

School of Pharmacy University of Pittsburgh

Policies and Procedures pertaining to

Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows

General Information

Definition of TA/TF:

For the purpose of this document all teaching assistants and teaching fellows will be referred to as TAs and TFs, respectively.

A TA is a graduate student who holds a teaching or teaching-related appointment made in accord with the University regulations pertaining to TA/TFs. TA/TF are not normally employed to teach post-baccalaureate courses.

A TF is the same as a TA except that the TF is more educationally advanced or experienced and typically holds the equivalent of a master's degree. Promotion to a TF position will be made based on performance after a review by the Graduate Academic Affairs committee.

A graduate student assistant (GSA) is a graduate student who performs duties to assist in the educational or research mission of the University but does not teach a class, recitation or laboratory.

Purpose and Role of TAs/TFs:

The Department of Pharmaceutical Sciences offers TAs and TFs to qualified graduate students in the graduate program.

TAs/TFs are offered to graduate students in recognition of their ability to support the teaching mission of the School / University.

TAs/TFs play a key role in supporting the faculty in accomplishing the teaching missions of the School / University.

Being designated as a TA/TF is a privilege and a responsibility.

Although the specific role that a TA/TF is expected to fulfill may vary from hour to hour (student, teacher, researcher, or administrator), a TA/TF is, more than any one thing, an educator in the broadest sense of the word. The TA/TF may be expected to provide logistical support (proctor exams; deliver and set up AV equipment; record grades, etc) or instructional support (assist with the preparation of exams or other forms of assessment; grade/assess student work; assist with lab preparation; give introductory lectures for pre-labs; supervise lab sessions; lecture on topics related to areas of expertise/interest; facilitate discussions; supervise practicum activities).

TAs and TFs are not permitted to assume full responsibility for teaching all or major portions of an entire course. In addition, tasks that are not related to the school's educational mission will not be assigned to TAs or TFs.

TAs/TFs receive tuition remission and stipend and health care benefits in recognition of their contribution to the teaching missions of the University.

All graduate students, regardless of career interests and regardless of whether they receive a salary, stipend or other financial support, should be provided an opportunity to develop teaching skills as part of their graduate and/or post-graduate studies. These skills include: presentations to large groups, leading/facilitating group discussion, designing effective learning tools, and assessing the performance of others.

Eligibility:

In order to qualify for the position of TA/TF a graduate student:

- Must be admitted to the graduate program as a full-time student in good standing.
- Must have a degree from a recognized university.
- Must be knowledgeable with the course area.
- Must be able to communicate well (oral and written) in English. Verbal and written competency in English is determined by scores in TOEFL, GRE, personal and/or phone interview. The TA/TF must also pass the language examination administered by the University. It is the responsibility of the graduate admissions committee to make sure that the graduate students admitted into the program meet this requirement and make the appropriate recommendations to remedy potential concerns.

Appointment and Termination

TA and TF awards:

The Admissions Committee will recommend students for TA or TF positions after reviewing their experience during the admissions process.

Assignment of TAs to specific courses:

It is important that TAs and TFs be assigned to courses so as to ensure appropriate support of the curriculum as well as equitable distribution of the TA/TF workload. In order to coordinate this activity:

- Faculty requiring the support of TAs/TFs will submit a written request to the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee describing the need for a TA/TF in that course, TA/TF's responsibilities, and the estimated amount of time required to complete those responsibilities.

- The Graduate Academic Affairs Committee will review all requests for TA/TF support and either approve or disapprove the support including the number of hours of work-load permitted by each TA/TF.

The following criteria will be applied when a TA/TF is assigned to a course:

- TA/TF positions fulfill the educational/programmatic objectives of the school.
- Requests for TA/TF support do not exceed the total hours of support that can be provided by available TAs/TFs.
- Faculty will provide students with the opportunity to further develop their teaching skills.

The Graduate Academic Affairs Committee, in consultation with department chairs, will:

- Coordinate the assignment of specific TAs and TFs to those positions approved.
- Ensure that the workload falls within established parameters (no more than 20 hours/week) and that TAs and TFs are being used to fulfill the educational / programmatic objectives of the school.
- Ensure that the assignments are appropriate, equitable, and fair in terms of work-load and time commitment.
- Assign TAs and TFs whenever possible to courses, which align with their areas of expertise/interest.
- Ensure whenever possible continuity in TA/TF assignments from year to year.
- Make TA/TF work assignments first from the pool of graduate students and then utilize other sources (e.g. residents, adjunct faculty, etc).

