Graduate Teaching Assistantship Guidelines for GLG 357

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Class time/location: Tuesday/Thursday, 8.30am – 09.50am, SHD 237
Lab time/location: Tuesday, 1.15pm – 4.05pm/SHD 239
Office hours: Thursday 1.15pm – 4.05pm/SHD 239

Graduate Teaching Assistant definition: A Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a student who assists faculty in providing instructional support for a credit-bearing course with specific student learning outcomes. In many cases, GTAs will have taken, and excelled in, the course for which they are serving as GTAs. These positions provide opportunities for students to enhance their educational experiences while simultaneously supporting faculty and providing greater individualized support of enrolled students than might not otherwise be possible. By assisting with course instruction, GTAs also develop knowledge of course content and skills that are aligned with an instructional role.

The role of a GTA can vary. As a student in graduate school, not only are you active in research but you are also an educator, a mentor, an advisor, a peer, and perhaps even a role model. Being a GTA can be a challenging, exciting, and a rewarding opportunity. As a GTA not only can you provide first-hand teaching experience to undergraduate students, but you can also integrate your natural enthusiasm for your discipline through a variety of pedagogical approaches.

I personally cannot emphasize the impact and significance of a GTA experience enough since I myself received very little in the way of formal teacher preparation as a graduate student (or as a post-doctoral researcher). GTA responsibilities should be integrated into your career as a graduate student such that over time you develop a professional working relationship with your peers, faculty advisors, and with other faculty in the department. Being a GTA, and with numerous other demands on your time, you will also learn how to establish priorities, in addition to supporting effective and efficient time management skills. In short, being a GTA comes with significant responsibility which will ultimately help you grow as a scientist, educator, and as a person both professionally and personally.

Please read this document carefully and let me know if you have any questions. Your reasons and motivations for undertaking this position will vary. The main part of my role is to be available as an advisor and mentor in whatever capacity you may need, and to provide direction and advice as you complete your GTA responsibilities. Course materials will be available to all TAs through the course Canvas site.

All materials from the 2021 course can be found in this **Google Drive**.

Many students undertaking a GTA position wonder what is expected of them and what they can expect from the instructor of the course in terms of support and guidance. Experiences can differ for each student because expectations may vary from one instructor (and/or course) to the next. This document is designed to outline what I expect of students who undertake an GTA position in GLG 357. This document also outlines what students can expect of me.

The content and information provided on the next several pages has been modified from various resources which exist at other institutions. It is presented to you here within the specific context of GLG 357.

Best Practices (*adapted from the University of Minnesota*)
What types of teaching practices can support students in their learning? What types of activities are particularly helpful to educators?

As you prepare for your role as a TA, consider the courses you have taken and think about what TAs in those environments have done that was particularly helpful. Also consider what have TAs done that was not helpful? You should not be undertaking the role of a GTA with the impression that you are supposed to simply supply students with correct answers to assignments.

Graduate Teaching Assistants play a crucial role in supporting students with their learning and simply supplying students with correct answers <u>does nothing to facilitate and support learning</u> (theirs or yours).

Below is a list of some practices that other TAs and course instructors have mentioned as being particularly useful:

- **Show up.** A large part of being successful is just showing up. Show up to the activities that you are responsible for. Students will appreciate being able to rely on you.
- **Be prompt.** Show up on time. Ideally, try to show up a few minutes early so students can settle in by the time the lab starts. Answer email and other communications in a timely fashion*. Be on time for our weekly TA meetings.
    *I personally aim to respond to emails within 24-48 hours. The following is copied from pg. 9 of the GLG 357 syllabus regarding email and communication policies:

    *As your instructor, I take responsibility in assisting you with your learning of fundamental concepts, theories, and ideas that accompany the class material. I am responsible for guiding you through the class material and evaluating how well you understand the topics presented and discussed. It is your responsibility to attend class, take and review notes and material, read and study the material discussed. If you have any questions, I encourage you to take advantage of my office hours or talk to me before or after class. I aim to respond to emails within 24-48 hours. **<u>I will not reply to any emails sent after 6pm on the day they are sent</u>**.*

    Two weekly emails to the class will be sent. One on Wednesday mornings and one on Friday mornings. The purpose of these emails is to briefly summarize concepts discussed in class the day before, communicate course logistics, and to provide reminders for upcoming assignments. No emails, or course announcements via Canvas, will be sent during the weekend.

