

Teaching Assistant Duties and Policies

Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences

Introduction

Welcome to teaching in the Department of Earth and Atmospheric Sciences at the University of Houston! Being a teaching assistant (TA) will provide you with many professional development opportunities to practice your [soft skills](#), including written and oral communication, time management, organization, adaptability, and more. These skills are directly transferable to whichever career path you follow, are desirable to employers, and should be showcased on your resume.

The EAS department has two faculty members who oversee TAs:



Jinny Sisson

vbsisson@central.uh.edu

Office: SR1 236-A



Dan Hauptvogel

dwhauptv@central.uh.edu

Office: SR1 225-D

Email is the best form of contact. **Please send any communication to both of us** because we both need to be aware of issues that arise. Typically, the first to read your message will reply, and this is especially handy if one of us is traveling, teaching, or unavailable.

This guide will introduce you to TA duties and requirements, how to prepare for teaching, how to be an effective instructor, and discuss some common situations you may encounter. The purpose is to get you feeling comfortable about entering a teaching-focused role, even though you may have no formal training or experience in education

Duties

Orientation

TA orientation is held on the Friday before every semester begins. The morning is usually a session with brand-new TAs, followed by an afternoon session with all department TAs. We discuss issues that came up in the previous semester, teaching tips, development, and more.

Note: If you travel between semesters, have summer work or internships, you need to be back on campus for TA orientation.

Duties Overview

The responsibilities of a TA vary from semester to semester depending on department needs and course enrollment. In general, you'll work about 15 to 20 hours per week on TA duties. There are two primary roles that TAs are assigned, plus a combination of additional duties to reach 15 to 20 hours.

The two primary TA roles are:

1. **Laboratory Instructor:** Most TAs will be assigned as instructors of the laboratory components of courses at the undergraduate level. Most undergraduate labs meet for two sessions a week, which are one hour and twenty minutes long. Each lab is typically assigned two TA instructors, one serving as the lead TA and the other as an assistant TA, though it is up to the faculty member in charge of the course to determine this relationship. Some faculty may require you to attend the lecture.
2. **Lecture Assistant:** Some TAs may be assigned as assistants for lecture courses rather than formal teaching duties. In this role, TAs are responsible for grading class assignments and exams, taking attendance, answering student questions, and performing other duties as defined by the lecture professor. Most TAs in this role are required to attend the class.

In addition to these two primary roles, TAs can be assigned a combination of other duties:

- **Geoscience Learning Center (GLC):** Almost all TAs will be assigned to staff the GLC, a tutoring center for students enrolled in EAS courses. Most TAs work between 2 and 4 hours per week in the GLC. Specifics about GLC policy are available on the EAS website for [GLC Duties and FAQ](#).
- **Proctoring:** Many TAs are assigned to supervise or monitor students during exams for lecture classes. Some faculty may also require help with some light grading.
- **Field trips assistants:** Several courses have field trips that are either required or optional for extra credit. These may require you to work on a weekend or during spring break.
- **Other Duties:** You may get assigned other duties as determined by the department.

Regardless of your assigned duties, all TAs must attend department seminars, which are typically held on Fridays from 11:00 am to 12:00 pm during the fall and spring semesters.

Some TAs are assigned to one course, others get two. Some are assigned as a lead TA in one course and an assistant TA in another section. We try to balance your workload so that you work no more than 20 hours per week. Those who have lighter teaching duties are assigned a heavier load of additional duties.

You must be available to perform your TA duties through the last day of the semester, which is typically early December for fall semesters and early May for spring semesters. If you plan on traveling over the breaks, you must consult the [UH academic calendar](#) to see when classes end and begin before you book your travel. Be sure to be back on campus by the Friday before semesters start for TA orientation.

Policies

Requirements to Maintain TA Status

To remain a TA, you must:

1. Perform your assigned duties
2. Maintain a GPA of 3.0 or higher
3. Maintain full-time status with 9 credit hours per semester
4. Make progress on your degree, including meeting the milestones:
 - a. Ph.D. students
 - i. 2nd semester: establish your research committee
 - ii. 4th semester: qualifying exam or paper submission, and dissertation proposal defense
 - iii. 5th semester and above: meet with their academic committee every fall to give a yearly progress report
 - iv. By 10th semester: dissertation defense
 - b. M.S. students
 - i. 2nd semester: research committee and proposal defense
 - ii. By 4th semester: thesis defense

Consult the [department guidelines](#) for more information on degree milestones and policies.

Students who receive graduate assistantships (i.e., teaching assistantships/TAs or research assistantships/RAs) may not be employed elsewhere without department approval (during fall and spring semesters). Part-time employment concurrent with an assistantship must be disclosed to and approved by the department chair prior to the beginning of the term of the assistantship. Summer work or paid internships are allowed and don't need approval.

