PROVIDING TEACHING-RELATED SUPPORT
James R. Horn, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115, U.S.A.
jrhorn@niu.edu

Your New Journey
• Do you know how you will find your balance?
• Know what to expect
• Think of your T.A. experience as an important phase of your training

BACKGROUND
• Majority of TAs at NIU provide teaching-related support and not primary instruction
• But, teaching-related support involves many of the same responsibilities related to providing primary instruction
• Focus of this presentation is to discuss some of the common responsibilities of teaching-related support
• Your department may offer discipline-specific TA training
• Check with your supervisor for additional training related to your responsibilities

TYPES OF TEACHING-RELATED SUPPORT
Assisting Students
Grading
Lab, Studio, or Clinic Support
Assisting Your Course Supervisor

Do you know what your duties will be?

Do you feel prepared to start?
If you are not sure...
If not, that’s OK!
(and it is normal)

Know your responsibilities
and related policies

Responsibilities
• Work hours/week
• Duration of work
• Types of responsibilities
• Office hours
• Documentation requirements
• Reporting requirements
• Training and professional development requirements
• Performance expectations
• Performance evaluation

Policies
• FERPA - Family Educational Right to Privacy Act
  (www.reg.niu.edu/regrec/confidentiality/index.shtml)
• Assisting students with disabilities
  (niu.edu/disability/) and emotional difficulties
  (www.niu.edu/cdsc/)
• Academic dishonesty and incident reporting
  (https://publicdocs.maxient.com/reportingform.php
  NorthernIllinoisUniv&layout_id=1)
• Safety policies and procedures, and incident reporting related to your responsibilities
• Sexual harassment and ethics training
• Course load requirements for TAs
• Policies pertaining to Graduate Assistantships
  (www.niu.edu/provost/policies/appm/IV1.shtml)

Assisting students

You may assist students with
• Tutoring
• Recitation sessions
• One-on-one help during office hours
• Laboratory/Studio/Clinic sessions
• In-class discussions and activities
• Out of class activities (e.g. field trips)
• Online discussions
• Other?
**When assisting students**

- Focus on the scope of your responsibilities
- Help your students to learn but not do their course work for them
- Be professional and encouraging
- If you recognize problems, inform your faculty supervisor as soon possible
- Do not socialize with students you are a TA for as it may lead to conflicts of interest
- Do not let students take advantage of your willingness to help beyond the call of duty (and contact you at odd hours for help!)

---

**Grading**

- Grading involves evaluating students’ work against certain course objectives
- Grading techniques may differ depending on type of work and testing mechanism:
  - Quantitative vs qualitative work
  - Written work vs performance
  - Multiple-choice tests vs detailed tests
- Find out from your supervisor how to grade different types of work:
  - Use of rubrics
  - Specific guidelines or procedures
  - Assigning final grades (distribution vs breakpoints)

**Grading Tips**

- Grade the same problem or work for all the students before moving on to the next one
- Be consistent and fair as you would like to be graded
- Inform your supervisor if you suspect any academic dishonesty in students’ work while grading them
- **DO NOT** display grades publicly with names or IDs
- Do not discuss students’ performance with anyone other than your faculty supervisor
- Keep records for at least 13 months and be prepared to explain your grading process in case there is an appeal
- Protect the grade roll and keep a back-up copy
How is student work graded in your disciplines?

How will you grade students’ work?

What potential challenges do you anticipate in grading?

Regardless of lab/studio/clinic setting you may have to:
  • Lead or assist with laboratory, performance studio, or clinic sessions
  • Set up, install and maintain equipment and materials
  • Enforce safety precautions, take appropriate actions when necessary, and report safety violations
  • Follow special protocols in labs involving human subjects, animal subjects, laser, radiation, etc.
  • Undergo training before assisting students

Lab/Studio/Clinic Support

Lab/Studio/Clinic Tips:
  • Get the necessary training first
  • Familiarize yourself with safety policies and procedures
  • Know how to enforce safety policies or take action when necessary
  • Learn to set up, calibrate, clean up and maintain equipment
  • Practice leading laboratory, studio or clinical sessions
  • Learn how to manage students in laboratory, studio and clinic settings
Who will be providing support in laboratory/studio/clinics?

What will be your role in that setting?

How will you prepare yourself for it?

How will you identify safety issues and provide a safe environment?

Are there dress codes, hazardous materials, or safety procedures?

What challenges do you anticipate in the lab/studio/clinic?
Assisting Your Supervisor

- These are activities other than grading, assisting students, and lab assistance
- Researching course-related information
- Preparing lecture materials, homework assignments and solutions
- Proctoring exams, exhibits and recitals
- Assisting with in-class or out of class (e.g. field-trips, site visits) activities
- Managing the course website
- Teaching the class during the course instructor’s absence

Tips for Assisting your Supervisor Effectively

- Know the details, performance expectations, and deadlines for your assigned activities
- Meet with your supervisor regularly
- Get samples or guidelines for course materials to be produced
- For covering the class during your supervisor’s absence, be clear on what to cover, prepare, practice, and deliver
- Request feedback on your work so that you can continue to improve
- Keep track of your work and hours

What are you expected to do to assist your faculty supervisor?

General Tips

- Take your TA responsibilities seriously
- If you need help, talk to your faculty supervisor, Graduate Director, or Chair
- Keep a detailed record of your work hours and activities in case there is a concern
- Consult your department chair if you are asked to work more than the required hours or to do tasks not appropriate for your role
- Request permission from supervisor for planned absence, and inform students about your absence in advance

How will you learn the best ways to complete those tasks?
General Tips

- Become proficient on technology tools regardless of your discipline
- Be aware of policies and procedures that apply to your work
- Do not post photos or comments online that may be considered unprofessional
- Attend Faculty Development’s programs and training offered by your department
- Do more than the minimum! Go beyond the call of duty to gain the necessary experience and recognition

Conclusions

- As a TA, you have a significant impact on students and their learning
- You have the opportunity to:
  - Develop teaching skills in a safe environment
  - Prepare yourself for future career
  - Contribute to university’s teaching mission
  - Be recognized for your efforts
    - Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award
      www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/outstandingta.shtml
    - Graduate Teaching Certificate
      www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/tacert.shtml
- Enjoy the opportunity and make the best of it!

Resources

- Resources for Graduate Teaching Assistants:
  www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/index.shtml
- Instructional Guide for University Faculty and TAs
  www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/index.shtml
- Quick Tips on Effective Instruction
  www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/quicktips/index.shtml
- Programs for Graduate Teaching Assistants
  www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/programs/tacurrent.shtml
- TA Connections Newsletter
  www.niu.edu/taconnections/