Succeeding as a TA in Lab and Tutorial Settings

Presented by
Sarah West
Assistant Professional Specialist
Dept. of Chemistry and Biochemistry

Michelle Bertke
Assistant Professional Specialist
Dept. of Chemistry and Biochemistry

The Notre Dame Student
This year there are
- 18,157 applications
- 3,593 admitted
- 2,010 enrolled
Enrolled students
- 42% ranked in top 1% of their class
- 79% ranked in top 5%
- Median scores: SAT 1460    ACT  33
*data compiled from: http://admissions.nd.edu/admission-and-application/admissions-statistics/

The role of a TA
- Additional support for a course.
- This will vary from course to course and may include
  - Holding office hours
  - Running lab or tutorial sessions
  - Attending course lectures
  - GRADING!
  - Attending weekly meetings with instructor
  - Holding review sessions
  - Guest lecture
  - Posting information/grades on CMS (i.e. Sakai)
Guidelines for Teaching Assistants

1. Benefit from your own experiences.
   - You were once a student, too.
   - Remember what was good and bad about a class and/or the instructor.
   - Think how you can take advantage of the good points and avoid the bad points.

2. Benefit from the lectures you attend.
   - Pay attention to how the material is taught.
   - Pay attention to the students and what they are (or are not) understanding.
   - Analyze the lectures and lecturing styles.

3. Punctuality
   - Arrive early! This allows you to set up your classroom/lab and answer student questions.

4. Acting as an interface
   - You are the liaison between professor and student.
   - You must understand, support, and reinforce the professor.
   - You must never undermine the course or the professor formally or informally.
   - COMMUNICATE with the professor.
   - Ask Questions.
   - Provide feedback.
5. Be prepared
   - Preparation before arriving to the lecture room or lab is crucial.
   - Students will know if you are not prepared.

In Lab
   - Complete each experiment along with the post-lab questions.
   - Know how to use lab equipment.
   - Know location of all materials, waste disposal, and safety.

In Tutorial/Office Hours/Study Sessions
   - Complete assigned (and unassigned) problems.
   - Answer questions about lectures and any other topics about the course.

6. Be in contact with your students
   - Move around the room.
   - Learn the students’ names and use them frequently.
   - Respond to emails in a timely manner.
   - Keep students on an email list.

7. Professionalism
   - You are not their buddy, but you are not a robot either.

8. Do not talk down to or belittle students
   - Treat students as young colleagues.
   - If there is a critical matter to discuss with a student, discuss it privately. Not in front of his/her peers.

9. Attitude
   - Be Enthusiastic!
   - Behave as if you are important and treat your students as if they are even more important.
   - Teaching is your job, treat it like one. Treat it like a chore and you will have problems.
10. Admit ignorance
- When you cannot immediately answer a question, admit that you don’t know the answer.
- Inform the student(s) that you will seek the answer and respond as soon as possible. “That’s a great question, but it’s a bit beyond me. I’ll check with the instructor and email you all the answer.”
- Work with the student in finding the answer from a textbook or other source. “That’s a great question. Let’s take a look into the text to see what the author has to say on this issue.”
- “That’s a great question. Who has a start toward answering it?”
- Hopefully this will not happen too often if you are well-prepared.

Office Hours & Review Sessions

Office Hours
- Encourage students to work in groups.
- Be on time!
- Walk around the room.
- Be Prepared.

Review Sessions
- Formal/Structured
- Informal/Q&A

Grading
- Follow the grading rubric!
- Return graded assignments in a timely matter. Preferably one week.
- Provide good feedback when grading to explain why points were taken off.
- Keep good records of grades.
- NEVER post grades or leave graded papers for anyone to see. Return directly to students.
- Answer keys and rubrics must NEVER be shared with students.
- You cannot discuss a student’s grades with family members. FERPA
Preparing for Lab
- Know the experiment in detail. Know how to use equipment and instrumentation.
- Know emergency response procedures.
- Be familiar with lab manual and criteria for students’ lab notebooks.
- Learn from the professor any tips on how to best help the students with the lab procedure and calculations.
- Pre-lab Lecture

Before Lab
- Be at least 15 minutes early.
- Prepare any announcements and instructions for the beginning of the lab.
- Write announcements, safety warnings, etc... on the board.
- Check for all chemicals/supplies and necessary equipment.
- Greet students by name as they enter the lab.

During Lab...
- Try not to interrupt lab work frequently with announcements.
- Circulate continually around the lab.
- Answer questions with questions when possible. “What does it say in your Lab Manual?”
- Learn to balance your desire to be friendly and conversant and your professional responsibility as an instructor.
- Make sure students return all equipment & chemicals/supplies and have cleaned their workspace.
- Enforce AND FOLLOW the safety rules.
After Lab
- Make sure everything is cleaned and put away.
- Follow up on any unanswered questions.
- Communicate with professor.

Preparing for Tutorial/Discussion
- Attend lecture. This keeps you on the same 'wavelength' as the students.
- Make sure you are teaching the material the same way as the professor.
- Be familiar with the text.
- Always plan extra material in case finishing really early.

Beginning of Tutorial
- Always remind students of your office hours.
- Remind them of upcoming review sessions and exams.

During Tutorial
- Call on students so one student isn’t dominating the session. This also gets everyone involved.
- Be prepared with example problems...don’t just 'wing it'.
- Don’t just solve a problem. Help the students work through the problem.
After Tutorial
- Before students leave have them write down:
  - “What was the main point that you learned today?”
  - “What was your biggest unanswered question?”
- Follow up on any unanswered questions.
- Communicate with professor.

Helpful Hints
- Keep students on an email list.
- Give Handouts...NOT answer keys.
- Quizzes can be helpful but detrimental.
- Learn as many names as you can.
- If possible, have extra office hours/review sessions.
- Go to lectures and be familiar with the book.
- Be professional