TAProject

Teaching Assistant Handbook

RUTGERS
School of Graduate Studies

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Introduction

As a TA, you will find yourself filling two roles: not only will you continue to be a student, but you will also (possibly for the first time) be a teacher. How will you behave with students and while standing in front of a class? What expectations will you set for your students in terms of classwork, discipline, attendance, and grades? How can you ensure fair treatment of all students? What kind of relationship should you establish with your students? These and a hundred other questions will probably present themselves to you. Though time and experience will ultimately be your most effective mentor, hopefully this handbook can answer some of your questions and put your mind more at ease.

Why TAs?

The teaching assistant (TA) at Rutgers, as at other major research universities in the United States, plays an important role in the education of undergraduates. Rutgers depends on teaching assistants to staff undergraduate courses. It is a rare student who graduates without having been taught by a TA. Furthermore, without teaching assistantships the university would be at a disadvantage in competing to attract the best faculty and would have difficulty meeting its obligation to train and develop the next generation of scholars and teachers.

The benefits of an assistantship to a graduate student are considerable. First, there are the financial benefits, including tuition remission. TAs also gain valuable teaching experience. Finally, TAs have an opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of their chosen field, since teaching demands not only a thorough understanding but also a constant rethinking of the subject matter. TAs and professors frequently comment on how much better they have grasped a subject after teaching it.

As graduate students, TAs may feel that they have come a long way from their undergraduate days, but as teachers, they may feel that they have far to go. Although resolving this conflict may not be simple, working hard at professional development will make TAs feel more secure in their status as members of the teaching staff and help accelerate their professional growth.

The ABCs of Being a TA

Appointments

The individual departments establish their own procedures for appointment and reappointment (consistent with university policy). The department also determines the specific TA assignments, which may include teaching your own class, leading a recitation/discussion/ laboratory section, grading, laboratory supervision, or other academic duties as dictated by need. The term of appointment for teaching assistants is from August 25 to Commencement, but for payroll purposes runs from September 1 to June 30; all standard appointments are made for one year only.

Appointment to a teaching assistantship one year does not guarantee reappointment the next year. Since all university appointments are subject to availability of resources, it is essential that TAs reapply each year, according to departmental instructions. All questions about reappointment should be directed to the individual department or graduate program director or administrator.

Quick Facts:

- Your assistantship lasts from August 25 to University Commencement
- Your first paycheck arrives mid-September
- You are paid until the end of June

Hours and Duties

A full-time teaching assistant works normally at the maximum rate of fifteen clock hours per week (the average total hours worked for the semester divided by the number of weeks). Some weeks, especially around exams, require more work while other weeks require less. The number of hours varies according to the time of semester. For example, TAs hired as graders should expect to put in more hours when exams or papers are scheduled.

If you are unhappy with your assigned duties or feel overburdened by the amount of work and time you are expected to invest, try talking to other TAs within the department to see if your experience is unusual and your expectations are realistic. (It is unrealistic to compare the workload of one department to another; because of the variety of duties and the disparity of disciplinary demands, what is usual in one program may not be in another). Discuss the cause of your displeasure with the department chair to see if changes can be made for the next semester. Most faculty members are sympathetic to the problems of the TA and try to be fair in their assignments.

If you feel, however, that you are being asked to perform duties which are inappropriate, or that you are being exploited or overburdened, do not suffer in silence. Speak to someone. You should not be putting in so many hours as a TA that your graduate work suffers. Your advisor is a good person to begin with, but if you get no satisfaction there you should make an appointment with the course or department chair. If that does not help, then contact Barbara Bender in the Dean's Office for assistance. You can say no to a faculty member who is overwhelming you with work—you are a professional and deserve to be treated like one.

Salary and Benefits

In addition to a salary, paid every two weeks during the contract year, the full-time TA at Rutgers is entitled to a variety of benefits, such as health and life insurance, dental insurance (an optional benefit for which the TA must pay a portion of the cost), and tuition remission.

Full tuition remission is given to all TAs on standard appointments; this will cover up to twelve credits a semester and six credits during the summer following a full-year appointment. TAs do not need to do anything to take advantage of this benefit—the department administrators handle the paperwork.

E-credits

A teaching assistantship (standard appointment) carries with it 6 E-credits. (Partial TA appointments have proportionally fewer E-credits.) The E indicates that no credit has been earned toward the degree and no grade computed in the cumulative average. This means that if you are registered for at least 3 other credits of coursework or research you maintain full-time status in the university, thus ensuring that you receive all the benefits of a full-time student.

Getting Paid

The university must have certain information before a paycheck can be issued; without this information, it is impossible to get paid. Be diligent in completing, and prompt in returning, the forms the department provides, since it may take up to six weeks to activate a new name in the payroll system. If you have any questions, check with your graduate program administrator.

International TAs must report to Rutgers Global–International Student and Scholar Services to complete the proper payroll forms. Contact the Center to learn the scheduled times for

processing employment verifications (I-9s); this cannot be done on a walk-in basis. Until international TAs complete employment verifications, their payroll cannot be processed.

Many students already have a United States Social Security number. If you do not, apply for one immediately. This is required by the payroll department, without which you cannot be paid. If a problem arises at the beginning of the semester and your paycheck is delayed, speak to the graduate program administrator to find out whom to contact to trace your check. (If necessary, the graduate program administrator may be able to process a request for an emergency check. Since this entails even more paperwork, however, it is best to try to get everything straightened out before the semester begins.)

Payroll is deposited directly into your bank account on alternate Fridays (remember to complete the necessary direct deposit form). Payments begin in September. For TAs appointed for the fall term only, payments run from September through January, and for TAs appointed for the spring term only, February through June.

Health Benefits

All full-time students are entitled to use Rutgers Student Health services; TAs on standard appointments are considered full-time. There are multiple health centers for New Brunswick/ Piscataway students. To make an appointment visit the Student Health website or call 848-932-7402.

Additionally, the university offers a variety of benefit plans from which all full-time TAs may select. To be covered you must fill out the necessary forms at the beginning of the semester. Information on medical plans, the prescription drug plan, and dental coverage is available from the Benefits Office (848-932-3990).

Your Students and Their World

What is it like to be an Undergraduate?

Many TAs feel far removed from undergraduate culture, distant from that way of living and thinking, even when they themselves were undergraduates not so long ago. Although the life of an undergraduate may seem idyllic when viewed through the eyes of an overburdened graduate student, it is not quite as simple as memory may make it. Most undergraduates have a full schedule of classes, carrying at least twelve credits (often sixteen, or more). In addition to this,

many undergraduates must work part-time or even full-time jobs to subsidize their education. For many students, a job is a necessity: without it, they would be forced to leave school. Furthermore, many of these students are living away from home for the first time in their lives. Clearly, students who are overwhelmed by work and social life will have difficulties investing the time needed to complete their coursework.

Once TAs recognize the fact that the life of an undergraduate is not always an easy one, they are in a position to adopt proactive teaching strategies. Perhaps the most effective first step TAs can take is to stop thinking about their students as an amorphous mass, "the undergraduates," and to attempt to see them as individuals. Do not generalize (e.g., undergraduates are lazy, silly, shallow, unmotivated). Most students are sincerely involved with their education and willing to work hard to succeed.

Be understanding when students come to you with problems or with excuses for late or unsatisfactory work; they honestly do have tight schedules and may be under a lot of pressure. Help them if you can; don't put another obstacle in their way. This does not mean that you should fall for every line they give you, but do not be so skeptical that you do not accept any excuses. Dealing with students in a fair and honest manner is the best policy. Try to help them find ways to meet their commitments to your class without losing control of other equally important parts of their lives. It is important to always remember that, at the end of the day, your job is to teach them; if some flexibility on your part can facilitate that, then you should feel free to be flexible.

The Student Body

What expectations can a TA have about a Rutgers student? In a university of more than 69,000 students—nearly 50,000 in New Brunswick alone—you can expect variety. There are more full-time students than part-time students, more women than men enrolled at Rutgers. Most of the students (82%) are from New Jersey. Numbers and percentiles say little about the abilities of a given individual or the scope of knowledge or range of experiences a student may bring to your classroom. Avoid stereotyping students—treat each student as an individual and hold high expectations for their success.

Campuses and Schools

Try to become familiar with the five New Brunswick/Piscataway campuses; you will feel more comfortable if you do so. Special events of interest are held on each campus—lectures, movies, sporting events, etc., so you will probably have occasion to visit all of them at one time or another. Although the campuses may seem widely scattered, all can be reached with the campus bus service. Knowledge of the campuses and the difficulties sometimes encountered getting from one campus from another will also help you understand the challenges students may have reaching your class on time.

Additionally, recognizing which school your students are matriculated in will give you clues about their goals. There are 12 undergraduate degree-granting schools on the 5 New Brunswick campuses. Each has an administrative code that you will see on rosters next to the student's name. These codes are listed with the school name below.

- Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy (10)
- Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy (30)
- Mason Gross School of the Arts (07)
- Rutgers Business School (33)
- School of Arts and Sciences (01)
- School of Communication and Information (04)
- School of Engineering (14)
- School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (11)
- School of Management and Labor Relations (33)
- School of Nursing (25)
- School of Public Health (10)
- School of Social Work (09)

Identifying a student's school may help you to understand the focus of a student's interest in your discipline: why he or she are taking your course, why his or her level of interest is so high or so low, and what the rest of his or her program may be like. Of course, more can be learned by speaking with the student.

Beginning to Teach

TA Assignments: What will I teach?

Although you may have found out in June that you were awarded a teaching assistantship, you may not know the particulars of your assignment until late August or even early September. Because of variables such as student enrollment, assignments are sometimes made quite late. Feel free to reach out to your department and other graduate students to get a sense of common placements.

Common TA assignments include grading, teaching recitations sections, and teaching lab courses. As soon as you receive your TA assignment, you will want to reach out to a faculty member for assistance. Every department should have someone to assist and advise TAs. If you are assigned to work with one specific faculty member, contact them and let them know you will be their TA and set up a meeting to discuss your duties for the semester.

Most importantly, get organized early. The following sections may help you in doing so. In addition, don't be shy in asking graduate students and faculty members for help. The more prepared you are on the first day of class, the more secure you will feel.

Preparing for the First Day

It is natural to be nervous on the first day; even experienced teachers sometimes feel anxious. Taking the time to prepare will help ensure that the first class goes smoothly. Remind yourself that you were given this position because you are qualified to perform it. Be prepared but relax—you may even have some fun!

It is normal to experience some of the common fears associated with the first day of class. For example, what if…

- a student asks me a question I can't answer?
- I can't control the class?
- I lose my train of thought?
- I give a wrong answer or make a mistake?
- a demonstration or experiment does not work properly?

These thoughts are all normal and to be expected, but with preparation and confidence you can handle anything that comes your way. As you walk into the classroom or lab on that first day, remember that students make certain automatic assumptions about the teacher. The first is that since you are the teacher you must know what you are doing. Your position—the person in

front of the classroom—vests you with authority. Use this knowledge to bolster your confidence before you step into the room. And remember, the students are probably feeling more than a bit anxious and worried about the course and what to expect.

It is also best to accept the fact that, sooner or later, you probably will make a mistake—it happens. It won't, however, be the end of the world. Consider beforehand how to respond to such a situation, and it will become less threatening. Be assured that your errors will not seem as disastrous to the students as they do to you. In fact, they may not even notice! If you realize that you have given incorrect information, it is okay to make a statement correcting your mistake. The students will appreciate this. Admitting that you were wrong will not cause students to lose respect for you, in fact, it may lead them to value your honestly and lead them to feel more comfortable asking questions themselves.

In addition, despite your best preparation, understand that sometimes things do not go exactly as you had planned. For example, one lesson may take longer than you expected. Another activity may not produce responses from the students that you expected. When things don't go as planned, this does not mean that you have failed, it simply means that you now have an opportunity to enact an alternate plan of action. As you plan each activity, consider the various paths it might take and do your best to be prepared with alternate ways to handle these potential situations. If you find yourself in a situation that you are not prepared for, it is okay to take a few minutes to collect your thoughts and make a new plan before reconvening the class. Remember, you are human too!

First Impressions

Your first impression to the class is very important. In fact, you can set a certain tone for the semester by your overall behavior and appearance. For example, a teacher who is not punctual may send a message to the students that their time is not valuable, or that they are allowed to be late to class as well. Be sure to arrive on time, if not a few minutes early. Arriving early allows you time to collect your thoughts and reorient your focus toward the class. This also allows you time to talk to your students informally and allows students to ask you questions. In addition, always begin class promptly.

During the first week, try to have a little patience for students who wander in late; they may have registration difficulties, problems finding classrooms, or miscalculating the time it takes to get from class to class. Be understanding.

You may dress in any way that you feel is appropriate but know that students will interpret your dress in certain ways. Your students may be fairly close to you in age. If you are particularly concerned about establishing authority in the classroom, dressing a bit more formally than your students makes an important distinction which can help you establish proper authority. Although you may want to connect with your students, you will also want them to see you as an authority figure rather than another peer. If you dress too casually, this may subtly suggest you are just another student.

