

**University of Delaware**

**Department of  
Political Science & International Relations**

**Handbook for Graduate Student Teaching Assistants  
and Research Assistants**

**July 2019**

## **General Guidelines for Graduate Student Teaching Assistants and Research Assistants**

This Handbook provides guidelines for Department of Political Science & International Relations Teaching Assistants (TA) and Research Assistants (RA). These guidelines are in addition to all University requirements described under Students and Policies for the [Graduate College](#) as well as in the Student Guide to University Policies. You should adhere to these principles, but you should also use your common sense in dealing with situations, that are not covered by this document or by any other University and departmental rules and regulations. In case you are uncertain about how to resolve any issues that you may encounter as a TA or RA, you should consult the following UD resources available online or in the departmental office: [Guidelines for Graduate Students on Fellowship or Assistantship Contracts](#) and the Graduate Student Handbook.

If you cannot find the answer in the documents listed above, or in these guidelines, then you should consult with the instructor of the course for whom you are a TA, your RA supervisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, or the Department Chair. If anything in these guidelines is unclear, please discuss with the Director of Graduate Studies or Department Chair. You should also discuss these responsibilities with your supervisor: the instructor of record (for TAs) or Primary Investigator (for RAs).

As an employee of the University and as a TA you are representing yourself, the Department, and the University to undergraduate students. Your conduct reflects upon you as a scholar as well as on the Department as a whole. You are a professional and are expected to treat your position as a professional responsibility. You should perform to the best of your abilities and consider your position as a job and an educational opportunity.

TA and RA positions are awarded on a semester-by-semester basis though generally students are offered a contract for a funding package for the academic year. The Graduate Director and Department Chair make position assignments in consultation with the administrative staff. While attempts will be made to match assignments with student interests and faculty requests, assignments must also consider student and course schedules, seniority, and other departmental needs.

The evaluations on your performance as a TA or RA are used to decide whether your funding will continue for the following year as well as during your second year review in which we make determinations about continuation in the graduate program.

## **Workload**

Students who receive 100% of the minimum stipend and 100% tuition scholarship may not hold additional employment on or off campus. As with any professional appointment, the amount of work may vary from week to week, but the average is usually expected to be no more than 20 hours per week for the UD minimum stipend.

The Department will assign you no more than 20 hours per week on average for teaching duties during the regular semesters (fall and spring). The course instructors or supervisor will assign work to you. If you find that your assigned duties consistently demand more than 20 hours per week, speak first with the instructor about finding ways to reduce your time commitment. If the issue persists after that conversation, you are advised to discuss it with the Graduate Director or the Department Chair.

## **TA Responsibilities**

As a TA, you are expected to follow the instructions given to you by the course instructor(s), and to respond to her/him/them in a timely fashion. Email is the most frequently used means of communication among instructors, TAs and students in a course, so you must check and answer your email daily (UD account) to respond to your supervisor's and students' questions and/or requests in a timely fashion.

Students in teaching assistantship positions will have varying duties based on the type of course to which they are assigned.

## **TA Positions**

- **Grader:** You will be responsible for grading duties as necessary across one or more courses. You may possibly facilitate classroom activities or lead occasional discussions or lectures during regular class time.
- **Lab Instructors:** You may be responsible for leading lab sections associated with POSC300 (Research Methods in Political Science). This includes grading responsibilities.
- **Writing Instructors:** Your assignment may be a second-writing course requiring you to do grading and writing instruction, in addition to attending lecture, for that course.

- **Discussion Section Leaders:** You will be responsible for leading discussion sections. You will be required to attend lecture, grade, and lead two discussion sections per week.
- **Instructor:** Advanced graduate students who have defended their dissertation proposals may have the opportunity teach their own courses.

The instructor will set clear expectations for the TA on how lectures and discussion sections take place. It is your responsibility as a TA to familiarize yourself with the course materials, textbook, simulations, websites, software, homework assignments before each class meeting with students. As a TA, please be ready to attend all lectures, labs, review sessions, exams, and discussion sections as required.

