

# TEACHING ASSISTANT'S HANDBOOK

**Policies of the University of Florida  
Department of Mathematics  
August 2019**

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The following policies of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Florida are for Teaching Assistants and adjuncts. Your supervisor is Dr. Knudson, the Department Chair, if you are teaching a stand-alone section, or the course coordinator if you are teaching a discussion section of a lecture-discussion class.

## Policies for All Sections

### MEETING YOUR CLASS

1. You must meet your class when and where it is scheduled to meet. You are not allowed to cancel a class without prior authorization from your supervisor. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to arrange an acceptable substitute and to inform your coordinator and Margaret ([msomers@ufl.edu](mailto:msomers@ufl.edu), 352-294-2355) of the substitution before it occurs. The choice of substitute and the reason for your absence must be acceptable to your supervisor. If you are teaching a stand-alone class you must notify Margaret.
2. It is recommended that you pair up with another Teaching Assistant who is teaching the same course and would be available to teach your assigned periods at the last moment if necessary. As stated above, you must notify your coordinator and Margaret Somers ([msomers@ufl.edu](mailto:msomers@ufl.edu), 352-294-2355). If you cannot reach either of them, then notify the Math Department office (352- 294-2350). If it is not during business hours, then send emails to your coordinator and Margaret.
3. Remember that your teaching assignment is a contractual obligation which you accepted when you signed your letter of appointment, and it has specific beginning and ending dates. These dates extend beyond the beginning and ending of the semester. *Note that your duties can often include meetings before the beginning of the semester or around the time of posting final grades.*

### CHANGE OF TEACHING ASSIGNMENT

Trades of teaching assignments before the semester begins are acceptable within the same course, but Sandy, the coordinator, and Dr. Knudson must be notified. All other changes and trades must be approved by Dr. Knudson in advance. Notification is necessary to provide access to your class rosters.

### CLASS ROLL

You cannot add or drop students to/from your classes. All students must go through the regular drop-add process. Do not encourage them, if they cannot enroll in your section there is a reason. *Under no circumstances should you allow a student to stay in your class who is not on your roster.*

### GRADES

1. In lecture/discussion courses, all course policies on grading must be strictly followed.
2. Your supervisor may want you to input grades for your sections in the grading system, if so these grades will be reviewed by your supervisor.

3. You may not change the grade for a student by allowing them to sit through the course again.
4. An "I" (incomplete) may be given in lecture-discussion courses by permission of the course coordinator only.
5. In stand-alone courses, an "I" can only be given with the approval from Dr. Knudson. Strict guidelines are followed in the use of the "I" grade. You must fill out a contract which states exactly how you and the student will complete the course. Normally the work must be completed within the first few weeks of the following semester. The Department Incomplete Criteria is posted at <http://www.math.ufl.edu/department/incomplete-grades/> .
6. Any extra credit project or other opportunity to improve the grade that is offered to one student must be offered to all students and must be approved by the course coordinator. In particular, no student may be offered a chance to improve his/her grade after the final exam is completed. If you are a discussion leader, do not deviate from the course grading policy.

#### OFFICE HOURS

1. You must provide at least 2 hours per week when you will be in your office and available to talk to students. These hours are for students in your discussion class and for students in the overall course. It is preferable to stagger these times, rather than having them all in the same period, for the convenience of your students.
2. You must announce them to your sections.
3. You must inform the Math Dept. by filling out the requested schedule cards.
4. You must post them on your office door.
5. All scheduled office hours must be between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> periods inclusive.
6. If a student has a grade issue, you should also be willing to make arrangements with individual students to meet at other appropriate times should your office hours be inconvenient for the student.
7. If you find it necessary to miss an office hour, you should notify your sections in advance, if possible, or put a message on your office door, and in either case announce when the office hour will be made up.
8. You should also provide your students with your email address.
9. You must also work one hour in the Teaching Center Math Lab (LIT215). Please respond to the email (survey) concerning your hour in the lab.