The First Class

To begin, you must decide what you intend to achieve with your first class. Do you wish to plunge into the course work almost immediately? Or, do you wish to spend the first day getting to know something about your students and letting them get to know you? Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages—the choice depends largely on how much guidance you have been given from your department and your lead instructor. You may also consider your style as a teacher and the impressions you want to make towards your students.

Taking attendance, at least for the first two weeks of class, is important so you can help establish an accurate class roster. Some departments even require a teacher to report attendance numbers to them during the drop/add period (the first week of each semester). Check with your department about rules and standards for attendance. Your course may or may not have an attendance policy that will require attendance be taken during every class.

Taking attendance also aids in quickly learning students' names. Learning a student's name is an incredibly effective way of demonstrating to them that their individual ideas are valued. It can be difficult if not impossible to remember all the names of your students in a large lecture class, however in most lab sections, recitations, and smaller classes, it is feasible. If you are committed to learning student names, some strategies may help you, such as asking them to wear nametags for the first week or doing introductions several times at the beginning of the semester. There is also a photo roster available from your course roster which can help you

match names with faces. Some teachers even ask that students take the same seat so that it will be easier to remember names.

In addition to providing an introduction to the course, a major part of the first day is introducing yourself to the class. How should the students address you? This is your decision. The level of familiarity you wish to establish is something that you, not the students, should determine. Whatever you choose, inform students at the beginning of the first class. Do not merely tell them that your name is Ann Smith. This forces them to decide whether to call you Ann or Ms. Smith or Professor Smith. Write your name on the blackboard at the beginning of class in the way that you wish to hear it all semester and directly tell your students how to address you in emails and in-person.

After you have taken attendance and introduced yourself, many instructors choose to begin the course by handing out a syllabus that provides a clear plan for the semester (see Preparing a Syllabus). This is one of the most straightforward ways to convey information about the course, what you will cover, what the students will be expected to do and learn, as well as what the classroom culture and expectations will be. The syllabus is also a preview, presenting an overview of the course that will help students decide during the drop/add period whether or not to commit themselves to the class. You can choose to go over the syllabus together with the class, clarifying important points and answering questions. Students have a right to know what to expect from a course in terms of workload, grading, and other matters. For lab instructors, it is often necessary to open the first class with a discussion of lab protocol and safety procedures.

These preliminaries will not necessarily take up the entire class period. Many teachers like to spend time learning about the students. Some distribute index cards and ask the students to respond to a series of questions designed to give them an opportunity to describe the range of their knowledge in the subject and outside interests they have that may be of use in planning discussions. Other teachers prefer having the students share information about themselves with the class in order to break the ice and accustom the students to speaking up. Depending on the classroom culture you seek to create, various activities may be appropriate.

An alternate way of beginning the semester is by presenting a mini-lecture that gives a broad overview of the subject of the course and a general idea of various scholarly approaches to this field of knowledge. This method can give students direct experience as to what to expect from the course. Other teachers prefer to begin the semester with a discussion. This takes some

of the pressure off the new teacher (although a discussion class presents its own unique challenges—see The Discussion Class) and signals to the students that the course will demand engagement and participation. A discussion can be a valuable way of introducing some of the concerns of the class while allowing the teacher to gauge the levels of knowledge of the students.

Whichever approach you take for the first day of class, be aware that some students will invariably miss the first day. Students are still adding their classes, and others will ultimately drop your course. Because of this, don't assign permanent groups or make any decisions that require your roster to be set-in-stone. Some teachers choose to save the introductory lecture or syllabus overview for the second class, when the students have already had time to do some preliminary reading in the texts. Students who do not arrive until the second or even third class may be at a slight disadvantage, but they will also understand that time in the class will not be wasted and their regular attendance is required.

Creating the Right Atmosphere

One of the hallmarks of a good teacher is the ability to create a classroom environment where all students feel free to offer opinions and ask questions. This atmosphere will probably develop over the course of the semester, as you and the students begin to trust each other. Acknowledge to the class that both you and your students have things to teach each other, and both you and your students can (and will) make mistakes. You may even choose to include a statement about the class culture in your syllabus.

Never belittle or criticize a student for making a mistake. You can correct the error, but it is best to do this in a kindly and non-judgmental way. Students will only participate freely if they know they will not be criticized for making mistakes. With every constructive comment, try to lead with a positive one as well. Offer praise whenever possible but only when deserved. Instructors who say "very good" after every student response run the risk of devaluing all praise.

In addition, all students in your class should feel they have an equal claim to your attention. Consider your non-verbal behavior. When you look around the class, do you tend to make eye contact only with certain students? Do you teach to one side of the room, or only to the front of the room? Be on guard against personal prejudices and unconscious stereotyping (see Our Common Purposes). Do you call on women as frequently as you do men? Do you find yourself

letting class discussions be dominated by some students or some groups of students? In your classroom, do you make eye contact with members of these groups as often as with others? Although teachers may be unaware of these habits, students will notice, so guard against them.

Furthermore, set consistent rules and guidelines and stick to them. This will encourage you to treat everyone equally when there are set standards in place. However, don't feel obligated to be a stern disciplinarian at all times. Although you should expect students to conform to the rules you have set, be understanding when one comes to you with a legitimate excuse or a request for a special favor—an extended deadline or a make-up test, for example. You have the right (in line with the lead instructor when applicable) to make judgement calls about these situations. You should certainly not grant every request, and repeated ones by the same student should be looked upon with suspicion, but you are allowed to hear them out and make a decision based on the circumstances.

Above all, be sure to listen to your students and treat them with respect and courtesy. You can be the authority while being respectful. You may ask and expect the same respect and courtesy from them which together can allow your classroom to be a mutual and respectful learning environment.

Preparing a Syllabus

Your TA duties may or may not require you to prepare a syllabus. If you are leading a lab or recitation section, you may be provided with a syllabus to use. This might be the case even if you are teaching a stand-alone course, which will sometimes have a department-approved syllabus. In other cases, you will have the responsibility of designing your own syllabus. Regardless, it is crucial to understand how a syllabus works, what should be included in it, and what its purpose is.

A syllabus is composed of several parts, all of which require careful thought and planning. Some classes will require additional components, but all syllabi should include at least the following:

- Contact and Logistical Information: All syllabi should include your name, email, office location, and office hours, as well as the location and times of class meetings, recitation sections, and/or labs.

- Learning Goals: Usually appearing at or near the beginning of a syllabus, learning goals set out as clearly as possible what your students should expect to learn in the course. They will usually include both skills and information and may also cover a range of topics from the general to the more specific.

- Policies and Procedures: A good syllabus provides clear and concise information about what the course's policies will be, and how assignments, exams, and other activities will proceed. Though it is much more than this, a syllabus is in some ways a contract with your students. Establishing clear policies on attendance, classroom etiquette, technology use, and other expectations can help avoid problems down the line.

- The Schedule: For most classes, the syllabus will include the schedule for the entire term. The schedule should contain details about what each class meeting will cover, how students should prepare for it, and specify when assignments will be distributed and when they are due. Make sure to take into account holidays and breaks, and, if possible, include some flexibility to account for classes that might be cancelled for reasons such as snow days. It should also consider what other responsibilities you and your students may be responsible for at certain times during the semester.

Ultimately, the design of the syllabus will be determined by the nature of the course material. For example, some subjects, like history and literature, often lend themselves to chronological arrangement, while others, such as science and engineering, may require organization around general topics. Whichever method you choose, it should be made clear to the students from the beginning. In addition, the overall connection between the class material and the text(s), the labs, or other elements of the course must be explained to your students. You are the expert in the room and part of your job is to help students understand these connections.

Strive to create a syllabus that gives a realistic indication of what the class will achieve over the semester. Alter your syllabus as little as possible once the semester has begun. It is unfair—and, in some cases, against university policy—to change the course requirements after students can no longer switch sections or drop the course.

Choosing the Text

Depending on the course you are teaching and the department's policies, you may or may not have a choice about required books for the course. If you are TAing for a course with multiple sections, members of the department often choose what they consider the most useful books for the majority of students. In this case, you will not be responsible for ordering books. Instead, the department will supply you with a desk copy of each book and, sometimes, with a teacher's guide. Be sure to be in touch with your faculty advisor if you are not sure about this process.

Before the course starts, review each book carefully and assess how much your course relies on the text. There will certainly be chapters you will want to stress, others you will wish to minimize. Consider how much supplementary material will be necessary for your students to reach the goals you have set.

Sometimes you may be required to teach from a text that you do not like. You are welcome to explain your reservations and even suggest alternate options, however, keep in mind, that almost certainly no change can be made for the upcoming semester. While the instructor may sympathize with your complaints, he or she may still have valid reasons for choosing that book. If you must teach from a text that you do not particularly like, you may share your feelings with the class, giving the students your estimation of both the strengths and weaknesses of the text, but try to stress what you see as positive. If you are wholly negative, students may wonder why you or the department made them waste their time (and money) on what you are telling them is a book of dubious value. Remember, too, that these students do not have your advanced knowledge of the subject and may find the book very useful in helping them to understand the basics. Make the best of the situation as much as possible!

If you do have the opportunity to select your own booklist, there are many factors for you to consider:

- Which book or books can best further your course goals? The more clearly you formulate your learning goals for the course, the more surely you can choose the books that will help your students reach these goals.

- How much material can be covered over the semester? Consider both how much reading students can be expected to do, as well as the depth of material you want to cover. Sometimes it is hard to judge what is a reasonable workload. Experienced instructors in your department will have a fair idea of how much work students can or will cover. In some fields, for example, there are fairly standard 'rules of thumb' concerning how many pages of reading per class meeting can be assigned. Feel free to consult faculty members or other TAs for guidance about these standards.

- How expensive will these books be? Although cost should not be the only consideration, given the price of books today some students may opt out of purchasing books even when they are required if they are too expensive. If students do not purchase the book, this will certainly impact their learning. Perhaps consider an open textbook.

- If you choose to rely heavily on PDFs or shared materials, copyright laws must be taken into account.

You may choose to reach out to various publishers to acquire sample copies of books. You will find this is helpful if you want to pit two books against each other side-by-side. Once you have compiled what you think is a good preliminary list, take it, along with your syllabus, to the department chair or to an instructor who has already taught this course or a similar one. Consider all suggestions—remember they have more extensive classroom experience—but, in the end, it is you who will determine the structure and focus of the course.

Once you have decided upon the booklist, you must complete an online book order form. The graduate program administrator will be able to assist you with placing the book order and your department may request the information as well. These lists should be completed as soon as possible so that the books will be available at the bookstore by the first day of classes.

Supplementary Readings

Many teachers choose to use PDFs and online materials from various sources to supplement the text and their lectures. Usually, such material is placed online via the course learning management system (such as Sakai or Canvas). While supplemental readings can be very useful, take care not to overwhelm students—the purpose is to clarify, not to make learning more

difficult. Furthermore, if you choose to rely heavily on PDFs or shared materials, copyright laws must be considered.

You may include a “For Further Reading” list for students who want to dive deeper into various topics. Occasionally alluding to these materials in class or choosing interesting examples from them may help to motivate students to read them at a future date. However, students cannot be held responsible for any material that is not specifically labeled as required.

Record Keeping

Consider the kinds of student records that must be maintained and devise a workable system for doing so. The university mandates that all grades be kept on file by the instructor for at least one year—your department may also have its own rules. Many experienced teachers suggest that you keep this information for as long as possible but certainly for at least five years.

Student attendance and performance should be accurately detailed in these records. All letter or number grades for quizzes, exams, homework, and in-class work must be properly recorded. In addition, many teachers find it useful to reserve a space next to each student's record for a brief final evaluation of his or her strengths and weaknesses (one or two sentences at most). This brief note may assist you in the future if the student asks for a letter of recommendation.

Take time to record all information clearly and accurately. You will have to refer to this information several times in the course of the semester—at mid-semester when it is time to issue warning notices, at semester's end when you are calculating final grades, and at any time during the semester when you meet with students to discuss their progress. These tasks will be much less time-consuming if your grade information is in order. If your records are stored on a computer, it is essential to keep a backup. Similarly, if you post grades online, make sure to have the full gradebook stored for your own personal records as well. Keep in mind the possible security risks—who else will have access to your records? If you lose your records, the burden of proof for a grade is on you, and the resulting problems could become a bureaucratic nightmare.

Rosters and Drop/Adds

The online class rosters are updated as students change their registration. Do not attempt to add the names of students who do not appear on your roster and do not attempt to delete the names of students who have not attended.

Some students do considerable 'shopping' for courses during the first weeks of a semester; others will be deregistered after the first two weeks of classes because they have not paid their term bill. Once these students pay their term bill, their courses are automatically restored; they do not have to reregister for their classes. Therefore, you may notice student rosters changing over the first few weeks of the course; this is normal.

During the first week students may add classes. During the first two weeks students can drop courses without incurring any penalty, however, for the following six weeks a 'W' will be recorded on the student's transcript. After eight weeks, a student can drop a course only with the permission of the college dean; after the twelfth week of classes, a student can drop a course only with the permission of both the college dean and the instructor.

