

EXPECTATIONS FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS (2021-2022)

Teaching Coordinator: Sergio H. Lence, 368E Heady (shlence@iastate.edu)
Graduate Program Coordinator: Amy Bainum Emmett, 260B Heady (abainum@iastate.edu)
Help Room Coordinator: Rwit Chakravorty, 178B Heady (rwitch@iastate.edu)

Hours Per Week

- A 1/4 time TA is responsible for working 10 hours per week, on average, including office hours in the Help Room or elsewhere.
- A 1/2 time TA is responsible for working 20 hours per week and typically will be assigned to two different courses, each having 10 hour per week obligations. A Help Room assignment is equivalent to a course assignment, except that the entire assignment consists of working in the Help Room (and occasionally doing other tasks like proctoring exams).
- Some deviations in weekly hours will naturally occur due to the scheduling of exams, assignments, and other obligations of the TA and instructor. However, any significant deviations from the typical pattern must be approved by the instructor and the teaching coordinator.
- Given a shortage of available TAs for certain time slots, we sometimes need to call on TAs to help proctor exams for other classes. We try to do this on a rotating basis to the extent possible.
- Each semester, we ask TAs to fill out an online survey about their availability for courses that use a TA. It is imperative that TAs accurately document any time conflicts. Faculty and staff spend many hours trying to fix scheduling problems created by TAs who report being available to attend a class that conflicts with one of their own courses.

Office Hours

- In general, each TA should schedule a total of at least 3 office hours each week. Instructors may require additional office hours.
- First-year TAs assigned to 101 and 102 must hold their office hours in the Help Room located in 180 Heady.¹ Other TAs also may be required to hold office hours in the Help Room. To ensure that the Help Room is properly staffed throughout the week, the Help Room Coordinator will determine the office hours of each TA holding hours in the Help Room. Under typical circumstances, this assignment amounts to 3 hours for a 1/4 time assignment and 6 hours for a 1/2 time assignment. An instructor may ask you to schedule additional office hours – that may be held outside the classroom – as long as the total number of hours per week (including the 3 assigned Help Room hours, class attendance, recitations, grading, etc., plus any additional office hours) does not exceed 10 for a 1/4 TA appointment.
- TAs assigned to the Help Room must be present in the Help Room as scheduled by the Help Room Coordinator, to ensure that the Help Room is properly staffed throughout the week. This assignment will be made in a manner consistent with the number of work hours per week for the appointment (e.g., an average of 10 hours of work per week for a 1/4 time TA assignment.)
- Once you receive your TA assignment, email the following information to your instructor and the Help Room Coordinator: (a) your office hours, (b) office location, (c) phone number, and (d) email address. If you must change your hours or location, notify your instructor immediately.
- Be present for office hours. Instructors and students expect you to be present when you are scheduled, and major problems arise when you are not available on time. If for some reason you must miss part or all of your office hours, you should (1) contact the instructor or Help Room

¹ If an instructor requires additional office hours beyond the minimum 3 hours, then those extra office hours do *not* need to be held in the Help Room.

Coordinator immediately by e-mail, (2) switch with another TA or schedule make-up hours, and (3) post a notice for students. Such absences should be very rare.

- Office hours should be scheduled only during times that are convenient for the students taking the class. It is often best *not* to schedule them at the same time every day as it prevents any student with a class scheduled at that time from ever coming to office hours. (This is less important for the 101 and 102 sections, because other TAs will be available.)
- A TA assigned to two courses may use the same office hours for both courses if the chosen hours are convenient for students in both courses. A TA who has two principal assignments will hold twice as many hours as a TA with only one principal assignment. The week before an exam, including finals, TAs will need to offer at least one additional hour per class to accommodate the additional students seeking help. Notify the Help Room Coordinator of those changes by e-mail before the scheduled hours have come to pass.
- All TAs must schedule office hours during Final Exam week. TAs who meet in the Help Room must also meet there during Final Exam week, though the office hours will be different for that week. The Help Room Coordinator will post a sign-up list in the Help Room prior to final exams. The number of hours a TA is assigned during finals week may depend on the TA's work ethic and dependability throughout the semester.

