

## **Guidelines & Responsibilities Related to Teaching Assistants - Department of Psychology**

### **Accepted Mar 2024**

The Department of Psychology is committed to assisting our graduate students in balancing their educational goals and financial demands. As such, we provide all our incoming Ph.D. students with a package of support that is competitive with similar universities. In most cases, this support is provided in the form of a teaching or research assistant, which requires that students carry out certain duties. The Department follows the guidance and policies of the UMBC Graduate school in the provision, requirements, supervision, and support provided to our graduate assistantships (TAs, RAs, Fellowships, etc.). The UMBC graduate school describes graduate assistantships as follows:

“Graduate assistantships provide graduate students with the financial resources necessary to pursue their degrees. This financial support—stipend, tuition remission, and benefits—is part of the University’s commitment to the success of our graduate students. Most GA positions are awarded by individual departments.

The opportunity to **work closely with faculty members and undergraduate students in teaching, research, or administrative environments is an integral part of graduate education.** Graduate students who hold graduate assistantships benefit educationally and professionally.

They gain further expertise in their field; enhance their research skills and develop pedagogical skills; acquire experience in leadership, interpersonal effectiveness, and performance evaluation; acquire academic administrative experience; and enjoy collegial collaborations with advisors that may result in joint publications and other professional activities.

Skills learned in graduate assistantships prepare students not only for the academy, but also for corporate, government, and nonprofit organizations.”

The Department further recognizes that faculty workloads can be overwhelming with large classes and multiple demands. Thus, TAs not only provided graduate students with financial support and professional training that is integral to their success, but they are also integral to faculty abilities to meet their responsibilities as educators and scholars. While TAs are essential to classroom success, it should be remembered that they are also graduate students who are themselves sometimes feeling overwhelmed, and can be vulnerable, and impressionable. Every effort should be made to create a collegial environment with mutual respect for each other’s challenges. Their assistance can be helpful, but they need supported in their work.

### **Guidance for Appropriate Responsibilities for TAs in Psychology**

TAs are assigned to specific courses, not to Faculty in general. The specific duties of a Teaching Assistant (TA) vary from course to course in Psychology, but for the majority, assignments and responsibilities will fall into the following four categories:

- a) teaching responsibility for a laboratory or discussion section of a course;
- b) assisting a faculty member in the grading assignment, mentoring students, proctoring exams, and handling administrative duties necessary for course delivery;
- c) assisting with general departmental administrative duties;

d) providing students with at least one hour of office hours with more hours designated weekly if the course needs.

In general, TAs assist with these duties. They do not carry the full responsibility to grade, design or complete course assessments. They provide help to both faculty and students in the course. Specific tasks and responsibilities are discussed below and can vary across courses.

## General Policies

1. Full-time and part-time TAs may be asked to perform their duties from the beginning of August through mid-June (including the month of January). This may include preparatory work for the upcoming semester or professional development (CIRTL) activities.
2. Full-time TAs are expected to work, on average, 16-20 hours per week and half-time TAs, on average, 8-10 hours per week.
3. Whenever possible, TA assignments will be made commensurate with the talents, training, and experience of the assigned graduate student. TAs should expect to receive their assignments approximately one week before classes commence. Refusal of a particular course is not appropriate, but special requests based on logical rationale will be considered, but not guaranteed.
4. Every effort should be made on the part of the faculty to have full-time **TAs work no more than 20 hours/week and half-time TAs no more than 10 hours/week**. If there are periods during the semester when it will become necessary for TAs to exceed these time commitments, the faculty should give the TAs as much advanced notice as possible, so that the students can reduce their commitments in other areas while performing their greater (or more time-intensive) TA duties in one course. **TAs may NOT be able to accommodate** this request for longer hours, given their own education, but efforts to negotiate are reasonable. **If it becomes apparent that the average load constantly exceeds 20 hours per week, the student should discuss the problem with the TA coordinator.**
5. TAs are expected to be available for courses approximately one week before classes begin and approximately one week after final grades have been turned in. If TAs need or wish to take time off or to be away from campus during the periods when they are “on contract” they will need to receive clearance from (1) the course instructor(s), if course assignments have already been made; and (2) the department's TA coordinator.
6. All TAs (**both new and experienced**) are required to participate in TA Orientation in August, and final meeting in December unless extraordinary circumstances prevent this. A student must notify the TA Coordinator at least seven days prior to the event if such circumstances occur; alternative orientation and final meeting options will be discussed.
7. All TAs are expected to comply with all UMBC training and compliance requirements (e.g., Title IX, COVID, etc.) as announced by the University, Department, and/or TA Coordinator. TAs are encouraged to seek out additional training opportunities from FDC and CIRTL on campus when available.