Warning rosters are generally available between the fourth and seventh week of the semester which allow you to submit “warning” grades to students and their departments. You will be notified of the specific due date for warning rosters. The first hourly exam or some substantial graded assignment should be scheduled and graded before the seventh week of classes so that students who do poorly and are in danger of failing can be notified. Comments should be entered next to the warning grades. The Warning Roster will list all of the students registered for your class. If a student's name is not listed, please send the student to their dean's office to properly register. Warning grades are as follows:

- W1 = Warning for poor performance;
- W2 = Warning for poor attendance;
- W3 = Warning for both poor attendance and poor performance;

The final roster is the Grade Roster. Grades must be submitted within 48 hours after the final exam as scheduled by the university. Instructors are expected to submit final grades using REGIS (Rosters and Electronic Grading Information System).

For undergraduate students, you may submit a grade of either *A*, *B*, *B+*, *C*, *C+*, *D*, *F*, *NG*, *TZ*, or *TF*. Note that minus grades are not permitted. Assign a grade of *NG* (no grade given) to a

student who has not attended the course. The *NG* will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA; however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the *NG* will convert to an *F*, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of *TZ* when a student is unable to complete the semester's course work due to a verifiable emergency situation; reach an agreement with the student as soon as possible as to how the course should be completed. The TZ will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA, however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the *TZ* will convert to an *F*, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of *TF* if the student does not complete the course work required or has not taken the final exam. The *TF* will be calculated into the GPA immediately. If the course work is not made up within the following semester, the *TF* converts to an *F*. Similarly, instructors can submit *TD*, *TC*, *TC+*, *TB*, or *TB+* grades if the instructor believes that the student should receive that letter grade even if the student completes no further work for the course. *T* grades can never be lowered. Please consult with your department regarding procedures for submitting changes of grades after the semester has ended.

The Classroom

You will be assigned a specific classroom or lab when you are given your first roster at the beginning of the semester. If possible, go and look at the classroom before the first class to judge its suitability. The logistics of scheduling an enormous number of classes make it almost impossible to get a class location changed, but if the classroom is totally inappropriate for the course (in size, available facilities, etc.) report the problem at once to the graduate program administrator or to someone at Scheduling and Space Management.

Digital Classroom Services

Information regarding the size, location, and permanently installed equipment in a classroom is available on Digital Classroom Services' website. Instructions and videos explaining the operation of the systems and equipment are also available.

Facilities Maintenance

Although what happens in the classroom is naturally much more important than the physical appearance of the room, no one should have to spend a semester in an unpleasant environment. When you look at the classroom or lab for the first time, take note of its physical condition.

- Is the classroom clean?
- Do all of the lights work?
- Does the heat/air conditioning work?
- Are there enough desks?
- If you will need a podium, does the room have one?
- Is there an adequate supply of chalk/markers and erasers?
- Are there broken windows or locks?

In most cases the classroom will be adequate. If there is a problem, however, act at once to remedy it. An annoying buzzing light will distract even the most interested students, just as an overheated classroom will lull even the most attentive to sleep.

Facilities Maintenance should be notified in the event of problems with plumbing, air conditioning, repairs, maintenance, classroom supplies, or broken locks. If it is an emergency, the operator can have someone respond immediately.

Getting an Office

The university requires that all teachers make themselves available to their students outside of class. Office assignments are usually made before classes begin or during the first few weeks of the semester. Because of the shortage of office space in many departments, it is likely that you will have to share your office with several other TAs. Teaching and class schedules are so varied that this presents fewer problems than may seem probable at first.

Unfortunately, in some departments, space is at such a premium that TAs who grade or teach labs and recitations may be without office assignments at the beginning of the semester. If you find yourself without an office, ask your graduate program administrator for suggestions about what to do. If no help is received, speak to the instructor with whom you are working. Some faculty members allow TAs to hold office hours in their own offices at times when they will not be using them.

Some departments have shared office space or extra rooms which you may use in the event that you want to hold office hours or schedule a meeting. You can try to find an unused classroom where you can meet students or reserve a meeting room in one of the libraries

where conversation is possible. Be sure to announce in class where and when you will be available, and then be there for the full length of the appointed time.

Scheduling Hours

The importance of maintaining regular office hours cannot be overemphasized—students must feel that they have access to their teachers. No matter how good a teacher you are, if the students feel that you are inaccessible or too busy to meet with them, even the smallest confusion can lead them to feel behind or lose interest in the class.

Your department may require you to hold a certain number of office hours per week. Whether and where you hold additional office hours is a decision you can make based on the needs of the students. Student schedules are so varied, with classes spread around five campuses, that meetings may sometimes be very difficult to arrange. Some teachers find that scheduling office hours before or after class works out well because many students try to avoid scheduling back-to-back classes.

In addition, you may hold office hours “by appointment” so that students can schedule during times that fit with their busy schedules. Let your students know, often, that you are available for meetings at other times by appointment. Sometimes students may be more hesitant to reach out for a personal appointment, so be sure to encourage them to do so. You may meet with students in the library or in one of the student lounges if that is more convenient for both of you. If you are teaching a large section, you must expect to set aside at least two periods to accommodate all students who wish to speak with you.

You may wish to supplement these face-to-face office hours with “virtual” office hours on Skype, Google Hangouts, etc. Alternately, you can use the chatroom function in Sakai. This chatroom is available only to your students and the conversations are archived online. This feature makes it particularly useful for review sessions so that students who were unable to participate in real time are able to read the transcript of your answers to questions posed by other students. It is vital to remember that, since the chatroom is viewable by all students, it is not suitable for personal discussions about grades, makeup work, etc. Students often appreciate online office hours because they can 'attend' regardless of where they are (home, dorm, between classes, break at work, etc.).

Making the most of your office hours is a fundamental way of ensuring that your students make the most of your class. An instructor who is able to establish personal contact with students not only helps the individual students but the class as a whole.

Uses of Office Hours

If you sit back and wait for the students to appear at your door, you are letting a great opportunity pass by. Some students will show up only late in the semester when they are worried about their final grades. Let students know that office hours are dedicated time for them and can only help. Some additional suggestions for getting students to come to your office:

- Remind the students frequently of the scheduled hours and other appointment possibilities;
- During office hours, keep the door open to let the students know that you are there and available;
- When students do come into your office, put your work aside and make them feel like welcome guests, not intruders;
- When you meet with students, look at them and listen. Let them do the talking. Pay attention. Look interested. Be interested;
- Establish a friendly relationship with them in the classroom so that they will be less hesitant about coming to see you later.

A few students coming in with the same problem should suggest to you the topics that need to be explained more clearly. Many teachers require that all students schedule an appointment before or after the first paper exam, so that their progress can be discussed. Once students find your office for this required appointment, they are more apt to make a return visit.

Additionally, if you write a comment on an essay—"Why not come and talk to me about this in my office?"—most students will take this advice and meet with you. Even students who would not initiate a contact are grateful for the opportunity to meet.

Problems

If a student comes to you with personal problems, you should listen; but remember that you are not always qualified to help. Do not attempt to be a counselor or psychiatrist. You can best assist the student by knowing where to find help and by urging the student to make an appointment with a more qualified person by visiting Rutgers Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS). If possible, walk the student over to the appropriate office. Always be supportive and understanding but recognize your limitations (see Troubled Students.)

A problem some TAs encounter is the student who comes once a week for office hours and wants to just sit down and chat. Although this may not always cause a problem, at times it can be very frustrating. One way to avoid this is to maintain distance from your students as early as the first day of class, communicating that you are their TA rather than their peer. In a case like this, kindly, but firmly, tell the student that although you would like to talk, your conversations should stay focused on the class. If you suspect that the student's frequent visits are symptoms of an emotional problem rather than focused on their performance in the course, you will want to help the student to receive the proper counseling (see Troubled Students).

Another possible concern is the student who comes to your office at times other than your office hours. If you are not engaged in any particular work, you may decide to see the student. If the student is one who generally seems apprehensive or appears to be under some stress, you should welcome the opportunity at any time to open up the lines of communication. Use your own judgment about the student's needs. But, if you have budgeted your time carefully and set this period aside for your own work, your students should be expected to respect your decision about office hours, except in extreme cases. Explain to these students that you cannot speak to them now, but that you will gladly see them during your regular office hours or at an agreed-upon, mutually convenient time.

Attendance Policy for TAs

If for any reason you are unable to conduct a class for which you are scheduled, notify the department or the appropriate person as soon as possible. Missed classwork must be made up at some point in the semester, placing a future burden on the TA and on the students. If the TA is in charge of a lab section, a substitute must be found because in most cases the students will not be able to make up the lab. Students would be justified in complaining about a TA who

misses classes or who is regularly late just as you have a responsibility to speak to a student with these problems.

Everybody, of course, becomes ill at one time or another or has an emergency which prevents him or her from attending to duties. In these situations, do what you can to make your absence cause as little disruption as possible in both your own life and in that of your students. Keep a backup plan in place. Know beforehand the department's policy on absences and the appropriate person to notify about them.

Attendance Policy for Students

Official university policy is that attendance "shall be expected." This is generally interpreted by faculty and administration to mean that attendance is required. How closely should you monitor the attendance of individual students? This will generally be decided by the faculty advisor's attendance policy and tends to depend on the course structure. In a large lecture class, taking attendance is time-consuming and difficult to manage unless a sign-in sheet is circulated at every class. Even in smaller classes, however, where it is possible to monitor attendance, some teachers are reluctant to establish a strict attendance policy. Some instructors feel that college students should be allowed more freedom than high school students and should be free to attend or not attend as they choose. Others do not want to waste class time in taking attendance or want to encourage intrinsic motivation to attend class.

There are, however, compelling reasons for requiring attendance and more or less painless ways of managing the necessary recordkeeping. Perhaps the most important reason for regulating attendance is that it forces you to learn your students' names very quickly. You may be surprised at how soon you recognize students by name, and at that point you can take attendance quickly and silently at the beginning of the class period.

In addition, by setting a limit on the number of absences, the teacher is signaling to the students that what takes place in class is important. You are not merely rehashing what the professor said in the lecture class, or restating the material found in the text, but you are using your recitation, lab, or lecture to enlarge the students' understanding of the topic.

Taking attendance may also assist you at the end of the semester when compiling grades. Your decision about a student with a true borderline grade could be influenced by the student's

attendance and participation; in cases such as this, being able to match a face with a name is helpful.

A clearly established attendance policy will avoid many problems, but to be effective any policy must be enforced consistently and equally. This is not to suggest inflexibility—exceptions can and, at times, should be made. Regardless of what policy you decide on, make your expectations clear to the students. It is not fair to secretly take attendance all semester if the students were not informed this would be considered as part of their grade. Be clear about what is expected of the students and they will value their time in the class even more.

The Craft of Teaching

The Lecture

The most traditional form of college teaching, and still the most common, is the formal lecture. Lecturing can also be the most frightening teaching method for new TAs. The pressure of standing in front of a classroom, sometimes filled with hundreds of students, and asserting expertise on a topic can be daunting. The goal of the following pages is to answer some questions and provide some preparation to help demystify the lecture and allow you to walk into class on that first day with confidence.

Before beginning to compile material for a lecture, it is useful to pose a few questions, the answers to which will help to determine your focus:

- What is the purpose of the lecture?
- Is it meant to introduce entirely new material, or is it intended to summarize material already covered?
- Is the lecture an expansion of materials covered by the text, or is it a review?
- How is the substance of the lecture related to the text or the lab materials?

One of the toughest problems faced by new instructors is in judging the abilities of their class. The material presented must be challenging enough so that students are not bored, yet not so difficult that they are lost, overwhelmed, or discouraged. Striking a reasonable balance between these two points takes practice—and even experienced faculty sometimes misjudge.

Many new instructors tend to over-prepare because they think they must know everything written about a topic before they can teach it, or they are afraid that the students will ask

difficult questions. TAs should realize that it is always possible to say to students, "I don't know, but I'll find out."

In addition, remember that students are probably not as interested as you in the current scholarly debates and controversies. Later on, when they have a fuller understanding of the field, they may be interested, but first give them the basic information. On the other hand, you do not wish to insult your students by presenting a lecture so elementary that the students barely need to listen (and certainly won't as the semester progresses). You should assume that your audience is composed of intelligent, interested adults who, while they may not have deep knowledge of the field, are capable and desirous of learning.

Once you have decided upon the depth of material to be covered, you can begin to prepare your notes. Perhaps the worst way to give a lecture is by writing out the entire "script" beforehand and reading it to the class. Unless you are an exceptionally gifted speaker, this will alienate and bore your students. Beginning instructors may feel more confident with a typed text in front of them, but this confidence is gained at the loss of some excitement and much spontaneity.

Instead, prepare a good outline for yourself, including all the main topics, sub-topics, sub-sub-topics, illustrations, examples, and anecdotes, detailed enough so that you will not unintentionally omit anything of importance. For some teachers, four to five pages are more than enough for an eighty-minute class, while others may need more or fewer. Using an outline rather than a prepared text allows you to pace your lectures. If a point at the beginning produces a flood of questions, time can be made up later in the lecture by eliminating some of the less important points. This is almost impossible to do if you are reading a tightly organized lecture/essay.

