

# ***Teaching Assistant Training***

**Highlights**

**2023**

**Department of Economics  
CU Boulder**

## **The Importance of Being a TA**

### **Importance of the TA's role to the Department**

- Assisting instructors, acting as a student-instructor liaison
- Teaching recitation, encouraging students to continue in the discipline
- TA's office hours, help students to better understand the course material, work on assignments, and perform well in the

### **Importance of the TA's Role in Professional Development**

- Learning how to teach
- Learning how the department works
- Networking with professors
- Learning academic professional development skills like time management, collaborative work, team building, evaluation, management, and human relations

### **Importance of the TA's Role to Undergraduate Students**

- Direct and first point of contact with students in large classes
- Introduction to the discipline and declaring major
- A positive learning experience and high-quality college education

## **The Dual Role of a TA/Graduate Student**

### **The TA's Basic Responsibilities**

- Perform duties assigned by the professor/instructor in a timely and conscientious manner
- Prepare class work carefully
- Show proper respect to all students and faculty
- \*Make adequate progress toward achieving their degree, which means completing work and requirements according to the departmental schedule outlined in the graduate student handbook\*

### **Professionalism**

- TAs are expected to be punctual, dependable, and professional. If for any reason the TA will not be able to perform assigned duties on schedule, the course instructor should be informed.
- A class may never be canceled without the course instructor's prior approval. Any other changes must be approved by the instructor and notice given with adequate time for students to adjust plans.
- Changes in room and time may not be made.
- TAs are expected to project the professionalism and academic ideals of the regular faculty and exercise basic courtesy and respect in all student-teacher interactions as well as uphold the policies of the University and department.

## Getting Started: The TA Assignment

### What is recitation?

- Recitation/"discussion section"/"lab" usually accompanies large lecture classes (from 80-500 students), but might also accompany smaller classes (less than 47 students).
- Recitations generally meet once per week for 50 minutes with about 25 students in each section.
- One TA will teach multiple recitation sections.
- Recitation content follows (and usually lags) lecture content and serves as reviews.
- Review of the lecture concepts is accomplished through Q&A time, worksheets, problem sets, and quizzes.
- (Generally) TA should not teach new material or re-lecture old material.
- Instructors may outline expectations for recitation or may leave it entirely up to TA.

### Getting started

- Email the instructor you will be working for to set up a time to meet about TA duties for the course. Some instructors may choose to meet for the first time in the first lecture.
- Coordinating with Instructor:
  - Get a copy of the instructor's syllabus and textbook.
  - Discuss grading breakdown, responsibilities, and final grade submission.
  - Discuss coordination with other TAs.
- Coordinating with fellow TAs:
  - Make your life easy and divide up prep work. Agree on logistics and deadlines.
  - Exchange contact info.
  - Generally, TAs in the same course keep the same grading scheme/scale (defer to your instructor).
- Recitation does not meet the first week of classes.

## Planning your recitation

### Office hours

- Hold the same number of office hours as the recitation sections you teach.
- Schedule them at different times than your instructor and fellow TAs.
- The Website Manager will email you asking for office hours to include in the department schedule.

### Write your syllabus (optional)

- Check with your instructor if this is desired.
- Aim for clarity above all.

- A syllabus is not required for TAs, but if you choose to use one, don't deviate from it until next semester.

### **Set up a course webpage**

- Your instructor will likely use Canvas, in which case they will add you to it.
- You may create a personal website (Google Sites is a good option: <http://sites.google.com>).
- Our graduate student web assistant can help you set one up and will add it to the department webpage.

## **Meeting the Class for the First Time**

### **Basic Preparation**

- Find your classroom ahead of time.
- Test the equipment of your classroom in case you will use it.
- Bring your class photo roster, syllabus, worksheets, pen/pencil, chalk, and water bottle.

### **Introduction**

- Write your name (with pronunciation if needed), office number, office hours, email address, and web address on the board.
- Write the course number, title, and instructor's name on the board.
- You might tell the students a little bit about yourself. A good tone for recitation is friendly and interactive, and this first introduction will set that tone.

### **Ways to get to know your students**

- Call attendance from the roster. (Update your roster several times in the first two weeks.)
- Plan an icebreaker. (Resources can be found in the shared Google Drive folder.)
- Pass out notecards and ask students to fill out the information about themselves. Attach photos from the roster for your personal records.
- Invite them to or offer extra credit for visiting office hours.

### **Outlining the course**

- Explain the role of recitation in relation to their main lecture course (esp. if you are teaching mostly freshmen).
- Review the syllabus that you printed and handed out.
- Cover policies on grading, attendance, assignments, and makeup work.
- Cover the role that recitation grade plays in overall course grade.

