

## Will we be tested on this?

Although this question may exasperate teachers, from the students' point of view it is a legitimate one: after all, the most important material covered in class *should* be on the test. Unless exams reflect the principal facts, concepts, and theories of the class, the test is simply not a valid one. Teachers who understand the potential advantages and the necessary limits of testing, and can convey this understanding to their students, will make test-taking a more positive, less stressful situation for their students.

Too many students perceive testing and grading as a necessary evil, with little relationship to anything but their grade point average. They seem to have struck a silent bargain with the teacher: they will do a minimal amount of work--attend class, take notes, complete assignments, and take the exams--and the teacher will give tests that faithfully mirror the work they have done so that they will receive a passing grade. When both sides carry out their side of the agreement, it is not, perhaps, such a bad bargain. A good teacher, however, will see that the students get more than they bargained for, will use testing not just to evaluate students' ability to rehash what has been covered in class but to increase students' learning and to motivate them to work harder. A well-designed test also helps teachers to evaluate and strengthen their own teaching skills.

Of course, not all tests measure the same things. What the test is designed to measure--basic knowledge, analysis or application of facts, the ability to synthesize disparate information, etc.--depends primarily on the goals of the class. It also depends, however, to a greater or lesser degree, on such factors as the level of students in the class, the time allowed for the test, and even the number of students in the class. Testing for basic knowledge (i.e., dates, formulae, steps in a process) elicits the most rudimentary responses and is the least demanding form of learning; students merely memorize and regurgitate. Test questions that cover a range of responses--some asking for basic facts, some seeking an interpretation of the facts, and some requiring expanding upon or relating basic facts to other topics--inform teachers not just what information the students know but, more significant in terms of

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## Library Schedules Computer Workshops

TAs who can assist their students in using the library efficiently will be giving their students a skill that will help them throughout their university career and beyond. Many TAs, however, when faced with the variety of electronic information resources that now exist feel overwhelmed and doubt their ability to help their students. TAs can overcome such insecurities by enrolling in one of the many workshops that the libraries offer each semester to introduce members of the university community to their latest resources. Two such workshops will be offered several times this semester.

"The Rutgers Connection" focuses on *IRIS* (Rutgers online catalog), *Innopac* (books that are on order for Rutgers and what journal issues have been received recently) and *UnCover* (tables of contents of over 16,000 journals in every subject area). The dates and library locations for this workshop are:

Thurs. Nov. 4, 10a.m.-12noon  
(TBA)

Mon. Nov. 8, 5p.m.-6:30p.m.  
Kilmer Library

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true learning, how they can use those facts to solve more complicated problems, to further their knowledge of related, more abstract issues.

Tests sometimes reveal what may not be evident in class. In large lecture sections, for example, it may be difficult to gauge the depth of the students' understanding. If a test demonstrates that students are merely remembering facts and not thinking much beyond that, the teacher may wish to reconsider the way the class is being taught, to try to find ways to stimulate the students into more active engagement with the basic material. If a number of students have difficulty with a specific problem or display a common misperception, a review of that lesson may be needed before continuing on with other material.

Although teachers dream of students who have a genuine desire to learn and are motivated by a love of knowledge, the reality of the situation is

that most students are motivated by grades. Tests that challenge the students *in a fair manner* are tests that are based on what the student has learned in class but ask the student to demonstrate an understanding of the implications of that knowledge, to show that they have processed the information, not merely retained it. By giving a reasonable number of tests over the semester, teachers are providing the students with a regular motivation to study; in addition, the greater the number of tests and written assignments, the greater the likelihood that a teacher gets an accurate picture of the students' abilities.

Take time in class to prepare the students for tests by showing them ways of applying and developing what they have learned; encourage them to be creative. Give practice questions for them to take home and try to solve; in the next class, give them a page with several ways of answering the question, so they will see what constitutes a fair, a good, and an excellent answer.

Grade the papers in a way that helps students learn from their mistakes. Do not just put a numerical value next to the answer; give some indication of what students could have done to improve their grades. If students are to learn from their exams, it is essential that they are given quick feedback. The

sooner exams are returned the more likely the students will pay attention to the comments. Their grade tells them whether their notetaking and studying has been effective; the comments you provide tell them exactly where their methods have succeeded or failed.

