

School of Social Transformation Teaching Assistant/Associate Handbook

Introduction

This handbook outlines expectations of graduate student Teaching Assistants and Associates (TAs) hired by the School of Social Transformation. It should be read in conjunction with the *ASU Graduate Education TA/RA Handbook* that outlines University policies and procedures. The University handbook can be accessed at: <https://graduate.asu.edu/sites/default/files/TA-RA-policy-and-procedures-handbook.pdf>

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Work Schedule and Workload

The TA work schedule is composed of the appointment load (number of hours or percentage time) and special arrangements between the TA and SST faculty supervisor. **Teaching Assistants** (supporting faculty instruction as worked out together) and **Teaching Associates** (instructors of record, teaching their own courses) are hired for 20 hours/week or 0.5 FTE. Each TA is expected to dedicate, on average, 20 hours per week. It is important that TAs monitor their hours to ensure that they are not consistently being asked to work more or less than their appointment load. It may be necessary for supervisors to adjust hours across weeks to accommodate work cycles within courses (such as heavy periods around exams); this should be negotiated on a case-by-case basis between the supervisor and their TA(s). For example, the first week(s) of class will not require as many hours as the last week(s), thus, the TA's hours may average out to 20 per week over the course of the term.

SST TAs work for the duration of their appointment as clarified in the formal contract, except for University holidays. As University employees, TAs cannot be absent from their duties unless they are administratively excused (e.g., parental leave) or traveling on University business on an approved travel authority (e.g., conferences).

University policy stipulates that TAs are in residence or available to meet with students on campus. The only exception is that supervisors have the discretion to release TAs from duties once all instructional tasks for the semester are completed. TAs must speak with their faculty supervisors **before** the beginning of appointment about any planned absences, and also discuss the likely scheduling of the completion of course-related duties so they can plan accordingly. Excessive absences, regardless of the reason, are cause for termination before the end of the appointment period.

Appointment Type

The offer letter should indicate the student's appointment as a teaching assistant/associate. Pay grade should be included in the offer letter. TAs assist a professor in any aspect of instruction related to a course, as needed by that professor or instructor. If appointed as instructor of record, a TA will perform the instructional duties as a professor, with mentorship assistance from faculty and previous course material.

Essential Functions

Planning

Each TA should **contact her/his faculty supervisor upon receiving the appointment** to discuss course planning. Contacting and meeting with the faculty supervisor is a crucial step in establishing the responsibilities of the TA in the planning stages and throughout the semester. Normal pre-course activities for TAs can include updating and finalizing syllabi, updating and finalizing Blackboard and updating reading material or assignments.

Teaching

Teaching Assistant duties vary by level and type of teaching responsibility within her/his course, whether it be leading a weekly discussion section, recording material or posting feedback for an online course, meeting with students virtually or in person during office hours, and dealing with grading and grades. Often responsibilities also include the production and distribution of teaching materials including grading rubrics, activities, or exams. Each TA should discuss the general nature of expected teaching responsibilities with her/his faculty supervisor before the semester begins. A TA who is instructor of record (Teaching Associate) is being given a position of responsibility and relative autonomy similar to any other professor, but with the support and oversight of the SST TA Coordinator and professional development workshops (see that section for more information). TAs teaching courses are responsible for providing the final syllabus to the Faculty Head at the beginning of the instructional period (semester or session).

Professional Development

New TAs are required to complete: (1) a **fall TA 1 credit seminar** (workshop series), titled SST 691, TA Professional Development Seminar (Holman) and (2) a **spring 3 credit course** on Teaching for Social Transformation. TAs are also expected to complete the University Graduate Education orientation and are encouraged to take advantage of other professional development opportunities that are publicized on the SST graduate student listserv. The TA Professional Development Seminar will be facilitated by Dr. Christine Holman, TA Supervisor for SST and will address the “nuts and bolts” of teaching, as well as problem solving, teaching tips and exploring the fundamentals of positive pedagogy.

