

Teaching Assistant Handbook

Department of Biological Sciences
Kent State University

2023

A decorative graphic at the bottom of the page consisting of several overlapping, wavy lines in shades of blue, yellow, and orange, creating a colorful, abstract background.

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

A HANDBOOK AND GUIDE FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES

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Department of Biological Sciences
Kent State University

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Introduction

Teaching Assistants within the Department of Biological Sciences at Kent State University play a vital role in the functioning of the Department. We hope you will find your time as a Teaching Assistant to be a rewarding and valuable experience. With that in mind, this handbook has been put together to provide you with some guidance about your role within the Department. It includes suggestions on how to be an effective instructor as well as some general information that may be of use to you.

If you are new to teaching, this handbook will help you prepare and better understand this new challenge. We also encourage you to seek out assistance in the Department. If you are a seasoned Teaching Assistant, this handbook will serve as a refresher for you and provide you an opportunity to reflect on your experiences. However, no matter your level of experience, we would like you to take your teaching position seriously and strive to make the classroom experience positive for yourself and your students.

This is an evolving document. So, if you have any feedback please let us know so that we can continue improving its quality.



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1.0 Expectations

1.1 Professionalism

If you are working as a Teaching Assistant (TA), this is part of your job as a graduate student. Whether you are a Biological Sciences or Biomedical Sciences graduate student, you are a part of the Department of Biological Sciences and contribute to the education of undergraduates. Thus, you must approach your role as a TA with the same level of professionalism that you bring to your research and studies. This includes attending the required preparatory meetings, arriving early and prepared for class, and showing respect to your students and colleagues.

1.2 Responsibilities

In your role as a TA, you are likely involved in developing and delivering course content, grading, laboratory preparation, and proctoring. No matter your role, it is important that you contribute to a safe and respectful learning environment. Several responsibilities are particularly critical, including upholding academic integrity and protecting privacy. Other responsibilities include holding office hours.

1.2.1 Upholding Academic Integrity

1.2.2 The Department of Biological Sciences and the University expect honesty and fairness to guide your teaching. . The University has policies and procedures that deal with cases of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic misconduct. These policies are in place to protect the integrity of Kent State University and maintain fairness and integrity in the classroom. You may find these policies in section 3-01.8 of the Policy Register, titled [Administrative policy regarding student cheating and plagiarism](#).

1.2.3 Protecting Privacy

Kent State University respects the privacy of its students. Thus, it is expected that with regard to administering and maintaining student records, you will be in comply with the [Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 \(FERPA\)](#). University policy 5-08.101 covers this issue and is titled [Operational procedures and regulations regarding collection, retention, and dissemination of information about students](#).

As a TA, you will have access to students' personal information, including their full name, student number, contact information, assignments, and grades. This information is only being made available to you for the management and administration of the course you teach and should not be used/shared for any other purpose.

Even seemingly normal classroom customs can violate FERPA. Here are some examples...

| Do Not | Do |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take attendance by passing around a sheet that requires students to record their full names and student numbers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a seating plan of your own and take attendance or do it based on their completion of a test, quiz or assignment in class |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return student work by leaving it in a pile at the front of the room or outside of your work area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Return assignments individually |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow students to collect the work of other students (This is a violation of an individual student's privacy) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> See above |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a student's grade on the front of an assignment/test where it can be easily seen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Record grades on the second page or a separate sheet that is attached within the assignment |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share student emails or forward emails to individuals that are not involved in administering the course | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the email tool within Flashline or Blackboard to email students in your class <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use the BCC field for student addresses |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post student grades in public places | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only use the Grade Center in Blackboard to post grades |

1.2.4 Office Hours

As a TA, you are expected to hold regularly scheduled office hours, a minimum of 1 hour per lab section. Office hours should be clearly stated in your syllabus, and you must be available even if no one comes to see you. If you are not going to be holding office hours due to an extenuating circumstance, you need to inform your students.

1.3 Proctoring

While we no longer have a proctor pool, the instructor for the course associated with your laboratory may ask you to serve in this capacity. Proctoring might seem like a job that is not particularly important, but it is! Your role as a proctor is to assist in providing a fair testing environment. Just the presence of additional instructors in the classroom can deter academic dishonesty. If you are asked to proctor, please make every effort to assist.