## TA Responsibilities

1. All TAs are expected to complete the “TA Availability” form promptly and completely, indicating any standing weekday time commitments (e.g., class, practicum, RA duties). This form typically is uploaded to a google form that you will receive in early May and early November of each year. It is the student's responsibility to inform the TA Coordinator, and the Chair, of any

changes in their availability once the "TA Availability" form has been submitted, no later than August 1 for Fall assignments, and January 1 for Spring assignments. Some courses have evening

meeting schedules; TAs should consider availability beyond a 9-5 day. Weekends may be needed to complete tasks for course assignments and the evening hours might be necessary for meeting demands of the TA role. Thus, the availability time block is not expected to be the only time that the TA works to complete their duties.

2. TAs should connect with course faculty and begin to familiarize themselves with the course readings and requirements as soon as they receive their assignments. It is also strongly recommended that students read (or re-read) the Publication Manual of the APA before classes commence.

3 It is expected that TAs will assist the instructors to whom they have been assigned in course preparation items, photocopying, grading, etc. both before and after the Fall and Spring semesters (i.e., for as long as they are being paid). If there is insufficient coursework for them to do during these periods, they may be asked to perform other departmental duties consistent with the department's teaching mission.

4. Typically, TAs are expected to be connected to course faculty one week before classes begin and approximately one week after final grades have been turned in. If TAs need or wish to take time off or to be away from campus during the periods when they are being paid, they will need to receive clearance from (1) the course instructor(s),( if course assignments have already been made); or (2) the department's TA Coordinator

5. If a problem arises for a student during their assistantship, they should first try to resolve the difficulty by speaking directly to the course instructor. If the problem remains unresolved, then the TA should seek the counsel of the TA Coordinator or Chair of the Department

6. Renewal of teaching assistantships is dependent upon satisfactory evaluations by the professors with whom students are working. TAs have the right to appeal any evaluation to the TA Coordinator or Chair of the Department.

7. Acceptance of TA funding (via signed contract) is considered binding. A student who subsequently wishes to relinquish funding must submit this request in writing to the TA coordinator, Chair and appropriate Graduate Program Director. Although attempts will be made to honor requests to relinquish the TA after the contract is signed, this cannot be guaranteed.

8. Special Sessions teaching assistants are determined according to the budget available to the department. These opportunities are entirely separate from the GRA contracted support.

9. Each TA will be evaluated by the course instructor according to the following scale: Excellent, well-above expectations; Quite Good, needs minor guidance; Satisfactory, basically gets the work done with prodding; Somewhat Problematic, below expectations; and Extremely Problematic, well below expectations. TAs who repeatedly perform below expectations may see their support jeopardized in future semesters.

## **Faculty Responsibilities**

1. In order to be awarded a TA for a course, faculty must complete the TA Request form each May and November. Faculty have the right to not request a TA, but consideration to the benefits of being a TA and the needs of students in the class should be considered. Failure to complete the form in a timely fashion can result in not receiving a TA.

2. Faculty of record are responsible for developing their courses, evaluating their students, and providing their students with strategies for success. TAs can assist, but are not the sole reader or grader in the course.

3. Faculty should prepare written instructions for TAs related to specific course expectations. An individual “contract” that delineates your expectations, providing clear rubrics for grading, establishing timelines for completion of course grading, and providing opportunities for growth for TAs should be negotiated at the beginning of the semester.

4. Faculty should secure a textbook or digital text for the TA prior to the start of classes so that they can prepare for the course topics.

5. Consistent communication, whether through weekly meeting with the TA, weekly emails to document instructions etc. is expected and essential.

6. Assisting the TA to time manage their work in to your course and their own courses is advantageous for everyone. Remember the 10 hours TAs may be assigned to another course or faculty member at the same time as they work with your designated course. Thus, it is important to keep to the 10-hour limit as well as recognizing that requests for less hours one week and more another may not work if both of the TA’s assignments are asking for the same consideration. Faculty should always consider speaking directly to the other faculty to whom the student is assigned.

7. Faculty who consistently abuse the time and efforts of TAs will risk not receiving a TA in the future.

8. All TAs must be evaluated after each semester, as this is important to continued awards for GAs. It helps their professional development to receive this feedback and mentoring from faculty. Completion of the end of semester form is required of all faculty working with TAs.