

## TA Job Description for Class BIO345

### Unusual or unique aspects of the course

BIO345 is organized into five learning modules that integrate concepts in ecology and evolutionary biology. The course is taught using a flipped approach that combines asynchronous online learning with synchronous problem-based and active learning opportunities. Flipped classrooms have been shown to positively impact student learning by allowing students to engage in higher order thinking and activities in the classroom where they have support from their peers and instructors. Students work through the online materials associated with each module at their own pace with the expectation that all required assignments are completed by the end of the module. Synchronous classes are devoted to group work, class discussions, scaffolded writing assignments, and review activities facilitated by the instructional team.

### What aspects of the course / specific tasks are TAs involved in (what is the role of the TA in the course)?

Graduate teaching assistants play an integral role in supporting student learning and engagement through both online and in-class activities. Thus, it is important that TAs are familiar with the course structure and content covered within each learning module. TAs will be involved in regular course planning meetings and collaborate with the faculty instructors in designing and leading weekly in-class activities. TAs will also be involved in tracking attendance and grading student work in coordination with the faculty instructors. Major assessments such as exams and essays will be graded collaboratively according to detailed rubrics. Specific TA responsibilities are further outlined below:

- *Review online materials in preparation for class (15%):* Online lectures and reading assignments are designed to introduce students to fundamental concepts in ecology and evolution as well as provide opportunities for students to practice answering questions about these concepts. Reviewing these materials will help TAs prepare to answer student questions and facilitate discussion during class.
- *Facilitate in-class group activities (5%, Tuesdays):* In-class group activities are designed to engage students in higher-order thinking about the process of science and key concepts in ecology and evolution. TAs will help the faculty instructors monitor student engagement, ensure that students understand the task at hand, pose questions for class discussion, and highlight positive examples of student work. We encourage TAs to rotate this responsibility each week.
- *Prepare and lead in-class practice problems (15%, Thursdays):* Each week will feature a mini-lecture to review key concepts from that week followed by representative practice problems. In coordination with the faculty instructor, TAs will design and lead the practice problem portion of class. This is an opportunity for TAs to gain teaching experience and bring examples from their own research into the classroom. To aid in designing appropriate problems, TAs will have access to example problems from the lecture videos, online problems and test questions from the textbook, and materials prepared in previous semesters. We encourage TAs to rotate this responsibility each week.
- *Grade student assignments (25%):* Over the course of the semester students will complete five group case studies, three database/discussion assignments, and three scaffolded writing assignments. TAs are responsible for grading these assignments (typically within one week) using holistic rubrics provided by the faculty instructors. We encourage TAs to split grading responsibilities and to bring any concerns over grading to the attention of the faculty instructors.
- *Lead exam review sessions (2.5%):* BIO345 students often request additional preparation for exams. In the past TAs have offered this support in the form of key concept guides, group review sessions, and/or additional student hours. To aid in this task, TAs will have access to materials prepared by previous TAs as well as sample exam questions. We encourage TAs to split this responsibility as appropriate and to coordinate review materials with the faculty instructors.

- *Proctor and evaluate three written exams (25%):* BIO345 exams are administered on Monday evenings. TAs will help the faculty instructors proctor these exams, including answering student questions. The exams are comprised of quantitative, short answer, and essay questions. TAs will grade these exams in coordination with the faculty instructors. To the extent possible, we will schedule team meetings to facilitate exam grading during the week following each exam. Grading as a team helps ensure that student exams are graded consistently and fairly with respect to the course expectations.
- *Participate in weekly team meetings (5%, Fridays):* Each week we will meet as an instructional team to discuss course planning goals; instructor roles, content, and assignments for the upcoming week; grading responsibilities; and any outstanding issues or student questions. TAs are encouraged to provide feedback to the instructors about course materials and TA responsibilities/workload during these meetings. These meetings may also include general discussion of course planning, teaching strategies, and other topics related to course instruction.
- *Respond to student questions through office hours and email (5%):* Each instructor, including the TAs, is expected to schedule regular office hours in which students can drop in (virtually or in-person) to ask questions. These sessions are an opportunity for instructors to connect with students outside of the classroom. We will coordinate office hours as an instructional team so that students can meet with a BIO345 instructor on different days throughout the week. We will also use a shared Google Form to collect, manage, and respond to student questions as a team via email.
- *Track student attendance (2.5%):* In-class assignments often involve group work and/or class discussion where students must be present in order to earn full credit. We encourage TAs to rotate responsibility for tracking student attendance each week.