Communication with Faculty Supervisor for assigned course

Communication with the faculty supervisor is **critical** to students serving in the TA role. Each TA should contact and meet with the faculty supervisor as soon as possible when their contract begins and regularly thereafter. Both faculty and TAs are expected to maintain on-going and clear communication – and response time of TAs to faculty communication should be clarified. The first meeting establishes the TA work schedule, course material preparation responsibilities, teaching contributions and media management responsibilities (as well as covering other issues). This meeting should also include general criteria of evaluation, so that the TA understands how her/his work will be assessed during the semester. Each TA and faculty supervisor should exchange cell phone and email information, as well as best times to meet.

A form to clarify expectations for the TA and faculty member is found in Appendix A. This should be part of the initial meeting between TA and supervising faculty.

Work Schedule

The TA work schedule should include at least two hours per week of consistently scheduled in-person office hours (e.g. Tuesdays and Thursdays from 2-3pm) for a face-to-face course. For

online courses, check with your faculty supervisor regarding whether or not you need to hold Skype or other forms of virtual office hours. It is highly recommended that all TAs set communication times with assigned students whether in traditional, hybrid or online courses. This ensures that students know when the TA will check email or other media (e.g., Blackboard forum) as well as allowing the TA to keep a reasonable work schedule. **Office hours should be communicated to the SST reception desk by the first week of classes** (SSTrequests@asu.edu; 125 Wilson, 480-965-7682) in order to respond to student requests for office hour times.

A TA should also provide contact information to the faculty supervisor and clarify which information should be listed in the syllabus. If the TA needs **office space**, she/he should speak with the faculty supervisor about space (though TAs in SST are typically assigned offices in Wilson Hall).

The initial TA/faculty meeting should include establishing a meeting schedule for the semester. By creating this schedule, both the TA and faculty supervisor maintain open lines of communication that makes planning easier and ensures that evaluations match expectations. These meeting times may take the form of in-person, phone, Skype or Google Chat, depending on the structure of the course and the format agreed upon between TA and faculty supervisor.

Course Material

Depending on the level of experience with course content, a TA may be asked to generate course material such as portions of a syllabus, activities, relevant media, etc. A TA may also be asked to scan material from publications, copy materials and/or submit testing materials to University Testing Services.

Teaching

Faculty are expected to clarify what the TA is expected to generate in relation to teaching. This includes clarifying what is expected when the TA facilitates discussions, gives lectures or assists in grading and other roles. In addition to individual meetings with the faculty supervisor, TAs will participate in professional development workshops which will also provide resources and support to new TAs.

Media

The TA and faculty supervisor should establish who will be responsible for any media used alongside the course, including Blackboard or other course websites. This is a crucial part of the first meeting, as some of the materials need to be uploaded onto the course websites before the first class begins. The supervisor and TA can share responsibilities such as managing the course website, commenting on discussion threads, etc., but it should be clear who will undertake which portions of material and related tasks and thus ensure their completion.

Note that **SST provides instructional tech support** to assist TAs and faculty with using Blackboard; these services are available to anyone teaching in SST and not only for those teaching online. **All TAs are required to participate in Blackboard training/overview.** The first session of the TA Professional Development seminar will provide some of this training.

Please contact Gemma Garcia for an appointment if you want to access this support or have tech support questions: Gemma.Garcia@asu.edu or call 480.727.8850.

Participation in Blackboard training is required of all TAs/graders who will be assisting with or teaching an online class. This training should be successfully completed **prior** to the start of the course.

TA Tips for First Meeting with Faculty

- Come prepared – know what you need from your faculty supervisor and the basic requirements
- Contribute – help decide your roles and responsibilities
- Be honest – know your strengths, admit what you do not know or what you want to improve upon (as related to the course content and your teaching experience)
- Be confident – you have many supports in becoming a strong educator and know that your supervisor and other graduate leaders want to assist you
- Make sure you leave the meeting with the following:
 - 1) Your work schedule including office hours (either in-person or online)
 - 2) Any additional faculty contact information (e.g. cell, email, best phone number)
 - 3) Your meeting schedule with faculty for the semester
 - 4) What you need to do before the class starts
 - 5) Any course readings or other materials you cannot access electronically
 - 6) Your planned teaching contributions and what you need to have for each one
 - 7) Contact information (so that you may be easily reached by faculty supervisor and/or students) and any guidelines on not calling after a certain evening hour, etc.
 - 8) A clear understanding of your responsibilities for course media management
 - 9) A discussion of evaluation criteria for your position (can be in writing)

Ideally, TAs should meet briefly every 1-2 weeks faculty supervisor and have them initial your work hours. As stated above, this can also be conducted electronically/virtually if necessary. In this situation, approval/discussion of hours can be documented via email.

