

University of California, Santa Barbara
Department of Physics

Roles and Responsibilities
for Teaching Assistants (TAs)
and Supervising Faculty Members

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This document sets forth guidelines for the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants (TAs) and supervising faculty members in the Department of Physics at UCSB. The term “teaching assistant” is used to represent collectively all teaching apprentice positions, including graders. The purposes of these guidelines are (1) to improve the quality of teaching in undergraduate physics courses at UCSB; (2) to clarify the mutual responsibilities and obligations of the professor and the TA; and (3) to improve the instruction and training of graduate students as educators.

The guidelines given below are based on the following assumptions:

1. The quality of undergraduate education is at its best when TAs and faculty work together in a spirit of cooperation. It is therefore the mutual responsibility of the TA and the supervising faculty member to communicate to each other questions and problems regarding teaching materials and techniques, as well as any other concerns that affect the performance of their separate duties.

2. The relationship between TAs and faculty is one of student to teacher and advisee to advisor. As such it carries with it the potential for intimidation. The responsibility therefore rests with the faculty member to create an atmosphere where communication is open and without threat.
3. The concept of the TA as an apprentice teacher implies that the faculty will provide TAs with active feedback. It is the responsibility of the supervising faculty member to provide the TA with detailed information about the content of the course, including information that is more detailed than that found in the course syllabus. In addition, TAs will receive feedback from the faculty about their actual in-class performance. This may take the form of videotaping of TAs, direct observation of TAs by faculty, or discussion of the TA's student evaluations. Any classroom observations are to be conducted with the full agreement of the TA and with sufficient advance notice.
4. Effective teaching by TAs requires that they be creditable in their roles as teachers. Observations of TAs and subsequent discussions of these observations must be conducted in a way that will not jeopardize the rapport and standing of the TA with his or her students.

Guidelines

1. **TA Assignments.** Half-time TAs are to spend 20 hours per week on all aspects of their TA duties. Quarter-time TAs are to spend 10 hours per week on all aspects of their TA duties. The division of these hours between discussion and/or laboratory sections, grading, preparation, and office hours will be specified each quarter by the Head TA when TAs receive their assignments. If a TA finds that his

or her duties cannot reasonably be performed during the allotted time, it is the responsibility of the TA to bring this to the attention of the course professor and the Head TA.

2. TA Mailboxes and E-mail. Since they cannot always easily be reached by telephone, TAs are to check their mailboxes, the graduate bulletin board, and their electronic mail at least daily. These are often the only ways that the faculty and staff can contact TAs on short notice.

3. TA Training. The faculty will provide active tutelage of teaching assistants. One faculty member shall be designated as TA Training Coordinator, and that faculty member will teach Physics 500 (Teaching Assistant Seminar). All TAs new to the Department of Physics at UCSB are required to enroll in Physics 500. The TA Training Coordinator will arrange for the periodic evaluation of the TAs by means of videotaping of their in-class work and/or by personal observation of teaching technique, and will provide constructive criticism and assistance in teaching technique. TAs are encouraged to discuss questions of teaching technique with the TA Training Coordinator.

4. Office Hours. All TAs will hold weekly office hours in the Physics Study Room (PSR) on the first floor of Broida Hall (Room 1019). The number of hours for which each TA is responsible depends on the nature of the TA's particular assignment, and will be assigned by the Head TA. TAs will choose the office hours that best fit their schedules, subject to the restriction that there be TAs present in the PSR during all hours of operation and that no more than three (3) TAs shall be present at any time. Office hours for all TAs will be posted on a master list in the PSR. TAs must have their photograph taken so that it can be mounted on their TA placard. It is the TA's responsibility to post this placard in the PSR while on duty.

It is also the TA's responsibility to sign in and sign out of the PSR using an electronic key.

5. Absences from Office Hours. If a TA is unable to make an office hour, it is the responsibility of the TA to notify the Head TA **and** to arrange a substitute in a timely manner. In extreme situations, the Head TA can assist with arranging a substitute. Repeated absences from office hours can and will lead to termination of TA appointments.

6. Printed and Online Materials for TAs. The supervising faculty member will ensure that his or her TAs are all provided with copies of all printed materials distributed to students, as well as with copies of ASUCSB Lecture Notes for the course (when available). If online materials are provided to students, the supervising faculty member will ensure that his or her TAs have access to these.

7. Weekly Meetings. The supervising faculty member will meet with his or her TAs on a weekly basis. The supervising faculty member will provide TAs with sufficient information concerning the upcoming discussion section to ensure that the TAs are comfortable with the content, presentation, and implementation of all materials. This information might include:

- (a) rationales, goals, and objectives for the discussion;
- (b) specific content and examples for each topic;
- (c) emphasis or amount of time to be spent on each topic;
- (d) questions to ask students or discussion topics to be covered;
- (e) potential problem areas in the presentation, and recommended solutions;

- (f) references to assist in the preparation of the TA's presentation.