All new TAs must enroll in GEOL 6000. This is a 0-credit course for the EAS new TA orientation.

Length of TA Support

Department support combines TA and RA semesters. Ph.D. students can be supported for a maximum of 10 semesters, and M.S. students for a maximum of 4 semesters. Extensions of up to 2 semesters are given in rare cases and require a petition to the graduate advisor, a detailed explanation of why you need an extension, and a letter of support from your research advisor.

Stipend and Tuition Support

All TAs receive a monthly stipend, which is paid on the first business day of each month, for 9 months. In a standard academic year beginning with the fall semester, the first pay date is October 1, and the last is June 1. If you are a TA for only one semester, you'll receive 4.5 payments.

- M.S. stipend - \$2,031.76/month (\$18,285.89 per 9 months)
- Ph.D. stipend - \$2,176.21/month (\$19,585.89 per 9 months)
 - Salary numbers updated as of Spring 2025, subject to change.

M.S. and Ph.D. students receive a *Tuition Waiver*, which reduces tuition cost to the in-state rate. Ph.D. students get their tuition covered through the *Graduate Teaching Assistant Fellowship (GTAF)*. M.S. students are responsible for paying their tuition.

There are very few opportunities for TA support over the summer. Please consult with your advisor about other options for summer support. You can work a paid job or internship over the summer. You'll need to be back on campus for TA orientation.

Communication

All TAs (UH employees) must use their @cougarnet.uh.edu email for all UH-related communications. Use of personal email is not allowed.

Discipline and Dismissal

If you do not perform well in your TA duties, you may receive a warning letter or you can be dismissed from your TA position. TAs can be dismissed mid-semester, in which case any tuition waiver or GTAF will be rescinded, and you'll become immediately responsible for that semester's tuition.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

FERPA is a federal law that protects students' personal and educational information. You should never discuss a student's academic record with anyone other than that student, the instructor of record for the course you're assigned, or other university officials. Failure to adhere to the regulations contained in FERPA. Other tips:

- Hand graded work directly to the student. Do not leave a pile for students to sort through.
- Don't discuss grades in public, in front of other students, or with anyone not affiliated with UH.
- Don't give out any identifying information, including myUH#, race, gender, or ethnicity.

Students can submit official documentation to UH that specifies who you can share academic information with. Please consult Dan or Jinny if this occurs.

Title IX and Sexual Misconduct

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 protects people from sex and gender discrimination, including sexual misconduct, in educational programs and activities at institutions that receive Federal financial assistance. As a TA, you're considered a mandatory reporter. This means that you must report any instances or suspicions of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, or stalking that involve any members of UH (faculty, students, staff, visitors). Incidents you need to report can occur on or off campus, as long as the involve at least one member of the UH community. You can find the reporting form link at the bottom of every UH webpage, "[Discrimination and Sexual Misconduct Reporting and Awareness](#)". Failure to report an instance is a criminal offense and will result in immediate termination.

More information on discrimination policies can be found on the [Equal Opportunity Services \(EOS\)](#) webpages:

- [Anti-Discrimination Policy](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)
- [ADA Policy](#)
- [Pregnancy and Parenting Policy](#)

Consensual Relationships

The [university policy](#) is that there can be no consensual dating, intimate, romantic, and/or sexual relationships between a UH employee and an individual over whom the employee has responsibility. This includes people you may teach, instruct, manage, supervise, advise, counsel, oversee, grade, coach, train, treat, or evaluate in any way. What this boils down to is that you cannot date any students you interact with during your TA duties.

Mandatory Training

All TAs must complete the annual mandatory training every fall semester. These are online modules from UH about FERPA, ethics, hazardous materials, and more. You should receive an email from UH in early October with instructions. They are typically due in November. Failure to complete the trainings can result in the termination of your TA appointment.

GLC Schedule

The GLC schedule is made to fit the needs of our undergraduate students and professors. We first accommodate faculty requests because some professors want TAs there before or after their class. This is then balanced with TA requests, such as regular doctor appointments, religious time, and childcare. Finally, we try to accommodate any time preference requests for other reasons. The most common request we get from TAs is to have their GLC shifts between 10-2 on the same day as when they are in lab, but it's impossible to accommodate everyone. We must be sure not to schedule TAs when they have classes, group meetings, or regular meetings with a discipline seminar, professor, company, etc. Then, some need large blocks of lab time for their research. For large enrollment classes (Climate Change, Physical Geology, and Natural Disasters), there need to be TAs in the GLC every day of the week. This means that some TAs must work on days different from their lecture/lab times. We try to avoid having a TA work from 8:30 am to 7 pm (including their own classes). For example, if a TA has late classes, we try to avoid having an early GLC shift.