

Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences
Teaching Assistant (TA) Expectations
Updated May 2022

University, College, and Department Expectations for TAs

General policies:

- All TAs are required to attend the: 1) University TA Orientation training and 2) University Diversity and Inclusion training. These trainings are usually part of graduate student orientation and hence will be completed prior to engaging in teaching duties in the fall. If the TA starts in the spring these will be available upon enquiry to the appropriate office. 3) Any other training – e.g., driver training for departmental vans and/or safety training should be undertaken before the semester starts or in any event, before needed for fieldtrips.
- TAs are expected to abide by all University guidelines including Religious Observances, Disability/CDR policy, and Code of Conduct.
- TAs are expected to be on campus (or available if teaching is online) at the beginning of and throughout their appointed contract. Should a situation arise where a TA will be absent, the TA must make arrangements to cover their sections with the faculty course instructor.

Class policies and communication:

- TAs will adhere to departmental/instructor policies (these will be outlined in the course syllabus). Policies may include classroom etiquette, plus delivery lab/recitation content to the students in a professional and respectful manner whether this be in person and/or online and/or hybrid modes of instruction.
- TAs will provide instruction in the teaching modality that the instructor has selected (online/hybrid/ in person). The Department will do its best to accommodate for the preference of TAs for their preferred teaching method however these must be made in advance and cannot be changed after the start of the semester unless required by the University.
- TAs will work with course instructors and/or TA Coordinators to make or deny exceptions to late or incomplete work to maintain consistency across sections within the course
- TAs will communicate and coordinate with instructors for their course and if applicable, the TA Coordinator in charge of recitations and labs.
- All TAs are required to attend scheduled meetings with the instructor and/or TA Coordinators. Any absence or tardiness to these meetings must be communicated with the meeting host prior to the start of the meeting.
- syr.edu email is the official mode of communication at SU (note that student email addresses as NAME@syr.edu are already entered into Blackboard).
- TAs are expected to clearly indicate expectations for students in labs/recitations including: attendance, participation, communications, grading, online etiquette, and any other expectations that is also clearly outlined in a provided syllabus for the labs/recitations.

During the semester (teaching and grading):

- TAs are expected to be familiar with the subject matter of classes you are assigned to TA, and to also attend lectures (watch asynchronous videos) to ensure you are familiar with course content, or anything the instructor may add. TAs will help the instructor/TA Coordinator and/or others in the proper use and storage of materials and equipment for labs/recitations.
- TAs should expect in-class evaluations of their sessions early in the semester by the faculty course instructor and respond to suggestions for improvements in presentations.

- TAs are required to use Blackboard – for sharing of teaching material, communication with students and to keep all records (attendance, grades etc.).
- TAs are required to hold regularly scheduled weekly office hours, grade student material promptly (for example – within a week, before the next class) and answer students' emails promptly, for example within twenty-four hours of their receipt.
- TAs will be required to record recitations/labs for asynchronous teaching for online or hybrid courses or as necessary to provide access to students who cannot attend otherwise. This will include using your own voice (no voice modulation or voice masking permitted) and may require that you appear on video depending on the program used. Any exceptions should be cleared through your instructor– prior to the start of classes. Teaching stations have been created within the Department to assist with the technology required to share and record both audio and video presentations
- TAs may be required to drive departmental vans for fieldtrips and being responsible for safety while on field trips. Training needs to be completed before fieldtrips occur.
- TAs should encourage students in labs/recitations to respond to course evaluations.

The end of the semester (grading, reporting of grades, and wrapping up):

- The Department requires that TAs spend time in the last week(s) of the course to put away materials used in their lab/recitations. Those materials should be restored to the condition in which they were originally used (e.g., samples and corresponding labels returned to their proper places in a sample set) so that they will be ready the next time the class is taught. Any broken or missing items should be reported to the TA Coordinator and/or the relevant instructor.
- Submission of final grades: TA duties are not completed until the final grade roster is posted by the instructor, and TAs should expect to meet with the instructor after the semester is finished to discuss and assign final grades (typically for majors courses) or provide lab/recitation grades promptly after the end of the semester (typically for large introductory courses). TAs wishing to leave town before this is completed will need the approval of their instructor and/or the Director of Graduate Studies.

TAs will maintain an estimate of the time they spend per week on TA duties. This is important to ensure that twenty hours per week is not exceeded, something that is hard to estimate with online and hybrid teaching demands – but something we want to monitor.