Below are some suggestions for best practices for Proctoring exams:

- Communicate with the course instructor regarding your assistance.
- Arrive a minimum of 5 minutes early, as you will be able to help the instructor distribute testing materials.
- Check with the instructor about what types of aids, if any, students are permitted to have during the exam. Keep an eye out for items that are not approved.
- Check with the instructor about the types of questions you can answer for students.
- If you are encountering common questions about the exam, let the instructor know.
- Walk around during the exam so that you can observe all students.
- If you observe any suspicious behavior, or suspect a student of cheating, inform the course instructor immediately.
- If you are helping to collect exams, take a look to see if the students have written their name on their exams.

When proctoring, it is important that you remain vigilant; therefore, it is not okay to chat with other proctors, do your own work, or use your phone. These activities are distracting behaviors and demonstrate a lack of professionalism.

2.0 Emergency Information

Kent State University's Chemical Hygiene Plan outlines laboratory safety rules and emergency response procedures. Below, is an overview of some of the rules focusing on their application to the teaching laboratory. These are general rules that apply to virtually every teaching laboratory. There may be additional rules that apply to specific courses or activities. You can view the KSU Chemical Hygiene Plan in its entirety at <http://www.dept.kent.edu/ORS/ORSContent/ORSChem/KSUCHP.pdf>

2.1 Emergency Numbers

In the case of fire, serious injury or a large chemical spill FIRST, call 9-1-1.

In case of a non-life threatening emergency after hours, call the University's Communication Center 330-672-2212.

Donna Laverne

Department of Biological Sciences – Building Manager
Phone number: 330-672-8306

Michelle Kane-Sutton

Department of Biological Sciences- Chemical Hygiene Officer/Research Lab Manager
Phone number: 330-672-3810

Shelley Jurkiewicz

Department of Biological Sciences Academic Laboratory Manager and TA Coordinator
Phone number: 330-672-7828

Tim Spiranec

Environmental Health & Safety Coordinator
Phone number: 330-672-1944

2.2 General Laboratory Safety Rules

Teaching Assistants must go over the safety rules with their students on the first day of class. Teaching Assistants should be prepared to point out special safety concerns at the beginning of each laboratory meeting, model appropriate behavior and enforce, as needed, all laboratory rules listed below:

1. No food (even gum) or drink (even water) is allowed in the labs.
2. Appropriate clothing must be worn. No open-toed shoes, shorts/short skirts or tank tops.
3. Require students to store coats and book bags on the racks provided; coats should not hang on the back of laboratory chairs and book bags kept under laboratory benches can be a hazard.
4. Contain all long hair and dangling apparel (necklaces, hooded sweatshirt strings, neckties, etc)
5. Know the location of the closest eyewash, safety shower, first aid kit, emergency exit, spill kits and fire alarm.
6. When handling chemicals, microorganisms, or potentially disease-causing materials disposable gloves MUST be worn. These gloves should be discarded before leaving the laboratory.
7. Safety glasses should be worn when working with chemicals, liquid bacterial cultures and preserved dissection specimens.
8. Follow the protocol you are given exactly; know the hazards related to the chemicals and procedures to be completed before beginning the laboratory activity.
9. Read all containers carefully before dispensing the materials; NEVER mouth pipet any solution.
10. All chemicals and solutions must be properly labeled.
11. Keep all containers capped/sealed when not in use.
12. Keep all supplies and equipment at least 6 inches from the edge of the benchtop,
13. Dispose of all materials as directed. Be sure to read the labels on the chemical collection bottles first.
14. Extinguish all flames when not in use.
15. Keep workspace orderly and clean.
16. Do not behave in a way that endangers the health or safety of others.
17. Students are not permitted to work alone in a laboratory.
18. Accidents, breakage, or equipment damage should be reported to the Teaching Assistant who will fill out the appropriate Incident Report Form.
19. Inspect the laboratory after the class has ended to confirm everything is turned off and in the proper location
20. Wash your hands before leaving the lab.

2.3 Emergency Procedures

2.3.1 Damaged Equipment

Label and set damaged equipment aside. Notify your course coordinator and the academic laboratory manager.

2.3.2 Glass and Sharps

Specially marked cardboard glass disposal boxes are provided to collect broken glass (test tubes, pipets, slides, etc.). These boxes are for glass only. No gloves, paper or specimens should be put into these containers.

Red, plastic sharps containers are provided to collect non-glass sharp items (pins, scalpels, broken probes, etc.). It is very important that only sharps are deposited into these containers. No absorbent materials (paper, paper towels, Kim-wipes) are to be put into these containers.

