

Department of Geoscience Graduate Student Teaching Assistant Guidelines

October 2019

Graduate student Teaching Assistants (TA) are a vital part of our teaching and educational mission. They assist in large enrollment general education courses and teach many of our laboratories. Unfortunately, the departmental TA budget is insufficient to provide TA support for all courses that arguably deserve a TA. This document is intended to clarify the procedures and criteria by which TAs are assigned.

TA assignments will be decided by a committee composed of: the Director of Undergraduate Studies, the Director of Graduate Studies, the Associate Department Head, and Anne Chase, with approval of the Department Head.

Timing: The department is provided with a TA budget at the end of the Spring semester that supports TAs the following academic year. The committee meets shortly after the budget is received, but changes to TA assignments may take place until the beginning of the Fall semester based on updates in course enrollments and RA/TA requests.

Priorities and Criteria: The committee aims to provide the best possible use of TA support, including making sure that TAs are qualified to assist with their assigned course, and gives priority to large-enrollment courses and required courses for majors that include a required lab component (4-unit courses). A number of courses offer optional or required field trips but no or little lab component. The department does not deem that a semester-long TA is justified for assistance with field trips in these courses. No-cost options to consider include enrolling undergraduate preceptors and seeking student/postdoc volunteers. It has not been uncommon in the past to find willing volunteers (with HOV training or who are over age 25 and thus can drive a large occupancy vehicle rented from Enterprise) who appreciate the opportunity to attend field trips at no personal cost and to gain additional experience with field research and/or teaching. If volunteers are lacking or insufficient, it is appropriate to ask the Department for resources to hire someone to assist with a particular field trip. The response to the request will depend on availability of funds. Amount of homework given, difficulty of assignments given, the use of active learning in class, and amount of grading are not criteria that are used to determine whether a class requires TA support. Courses that are co-taught by two or more faculty are unlikely to receive TA support unless the course is sufficiently large.

TAs are provided as follows:

- One ¼ time per 100 students in general education courses
- One ¼ time per lab section in 200, 300, and when possible 400 level, lab courses required by the Geoscience major.

Courses with <50 students per faculty that involve no required or significant lab component will likely not be assigned a TA.

In the event that additional TA funds are available, a ¼ TA will be assigned to courses with the following priorities:

- Required course with >50 students per faculty that has a listed lab
- Required course with >40 students per faculty that has a listed lab
- Geoscience course with >50 students per faculty that does not have a listed lab

If there is more than one course that fits the above criteria but only one ¼ TA available, we will assign the TA to the course with the largest number of Geoscience majors. The additional TA assignments (for upper division courses) are likely to be last minute given reasons provided above. Considerations will also be given to courses taught for the first time by junior faculty members and to newly developed courses in the major.

Although faculty can send their recommendations to Anne Chase about which classes they prefer for their students to TA, the final decision on TA assignments resides with the committee and Department Head based on needs.

If you have questions about TA assignments, please contact Anne Chase. Anne Chase will coordinate with the rest of the committee and with the Department Head to resolve any TA-related issues. Please do not move or switch TAs without communicating with Anne Chase, as graduate student TA assignments must be reported to the University.