Communication with Students

Professionalism

Always be professional when dealing with students. Remember that you are not their friend, you are an instructor. On days when you will be in class or meeting with students, please dress professionally. This article clarifies why dress matters:

<http://zoology.wisc.edu/grad/attire.pdf>. Students will not respect your status or knowledge if they think you are “one of them.” Make a point of differentiating yourself by your dress, language etc. If you are unsure of what constitutes professional dress in SST, please discuss with your faculty supervisor or SST TA Supervisor, Dr. Christine Holman.

All communications with students should reflect an amiable tone and use professional language, both in person and in email. This includes informal communications. Anything written should conform to these standards. Please remember, as an employee of a state university, any written records (including emails) can be subject to review (ASU policy: <http://www.asu.edu/counsel/brief/pubrecsfac.html>)

You are expected to attend the class for which you serve as a TA (if it is a traditional, not online, class). This attendance is critical, as students get to know who you are, and you become “real” to them. You also get to know students and can observe them in the classroom setting. Students are more likely to utilize TA office hours and seek out help if they “know” the TA from being in the class on a regular basis. Additionally, you will better integrate the course material for yourself and be best situated to assist in grading, answering student questions and gaining overall content comprehension.

Communication

As stated above, online TAs should provide set communication. Email should be checked daily Monday through Friday, with a 24 hour response time to course-related email from students from Monday – Thursday and a Monday response to Friday and weekend messages. Information on response time should be included in the course syllabus. If you cannot adhere to the 24 response time window on a certain day (or over a particular weekend, for example), you should let your faculty supervisor know well in advance (or ASAP in case of an emergency situation). This way, your faculty supervisor can direct you in how to communicate this possible lag time to students. Clear, consistent and dependable communication is key in maintaining a successful online, educational environment.

Resources

Student may ask for help that a TA cannot or should not provide. If a student communicates something with a TA that cannot be answered by the TA, the TA should refer the issue to the faculty supervisor. In general, it is good to be aware of ASU resources for handling sensitive issues. TAs should let their faculty supervisor know about such concerns as soon as possible. After consultation with faculty, or if you are the instructor of record (teaching associate) you may be in a position to recommend support services at ASU. These resources include:

- ASU Counseling Services <https://students.asu.edu/counselingservices>
- ASU Tutoring and Academic Success <https://students.asu.edu/academic-success>
- ASU Disability Resource Center <http://www.asu.edu/studentaffairs/ed/drc/>
- ASU International Student Services <http://global.asu.edu/>
- ASU Writing Centers <http://studentsuccess.asu.edu/writingcenters>
- SST Academic Advising/Student Success <https://sst.clas.asu.edu/undergrad/why-study-school-social-transformation>
- SST Undergraduate Writing Center [information will be made available Fall 2014]

For a more complete list of resources, see ASU Support Services:

<https://students.asu.edu/supportservices>

Conflict

Students can become upset and frustrated with grades, assessments of course progress (self-imposed or external) and/or course materials. Conflict is a typical part of teaching and is acceptable when students maintain professionalism and respect for TAs and faculty. However, if a **TA receives any type of threat or inappropriate communication from a student** regarding a conflict, it should be **shared immediately with the faculty supervisor**. If the TA is instructor of record or Teaching Associate, the TA Supervisor (Dr. Christine Holman) **should be notified immediately**. Threats and harassment are never acceptable, nor will they be tolerated, including on social media (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). Please do not dismiss this type of behavior as a “one time only” situation or discount your intuition/feelings. If you feel threatened, harassed or even badgered by a student, discuss this with your faculty supervisor.