    *As detailed below, lab assignments are due Tuesdays at 1.15PM the week after they are issued. Exams will be held in person during class and lab time. **Many of the other assignments in this course are due by 9PM on their respective due dates.**
    <u>I will not respond to emails regarding any component of any assignment that are sent less than 24 hours before the assignment is due</u>.*

- **Be engaged.** When you are in a lab, **<u>you are there for the students</u>**. <u>Students appreciate knowing that you are approachable and are there to help them</u>. Lab time, for example, is not a time to withdraw to a corner and check your phone, or work on an assignment for one of your classes. Even if there is a lull in student questions during the lab, make sure you are attentive to what is going on, and that students know you are accessible for questions or for discussing their work.
- **Use effective time management skills.** Part of being a student (and a professor!) is seemingly always having too much to do. There is always more to learn, more to read, more to write, more research to do, people to talk to, projects to participate in, etc. Being a successful GTA requires balancing your GTA work, your coursework, and other commitments. This is admittedly not easy and I am happy to work with anyone who wishes to address any issues regarding time management. By accepting a GTA offer you are committing to being able to put in sufficient time to do your GTA duties.
- **Communicate.** Part of working in a group and as part of a collaborative team is utilizing and engaging with effective communication practices. Part of this is communicating with students. Part is communicating with other TAs. And part is communicating with the instructor. There are numerous examples of effective communication practices including (but not limited to) the following:
    o If your course has TA weekly meetings (which this one does!) make sure you attend them since these meetings are the primary way for the instructional team to exchange important

information; if you miss a meeting (for example due to illness) please follow-up to see what you missed.

- o Alert the instructor (and other TAs if appropriate) about course problems. Often TAs are the first to recognize when, for example, the majority of the class is struggling with material/content, when there is confusion about the meaning of a particular question, or what wonderfully weird minerals they are observing in a hand sample or thin section.
- o Ask good questions. These might be for the instructor and/or TAs "*A number of students are asking about X, and I'm not sure what to tell them. What do you recommend?*", or of the students themselves "*can you explain your answer so I'm sure I understand it?*". One of the most efficient ways to assess if a student truly understands a concept is to ask them to explain it to you, or at least for them to explain their approach/reasoning behind their answer.

- **Mentor other TAs.** One important way, if not the primary way, that effective TA practices are passed along is from TA to TA. This is one reason why there are multiple TAs (both graduate and undergraduate), usually including a number of experienced TAs. TAs should help other. For example, TAs often share tips about how to handle difficult course concepts "*in the past this topic has been difficult for students, but we found that it helps to explain it by...*".

- **Be positive and enjoy your TA work**. You are likely a TA for GLG 357 because you find the course content interesting, you like teaching and learning, and you enjoy helping others learn. Be positive, enjoy your TA work, and share your enthusiasm for learning, for the field of Petrology, and for the Geosciences!

- **Be professional**. In addition to following departmental and University guidelines, TAs should model professional behavior in their TA work. Students take cues from TAs. If students see TAs arriving to labs on time, being approachable, etc. then students are more likely to show up on time and be engaged. If students see TAs arriving late, retreating to a corner to do their own work during lab, browsing social media, and disengaging, etc. then students are less likely to have a high regard for the course, or for the field of study. Professionalism includes not only those issues, but also respect for students and respect for their learning environment.

Responsibilities and Expectations

GTAs will not be responsible for the sole design of any assignments (without oversight). Where GTAs are interested in developing their skills as an educator, a mentor, and/or as a science communicator, I (the instructor) will happily work with you on developing those skills (and assignments). At any point during the semester, you are welcome to discuss with me any aspect of the course from a course design perspective (e.g., learning outcomes, lab design, assignments, assessment structure). For those interested in developing their education training further, I encourage you to consider the Miami University Graduate Student Teaching Enhancement Program (GSTEP) offered through the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

It is expected that GTAs attend weekly 1-hour meetings to review lab for the next week, and assist the instructor in preparation of materials for the upcoming lab. It is expected that GTAs attend the lab session on Tuesdays from 1.15 to 4.05pm having reviewed the lab (and corresponding answer key) provided in the prior week's meeting. If your schedule allows, I kindly request that you consider scheduling your office hours

from 1.15PM to 4.05PM on Thursday. This is a block of time in the course schedule during which all students (and myself) will be available. These office hours have traditionally been held in SHD. 239 in order to support questions students may have regarding lab materials and/or other course assignments. All GTAs are strongly encouraged to attend the class sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 08.30AM to 09.50AM, especially if they have not served in a GTA role in GLG 357 before. This however is not a requirement of the GTA position. It is expected that GTAs will grade the weekly labs and provide cumulative feedback to the class. During weeks where no labs are submitted for grading it is expected that GTAs be available to support grading of course exams and/or assisting the instructor with other course-related duties.

Grading, attending the weekly TA meetings (1 hour), attending the lab (Tuesday 1.15-4.05PM), holding office hours (encouraged to be Thursday 1.15 to 4.05PM), ± attending the class sessions all contribute towards your GTA hours for this course. When combined with other GTA duties, this time commitment **should not exceed 20 hours per week**. If you find yourself exceeding these hours, please do not hesitate to contact me.

GTAs will also not be solely responsible for the organization of the course field trip, or conducting any high-risk laboratory experiments. If a GTA suspects another student of being in violation of the Miami academic student code of conduct, they should report this immediately to the faculty member (*see Academic Dishonesty section below*).

GTAs are expected to disclose any possible conflicts of interest due to previous or present personal relationships with students in the course, and should never accept money or personal gifts from other students.