Do not try to cover too much in one lecture. Thoroughly explaining two or three points may be considered a real achievement. During the second half of the semester, when the pressures of time are more felt, you may be tempted to try to cram two lectures into one. This usually does not save time in the end because the students rarely absorb it all, and you will probably end up spending time in the following weeks answering questions and clearing up the confusion caused by this double lecture.

Although instructors are discouraged from presenting an essay as a lecture, a lecture should be modeled on the basic elements of a good essay, with a clearly identified beginning, middle,

and end. Students need to understand very specifically what you propose to talk about and how it relates to other course materials. One piece of advice, found in almost every text on teaching, offers three steps to preparing a successful lecture:

1. Tell them what you are going to say;
2. Say it;
3. Tell them what you said.

Many teachers like to begin class with an amusing story, an anecdote, or a news item that is related to materials already covered or about to be covered in the class. This works as an effective transitional device for the students, easing them gently from whatever they have just left—their previous class, their job, their friends—to the work at hand in your class. Beginning the class in this way helps students to relax and makes them more receptive to the work that follows.

In editing your lecture so that it fits into the allocated time, avoid cutting out illustrations, examples, and anecdotes. A successful lecture is one that helps students comprehend the point— often an apt illustration or example can make the difference between merely covering the material and actually teaching it. People remember well-chosen examples and vivid illustrations.

It is a good idea when planning a lecture class to reserve some time for students' questions and responses. If you plan to cover two main topics, pause midway to give the students a chance to ask questions or make comments. Reserve time at the beginning of each class for questions. Remember that the purpose of a good lecture is to make students think, to raise questions, and to provoke responses. A successful lecture does not remain a monologue but develops into a dialogue.

Give your students an outline of each lecture. Write the outline on the board, use PowerPoint, or provide a hardcopy or digital handout. This outline can be a distillation of your own outline, perhaps listing only the main ideas. The benefits of this handout outweigh the small amount of time that it will take you to prepare it. The students can follow your lecture more easily and identify the major and minor points without difficulty. In addition, just having a

piece of paper in hand gives many students a feeling of confidence in the instructor's organization.

Teachers, like any other public performer, must work on their delivery and movements. If your speech is difficult to understand or if your delivery unanimated, you may soon lose the class' interest. At least at first, check and evaluate yourself regularly. Below are some of the things you should be aware of when you begin to lecture:

- Use natural hand gestures as you speak and move around a bit;
- Make eye contact with the students;
- Speak loudly enough and enunciate distinctly;
- Avoid filler words and phrases like "er," "uh," "oh," "um," or "you know;"

Use the blackboard/whiteboard or other audio-visual aids to break up the monotony of one voice speaking. Even the most exciting public speaker knows that visuals are a sure way to regain an audience whose attention is fading.

The Discussion Class

Leading an effective discussion can require as much or even more preparation than for a lecture, as well as the flexibility and perceptiveness to follow the conversation in the direction that will be most productive for a given group of students. You must also ensure that students participate. All of this can be achieved through a combination of careful planning, enthusiasm, and a bit of luck.

The shape of any discussion class is determined in large part, of course, by the kind of class you are teaching. In some courses—many humanities courses, for example—the lively exchange of ideas is the very heart of the class, with most class time devoted to a discussion based on assigned readings. After completing the reading and with texts in hand, students come to class prepared to talk, question, analyze, or offer opinions. In other courses, discussion forms a less central but no less important function. Often, a discussion class is an adjunct to a larger lecture class, allowing students to investigate crucial points in more depth than is possible in the lecture hall. In between these two types of classes are a whole range of classes which use discussion to a greater or lesser degree. Not all subject matter lends itself to a discussion. A teacher interested in conveying specific information and facts would do well to give the

students the information in a lecture or a handout and then, perhaps, use that material as the basis for a discussion.

All instructors who make use of the discussion format—and, at one time or another, that is almost every instructor—must begin with a few basic questions. These questions will simplify and define the aims of your class and help you to begin to plan your class.

The pivotal question is: what is the purpose of the discussion? Is it meant to reinforce ideas introduced during a lecture or reading or to explain them in more detail? Is the purpose to allow students to make connections between the abstractions presented in the text and more concrete examples, perhaps in their own lives, or are discussions meant to introduce new material, to start the students thinking in a new direction? How are the topics under discussion related to the overall aims of the course? In some cases, these questions will be answered by the course supervisor, so it is necessary to consult with him or her before the semester begins and to maintain regular contact over the semester.

Before conducting a discussion class, you should make an outline of what you hope to cover. This outline need not be written in stone—be flexible in moving from topic to topic and allow the students some latitude in the range of their discussion. With as much thoroughness as is required in preparing a lecture, an instructor should go through the details of the discussion, deciding which points are absolutely necessary, which are less important, and which can be omitted entirely.

Once these priorities have been established, you should formulate thought-provoking questions that may lead the students toward the decided-upon topics without dictating responses. Just as for a lecture, a discussion should not try to cover too much, so establishing 2-3 overarching questions with several clarifying/specific questions for each will usually suffice.

After formulating these questions, a helpful strategy for preparing to lead the discussion is to compile a list of the examples, accompanied by page numbers, where applicable, that are relevant to them. Feel free to include anything you think might be helpful. This list merely serves as a reference so that you always have a path forward ready at hand. If a student raises a new question or makes an observation relevant to one of these examples, you can then quickly direct everyone's attention there.

When beginning the discussion, do not panic if your first question fails to produce the desired response. Give the students time to think and formulate an answer. Don't be afraid of

silences! We can sometimes have an urge to fill every minute of class time, but in some cases allowing students to think quietly and come up with the next link in the discussion chain is the most effective way forward. If students seem lost, recap a bit so that they may better see what you are proposing with the question. Like a good conversation, a good discussion must evolve naturally.

In spite of all your preparations, a discussion class will only limp along unless the students are motivated to participate. Occasionally, a teacher will encounter a class that for one reason or another never catches fire, but most classes, with a little encouragement and planning, profit from discussions. If students seem especially reluctant to join in the discussion, a helpful activity might be to temporarily break the class into smaller groups, with each preparing a few thoughts and identifying a few examples that might help them address the discussion questions. You can then reconvene the class as a whole and allow the small groups' ideas to serve as a new jumping-off point. This can also allow students who may feel too nervous to speak to the whole group a chance to participate. As with any small group activity, you should circulate among the groups providing pointers and observing.

Though this may not always be possible given the constraints of class size and classroom setup, having students sit in a circle facing each other is usually best when leading a class discussion. Having students face each other forces them to make eye contact, helping them engage with the rest of the group rather than leaving them feeling isolated and disconnected. The other benefit is that the importance and the authority (and intimidation) of the instructor seems temporarily minimized.

Be encouraging to your students. Show them that you are paying attention to what they are saying. Remember to make eye contact yourself and offer an appropriate comment when they finish speaking. Do not just allow them to speak and then go on to another topic without acknowledging their contribution. Make positive comments about their responses if possible. Use discretion, however; do not say 'very good' if the answer was not very good. Students dislike this type of dishonesty and will begin to distrust and devalue all that the teacher says. It is important to establish a classroom climate conducive to the free exchange of ideas. Students should feel able to give wrong answers without being humiliated, to explore ideas without being censored.

Finally, the enthusiasm of the teacher for the topic will almost always spark student interest. If a teacher's manner is uninterested and uninteresting, even the most exciting topic will fall flat. A quiet, reserved teacher is as capable of projecting intensity for a subject as an outspoken one. Express your ideas and feelings honestly, and your students will soon follow your example.

The Recitation Class

A recitation class is a small sub-group of a larger lecture class which meets regularly as a supplement to the weekly lectures. The lecture sections are usually taught by faculty who supervise TAs responsible for their recitation classes. The faculty member will generally determine the purpose of the recitation class, although the TA will sometimes be able to shape the class in an individual way.

In these classes, as in all other discussion classes, the learning goals should dictate the activities. What is the purpose of the class? What do your students need to leave each day knowing? Is the class period a review session meant to further explain material already covered in the lecture? Or is the TA meant to introduce new material or engage the students with hands-on applications to concepts already learned? As the TA, you should clearly define these goals to yourself and to your students.

Running an efficient recitation requires the TA to have a firm grasp of the course material and to keep up with the course readings, labs, and lectures. Some departments require TAs to attend all lectures for the course. Depending on your department requirements and your knowledge of the course, attending lectures can be an extremely useful practice. Although the syllabus may give TAs a general idea of what is being covered in class, only attendance at the lectures will show if all points were clearly and comprehensively explained. The TA is also aware of any potentially confusing event in the lecture (e.g., a misinterpreted word or phrase or a poorly designed PowerPoint).

Let the students know at the beginning of the semester that the recitation class is not just a rehash of the lecture but an opportunity for the students to grapple with problems they may not thoroughly understand, to broaden their knowledge of concepts, and to give them some practice in applying the things they have learned.

A good way to involve everyone in the class is to ask the students to be ready at the beginning of class with a question that they would like to have answered. You might start the

class by writing all of these questions on the board. This takes only a few minutes and will give you an idea of the areas where students are having problems and give them a sense of participating in the shaping of the class.

An alternate way of involving students is by outlining on the board the topics that you think need to be covered and having the students rank them. This method has the advantage of giving you more control over the contents of the class while still allowing the students some voice.

At the end of each recitation class you may want to assess if the day's learning goals have been met. Sometimes you will have weekly quizzes or assignments as dictated by the course, however you may choose to supplement these assessments to get a better sense for how the course is going. One suggestion is to use an "exit ticket" approach. This requires that students submit a brief assignment before leaving for the day. Alternatively, this provides an opportunity for students to write down questions that are still unclear to them. Feel free to do this anonymously if you want to ensure utmost honesty for those who might be shy about feeling behind in relation to a particular topic. Assessing student understanding regularly can give insight into topics that you may want to cover at the beginning of the next meeting or teaching methods that are most effective.

The Laboratory Section

A lab instructor must know the materials of the class, which means working closely with the lecturer and keeping up with the course readings. Some departments require TAs to attend all lectures for the course. Depending on your department requirements, your knowledge of the course, and the extent that the lab course is aligned with another course, attending lectures can better prepare you to guide students during the lab meetings.

Careful planning is essential in teaching a successful lab section. The primary structure of each lab class should be dictated by the learning goals. Each lab meeting should have a clear purpose with defined learning goals and ways to assess if those learning goals have been met. Often times a lab class is meant to apply material learned in class using a hands-on approach. Whatever these goals are, be sure to clearly define them both to yourself and to your students.

You may choose to prepare a brief lecture to begin the lab, one that helps to focus the students on the problem at hand and covers all of the points that need to be articulated. So that

students understand the end goal of the lab and do not feel that they are merely repeating a meaningless exercise, prepare handouts or use PowerPoint or the blackboard/whiteboard to provide them with a clear overview of the demonstration.

Many instructors like to use a few minutes at the beginning of the section to review the lab from the previous week and establish some connections between that lab and the current one.

Most lab courses have a supervisor who is responsible for the labs, holds weekly lab preparation meetings, and is available to help with problems. The lab instructor, however, is ultimately responsible for the success and safety of the lab. A lab instructor should always go through all the steps of the demonstration at least once before conducting each lab. In fact, it may help you plan ahead to complete the lab on your own before class begins. This allows you to asses timing as well as prepare for any mistakes that students might make.

If you teach a lab that has been taught in the past, you may wish to ask other lab instructors where their students encountered difficulties. For labs that necessitate the use of unfamiliar equipment, the TA is required to take time to demonstrate its use, thoroughly and carefully. In some labs, students may be reluctant to handle the required materials because of squeamishness or fear; in others, they are confused by the topic and are unable to interpret the results in any meaningful way. Knowing beforehand where trouble can be expected saves valuable time.

Lab safety must always be a major concern. All TAs need to be informed about the necessary safety precautions, since the lab instructor is responsible for the safety of the students. Although vigilance is necessary in all labs, extra caution must be exercised in introductory courses. Inattentive students pose a real danger to themselves and the entire class. Clowning around in the lab can cause serious trouble, and it is up to you to see that order is maintained. Warn students at the beginning of class about any potentially hazardous materials they will be handling. Write warnings on the blackboard/whiteboard and repeat them often throughout the class. Make sure that students wear safety goggles and other equipment as necessary. If you are not sure about the possible dangers of a material, ask the professor in charge of the course. You cannot be too careful. Students who refuse to comply with safety regulations should not be allowed to continue with the lab. You should demonstrate proper safety compliance for the entire duration of the lab as a means to communicate this importance to your students. They will learn by your example.

Lab instructors should arrive early to make sure that all equipment is in working order and the needed supplies are available. Although instructors should make their students clean up after the lab, you will want to double-check before your class begins to make sure that all equipment is intact. Do not depend on someone else to do this for you. When something goes wrong, it is you who will be responsible.

Before the students begin work, it is often necessary to organize them into groups. There are many strategies for putting students into groups but be sure to provide clear instructions about how the groups should be formed. Do not leave this to chance.