3.0 Administrative Items

3.1 Faculty and Staff Contact Information

| Phone # | Office# | | E-mail |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------|--|
| Dr. Heather Caldwell, Chair | 23614 | 256 | hcaldwel@kent.edu |
| Dr. Sean Veney, Asst. Chair | 23614 | 26 | sveney@kent.edu |
| Dr. Oscar J. Rocha, Graduate Coord. | 23636 | 114 | hcaldwel@kent.edu |
| Dr. Edgar Kooijman, Undergrad. Coord. | 28568 | 251 | ekooijma@kent.edu |
| Dr. Jen Mou, MA Program Coord. | 23625 | ISB251B | xmou@kent.edu |
| Shelley Jurkiewicz, TA Coord. | 27828 | ISB251L | sjurkiew@kent.edu |
| <hr/> | | | |
| Animal Facility | 22575 | | |
| Mark Moser | 23653 | | mmoser2@kent.edu |
| Academic Advisor | 22984 | 256 | |
| Joan Iacobacci | | | jiacobac@kent.edu |
| Academic Lab Manager | 27828 | ISB251L | |
| Shelley Jurkiewicz | 27828 | | sjurkiew@kent.edu |
| Graduate Office | 22819 | 253B | |
| Susan Kieklak | | | skieklak@kent.edu |
| Graduate Office - BMS | 22263 | | |
| Dr. John Johnson, Director | 23849 | ISB251P | jjohns72@kent.edu |
| Donna Warner | 28310 | ISB251T | djwarner@kent.edu |
| Grant Coordinator | 28307 | 251 | |
| Stephanie Skibiski | 28307 | | sskibisk@kent.edu |
| Greenhouse | 22469 | | |
| Melissa Davis | 22469 | | mdavis7@kent.edu |
| Herbarium | 22453 | 128 | |
| IT Team Lead | 21367 | A001-003 | adangona@kent.edu |
| Anthony D'Angona | | | |
| Main Office Staff | 23614 | 256 | |
| Alice Kopunovitz | 28308 | | akopunov@kent.edu |
| Stephanie Skibiski | 28307 | | sskibisk@kent.edu |
| FAX 330-672-3713 | | | |
| Stockroom | 22574 | 222 | |
| Donna Laverne, Bus. Mgr. | 28306 | | dlaverne@kent.edu |
| Lajuane Mathis | 22574 | | lmathis2@kent.edu |
| Michelle Kane-Sutton | 23810 | 220 | mkanesut@kent.edu |

Numbers that begin with a "2" can be dialed direct. Numbers that begin with "8" are voicemail guest boxes. You can dial 28888 * and put in the voice mail box number and leave a message.

3.2 The TA Contract

3.2.1 Your Obligations

As a TA, you are contractually obligated to be here the week prior to the start of classes through the week of final exams. It is expected that during the semester, as well as any breaks, that you are working on your research project(s). You are paid a stipend as well as provided with a tuition waiver for your service, which requires 20 hours of service per week for a total of 300 hours per semester. During this time, you must maintain full-time student status and at least a 3.0 GPA, as well as be making progress toward degree completion. Teaching assistantships are not automatically renewed; they are contingent upon your performance as a TA and your academic progress toward your degree. At the end of the fall semester, the Graduate Office will send out a renewal request form, which you will need to fill out and will let the department know whether or not you are seeking support for the following Summer and Academic Year.

Assignments are made before the start of each semester. To make these assignments, we follow specific guidelines (described in the TA Assignment Guidelines document under "Resources") to the best of our ability. These guidelines help keep teaching loads low enough to allow you to continue to progress on your thesis or dissertation work successfully. We also provide each of you with a workload statement that will give you an idea of your teaching load should be each year. We hope to provide these before the start of the fall semester. When you receive your workload statements you should review it with your advisor, sign it, and submit it to the Graduate Office or the TA Coordinator, as appropriate (be sure to make a copy for your records).

3.2.1.1 Absence from teaching related responsibilities

The role of a teaching assistant is multi-faceted and includes responsibilities such as holding office hours and attending preparatory meetings scheduled outside of the assigned lab session. All of these activities are an important part of the teaching role, and attendance is required. On rare occasions, you may be unable to be on campus during one of the scheduled teaching commitments. Below is a list of things that may come up and what you should do to notify your teaching team of your impending absence. Note: repeated absences will jeopardize your assistantship.

Illness and family emergency.

In the event of illness or family emergency, you must notify the laboratory coordinator for your class, giving as much notice as possible so someone can be found to cover your class. If you must miss office hours, notify your class via e-mail that you will not be holding them and let them know when you

will be available. Do not wait until the last minute to cover your teaching assignment, as this can create problems for those who need to cover you.

Planned travel for a conference.

