TA'ing in the Sciences

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• Introductions & General Remarks

– Evaluation is an important and necessary part of university life.

– It has a dual role

  · to help students learn

  · to invest some meaning in a degree from U of O.

  strike a balance

– It can be pleasant/unpleasant, since some students succeed and some don't.

– **A serious matter: it affects**

  · students' timely success

  · success at all!

  · scholarships, loans, awards

  · relationship of students with parents, etc.

  · atmosphere in classroom

• Never be casual about it

– Students have the right to see any graded work upon request and can have it re-graded.

– Students appreciate positive, constructive feedback. Evaluation should aim to encourage students, without misleading them.

• Purposes

– to help students learn, motivate them to learn

– to let them know what they understand , what they don't (Both "✓" and "this isn't correct" are important)

– help students in their choice of a career

– to help the professor know what's getting across

– to determine academic progress

- **Some Myths** ($K_i > 0$)

– Quality of education $= K_1$. exam difficulty

– Students' satisfaction $= K_2$. average grade $+ \frac{K_3}{\text{thoroughness of marking}}$

– Strict grading motivates students

- **Responsibilities of Prof. and TA**

– Professor:
  - determines the nature of the evaluation
  - determines standards for tests, assignments, reports
  - sets tests, assignments, reports
  - determines grading schemes
  - determines all policies re: late assignments, reports, missed tests, etc.
  - has ultimate responsibility for all marks
  - administers the tests, labs
  - marks the students' work

– The TA:
  - administers the tests, labs
  - marks the students' work

- **Exceptions: the real world**

  If the TA is responsible for
  - setting tests, assignments, reports
  - determining grading schemes

– these must be consistent with
  - course goals
  - other sections of the same course, or other language homologue.

⇒ discuss these matters with the prof!

- **Frustrations**

– exact responsibilities ‘evolve’, or are unclear

– overwork

– student dissatisfaction

MAT 1341A ESTIMATE OF DUTIES

Enrolment: (est. 240)

Duty	**Hours allotted**
Miscellaneous	
Meetings with supervisor 6 @ 1/6 hr	1
Learning computer entry of grades	1
Tutorials, etc	
proctoring diag, mini-tests	5
tutorial preparation: 9 @ approx. 2 hours	18
9 tutorials @ approx. 1.5 hours	14
Office hours:	13
Grading, etc.	
Reviewing solutions prior to grading: 3 @ 2/3 hr	2
1 diagnostic @ approx. 1/2 min each for 240 students	2
2 mini-tests @ approx. 7.5 mins each for 240 students	60
Writing summaries of students' problems 3 @ 1/3 hr	1
Entering grades on computer (3 tests @ 1 hr)	3
Total	120 hrs.

Notes:

1. If at any time it seems that you have not been given sufficient time for a task, please see me immediately.

2. Please note that this requires you to work more than 10 hours in some weeks. In particular, please take note of the test schedule: Diagnostic test Sept. 17, Mini-test 1 Oct. 1, Mid-Term Oct. 21, Mini-test 2 Nov. 19.

- **Grading**

  Must be

– Objective and Equitable: not affected by
  - like/dislike of student
  - handwriting or presentation (unless specified)
  - gender, ethnicity, etc.
  - your mood (maybe later?)
  - fatigue (take a break!)
  - contrast effect (good/bad papers)
  - order effect (same incorrect response $n + 1$ times -make a note, tell the prof, take a break!)

– Valid: the mark should reflect the degree to which course objectives are achieved. Follow the grading scheme.

• **Nuts and Bolts of Grading**

– 0. Pick up the papers in a timely fashion. Establish a timetable with the prof/other TAs.

– 1. Study and check the solutions, the marking scheme. (Or: -1. prepare solutions, scheme and check with the prof.)

– 2. Choose ≥ 6 papers at random, read without assigning a grade, note the range of quality (to counter the contrast and order effects)

– 3. Look at the grading scheme again. Is a potential disaster looming? (av.=95%, 25%) Is this really a disaster? -check with the prof/ other TAs. Take a few graded papers to the prof to check.

– 4. Mark one question at a time, with as few interruptions as possible, taking short breaks only. (Choose a realistic pile).

- **Nuts and Bolts of Grading, cont.**

– 5. Stick to the criteria - note exceptions and common mistakes on the scheme, and what you do. Ask if you're in doubt.
(example)

- **Nuts and Bolts of Grading, cont.**

– 6. Shuffle papers or piles after grading each question.

– 7. Check/note your time. Avoid overworking or underworking, consult the prof. if necessary. Don't rush.

– 8. **Comments on Papers**
  - make them precise, and useful
  - be as positive as you can
  - use "please see solutions/prof/me" judiciously
  - avoid the use of exclamation marks in a negative sense (e.g. "×!!!", "NO!")
  - avoid sarcasm. It is never appreciated.
  - **Never write a gratuitous comment in frustration.** If you feel one coming on, take a break.

- **Nuts and Bolts of Grading, cont.**

– 9. Return the papers in a timely fashion.

– 10. If not done earlier, ask the prof to check a sample of your grading.

– 11. Discuss common problems/approaches with prof. (Written summary?)

- **After Grading**

– Returning papers to students

  · be aware it can be an anxious time

  · announce distribution of grades

  · never be flippant about the results

– Reviewing papers

  · don't make special exceptions you haven't made before

  · be prepared to admit an error

  · refer 'difficult' cases to prof.

- **Administering Tests/Labs**

– be organized
  - who is picking up the exams, exam booklets, scrap paper?
  - will the office be locked when you plan to go there?

– arrive early (at least 5-10 minutes)

– start/finish all students at the same time

– be prepared for questions
  - know the exam, or how to quickly contact someone who does
  - know what you <u>can</u> say (e.g. "what's a parallelepiped?", "what does 'inconsistent' mean ?")

– move around the room quietly

– be ready for the end of the test

- **Academic Fraud**

– the vast majority of students don't cheat and do care when others do.

– read the relevant section in your faculty handbook.

– procedures: (tests)
  - · give an individual warning, tell another TA, be sure.
  - · keep relevant evidence, ask the student(s) to leave.
  - · write an account of events asap.
  - · be polite but firm at all times.
  - · tell the prof, be prepared to recount to a committee of the faculty.

  (papers)
  - · show the prof, ask for direction.

Academic Fraud, cont.

- sanctions:
  - F for the work/course
  - loss of all credits for the session
  - loss of all credits for the year
  - suspension from the program or faculty ($.5 \leq T \leq 3$)
  - expulsion from the Faculty
  - expulsion from the University ($T \geq 3$)
  - revocation of a degree

Summary

- Get yourself enough time – then use it all.
- Use a detailed marking scheme – be thorough.
- develop good grading habits – be fair.
- be encouraging – without misleading
- consult the prof. when you're unsure
- get back to the thesis!