8. Laboratory meetings. Laboratory TAs shall meet each Friday with the Laboratory Manager to discuss the equipment, procedure, and TA presentation to be used in the coming week's experiment. At this meeting, TAs will be provided with information concerning the operation of the equipment as well as potential problems in its use.

There will be only minimal discussion of the theoretical background of the experiment, so it is the TA's responsibility to review and understand the physics of the experiment. The focus of the meeting will be on the successful execution of the lab by the student with the TA as mentor.

All laboratory TAs are required to run through the lab at the Friday meeting, time permitting. The experimental apparatus is also available to TAs on weekends and Monday mornings. If an emergency prevents a TA from running through the lab at these times, he or she is to attend another lab section prior to his or her own section.

At the first Friday meeting of the quarter, the following items will be covered in addition to the following week's experiment:

- (a) room keys and laboratory readers will be issued;
- (b) the schedule of labs will be presented and discussed;
- (c) procedures for collecting, grading, and returning student lab notebooks will be discussed; and
- (d) lab safety and emergency procedures will be reviewed.

The responsible faculty member(s) is (are) invited to attend the lab meetings and offer guidance and instruction.

9. Responsibility for Grades. The supervising faculty member is responsible for instruction and grading in his or her course, including laboratory courses that accompany lecture courses. Thus, although the TA is the person who works directly with the students in the laboratory and grades their performance, it is expected that the efforts of the TA will be checked by the supervising faculty member periodically during the quarter to maintain academic standards and provide necessary feedback. Furthermore, the laboratory TA will recommend final course grades for the laboratory to the supervising faculty member, but it is the faculty member who, as instructor of record, has final approval of these grades.

10. Role of the Head TA. Teaching assistants serve as apprentices to their supervising faculty member, not to the more experienced TAs. The responsibilities of the Head TA are therefore not intended to replace those of the faculty. The Head TA will arrange TA assignments, assist in the smooth functioning of courses with several TAs, provide laboratory TAs with information concerning experiments, and to serve as a resource for TAs and faculty alike. TAs and faculty should also make their students aware of the existence of the Head TA, who will serve as a conduit for student feedback both good and bad about TAs and faculty alike.

11. Examination Keys. The supervising faculty member will provide the TAs with keys to all of the faculty member's lecture exams. Each key will include detailed instructions for the assignment of points as well as guidelines for grading.

This will help ensure that the grading is reflective of the emphases of the supervising faculty member, not those of individual TAs, and will contribute to the maintenance of uniformity among different graders. At the discretion of the supervising faculty member, TAs may be asked to review examination questions prior to the exam.

12. Grading. TAs are responsible for the prompt and conscientious grading of all homework, laboratory reports, and examinations included in their assignment. TAs are not to depart UCSB at the end of an academic quarter until such time as all grading duties have been performed.

13. Course Lectures by TAs. Experienced TAs may occasionally be given the opportunity to give a course lecture. Such lecturing experiences should be limited in occurrence and carried out under the supervision and guidance of the faculty member. TAs should not be expected to lecture merely to substitute for an absent faculty member.

14. Professional Attitude. It is crucial that students enrolled in a course have confidence in the teaching staff for that course. Therefore a professional attitude shall be presented to the students at all times by both TAs and faculty members. Any disagreements or problems related to the teaching of the course are to be handled confidentially among the teaching staff.

15. Student Evaluations. TAs will assist with teaching evaluations at the end of each quarter. TAs will be asked to distribute and collect student evaluation forms in one of the lecture courses (not necessarily the same course for which they teach). These forms are to be returned promptly to the Undergraduate Program Assistant. In addition, TAs will be provided with evaluation forms for their own class, which are to be distributed in class at the end of the quarter. Each TA will

designate a student who will be responsible for collecting these forms and promptly returning them to the Undergraduate Program Assistant.

16. Contractual Obligations. A TA's appointment is a binding contract for the duration of the quarter. Once instruction has begun, it is unacceptable for a TA to break the contract for any reason except one of extreme emergency.

Resolution of Problems Concerning the Guidelines

If problems arise concerning the roles or responsibilities of supervising faculty and TAs, the involved parties should meet with each other to discuss the problem and its resolution. If this meeting does not lead to a resolution, the TA or supervising faculty member should attempt to resolve the problem through consultation with the department chair, who has the responsibility to resolve matters regarding department personnel.