### **Questions you might be asked**

- Be familiar with the policies of the department and your instructor, within reason. You don't have to know everything!
- Refer detailed course logistics questions to the instructor.

- Refer any questions about degree requirements to the econ undergraduate advisors (their office is right by the econ main office).
- TAs cannot add waitlisted people to a closed section. Advise the student to switch to an open section or to keep attending to see if someone drops. After the add/drop deadline, you may refer them to the course instructor.

## **All About Office Hours**

### **Number of office hours required**

- The department requires TAs to hold 1 office hour for every recitation section.
- If you have a full appointment (50%), and are only teaching 3 recitations, the department asks that you hold an additional office hour (for a total of 4).

### **University's goal for requiring office hours**

- Facilitate learning, reduce anonymity, and increase motivation and retention
- Encourage students to major in your field

### **Students' goals for office hours**

- Get individual assistance with readings, problems, and study tips
- Discuss grades
- Networking

### **Why do students go to office hours**

- One-on-one learning style
- Future letters of recommendation from teachers
- Learn about career opportunities
- Makeup class work

### **Why students *DON'T* go to office hours**

- They think the teacher is inaccessible or doesn't care about students
- They think asking for help is a "sign of weakness or stupidity"
- They feel too lost to ask for help

### **How to get students in office hours**

- Regular reminders of time/place
- Make appointments
- Require a short visit or offer extra credit
- Ask student to drop off/pick up an assignment in your office

### **Potentially uncomfortable issues**

- Verbal personal/emotional/irrational attacks
- Sharing personal info
- Blatant or subtle sexual advances

*Your Lead GPTI has several resources for difficult situation*

### **Additional help**

- Free walk-in tutoring lab during the regular semester (see right side-bar on “Undergraduates” tab of department website).
- Department’s private tutoring list (you cannot tutor your own students for pay)

## **Helpful Hints**

### **Communicating in Class**

- Write your name on the board for the first several sessions.
- Call on students by name (refer to your roster).
- Use small group activities to take the focus off yourself.
- Use handouts and write on the board to help students follow your discussion.
- Be neat when writing on the board and stay organized.

### **Assignments/Grading**

- Download your official course roster from MyCUInfo. Update the spreadsheet after two weeks to adjust for adds/drops.
- Ask your instructor if they have preferences for the grade spreadsheet you’ll give them.
- Keep an up-to-date gradebook and be ready to inform students regularly of their progress in your class.
- Keep a backup and a hard copy of your grades. You are not allowed to publicly post grades by student name or student ID number. Use a secure medium such as Canvas.
- Try to appeal to various learning styles by using various types of assignments.
- Assignments should coincide directly with what the instructor is teaching in the lecture. *Do not* teach topics not covered by the instructor.
- Return assignments in a timely manner and be organized.

### **Office Hours**

- Keep your door open during office hours.
- Keep mints/gum/mouthwash at your desk.
- Write on scrap paper and allow students to take these.
- Keep an updated copy of your grades with you.
- Don’t cancel office hours without extenuating circumstances. Reschedule them instead of canceling when possible.

### **Attending Lecture**

- The department requires that all TAs attend lectures regularly.
- Attending lectures helps you understand how the material is being taught and when students seem confused which will help to plan recitation.
- Do not disrespect, challenge or question an instructor during the lecture.
- Do not blatantly study other material or be on your laptop during the lecture as it sets a bad example for the students.

### **Looking Forward**

- Stay organized as you might teach this course in the future. Try labeling lesson plans with “Course Name – Recitation Number, Subject” or something similar.
- Ask your instructor if you can guest teach a lecture. Great practice for when you become a GPTI.

## **Teaching Appointment Policies/Requirements**

Students must complete five full-time hours of their own course while on appointment.

Students must maintain satisfactory progress per their offer letter. See your offer letter for more information.

### **TA requirements**

- Departmental TA training (this workshop and micro-teaching)
- University sexual harassment training (During “Fall Intensive”)
- International Graduate Teacher Cultural Intensive (International TAs)
- Recitation Observation

### **Add/Drop Policy**

- Mostly out of your jurisdiction, but you might need to ask Joy ([joy.oge@colorado.edu](mailto:joy.oge@colorado.edu)) to move a student from one recitation to another (space permitting). If so, include the student’s name and their ID number along with the relevant sections.

### **FCQ (Faculty Course Questionnaire)**

- Faculty Course Questionnaires (FCQs) are student evaluations of the instructor and TA in the second-to-last week of the semester.
- Separate for TA and instructor (you should emphasize this to students).
- FCQs are administered online.
- FCQ results are published at <https://www.colorado.edu/fcq/boulder-fcq-results>
- You may choose to do your own informal survey earlier in the semester.
- You can increase response rates by offering in-class time for students to complete FCQs.