TA or TF positions are normally offered for a period of one year with the opportunity to renew for a total of up to three years. An extension to the three-year period may be granted in exceptional cases by the department chair and the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee.

The department chair and the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee will evaluate students for reappointment or promotion from TA to TF on an annual basis.

The TA/TF appointment may be terminated for one of the following reasons:

- QPA drops below 3.0
- A grade C or lower is received in a required course.
- Failure in comprehensive examination.
- Unsatisfactory professional conduct – poor performance evaluation; repeated failure to complete assignments on time.
- Unethical practices in conduct of the duties.

If the TA/TF appointment is terminated by the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee, the Graduate Committee will provide the TA/TF with a letter stating the reason(s) for termination of TA/TF support. The TA/TF may appeal this decision through a letter to the Dean of the school. The appeal should provide the Dean with clear and convincing

evidence to support a continuation of the appointment. The final decision of the Dean will be communicated to the student directly by the Dean.

TAs and TFs must be familiar with:

- The School of Pharmacy's policies and procedures on TA/TFs.
- The University's grading policy (<http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regtoc.html>)
- The University and School of Pharmacy's guideline on academic integrity.
- *Teaching at Pitt, A Handbook for Teaching Assistants*, published by faculty Development. (http://www.pitt.edu/~ciddeweb/faculty-development/ta_handbook/chapter-1.htm)
- The University's sexual harassment policy.

Responsibilities of TAs/TFs

Expected workload including preparation time, grading, proctoring

The position of a TA/TF comes with several responsibilities.

A teaching assistant must:

- Behave professionally (dress and act appropriately).
- Thoroughly understand the teaching missions of the School / University.
- Meet with the course instructor prior to the start of classes to learn the expectations of the instructor.
- Attend all course sessions in order to thoroughly familiarize himself/herself with the course content.
- Communicate effectively, verbally and in writing with the students and instructors.
- Provide instructor with reliable contact information.
- Keep regular office hours to assist students in the course.
- Carry out the responsibilities in a timely and professional manner.
- Meet with the course instructor at least once during the semester and at the end of the assignment to discuss the performance in the course as a TA/TF.

A TA/TF may be expected to:

- Prepare handouts and other materials.
- Lecture on a selected topic with the help of the instructor.
- Conduct practicum sessions.
- Lead recitation/review sessions.
- Conduct review sessions.
- Prepare and present pre-lab instructional material.
- Prepare for and conduct (prepare chemicals/solutions/supplies for the lab / prepare experimental demonstrations) the laboratory sessions.
- Monitor student safety and care of instruments in the lab sessions.
- Proctor examinations with due vigilance.
- Prepare answer keys.
- Grade examinations, problem sets, practicum and projects.
- Inform the instructor ahead of time if the assigned responsibilities cannot be completed on time due to extenuating circumstances.
- Take the responsibility to arrange for alternative / substitute to step in when it is not possible to take on a responsibility due to unavoidable circumstances.
- Maintain black Board course site.
- Maintain grade records.

Work Load:

Full time TA/TFs are expected to work on an average of up to 20 hrs per week. This includes direct contact with the students, preparation for the course, grading, proctoring, and other responsibilities. TA/TF's are responsible for keeping a time record and bring the total time commitment to the attention of course instructor at the end of the semester.

Responsibilities of Faculty to TA/TFs:

An instructor must:

- Behave professionally.
- Inform the TA/TF of the teaching missions of the School / University.
- Understand the role of the TA/TF.
- Meet with the TA/TF prior to the start of classes to inform the expectations.
- Provide opportunity for the TA/TF to thoroughly familiarize himself/herself with the course content.
- Plan TA/TF assignments ahead of time; avoid last minute demands.
- Schedule time for office hours for the course.
- Provide adequate time to accomplish his/her expectations.
- Provide opportunities to teach and acquire teaching skills.
- Show interest in the development of the TA/TF and treat them as partners in achieving the teaching mission of the University.
- Meet with the TA/TF periodically (at least twice in a semester) to provide feed back on performance. Provide feed back on effectiveness of teaching and suggestions for improvement.
- Provide written feedback regarding TA/TF performance at the end of semester to TA/TF and to Chairperson of the department and the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee.

Responsibilities of the Institution:

- The school / department must clearly state the roles and responsibilities of TAs/TFs.
- The school / department must provide copies of all documents relevant to the TAs/TFs.
- The school / department must provide an orientation to the TAs/TFs regarding teaching mission of the University.
- The school / department must provide annual evaluation of the performance of the TAs /TFs.
- The school must take immediate action to resolve any conflicts between TA/TF and the course instructor.