Ideally, TAs planning to attend a conference will provide this information, in writing to the laboratory coordinator at the beginning of the semester or as soon as they know that they will be attending a conference.

Planned travel for academic program or job interview.

As much as possible, try to schedule your interview on days that you do not teach. Notify your laboratory coordinator in writing as soon as you know the dates you will be away.

Concerts, cruises, vacations, and other activities.

Teaching Assistants DO NOT receive vacation or days off for personal trips. Personal activities are not valid reasons to be absent from any teaching related responsibilities.

3.2.1.2 Missing a proctoring assignment

TAs are often assigned to help proctor lecture exams. Suppose you become ill or have a family emergency and cannot meet a proctoring obligation. In that case, it is important to notify the faculty member for whom you are proctoring as soon as possible.

3.2.2 Outside Employment

3.3 TA Performance Policy

Students are required to sign the Departmental TA Performance Policy (found under “Resources” at the end of this document). This form describes the disciplinary action(s) that will occur when there is evidence of unsatisfactory execution of the duties associated with your teaching assistantship.

3.4. Teaching Evaluations

Within the Department, teaching evaluations for TAs come primarily from student evaluations, which occur at the end of each semester. **YOU ARE REQUIRED TO BE EVALUATED.** When the materials to make your packets are available towards the end of the semester, you will be notified. You will then need to go to the BSCI Graduate Office and assemble your packets. (Please follow the directions for making your packets and directions for having your students complete the evaluations.) These evaluations must be completed prior to the start of final exams. After the evaluations are processed, they will be made available to you.

The Department may also have you do a “self-reflection” evaluation sometime during the year. These provide an opportunity for you to consider how to improve your teaching.

The Student and Self Review teaching evaluations will be taken into consideration when decisions regarding contract renewals are being made. The Department expects that you will take the feedback that is provided to you as constructive criticism and use it to improve your teaching.

3.5 Departmental Information

3.5.1 Copying:

It is the responsibility of the grad student to be aware of U.S. copyright laws and to abide by them.

Handouts and exams for labs you are teaching should be taken to Room 256 with a Copy Request Form attached. Alternatively, you can email your request to Ms. Stephanie Skibiski (sblair6@kent.edu) 48 hours before you need the copies. Finished copies will be placed in the second drawer of the filing cabinet behind the secretary's desk in the main office. We strongly discourage last-minute copying. Whenever possible, you are expected to share handouts with your students via CANVAS or email. *It is also possible, and in many instances preferable, for you to make your own copies using one of the copy machines throughout Cunningham Hall and ISB or borrow a key card for the copy room to make your copies.* *The Department copier is not to be used for personal documents. *

It is the responsibility of the grad student to be aware of U.S. copyright laws and to abide by them.

3.5.2 Student Assignments:

Please have students turn in assignments to you during your office hours or in class. They should only be turned in at the main office under extenuating circumstances.

3.5.3 Personal Information and Schedule:

Should you move during your time at KSU, please inform the Graduate Studies Office of your new address and phone number, in addition to making the change on your Flashline account. You can provide your contact information, office hours, teaching time, etc., on a Google Doc; the link will be sent to you at the start of the semester.

3.5.4 Teaching supplies:

The supplies that the Department provides are kept in the mailroom. Supplies that are needed for specific laboratories need to be discussed with the Academic Laboratory Coordinator.

3.5.5 Mailboxes

The Biology Graduate Office, Room 253B, handles mailbox assignments. The mailboxes are physically located in the Biology Main Office, Room 256. Please check your mail daily as many important departmental notices are placed there.

3.5.6 Office Space

- All incoming BSCI and BMS MS and PhD students working with advisors in Cunningham Hall will be assigned desks in one of our TA offices. You can use this space to hold office hours, study, write, etc. We expect you to be a good citizen, respecting one another and keeping the area neat and organized. You are welcome to eat in this space or the Graduate Student Lounge, CHH 29.

3.6 Training Opportunities

- The Graduate College at Kent State University offers Graduate Professional and Academic Development (GPAD) Workshops each semester. For more information see the following website: <https://www.kent.edu/graduatecollege/graduate-professional-and-academic-development>.

4.0 Being Prepared

Teaching is a rewarding activity that lets you share your knowledge and enthusiasm for Biology and provides an opportunity for you to develop professionally. Teaching is also hard work because, as the classroom facilitator, you play an essential role in helping students learn concepts, practice techniques, and work safely. For most lab courses, there will be a weekly preparatory meeting. These are critical to your success as a teacher and, by extension, critical to the learning of the students in your class. Each week, the laboratory coordinator will review the materials available for class, outline the procedures to be followed, highlight important safety considerations and provide insight, and helpful tips for creating an efficient, stress-free learning environment. Never miss these meetings; going into a class unprepared does not create the best chance for success. In the sections below, you will find some ideas for the preparation and delivery of your first class, as well as some suggestions that apply equally to every class of the semester.

