Guidelines for CU Boulder Sociology Department Graduate Student Teaching Assistants

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Document was last updated on 7/1/2020.*

This document provides guidelines for graduate student Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the Department of Sociology, including topics that should be discussed with individual instructors (in italics).

This document is intended to serve as a resource for new and continuing Graduate Teaching Assistants at the University of Colorado Boulder’s Sociology Department. It was created to clarify the expectations around workload and conduct for both TAs and instructors. It also serves as a guidebook and has advice and recommendations on TAing in the department. There is no one right way to TA or use this document. However, this should help set up a TA in the department to clarify what to expect out of the TA experience.

**Position Overview**

* TAs are generally on 50% appointments in the Sociology Department. This means TAs are being paid to work an average of 20 hours a week for their teaching positions. There are some weeks TAs may work a little more (like after a test or assignment) and some in which less work is required. However, such workloads should even out, and the average should not exceed 20 hours per week.

*TAs are not be expected to work more than 20 hours per week on average. If more hours are required to accomplish the job, discuss with the instructor and/or the Undergraduate Chair.*

* Most, but not all, TA positions involve teaching recitations. Recitations take the form of three 50-minute classes outside of lecture, with about 30 students per class. Some courses only have one TA, meaning there are about 100 students in a lecture split across three recitations. Larger courses with 200-400 students have a team of TAs who coordinate with each other and the instructor. Sometimes these larger classes are assigned a lead TA, typically someone who has taught before, often for the exact course and with the same instructor. Both recitations and “TA-ing” on a team are discussed below.
* Given the nature of the semester-long teaching contracts, TAs are not technically entitled to sick days or time off, although the department certainly aims to support good health! If you need to miss work due to illness or another legitimate reason, you must notify the instructor immediately so that they can create a plan for your absence.
* Recitations should not be cancelled except for official campus closures (such as for snow) or for an emergency. There are important state-level standards for “contact hours” that necessitate commitment to scheduled class times. If you anticipate not being able to hold a particular recitation, discuss with the instructor so alternative arrangements can be made.

*It is important to communicate with the instructor right away when you think you may miss work. Instructors are expected to be understanding of personal emergencies and illnesses.*

* Instructors are socializing you into the teaching profession – they are teaching mentors in addition to being the “instructor of record” for the course. As mentors, instructors are generally happy to answer questions and provide advice. In essence, your appointment as a TA should be beneficial to the instructor, you, and the undergraduates in the course.

**Duties**

* TAs are expected to be familiar with the syllabus, students, readings, and other course material. This includes understanding the grading scheme and being able to field questions about the logistics of the course. The topics, readings, or grading schemes might be unfamiliar to you or different from how you experienced them at other institutions. That is okay. You are always welcome to ask for clarification on any matters pertaining to course material and structure.

*Don’t feel pressured to work entirely independently. You are supporting the instructor, but they are also supporting you.*

* It is important to be consistent in course policy across your recitations and between you and the instructor. If something in the syllabus is unclear or ambiguous to you, or if you are not sure how to answer a student’s question, ask the instructor before making a decision.
* TAs, especially when working in groups, may be asked to meet with instructors regularly outside of recitation or lecture. Weekly meetings are very helpful ways to discuss teaching practice, clarify course concepts, and otherwise work well together as a team.

*Instructors should communicate expectations for how TAs are expected to meet at the beginning of the semester. Graduate students are welcome to reach out at that time to set a meeting to discuss these expectations.*

* You are expected to attend and take notes at lecture. Since you are part of the course’s instructional team, it is important to know what the instructor has presented. This is essential to effectively advise students about assignments and evaluate their comprehension of lecture material. Additionally, as a TA, you are being trained on how to teach, and attending lecture is a valuable part of your training.

*The instructor should lay out the expectations for lecture, including where you should sit while they are lecturing*, *at the beginning of term.*

* You will be responsible for answering student inquiries over email promptly (within reason). Policies vary by instructor, but typically this looks like within 24 hours on weekdays.