Responsibilities

- TAs are expected to attend the classes they are assisting unless the instructor explicitly says otherwise.
- It is imperative that every TA routinely checks his/her e-mail to ensure quality communication. In general, this means multiple times per day. Respond promptly.
- It is the responsibility of TAs to ask for clarification if they do not understand their job descriptions or a particular request. It is understandable that a TA might have some communication difficulties if English is not his or her native language. But it is important to let people know when you do not understand something instead of pretending to understand and hoping for the best!
- In addition to holding office hours, most TAs are assigned to a variety of tasks including class attendance; grading of problem sets, quizzes and exams; proctoring quizzes and exams; leading labs or special discussion sections; conducting review sessions; preparing problem sets, quizzes, exams, or answer keys; development of computer exercises; and training students on computer use or library work. The instructor will inform you of your responsibilities. When you are asked to assist with proctoring and distributing material to the class, it is very important that you be present at the requested time.
- Faculty may allocate different tasks to different TAs in a given class section based on class needs and the comparative advantage of the individual TA. Typically, TAs will work for the assigned class, but occasionally an instructor may ask the TA to work with a different section or class (especially for proctoring exams) if the TA has no class conflicts.
- If a TA believes that he or she is being treated unfairly by a student or instructor and cannot resolve the problem, then the TA should consult with the teaching coordinator as soon as possible.

Professional Etiquette

- TAs are expected to behave professionally. For example, TAs should not undermine instructors, e.g., by making comments like "I think the instructor is wrong" or "This exam question was poorly written" to their students.

Confidentiality

- Instructors/TAs are not allowed to distribute a list of student grades to their classes, even if students are identified only by ISU ID numbers. Publicly circulating such lists is not allowed because one

student might be able to figure out another student's grade. Specifically, it violates the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act (FERPA). Please read the ISU policy here: <https://www.registrar.iastate.edu/policies>. From the department Chair:

“The Canvas gradebook allows individual students to see their own grades and does not expose you to potential violations of this federal law. Please do not publicly post student grades even if you believe you have done so in a manner that protects anonymity. Violations of FERPA are serious business and are simply not acceptable.”

Iowa State University Policies, Title IX, and Principles of Community

- Instructors/TAs should not violate ISU policies (<https://www.policy.iastate.edu/>). As students and employees of Iowa State University, instructors/TAs should comply with Title IX (<https://www.eoc.iastate.edu/title-ix>) and support ISU’s Principles of Community (<https://www.diversity.iastate.edu/connect/principles>), which asks to support respect, purpose, cooperation, diversity, freedom from discrimination, and honest and respectful expression of ideas. Instructors/TAs should not exploit their positions of authority in any way (e.g., it is not appropriate for a course’s TA to ask to go on a date to a student taking that course). As stated in the Introduction to ISU’s policy regarding Title IX (<https://www.policy.iastate.edu/policy/students/sexualmisconduct#intro>):

“Iowa State University is committed to creating a welcoming and respectful educational, work, living, and campus environment that is free from all forms of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking.”

Professional Development

- TAs interested in pursuing academic careers may want to explore the resources available at ISU’s Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CELT) <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/> to improve their performance in the classroom. You can find the schedule of CELT events and the corresponding registration forms at <https://www.celt.iastate.edu/events-registration/>
- The department rewards demonstrated outstanding TA performance by typically nominating up to four candidates per year for the *Iowa State University Teaching Excellence Award* (<https://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/academics/awards/tex/>) (click here for the most recent recipients <https://www.econ.iastate.edu/grad-students-win-teaching-excellence-awards>). To this end, the Teaching Coordinator requests information about TA performance from instructors and the Help Room Coordinator.
- The department also rewards demonstrated outstanding TA performance by giving priority for stand-alone teaching assignments.