While the students are working, your presence should be felt in the room. Do not just sit in the front of the class. Circulate around the room, making sure that all students are making progress. Check in on them often, ask questions, and take an active role, offering suggestions and assistance when needed.

Online/Hybrid Teaching

The Internet has become an invaluable tool for teaching, but it also now requires that TAs become familiar with a new range of skills and competencies. The use of online learning platforms such as Sakai and Canvas will likely be an important part of any class you teach. These tools can help you communicate with your students, share resources, and distribute, collect, and grade assignments. It is possible that during your time at Rutgers, you will be asked to teach an online or hybrid course, and you should be prepared for what that will entail.

An online course is a course in which students will not meet in person, and all coursework activities are completed using an online learning platform. In a hybrid course, there will still be some in-person meetings, but the bulk of the course will be conducted online. In addition to the usual thinking and planning that goes into teaching a course, for an online or hybrid course there are additional considerations.

Communication. Good communication between you and your students is always a crucial aspect of any course, but when teaching an online/hybrid course it can be a bit more challenging. This is because we use more than just words when communicating with our students—body language, eye contact, and tone all contribute to effective communication, but are usually lost when communicating solely through email or other electronic means. To make up for this, you should consider incorporating video and audio communication into your online/

hybrid course. (Rutgers supports Sakai, Canvas, Zoom, Webex, and other tools which allow you to record audio and video to share with students.) Allowing them to see your face and hear your voice is often the clearest and most efficient way to explain an idea or an assignment to the class.

Office Hours. Though an online/hybrid course will incorporate fewer, if any, in-person class meetings, it is important for your students to know that they can still schedule in-person meetings with you (if this is something you can accommodate). Again, a few minutes of face-to-face contact can sometimes accomplish what hundreds of words of emailed text cannot. If you cannot accommodate in-person office hours, or if you would like to supplement your in-person office hours, you can use platforms such as Zoom, Webex, Adobe Connect, Big Blue Button, or Google Hangouts to host virtual office hours (likely, one of these platforms or a similar one is currently integrated into the learning management system that you are using). These platforms allow students to type questions in a chat box and allow you to communicate with them via video and/or audio via a webcam. Though it still has challenges when compared to in-person meetings, the option to allow students to see and hear you when you answer their questions often makes that communication much smoother.

Pacing. When designing and teaching an online/hybrid course, some extra thought must be given to the pacing. For one, you must decide whether any activities will be held simultaneously for all students, or if in a given week students can complete activities and assignments at their own pace. If you do decide to run activities simultaneously (via live blogging/chatting, live video lecturing, etc.) you must schedule these with students ahead of time, ideally at the start of the semester. Remember that not all students will be available for all such activities; many students take online courses specifically because they work or have other activities that would prevent them from being reliably available at the same times each week. You should do your best to accommodate students who are not able to participate in simultaneous activities.

Discussions/Group Work. The online/hybrid platform can be especially challenging for courses that rely on class discussion or small-group work. Using the tools provided by online learning platforms like Sakai and Canvas can help with this—tools like chat rooms, blogs, and file-sharing can allow students to collaborate with each other, even in real-time. Additionally, these tools allow you to monitor students' progress, so that you can ensure all students are devoting sufficient time and effort to the assignment or activity, and so that you can help

struggling students as needed. It is important to remember, though, that for online discussions you will need to model the kind of contributions you expect from your students. You should not expect them to arrive knowing what a blog post or discussion thread entry needs to look like—they will be looking to you to lead by example.

The Foreign Language Class

Most foreign language departments in the university have already established ongoing training and support programs for their TAs. As language courses, especially introductory ones, require the mastery of certain lessons in a set sequence, the course outline is often determined beforehand and is common to all instructors teaching that course. Within these limits, however, the TA will certainly find room for individual creativity.

New TAs would do well to recall their first foreign language class and the feelings they had at that time. A situation where a person is suddenly unable to communicate coherently can be profoundly disturbing. The task of the instructor is to enable the students to get beyond their fears to a state where language acquisition is possible.

To a large extent, the climate that the TA establishes determines the success of the class. The TA must be sensitive to the inhibitions and embarrassments experienced by someone first learning a language, yet he or she must still be able to facilitate conversation. Give the students time to answer your questions and to respond to your statements. Do not help them before they need it; let them make mistakes and then gently correct them. Beginning to learn a language must be seen as a series of small steps and minor victories. Language teachers should cheer these victories and make an extra effort to give encouragement, confidence, and support to their students.

In the Field

In many disciplines, work in the laboratory or classroom is enriched by trips into the field to explore the subject matter of the class in a hands-on way. Amy Clifton, a former TA who received her Ph.D. from the Geological Sciences program, offers the following guidelines to consider when planning to take students into the field:

- Introduce whatever skills or techniques necessary beforehand, if that is the goal of the trip;
- Field trips should be hands-on rather than "show and tell;"

- Make sure you know what to do in case of an emergency or accident;
- Make sure there are enough TAs for the class size;
- Make sure you plan for bad weather (i.e., have a "rain date" or go "rain or shine").

Active Learning

In 2014, Freeman et al (2014) published a metanalysis of 225 education studies looking at the effects of active learning in the sciences, engineering, and mathematics. Their results were overwhelmingly in favor of the use of active learning in the classroom. Perhaps most telling is the following analogy the authors provide of their results: “If the experiments analyzed here had been conducted as randomized controlled trials of medical interventions, they may have been stopped for benefit—meaning that enrolling patients in the control condition might be discontinued because the treatment being tested was clearly more beneficial.”

Active learning can take a whole spectrum of forms, from quick 2-minute activities to break up a lecture to a completely flipped class. If you’re new to active learning, try incorporating small activities at first. These activities could take anywhere from 2 to 5 minutes and can still provide significant gains in student learning and focus. They can be graded or ungraded, depending on the activity chosen and purpose for including it (see Assessment and Testing). Some examples of these short activities are listed below.

Think-Pair-Share: Put a question on the board or a slide which you would like the students to answer. First, have them answer the question themselves. Then, have them discuss their answers with the person next to them. Finally, discuss the question and solution as a class all together. Many instructors like to use clickers as part of think-pair-shares, asking students to submit their solutions after the first two stages. This gives the instructor immediate feedback on how well the students understand the question or topic, which can help guide the instructor-led discussion with the whole class at the end of the activity.

Minute Papers: This activity is exactly what it sounds like. Give the students a question to write about and have them spend one minute free writing their response. You could ask any question whose response entails enough content and detail that the students will be able to write for the full minute.

For some topics, you may want to include longer activities to allow for more detailed discussion. In this case, you may choose to replace some of the lecture content with an activity

rather than just breaking up the time. For example, you may choose to remove details or entire topics from the lecture and instead give students that material through the activity. Some examples of these longer activities include:

- **Jigsaw**: In the first round, divide the class into groups. Give each group a different question or problem to solve. Once the groups finish these problems, shuffle the class into new groups. In this round, each group should have at least one representative from each group from round 1. The students are responsible for sharing their group's solutions to the rest of their new group.
- **Outlines** (filling in the details): Provide the students with outlines of the material you want them to learn or practice during that session. Have them work in groups to fill in the details on the outlines. You can give them resources such as their textbooks, their notes, or if applicable, access to the internet.
- **Wrench in the Gears**: Break the students into groups and give them a complex problem to work on. Periodically add new parameters or constraints to the problem as they work, forcing them to adjust their solutions or strategies.

For more activity ideas, peruse this list from the Rutgers Active Learning Community.

The most extreme version of active learning is a flipped classroom. In this model, students first see the course content outside of class. By moving this material outside the classroom, this frees up class time for activities, discussion, and practice problems. Though flipped classrooms have a growing following in the education community, designing a flipped course is an enormous undertaking. Before you embark on that journey, be sure you have the time to devote to it. For example, if you plan to make videos to replace the lectures, you should plan for each 5 minutes of video to take about 4 hours to put together. If and when you decide to try this model, ask if anyone else in your field has tried this before. Use materials that already exist as much as you can. Learn from the mistakes or triumphs of others. You may also find some of the following resources helpful:

- Successful Flipped Classes by Stephanie Butler Velegol, Sarah E. Zappe, and Emily Mahoney (Tomorrow's Professor Posting 1421)
- Flipped Classrooms – Old or New? by Marilla Svinicki (Tomorrow's Professor Posting 1330)

- The Flipped Class Demystified from New York University
- Freeman, S., Eddy, S., McDonough, M., Smith, M., Okoroafor, N., Jordt, H., & Wenderoth, M. (2014). Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 111*(23), 8410.

Asking Questions in the Classroom

Whether leading a discussion class, directing a lab, or even lecturing to a large section, the quality of the questions that you ask determines the quality of the responses. Asking the right questions forces students to take a more active part in the class, leading them to formulate their own opinions based on the materials presented.

Closed-ended questions that require a "yes," "no," or any other single word answer can be useful for quick assessment of basic facts but should be used sparingly when testing deeper understanding of material. Asking a variety of types of questions can allow you to assess different types and levels of student understanding. When used during class discussions or on short quizzes, this variety can help students to develop the deeper understanding that you will eventually evaluate on their exams. A few types of questions you could employ include the following.

True or false: Give students a statement and ask them to determine whether it is a true statement or a false one. For a deeper assessment, you could ask the students to modify the false statements to make them true. Including this type of question on short quizzes can be helpful to counteract common student misconceptions.

Fill in the blank: Give the students a statement with one or a few words missing and ask them to fill in the missing word(s). If you ask them to fill in more than one word, you should consider telling them how many words they should be including. This type of question can be useful for assessing whether students know basic facts or definitions.

Multiple choice: Ask the students a question followed by a list of possible responses. You have many options for how to structure the possible answers. In many cases, exactly one of the possibilities listed is the correct answer, and sometimes one of the choices is "None of the above." To assess deeper understanding, you could have more than one correct answer and ask

the students to find all correct answers. For more subtle points, you could ask the students to choose the “best” answer and then explain their choice.

Scenarios or Find-the-Error: Describe a potential student solution or debate and ask students to evaluate it. This can be extremely helpful in mitigating common student mistakes. Students don’t always look at the comments on their graded assignments. However, you could build some of their mistakes into questions like this, forcing them to face these concerns and learn from them.

Many educators have written helpful articles offering suggestions for asking questions which encourage student participation and aid in deeper learning. The following posts from Tomorrow’s Professor are just a few:

- The Sound of Silence Can Be Deafening and the Questions You Ask Your Students Can Provoke It by Howard Aldrich
- Multiple-Choice Questions You Wouldn’t Put on a Test: Promoting Deep Learning Using Clickers by Derek Bruff
- Deeper Understanding Through Questions by Ellen Weber

Students in Groups

In group situations, the teacher's role is one of unobtrusive guide: determining the destination and guiding the way. With careful preparation, a teacher can provide strong support while allowing students the freedom to make discoveries. For examples of activities that the students could do in groups, see Active Learning.

Establish groups with care. The easy way to divide up the class would be to separate the students according to where they are sitting; this is not always the best way. The way you divide your groups might change based on the course, the classroom dynamic, or even the activity at hand. Sometimes it is best to make groups with a mix of ability levels. This allows the stronger students to act as instructors to guide students who need more help. In some cases, you may want random groups. You may even want to change the groups every class meeting or activity. However you choose to divide the class, be sure that it fits with the purpose of the activity.

Work to overcome students' natural reluctance to participate in group activities. Students often resist working in groups. Over the years, they have been conditioned to look to the teacher alone for all the answers and so perceive group work as a waste of time. Teachers often

find it difficult, even in class discussions, to persuade students to talk to each other—more often than not they look at and speak to the teacher, even when they are directly responding to a statement by a fellow student. Work to have the students listen and speak to each other. In class discussion, ask them to relate their answers to other students' answers, thus guiding them to attend to the responses of others. Try asking students to explain their group-mate's idea or solution. This forces them to discuss their ideas with each other, even if the end goal is to explain it to you. You can also try assigning roles to each student in the class. For example, you could say that one person in the group is in charge of writing down the solutions to be turned in. This forces the students to communicate with that person. You could also have a rule that only one student in the group is allowed to ask you questions during the activity. Be patient and be willing to try different strategies or group structures to coax them to work together. Students cannot unlearn old behavior overnight. Trusting their own ideas or the ideas of their fellow students may be a new experience for them, but it can, in the end, be a rewarding one.

Beyond classroom activities, working in groups can be especially helpful to students when studying for exams. Students who work in groups are more inclined to go through every question or problem they need to know; it is more likely that they, as a group, have a range of knowledge that covers all of the necessary problems. Students studying alone may have gaps in their knowledge, causing them to skip over complicated problems, or they may get stuck and spend far too much time struggling with a single difficult problem. Teachers cannot force students to study together, but they can use certain strategies to encourage students to adopt this effective study habit.