## Library Workshops

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Mon. Nov. 15, 1p.m.-3p.m.  
(TBA)

Mon. Dec. 6, 3:30 p.m.-5p.m.  
Library of Science & Medicine

A second series of workshops will introduce users to *Eureka* software, which allows searching in RLIN's bibliographic database for books and other materials. Users may search for articles in *Periodical Abstracts*, *Newspaper Abstracts*, and *ABI/Inform* (a business database), with available article delivery. These workshops will be held:

Thurs. Nov. 11, 3:30p.m.-5p.m.  
Alexander Library  
Weds. Nov. 17, 3p.m.-4:30p.m.  
Douglass Library  
Thurs. Dec. 2, 3:30p.m.-5p.m.  
Kilmer Library

Reservations are required for all workshops where the locations are to be announced (TBA) and are strongly recommended for the others. For reservations, call Bobbi Loeb, Libraries Central Administration, Alexander Library, 908-932-7505, or send e-mail to loeb@zodiac.rutgers.edu.

*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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(908) 932-7034

# IN THE PROGRAMS

The Philosophy program has instituted a comprehensive training program for its TAs. The main features of the program are:

- A seminar for TAs conducted by the supervisor of TAs to discuss teaching techniques, problems that arise, etc.
- Class visitations and evaluations of TA teaching. These evaluations are entered into the students' records and provide useful evidence of teaching experience when TAs apply for jobs.
- An apprenticeship program in which students without previous teaching experience apprentice to faculty in a course that the TA is likely to teach.

## TA Helpline Call

**932-11TA**

Monday-Friday  
between  
the hours  
of  
8:30-4:30

# NOTES ON THE UNDERGRADS

## FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

Because TAs teach so many introductory classes, they often have more contact with first year students than other faculty. Especially during the first semester, TAs should try to be sensitive to the special problems of first year students.

Many of these students have just graduated from high school, and making the adjustment to college life may be very difficult for them: they are experiencing their first taste of independence--from family constraints, from high school regimens--and may have trouble at first in achieving a balance in their lives. They may be tempted to stay out too late at night and miss classes, or to cut classes just because no one is keeping track. A quiet warning may be sufficient to get some of these students back on track; for others, mid-semester exams are a sobering experience that effectively help them to refocus.









Other students may have more serious problems. Students who did not develop good study skills in high school may feel overwhelmed by the amount of homework and underprepared for the quality of work they are expected to produce, on their own, in college. They may not know where to go for help. Conscientious TAs will inform

their students about the availability of tutoring for students in their classes and encourage them to get the help they need; if no formal assistance exists, teachers can work with students to organize study groups.

First year students may also not know where to get help with personal problems. Students who are depressed or having difficulties in adjusting to their roommates or their new lives may need counseling. TAs should know the services that are available, so if a troubled student comes to them they will be able to insure that the student will get the appropriate assistance. TAs are not counselors and should never try to solve the non-academic problems of their students; other more qualified people are ready to help when called upon. Know who these people are. If you're not sure, call the TA Helpline (932-11TA) for the answer.

Perhaps most importantly, TAs should try to make themselves available so that students feel able to come to them when they have a problem. Encourage students to come to your office hours. Listen to what they are telling you--sometimes this is all a frightened or insecure student needs.

## 1993-1994 Academic Calender

 <p><b>October</b></p> <p>1 Deadline for filing diploma application, dissertation and candidacy forms for October 1993 degree.</p> <p>2 Graduate School Language Exam.</p> <p>13&amp;25 Dissertation Workshops.</p> <p>26 Last day undergraduates can withdraw from course with a "W" grade.</p> <p>29 Last day to register for Nov. 14 Foreign Language Exam.</p>	 <p><b>December</b></p> <p>10 Last day of classes. MONDAY CLASSES.</p> <p>14 Fall exams begin.</p> <p>21 Fall exams end.</p> <p>22 Winter Recess begins.</p> <p><b>January</b></p>  <p>3 Deadline for filing diploma application for a January dated degree.</p> <p>10 Deadline for completion of degree requirements for January degree.</p> <p>17 Winter recess ends.</p> <p>18 Spring semester begins.</p>	<p><b>March</b></p>  <p>3&amp;18&amp;28 Dissertation Workshops</p> <p>13 Spring Recess begins.</p> <p>20 Spring Recess ends.</p> <p><b>April</b></p>  <p>1 Deadline to submit diploma applications for a May degree.</p> <p>12&amp;27 Dissertation Workshops.</p> <p><b>May</b></p>  <p>1 Deadline for submission of dissertation and candidacy forms for May degree.</p> <p>2 Classes end.</p> <p>4 Spring exams begin.</p> <p>11 Spring exams end.</p> <p>19 228th commencement.</p>
 <p><b>November</b></p> <p>11&amp;29 Dissertation Workshops.</p> <p>14 Foreign Language Exam.</p> <p>24 FRIDAY CLASSES.</p> <p>25-28 Thanksgiving Recess.</p>	 <p><b>February</b></p> <p>1&amp;16 Dissertation Workshops.</p>	

## Teaching Assistant Project

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