A Teaching Assistantship can have many benefits to the student, the faculty instructor, and other students enrolled in the class. For you, the GTA, it has the potential to lead to:
      1) a better understanding of the teaching and learning process
      2) a deeper appreciation of the subject matter
      3) pre-professional training
      4) improvement of scientific communications skills
      5) the development of leadership and self-confidence
      6) better time management skills

Communication
I encourage all GTAs to check their email regularly and respond to faculty and members of the teaching team in a timely fashion (usually within 48 hours). Please also be cognizant and respectful of each other's time and consider that your working hours may not overlap with others.

Academic Dishonesty
If you notice suspicious activity, you first need to decide whether it is likely that academic dishonesty occurred, and, if so, whether there is reasonable evidence to support that suspicion. Please refer to the course syllabus and [Miami University's Student Code of Conduct](#) for additional clarification regarding Academic Dishonesty policies. If you think that cheating has occurred, then you should always report this to the instructor. More specifically, you should
- Gather evidence.
- Take notes: write down any additional information that might be relevant, and which you might not remember if the situation is contested at a later date.
- Discuss with the instructor: the instructor will then need to decide what further action to take. If the instructor determines that cheating has indeed occurred, there are University procedures they will need to follow.

Faculty Responsibilities
For the faculty instructor, GTAs can provide valuable formative feedback on course assignments, course content and delivery, as well as discussion on how well the students in the course coping with the material

and workload. From Roderick (2009) several aspects of good practice for TAs have been identified. From my perspective, these work to:

1) Train and mentor teaching assistants;
2) Provide teaching assistants with visibility and opportunities to display competence;
3) Engage teaching assistants in the course and in student learning;
4) Communicate clearly the responsibilities of assistantships;
5) Enhance educational quality for all.

As the faculty instructor, I therefore have following responsibilities:

1) Establish and maintain reliable lines of communication;
2) Provide all TAs with course materials in advance and in a timely manner. All TAs will have access to materials from the year prior via the course **Google Drive** and will receive the lab (and corresponding answer key) the week before the lab is held;
3) Ensure that all TAs receive the appropriate training;
4) Never require TAs to prepare course material without oversight;
5) Work with all TAs to support their own pedagogical interests;
6) Work with all TAs ahead of time to identify potential peer conflicts;
7) Work with all TAs ahead of time to identify schedule conflicts.

I am extremely grateful to anyone who supports student learning through the teaching of this course. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time regarding any aspect of your role as a GTA in GLG 357.

References cited:
Roderick, C. (2009). Undergraduate teaching assistantships: Good practices. *MountainRise, the International Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*.
http://www.wcu.edu/facctr/mountainrise/archive/vol5no2/html/finuta.pdf

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Additional resources for Graduate Student Teachers:
Miami University - Statement of Good Teaching Practices

Video (9 minutes) - Being a New Graduate Student Teaching Assistant

Yale Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning - Graduate Student Teachers
https://poorvucenter.yale.edu/graduate-students/resources-graduate-student-teachers

University of Texas at Austin, Faculty innovation Center
https://facultyinnovate.utexas.edu/teaching-resources-graduate-teaching-assistants

Carnegie Mellon University - Strategies and Resources from TAs for TAs
https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/PublicationsArchives/CollectedWisdom/collectwisdom-teachingstrategies.pdf

Cornell University - tips for TAs
https://gradschool.cornell.edu/career-and-professional-development/pathways-to-success/build-your-skills/tips-for-tas/

Drexel University - The Effective Teaching Assistant (Sixth Edition, 2008)
https://drexel.edu/~/media/Files/graduatecollege/ta-manual.ashx?la=en

Southern Methodist University - Resources for Teaching Assistants
https://www.smu.edu/Provost/CTE/Programs/TA_Training/TAResources

University of Louisville - Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook (updated 2018)
https://louisville.edu/graduate/files/gta-handbook

University of Pittsburgh, University Center for Teaching and Learning
https://teaching.pitt.edu/graduate-student-teaching/resources/

University of Maine
https://umaine.edu/graduate/wp-content/uploads/sites/551/2021/08/TA-Handbook-2021-2022.docx-1.pdf

University of Maryland - Resources for Graduate Teaching Assistants
http://cmns-tlc.umd.edu/resourcesforgtas

University of North Carolina Wilmington - Resource Handbook for Graduate Teaching Assistants
(*recommend beginning at PDF pg. #37, document pg. #30*)
https://uncw.edu/gradschool/graduateassistants/guidelines/manual.pdf

Books
- Small Teaching (2016) by James Lang
- Small Teaching Online (2019) by Flower Darby & James Lang
- Distracted (2020) by James Lang
- Student Engagement Techniques (2020) by Claire Major & Elizabeth Barkley
- Collaborative Learning Techniques (2014) by Elizabeth Barkley, Claire Major, and K. Patricia Cross

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This document has been prepared with resources available from Brown University, Carnegie Mellon, Columbia University, SUNY Buffalo, University of Georgia, University of Minnesota, University of Pittsburgh, and Yale.