*Discuss with the instructor how promptly you are expected to respond to emails.*

* You may be asked to write a separate syllabus for your recitations to outline expectations. If this is the case, you may ask for an example syllabus to help structure yours.
* You may be responsible for tracking attendance. The instructor will most likely have an existing mechanism to do so or may ask you to help develop one. Typical ways of taking attendance include sign-in sheets, clickers, Canvas’s attendance function, or short written responses.
* You may be expected to proctor exams in a separate space for students who have documented disability accommodations, and to schedule such exams. Refer to department and university policy regarding disability accommodations.

*Instructors should give you a few weeks warning if you are expected coordinate disability accommodations and, if so, what that process will entail. More information on what this process will look like is provided by the Undergraduate Chair and office staff.*

* In some cases, you will be expected to collaborate with the instructor and/or other TAs to share in responsibilities such as writing test questions, managing the course Canvas page, or creating curricula and slides for recitations. This is not considered additional work and should be factored into your 20 hours a week of expected labor.

*If you would like to give a guest lecture, discuss the possibility with the instructor. Most instructors are happy to facilitate this.*

* You may be expected to print materials for class. For most printing needs, graduate students should use the printer on the 3rd floor of Ketchum. For very large print jobs, such as for courses with hundreds of students, the front office staff can help. See “Points of Contact,” below.

*Instructors should give you ample time to complete tasks if it is within your duties to print materials like syllabi or tests.*

* You are expected to offer at least two regular office hours per week to meet with students. These should be noted on the syllabus and on campus, preferably in Ketchum. In order to make office hours accessible to as many students as possible, you should offer them at different times and days than the professor. To schedule private meeting space for office hours, please see the Undergraduate Program Assistant.
* Issues around mandatory reporting require careful attention. As a TA, you are in supervisory role given that you have the authority to evaluate students. CU Boulder has policies that prohibit discrimination and harassment, including sexual harassment, sexual assault, intimate partner abuse, and stalking. “Mandatory reporting” requires any supervisor who becomes aware of a complaint to promptly report it to the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC) if the alleged perpetrator is an employee or a student. Additional information is available here: <https://www.colorado.edu/ova/mandatory-reporting>

*Immediately talk to the instructor, Graduate Chair, or Department Chair if you have questions about a particular student report and/or the reporting requirements. This is part of ensuring the university remains safe for everyone and that you are supported by the appropriate resources and offices.*

* Instructors may hire students for non-academic tasks (e.g. helping to move an office, babysitting, pet care), but students should be paid for such work with payment commensurate to market rates and agreed upon in advance. Such tasks are not part of teaching positions.

***Grading***

* + You will be responsible for grading assignments and inputting grades, at the direction of the instructor. Any problems with grading, including standardizing against other graders on a team, should first be brought to the instructor of the course. The Undergraduate Chair can also act as a resource for concerns due to grading.

*Instructors are expected to give clear instructions for standards and what to focus on when grading each assignment. Many will co-develop these standards with TAs.*

The time it takes to grade students’ assignments can vary by the length of assignment and/or number of students. A typical turnaround for many assignments is no more than two weeks but instructors often can intervene if grading is taking much longer or if deadlines coincide with your work in courses or research projects. Instructors should create a standard for grading assignments.

*Communicate with the instructor throughout the semester about reasonable times for grading assignments and posting grades. Instructors should be appropriately flexible with minimum turnaround times.*

* + Do not release exam grades before discussing them with the instructor. Some instructors want to look at graded material or see general student trends before grades are released. Grades can be “muted” on Canvas under the dropdown menu for each assignment in the gradebook and then “unmuted” to release them.
  + Do feel free to ask your instructor for advice about how to respond to particular students’ inquiries or concerns about grades (or anything else!). Work with the instructor to determine how best to address any grade disputes.

***Recitations***

* + Recitations’ curricula are sometimes created by the instructor and are often co-created by the instructor and the TA (or TA team).

