

To: Economics Department Faculty
From: The Undergraduate Advising Head
Subject: Faculty Use of Teaching Assistants
Date: 2018

TAs are an additional resource for students and can reduce demands on faculty time. Appropriate roles for TAs include running recitation or review/study sessions, holding office hours, helping proctor exams, and grading student work. Though subject to budget constraints, TA support is typically available for courses that are expected to have 40 or more students and some smaller courses that have a significant number of problem sets and/or are writing intensive.

Hiring TAs.

For Business courses, Lauren Hasselriis-Ghom handles faculty requests for TA's, student applications, and weekly TA time sheets. For Economics courses, Leslie Yancich handles faculty requests for TA's, student applications, and processes the weekly TA time sheets. The procedures for hiring TAs are outlined in the IBS and Department of Economics *Faculty Handbook* and a copy of the form used to request TA support is included in the Appendix. Each prospective TA must file an application with Leslie or Lauren even if you have agreed, in principle, to hire a particular student as a TA. Only current Brandeis students are eligible to serve as TA's.

Best Practices.

All instructors who have undergraduate TAs with grading responsibilities are asked to review the "Best Practices/Tips for Preparing and Supporting Undergraduate Teaching Assistants" with their undergraduate TAs. Since the "Best Practices" document, which has been prepared by the Office of the Dean of Arts & Sciences, is actually addressed to faculty rather than TAs, it may be useful to highlight the guidelines that are most relevant to your course. Both you and your undergraduate TAs must sign the accompanying form. The signed form needs to be submitted to Meredith or Karen early in the semester. Though "Best Practices" is not directed at graduate students, they would also benefit from reading the document and being part of the discussion with the undergraduate TAs.

Time Commitment.

The department assumes that each TA will work an average of about 10 hours a week, including class attendance and other preparation time, and budgets accordingly. While commitments vary between courses and from week to week, the 10 hour figure provides a useful benchmark when allocating work to your TAs.

Proctoring Exams.

TAs can assist in proctoring exams during the semester and can, in principle, proctor an exam in the instructor's absence. However, according to the "Best Practices," "Undergraduates should only assist in proctoring exams when the course instructor is also present." And even in cases where a course has a graduate TA, it is strongly recommended that the instructor be present for exams.

Instructors are expected to proctor final exams for their courses or find an alternative proctor. Eligible proctors include graduate TAs assigned to the course or other faculty in the department. If the absence is anticipated, e.g., the instructor is attending a conference, but the instructor will be available on another day or days during the finals period, the instructor can contact the Registrar's Office to see if the final exam can be moved to a day when the instructor will be available to proctor the exam.

TAs are expected to assist in proctoring the final exam unless they have a final at the same time. Prior to the final, you should verify that a sufficient number of your TAs will be able to help proctor. If not, you

should request additional proctors from the Registrar's Office. However, should one of your TAs be unable to proctor at the last minute, the department may be able to supply a replacement.

Discuss proctoring responsibilities with your TAs prior to exams. TAs should be alert for cheating and should not distract students by conversing, etc., during the exam. (Specific practices are discussed in "Suggestions for Proctoring Exams.") Also let your TAs know how far they should go in answering student questions during the exam.

Grading

The "Best Practices" includes many useful suggestions and guidelines for TA grading. In addition, the following statement from previous editions of the IBS and Department of Economics, *Faculty Handbook*, remains valid:

TAs should have only minimal authority over students' grades. Moreover, it should be clear to students that appeals of TA decisions to the professor are OK – they will not cause the professor or the TA to be upset with the student. Grading of students' work by non-faculty is a sensitive matter, and so TA grading should be limited to the following:

1. Problem sets that have minimal impact on the total grade, and for which grading standards are clearly specified.
2. Objective test questions that require minimal discretion on partial credit, e.g., multiple choice questions or short answers in which specific points are assigned for specific portions of the correct response.
3. Other situations that have been discussed and approved by the Economics Chair and/or IBS Program Director, as appropriate.

Evaluating TAs.

Like faculty, TAs are subject to automatic online evaluation at the end of the semester. If you do not want your TAs to be evaluated, let Leslie or Lauren know before the deadline. An email reminder is sent around the middle of the semester. If you would like to see your TAs' evaluations, Leslie or Lauren can download them for you.

You can also get informal feedback from students during the semester. Students may volunteer information about TAs who have been particularly helpful or unhelpful. But you can also ask students who come in for help if they have been to recitations or TA office hours. If they have, ask them which TAs they interacted with and how useful they found those TAs to be.

Terminating TAs.

In rare cases, TAs are not conscientious about their responsibilities or engage in misconduct. The termination of TAs is governed by the "Student Employment Disciplinary and Termination Policies" contained in the Student Employment Handbook.

Looking Ahead.

In larger courses or those with multiple sections, it is likely that some TAs can carry over from one year to the next. Experienced students with repeat TA assignments can be fabulously helpful. Where appropriate, give them a TA leader or captain role. Also, in each class, you should be attentive to students who by their skill and temperament may be exceptionally good candidates to serve as a TA in that course or other economics courses or as a B.U.G.S. tutor. Talk with them and Leslie or Lauren about future TA assignments.