

The End of the Semester—Are You Ready?

The end of the semester brings with it more responsibilities and duties for teachers. TAs might have to design final exams, grade them, evaluate students' written work to assign final grades, and contend with a variety of student demands. At the same time, graduate work may be coming due, and graduate students will have to block off time for this responsibility as well.

Keep in mind that undergraduates, too, are facing the end of the semester—and many of them are beginning to panic. Some students may approach TAs for last minute help or tutoring. Office hours may become teaching sessions, and extra appointments may have to be scheduled. If TAs are not planning to allot extra time for appointments at the end of the semester, they should clearly inform the class as early in the semester as possible, so the undergraduates will have plenty of time to plan for a regularly scheduled office-hour visit. Some students will ask TAs to consider assigning them extra-credit or make-up work. TAs must decide beforehand whether this is fair to the rest of the class; whatever the decision, students should be informed of the policy. In short, TAs who have made their policies about office hours and make-up work clear at the beginning of the semester and have reminded students periodically of their expectations will not be faced with students complaining that they are being treated unfairly or have not been warned.

Additionally, students should be aware of how they are doing in the class during the entire semester—where they stand gradewise, what work they have pending, and what the course's grading and evaluation policies are. Keeping students informed at all stages of the semester about grading policies and about their own progress in the class can stem the tide of resentment that sometimes arises from poor communication.

Final examination time is a difficult period for students, and some may consider cheating if they are feeling desperate. TAs should make the students aware of the university's academic integrity code at the beginning of the semester and remind them of it during exam period. When proctoring an exam, take precautions to deter cheating. For example, if students use

Orientation Scheduled

The Teaching Assistant Project (TAP) will hold its ninth annual Teaching Assistant Orientation on August 29, 1996. While all newly appointed TAs are required to attend the orientation, many workshops and sessions may also be of interest to current TAs who expect reappointment for next year. The orientation will begin with a talk by David Carr, Associate Professor in Library and Information Studies. In his address to new TAs, Professor Carr will focus on motivating students, a topic that promises to be useful for even the most experienced teachers.

Additionally, several new workshops are scheduled for this year's orientation, such as "Legal & Ethical Issues in the Academy," "Teaching a Class Solo," and "Grading and Assessment." All TAs are welcome to attend all or part of the orientation, and can request a detailed schedule or reserve a place by contacting the TAP office at 932-1182.

The End of the Semester

(continued from page 1)

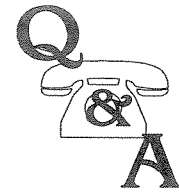
bluebooks, ask them to turn them in at the start of the session; TAs can then quickly flip through them to make sure they are blank. Before returning the books, the TA should number them so that no prewritten bluebooks are introduced.

Some students who are particularly worried about their performance may become combative and try to manipulate a TA into accommodating his or her demands, but it is important that TAs stick to their established policies. As early in the semester as possible, students who are in danger of failing should be encouraged to seek tutoring. Numerous tutoring services are available on campus, although their rules for accepting students vary; not all of them serve students on a walk-in basis (see box on page 3 for the telephone numbers of the Learning Resource Centers).

TAs should understand their limitations and not try to act as counselors to students who appear to have emotional or psychiatric difficulties. The university has an excellent and professionally staffed counseling service to which undergraduates can be referred. TAs are not counselors and should not attempt to assume that role.

Many factors go into assigning grades. TAs must adhere to the grading guidelines established at the beginning of the semester and must grade fairly. Schedule office hours after the grades have been handed in, so students have an opportunity to discuss their final exam or grades.

Finally, teaching assistants should remember that they are graduate students and they must schedule time for themselves. It is essential for them to make time in their busy schedules to complete final papers and study for exams.



Call
932-11TA

In the "Students' Right to Privacy" article in last month's TAPTalk, you caution TAs against posting grades, but my students demand that grades be posted. How do I negotiate this conflict?

A simple solution is to announce that any students who wants their grade before it is released by the university must attach a self-addressed, stamped postcard to their final exam or assignment. As you prepare the final grades, it is a simple matter to jot down the grade for the student.

