

Teaching Assistant Handbook for Master's Students

Department of Mathematics
Columbia University in the City of New York

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Duties

Master's candidates are hired as Teaching Assistants (officially "Readers") on a part-time, semester by semester basis. Continued employment is contingent upon positive performance, attendance record, and punctuality during the previous semester(s).

Individual duties required from each Reader will vary depending on many factors, such as the course level, size, and instructor's needs. Reader positions involve, on average, *8 hours per week* of effort.

There are two main duties of Readers in the Mathematics Department:

1. Grading (4 hours/week, on average)
2. Holding office hours and communicating with students (4 hours/week, on average)

Qualifications

Applicants must meet the following criteria to be considered for employment:

1. Must be a **CURRENTLY ENROLLED, FULL TIME STUDENT IN A MASTERS PROGRAM** in the Graduate School of Arts & Sciences (GSAS) or the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS). Due to University policy, we regretfully cannot hire students from Barnard, Teacher's College, or other schools
2. Must have a bachelor's degree PRIOR to the start of employment
3. Must submit an application and an **unofficial transcript** (can be printed from [SSOL](#))
4. A printout of your **Academic Profile** from SSOL indicating "full time" enrollment status for the semester of desired employment.

Hiring Process

Submission of Applications ¹

All applications must be submitted to the Undergraduate Program Administrative Assistant in Room 410 Math. Applications will be accepted any time, but are reviewed in the following manner:

1. A pool of potential TAs will be identified before the beginning of each semester, after grades from the previous term are released. This occurs:
 - a. For Fall appointments, in late May
 - b. For Spring appointments, in late December
2. Applicants will be informed of the completeness of their submission or, if necessary, advised as to which pieces of documentation are missing.
3. Applicants who meet the minimum criteria and can fulfill a need for the department will be contacted for an interview.
4. Those not selected will be notified that their application has been placed on hold or rejected.

¹ To download and complete an application, please visit:
<http://www.math.columbia.edu/programs-math/undergraduate-program/teaching-assistant-resources/>

Interviews

Interviews will be conducted by the Academic Coordinator, as necessary. At the interview, a brief overview of the program will be given. Pay rate, scheduling, and expectations regarding time and attendance will be discussed. In addition, the interviewer will look for the applicant's ability to communicate effectively and clearly.

Hiring Decisions

Applicants will be evaluated for hire based on the following criteria:

- ❖ Recommendation of instructor and applicability of prior experience to the position
- ❖ Interpersonal skills / ability to communicate effectively

After consideration of the above criteria, as well as department and instructor needs, a final decision will be made. Possible outcomes will consist of an offer of employment, holding the application on file, or rejection of the application. Students who are not selected are welcome to apply again for employment in subsequent semesters.

The hiring process can often extend into the beginning of an academic semester, so please be patient while final decisions are reached by the department.

Continuing Appointments

The Mathematics Department expects to re-hire Readers when possible, provided the individual has received a positive performance evaluation and has consistently demonstrated good attendance and punctuality.

To be re-hired, current Readers must continue as a full time student in the following semester, and submit an **unofficial transcript** and **enrollment status verification** to the Academic Coordinator in Room 410 after final grades are released each semester:

- ❖ To be rehired for the Fall, submit your transcript/enrollment in late May
- ❖ To be rehired for the Spring, submit your transcript/enrollment in late December

Appointment Details

Students who are hired by the Department receive an official University appointment as a "Reader". This is a part-time, Student Officer level position. You may receive compensation from other departments on campus, provided that your total workload does not exceed 20 hours per week. This will generally be paid to you as "additional compensation". Please notify the department IMMEDIATELY if you accept another position on campus, or at time of hiring if you are already employed with another department.

All new Readers are required to fill out a hiring packet with the Department's Human Resources Manager in Room 509 Math in order to be placed on payroll. **Required paperwork must be completed within the first two weeks of the semester or you will not be allowed to work for the department.** Exceptions will only be made in unusual circumstances, and are handled on a case-by-case basis.

Currently, Readers receive \$1,800 per semester in salary, and an additional \$1,500 tuition credit. Salary is paid on a semi-monthly schedule (15th and the last day of each month) over the duration of the appointment (Sept 1 – Dec 31 for Fall appointments, and Jan 1 – May 31 for Spring appointments). Readers are strongly encouraged to enroll in [direct deposit](#) as the preferred method for receiving their paychecks. The tuition credit is applied by GSAS Financial Aid directly to the student account. Credits are disbursed once per semester, about midway through the term. Depending on timing and your option for receiving a refund, the credit may either apply to a balance on your account, or may be issued directly as a refund. Questions regarding payroll or tuition credits should be directed to the department's Human Resources Manager in 509 Math.