Lines of accountability for TA/TFs and the potential penalties for failure to meet defined responsibilities in a timely fashion:

- The TA/TF is directly accountable to the course instructor / coordinator and to Graduate Academic Affairs Committee
- The TA/TF must keep a time log of his/her work.
- The performance of the TA/TF will be rated by the students in the course, by the course faculty, and by self-evaluation.

Conflict Resolution:

A TA/TF must strive to resolve conflicts mutually with the instructor. If this is not possible, it should be brought to the attention of the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee. The department chairperson will be ultimately responsible for resolution of any continued conflict.

Mechanisms for and frequency of feedback on teaching performance.

The course faculty and TA/TF must meet at least once during the semester and once at the end of the semester to evaluate the contribution of the TA/TF to the course. An evaluation form must be filled out at the end of the course.

Mechanisms for teaching assistants to learn to teach, be apprentice teachers, and take responsibility for teaching in our curriculum:

In order to assure that TAs/TFs in the program appreciate what goes into good teaching and possess at least some teaching skills upon graduation, the following training / experiential program will be followed:

1. A formal orientation to the school, the department and the faculty.
 - At the beginning of the TA/TF's first term, s/he will attend an orientation session.
 - Orientation to the school and the graduate program:
(Associate Dean for Research)
 - Orientation to the Department:
(Chairperson of the departments)
 - Orientation to the course sequence and content of the PharmD curriculum. This will give the TA/TF an idea of the level of knowledge and experience the professional students have at each year level.
(Chairman of the Curriculum Committee)
 - Technology update in the School:
(Mike Zemaitis)

2. At the beginning of the TA/TF's first term, s/he will attend the two-day "New Teaching Assistant Orientation" program held by CIDDE and a ½ day black board session. [<http://www.pitt.edu/~ciddeweb/FACULTY-DEVELOPMENT/FDS/tawork.htm>]
3. At the beginning of the TA/TF's first term, and once a year after that, the TA will attend a teaching technology update (Dr. Zemaitis). This demonstration will update teaching technology available in the School of Pharmacy.
4. Each TA/TF will be expected to attend several lectures in the professional curriculum. These will be selected on a yearly basis and will be based on abilities of selected professors and/or course content. After the lecture, each TA/TF should have a brief meeting with the lecturers to discuss their observations and ask questions.
5. TA/TF's in a specific course will be expected to attend the lectures for that course. They will be expected to become expert enough in the material to hold tutoring / review sessions at the discretion of the course director. TA/TF's will attend and participate in all course practica.
6. As part of course work designed to develop skills at presenting seminars, students may be expected to deliver a lecture on a particular pharmaceutical topic. This lecture will be then be critiqued by peers and instructors.
7. Each TA/TF must attend the Pharmaceutical Sciences Seminar course (number 3023 in fall and 3024 in spring) organized by Dr. Randall B. Smith.

Supervision and Evaluation of TAs/TFs

Expectations of the TA/TF should be made clear by a faculty member or course coordinator as part of an orientation to the course. If a TA/TF is expected to carry out instructional responsibilities (e.g. give lectures/ presentations, lead discussions, etc) there should be instruction on how to conduct these duties. TAs and TFs who are asked to lecture may have their presentation videotaped and then constructively critiqued. A faculty advisor should be present at one or more teaching sessions to provide feedback to the TA/TF. Evaluation of TAs/TFs should include self-evaluation, student evaluation, and faculty evaluation.

The course directors should provide feedback to TAs/TFs on a continuous basis throughout the course. The course coordinator will summarize the evaluation during the following term and submit a formal evaluation form (See later) to the Graduate Academic affairs Committee. If a performance evaluation is not satisfactory, that should be communicated first to the TA/TF and, if there is no improvement, then to the Graduate Committee. This evaluation will become a part of the record for the student. The Graduate Academic Affairs Committee will evaluate the performance of all the TA/TF during the summer months and make a recommendation to the department chairperson. The chairperson will make the final decision as to continued TA/TF support for the graduate student. A TA/TF will be awarded TA/TF position for the following year if the performance has been satisfactory. Failure to meet the responsibilities may result in warning and subsequent termination of the TA/TF position.

Students' evaluations of TA/TF positions shall be forwarded to the TA/TF, course director and to the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee.

TA/TF's should likewise provide feedback about the duties assigned to the TA/TF position via a standard form.

- Was the description of TA/TF responsibilities in the course accurate?
- Was the amount of time required to complete the responsibilities appropriate?
- Were expectations clear?
- Was supervision appropriate and helpful?
- Did the experience enhance your teaching skills?
- Did the TA/TF discuss this evaluation with the professor?