If a TA becomes concerned that a student may act inappropriately, regardless of previous communications, the TA should take steps to ensure her/his safety as well as seeking a resolution to the conflict. The first step is to discuss the matter with the faculty supervisor. If a meeting with the student is planned, the TA should ensure that s/he will not be alone with the student or cancel the meeting if the student is threatening or harassing the TA.

If a student maintains professionalism, the TA should help resolve the conflict. Often, student will want to discuss why the frustrating outcome (grade, assessment, etc.) occurred and how they can improve it now or in the future. It is very helpful to prepare for such interactions by researching what the student reported and discussing potential resolutions with the faculty supervisor. During meetings with the student, the TA should remain calm, professional and firm. Exceptions should not be made simply because the student is emotional; the TA should work with the student (and the faculty supervisor) to find an appropriate solution.

If students are frustrated with course materials, it is important to listen and collect written feedback. If the content can be adjusted so that students understand it better, adjustments may be made. If students are frustrated with the material or score poorly on assessments, the material or instruction may need to be modified. In many SST courses, controversial topics are discussed and professional development will be provided that addresses ways of dealing with student resistance. Keep a record of all communications. While such written communication is inherent in online classes, please ask students to “email” you a summary of their concerns for in-person classes. This way, the student has a chance to think through the problem/situation and you have a written record of the issue, making it easier to communicate the problem clearly to your faculty supervisor.

SST has a policy on harassment, including cyber harassment, consistent with University policy that may be included on syllabi. See Appendix B.

TAs should also be aware that some students may have “crushes” or want to develop special friendships and this should be discouraged, consistent with ASU policy of sexual harassment. Again, if you find yourself in any situation that feels inappropriate (or that just concerns you) regarding a student, please speak with either your faculty supervisor or Dr. Holman immediately. See Appendix C.

Evaluation

SST teaching assistants are evaluated according to the following criteria:

- Completion of assigned and agreed upon tasks
- Ability to work independently and solve problems
- Demonstrating respect to students and faculty
- Maintaining open communication with faculty supervisor and having regular meetings
- Other criteria may be listed on the TA evaluation forms used by JUS and WGS

Note that all teaching/TA renewals will be based in part on the evaluations from the previous year/semester. Poor evaluations will prevent you from being able to teach your own course. TA appointments are made by the Faculty Head in consultation with the Graduate Director.

Sick Leave, Absence and Family Leave

TAs do not accrue vacation or sick leave. They continue to be paid their stipend while out on leave or missing a few days when sick. TAs should communicate their health situation to their faculty supervisor as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made.

It is anticipated that TAs will attend and present papers at professional conferences. A TA should **notify faculty supervisor in advance of an absence** and, when possible, assist in obtaining a replacement or rearrangement of the duties.

Excessive absences, regardless of the reason, are cause for termination before the end of the appointment period. TA should consult with the supervising faculty member about specific policies regarding absence from service.

Graduate teaching and research assistants/associates with .50 FTE appointments may **receive six weeks of paid family leave** for purposes of recovering from childbirth. Arrangements may be made for longer leave, as approved by the School Director. For further information on parental leave, see: http://provost.asu.edu/academic_personnel/parental_leave

The ASU TA/RA policy handbook provides more detailed information on employment policy: <https://graduate.asu.edu/sites/default/files/TA-RA-policy-and-procedures-handbook.pdf>

Grievance Procedure

If TAs have serious concerns related to their work climate, load, expectations, etc. the first step is to address these with the faculty supervisor (or, in the case of Faculty Associates teaching their own classes, with Dr. Christine Holman, the TA coordinator). If that does not resolve the issue, the TA should talk with the Graduate Director (Dr. Vera Lopez for JUS and Dr. Alesha Durfee for WGS). If further mediation is required, the SST Graduate Committee (chaired by Dr. Beth Swadener) serves as the Graduate Grievance Committee (minus student representatives).

