

## **BEST PRACTICES, POLICIES & GUIDELINES FOR USE OF UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS (UTAs)**

### **I. Tasks**

Undergraduates can fulfill several roles as UTAs, depending on the particular needs of a department and the nature of the course/lab to which the UTA is assigned. Below is a list of functions UTAs may serve in Trinity College:

- Assisting course instructor with class preparation and course materials (e.g., setting up AV equipment or lab specimens, maintaining course website, photocopying)
- Assisting students in help rooms or review sessions outside of class time
- Leading discussion sections or labs
- Assisting course instructor with grading (e.g., homework, quizzes, lab reports)

**Note on Grading:** Faculty are responsible for assigning and submitting all grades. UTAs may, however, assist faculty with the grading process. Individual departments should determine the type of grading permitted by UTAs based on what is appropriate for their level of knowledge and experience, and the nature of the material being evaluated. Within this context UTAs can implement well-delineated grading criteria protocols. UTAs should not be allowed to develop their own grading rubric for any assignment. Departments using UTAs in grading roles should provide a procedure for re-grade requests in the event that a student disagrees with a grade given by a UTA. Departments should also provide UTAs with a protocol for grading problems that have more than one solution and/or where students may come up with unique answers not in the grading rubric.

UTAs should only be able to view grades that they have personally recorded. In courses where UTAs are assigned to particular lab or discussion sections, UTAs should only have access to grades they have recorded for students in their section. UTAs are not permitted to access, calculate or enter official midterm or final course grades. For this reason, UTAs may **not** be assigned a Teacher's Assistant or Grader role in Sakai or STORM.

The specific tasks required of UTAs should be provided, in writing, to any student who serves in this role for a Trinity College course. UTAs should not be asked to perform tasks that are not specified in their position description.

### **II. Selection**

The process by which students become UTAs may vary depending on the particular needs of departments. UTAs may be recruited and hired on the basis of faculty recommendations. Departments that must employ several UTAs each semester may have a formalized search procedure, involving a job announcement, an application submission period, and interviews. Alternatively, other departments may hire UTAs more opportunistically; for instance, a UTA position may be filled when an individual student approaches a faculty member or the DUS directly about possible employment opportunities in the department. Ideally, UTAs will be assigned to faculty members taking into consideration mutual intellectual interests and the potential for collaboration in course work, research, etc.

Undergraduates serving as UTAs should have earned an above-average grade in the course (or its equivalent) in which they assist, with grades being commensurate with the responsibilities of the position.

The UTA may also demonstrate knowledge of the material by performing well in more advanced courses. Prospective UTAs should be judged to be mature and willing and able to learn to function as professionals in fulfilling all aspects of their teaching responsibilities.

### **III. Training**

UTAs should have training in the specific content of their teaching responsibilities as well as general training on the professional aspects of teaching. This training should occur before the UTA starts teaching and may require that they return to campus prior to the beginning of classes. Each department utilizing UTAs should provide UTAs with a written guide or handbook, which provides appropriate information needed to carry out their responsibilities in a professional manner. Some suggestions for information that should be included in the training and/or guide are:

- Name(s) of person(s): (a) having ultimate responsibility for policy decisions in the courses in which they are assisting, and (b) having responsibility for their mentoring and supervision
- Expectations regarding grading, including
  - Proper record keeping of students' grades
  - Returning papers in a timely fashion
  - Confidentiality of student records
- Expectations regarding how to handle situations in which students miss deadlines or who have excessive absences
- Limitations on scheduling extra help sessions and procedures for reserving rooms for help sessions
- The URLs for academic or personal help resources on campus (academic deans' offices, Academic Resource Center, Peer Tutoring Program, Athletic Tutoring Program, CAPS)
- Promoting academic integrity and how to handle cases of suspected academic dishonesty
- University policies on tutoring students in their classes, dating students in their classes, grading papers of students they are dating or tutoring, and sexual harassment
- How to respond to an emergency situation such as how to exit a building in case of fire
- Liability in case of a classroom accident caused by instructor negligence

### **IV. Supervision & Mentoring**

A faculty member having the responsibility for the assigning of grades in a course also has the ultimate responsibility for the performance of UTAs serving in that course. The faculty member may delegate the direct supervision of UTAs to others such as a lab manager or a graduate student. The faculty member (or his/her designate) is expected to meet with UTAs regularly (usually weekly) to inform them about the material covered, the approach taken in presenting the material, the approach the UTA should take to reinforce the material, evaluative exercises and upcoming deadlines. UTAs may also be expected to provide valuable feedback to the faculty member on how well the students are learning the material.