#### PROCTORING

1. You will proctor night exams for the class you are teaching.
2. You will also be assigned night proctoring for other classes.
3. You will proctor your final and possibly other finals.

#### KEEP INFORMED

1. Check your mailbox at least once per day.
2. Check your official UF email at least once per day, and especially just before your classes, for important information that may need to reach you or be disseminated to your students.

3. Keeping informed is especially important for teaching assistants with discussion sections.

### CHALKBOARDS

1. The chalkboard/whiteboard space in your classroom is for the use of you and your class during your class period. All outside notices should be erased, even if they say "do not erase," as they are apt to distract your students.
2. The only exceptions would be notices directly relevant to the operation of the classroom, such as lost-and-found notices, or notices of change of room for some other class.
3. The tradition at the University of Florida is that every instructor should erase the chalkboard/whiteboard completely at the end of class as a courtesy to the next instructor.

### CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

1. Anything that might conceivably influence you in the determination of a grade is a possible conflict of interest.
2. It is a conflict of interest to tutor for compensation a student who is in your section or is taking the same course that you teaching.
3. A gift would frequently be viewed as a conflict of interest. A gift offered to you after the semester is over as thanks for a good job of teaching may be accepted provided: (1) the gift is of modest value, say \$25 or less, (2) it is clear that there was no attempt to influence the grade, and (3) your supervisor is informed.
4. A more serious example is romantic or sexual involvement. Any such involvement with a student in your section is a very serious conflict of interest. Sexual involvement places you in a position to be viewed as sexually harassing the student. Sexual harassment policy requires that *all cases be immediately reported*. See <https://titleix.ufl.edu/> for the relevant policies.

### SPECIAL REQUESTS FROM STUDENTS

1. Students will frequently ask for the opportunity to do something extra to help their grade. If you are a discussion leader, do not deviate from the course grading policy.
2. If you are teaching a stand-alone section, any opportunity offered to one student must be offered to all. You should weigh carefully if the entire group needs this special opportunity.
3. Students may inquire about an Incomplete in the course. Always follow the Department Incomplete Policy. If the course has a coordinator, refer the student to the coordinator. When in doubt about the policy, talk to Dr. Knudson. Form to be completed for an I: <http://www.math.ufl.edu/departement/incomplete-grades/>.
4. A student may present you with a petition. It is possible to petition for a great variety of things at UF. You should supply the requested information. The petition will go to the Petitions Committee. It is their job to assess the validity of the request, and your job to supply the information which will assist them. Do not try to influence the Petitions Committee beyond the fact requested on the form.

5. When in doubt consult the course coordinator or Dr. Knudson.

#### CLASSROOM DISRUPTIONS (DELIBERATE)

1. Disruptions of a class are very rare, but they do occasionally occur.
2. When a student deliberately disrupts a class, making it difficult for the others to learn, that student is in violation of the Code of Student Conduct.
3. Keep cool, if the disruption is persistent, ask the student to stop. If they persist, ask them to leave the room.
4. Bear in mind that the other students in the class are on your side.
5. Be sure to get the student's name.
6. After the class, see your supervisor to discuss what happened and make a plan on how to handle the situation if it should happen again.
7. If at any time you feel that you or someone in the class is in danger, call 911.
8. For more information go to <https://counseling.ufl.edu/resources/faculty-staff/disruptive/>

#### CLASSROOM DISRUPTIONS (UNINTENTIONAL)

1. An unintentional disruption can be something as minor as a cell phone or something as serious as a seizure.
2. Do not let the minor things noticeably bother you; just tell them to turn off the cell, etc.
3. If there is a health related issue, you are not expected to diagnose the severity of the situation.
4. If the student is not in self-control, **call 911** and call the Mathematics Department office, 352-294-2350, for help.
5. If they are lucid enough to respond to questions, call the Department office.
6. When in doubt, call 911; better safe than sorry.
7. A student can refuse to be transported by signing a waiver. The paramedics will usually allow this if the person is coherent and doesn't want to be transported. Ambulance transportation is expensive and many students would like to avoid the cost.
8. A UFPD officer may arrive before paramedics. Let the officer take charge.

