Will you have time to review and grade these extra assignments? Although one extra assignment may not seem like much, once you allow one student this privilege you risk appearing biased if you do not permit all of the others to do the same.

Make-up Exams: Inevitably, one or more students will miss a final exam. Your policy on make-up exams should be very clear to your students by now (it would be well to put this information on your syllabus at the beginning of the semester and to repeat this information before every exam). If you have articulated no policy, you should be prepared to face certain problems. Unless you wish

Almost everyone experiences a sense of relief that the school year has ended—students, faculty, administrators, and, of course, TAs. Even though most graduate students still have to work, life just seems to ease up a bit in the summer. The immediate and simultaneous pressures of deadlines, classes, and teaching give way to a sense (perhaps false and inevitably temporary) that things are not as urgent, not as pressing, as they seemed yesterday. Suddenly there is time to see the movie, read the novel, or take the hike that was so impossible just a short while ago.

For serious graduate students, of course, the summer is never all play. People must still work to support themselves. Qualifying exams and dissertations may be out of sight but are never out of mind; the work must continue, perhaps even at an accelerated pace because other responsibilities have receded for a while. The opportunity to devote oneself wholeheartedly, uninterrupted, to such work, however, is not usually seen as a chore, and it offers rewards often unavailable during the school year.
to be administering exams until the day that grades are due, or, for that matter, throughout the next semester, you must have certain rules about make-ups. Preparing a new exam for one or two students extra work for you, so do not think that it is mean to require some extra effort on their part by making them provide you with some evidence of their illness or bereavement. If the student is unable to produce such documentation, you are not obligated to provide the student with a make-up exam. In many cases, the student’s dean will notify you of a problem.

**Grade Challenges:** Once you have handed in your grades, you owe it to your students to make yourself available to speak to them about the final exam or grade if they desire. At the last class, announce a day and time when you will be in your office for students to come and see you. Announce it again on the day of the final exam. Then be in your office to meet with all those students who show up. During these hours, the main rule is never to argue with your students. Have your grade book and their exam or final paper on hand, and be prepared to listen. Occasionally, a teacher will make an error in determining the grade, and, if this has occurred, the teacher is obligated to change the grade. You should not, however, allow students to blackmail you emotionally: tears and explanations should be dealt with sympathetically, caring, fairly, but, quite frankly, it is just too late for excuses. The student who will not get into law school because of the grade they've earned should have been more concerned early in the semester, should have come to you for help when you were still able to give some assistance. TAs must uphold the standards they have set for their students: this is the only fair way.

**Academic Dishonesty:** This is the time of year when the temptation is strongest for students to cheat. They feel overworked, underappreciated, and desperate. TAs should not gloss over violations of academic integrity because they are too busy at this time of year to pursue them. To allow such episodes to pass by unremarked is to encourage the student to continue in his/her dishonest way and to deprive other students of fair competition. Take precautions against cheating, but if it occurs, do not ignore it.

Summer...

For the serious teacher, too, the summer break is not a time of total neglect and abandonment. As teachers, graduate students should take advantage of the summer months to refresh themselves from the overload of the semester, to recharge themselves for the fall. Although some TAs may be teaching over the summer, the course load is never as heavy as during the school year. Summer is a good time to step back, to review, to plan.

Although most TAs consider themselves good teachers, surprisingly few feel the need to actively educate themselves about teaching. Unless TAs have taken education courses, it is not very likely that they will have read many books about teaching. This, however, can be a loss both to their students and to the teacher.

As professionals, teachers have an obligation to make sure that their students learn. Part of good teaching is instinctive, of course, but there are always

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**TapTalk** is a monthly newsletter produced by the Teaching Assistant Project (TAP), Graduate School, New Brunswick. Letters and suggestions for articles should be directed to the editor:

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**SummerTime IS A GOOD TIME TO HAVE YOUR CLASS VIDEOTAPEd.**

**To Schedule an Appointment, Call Beth GrieCh 932-7034**
In the Programs

On Wednesday, April 15th, the Graduate Program in Economics held a roundtable lunchtime discussion with Professors Michael Taussig and Gary Gigliotti, on "The End of the Semester: the Perils and Pitfalls." The discussion was followed by a question and answer session.

TA Conference

The fourth annual Teaching Assistant Orientation will be held on August 27, 1992. This orientation is for all newly-appointed TAs on the New Brunswick campuses, so TAs who were first appointed for the spring 1992 semester or the fall 1992 semester will soon receive an announcement in the mail.

An effort has been made in planning this year's conference to include more workshops for experienced teachers. Among the offerings for experienced TAs will be "Getting Your Students the Help They Need," "Creative Teaching in the Humanities," "Creative Teaching in the Physical Sciences," and "Advanced Classroom Techniques." Experienced TAs who would like to attend one of these workshops or the entire conference may contact Beth Griech at 932-7034.

On the Undergrads

College is an exciting time for most undergraduates. They are permitted a new freedom in the way they live, a stronger voice in the decisions that will determine their future. Along with this perception of self-empowerment comes a heightened sense of responsibility: successes and failures become more their own. While most students accept, even thrive, under these new conditions, some are less ready to deal with the burden of responsibilities and may need some assistance in getting through the school year.

Final exam period seems to magnify all problems. Students may become depressed and discouraged, overwhelmed by all the work that remains to be done. They blame themselves (sometimes justly) for not working harder during the semester, and pull all-nighters trying to catch up. For most students, these few weeks of stress do little damage, and can be, in fact, a learning experience for them. For others, however, the extra stress adds up to too much stress, and they may need some help to make it through these final weeks.

TAs should be on the alert for students who seem to be having difficulties in handling the semester, who seem overwhelmed by problems. Some students may come to you for assistance; others may send non-verbal signals that they need help. Among the signs that may indicate a serious problem: a marked decline in the student's performance or increased absences; prolonged depression, indicated by a sad expression, tears, apathy, change in physical appearance; nervousness, agitation, excessive worry, irritability, aggressiveness or non-stop talking; bizarre, strange behavior or speech; extreme dependency on faculty or staff; marked change in personal hygiene; talk of suicide; comments in a paper that arouse concern.

If a student confides in you or if you suspect a problem, the best course of action is to contact the Counseling Center. Trained counselors are the only ones who can determine whether there is a problem, how serious it is, and how best to deal with it. Leave this to the experts. A TA's responsibility is to be sensitive enough to the students to discover such problems when they exist and then to get the student the help that s/he needs.

Have a great summer!
Summer . . .
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things to be learned, new ways of seeing or doing things. In addition, you gain confidence when experts in a field make recommendations that you have already intuitively put into practice.

Decide this summer that you will do one thing to make yourself a better teacher next year: read a book about teaching, about undergraduates, about ways of learning; rethink your teaching plan for a course; go to the library to read the journals, to find out how experts in your field approach certain topics. Most of all, enjoy the uncommon luxury of time to read and think!

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**TA Helpline**
**On-call all summer**
**932-11TA**
**Monday-Friday between the hours of 8:30-4:30**

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**Coming Events**

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<td>End of spring term.</td>
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<td>Last day for final roster submission.</td>
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<td>May 21</td>
<td>226th commencement</td>
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<td>May 26</td>
<td>First term summer session begins</td>
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<td>June 22</td>
<td>Second term summer session begins</td>
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<td>July 6</td>
<td>Third term summer session begins</td>
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<td>Fall semester begins</td>
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