Assessment and Testing

Tests act as a kind of broad mirror of the work done over the semester. They should present no major surprises for the student who has attended class and kept up with the readings. Consider providing students with a written proportional breakdown of areas to be tested—that is, a pre-test handout indicating how many points of the test correspond to a particular area of focus. Even if you do not do this for students, such an exercise may help you prepare tests. Test yourself: do your questions foci faithfully mirror your class time foci? If not, plan your class better so that your tests are not surprises for students. If tests seem totally divorced from classwork, students may have little inclination to attend classes from that first test onward.

Students perform best in classes where they are frequently checked on their knowledge. This means that courses which have only a midterm and a final do not provide the students with as effective a learning environment as courses where tests are more frequent. The use of weekly low-stake quizzes and writing assignments help students focus on the material and to quickly discover in which areas their understanding is weak. Of importance here is quick turn-around time. Whenever you give a quiz, make sure that you return it to the students by the next class. There is no need for lengthy comments or analysis on your part—a sentence or two noting the good and bad points is all that is needed. If you procrastinate and give back quizzes or other minor assignments only after you have gone on to another topic, the results do not help the students in any meaningful way.

TAs can help students do well on exams by offering extra review sessions—either in person or online, for students who are interested, giving them a chance to go over materials about which they feel unsure. Another way to assist students is by providing them with study questions and/or sample problems that show them what they can expect from the exam.

Although each exam will be different—its final form determined by subject matter and course goals—some commonalities confront all instructors. When writing your exam, you should consider three crucial questions:

1. What content or skills are you testing?
2. What weight in the overall course grade should this exam carry?
3. How can you make the exam most beneficial to the students?

First and foremost, the instructor should be clear about what they wish to test. Is the test meant to measure knowledge of specific facts? Is it meant to demonstrate the students' ability to deal with certain facts or theories in an original and comprehensive way? Or make connections among a group of texts or ideas? The answer to these questions will usually determine the type of test, objective or essay (or possibly a combination of the two). Test questions should reflect the kinds of assignments the students have been doing all semester and should never be something entirely new. The teacher should also try to determine beforehand the value of each answer and the range of acceptable responses to each question.

You should determine how much of the final course grade an exam will count toward. A midterm exam will seem most threatening to students for whom this exam and the final exam will largely determine their grade for the class. Many educators feel that it is more beneficial to

students to give several tests over the course of the semester, making each test equally important, thus eliminating the "do or die" element of only one or two significant grades. Tests given on a regular basis are also aids to the teacher who wishes to know if the majority of students are keeping up with the class. Often this decision is made before the course starts, when writing your syllabus. However, you should still consider the makeup of your exam when deciding its weight, even if you are not writing the entire exam before the course starts.

Lastly, the instructor should make sure that the exam will be beneficial to the student. Tests can be an effective way of providing feedback, but for this to happen, the student must be motivated to look beyond the letter grade assigned. Arrange for students to come speak to you in your office about the exam. Use class time to go over those questions that many students answered incorrectly. Be aware of the fact, however, that this may be less an indication that the students do not know the material than that your question was ambiguous or misleading. One strategy you might consider would be allowing students to submit corrections to their exams. You might consider giving them back some fraction of the points they lost if they submit a correct solution and explain the mistake in their original solution. The prospect of getting points back will motivate students to look over their graded work with a close eye, and they will likely learn from their mistakes in this process.

Some teachers suggest letting the students participate in creating the exams. The ability to form a good exam question is an indication that the students have a full understanding of the course material and of the goals of the course. Their input may also give them a greater investment in the exam. You may not wish to do this on the midterm, but certainly by the time the final exam comes around, your students should be prepared to help write the exam. Essay exams lend themselves to this kind of pre-test exercise. Some teachers even use this as part of the exam itself, asking the students to formulate what they consider a good exam question and then answer it. It should be said that you do not have to include the students' suggested questions in the exam for this to still be a good exercise.

After composing an exam, put it aside for a day or two and then reconsider your work. Is the wording of all the questions clear and unambiguous? Is it realistic to think that students can complete the exam in the time allotted? Have you covered all of the material you need to cover? If after re-examining the test you still feel that the exam is sound, then carefully consider and write out your 'ideal' responses to all questions. This exercise is doubly useful. First, by

checking your answers with the questions, you can see if they truly elicit all the information you desire. If your responses added more information than the question demanded, you may wish to rewrite the question to be more inclusive. Second, this exercise will help you when grading the exams if you use your own responses as a model for student answers.

Once the students have taken the exam, evaluate it again. Was it too difficult or simple? Did students misunderstand any of the questions? Do you see areas where the class as a whole missed some vital piece of information? No matter how satisfied you are with the exam, there is a good chance that not all the students will feel the same way. Listen to your students. Although you are not obligated to agree with them, you will discover where your expectations and theirs did not coincide, information that you can use to your own and your students' advantage in future semesters.

Determining Course Grades

Like it or not, testing and grading are integral parts of the educational process and central elements of most courses to many students. Decisions about grading should be made with care since your grading policy, more than anything else, will be scrutinized, discussed, and, sometimes, contested by your students. Many TAs worry at the beginning about whether they should be a 'hard' grader or a 'soft' one, but, in fact, this is not the question. Rather, TAs should worry (if they must worry about something) about whether or not they grade fairly and consistently. Do not be surprised to find out that fairness is foremost in the students' minds too.

How can a teacher insure fairness in grading? This begins by establishing a clear standard of grading at the beginning of the semester. Students should be told what quantity and quality of work is necessary to get each possible grade. If the grade will be determined strictly by numerical grades awarded on a series of tests, the student should know how each one will be weighed in the final grade and what material the student must master to achieve the highest grade. The weight of class participation, lab work, attendance, and the possibility of make-up work and exams should be laid out. If a class is to be graded on a curve, the method should be explained to the students at the beginning. This is all part of the contract that a good teacher makes with a class. Remember too that first-year students may need more detailed explanations of grading practices and standards than more advanced students. All students, however, will be less anxious if they feel that the system their teacher uses is fair and sensible.

Remind students that there are certain acceptable standards of written English to which they must comply. Students might argue that it is not fair to penalize them for their writing in classes other than English, since all that really matters are the facts (i.e., what they say, not how they say it). By emphasizing high standards for written English early in the semester, those students with writing problems will be encouraged to seek help. Consequently, reading and grading exams will be a less difficult task for the teacher. You should encourage students who need help with their writing to utilize the writing coaching available at the Rutgers Learning Centers.

A TA who is grading for another professor must discuss these issues with the professor at the beginning of the semester so that there will be no later misunderstandings. The faculty member and the TA (or TAs) must agree on the grading criterion for that class.

Many teachers tell students at the beginning of the semester that they should feel free to come to them during office hours to discuss grades. If a student does come to you with questions about a grade, listen carefully. Although you may decline to change the grade, you might discover that exam questions were more ambiguous, or essay assignments less clearly defined than you thought.

If students feel that they merited a higher grade on an essay or term paper, you should always offer to reread it. The possibility exists that you did not read as carefully as you should have the first time. Do not be intractable: you are human and can make mistakes. Do not, however, allow yourself to be manipulated or bullied into giving another grade. Fairness to all your students demands objectivity and equal standards. If you cannot resolve a grade problem with a student, do not allow yourself to get into an argument. Offer to have the appropriate person in the department read the paper, perhaps the course supervisor or the department chair. Know ahead of time the name of the person in your department to whom you can refer these kinds of problems.

A TA should, of course, consult with members of the department to discover that department's special policies on grades. TAs must be clear on the department's policy and develop a system in conformity with it.

Instructors should post grades (using a secure system like SAS Gradebook or the gradebook features in Sakai or Canvas) as soon as possible. Additionally, all instructors should schedule at least one final office hour after the semester ends to allow students to discuss their final grade.

Occasionally students will come in to challenge their final grades. If large numbers of students complain, you will need to review your own performance. Listen carefully to each student's complaint and then show the student how you arrived at the grade. Remind students what would have been necessary for a higher grade. If you cannot reconcile a student to his or her grade, he or she must register the concern in writing to the department chair or other appropriate person and to the office of the dean of the faculty offering the course.

The bottom line is that students must be protected from arbitrary or capricious treatment. Be clear on what is expected, fair in evaluation, and articulate in pointing out the pros and cons of any piece of graded work.

Students' Rights to Privacy

All students in the university have a basic right to privacy, and it is the responsibility of the instructor to respect and safeguard that privacy. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, commonly known as FERPA or the Buckley Amendment, dictates that information about a student cannot be released to anyone, including parents, without the express permission of the student. Although this ruling most directly concerns staff members working in offices that deal with academic transcripts, disciplinary records, psychological files, and placement office credential files that contain letters of recommendation, TAs too must take care that student grades, records, and identifiable information are handled in a confidential manner.

NEVER discuss one student's grades with another student or with any other person. Of course, you may discuss students with those who have a professional need to know, such as other faculty members involved with that student.

When returning exams or papers, do not allow other students to pick up papers for their absent friends. Return written work only to the student concerned. Remind students that the university is prompt in releasing grades. Students may visit my.rutgers.edu to find their grades shortly after the instructor is required to submit them if you—or the faculty member—decided not to also post grades via SAS Gradebook, Sakai, or Canvas.

The Chalkboard/Whiteboard

The chalkboard and whiteboard, used with care and forethought, can be valuable classroom aides: to illustrate an argument or demonstration, to outline or organize material, or to work

out complicated problems. Instructors should consider how to use the board to its best advantage.

- Start with a clean slate. At the beginning of every class, erase all material from the previous class even if you do not plan to use the board.
- If drawing pictures or other diagrams, draw them bigger than you think you need them to be. If your drawing isn't large enough when you start annotating it, it will become cluttered and difficult to read.
- If your handwriting is difficult to decipher, print slowly and carefully. Come to class a few minutes early if you must, to write out long outlines or assignments.
- Do not stand in front of the board, blocking the students' view. After writing a piece of the material, step away from the board to allow students to copy it down.
- Remember that there is a delay from when you have written something on the board to when the students have copied it into their notes. In fact, when you are finished writing an important point, turn to watch the students. It's okay – and in fact preferable – to pause and be silent for a moment while the students finish writing. When you see that most or all of the students have finished writing, continue with the lecture. If you begin talking while they are still writing, they will likely be too focused on writing the notes and miss what you say out loud.
- After writing the entire equation on the board, turn fully to the class and point out the steps as you describe them.
- Do not erase anything before the end of the class if you can avoid it. Before erasing, ask the students if they have copied everything.
- Colored chalk can be a great tool for visualization but only if used properly. Before choosing to use a color, be sure that it can be read from the back of the room. One way to accomplish this would be to arrive at the classroom early, write something on the board in each color, and then walk to the back of the room to see if you can read what you've written.

Think carefully about how much detail to write on the board when lecturing. Given the limited time in the classroom, it may be tempting to only write an outline or the essential ideas on the board. Fukawa-Connelly, et al. (2017) however, found that of comments made orally but not written on the board, at most 3% ends up in students' notes. Therefore, you should make choices about what you write on the board based on how you would like students to record the information. Some possible techniques include:

- Explaining the idea verbally and then writing all the details on the board, or vise-versa.
- Writing an outline of the ideas on the board and then instructing the students to fill in the details in groups during class.
- If you would like students to fill in the details at home, write that on the board to ensure that instruction makes it into their notes.

Helpful Resources

The Rutgers Libraries offer workshops introducing students to a research library. This orientation will focus directly on the specific types of material that the students will need for their research projects.

The Language Center contains materials for all languages studied at the university. Their services are available to anyone in the university.

The Learning Centers provide academic support programs for undergraduates. Services include: peer tutoring, study groups, and academic and writing assistance.

The Math and Science Learning Center provide support services to students in introductory math and science courses.

The Center for Teaching Advancement and Assessment Research offer technology training workshops and are also responsible for the end-of-semester student course evaluation surveys.

Active Learning Community is a community of educators at Rutgers who are interested in active learning. They run workshops and training sessions and provide resources for other instructors on their website.

Helping Yourself

TA/Faculty Relations

Although all programs may not officially designate someone by the title "faculty advisor," they all should designate a person to whom TAs may go with questions or problems.

Your assignment as a TA will determine the nature of your relationship with your advisor. If you have been assigned to teach a recitation or lab section, or to grade papers, the faculty member who teaches the lecture section of the class will usually be the person to whom you go with your problems. In courses where there are multiple TAs, it is absolutely necessary to work closely to coordinate class methods and goals—how the class will be shaped, what kinds of exercises and tests will be used—so that each TA's assignments will be consistent with the rest. If you are a section teacher in a multi-sectioned course, there may be a course coordinator who can help you.

Those TAs teaching single-section upper level courses for which there is no apparent advisor should approach the department's director of undergraduate studies, who will act as advisor or may recommend another faculty member more knowledgeable about that particular course. Establish a link between yourself, your course, and the department at the beginning of the semester to ensure you have the assistance you require throughout the semester and to let the department know that you are interested in doing everything possible to make the course a good one. Clearly, your TA assignment will determine how much contact you have with your advisor; some TAs will be fairly independent while others will work very closely with him or her.

Clear guidelines about course responsibilities should be established with your advisor before the beginning of the semester. Decisions about testing, grading, content, and division of work may be made at this time. Discussing these issues beforehand eliminates what could develop into serious problems later in the semester. A TA telling the class one thing and the faculty member telling it something different can lead to confusion in the class and tension between the TA and faculty member.