If it is determined that a TA *cannot* meet the demands of the course and/or instructor (for example, the TA does not submit homework grades in a timely manner, does not show up for office hours as expected, does not communicate or behave appropriately, etc.) employment may be terminated at any point during the term.

Expectations

As an employee of the Mathematics Department and Columbia University, you are expected to uphold the standards, policies, and procedures which come with being a representative of the University.

Refer to the *Faculty Handbook* (<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/vpaa/handbook/>) for information on University employment. Students are held to the same standards as faculty officers of instruction and research with regards to University policies and procedures.

For convenience, we refer to the Reader position as a Teaching Assistant (TA) below.

- ❖ **Availability:** Students have limited time to work with his/her TA, and therefore have the right to expect each TA to be present, punctual, and fully attentive during help room hours. Undergraduate Students with significant time restrictions should not accept TA offers. TAs must be present on campus by the first day of classes, and must not leave at the end of the semester until all their TA responsibilities are fulfilled (unless they have been given explicit permission by their course instructor).

If you accept a TA position, you are expected to have sufficient time during each term of your appointment. If you have additional academic or other activities, ensure that you have enough time to commit to this position. Furthermore, TA availability should match the needs of their course and instructor.

Students who experience a drastic change in availability during the course of the semester and can no longer meet the position's time requirement should consult with the Undergraduate Program Administrative Assistant immediately.

- ❖ **Grading:** Grade your assigned work in a timely manner. This ensures that students receive quick feedback on their work. If the amount of grading proves to be too much in any given week, the TA should discuss this with the instructor and formulate an agreed upon plan (slightly longer

time to finish grading, grade only a certain subset of problems, etc.).

- ❖ **Office Hours:** On or before the first week of classes, TAs should discuss their office hours with their course instructor. If multiple TAs are assigned to the same class, please coordinate your help room hours with the course instructor and other TAs to avoid overlapping schedules and best accommodate student needs.
- ❖ **Course Planning:** Instructors usually contact TAs the week before classes start, or in some instances, during the first week of classes to have an organizational meeting. If you have not heard from your instructor by the first week of classes, please email them and alert the Undergraduate Program Administrative Assistant.
- ❖ **Staff Meetings:** Many classes hold occasional staff meetings with instructors and TAs. All TAs (graduate and undergraduate) are expected to be present during these staff meetings, unless excused with the permission of the course instructor. These meetings are important for organizing, planning, and sharing teaching tips and other critical course information.
- ❖ **Textbooks:** The Department has a limited number of course textbooks (compared to the number of TAs), and cannot provide textbooks to everyone. TAs of the same course are encouraged to share or borrow textbooks from other TAs, or from the course instructor.
- ❖ **Absence/Tardiness:** Students depend on their TAs to be available according to the posted schedules; absences and tardiness disrupt the learning environment. As a result, attendance is carefully monitored. A consistent pattern of absence, tardiness or negative work ethic may result in non-renewal or termination of employment. In case of illness or other emergency, you should notify the course instructor and Undergraduate Program Administrative Assistant as soon as possible about the unexpected absence.
- ❖ **Communication:** TAs are **required** to check their email regularly and respond to the course instructor, other TAs, department staff, and student inquiries in a timely manner---generally within one or two business days.
- ❖ **Conflicts of Interest:** TAs are expected to inform the course instructor of any possible conflicts of interest due to previous or on-going personal relationships with students in the course, and should never accept money or personal gifts from other students.

TAs should not grade the work of anyone they are closely related to, or with whom they have a close personal relationship. If you are assigned to TA a course with students whom you know well, please notify the instructor immediately. Instructors can set up procedures, such as having other TAs grade the student's work, in order to safeguard all parties.

- ❖ **Student Records Confidentiality:** TAs have access to personal and academic records in order to perform their duties. Per Department and University policy and Federal law, TAs should actively protect student's privacy and confidentiality at all times.

Important Contacts

Academic Coordinator

- ❖ Shay Bailey
410 Mathematics
sb3985@columbia.edu
212-854-2432

Human Resources Manager

- ❖ Abbygale Dove
509 Mathematics
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