Syracuse University Policy: Graduate teaching and research assistants provide services to an academic or administrative Department of the University as defined in their appointment letters. *A full-time graduate teaching or research assistant appointment shall not require a total workload exceeding twenty hours a week.* The combination of service, study, and research performed by those holding full-time, twenty hours/week graduate teaching or research assistantships constitutes a full-time assignment.

“Working outside an assistantship:

Students with a full-time, twenty hour/week assistantship are not permitted to work outside their assistantship. *Exceptions to this policy must be approved by a program director or advisor.* This requirement does not apply to students who hold part-time assistantships (less than twenty hours/week).”

Department estimates of time: It is the goal of our department to assign each TA no more than four labs, five recitations, a combination of labs and recitations, or one major lab class (e.g., Structural Geology, Sedimentary Processes & Systems, Introduction to Paleobiology, Mineralogy, Petrology) to ensure the twenty hour limit is not exceeded unless unavoidable due to the number classes or students' schedules, we try and limit TA assignments to one class. Below are examples of potential TA assignments.

If you are assigned **four introductory lab sections** you can anticipate your time commitments per week to be estimated as follows:

Lab teaching: 4 labs x 2 hrs/week =	8 hrs
Attending lecture: 2 Lectures/wk =	3 hrs (includes proctoring exams)
Preparatory time for labs:	approximately 2 hr
Instructor/TA course planning meeting	1 hr
Office hours:	2 hrs
Grading: 4 labs x 1 hrs/wk =	approximately 4 hrs
Fieldtrips – for those lab courses that have weekend field trips – we estimate ~1 hour additional time-averaged commitment per week that includes the reconnaissance and the field trip.	

If you are assigned **five introductory recitation sections** you can anticipate your time commitments per week to be estimated as follows:

Recitation teaching: 5 recitations x 1 hr each	5 hrs
Attending lecture: 3 lectures x 1 hr each or 2 @1.5 hours	3 hrs (includes proctoring)
Instructor/TA course planning meeting	1 hr
Preparatory time for recitations:	approximately 2 hrs
Office hours: 4 recitations	2.5 hrs
Grading: 5 recitations x 1.5 hrs each	approximately 6 hrs
Plus additional time for field trips for those recitations that have them.	

If you are assigned **a major lab class** (e.g., structural geology, sedimentary processes & systems, intro to paleobiology, and mineralogy) you can anticipate your time commitments per week to be estimated as follows:

Lab teaching time: 1 lab x 3 hrs	3 hrs
Attending lecture, 2 lectures/week	3 hrs (includes proctoring)
Preparatory time for lab: 1 lab x 3 hr	approximately 3 hrs
Instructor/TA course planning meeting	1 hr
Office hours (formal) 1 lab x 2 hr	2 hrs
Grading	approximately 6 hrs
Fieldtrips – 2 weekend field trips (averaged per week)	2 hrs

*If you are assigned less than four lab sections or five recitation sections, or if your faculty instructor feels that your commitment to a lab class will not require twenty hours of work effort, you may be called upon to pick up other departmental teaching related assignments. This may include helping grade exams or other teaching-related work for the weeks following the end of scheduled classes up until TA/RA compensation ends.

University policy regarding time off: Graduate assistants generally are not required to work on standard holidays or on bonus holidays as defined by the Office of Human Resources. Standard holidays are days in which the University is not in session. These include *Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, and Martin Luther King Day for the academic year—and additionally Memorial Day and Independence Day for the calendar year*. Bonus holidays (typically three per year) are "floating" holidays that are scheduled proximate to Thanksgiving, Christmas, and/or Independence Day, to allow for longer recesses. In cases where the nature of the agreed upon responsibilities requires a graduate assistant to work on standard or bonus holidays (for example, to attend to critical laboratory functions), compensatory time will be provided by the employing unit. On days when classes are not in session but the University is open for business (Yom Kippur, Autumn Break, the Wednesday prior to Thanksgiving,

the December-January intermission, Spring Vacation, and Easter Break), graduate assistants may take vacations at times that are mutually agreeable to them and their supervisors on the basis of their responsibilities communicated in advance. These will be considered paid vacations. (*Approved by the Board of Graduate Studies, April 1990.*)

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this document, please contact the Director of Graduate Studies. We would be interested in any feedback, including time commitments while performing the duties of a TA.