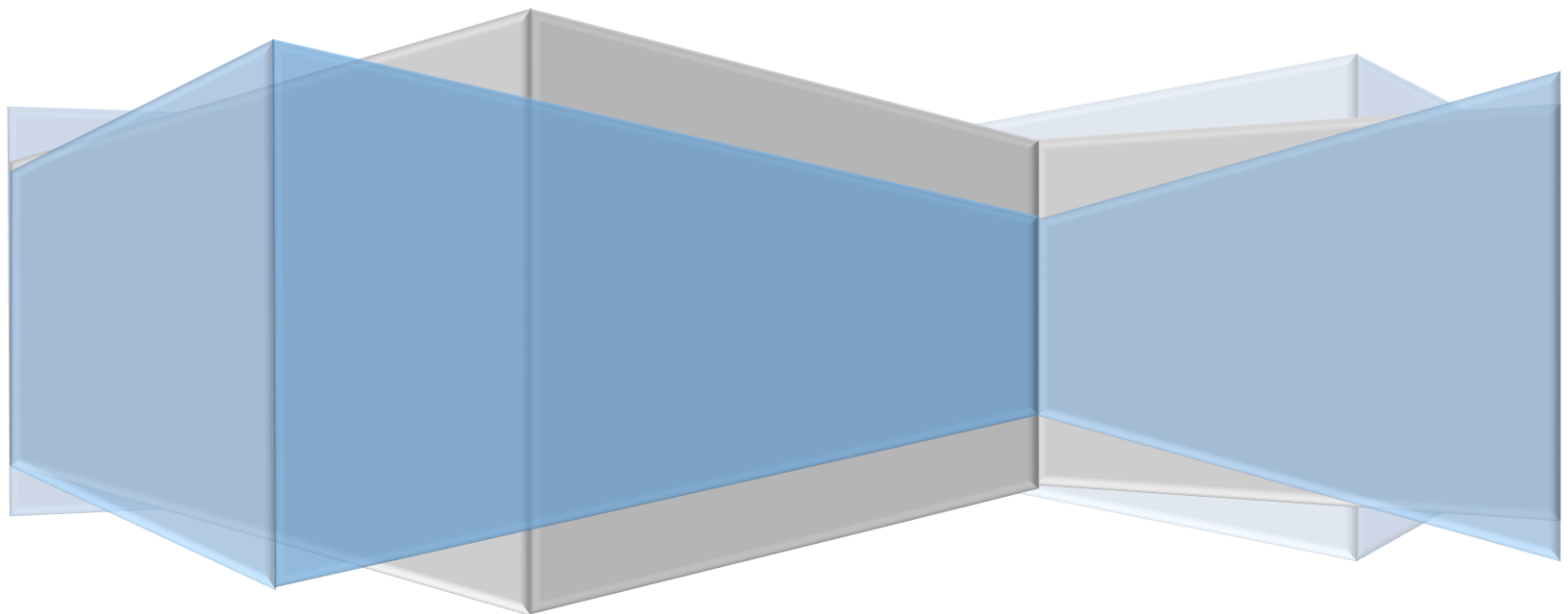


UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

Department of Mathematics

Columbia University



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QUALIFICATIONS

To be eligible for a Teaching Assistant position:

1. Applicants must be a **CURRENTLY ENROLLED, FULL TIME UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT IN A DEGREE GRANTING PROGRAM** in Columbia College (CC), School of Professional Studies (SPS), General Studies (GS) or the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences (SEAS). Proof of full-time enrollment must be provided by submitting a copy of the **Academic Profile** from [SSOL](#) each semester (see Figure 1 below). Due to University policy, we cannot hire non-degree students, students from Barnard College, Teacher's College or other schools, or students enrolled half- or part- time.

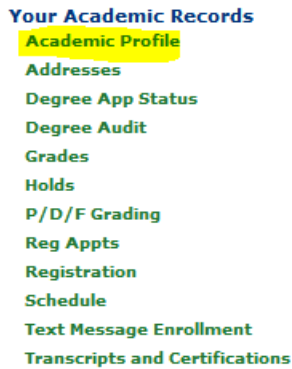


Figure 1 - SSOL Academic Profile

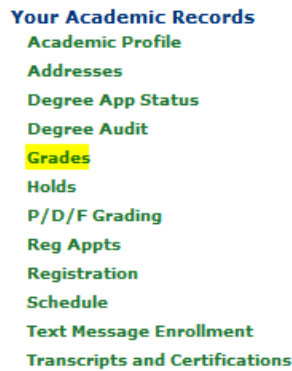


Figure 2 - SSOL Grade Verification

2. Applicants must show **SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION** of the course, with a minimum grade of 'A'. Relevant coursework must be completed at Columbia University. A current copy of the **Grades** section from [SSOL](#) (see Figure 2 above) or an **Unofficial Transcript** must be submitted as verification. Only in rare cases will the Department consider substituting classes taken outside Columbia towards this requirement.