Students' evaluations of TA/TF positions should go to the course director and to the Graduate Academic Affairs Committee. Instances where the requirements and expectations of the TA/TF position are in disagreement with those reported by the student should be discussed with the course director and resolved. Continued disagreement should be brought to the attention of Graduate Academic Affairs Committee and resolved prior to the next TA/TF assignment.

All graduate students should be encouraged, but not required, to develop a teaching portfolio for their own use in securing a position, especially for academia.

Process for assuring that the TA/TF experience is a quality one from the perspectives of the TA/TF, the faculty member, and the student learner.

Monitoring process:

Once every year, there will be a Brown Bag session to discuss the experience of TA/TF during the past year and recommend future course of action.

Recognition of high performance:

Based on the overall performance in the teaching area, an “Outstanding TA/TF” award will be made annually in the fall at the Graduate Student Dinner. All TA/TF’s, regardless of time in the program, will be eligible for the award. This award will be based on reviews by students, peers and faculty mentors. The individual faculty is encouraged to submit nominations for the TA/TF in their course. The graduate committee will review the recommendations of the faculty and an awardee will be selected. The achievements of TA/TF will be publicized in Pharmacy newsletter / alumni newsletter.

TA / TF Request Form:

Course Name: _____

Course #: _____

Instructor / Coordinator: _____

Number of Students in class: _____

Need for TA / TF: _____ Lecture _____
Lab _____

Number of TA's: _____

Hours of TA per week: _____

TA/ TF Responsibilities: Copy from list given elsewhere in the document:

Check List for Instructors:

Name of the course: _____

Name of the Instructors/Coordinator: _____

Names of the TAs/TFs: _____

Time of the course: Lecture _____
 Practicum _____
 Laboratory _____

If more than one TA/TF is assigned to this course, clearly spell out expectations of individual TAs/TFs. The workload must be assigned equitably between the TAs/TFs.

- ___ Course outline provided
- ___ Course text book / handouts provided
- ___ Verified TA/TF contact information / office hours in handouts
- ___ Has the TA attended this course in the past?
(This is especially important if TA/TF is not familiar with the course material)
- ___ Determined if the TA/TF is required to attend this course.
(This is especially important if TA/TF is not familiar with the course material)
- ___ Provided the TA/TF with a verbal over view of the course material?
(This is especially important if TA/TF is not familiar with the course material)
- ___ Reviewed TAs/TFs role, responsibility and expectations in the course during the semester.
- ___ Described involvement in lecture:
(Faculty are encouraged to provide opportunity to senior TAs/TFs to lecture in courses)
- ___ Described involvement in practicum:
- ___ Described involvement in laboratory:
- ___ Established communication lines:
(Frequency and duration of meetings with TAs/TFs; e-mail and personal meetings)
- ___ Mid term review performed: (Date _____)
 - ___ Excellent
 - ___ Good
 - ___ Acceptable
 - ___ Not acceptable
- ___ End of term review performed: (Date _____)
 - ___ Excellent
 - ___ Good
 - ___ Acceptable
 - ___ Not acceptable

List of Specific Functions of the TA/TF:

Copy from list elsewhere in the document as it applies to your course

Check List for TA/TF:

Did I.....

- ___ Obtain information about TA's/TF's role and responsibility for the whole program from the department office?
- ___ Read and understand the University code of conduct – Read, sign, and send a copy to the Office of the Dean?
- ___ Read and understand the University grading policy (<http://www.pitt.edu/~graduate/regtoc.html>)?
- ___ Review the University guideline on academic integrity? Pay close attention to faculty obligations outlined in this document?
- ___ Read and understand *Teaching at Pitt, A Handbook for Teaching Assistants*, published by faculty development? (http://www.pitt.edu/~ciddeweb/faculty-development/ta_handbook/chapter-1.htm)
- ___ Read and understand the sexual harassment handbook?
- ___ Obtain information about TA's/TF's responsibility for the whole course in this semester from the course instructor or coordinator?
- ___ Obtain course outline / course textbook / handouts to thoroughly familiarize with the course content?
- ___ Review the contribution of this course to the overall curricular objectives?
- ___ Verify TA/TF contact information / office hours in handouts?
- ___ Attend this course?
(This is especially important if TA/TF is not familiar with the course material)
- ___ Receive a verbal over view of the course material?
(This is especially important if TA/TF is not familiar with the course material)
- ___ Have my roles, responsibilities and expectations reviewed in the course during the semester?
- ___ Participate in lecturing?
(Faculty are encouraged to provide opportunity to senior TA's/TF's to lecture in courses, prepare any lecture notes)
- ___ Prepare any handouts? (copying, etc.)
- ___ Get involved in practicum?
- ___ Prepare and present a pre-lab session?
- ___ Prepare the laboratory for session and prepared chemicals/solutions/supplies for the lab?
- ___ Run the laboratory sessions?
- ___ Prepare experimental demonstrations in the lab?
- ___ Monitor student safety and care of instruments?
- ___ Hold a formal review session for the course?
- ___ Schedule office hours?
- ___ Copy examinations?
- ___ Proctor the examinations?
- ___ Prepare an answer key?
- ___ Grade examinations, problem set, practicum and projects?
(learn grading systems and methods used)
- ___ Enter the grades in the blackBoard?