### **Student Privacy**

- See <https://www.colorado.edu/registrar/students/records/privacy/consent> for a complete guide to FERPA. Do not disclose any information about a student to a third party (including parents) without a signed waiver.
- Do not post grades in a publicly accessed forum using the student's name, student identification number, or social security number. Use Canvas.
- Only hand back a graded assignment to the students themselves. No envelopes or roommates.
- Do not write a letter of reference without that student’s consent.
- The Department’s formal grievance procedure is under the “Undergraduate” tab on the Department website.

- Do not engage in conversations with students regarding a dispute between that student and another department member.
- Do not agree to look at assignments from a student's other Econ courses in order to "dispute" a grade.

### **Academic Misconduct**

*Some of the highlights in this section may be out of date. Refer to up-to-date guidelines and procedures the CU Boulder Honor Code website: <https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/honor-code>*

- The University has a formal department and procedure for handling academic misconduct. This is the best option and represents the least amount of work for you.
- Include the Honor Code statement (found here: <http://honorcode.colorado.edu/faculty-information/syllabi-statement>) in your syllabus.
- Discourage cheating by arranging examinations and assignments so to make dishonest behavior difficult.
- You should discuss your instructor's cheating policy with them (ideally, ahead of time) and implement it.
- You can also try:
  - If you suspect cheating, ask someone else for a second opinion when possible.
  - If suspicion is weak, relocate students in question (tell them it's for their own protection).
  - If suspicion is strong, confiscate the examination.
- For written assignments visit <https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/honor-code-resources> for resources to help define and identify instances of plagiarism.
- Example of procedure when academic misconduct occurs:
  - You do not need incontrovertible evidence.
  - Your first obligation is to impose an academic sanction (e.g. a failing grade on that assignment).
  - Your second obligation is to report this behavior to the Honor Code Council. If the student acknowledges the behavior, the report is simple a "report" (see <http://honorcode.colorado.edu/resources/facultystaff-violation-report-form> for relevant documents). If the student denies the behavior, the report is an "accusation" (see <http://honorcode.colorado.edu/resources/faculty-accusationreferral-form> for the relevant form).
  - Now the process is in the hands of the Honor Code Council, and nothing further is required of you.
  - If the student withdraws from your course in order to escape your academic sanctions, wait until the Honor Code Council makes its determination. If this process lasts past the end of the semester, you may use a Change of Record form (contact the main office).



## Designing a Recitation

*In designing your recitation format, you should keep three things in mind:*

1. The instructor's goals for the recitation
2. How do you feel most comfortable teaching
3. Presenting content in multiple formats (written on the board, discussion-based, activity-based)

### **What does the professor expect you to do in recitation?**

- Re-explain difficult material
- Answer questions
- Practice problems
- Discuss ideas presented in class and find other applications
- Provide help on homework and prepare for exams

### **How do you feel most comfortable teaching?**

- Lecturing
- Answering questions
- Small group work

### **How can you integrate different styles of learning into your recitation?**

- Some students need to understand the big picture and examples before they can absorb the details
- Some students learn by taking lecture notes and synthesizing the material on their own
- Some students are very hands-on
- Some students learn by problem solving and asking questions

## Activities for Recitations

### **Mini lecture/Review (5-20 minutes)**

- Do a weekly recap: "Last time on ..."
- Write problems based on lectures, homework
- Let students interrupt
- Ask questions/call on students during sessions

### **Practice problems**

- Worksheets (fill in the blank, short answer, multiple choice, calculations)
- Homework problems (ask your instructor if they would like/not like you to cover these)
- See other TAs for previously used assignments

### **Quizzes**

- Multiple choice and some longer problems
- Can do alone, with notes, with a partner, in a group

- Rule of thumb is 2 minutes for every multiple-choice problem

### Games

- Anything to make the class fun...quiz bowls, competitions, group Jeopardy, etc.

### Review Sessions

- Can be held outside of class to cover all your sections at once (get room scheduling form from main office)

### Additional Comments

- Break up the recitation with different activities (~15 min each activity).
- Get participation from your students.
- You can use groups for just about any activity.
  - Choose the groups for the first few weeks.
  - Walk around the room and require group presentations to keep students on task.
- Get feedback from your students regularly.
- Share worksheet-creation duties with fellow TAs.

## Emailing your professor for the first time

### Professors as supervisors/mentors

- Professors in the department are friendly but deserve respect for their status and for their time. Be brief!
- If your instructor is another graduate student, they are still your “boss” – respect their authority in the classroom.

**Example Email:** *Find out who the other TAs are – only one of you needs to send an email and copy the others.*

Hi Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am one of your TAs in Principles of **Micro** this fall. If you have the time, I would love to meet for introductions and to get your expectations for recitations, grading, general duties, etc. I understand that you are busy, so if you prefer, I can set up a meeting for all of your TAs to meet you at the same time. Please let me know what is best for you, and I will work around your schedule. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to working with you this semester!