*Work with your instructor to determine how you should structure each week’s recitations. Ideally, you are not expected to come up with recitations completely by yourself but have some level of independence.*

**Communication with the Instructor**

* Discuss with the instructor, and mutually agree on, the frequency and length of your in-person meetings. Regularly scheduled, weekly meetings are highly recommended*.* Feel free to request additional meetings if concerns arise. Discuss with the instructor and mutually agree on how best to communicate outside of in-person advising meetings. This includes expectations about communication outside of regular business hours.

*It should be at the TA’s discretion to decide which type of communication method is most preferred. TAs should not be expected to give out their own personal information, such as personal phone numbers, if they are not comfortable doing so. Means of communication should be mutually agreed upon and if you have concerns, please reach out to the Undergraduate Chair. You can also write to the Chair, including filing an anonymous complaint via a form on the departmental homepage.*

* If any problems arise with students in the class, share these with the instructor. Issues can include classroom disruptions, individual challenges (e.g., chronic physical health problems, mental health issues, family emergencies), requests for extensions or excused absences, grade disputes, inappropriate or threatening comments, etc. This includes any reports that need to be made about student conduct and/or as required by mandatory reporting.

*It is the instructor’s job to support you and also to know what is going on with students. Do not hesitate to inform them. Always bring these issues up sooner rather than later.*

**Communication with Students**

* If a student asks to be excused from a deadline or for other exceptions as related to course requirements, ask the instructor how you should proceed.
* Keep all email correspondence with students until the end of the semester, if not longer. You can declutter your inbox by making a folder for the class you teach.

*Ask the instructor for guidance as to how long they would like you to keep email correspondence after the end of the semester.*

* Always be professional in your correspondence with students. Avoid casual language.
* Keep the office door open during conversations with students. If the topic is sensitive (e.g., how to improve a low grade), consider meeting in a consultation room (Ketchum 331-337 -- as teaching staff, you have priority and can ask undergraduates in these rooms to vacate). Consider making a reservation for a consultation room through the Undergraduate Program Assistant for the week after you finish grading an exam or paper. This is a time of high demand for individual conversation.

**Points of Contact**

* The Department’s Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies (aka “Undergraduate Chair”) is your point of contact for problems you are not comfortable bringing to your instructor. They also make decisions about teaching assignments, oversee course scheduling, and help faculty and students address teaching-related problems. If you are concerned about anonymity, you can file an anonymous complaint via the form on the department home page which is received by the Chair.

*The Department website provides up-to-date information for the relevant contacts listed in this section.*

* Our Undergraduate Program Assistant is your point of contact in the office for administrative issues. They field inquiries from students about enrollment, can help with waitlist questions, enrolling students, room changes, grade changes, disability accommodations, and other logistical components of the undergraduate experience.
* TAs should discuss with the instructor any offensive written or verbal comments that come up in class - directed either at the TA or others. It is usually the job of the instructor to intervene in such situations. Both TAs and instructors are encouraged to discuss best strategies with the Undergrad Chair or Department Chair.
* The front office staff are an excellent resource for other office needs like supplies, running scantrons, and printing written materials like tests for very large classes.They can be reached at [sociology@colorado.edu](mailto:sociology@colorado.edu).

*If you are a TA for a very large course and have a large printing job, ask for the dates they will be needed. Send the materials to the office staff well in advance (at least 24 hours typically and 48 hours during busy times like exam periods.).*

* + The [Center for Teaching and Learning](https://www.colorado.edu/center/teaching-learning/) (CTL) Lead serves as a peer to support graduate student teachers. They serve as a liaison from the sociology department to CU’s Graduate Teaching Program, advertise workshops, do formative teaching assessments, and help manage opportunities for all graduate student teachers in the department. This position is held by a Sociology graduate student, and their term lasts one academic year.
  + If you have any concerns about the department, including within your experience as a TA, there are several mechanisms through which to report:
* [A form on the home page of the Sociology website](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe-RMUEp2XjPvpRavm5webkFFOXMaI7beUOCbPKv5pN72lg1w/viewform) provides anonymous feedback to the department chair;
* The graduate student representatives on the Graduate Committee route a form each semester on which to report issues, and you can also reach out to them directly;
* SGSC executive members are open to fielding any concerns and offering guidance;
* If you feel you have experienced harassment or discrimination, or have been the victim of a crime, you can make a report with the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](https://www.colorado.edu/ova/mandatory-reporting-policy-cu-boulder) (OIEC).
* Other resources include:
* [Office of Victim’s Assistance](https://www.colorado.edu/ova/) (OVA): a confidential resource that offers counseling services;
* [Ombuds](https://www.colorado.edu/ombuds/): confidential counseling on university-related concerns;
* [Faculty Relations](https://www.colorado.edu/facultyrelations/about): conflict resolutions for problems that fall outside the purview of Ombuds.