At times, you may find yourself in the middle, between the students and the advisor. Do not feel that you have to relay every critical statement that one makes to the other. This is not your job. However, you should be prepared to act as a liaison when there are serious complaints. The professor should be informed when a majority of students have what seem to be valid complaints about the way the course is being conducted. A word to the professor can defuse what could turn into an explosive situation. Be tactful, of course. No one wants to be told that he or she is a bad teacher.

Constructive criticism from your advisor can help you in your professional development; accept this criticism gracefully and maturely. Course advisors recognize that TAs are apprentice

teachers and may benefit from their greater experience. They are a valuable resource which should not be overlooked.

Graduate Program Administrators

There are few people in the university who can help you as much on a day to day basis as your graduate program administrator. He or she is the person in your department who best understands those university procedures through which you will have to wend your way. If you are not sure about something—whom to call, when a deadline falls, or how to get some needed information—in most cases, the graduate program administrator will have the answer or know where to find it. Of course, do not burden the administrators with problems that you can figure out for yourself as most of them already have their hands full, but when you are really at a loss they will almost certainly steer you in the right direction.

International TAs

Most of the problems faced by international TAs are the same as those faced by American TAs. However, because many international TAs are not only new to Rutgers and to teaching but also to this country, there are some unique concerns that may trouble them. In particular, language and communication can sometimes present challenges. International TAs may worry that they will not be able to understand their students or that their students will not be able to understand them. This is, of course, a very real concern and one that can lessen only as the TA gains experience as a speaker of English. To hasten the process, TAs should try to immerse themselves in the language by watching videos and television, listening to podcasts and the radio, reading American newspapers and magazines, and, of course, speaking English as often as possible. Seek out native speakers with whom to practice speaking and listening skills. In particular, talk to your fellow TAs who are native English speakers about the course and its materials. They may be able to provide insight into how to most clearly communicate certain difficult ideas.

Be aware of the fact that your accent may be unfamiliar to many of your undergraduates, so you should speak slowly to give them a chance to get used to your accented English. When you introduce yourself on the first day (being sure to write your name on the blackboard/ whiteboard), you may wish to tell the students what country you are from and why you are here at Rutgers. Students who understand a little about a person's culture and background are more

willing to give that person a chance and make the small exertion necessary to understand an unfamiliar accent.

Let your students know that you care about them and are interested in them. You may wish to explain that you hope the class will be a partnership where both parties have something to offer. You look to them for help with correcting any initial difficulties you may have with the language, while they can look to you for expertise in the subject matter. Working together, you both can benefit.

It is very important to make it clear to the students that you expect them to let you know when they don't understand something you say and promise to do the same for them. If a student asks you a question you do not understand, ask the student to rephrase it. Don't worry that saying you don't understand will compromise your authority; pretending to understand when you clearly do not will do much more to undermine your authority and lose your students' respect. In fact, acknowledging any communication challenges up front helps you maintain your authority in the classroom. To avoid having students use your accent against you (e.g., telling you that they misunderstood you, so they did not complete their homework or study for a test—do not worry, very few students will do things like this) your syllabus should list all assignments.

During the first few weeks at least, pause often to ask students if they are following you, if they have any questions, and wait for an answer. Let them know that you really do want them to tell you when they are having difficulties. Make sure that during your lectures you write all key words on the board (or use PowerPoint or similar presentation software) so that you are sure the students are understanding them correctly.

American students may seem very different from students in other countries. International TAs are sometimes surprised at first by what they perceive as a lack of respect toward them as teachers. Understanding some of the differences in American students may help to alleviate this. One way to help develop this understanding is to sit in on some undergraduate courses in the university during your first weeks as a TA. This will allow you to see the varieties of accepted classroom behavior and the kinds of student/teacher relationships common in this country.

In the United States, students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some of your students may be older than you expect; many will be holding part-time, or even full-time, jobs. The dress and manner of your students may be quite casual; do not interpret this as a sign of

disrespect. Classrooms are sometimes quite informal. American students will often question or even disagree with something the teacher says. This is accepted classroom behavior and is not meant hostilely or as a challenge to the teacher's authority; the class is perceived as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

Workload Management

Class preparation, grading, and your own graduate work will all place competing demands on your time. To avoid a crisis, draw up some general rules at the beginning of the semester. You may not always be able to keep them, but you should try to adopt them as general guides.

Remember your own graduate work. Your first responsibility at the university is your graduate work, and, thinking practically, you must realize that the assistantship is dependent upon successful completion of your own courses.

Do not let work pile up. When you receive a set of papers to be graded, don't toss them into a corner until the time comes when you can do them all at once—that time will never come. Instead, calculate how many papers you would have to read every day in order to return them within a reasonable time (perhaps one week), and then find that much time.

Be ready to ask for help. If, as the semester progresses, you find yourself consistently behind in both your graduate work and your teaching, it is time to reassess your methods. Speak to your faculty advisor about your problems.

Stephanie Donato, a career development and placement specialist, offers the following helpful hints:

- Rank all tasks in their order of importance. This will give you a realistic perspective on the tasks you face.
- Make an outline of all deadlines you must meet before the end of the semester. This relieves pressure; rather than worrying about all of the deadlines, you can focus more sharply on the imminent ones.
- Enter all tasks and deadlines in a calendar and flag them.
- Set a reminder for two weeks before each deadline.
- Make a daily "to-do" list. Every day, before you begin your work, look at this list. Handle the most critical tasks first.

Teaching Evaluations

A good idea for all instructors is an evaluation during the first third or half of the term. Waiting until the end of the semester for an evaluation of your teaching performance can put your students at risk. What the students say on the final evaluation or how they do on their final exam or paper may permit you to draw some conclusions about your teaching, but if the conclusion is that your teaching was ineffective, it is certainly too late to repair the damage.

It is generally useful to have students' opinions about your teaching as the semester unfolds. Consider preparing your own evaluation form, or using or modifying TAP's mid-semester evaluation form, to give to the students during the first third or half of the semester.

Do not view evaluations as an intrusion or a punishment but as a means to becoming a better teacher. A single comment should not be given too much weight, but several that focus on the same issue should be given serious thought. View negative comments as constructive criticism, even if students may not always phrase them that way.

The Teaching Portfolio

An increasing number of colleges and universities are using teaching portfolios to help them make hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. A teaching portfolio provides a profile of you as a teacher. It is a solid collection of evidence detailing the effectiveness of your teaching and reflections on that evidence. It can also help you apply for teaching awards and research grants as well as assist faculty members in writing reference letters for you, as they will be able to read exactly how and why you've been teaching and tailor their reference letters accordingly.

For every course you teach, you should take notes that describe the course, how you taught it, and why you taught it the way you did. Gather syllabi, copies of any assignments you created, including exams and paper topics, and any materials you created. Your portfolio should also include evaluations of your teaching. In addition to student ratings or evaluations, you can ask a faculty member to observe your class and write an evaluation.

If you attend a workshop, take a course related to teaching, or participate in any other activities to improve your pedagogical skills (such as a TAP workshop or seminar), document it in your portfolio. Evidence of an interest in teaching and efforts to develop your teaching skills may make you stand out as a job candidate.

Other Considerations

Non-traditional Students

The non-traditional student, such as an older student with a career or a family, or both, has become a strong presence on American university campuses over the last several decades. Non-traditional students must meet the same standards as all students, but, often, because they are only attending part-time, they will take more time to complete their degree requirements.

Unlike the lives of many 'traditional' Rutgers students, those of non-traditional students will probably not be centered around the university. Their schoolwork is important to them, but they are equally committed to their jobs and families. This is not to suggest that they are less interested in their education; for the most part, they are dedicated and demanding students, often more actively involved in their education than other students. Many of these students have responsible jobs that have accustomed them to carrying out assignments independently. This experience may make them more demanding as students, less tolerant of wasted class time, poorly prepared lectures, and careless grading. Changing requirements, policies, or due dates mid-semester, while never a good idea, could cause severe hardships for these students whose time is necessarily carefully budgeted. Always be clear about requirements, whether work is voluntary or required, extra or no credit.

Your policies on deadlines and attendance may have to be more flexible than is usual. A student may have to travel occasionally for her job. A sick child may prevent another from completing his paper. All the work, of course, must be completed, but deadlines should not be totally inflexible.

Student Athletes

Some of your students will be committed to one or more varsity sports or in the band or on the cheerleading squad. Because travel is often involved in such activities, these students may sometimes have to miss class or even an exam. One of your responsibilities as a teacher is to ensure that these activities are not allowed to interfere with the progress the students make toward a degree.

As most people are aware, there have been some notable scandals in college athletics over the past several years—student athletes exempted from normal college requirements, teachers pressured to alter grades or lighten coursework, etc. Students who participate in such programs at Rutgers understand that they must meet certain academic standards, or they lose eligibility.

Students who are involved in a sport at the university should inform you of this at the beginning of the semester and give you their travel schedule. If there will be serious conflicts over the semester, it is best to discuss how to resolve them at the very beginning. Approximately a week before each trip, the student will bring you a letter, signed by the coach and an athletic academic advisor, to remind you of the upcoming absence. Students who tell you that they are unable to attend class but fail to produce such letters should not be officially excused. A NCAA regulation says that students may not miss class for practice, only for official games.

Student athletes are responsible for contacting their instructors as soon as they return from a trip. Although they have been excused from class, they are still responsible for finding out what went on in the class and completing the assignments. If a student athlete in your class seems to be having a difficult time keeping up, be sure to speak to the student. Given the oftentimes difficult schedule of classes, practices, and games, it is not surprising that some students may need some extra help.

Students with Disabilities

Any institution that receives federal funding must make its programs accessible to those with disabilities. You, as an instructor at Rutgers, have a responsibility to see that the rights of these students are not violated.

Some TAs may feel uncomfortable at first with a disabled student because they have never had contact with a person with a disability. Once they have a disabled student in their class however, they will realize that in nearly all respects they are just like the other students. Be careful to treat these students fairly: neither avoid them nor single them out for special treatment.

Remember that while in some cases the student's disability will be obvious, in many others you will never know about it unless the student tells you. Make it easy for a student to tell you. At the beginning of the semester, make a general announcement inviting students to come to your office or to speak with you privately after class about any questions or problems they may foresee in your course.

As a member of your class, the disabled student should be held responsible for the same material as the others. You may and should, however, make any reasonable accommodations you can to assist the student in completing the course requirements.

What kinds of assistance or accommodation should you expect to arrange? This will vary according to the student and should be determined and confirmed by the Office of Disability Services. All disabled students have a coordinator to assist them in securing the proper accommodations. For students who have not yet met with their coordinator, they should be directed to the Office of Disability Services and their coordinator to secure the proper documentation.

After meeting with the student, the disability coordinator will write to you verifying that the student has a disability and describing the necessary accommodations. A student with a hearing problem may simply ask you to reserve a desk near the front of the classroom. Some students may need to record lectures or to have a scribe take notes for them. Others may require longer times for exams or labs. By working together—you, the student, and the coordinator—a solution will be found that works best for all involved.

Difficult Students

New TAs will soon discover that, for the most part, Rutgers undergraduates are hard-working, courteous, and well-behaved. Occasionally, however, instructors will find themselves faced with a student whose behavior threatens to at least sidetrack if not disrupt the course entirely. Taking swift and firm action early on, before your authority is seriously compromised, is the best policy for all concerned. Being able to identify problems before they escalate will help you to maintain control of the class and the materials being presented.

Prevention is always better than cure. Establish certain standards at the beginning of the semester, adhere to them as the course goes on, and many problems can be averted. Explain to your students on the first day that attentiveness and participation are required. (Although most students understand this without being told, a brief discussion of expectations at the beginning of the semester leaves you standing on firmer ground if problems do develop.) Make it clear that students are not only expected to attend class but to be there mentally. Browsing the web, listening to music, texting, chatting with classmates, shouting out comments, doing homework for other classes are activities that disturb others and signal a disregard for classmates. Again,

setting these ground rules will not guarantee a problem-free class, but they can discourage certain kinds of behavior before they begin. Make certain to list these standards and expectations on the syllabus.

Perhaps the most common problem a teacher faces is the student who, for any variety of reasons, feels the need to monopolize class discussions or to blurt out answers before anyone else has a chance to respond. These students inhibit the quieter students, dampen the enthusiasm of the less shy, and cause resentment and anger against themselves and the teacher who allows them to dominate the class.

One such student is the very bright student, who usually sits near the front of the classroom where it is easiest to make eye contact with the teacher. What this student contributes to the class is generally worthwhile, but the student soon begins to dominate the discussions. At the beginning of the semester at least, the student is often implicitly encouraged in this behavior both by the other students and the teacher. The other students in the class are relieved that they do not have to respond because they know that this vocal student will; the instructor—especially the new and nervous instructor—will be happy that someone is responding, that questions do not fall flat upon a wall of silence.