HELP ROOM

Help Room Job Description

- After the first week of classes, the Help Room Coordinator will finalize the schedule to ensure that the Help Room is open from 9am-6pm Monday through Friday. A secondary Help Room schedule will be made specifically for final exam week.
- TAs must be present in 180 Heady during their assigned hours. A Help Room Sign-In Sheet will be used by TAs to sign in and out upon each arrival and departure. Please indicate the exact times so that we do not have to get into issues of how much rounding is appropriate. Falsifying this information is considered cheating.
- All on-duty TAs should make themselves easily identifiable to students walking in, as determined by the Help Room Coordinator (e.g., TAs may wear name tags).
- TAs should also be available in their respective webex rooms during their help room hours. However, priority should be given to students coming in person to the help room.
- A Help Room TA's duty is to help students, not study for his/her own classes, chat, eat, play with computers, or talk on the phone. If no students stop by, then a TA may study quietly. However, hiding from students or avoiding helping them is not allowed and will be noticed.
- Whenever a TA has to change his/her Help Room schedule, he/she should contact the Help Room Coordinator at least two days in advance. A valid reason and a good make-up plan are required before the Help Room Coordinator can make the change official. Such changes should be very rare.
- TAs must greet students as they walk in and ask how they can be of service. Students should be treated as customers. They are coming in to receive help from you. Without them, there would be no need for TAs.
- TAs with office hours in the Help Room should try to help any student who enters as long as the class involves economics. Although the Help Room is primarily responsible for assisting students taking Econ 101, 101L, 102, 207, 301, and 302, students from other economics courses may ask for assistance. Help them if you can. If you have problems, direct them to another TA who may have a better knowledge of the subject.
- Some students may need the computers located in 180B to work on their Aplia or other online assignments. These computers will not be used by on-duty TAs for any purpose other than teaching.
- Do not simply give students the answers. Show them how to think about a problem and help them come up with the answers by themselves. All TAs are encouraged to participate in Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (<http://www.celt.iastate.edu/>) programs to improve their teaching strategies.
- TAs are not to help students with certain assignments as specified by class instructors. Most of these assignments are supposed to be done independently by students. A Help Room TA should help students with the relevant concepts by making up his/her own examples.
- Sometimes instructors will make answer keys available to the help room TAs. Answer keys will be kept on or near the small bookshelf and used only for reference by TAs. **Students should not be allowed to look at, copy, or take answer keys.**
- Some instructors have their students submit and/or pick up homework and exams at the Help Room. The boxes in 180B serve this service effectively. If your instructor wants to provide this service, please label a note card and tape it to the box. **It is the responsibility of TAs to keep track of all the materials in the box.**

Incentives

- We very much appreciate the outstanding service provided by most of our TAs. Many do an exceptional job, and some have gone on to receive teaching awards based mostly on their service in the Help Room. Unfortunately, we've also occasionally had a few "slackers." Failure to fulfill rules and obligations have resulted in fines (reductions from paycheck) typically starting at \$100. Failure to respond to emails from a TA's instructor is one of the most common reasons for being fined. Do not expect to be warned, especially if you have inconvenienced your instructor to the point that other faculty (like the department chair or teaching coordinator) have to get involved. See the Help Room Coordinator in 178B if you do not understand any of your obligations.
- All TAs are expected to notify the Help Room Coordinator if there is a failure on the part of another TA to fulfill their obligations as stated previously. Notifications will be kept strictly anonymous.
- Mandatory Help Room TA Evaluation Forms will be used by students to provide feedback on TAs' performance. A TA must have the student complete an evaluation form once finishing assisting him/her. This information will help the department evaluate TAs and learn about Help Room usage patterns. We recognize that students sometimes make unfair complaints, and we do not automatically trust whatever the student might say. But positive and negative feedback will be examined closely and may affect future TA assignments.
- During finals week, the usual Help Room schedule is modified to accommodate both TAs' and students' finals. TAs who exhibit exceptional performance during the semester, largely measured through the number and quality of evaluation forms, will have first choice of Help Room hours during the final week of the semester.
- Exceptional performance will make a TA eligible for an *Iowa State University Teaching Excellence Award* nomination from the department's teaching coordinator (typically four awards per year).

We are very happy to have you serving the department as a TA. If a condition arises that prevents you from fulfilling your TA obligations, please contact the Help Room Coordinator by email. Explain the situation in full before it unnecessarily compounds itself. You may also contact the Graduate Program Coordinator or the Teaching Coordinator (see top of first page).