**Resources for Undergraduate Students**

* If you suspect plagiarism, cheating, or another form of academic dishonesty, discuss this with the instructor, including whether to report these incidents to the [Honor Code](https://www.colorado.edu/sccr/honor-code) office. Some of these issues can be avoided by teaching students how to cite their work correctly before written assignments are due.
* [The Writing Center](https://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writing-center) is a great resource for students who are struggling with their writing. It is not your job to “fix” students’ writing or teach them how to write. Similarly, the Writing Center cannot teach students sociology. They can help with syntax, grammar, formatting, and cohesion of written assignments.
* [Students of Concern](https://www.colorado.edu/studentaffairs/students-concern) is a mechanism for involving university administrators to connect students to resources. This is where to refer students who are struggling academically or in their personal lives, as well as those who are aggressive or violate boundaries (the website has a useful list of concerns and behaviors that are covered). If you think this might be helpful, document your concerns in writing, share that with the instructor, and discuss the issue with them to decide whether to make a referral*.*
* If a student speaks to you about emotional or other difficult personal problems, you can refer them to [CAPS](https://www.colorado.edu/counseling/) (psychological services). If they are in danger of hurting themselves or others, you are obligated to report this to Students of Concern. Separately, you can call the CAPS 24-hour hotline at 303-492-2277 for advice on how to support a student in this position. If you think you should refer a student to CAPS, document your concerns in writing, and share that with the instructor*.*
* If a student shares with you they feel they have experienced harassment or discrimination, or have been the victim of a crime, you are obligated to report this to the [Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance](https://www.colorado.edu/ova/mandatory-reporting-policy-cu-boulder) (OIEC). You can also refer the student to the [Office of Victims Assistance](https://www.colorado.edu/ova/) (OVA), which is confidential. If you think you should refer a student to OIEC and/or OVA, document your concerns in writing, and share that with the instructor*.*

**Teaching Resources for TAs**

* The [Sociology Repository](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pDhJSgkoHvfDa3x-jfwg1niaRkDbPNGW?usp=sharing) has teaching materials posted by previous graduate students, including TAs.
* The [Center for Teaching and L](https://www.colorado.edu/gtp/)earning (CTL) has workshops and other materials available for graduate student teachers.
* [The Office of Information Technology](https://oit.colorado.edu/) (OIT) can help you with any issues with technology you may have, including with myCUinfo and Canvas.

*If you have a problem with technology in the classroom, use the phone on the wall to call immediately – they are quite responsive!*

* [Arts and Sciences Support of Education Through Technology](https://www.colorado.edu/assett/) (ASSETT) can help you better integrate technology into your teaching, including free classroom consultations.
* [The Center for Inclusion and Social Change](https://www.colorado.edu/cisc/trainings-workshops) (CISC) has experts to aid in developing inclusive pedagogy.
* [CU Engage](https://www.colorado.edu/cudialogues/) will facilitate conversation in your courses on difficult topics. Work with your instructor to consider these options.
* The [glossary of terms](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1eIhWNnsNJSNme4hWhma1ZVziuRmauCOOLUXt_HN1Nqw/edit?usp=sharing) aimed at students identifying as first generation and/or being from low income background has information on terms specific to doctoral careers, CU, and the department. This includes teaching terms.
* The department’s liaison to Continuing Education, [Laura Patterson](http://laura.patterson@colorado.edu), can help support those teaching remotely and online.