

Reference Sheet for Teaching Assistants
Resources and Regulations

Marcia Groszek

This document is, to the best of my knowledge, correct, but it is certainly not complete. Notes about gaps, and suggestions about additions, are solicited.

1. Overview:

Your job as a teaching assistant assigned to a mathematics class is to help the instructor teach and to help the students learn.

Exactly what this means will depend on the class and the instructor. This document attempts to outline general department policies and College regulations that apply to all TAs, as well as to pinpoint some resources and contacts that might be useful to you.

2. Department Policy:

- (a) Gaining experience as a teaching assistant is part of the requirements for the degree.
- (b) Every graduate student who is not yet advanced to candidacy as of the beginning of fall term is given a teaching assistant assignment during two quarters of that academic year.
- (c) TA assignments are made by the Graduate Program Representative. Graduate students may make requests, which will be considered along with all the other factors in making assignments.
- (d) A TA assignment should generally take from 8 to 12 hours per week, on average, including preparation time.
- (e) The role of a TA complements those of course instructor and homework grader.
- (f) Teaching assistants are acting on the behalf of the department and, as such, should maintain the highest standards of professionalism.
- (g) The Department Reference Guide (available online) contains information about the conduct of courses with TAs.

3. College Policy:

This is a small selection of items of College policy a teaching assistant should be aware of.

- (a) No action to resolve a suspected honor code violation can be taken by any individual instructor (or teaching assistant.)

Interpretation: It is appropriate for you to give feedback to students about what behavior is or is not consistent with the honor code, but make sure you understand the professor's expectations (e.g., how much collaboration on homework is acceptable) before you do so. If you suspect an honor code violation, the department expects you to inform the course instructor. It is the instructor's responsibility to decide what further steps, if any, should be taken. Please read the statement of the Honor Principle, which can be found in numerous places, including the Graduate Student Handbook. A quote from that document: "In the presence of an undoubted violation of the Honor Principle, to stand by and do nothing is to threaten the spirit and effectiveness of the principle."

The Honor Principle online:

www.dartmouth.edu/~uja/honor/

- (b) Accommodations for students with disabilities, and for students with other commitments (ranging from football practice to physics lab), are determined by the instructor.

Interpretation: This means you are off the hook, in most cases; refer students with questions to the instructor. An exception is when students want you to accommodate their schedule conflicts with tutorials. This is still ultimately up to the instructor, but as you are seen as the tutorial authority, you should be as helpful as you can. You can refer the student to the instructor's office hours, or if the tutorial schedule is inconvenient for many students, you can offer to talk to the instructor about changing it. If the instructor wants you to hold office hours (this is not usually part of a TA's job, but occasionally it may be) then you can try to adjust your hours to students' schedules.

- (c) College faculty members should not disclose student education records to any unauthorized person.

Interpretation: This means you must not give information about students that you acquire as a TA — this includes such things as grades, progress, conduct, your assessment of mathematical ability, and even schedules — to anybody except the student him or herself, the course instructor, and other instructors and TAs who legitimately should have this information to do their jobs.

Parents are not on the list of people to whom you should give information. Students are adults, and not all parents are entitled to have access to confidential information, although many are. You can be friendly and polite and offer to have the instructor contact them.

If you contemplate giving information about students to anyone else (for example, sometimes contacting a class dean is appropriate), talk to the instructor first.

- (d) Graduate students who are fully supported (a full tuition scholarship and a full stipend) cannot receive additional payment from Dartmouth College for services rendered, and cannot accept employment outside the College while enrolled. Any exception must have the written approval of the graduate student's adviser, the Graduate Program Committee, and the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Interpretation: In particular, you may not be paid for individual tutoring.

There are also other reasons not to provide individual tutoring to students, particularly students in courses you are TAing. You should not provide time or resources to any student unless you offer the same to all similarly-circumstanced students in your course. Doing so is both unfair and unprofessional.

- (e) Sexual (and other) harassment is strictly prohibited.

Interpretation: Making social overtures to somebody who may feel pressured to accept them (because, for example, the person making the overtures helps grade the other's exams) can constitute harassment. Furthermore, professional standards require that you, as a teaching assistant, avoid both conflict of interest and the appearance of conflict of interest. This means that it is equally inappropriate for you to accept social overtures from students in your course as to make them.

