PROVIDING TEACHING-RELATED SUPPORT

David Changnon, Ph.D.
Distinguished Teaching Professor and Board of Trustees Professor
Department of Geography
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115, U.S.A.
dchangnon@niu.edu

BACKGROUND

• Majority of TAs at NIU provide teaching-related support and not primary instruction
• Teaching-related support involves many of the same responsibilities related to providing primary instruction
• This presentation is about 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
Lab, Studio, or Clinic Support
Assisting Your Course Supervisor
Grading

IF YOU ARE NOT SURE...

If not, that’s OK!
(and it is normal)

KNOW YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AND RELATED POLICIES

Do you know what your duties will be?
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 (www.niu.edu/disability/) and emotional difficulties (www.niu.edu/csdc/)
- Academic dishonesty and incident reporting (www.niu.edu/communitystandards/)
- 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/V1.shtml)

Assisting Students

- 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 learn but do not do their course work for them
- Be professional and encouraging
- Inform your faculty supervisor of any problems as soon possible
- Don’t socialize with students you work with
- Don’t let students take advantage of you

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?

Grading
Grading

- Grading involves evaluating students’ work against course objectives
- Grading techniques may differ based 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

Grading Tips

- Grade the same problem or work for all students before moving on to the next one
- Be consistent and fair
- Inform your supervisor if you suspect any academic dishonesty in student work
- DO NOT display grades publicly with names or IDs
- Do not discuss student 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

Lab/Studio/Clinic Support

- 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 Tips:

- Get the necessary training first
- Familiarize yourself with safety policies and procedures
- Know how to enforce safety policies and take action when necessary
- Learn to set up, calibrate, clean, and maintain equipment
- Practice leading laboratory, studio, or clinical sessions
- Learn how to manage students in laboratory, studio, and clinic settings

Assisting Your Supervisor

- 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
### Assisting your Supervisor May Involve:
- 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

### 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

### 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 not do the minimum but 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](http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/outstandingta.shtml)
    - Graduate Teaching Certificate
      - [www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/tacert.shtml](http://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](http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/ta/index.shtml)
- Instructional Guide for University Faculty and TAs: [www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/index.shtml](http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/guide/index.shtml)
- Quick Tips on Effective Instruction: [www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/quicktips/index.shtml](http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/resources/quicktips/index.shtml)
- Programs for Graduate Teaching Assistants: [www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/programs/tacurrent.shtml](http://www.facdev.niu.edu/facdev/programs/tacurrent.shtml)
- TA Connections Newsletter: [www.niu.edu/taconnections/](http://www.niu.edu/taconnections/)