There is absolutely no reason to post grades and risk involving yourself or the university in a legal entanglement, which can result if a student feels his or her right to privacy has been in any way violated. Remind students that the university is prompt in releasing grades: professors usually have a week or so after the final exam is over) to turn in grades, and then these grades are entered into the computer system within another week or two. Students simply telephone the Touch Tone Registration number corresponding to the campus on which they are enrolled to find out their grades.

Another reason not to post grades is that some students "cruise" the halls looking for

(continued on page 4)

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National TA Listserv Available

TAs interested in discussing teaching issues on the Internet with TAs across the nation can subscribe to a listserv by sending a message to listserv@unmvma.unm.edu with the line "subscribe t-assist" followed by your first name and last name as you would like to be known on the list.

IN THE PROGRAMS

NOTES ON THE UNDERGRADS

Teaching the "real world"

Jeffrey Smith, Professor and Acting Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Education, and Richard De Lisi, Professor, Graduate School of Education, recently presented workshops on Grading and Assessment in the **Political Science** and **Physics** departments. Professors Smith and De Lisi offered a number of suggestions for evaluating grading policies and course procedures to insure that they meet the needs of both students and faculty. Their insightful recommendations and guidelines are cross-disciplinary and are the result of their continuing research in this area. TAs were given concrete suggestions about syllabi, tests, and calculating end of semester grades, all designed to give students more "ownership" over grades. Professor Smith suggested that much anxiety about grading occurs when students feel that grades are "given" to them, rather than understanding that they are empowered to "earn" them.

Programs interested in offering a similar workshop this semester should contact Linda Schulze at the Graduate School (932-7747) as soon as possible.

A recent report by the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) found that first-year students are less concerned with political issues this year than at any other time of the report's thirty year history. "The American Freshman: National Norms for Fall 1995" surveyed over 240,000 students from 473 institutions and found that only 28.5 percent of students believe that keeping aware of current political affairs is an important life goal. Similarly, only 14.8 percent discuss politics frequently. At Rutgers, many students are involved in the CASE Program, which is one way of helping students see beyond their own interests; however, if one goal of a university is to educate all students to become better citizens, then it is imperative that instructors in *all* classes generate in students an awareness of their obligations to community and the larger world in which they live.

First, students need to make connections between what they learn in their coursework and what goes on in the "real world." Instructors can certainly help them to do this by bringing relevant examples from news items into their lectures. Mentioning scientific research publicized in the *New York Times* "Science" section

in a biology or chemistry class or the potential effects of a recent business takeover in an economics class can signal to students that applying course material to everyday events is an important part of the learning process.

Second, students should be encouraged to learn about the world through various media sources. Watching or listening to the news, scanning the Internet for news items, and reading newspapers provide students with information which, when applicable, they should be encouraged to discuss in class. If a research paper is one of the assignments for the course, encourage students to choose topics which can be researched through a current periodical or newspaper data base to get the most up-to-date information.

Because thinking about the world is a first step in getting

(continued on page 4)

Learning Resource Centers

College Avenue 932-1443
Cook/Douglass 932-1660
Livingston 445-0986

Math & Science
Learning Centers:
Busch 445-3123
Douglass 932-8991

Notes on the Undergrads

(continued from page 3)

people to take an active role in their communities, students should be encouraged to do some of that thinking in their classes. Most instructors are not willing to concede that their research or discipline has little connection to the larger world community. Helping students to see the relevance of their courses will foster an interest in and engagement with the world around them. People with a sense of connectedness to their community will feel an obligation to remain informed and involved as citizens and voters.

Q & A

(continued from page 2)

grade rosters with a significant percentage of high grades. Although many undergraduates do not realize it, all classes vary considerably in the ability of the students and their commitment; one semester of mostly high grades—or low ones—reveals little about a particular course or TA.

TAs who feel they *must* post grades should assign students a code number that has no relation to their social security number and then scramble the roster so students (i.e. code numbers) are no longer listed alphabetically.



April

- 1 April Fool's Day
- 3 Passover
- 7 Easter
- Daylight Savings Time begins
- 15 TA Liaison Meeting,
Monday, April 15, 1996
- 29 Regular Classes end
- 30 Reading Period



May

- 1 Spring Exams begin
- 8 Spring Exams end
- 16 Commencement
- 20 Victoria Day (Canada)
- 27 Memorial Day observed

Teaching
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