Removal

Although TAs are students first, a teaching assistantship is a job and certain performance requirements must be met. Graduate Education (in the TA/RA Handbook) provides a list of reasons for involuntary termination of a TA before the end of appointment, which include the following actionable items:

- Change in academic discipline (change of major)
- Academic or scientific misconduct
- Poor academic performance (failure to maintain satisfactory academic progress)
- Excessive unexcused absences
- Misconduct in duties
- Unsatisfactory performance of duties
- Breach of the ABOR Student Code of Conduct
- Professional misconduct (according to the ASU Academic Affairs Policies and Procedures Manual)
- Misuse of university assets, including but not limited to computing resources

Approved 8-11-14 by the SST Graduate Committee, Faculty Heads & Director

Appendix A
School of Social Transformation
Contract for Graduate Teaching (& Research) Assistants

Student _____

Supervising Professor _____

Name of Assistantship/Position _____

Hours per week (20 if .50; 10 if .25) _____

Responsibilities of Graduate Student

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Responsibilities of Supervising Professor

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

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Regular meeting time:

Other notes:

Professor's signature: _____ Date: _____

Graduate Assistant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Harassment (including Cyber, Social Media) Policy & Statements for Syllabi

Harassment Prohibited (university statement) - ASU policy prohibits harassment on the basis of race, sex, gender identity, age, religion, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, Vietnam era veteran status and other protected veteran status. Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including termination of employees or expulsion of students. Contact Student Life Tempe campus Student Services Building room 263, 480-965-6547 if you feel another student is harassing you based on any of the factors above; contact EO/AA (480-965-5057) if you feel an ASU employee is harassing you based on any of the factors above.

Example of another syllabus statement used in SST:

Because your active participation is required for this class to be a success, I will call on students throughout the semester. Please come to class having read and thought about the readings for the day. We regularly will talk about the readings and topics in small groups and as a class. I expect that each student will listen respectfully to others' points of view, even if s/he should disagree, and to respond to other's ideas in a thoughtful and mature way. *Productive* class participation is required for you to do well in this class.

Finally, please be aware that this course includes topics that are controversial and may be uncomfortable. If you choose to take this class, you are responsible for completing all of the reading and written assignments. Remember that you do not have to agree with all of the material presented in this class, but you are required to read, listen, think, and write about the views presented. If you are uncomfortable with certain topics, I encourage you to discuss this with me as soon as possible so that we can determine how you will complete the assignments.

University Advocate information clause:

If you are unable to complete assignments or attend class due to a family emergency or serious illness, please contact the University Advocate, 480-965-6547, who can send me and your other professors a letter to verify your absences and/or inability to meet a deadline. The University Advocate constitutes a resource for student emergencies and will assist students in negotiating university policy across units and campuses.

Appendix C

ASU Harassment Policy <http://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/acd/acd401.html>

Discrimination

Discrimination is defined under applicable federal and state law. In general, unlawful discrimination means failing to treat people equally based, at least in part, on status that is protected under applicable law or policy.

Harassment

Harassment is a specific form of discrimination. It is unwelcome behavior, based on a protected status, which is sufficiently severe or pervasive to create an intimidating, hostile, or offensive environment for academic pursuits, employment, or participation in university-sponsored programs or activities.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is harassment, whether between individuals of the same or different sex, which includes unwelcome behavior or conduct of a sexual nature that is made, either explicitly or implicitly, a condition of an individual's education, employment, or participation in university-sponsored programs or activities or the submission to or rejection of such behavior or conduct is a factor in decisions affecting that individual's education, employment, or participation in university-sponsored programs or activities.

Retaliation

Retaliation occurs when an adverse action is taken against an individual for engaging in protected activity. Protected activity consists of:

1. opposing conduct reasonably believed to constitute discrimination, including harassment, that violates an employment discrimination statute or that university or ABOR policy prohibits; or
2. filing a complaint about such practice; or
3. seeking an accommodation under this policy; or
4. testifying, assisting, or participating in any manner in an investigation or other proceeding related to a discrimination complaint.

Adverse actions that are reasonably likely to deter a complaining individual or others from engaging in protected activity are prohibited.

Report

Allegation(s) of a violation of this policy that is/are made to any manager, supervisor, administrator, or the Office of Equity and Inclusion or the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities.