

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

OFFICE OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

INTRODUCTION

A growing literature across academic disciplines supports the conclusion that participation of undergraduate teaching assistants in the higher education classroom provides benefits for the undergraduate teaching assistant (UTA), students in courses served by UTAs, and faculty instructors of UTA-assisted courses. UTAs have been found to develop close academic relationships with faculty mentors [1, 2], learn about higher education practice and processes [1, 3, 4], and gain knowledge of the content of courses in which they serve [1, 5]. Additionally, UTAs develop greater awareness of their role as learners apart from faculty [1], gain in self-confidence [5], and develop skills valued by employers and graduate schools—including communication and leadership [1, 3, 4, 5, 6]. Students in courses have been found to learn more in courses served by UTAs [1, 7, 8] and to express more satisfaction with course TAs when UTAs are employed [7]. Finally, faculty instructors receive valuable support from UTAs [1, 2, 9] and also profit from the student perspective on their courses provided by UTAs [1, 7, 9].

References

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The University of Maryland recognizes the value of undergraduate students serving as teaching assistants in regular university courses. Undergraduate teaching assistants gain valuable experience in higher education practice and processes, and they have the opportunity to develop academic relationships with faculty mentors. Faculty course instructors receive valuable support for their teaching, and they gain helpful student perspective on their classroom instruction. Students undertaking courses served by undergraduate teaching assistants also benefit, for they have been found to learn more about the subject-matter at stake in those courses.

Minimum Eligibility Requirements

To serve as an undergraduate teaching assistant, an undergraduate student must be in good academic standing and demonstrate curricular or extra-curricular preparation in the field area in which he or she will be serving as a teaching assistant. Also, prior to serving as an undergraduate teaching assistant, a student must secure the agreement of a faculty mentor whom he or she will assist with the teaching of a regular university course. Additionally, an undergraduate student must have completed or concurrently participate in pedagogical or mentoring experience that prepares the student for service as a teaching assistant. Often, this preparation will involve participation in the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program at the University of Maryland (see <http://www.cte.umd.edu/teaching/utaprograms.html>); however, an undergraduate student may alternatively participate in a pedagogical or mentoring experience officially recognized in the faculty mentor's College, School, department, or other unit as an appropriate preparation for service as a teaching assistant. Finally, undergraduate students must agree to comply with the Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and the University Policy and Procedures on the Disclosure of Student Education Records (<http://www.president.umd.edu/policies/iii630a.html>) before assuming duties as a teaching assistant (e.g., utilizing the confidentiality tutorial and supervisor notification form at https://www.sis.umd.edu/ferpa//Ferpa_Form.htm). Colleges, Schools, departments, and other units may establish eligibility requirements beyond these minimum requirements

Duties

Undergraduate teaching assistants may be assigned duties for up to fifteen hours per week during a semester of service in a course. Such duties must be in a support or apprenticeship role under the guidance of the faculty mentor and may include course planning, attendance-taking, distributing course materials, tutoring, leading discussions or laboratory experiences, leading examination reviews, proctoring examinations and quizzes, peer-mentoring, scoring examinations and other class assignments, entering grades in grade books or electronic databases, and carrying out other duties similar to these. At the same time, undergraduate teaching assistants may not serve as independent instructors for courses, present course content that has not been authorized by the faculty course instructor, or assign and submit official course grades.

Grievances

Where conflicts between undergraduate teaching assistants and faculty mentors arise about workload, conditions of employment, or personal and ethical issues, the student should first attempt to resolve the grievance informally by consulting the faculty mentor (or course coordinator), and if this does not produce a satisfactory outcome, the student should consult with the faculty mentor's unit chair or director. Either before or after such consultations, the student may informally contact the Undergraduate Student Ombudsperson. If formal resolution of a grievance becomes necessary, then the grievance must be addressed to the faculty mentor's Dean.