4.1 Before your first lab/class

1. Know a little about the course you are teaching. Be familiar with the scope of the course and the laboratory activities as well as the role it plays in the larger curriculum.
2. Know the policies related to the course, especially the policies about safety, grading, and classroom attendance.
3. Plan out your first laboratory and rehearse your class.

4.2 During your first lab/class

1. Introduce yourself.
2. Give a brief overview of the laboratory course and expectations for classroom behavior and attendance.
3. Go over the laboratory syllabus.

4. Go over the laboratory safety rules.
5. Begin to establish a routine for how the class will be run. For instance, designate a place where all materials to be turned in have to be turned in.

4.3 During each lab/class

1. Be prepared. Know the material to be covered and prepare a tentative timeline for completing activities. Part of your role is to keep everyone on task to be sure the activities are completed safely.
2. Arrive at least 7-10 minutes early. Walk through the lab with the laboratory protocol in your hands and locate all the supplies to be used that day. By doing this, if something missing or empty, you will have a chance to find or refill the item. You will also know where things are to direct your students to the materials. You should also check in with the TA who taught the section just before yours to see how the activity went for them.
3. Be conscious of the time you spend on your pre-lab lecture/introduction; in most classes, teaching assistants can expect to take 10-15 minutes reviewing the concepts to be investigated in the laboratory activity.
4. Point out the location of supplies and equipment to your students before they begin their laboratory activity.
5. Be sure to review relevant safety reminders and instructions for proper disposal of the materials used in class.
6. Once the laboratory activities are underway, be sure to circulate through the room to make sure that students are doing the activities correctly and assist students who may have questions.
7. Keep track of the time and let students know how much time is left in the class period so they can pace their time adequately.
8. Make sure all students clean up their work area, dispose of used materials, and store all equipment properly. If the students leave a mess, you will be responsible for cleaning up before the next class arrives for the lab.

4.4 If Problems Arise

If you are well prepared for and organized in your delivery of the class, laboratories usually go smoothly. From time to time though, there may be student issues (attendance problems, failing to comply with laboratory rules, failing to complete assignments, being disruptive in class). If an issue arises in your laboratory, speak to the student as soon as possible. It is best to have a quiet conversation with the student away from the rest of the class. If the issue continues, talk to your course coordinator and the TA coordinator (Shelley) for ideas on how to manage the student issue.

5.0 Improving Your Teaching

Once you have your first semester under your belt, take a minute or two to reflect on how you could improve your teaching. Try going back over section 4.0 of this document to guide your thoughts. Were there things from the lists that you should have done? Were there things you did but needed more of? During your next semester, make a conscious effort to correct these things. Other than those basics, what can you do to try to improve your teaching? Here are a few suggestions. Please keep in mind that these suggestions are not University Policy. You can and should familiarize yourself with University Policies that are relevant to you are found in the [University Policy Register](#) on the Kent State website.

5.1 Manage Class Time

What should you be doing while the students are working? If you ever found yourself during previous semesters of teaching just sitting at the front bench for more than a few minutes, there is room for improving your teaching. For some courses, there will be very little of this “extra” time; this is the case for very structured labs with specific procedures being conducted (such as microbiology and cell biology). Other labs have quite a bit of this ‘extra time’ (anatomy labs, for example – where you may, as an instructor, give a brief presentation, but most of the lab period consists of the students studying the material on their own). What, then, should you be doing? Definitively not sitting! Instead, “work the room”. Move about and interact with the students. Ask them questions! By asking questions, this is a great way to find out the following:

1. Are the students following procedures correctly? Ask them some of these questions: What step of the procedure are you on? Do you know why you are adding that particular reagent?
2. Did they complete something correctly? Ask to see a final product or the result of a series of procedures (for example, ask a student to see the Gram stain slide they just made. Ask to look at the data they have been recording).
3. Have they learned the material? Give the students a mini quiz; just one or two particular questions – make it fun and not too challenging. (You can easily stress out a student by quizzing them too harshly, or they may think you are picking on them).