TEACHING ASSISTANT DUTIES

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) are hired on a part-time, semester by semester basis. Continued employment depends on performance, attendance, and reliability.

Individual duties required will vary depending on many factors, such as the course level, size, and instructor needs. Undergraduate TA positions involve, on average, **5 hours per week** of effort.

There are three main duties of Undergraduate TAs in the Mathematics Department:

1. **Weekly Office Hours** in the Help Room (2 hours/week, fixed)
2. **Grading homework** (2 hours/week, on average) *
3. **Answering emails** and communicating with students and instructors (1 hour/week, on average) *

**Hours may vary from week to week. Some weeks TAs may have no grading, followed by a week of 4 to 5 hours of grading. The above average is based on the total number of hours spent over the duration of a semester.*

HIRING PROCESS

APPLICATION

Applications and supporting materials should be submitted through the Department's [online application form](#). At the beginning of each semester, instructional needs are assessed based on current enrollments; qualified applicants who can fulfill a need for the department will then be contacted. Applications that are not selected for a TA position will be kept on file for consideration in a future semester.

A brief screening interview may be conducted by the [Academic Coordinator](#). At the screening, a brief overview of the position and duties will be given. Pay rate, scheduling, and help room/grading expectations are typically covered. In addition to understanding the mathematical content of a course, the department looks to ensure that potential TAs can communicate clearly and effectively.

HIRING

Applicants will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- ❖ Grade in the course(s) for which the applicant requests to work
- ❖ Prior tutoring, teaching, or similar experience
- ❖ Interpersonal skills / ability to communicate effectively

A determination for each application is made after careful consideration of the instructional needs of the department and an individual's application, qualifications, and screening interview. The department receives a high volume of applications, and regrettably not all applicants can be hired. Students who are not selected are encouraged to apply again for a position in subsequent semesters, as the department's needs change each term.

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

RE-HIRING

The Department will re-hire TAs from year to year, provided the TA received positive evaluations. To be re-hired, current TAs need only notify the department of their interest and submit **updated grades**, an **Academic Profile**, and any course preferences via the [online application form](#) after final grades are released each semester.

EVALUATIONS

TAs are evaluated at the end of each semester as part of the course evaluation process. Additional feedback is provided by instructors directly to the department. Student comments are combined with instructor and staff feedback to form a determination of an individual's effectiveness as a TA. Students with positive evaluations will receive priority in the re-hire process and assignment of courses. Students with low evaluations or with demonstrated problems in communication, timely grading, and/or reliability will not be rehired.

In addition, the department regularly receives feedback regarding TA performance from enrolled students throughout the semester. Students may report issues using the online feedback tool or by contacting instructors and/or staff.

APPOINTMENT DETAILS

Undergraduates who are hired by the Department receive an official University appointment as a “Teaching Assistant III”. This is a part-time, Student Officer appointment. Students should refer to the [Faculty Handbook](#) for information that governs University wide employment policies and regulations. TA appointments fall under the category of “Student Officers”, which are subject to the same rules as other Officers at the University.

You may simultaneously work for and receive compensation from other departments on campus, provided that the total combined workload does not exceed 20 hours per week *across all campus jobs*. Other employment will generally be paid to you as “additional compensation” on the same paychecks you receive from the Mathematics department. Please notify the department’s [Human Resources Manager](#) IMMEDIATELY if you accept another position on campus, or if you are currently employed with another department at the time of hiring.

All new Undergraduate TAs are required to fill out a ‘new hire packet’ with the department’s [Human Resources Manager](#) in Room 509 Math. **All required paperwork must be completed within two weeks of the date you are notified of your assignment, or you will not be permitted to work.** Exceptions will only be made in unusual circumstances, and are handled on a case-by-case basis.

Undergraduate TAs receive a salary of \$3,600 for the academic year (\$1,800 per semester). This is paid on a semi-monthly schedule on the 15th and last day of each month, over the duration of the appointment:

- Sept 1 - May 31 for academic year appointments (\$3,600)
- Sept 1 – Dec 31 for Fall only appointments (\$1,800)
- Jan 1 – May 31 for Spring only appointments (\$1,800)

Students who are hired at the beginning of the fall will receive an appointment for the full academic year by default, unless the TA is not eligible to work after December. **TAs are strongly encouraged to enroll in [direct deposit](#) for payroll.** Any questions or concerns regarding payroll should be directed to the department’s [HR Manager](#).