*\*\*\*We will regularly discuss the workload associated with teaching BIO345 during our team meetings. Your input as TAs will help us adjust team dynamics to more efficiently and equitably assign course responsibilities. Your input will also help us refine expectations for future TAs.*

### Expectations for TAs

*In your role as a teaching assistant, we ask that you commit to:*

1. Foster a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive environment for all students;
2. Encourage diverse opinions and discussion within the classroom and among the instructional team;
3. Participate in 1-hour team meetings with the faculty instructors (typically Fridays);
4. Schedule regular office hours at least once per week to support student learning;
5. If needed, coordinate with the instructional team to support student learning outside of regular office hours and/or class;
6. Notify faculty instructors of anticipated absences at least one week prior to the absence;
7. In the event of unexpected absences, notify the lead instructor as soon as possible by email or text and coordinate with the co-TA to cover your teaching responsibilities;
8. Monitor student questions on the course Google Form on your assigned day (typically the day of your office hours) and respond to each student within at least two business days;
9. Notify the faculty instructor of any student questions that you are unable answer that same day;
10. Coordinate with the instructional team to grade student work fairly and in a timely manner such that grades can be posted on Blackboard within one week;
11. Respond to faculty emails within at least two business days; and
12. Provide feedback to the instructors about your role and responsibilities in this course.

### Commitments by faculty member

*In our role as lead instructors for this course, we commit to:*

1. Foster a welcoming, equitable, and inclusive environment for all students and TAs;
2. Encourage diverse opinions and discussion within the classroom and among the instructional team;
3. Clearly explain the course design and pedagogical decisions;
4. Clearly state what is expected of TAs and post these expectations on a team Google Drive;
5. Provide opportunities for TAs to develop their teaching skills by contributing to course instruction;
6. Provide TAs with course material at least one week prior to the start of each module (example materials from the previous year will be available prior to the start of the semester);
7. Support TAs in developing class activities by providing them with a list of key concepts and example problems at least one week prior to the start of each module (example materials from the previous year will be available prior to the start of the semester);
8. Support TAs in assessing student work fairly by providing detailed rubrics and examples;
9. Be prepared for class and team meetings and answer all questions to the best of our ability;
10. Inform TAs about important information using the team Google Drive and email;
11. Respond to TA questions within two business days or less; and
12. Solicit and listen to feedback from TAs about their role and responsibilities in this course.

#### General Biology Department Expectations of TAs and faculty

TAs should work a maximum of 20 hours a week on their TA responsibilities. TA contracts run from two weeks before classes start until December 31<sup>st</sup> (fall semester) and from January 1<sup>st</sup> until a week after graduation (spring semester). [2021/22 dates were Fall – 8/16/21-12/31/21; Spring – 1/1/22 – 5/15/22].

Faculty should respect the fact that TAs also have course commitments and research responsibilities. While TAs are expected to be available for class periods and weekly TA meetings for large courses, faculty should be as flexible as possible in when other tasks are performed. They should also provide as much notice as possible of what these tasks are and any time commitments outside class (for example for lab preparation).

Faculty are encouraged to make the role of TAs in the course explicit in their syllabus and talk to students in their classes about the essential roles of TAs in the course, as well as how students should treat TAs and what they can and cannot expect from TAs (i.e. be polite, TAs are not available 24/7, expected turn-around time for grading). They are also encouraged to emphasize the international and team orientated nature of science in their classes and to have TAs introduce themselves to classes as professionals integral to the course mission.

TAs are expected to provide feedback to faculty if they find that they are working more than 20 hours a week on TA tasks and/or if the distribution of time spent on different tasks is different from the job description.

*TAs and faculty are encouraged to reach out to the Graduate Program Director in the first place (or the Associate Chair or Chair of the Biology Department if that is not possible) if they feel that these expectations are not being met.*