5.2 Eliminating Bias in the Classroom

While it is required that all instructors treat all students fairly and equally, some amount of unintentional or subconscious bias may occur. Often this bias occurs more frequently in laboratory courses because instructors work more closely with students than in most lecture courses. Keep in mind this is not a section about overt bias such as racism, sexism, and bigotry, which is unethical and not tolerated. So, what are we talking about here? Think back to your previous semester’s teaching and try answering the following questions?

1. Did you find yourself spending more time with students who have a good grasp of the material and are keeping up with the lab exercise (i.e., the “smart” students)?

2. Did you find yourself spending more time with a student you were physically attracted to? Or who, based on their physical appearance, you can identify with?
3. Did you treat women differently than men?
4. Did you treat shy, quiet students differently than outgoing students?
5. Did you find yourself hanging out with and laughing with a particular group of students, especially right before or after class?

If you answered yes or are unsure if you did any of these things, then let's look at each more closely.

1. The "smart" students – It often makes an instructor feel good about their teaching if they ask a question of a student who answers it correctly. Thus, you may find yourself unintentionally spending more time with these students. If you are still not sure you do this, ask yourself if you tend to avoid students who are at the other end of the spectrum. Those students who never seem to know what's happening, frequently don't follow instructions, and whom you can never seem to get a correct answer from. Try to interact equally with all students.
2. The "physically attractive" students –Unintentionally, you may spend more time with that particular student for various reasons...you may feel they are particularly compatible with you or that you can relate to them. Other students in the class VERY quickly pick up on this!! The other students will often interpret your actions as favoritism. They may even accuse you (fairly or unfairly) of going easy on that particular student (giving them better grades and so forth). This is a place you, as an instructor, want to avoid finding yourself! **Be friendly to your students, but not be their friend.** As a side note, NEVER date or form a personal relationship with a student in your class!
3. Treating women differently than men - Cultures all over the world have socially defined ways of interacting with members of the opposite sex, and these can be quite different based on where you are in the world. Spend equal time with both the men and women in your class. Use the same manners of speech and intonations with both men and women in your class. For example, use a student's name to address them, and never use phrases such as sweetie, hon, honey, dude, etc. Do not patronize your students when talking to them.

5.3 Learn by Observing Other Instructors

You can learn a lot by observing other instructors. With permission, sit in on another TA's lab or a professor's lecture. Even though you, as a student, have taken many courses and labs from many different instructors, you were probably too busy focusing on the content to observe the instructor's teaching style strictly. By sitting in on a class you are not taking, you can focus on the methods of instruction. Ask around and pick a professor or TA that you have heard as being a good instructor. Here are some things to observe:

1. What is the rate at which the instructor presents material?

2. How much and what type of content does the instructor have on their slides?
3. How does the instructor go about asking questions?
4. Are there ways the instructor interacts with the students besides strictly asking questions?
5. Does the instructor use the class time efficiently?
6. What techniques does the instructor use to get the class's attention?

5.4 Review Your Teaching Evaluations

Always review your previous semester's teaching evaluations. Even though it can be frustrating or nerve-racking to look at your evaluations (after all, you may have put a lot of work into teaching your lab and still get negative and sometimes thoughtless comments), you are expected to do so. You can learn a great deal. First, remember that you cannot please everyone all the time. Most instructors will have a mix of good and not-so-good evaluations within a single course section. So, if you have a few negative scores or comments that are balanced with better scores and positive comments – you are doing OK. What you want to focus on is the preponderance of the scores and comments. If your scores are consistently low across many of the questions and you see comments that repeat the same negative sentiment, this indicates a problem in your teaching that needs to be addressed. Some of the problems that come to light on teaching evaluations are easy to resolve; others may not be. You can always ask the faculty member in charge of the course, an experienced TA, or the graduate coordinator for help in figuring out what to do to correct the situation. If you are receiving a majority of good numeric scores and positive comments with very few or no negative comments, you are doing great. Also, do not try to evaluate your numeric scores on a detailed level, but use them as a guide to suggest where you can improve.