#### EMERGENCIES

1. If there is a fire alarm or a bomb threat, immediately tell your class to go outside.
2. Tell the group to stay together, as it is fairly likely that it is a test or a false alarm and you will be able to return to the room.
3. Tell your supervisor about any missed work that may have resulted.

#### SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

1. Some students have the need for additional time on quizzes and exams.
2. If a student requests this, the student *must* produce a letter from the UF Disability Resource Center which is specific about the type of accommodation required.

3. Have the student discuss the accommodation with your coordinator.
4. It is important to be as fair as possible to all students.
5. *Do not allow an accommodation without the letter.*

## PRIVACY

1. The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requires privacy protection for students under Federal Law. For more information go to <http://www.registrar.ufl.edu/ferpa.html>.
2. Do not email grade or academic performance information *to anyone including the student or their parents* (see #7 for exception). You do not know who is on the other end of that email.
3. Do not discuss grade or academic performance information on the telephone *to anyone including the student or their parents*. You do not know who is on the other end of that phone line.
4. *The only time you can discuss grade or academic performance with anyone, including a parent, is in person with the student present and the student consents.*
5. If the parent protests, refer them to your supervisor.
6. Do not post grades on your door.
7. Some Campus groups, namely the University Athletic Association, AIM, and the Florida Opportunity Scholars will request academic progress information concerning students in their programs. Students have signed privacy waivers with these organizations which allow you to provide this information. If you are asked for information from one of these organizations, your supervisor will go over the procedures with you.
8. If you are in doubt about whether to provide information, contact your supervisor.
9. A FERPA violation could lead to losing your job. This is serious stuff.

## CHEATING

1. UF students are subject to the UF Honor Code.
2. Any work submitted by a student which is not solely theirs (with obvious group activity exceptions) is a violation of the Honor Code.
3. A student who provides work to another student (with obvious group activity exceptions) is in violation of the Honor Code.
4. Exam procedures used in the lecture courses are designed to discourage cheating. *Follow these exam procedures carefully.*
5. If you suspect or have evidence of cheating, you should contact your supervisor.

## PROFESSIONALISM

1. Your relationship with your students should be professional.
2. Treat your students politely and with respect.
3. Dress appropriately. Casual dress is fine. Slovenly or revealing attire is not appropriate.
4. Watch carefully what you reveal about yourself on personal websites and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. These sites can be helpful tools for teaching, but they can also lead to embarrassing situations.

## YOUR DEVELOPMENT AS A TEACHER

1. The Department offers a growth path for you in terms of increasing responsibility, variety, autonomy and mathematical depth of the courses you are assigned.
2. Your progress along this growth path is based on trust.
3. A TA who is conscientious and accurate in their teaching and administrative duties is showing that they can be trusted.
4. Since it is a *Teaching Assistantship*, a TA who cannot be trusted in the classroom, will not have their assistantship renewed.
5. Course assignments are based on Mathematics Department need. That need is not always the same as your expectation.

## SEVEN UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIORS OF A TEACHING ASSISTANT

1. Failure to meet your class. Arriving late. Leaving early.
2. Failure to proctor an assigned assembly exam. Arriving late. Leaving early.
3. Failure to keep office hours. Arriving late. Leaving early.
4. Failure to arrive on time for the start of the semester. Leaving early.
5. Failure to post scores and grades. Mishandling grades.
6. Failure to respond to your supervisor.
7. Conflict of interest with a student.

## DIFFICULTIES

If you are having problems with your teaching, let your supervisor know. You will not receive bad evaluations for problems that you are earnestly trying to correct

## **Procedures for Teaching Assistants**

### TEXTBOOKS

1. You may check out textbooks for the course you are teaching from the front desk.
2. They must be returned at the end of the semester, so that they are available for the instructors for the next semester.
3. Your textbooks must not be passed on to another instructor for the following semester without suitably notifying the front desk.
4. If the textbooks checked out in your name are not returned in a timely fashion, staff members have the right to enter your office in order to retrieve them.
5. Department textbooks must not be loaned or given to students under any circumstances.

