

Department of Geology and Geophysics

Graduate Teaching Assistant Information and FAQ

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What is a TA and what do TAs do?

Teaching Assistants (TAs) hold office hours to answer student questions, present and assist in laboratory or workshop periods, grade student assignments, and assist instructors in preparing for class. TAs should have good communication skills and a desire to help students. Becoming a TA is a great way help other students, solidify your understanding of topics, and make close connections with faculty.

Who can TA?

TAs are selected from graduate student candidates in the Department of Geology & Geophysics. TAs should have basic familiarity with material covered in the class, or have previously taken the course.

Master's and doctoral candidates must be registered as full-time students to be eligible for assistantships and to qualify for the University's tuition benefit program. Students may not have any additional gainful employment on-campus or off-campus while being supported on an assistantship.

Hiring decisions and timeline

Teaching Assistantships are assigned by the GG Graduate Affairs Committee after careful consideration of the academic qualifications of all eligible graduate student applicants. Instructor requests and evaluation of student enrollment determines which courses will be assigned a TA. Prospective TAs (and their advisors) can share a preferred assignment with the graduate affairs committee, however there is no guarantee that the student will be assigned their preferred course.

Graduate students will be informed of their TA assignments a couple weeks before classes start. Because of the nature of class enrollments, we cannot make hiring decisions farther in advance. Sometimes late decisions are made the day before classes start, or even during the first week of classes.

University Teaching Assistantships (UTAs) are awarded separately by the Graduate School on the basis of campus-wide competitions. They should be developed in cooperation with a course instructor. For more information: <https://gradschool.utah.edu/funding/fellowships-scholarships-awards/index.php>

TA pay and benefits

TAs are paid either for one or two semesters per academic year. Some summer courses also require TAs.

Teaching Assistantships (TAs) and Research Assistantships (RAs) receive equal pay in the department. We make every effort to add a cost of living increase to TA salary annually. For current salary values, please email the chair of Graduate Affairs or the department front office.

Job responsibilities

Graduate student TAs are expected to work up to 20 hours per week, on average, on assistantship duties. TAs are expected to:

- Allocate sufficient time for TA duties, including pre-reading and doing course assignments.
- Practice and prepare leading any discussion, laboratory, or workshop sections in advance.
- Be available to students at defined weekly office hours.
- Finish assigned grading promptly and accurately.
- Be able to attend the class lectures and lab sections if requested by the instructor.
- Effectively communicate with the instructor and students in the class.
- Provide additional support to the course instructor if/as requested.

International student TAs

International students must pass the ITA workshop through the Graduate School to verify their English communication skills - <https://gradschool.utah.edu/ita/>. Graduate School policy requires all graduate students who are non-native speakers of North American English to be cleared by the ITA Program in order to be eligible for benefits awarded to Teaching Assistants.

What to do when assigned

Graduate students assigned to TA should initiate contact with the course instructor a week or so before classes begin. The TA and instructor should meet to clearly define TA expectations for the semester, and the TA should indicate their preferred availability for office hours as well as contact information. TAs should check that they can attend the lab sections and/or lectures of the assigned class, and if not, make sure to mention this to the instructor, as it may affect their ability to assist with the course.

Appropriate conduct

TAs must avoid conflict of interests with students in their course/s. Potential conflicts of interest should be communicated and discussed with the course instructor. Please review our [department ethics policy](#).

Offices and classroom keys

TAs are not assigned separate offices. Office hours may be held in graduate student shared offices, computer labs, or common areas in FASB. TAs may be able to schedule an unused classroom for office hours by contacting the department front office. If you need a classroom key to assist with course prep or instruction, please contact the department front office.

FERPA

Teaching assistants access students information and therefore must be FERPA certified. Complete your certification online here: <https://registrar.utah.edu/faculty/ferpa-certified.php>

General questions

If you have additional questions please contact the chair of Graduate Affairs and/or the department main office. Topics (not all of these have info below):

- Department and college safety: <https://cmes.utah.edu/safety/index.php>
- Renting GG vehicles: https://earth.utah.edu/department-resources/fleet_vehicles.php
- HR, pay, key requests, and copy codes: Thea Hatfield: thea.hatfield@utah.edu
- Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action: <https://oeo.utah.edu/>
- Health and safety reporting: <https://safeu.utah.edu/how-do-i-report/>
- Dean of Students: <https://deanofstudents.utah.edu/bit/students-in-distress.php>

General policies

- Before you leave the sample prep room (376 FASB), please make sure it is cleaned, organized, and ready for the next person. The table should be cleared before you exit the room. That room is used by a lot of the people, including faculty, staff, and other students so it is critical (and considerate) that we all do our part to keep it a functional work space. The end of semester cleaning day is the first school day after finals week is over.
- All materials that are moved or removed from storage or prep spaces should be promptly and properly returned once they are no longer needed, and no later than the end of the semester unless permission has been granted otherwise. This includes any specimens that are used for final exams. Please clean off the counter tops and clean out the drawers.
- Graduate student instructors should not alter any department collection specimens without express permission from the curator. If anyone crosses out or removes any identifying information (such as a sample number or an inventory number), this is considered defacing university property and it renders the sample useless as a collection specimen.
- Please be diligent about closing and locking interior doors (including offices, workspace, and classrooms) when no one is in the room. TAs and teaching faculty, this includes locking classroom doors once class is done if they room is no longer needed. Do not leave any exterior doors propped open and make sure they fully close behind you.