6.0 Resources

6.1 Treasure Trove of Tips I

TA Treasure trove of tips: 10 how-tos from those in the trenches¹



1. Preparation is the key to a successful class!!
2. It's okay to say that you don't know an answer to a question... sometimes you can offer a guess on what you think the answer is or tell them related information that may help them to the correct answer.
3. Keep an upbeat attitude and be available. Circulate throughout the class or stand off to the side watching as they work. This lets students know you are approachable and willing to help. However, do not be afraid to correct or redirect students, YOU are the instructor and it is YOUR class.
4. If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, admit it, and make a note to look it up later and email out the question. You do not have to be an expert on every nuance of your class topic.
5. When students are upset, I usually start by telling them to "take a minute and breathe". Then calmly ask them what's wrong and talk to them.
6. In difficult situations stay calm. Even if the other person is agitated or worked up or being rude. Stay calm, speak in a calm, even tone and gather all the facts about a situation. If you are concerned about the tone of the situation contact your coordinator.
7. If a student is upset, it's important for you to remain calm. If it is about something related to your class, speak honestly about the situation with the student and give them their options. Advise them to speak with their advisor if they want to know options beyond the classroom, i.e dropping the class, changing major etc. If they are upset about something not related to class offer support and again direct them to their advisor or other campus student support services. You don't have to have phone numbers or emails, simply advise them to seek help from on campus student services.
8. Remember you do not have to take abuse or poor treatment. If a student (or parent) is being rude, harsh or aggressive you CAN end the meeting and reschedule at a later time with your coordinator and/or the lead professor present. If this situation occurs let your coordinator know immediately.
9. Use the resources you have. If you have a difficult student or situation, ask your coordinator for assistance. You do not have to struggle through problems on your own.
10. Be sure to leave a trail when communicating with students about a problem or difficult situation. CC your coordinator on all emails and keep track of any written communications, such as dates something was written. Again if the situation becomes very difficult, ask your coordinator for help or advice.

¹ Courtesy of Adrienne Hopson and Kristina Corella. Please, do not forget to thank them when you see them in the hallway...

6.2 Treasure Trove of Tips II

TA Treasure trove of tips: how-tos from those in the trenches¹



1. In the case of challenging student situations:

When asked a question that I didn't know the answer to. (This happens! I think it is great when a student applies him/herself enough to have questions like these.) I tell the students that I do not know, that I haven't thought of it, that it is a good question and one that I will investigate and we will talk about it the following week.

2. Insulting Students:

If you have a disrespectful student, do not tolerate it. Keep in mind that how you allow a student to treat you sets a precedent for the rest of the class. (Dr. Caldwell suggests that you politely indicate that their tone is not acceptable and that you tell them that you can discuss the issue at a later time. If they continue to be disruptive you can politely ask them to leave the classroom. If this is not effective you should call campus security).

3. Upset Students:

The easiest way to deal with students who are upset about grades is to be very clear about the expectations. Offering suggestions for moving forward in the class, extra meeting times, etc, can be very helpful. Remember that every student's situation is different and they have as much going on as you do.

Some general notes on teaching:

-Get to the room early: there is nothing as stressful as showing up late and being flustered. The students pick up on this quickly.

-Know your material!

-Be kind but firm with your students: in many ways we all live up to expectations held for us. Expect something from your students and they will aspire to it.

-Make sure you write information and quizzes and exams clearly.

-Keep students up to date with grades.

-Be confident that you have the most knowledge on the topic in the room. With that being said, do not gloss over or fudge those things you do not know.

-When the time comes for subjectivity, be as fair as possible.

-Do not speak ill of the department, your research, teaching, or the university. Also, do not criticize other TAs/coordinator of the course because you do not agree with them. This happened last year and it negatively affected student confidence in the class.

The above listed basic practices are some of the best way to eliminate many of the complications we run into while teaching. Remember, your students need to be engaged, and it is our role to do that. Some students will work well and some won't. Don't let challenges you encounter bring down the quality of education you provide to your students.

¹ Courtesy of Jessica Murphy. Please, do not forget to thank Jessica when you see her in the hallway...

6.3 TA Performance Policy

Kent State University Biological Sciences and Biomedical Sciences TA Performance Policy

All graduate students supported by Teaching Assistantships are expected to perform all of the duties of their job in a professional manner (including, but not limited to, being present during contracted dates, attending all required meetings; following the directions of the instructors and the lab coordinator; being responsive to email and phone inquiries – either from students or the instructors/lab coordinator; starting laboratory sections or classes on time; holding consistent weekly office hours (1 hour for each lab section); and being compliant with laboratory safety policies), with a focus on providing excellent education to undergraduate students. However, in the rare cases where there is evidence of unsatisfactory teaching performance, the response will proceed according to the following sequence:

1. The TA will receive a **Verbal Warning** from the faculty lab coordinator or TA coordinator. This warning will be followed up with an email from the faculty lab coordinator or TA coordinator that outlines the nature of the warning - the Graduate Coordinator or BMS Director (as appropriate) will be copied on this email.
2. The TA will receive a **Written Warning** from the Graduate Coordinator or BMS Director (as appropriate). This letter will be placed into the student's file and the student's advisor will be notified.
3. The TA will receive a **2nd Written Warning** and the Graduate Studies Committee or the BMS Director (as appropriate) will evaluate the TA and there will be a possible loss of funding. The student will be notified of the performance evaluation and may provide a rebuttal letter that will be considered in the evaluation. The letters will be placed into the student's file and the student notified of the decision of the program.
4. Any additional offenses will result in an automatic loss of the student's Teaching Assistantship.