### COPYING TESTS, QUIZZES, ETC

1. Materials to be used in the classes you teach may be copied by the Department.
2. Personal notes or books are NOT to be copied by the Department.
3. Generally, materials must be submitted at least 48 hours in advance, since last-minute copies are a tremendous strain on the staff.
4. Materials to be copied must be submitted in LIT 352 (metal mail drop slot), with the appropriate slip filled out giving the number of copies needed, etc. or you can email the information to Connie ([cdoby@ufl.edu](mailto:cdoby@ufl.edu)) and cc it to Margaret

[msomers@ufl.edu](mailto:msomers@ufl.edu)).

5. The copier in Little 465 may be used for teaching purposes, max of 40 copies.
6. The work will be put in your mailbox when it is completed, or a note saying where to pick it up if it is too large for the mailbox.
7. Also, if you need supply materials such as pens, pencils, chalk, notebooks, etc., see Connie.

#### MAILBOXES

1. Use your mailbox key.
2. You are not allowed to go behind the counter in the mailroom.

### **Preparation for Discussion Classes**

#### KNOW THE MATERIAL

1. Know what has been covered in lecture.
2. Attend the lecture if necessary; it is a good idea to attend occasionally in any case.
3. Just because a course is introductory does not mean that you already know the material.

#### PREPARE THE PROBLEMS

1. Work the problems that your students have been assigned for homework.
2. This will allow you to anticipate their questions.
3. If they do not have questions, you will know which problems have interesting solutions and you can ask them about those problems.
4. It is suggested to keep a notebook with the worked-out solutions in it.

#### MANAGEMENT

1. Plan your classroom time so that all of the required material will be covered.
2. Always start your class on time, so that the students know that they should be there on time.
3. If you are to take attendance, it is suggested that you do that as the first activity.
4. Likewise, it is recommended that papers and quizzes be returned at the beginning of class.
5. Complaints or questions about grading of individual students should be deferred until after class, so that they do not take up class time.

### **Preparation for Stand-Alone Classes**

#### PLAN THE SEMESTER

1. Get a "Course Description" from the front desk, which outlines the material that must be covered and the approximate time frame that is recommended.
2. You are required to cover the listed material in order to prepare the students for later courses.

3. Decide how you will structure the course, in terms of quizzes, homework, group work, etc., and how you will compute grades.
4. This information must be put in a course syllabus and made available to the students.
5. The syllabus should also be posted on your website at least three days prior to the start of the semester.
6. The UF syllabus policy is at: <http://www.syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/>.
7. Request an Elearning Canvas shell: <https://elearning.ufl.edu/course-request-process/>

#### CLASS PREPARATION

Carefully prepare for each day, both the new material you will explain, and the examples and problems you will work.

#### MANAGEMENT

Same as above.

### **Other Considerations**

#### WEBSITES

It is a good idea to have a website for your courses, as well as your home page. The website makes it easier for you to communicate assignments and other information to your students. Some of the more experienced graduate students might be willing to help you develop a website.

#### IMPROVEMENT

1. Watch the techniques of those professors who are the best teachers.
2. Ask them questions about teaching outside of class.
3. Talk to your fellow Teaching Assistants to see what techniques they are trying and to see how they have solved difficulties in the past.
4. Discuss ideas and problems with your supervisor.

#### YOUR CONTRIBUTION

The Mathematics Department is a complicated place which makes contact with nearly all students who enroll at the University of Florida. Your contribution is not only the knowledge you pass on to your students, but also your conscientious attention to the details that help this operation to run as smoothly as possible.

#### YOUR REWARDS

1. The financial support you receive, and the satisfaction of a job well done are just some of the rewards from your teaching.
2. Each year the Department nominates three TAs for the University Graduate Teaching Awards. Usually, one or two Mathematics TAs will win this award.

3. The level of responsibility you exhibit and the efforts you put forth are noticed. They are reflected in the letters of recommendation that will be written on your behalf when you graduate.

8/13/19