An official definition of sexual harassment can be found in the Graduate Student Handbook or the Faculty Handbook. A statement on graduate student relations with undergraduate students, which you should read, is on the Graduate Studies Office web page at

graduate.dartmouth.edu/services/undergradrel.html

- (f) The Graduate Student Handbook (online) contains many regulations that apply to graduate students; see graduate.dartmouth.edu/studentlife/handbook20102.pdf

4. Department Oversight

- (a) The course instructor is responsible for supervising TAs and helping them as needed.
- (b) Any questions or difficulties, in particular difficulties between an instructor and a TA, can be brought to the Graduate Program Representative.
(You can talk to the Advisor to Graduate Students – or the Graduate Program Representative – for advice on dealing with difficulties. The Graduate Program Representative is responsible for TA assignments, and is the person to go to if you want to request intervention of some sort, or would like to make suggestions about TA policy.)
- (c) Complaints from parents, inquiries about department policy, and anything else that should be handled on an official level can be referred to the Department Chair.

5. Information and Regulations Online

- (a) Department Reference Guide (on the department's web page.)
www.math.dartmouth.edu
- (b) (Undergraduate) Student Handbook.
www.dartmouth.edu/~deancoll/student-handbook/
- (c) Graduate Student Handbook (on the Graduate Studies Office web page.)
graduate.dartmouth.edu/studentlife/handbook20102.pdf

- (d) Faculty Handbook.
www.dartmouth.edu/~dof/pdfs/dartmouth_fac_handbook.pdf

6. Resources Regarding Infrastructure

- (a) Textbooks: Department administrative assistant Amy Potter can give you a copy of the textbook for the course you are TAing.
- (b) Scheduling classrooms: The course instructor should have reserved a classroom for tutorials. If you want to schedule a classroom for an extra exam review session, for example, email Classroom Scheduling (preferably not at the last minute.) Specify the course, the purpose (e.g. exam review session), the date and time (ending as well as beginning time.)
- (c) Unlocking classrooms: If you show up for evening tutorial and find the room locked, either your department key or your ID card should get you in. If that doesn't work, you can contact Safety and Security, 6-4000. Also, let your instructor know about the problem.
- (d) Classroom problems: If the ceiling in your classroom is leaking, or there is another physical problem, ask the department administrator Tracy Moloney to email Work Control. If the problem needs immediate attention, you can try calling Work Control at 6-2508.
- (e) Computer problems: If the computer or projector in your classroom is broken, e-mail Classroom Scheduling, with a carbon copy to Tracy Moloney. If it is important to have the problem fixed immediately, try calling 6-1155, the AV help number.
- (f) Making copies: You can use the copiers in the math department (there are copiers on each floor of Kemeny) for copying connected with your course. If the copier is malfunctioning, tell Administrative Assistant Amy Potter.
- (g) Other problems: If you have other problems and don't know who to ask, start with the department administrative staff. Tracy and Amy are likely to be able to point you in the right direction.

7. Resources Regarding Students

- (a) General Information: All kinds of information about resources available to undergraduates can be found in the Student Handbook, which is available online.
- (b) Disabilities: Ward Newmeyer is the Director of Student Accessibility Services in the Collis Center. Any student who suspects they may have a disability and wants to be tested, who wants to have a documentation of their disability (learning or otherwise) placed on file, or who needs other information, should be referred to him. Any questions about accommodating disabilities in the math course you are TAing should be referred to the course instructor.
- (c) Extra help: A student who needs more individual tutoring on a regular basis than evening tutorial and office hours can supply can find an individual tutor through the Tutor Clearinghouse at the Academic Skills Center. Because there is a limited number of tutors, students should request tutors as soon as possible. For students on financial aid, tutoring is available at no charge.

FAQs about tutoring:

www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/tutors/fortutees/tuteefaq/index.html

The Academic Skills Center also can help students with strategies for organizing their studying, taking exams, dealing with test anxiety or anxiety about participating in class, and other such things.

www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills

- (d) Counseling: A student who is looking for non-academic counseling should be referred to the Health Service (Dick's House.)
If you are concerned about a student's immediate health and safety, call Safety & Security, 6-4000, or the Safety & Security emergency number, 6-3333.
- (e) Library: The Cook Mathematics Collection, although shelved in Berry Library, is maintained by the Kresge Library staff, who can help students locate mathematics library resources.

8. **Emergency Phone Numbers**

- (a) 911
- (b) Dartmouth College Safety & Security emergency number: 6-3333

9. **Quasi-Emergency Phone Numbers**

- (a) Work Control (for physical problems with the building or classroom): 6-2508
- (b) Classroom Technology (for AV problems during class): 6-1155