The UTA position provides students with a unique opportunity to receive faculty mentoring, and it is Trinity College's expectation that all UTAs, regardless of the actual tasks of their position, benefit intellectually from their experience. Regular meetings or opportunities for conversations with the course instructor should not be limited to reviewing the UTAs assignments, but also serve as times for students

and faculty members to discuss current issues in the discipline, mutual scholarly interests, and future opportunities for the UTA in terms of research, graduate work, or careers.

## **V. Evaluation**

UTAs should be systematically evaluated at the end of the course to which they have been assigned. Departments are expected to design assessment methods appropriate to the tasks and roles fulfilled by the UTA, but must include written feedback from the students who were instructed by the UTA through discussion sections, labs, help rooms, and/or review sessions. Anyone who assisted in supervising the UTA (such as a course instructor, lab manager, graduate student, etc.) should also be invited to provide comments on the UTA's performance based on their observations. The results of these evaluations should be taken into consideration in any future hiring of the UTA. The forms completed by students or summaries thereof should be returned to the UTA after grades have been submitted for the course. The UTA may want to share the results of the evaluation with persons writing letters of recommendation for him/her.

## **VI. Compensation & Workload**

The amount of compensation for UTAs is to be determined at the discretion of the hiring department within the range for compensation set each year by the Office of the Dean of Academic Affairs of Trinity College. UTA hourly pay ranges from \$8.00 to \$13.50 (subject to change). To comply with University policy, all UTAs must fill out timecards and be paid biweekly. The University does not permit lump sum payments to UTAs.

Trinity College does not allow the use of academic credit as payment for UTAs. Students cannot be enrolled in a course in which they are concurrently serving as a UTA. If UTA-type work is required as part of a credit-bearing independent study experience, a written proposal describing the nature of the UTA work and the rationale for it as part of the student's intellectual experience should be submitted to the Dean of Trinity College. If academic credit is approved for UTA-type work, the student may not also receive monetary compensation.

Departments should ensure that UTA responsibilities do not adversely affect students' ability to complete their own academic work. While there is no set minimum or maximum number of hours that UTAs may work, the recommended workload is 5-15 hours/week.

## **VII. Confidentiality**

An important responsibility of the course instructor is to ensure that UTAs understand the need to protect student privacy and confidentiality in all aspects of the course, including grading. Suggested guidelines for UTAs include the following:

- Academic and/or personal information about a student that is brought to the attention of a UTA through his/her instructional/grading role in the course should not be shared with anyone but the course instructor.
- Grades or other assessments of student performance must not be discussed with anyone other than the student and the course instructor.
- When in the UTA's possession homework and other graded assignments must be stored securely and not left out in areas where they could be viewed inappropriately.

## **VIII. Relationships Between UTAs and Students**

It is inappropriate for UTAs to date students in their section, or to be assigned students whom they have dated in the past. Course instructors should request that their UTAs inform them of any possible conflicts of interest if someone they are dating or have previously dated is in their section, and/or if they are asked to grade a paper or assignment of someone they are dating or have previously dated. It is also inappropriate for UTAs to grade the work of a student whom they are currently tutoring. UTAs should disclose conflicts of interest to the course instructor/UTA supervisor, who should then reassign the student's work to another UTA and find another grader, respectively.

UTAs should be directed to the University Policy regarding sexual harassment. ([http://www.duke.edu/web/equity/har\\_policy.htm](http://www.duke.edu/web/equity/har_policy.htm)) UTAs should be made aware that sexual harassment of students by an instructor or teaching assistant in an academic environment is understood to be the intentional misuse of authority.

## **IX. Sakai**

Sakai allows for grading permissions for Teaching Assistants to be fine-tuned. By default, they have no grading rights. Permission to grade can be limited to certain tools or a subset of students (like groups or sections). This means the TAs view of the Gradebook can be limited.

However, it is not recommended that UTAs be given a Teaching Assistant role in Sakai. Teaching Assistants have instructor level permissions for all other tools, so it is possible that a TA might change their grading permissions to be more expansive. In addition, although only the course instructor can submit midterm and final course grades through STORM, Teaching Assistant access to the Gradebook is such that grades they enter or manipulate can affect midterm and final grades.

Future versions of Sakai and/or alternative electronic course management systems used by the university may include features that further limit the access of Teaching Assistants or a new role that will accommodate UTAs.

## **Codicil**

### **Summer Session UTAs (effective 2005 Summer Sessions)**

The above guidelines should be following for UTAs employed during summer session. Requests for additional compensation due to completing UTA responsibilities in the timeframe of summer session should be sent to Dean Paula Gilbert, who will review the request with the Dean of Academic Affairs. These requests should be submitted annually and should be factored into departmental budgets.

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