You should not cancel any section, lab, or lecture without consulting with the instructor first. If you cannot attend to your lecture, section, or lab for any reason, you should communicate the fact to your instructor as soon as possible, so that arrangements for a substitute can be made; communication should be made in writing unless it is impossible for you to do so. An email is best. Please do not make informal arrangements for a substitute; approval by your supervising instructor is necessary. Absence is justified only by extenuating circumstances beyond your control, or for approved departmental travel to attend special events such as conferences.

As a TA assigned to a grader position you are supposed to complete all reading materials in a timely fashion and to attend lectures as well as holding office hours (discussed below). The workload for these positions will vary from week to week. The course schedule will determine grading responsibilities. Students should coordinate with their supervising instructors in terms of expectations and timelines for grading. Teaching Assistants assigned to lead labs sections or discussion sections are expected to attend lecture and do grading as assigned by their instructor in addition to leading discussion sections and holding office hours (discussed below).

During discussion sessions and labs, you may give students as much time to ask questions, as they need. However, you should also prepare for the possibility that few questions will be asked, and plan activities that will make all of the time well spent. Always be prepared to review material as needed, and to discuss specific problems that help students understand the topics covered in the lectures. Lack of preparation will be obvious to the students, and it will certainly lead to student complaints. Talk about best teaching practices

with your fellow graduate students and faculty, and try to learn from their experiences. You are encouraged to attend any teaching seminars held in the Department and at the Center for Teaching and Learning. If you are concerned about some issue during your teaching, talk to your supervising instructor or the Graduate Director.

As a Teaching Assistant, you are expected to hold weekly office hours; it is best to schedule them in agreement with the course instructor in order to avoid holding office hours at the same times. Graduate students are encouraged to hold office hours in the Graduate Office (Smith 333) though some students do hold regular office hours in other locations such as the library or at a coffee house. Be sure to discuss your plans with your supervising instructor; all office hours must be held at regular times and in public places. You may schedule appointments with students at times outside of your office hours. Be aware that many students will utilize e-mail for questions. All e-mail questions and comments should be handled in a prompt and professional manner within a reasonable span of time. Discuss your supervisor's policies on e-mail including issues such as granting extensions or grade complaints.

At the end of each semester faculty submit evaluations of their TAs or RAs, that include quantitative and qualitative analyses of your performance. These become a part of your "permanent file" and will be used in evaluating your progress in the program and in making funding decisions. If you have any questions about these evaluations, you should speak to the Graduate Director.

In addition to your teaching responsibilities, you may be assigned proctoring duties for exams, including final exams, so you should not make travel or any other plans to leave the University before the final exam period is over, and the final exams for your course(s) are graded.

**In summary...**

- Follow the instructions given by your supervisor (the course instructor)
- Check and answer your udel.edu email daily
- Prepare for every lecture, discussion section, and lab carefully; do not rely on "winging it"
- Hold office hours and consider the students' needs
- Do not cancel discussion sessions or labs arbitrarily; attend all lectures

unless otherwise arranged with your supervisor

- Plan to be available until after the final exams are given and graded

## **TA Time Allocation**

This is *an example* of the average weekly time, you might spend on different teaching-related responsibilities.

### **Teaching Activities (11 hours)**

- 3-6 hours of classroom teaching (discussions or labs, or instructor-led lectures)
- 1-2 hours holding office hours each week
- 2-3 hours preparing for classroom teaching
- 2 hours organizing the production of course materials, entering grades, communicating with the instructor and the students, including email and appointments outside office hours as needed.

### **Proctoring and Grading (5-6 hours)**

- Proctoring and grading exams as assigned by the course instructor during the semester and final exam period. Additional writing assignments, regular homework, and other examination materials may be included in your responsibilities.

### **Professional Teaching Development (1 hour)**

- Observing the instructor's lecture and/or discussion and lab sessions conducted by other TAs, at the discretion of the course instructor or course coordinator.
- Attending teaching seminars and activities promoted by the Department, or training sessions requested by the instructor or course coordinator.
- Maintaining a teaching portfolio that includes syllabi, course materials, assignments, and other teaching materials from each semester.
- Participating in webinars on new technologies and techniques; practicing with the technology tools used at UD, etc.
- Participating in the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning (CTAL), which supports graduate students who serve as teaching assistants and who plan to pursue teaching careers in higher education.