Soon, however, problems may develop. Students will never become wholly engaged in the materials if they feel that the class is a dialogue between the teacher and one or two students. They will soon resent the fact that the course focuses upon a single student rather than on the class, and this resentment can easily turn into hostility. Because there is no necessity for responding, other students will invest less time in the class, often coming unprepared, thus excluding themselves from any chance of future participation. The end result is a class which is disengaged, a course which lacks the depth that it could have derived from a full range of student responses, and a teacher whose class has failed to excite the students.

From the beginning of the semester, a teacher must work hard to engage all students. Give the students a minute or two to formulate an answer after asking a question. Do not be afraid of silence. Look around the entire class, making eye contact with as many students as possible, to let them know that they are visible and valuable members of the class. Call on students who have not raised their hands. If they are unable to answer the first time that you do this, almost certainly they will be better prepared the second time. If a student gives an incorrect or vague answer, work with this student awhile; do not merely pass on quickly to the dominating student

from whom you know you can get the desired response. The dominating student should certainly not be ignored, but others must also be given the opportunity and the encouragement to participate.

If, in spite of these precautions, the student continues to monopolize the class, take the student aside after class. Explain that although you recognize the value of the student's contributions and the depth of the student's knowledge in the subject, you also see the value of involving the whole class in the learning process. You may wish to involve this student in your attempts to make the rest of the class more responsive. Many bright students readily acknowledge their own over-eagerness and are willing to give the other students in class an opportunity to respond before they do, especially if their teachers make it clear that they appreciate the student's ability and intelligence.

If a student interrupts others or shouts out the answer without waiting to be called on, make it clear immediately that this behavior is not acceptable. Even in a class discussion, where spontaneity is desirable, students should recognize the rights of others and treat them with courtesy. A discussion should never turn into a free-for-all, and you, the instructor, should act as moderator of the debates, exercising some control over the students, directing the discussion and its participants.

A related problem is the student who is forever volunteering answers that do not really respond to the questions you have asked or that tend to move the class away from the topic under discussion. This is not to say that there is only one answer to any question, but that some students have learned in high school that the best way to get high grades is by bluffing their way through a class. Rather than discussing the text or the issue under consideration (about which they often know very little), the student will relate long stories based on personal experiences or introduce material from another class, neither of which have relevance to the topic at hand. The result is to get the class off track and cause a carefully planned syllabus to fly out the window.

It is always preferable to try to avoid this situation in the first place, by formulating questions carefully in class so that students are forced to relate the answer to the text or the matter under discussion. If the student ignores your pointed question, as such students often do, ask the student to relate the answer to the question more specifically. If the student is unable to do this, you should ask him or her a direct question about class preparation: “Have

you read the text?" or "Have you worked out all the steps of the solution?" If not, suggest that the student see you after class and at that time you should kindly, yet firmly, explain the inappropriateness of that student's responses and the necessity of paying attention to the assignments and class focus. When once informed point-blank that bluffing is not useful, the student will usually stop this behavior.

Another problem is the genuinely disruptive student. You will sometimes encounter students who sit together (usually in one of the back corners of the classroom) and talk and laugh throughout class. Directing a pointed comment at this group may remind them of the expected behavior. "Did you wish to add something to the discussion, Mr. X?" will let them know that their behavior has been observed and that they are not behaving in an acceptable manner. You should also speak to them after class, individually whenever possible. If you wish, you can ask that they no longer sit together during your class. Most students will not persist in this kind of behavior once you have very clearly let them know that you will not allow it.

Other students may signal their lack of interest in the class by browsing the web, texting, or doing homework. Try to catch the eye of these students, letting them know in a non-verbal way that you do not approve of their behavior. Or, if the students are so engrossed in the activity that you cannot catch their eyes, ask a direct question of these inattentive students, and they will certainly not be able to answer. Often this is enough to discourage such behavior. If this doesn't work, however, ask them to stop at once and tell them to see you after class. Do not ignore these students for to do so only encourages others to participate in this kind of behavior.

Students who make offensive remarks in the classroom must be informed at once that their behavior is unacceptable. Make it very clear from the beginning of the semester that this can never be tolerated in a university classroom. Sexist, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic remarks should be confronted on the spot. If the student seems genuinely not to understand the problem, explain why the remark is unacceptable. But if the student clearly means to offend, you should respond sternly and quickly. If, after being spoken to, the student persists in such behavior, you may have to appeal to the dean's office of that student's particular school for further action (see Our Common Purposes).

In most situations, however, the basic rule is not to embarrass the student in class. Embarrassment does little to help change the student's behavior and may inhibit the other

members of the class from contributing. Never let a student feel 'put down' as this intimidates and usually turns off future participation.

Academic Integrity

No student should be allowed an unfair advantage through the use of dishonest methods. Examples of academic dishonesty cover a wide range of behaviors, including copying homework, plagiarizing, buying term papers, and cheating on exams. Some students are fully aware they are cheating, while others may not identify their actions as such. Some teachers deny that their students cheat because it seems to be a personal affront, and some realize that students do cheat, indeed even suspect certain students of cheating, but refuse to act upon their suspicions. They may worry about causing the student irreparable damage, of ruining the student's life, or they may just wish to avoid an unpleasant scene, or the process involved in going through a university hearing. So, for whatever reason, they remain silent, but to remain silent is to participate in the student's dishonesty.

Before the semester begins, instructors should read the Academic Integrity Policy, and at the beginning of the semester, spend a few minutes talking about academic integrity with their students. Reading aloud from the university policy on academic integrity is often a sobering experience, for the students learn that the teacher is obligated to report all violations for investigation. Explain very carefully that plagiarism does not merely mean copying someone's words without properly crediting them but copying their ideas also. Many students have a limited idea of what constitutes plagiarism. Correct this misperception. Set limits for your students on the first day of the semester. Explain the meaning of group work and where and when it is appropriate.

The research paper can be an opportunity for students to become familiar with the process of original scholarship, or it can be an occasion for dishonesty. Everyone by now is familiar with the term-paper mills (if you are not, do an online search for "term paper") where a student can buy a paper. Some suggestions for prevention follow.

- Take time to develop a good topic. Set very definite parameters to the assignment.
- Don't use the same essay topics every semester.
- If practical, insist that students hand in outlines and working bibliographies.

- If possible, meet with the students before they hand in their thesis statements. Discuss the papers they plan to write. Make recommendations of sources for the papers. Tell students that they may be expected to discuss their papers and its sources at a later meeting.

If you suspect that a student has cut-and-pasted part of a paper you need to follow through on your suspicions. When particular phrases strike you as unusual, for example, (they sound overly polished or technical or academic), do an Internet search on it. You may also want to search Amazon or Google Books or to use turnitin.com. (Whatever you do, document your searches, writing down or bookmarking the relevant URLs and keeping screenshots or printing out pages which contain matching text.

If the paper, as a whole, doesn't quite conform to your assignment or in some way seems suspicious to you (too many sources, sources that you don't trust, footnotes which don't seem to go with the text, a complete lack of footnotes), the student may have acquired the entire paper online, either from a free site or from a paper mill which sells term papers. For more tips, visit Plagiarism and Anti-Plagiarism by Professor Heyward Ehrlich.

If you cannot pinpoint the author, but you still have serious doubts about the paper's source, speak to the student. You might ask some specific questions about the paper, what the student means by certain words and phrases, or ask questions about some of the sources cited. Do not accuse the student directly of cheating. Explore the situation with such questions as "I was interested in your statement . . .?" or "I don't understand how . . .?" or "Can you tell me how you came to this conclusion?" etc. In the absence of a satisfactory response, you are left with no alternative but to refer the matter for review.

Likewise, make it difficult for students to cheat on exams.

- Don't use the same exams every semester.
- Give the students multiple small tests and papers rather than one or two large ones.
- If possible, use short answer or essay exams rather than relying solely on true/false or multiple-choice questions. If you do use multiple choice or true/false, make several different versions of the exam, with the order of the questions scrambled. Printing the exams on different colors of paper also helps.

- On the day of the exam, ask the students to seat themselves in alternate seats and rows so they will not be tempted to cheat.
- If the exam is held in a large, crowded classroom, make sure there are enough proctors. Some departments will hire them for you—ask your graduate program administrator or advisor.
- Walk around the classroom during the exam. If you sit down, do so in the back of the room.
- If you see a student cheating during the exam, take action immediately. A student who seems to be trying to look at another student's paper may be stopped with a meaningful look. If the student continues to look, insist that the student move to another part of the room.

If you do find evidence that a student has engaged in plagiarism or any other form of cheating, don't take action on your own, like failing the student or tearing up his or her paper. Following university procedures protects you and ensures fairness for your students. Make sure you speak with your department chair.

Information Literacy

Depending on the topic and your goals for the class you should discuss strategies for identifying reliable Internet sources with your students. Make sure students understand that the information they find online probably hasn't gone through a filtering process like editing or peer review. Let students know that they need to ask the following kinds of questions to begin to evaluate information they find online:

- Who is the author and what are their credentials?
- Does any institution (corporation, organization, university, government body, etc.) support this website?
- Does the institution exercise quality control over the content?
- How might the content of the website be biased by the author's affiliation with the supporting institution?

- When was the content created, and how recently was it updated?
- What is the apparent purpose of the information (to persuade, inform, entertain)?
- Who is the intended audience?

Troubled Students

For a variety of reasons, students often confide in TAs during personal crises. Listen to your students. Keep the lines of communications open. Even if the problems of the students seem trivial to you, do not treat them lightly. Remember that many of your students are living on their own for the first time and trying to cope with increased academic and social demands. Your compassion and understanding could make a big difference in their lives.

Some students won't come directly out and ask for assistance but may send you signals about their difficulties in other ways. There are a number of signs which can alert you to the fact that a student may be in distress. These include:

- Marked decline in quality of course work or class participation;
- Increased absence from class or failure to turn in work;
- Prolonged depression, suggested by a sad expression, apathy, weight loss or gain, sleeping difficulty, and tearfulness;
- Nervousness, agitation, excessive worry, irritability, aggressiveness, or nonstop talking;
- Bizarre, strange behavior or speech;
- Extreme dependency on faculty or staff, including spending much of their spare time visiting during office hours or at other times;
- Marked change in personal hygiene;
- Talk of suicide, either directly or indirectly such as, "I won't be around to take that exam anyway" or "I'm not worried about getting a job, I won't need one.";
- Comments in a student's paper that arouse concern.

If you are unsure about the severity of the student's problem, or the steps which should be taken, contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) or Senior Associate Dean Barbara Bender (barbara.bender@rutgers.edu or 848-932-7747). Always remember that you are not a

licensed counselor or psychologist, so the extent to which you can directly help students may be limited.

Never try to force a student to go to counseling. Inevitably, this is counterproductive. Encourage the students in whatever way you can and let them know that you are concerned and willing to help, but do not try to strong-arm them. Too much pressure will make them retreat, perhaps cutting them off from their only avenue of assistance. If, however, you suspect the student will harm themselves or others, you should contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) immediately or call 911. They will be able to guide you through the process of making sure the student and their classmates are protected.

Undergraduates are not, of course, the only people subject to depression and anxiety; graduate students are just as likely to suffer from these problems. Instructors should acknowledge the fact that they are human and may sometimes need help. They should also recognize the fact that their unique position in the university—both teacher and student—produces special problems. There is no need to wait until the pressure is unbearable. The sooner you seek help—for yourself or your student—the better.

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) provides personal counseling and psychological services for students at Rutgers. All university students, including those in the graduate and professional schools at Rutgers, are eligible for this free and confidential service. Matters involving counseling are kept strictly confidential. No information about a student is released without the student's permission, not even the fact that he or she consulted a counselor. No record of his or her visit to the Counseling Center is retained on permanent university records, so it cannot appear on a transcript or any official record.

Our Common Purposes

Most of us recognize the need to exhibit sensitivity to our students and colleagues on very delicate subjects. We would not make jokes in class about serious matters like religion or death; neither would we make personal remarks about someone's physical appearance. In general, we try to treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated, with sensitivity and respect.

Since many TAs are still taking courses, they are able to empathize with their students as students, to understand what it feels like to be on the other side of the desk. But treating students as you would like to be treated does not necessarily mean that you should assume that

they are all exactly like you. In fact, it is vital that you recognize, acknowledge, and respect each student's individuality. A thoughtless joke or a careless word can cause discomfort, even pain, to someone in your class. Be aware of the power you have to wound others and guard against doing so.

Students must also be held to the same standard of behavior, and one of the responsibilities of the TA is to help students understand this—it is a necessary part of their education. A large number of Rutgers students are from New Jersey and have little experience with people outside of their cultural background. Others have come from places where cultural attitudes are radically different. Lack of experience, however, does not excuse intolerance. As TAs we must address problems when they arise, to help our students learn to understand and accept people who are different. Education should be a process which opens the students up to a wider range of experiences and possibilities, not one which narrows or hardens old attitudes and prejudices.

Perhaps the most important point is that the TA should always treat the students with respect and try to be sensitive to their individual needs. Placing a student in an uncomfortable position either through words or actions is unnecessary and cruel. Understand that the relationship between a student and a teacher is a professional one; respect that bond and refuse to exploit it.