Best,

\_\_\_\_\_

## Designing your Syllabus

- If you choose to write a syllabus for your recitation, it should be as detailed as possible and should include:
  - Your complete contact info
  - Recitation course description
  - In-class notes policy
  - Grading
    - Breakdown of the grade (use percentages, not points)
    - Number of problem sets/quizzes, etc.
    - Make up policy
  - Important Dates Section
  - University Policies (see the links and additional information below)
    - Disability Policy
    - Religious Observance Policy
    - Classroom Behavior Policy
    - Honor Code
    - Discrimination & Sexual Harassment Policy
- Kimberly Van Mourik, our web manager, will email a request for syllabi to post online. TAs **do not** need to send their syllabi to her, only GPTIs and instructors do.
- See shared Google Drive folder for more examples of syllabi.
- Certain University policies **must** be included in your syllabus. Since these may change each semester, always copy and paste the latest language from the CU website:  
<https://www.colorado.edu/academicaffairs/policies-customs-guidelines/required-syllabus-statements>

## Economics Department Information for TAs

See <https://www.colorado.edu/economics/people> and  
<https://www.colorado.edu/economics/undergraduate/undergraduate-advising>  
for latest info.

### CHAIR

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### WEB SITE MANAGER

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<https://cuboulder.zoom.us/my/willhamilton>

### Mailing Address:

University of Colorado at Boulder  
Economics Building Rm 212  
256 UCB  
Boulder, Colorado 80309-0256

**Main office:** 303-735-5500

**Fall and Spring Hours Main Office Hours (CHECK DOOR SIGN) Usual hours are:** M-F 8:00 - 5:00; closed from 12:00pm to 1:00 pm

**Summer Hours Main Office Hours: (CHECK DOOR SIGN) Usual hours are:** 7:30 – 4:30; closed from 12:00pm to 1:00pm

### **Copying/Printing/Supplies/Mail**

- The copier is located in room 214 (the “kiosk”) and you may access the copier at any time of day.
- The copy machine is for course related use only. Your instructor will ask you to print course materials using their copy code (you don’t get your own) or use the department code.
- You may also print directly from the kiosk computer.
  - Printing from the large copier requires your instructor’s or department copy code as above.
  - The computer is usually always on.
- Office supplies for teaching purposes are available in the kiosk.
  - Most TA's use the chalkboards in classrooms, but you can also use electronic means as well.
- Your mailbox is located in the kiosk.
  - Do NOT instruct students to drop off their assignments in your mailbox; use an envelope outside your office or the drop box in the main office.

### **Scheduling/Offices/Keys**

- Scheduling questions should be directed to Karen.
  - Email her if you need to reserve a room for a review session, etc. Include the use for the room, date/time, and number of students.
- Office assignments and key paperwork are handled by Krystle.
  - You will pick up your keys at Access Services in the stadium (Gate 8, lower level, east side) and leave them there when your role changes.
  - Your student ID is used to enter the ECON building when it is locked.

### **Scantron Testing**

- If your instructor asks you to pick up and/or deliver bubble sheets (Scantrons) for grading in the testing assessment center, go to UMC 1B72B. Before you go make sure you know the following information:
  - How much is each question worth?
  - What is the total number of points available on the exam?
  - Is your class semester grading (i.e., is Scanning Services keeping track of all grades rather than the professor? Usually the answer is no.)
  - Does the professor want a merged Excel file with the scores?

### **Telephones**

- You have one in your office.
- Information on how to use voicemail is here:  
<http://www.colorado.edu/oit/services/voice-communications/voicemail>.

- Information on placing calls from office is here:  
<http://www.colorado.edu/oit/services/voice-communications/telephone-service/cisco-voip>.

### **Paydays**

- Paydays are the last working day of the month.
- You will receive a half-month's pay at the end of August, 8 full months from Sept. through April, and a half-month's pay at the end of May.
- If there is any problem with your pay, please see Krystle.

### **Tutoring**

- If you would like to be included on the private tutoring list, include your name, contact phone/email (personal!), your fee, and courses that you wish to tutor.
- You may not use your office for tutoring sessions.
- You may not tutor students that are enrolled in the course that you teach.

### **Computer Lab**

- Access the graduate student computer lab ECON 6 (in the basement, next to the undergrad lab) with your Buff OneCard.

### **Additional Information**

- Your Lead GPTI works with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) to offer resources for teaching and personal academic/professional development. Visit their website at <https://www.colorado.edu/c> <https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/enter/teaching-learning/> for more info and resources.
- One of the keystones of the CTL is the teaching and professional development teaching certificates which can help your future careers. For more information visit <https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/programs/graduate-certificates>