**Professional Development Seminars:** please follow this [CTAL link](#) for more information

- Teaching Assistant Orientation
- Conversations on Professional and Educational Development (COPED)

- Courses: UNIV600 – Learning; UNIV601 – Pedagogy
- Center for Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL)

**Pedagogical and Professional Development:** (varies)

- Research (on learning and teaching in higher education)
- Application (of learning theory on concrete learning contexts)
- Reflection (on the effectiveness of teaching methodologies)

## **TA Responsibilities Towards Students**

### **A student’s right to privacy and FERPA**

All UD Faculty, Staff and Graduate Teaching Assistants are responsible for becoming familiar with The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act or 1974, known as FERPA. Please familiarize yourself with the information at this [link](#). You are expected to follow the requirements of FERPA without exception.

### **Interacting with Students**

Students should be treated with respect and sympathy and you should avoid condescension. Do not discuss students in public forums including with other graduate students or on social media. In particular, students may ask questions that show a lack of knowledge of prerequisite material. This should be viewed as an opportunity for a quick review of background material that may have been forgotten, especially if you find that several students have the same question. Having an attitude ‘that the student should know the answer to the question’ only discourages students from asking questions and from participating in class. The best guide is to think about how you would like to be treated by your TA. At the same time, students should expect to be challenged, to put effort into learning the subject, to behave appropriately in the classroom, and to follow the rules set out on the syllabus given by the course instructor. In summary:

Be kind and responsive to your students, but expect them to behave according to the University code of conduct, and to put in the necessary effort in learning the subject matter. Arrive to class at least five minutes before its start. Maintain control in the classroom. Enforce class rules.

### **Disability Support Services**

The University's Office of Disability Support Services (DSS) takes care of proper certification of students who need special arrangements in taking classes, taking exams, etc. When a student is certified by DSS, it is not up to the instructor to question whether the student actually has the need identified by DSS — we must abide by University policies. Please follow [this link](#) for more information.

Be mindful that DSS accommodations are a private issue and should only be discussed in private with each student involved.

When receiving an email from DSS informing that specific students should have special accommodations, whether to take exams in their center facilities, with more time, or any other identified need, compliance with the instructions received from DSS is not an option. They request that exams be sent to them 24 hours in advance of the time for the exam. If the instructor does not have the exam ready by then, she/he must call the DSS Office and make arrangements so that the exam will be delivered to them at least 30 minutes ahead of the starting time; DSS should be made fully aware that the exam will not be delivered 24 hours ahead of time. That said, it is best to have the exam delivered to the DSS Office 24 hours in advance. In order to avoid abuse, the following should be kept in mind:

- (a) If a student is certified by DSS for special accommodations, the instructor will receive an email from DSS at the start of the semester with the name of the student and a description of the type of special accommodations needed (extra time, special room, etc.). It is important to save such an email from DSS with other class files.
- (b) Once DSS sends the notification, it is up to the student to communicate to the instructor, ahead of each exam, the intention to take advantage of those special accommodations. This is done by the student filling out a web form (UDSIS) which in turn generates an email to the instructor. DSS does not receive a copy of the form, and therefore does not check to see if the student who filled out the electronic form has been certified for such accommodations after the form is submitted. If the instructor does not check the request against the notifications received from DSS (see (a) above), a cheating student will go unnoticed. Therefore, the instructor should:
- (c) Check the request received from a student against the notification received from DSS to make sure that they match. If they do not match, the instructor should call DSS to verify the source of the discrepancy. The instructor should request an email from DSS if they just failed to send one. Otherwise, if the student is not certified,



the instructor must report the student (keeping all the evidence) to the Office of Student Conduct.