If the department determines that a TA is failing to meet the demands of the course or instructor, or the TA experiences a change in circumstances, a position may be terminated at any point during the semester. Such circumstances and actions shall be communicated clearly in writing between the department, TA, and instructor.

EXPECTATIONS

HELP ROOM

The Mathematics Department maintains two Help Rooms which provide one-on-one and small group tutoring to students enrolled in Mathematics courses. Help Rooms are staffed concurrently by undergraduate and graduate Teaching Assistants throughout semester.

Help Rooms are located in the following rooms:

- ❖ **Salmasi Computational Science/Math Collaboration Space – 502 Milstein Center**
Subjects: College Algebra, Calculus I, Calculus II, and Calculus III
- ❖ **Columbia Help Room – 406 Math**
Subjects: Calculus IV and higher Math

Undergraduate TAs are required to schedule 2 hours per week in the Help Room. During the first week of classes, TAs should discuss help room hours with their course instructor and follow instructions to sign up for the hours they would like to work. To avoid congestion, a maximum of three TAs can be scheduled for any given hour.

All TAs must sign in for their scheduled Help Room hours each week. Failure to sign in will be considered the same as an unexcused absence. Repeated tardiness, absences, or failures to sign in/out from for Help Room hours may be grounds for dismissal. While in the Help Room, TAs should use a nametag or nameplate, so that students can easily identify who to ask for help.

Students expect each TA to be present, punctual, and fully attentive during help room hours. Applicants 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 responsibilities are discharged. Individual duties and expectations should be discussed with the course instructor in advance.

TAs who experience a significant change in availability during the course of a semester and can no longer meet the time requirements should consult with the [Academic Coordinator](#) and/or course instructor as soon as possible.

GRADING

Instructors and students expect to receive feedback on assignments in a timely manner. Accordingly, TAs must complete assigned grading by the instructor's deadlines. If the amount of grading proves to be too much, the TA should notify the instructor to find a solution (for example, grading only a certain subset of problems, etc.).

TAs will receive a key to the homework drop-off boxes, which are located on the 4th floor of the Mathematics Building. A \$5 replacement fee will be required if the initial key is lost.

COURSE PLANNING

TAs should expect to meet with the course instructor at the beginning of the semester to discuss expectations and duties. In some cases, instructors will ask TAs to attend a class session for introductions. If you do not receive any information from your assigned instructor by the end of add/drop period, please notify the department's [Academic Coordinator](#).

Some instructors may hold occasional staff meetings with their TAs throughout the semester. These meetings are important for organization, planning, and dissemination of teaching tips and critical course information. If requested by the instructor, attendance at such meetings is required.

TEXTBOOKS

The Department has a limited number of textbooks available for TAs, but unfortunately cannot provide textbooks to everyone. TAs of the same course may be asked to share or borrow textbooks from other TAs, or from the course instructor.

ABSENCES/TARDINESS

TAs are required to be present for Help Room hours as scheduled. Absences and tardiness disrupt the learning environment for other students. Accordingly, a consistent pattern of absences or tardiness may result in termination.

If another commitment conflicts with your regular Help Room hours, notify the course instructor and [Academic Coordinator](#) at least one week in advance. In case of illness or other emergency, provide as much advance notice

as possible. If there is a planned absence, days or hours can be swapped with another TA. Students do not need prior approval to swap occasional office hours; however, any changes to regularly scheduled hours must be communicated in writing to the course instructor and [Academic Coordinator](#). Repeated deviations from scheduled hours may result in a change to the schedule, or in extreme cases, termination.

COMMUNICATION

TAs are required to check email regularly and respond to the course instructor, department staff, or student inquiries in a timely manner -- generally within one or two business days. Consistent delays in responding put students at a disadvantage for learning course material and are not acceptable.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

TAs are expected to disclose any conflicts of interest due to current or previous personal relationships with students in their assigned 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 (e.g., close friend, significant other, family member). If you are assigned to TA for 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.

CONFIDENTIALITY

By necessity of the job, TAs will have limited access to academic information (e.g., homework grades) of other students. Academic information should only be discussed with the individual student or course instructor. Sharing information protected under [FERPA](#) to any outside parties will result in serious consequences.

GRIEVANCES AND ESCALATION PROCEDURE

On rare occasion, a TA may wish to register a complaint about some problem (e.g., another student's behavior, the required workload is too much, etc.). The complaint should initially be directed to the course instructor. If this does not resolve the problem, or the problem involves the instructor, the TA may escalate an issue by notifying both the [Academic Coordinator](#) and [Director of Undergraduate Studies](#). Issues that cannot be resolved at this stage may be referred to the Department Chair.

DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

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