I have read and understand the **TA Performance Policy**:

Printed Name: _____ Year you began the program: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

revised 9/2022

6.4 TA Assignment Guidelines

Workload Assignment Guidelines for Teaching Assistants in Biological Sciences

These are guidelines to use in TA assignments—exceptions may be needed based on consultation with both the graduate coordinator and chair.

1. Each Summer, TAs will receive a preliminary workload statement for the following AY and subsequent summer that indicates tentative plans for teaching assignments as well as accounting for requests for semesters off for teaching, graduation plans, changes in the source of support (such as switching to a grant or fellowship), etc.
2. TAs will not be assigned to teach lecture sections without approval of the Faculty Advisory Committee and consultation with the student's advisor.
3. TAs will not be assigned for only lab preparation
4. TAs are expected to teach in two of the three terms (fall, spring, summer) each year. TAs that need a particular term free of teaching must consult their advisor and then submit a formal request to the graduate coordinator; such requests must be submitted by the first week of May for the fall of that calendar year and the spring and summer of the following calendar year. The need for TAs is much lower in the summer, so TAs will generally teach in fall and spring but not summer. In addition, because of limited offerings, the TA assignment options below may be altered in the summer.
5. TAs will be assigned one of the following:
 - a. Two lab sections of the same lower level course
 - b. One lab section (lower level) plus lecture aide (preferably for the same class) or lab preparation for the same class
 - c. One lab section (upper level)
 - d. Coordinator of General Microbiology or Cell Biology
6. Non-teaching assignments are limited to service as lecture aides for classes with over 100 students and must be approved by the chair; requests must include specific lists of duties for the lecture aide (instructors can request one or two lecture aides based on specific needs) and justification for why the instructor cannot perform these duties.. This justification should discuss the benefit that having a lecture aide will have for the class as well as how the time saved on the instructor's part will provide tangible enhancements to their productivity as faculty members. If the lecture aide's role is limited to proctoring exams, instructors are encouraged to have SI instructors serve as exam proctors. The role of graduate-level lecture aides is confined to courses where grading of assignments is a central aspect of the duties;

other tasks in these situations may include proctoring, holding office hours, helping with flipped classroom activities or breakout groups, etc. Undergraduate lecture aides may be available for specific classes on a case-by-case basis, but undergraduates cannot grade assignments. Requests for undergraduate lecture aides must include specific lists of duties for the lecture aide and justification for why the instructor cannot perform these duties. The instructor must submit a request for lecture aides at least one month before the start of a given term.

7. For courses needing transportation that cannot be provided by the students themselves, the instructor and TA are responsible for driving, and plans should be made in advance so that the larger-sized vehicles can be secured if needed based on class size. If the students are to provide their transportation to a designated site, that must be noted in the course schedule notes via e-mail before the course starts and should be stated on the syllabus.

6.5 Referral Guide for Additional Resources

Academic Assistance

- Academic Success Center (tutor/coaching) <https://www.kent.edu/asc>
- Student Accessibility Services (disabilities) <https://www.kent.edu/sas>
- Office of Ombuds (confidential advocate, grievances) <https://www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds>
- Writing Commons www.kent.edu/writingcommons
- Purdue OWL <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>

Financial Assistance

- Financial Aid www.kent.edu/financialaid

Health Related

- Counseling & Psychological Services <https://www.kent.edu/caps>
- University Health Services <https://www.kent.edu/uhs>

(adjustment to college, relationship difficulties, depression, anxiety, body image, eating disorders, sexuality, self-injurious behavior, substance-related issues, mental health, women's health)

Safety & Emergencies

- Campus Safety (police, escorts, assault) <https://www.kent.edu/campus-safety>
- Step-up & Speak Out (hotlines, disruptive/distressed) <https://www.kent.edu/stepupspeakout>
- Police 911 [Emergency] 330-672-2212 [Non-Emergency]
- Counseling Services After Hours Crisis Support 330-672-2487
- Coleman Services (suicide, behavioral emergency) 330-296-3555
- Townhall II Helpline 330-678-HELP or 866-449-8518
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 800-273-TALK
- The Trevor Lifeline (preventing suicide among LGBTQ) 866-488-7386

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