## **Title IX Compliance**

The University is required to be compliant with Title IX. From the University's policies:

*Title IX is a federal law that prohibits discrimination based on the sex of employees and students of educational institutions that receive federal financial assistance. Title IX's prohibition of sexual discrimination includes prohibition of sexual harassment and sexual violence.*

As an employee of the University, you have rights and responsibilities relative to Title IX. If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, discrimination, or sexual assault you may find resources for reporting and for finding support at the University's Title IX resource page. You may also discuss your situation with the Graduate Director, Department Chair, supervisor, or other campus resources without fear of retaliation.

As an employee, you are also considered a mandatory reporter relative to Title IX. If a student informs you or the class that they have been a victim of assault, harassment, or discrimination you must report the disclosure to the Title IX office. Please see [this link](#) for Equity and Inclusion Resources at UD.

## **Administrative Matters**

### **Room Assignments**

Room assignments are accessible through the Faculty Center on UDSIS. The Registrar may need to make classroom changes very close to the start of classes. Instructors and TAs should check to confirm their classroom assignments on the day of the first class (or the day before) in order to avoid going to the wrong room.

It is recommended that instructors and TAs check their room assignments early on to make sure that those are workable for the class being taught; any special room requests should be submitted to Mrs. Barbara Ford (barbford@udel.edu) long before the semester starts. Please, do not seek out other faculty or TAs trying to make side deals or swaps. Any room change has to be properly entered into the system so that the correct information is available to anyone who needs it.

## **Academic Misconduct**

You may encounter forms of academic misconduct including disruptive behavior in the classroom, cheating on exams or projects, or plagiarism. The University handles these cases through the Office of Student Conduct (OSC). You should consult with your supervising instructor(s) about how they would like to handle these cases. University guidelines are available from the OSC including a handout on academic dishonesty. See [this link](#) for more information on the Office of Student Conduct.

## **Teaching your own Class**

If you are assigned a course to teach in the fall, spring, summer or winter sessions, you will have additional responsibilities. You will need to prepare a syllabus that conforms to University and departmental guidelines, and you must follow the rules set out on the syllabus. Some obvious rules worth emphasizing again are:

- You must prepare a syllabus to be distributed to the students on the first day of classes. Sample syllabi are available in the main office and you are encouraged to speak with instructors who have previously taught these courses.
- You may not arbitrarily cancel class. If you are unable to teach your class due to extenuating circumstances, you should inform the office that you would be missing class. Do not ask a fellow graduate student to substitute for you without prior approval from the Graduate Director.
- You must administer exams on the days specified on the syllabus; the final exam is to be given on the day and location specified by the Registrar's Office. It is not acceptable to have take-home exams or to end classes before the date specified in the University Academic Calendar. Therefore, you should not make travel or any other plans to leave the University before the final exams are given and graded and the final course grades are submitted. If a student requires a makeup exam and you wish to have the departmental office administer the exam please give them at least 48 hours' notice before the exam is to be administered. When possible avoid having students submit papers or written work at the main office as it causes congestion but if you must do so notify the staff prior to the submission date and give clear instructions.
- You must keep for one year the final exams from your class as well as all grading

records. If you will be absent for a long period of time after teaching, you should leave all records as well as the final exams with the office, just in case a student has an inquiry during your absence.

- You may make use of departmental copy machines. Requests must be submitted in the main office at least 24 hours before the material is needed. Avoid utilizing the printers in the graduate office for large printing jobs.

### **Improving Teaching Skills**

The University has some useful resources to help you improve your teaching skills and your interaction with your students. One such resource is the Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning. Please follow [this link](#) to learn more about their teaching resources.

### **RA Responsibilities**

Expectations for RAs should be discussed and negotiated between the student and the faculty member(s) supervising the research before the term of research support begins. Students funded with an RA position through the Department are expected to complete approximately 20 hours per week.

Note that RAs may be required to perform research during a Winter term that comes between Fall and Spring semesters of continuous research support. If the funding faculty chooses this option, which is specified in the funding contract, the student may not take any additional employment, including teaching, during that winter term. Financial support for research during the Summer terms is negotiated and paid separately from the other semesters.