Check List for TA/TF:

Did I.....

- Assure that communication lines been established with the instructor?
(Frequency and duration of meetings with TAs/TFs; e-mail and personal meetings)
- Demonstrate appropriate professional behavior?
- Demonstrate the specific dress code requirements?
- Read the understand course evaluation?
- Meet with the course instructor mid term for review? (Date: _____)
- Meet with the course instructor at the end of the term for review? (Date _____)
- Understand my roles and responsibilities as a TA/TF?

Name of TA/TF: _____

Signature of TA/TF: _____

Date: _____

Name of Faculty: _____

Signature of Faculty: _____

Date: _____

Teaching Assistant Evaluation Form

_____ *Teaching Assistant*

_____ *Course/Term*

Check all that apply:

Professional Appearance

_____ Appropriate for the course

_____ Inappropriate for the course

Meeting Responsibilities

Which of the following best describes the teaching assistant's punctuality (for class/lab/exam assignments/office hours)?

- _____ TA comes early for class/exam/assignments.
- _____ TA comes on time for class/exam/assignments.
- _____ TA comes late for class/exam/assignments.
- _____ TA failed to show up for class/exam/assignments:
 - _____ Once
 - _____ Twice
 - _____ Three times
 - _____ On more than three occasions.

Which of the following characterizes the teaching assistant's work habits and ability to meet assignment deadlines?

- _____ TA completes assignments early.
- _____ TA completes assignments on time.
- _____ TA completes assignments after deadline.
 - _____ Once
 - _____ Twice
 - _____ Three or more times

Taking Initiative/Preparation for Class

Which of the following characterizes the TA's initiative in helping with the course?

- _____ TA seeks to do more than asked. Contributes ideas, suggestions for improving the course. Seeks feedback on performance.
- _____ TA does what is required. Provides ideas, suggestions for improving the course when prompted. Accepts feedback when given.
- _____ TA must be prompted to complete assignments. Provides feedback rarely. Does not seek feedback from instructors.

Which of the following characterizes the TA's preparation for class/lab/practicum assignments?

- _____ The TA has prepared for the class/lab/practicum and is able to function without supervision of the faculty member.
- _____ The TA requires prompting from faculty to perform duties. Purpose and procedures for the session must be reviewed prior to class/lab/practicum. The TA requires some supervision.
- _____ The TA is unprepared for class/lab/practicum and is unable to function without close supervision.

Communication

Which of the following characterizes the ability of the TA to communicate orally with students in the course?

- _____ TA communicates well. Students have no difficulty understanding the content or purpose of the verbal feedback provided by the TA.
- _____ TA communicates adequately. Students ask TA to repeat or explain content or purpose of verbal feedback.
- _____ TA communicates poorly. Students complain that the TA does not explain assignments or provides uninterpretable verbal feedback.

Which of the following characterizes the ability of the TA to communicate in writing with students in the course?

- _____ TA communicates well. Students have no difficulty understanding the content or purpose of the written feedback provided by the TA.
- _____ TA communicates adequately. Students ask TA to repeat or explain content or purpose of written feedback.
- _____ TA communicates poorly. Students complain that the TA does not explain assignments or provides uninterpretable written feedback.

Areas of strength (please provide examples, critical incidents to support this assessment):

Areas that need improving (please provide examples, critical incidents to support this assessment):

Is there something specific that you can recommend which may help the teaching assistant improve? What strategies or suggestions can you provide for improvement?

Overall assessment:

_____ Exemplary (exceeded expectations)

_____ Satisfactory (met expectations)

_____ Unsatisfactory (failed to meet expectations)

_____ Was this evaluation discussed with the TA?
(This is to insure that both written and oral feedback is given to the TA/TFs)

Faculty Signature

TA/TF

Date

Self Evaluation By TA / TF:

An Assessment prepared and submitted by the TA.

Student Evaluation of TA /TF:

A part of the Course evaluation.