

WHAT IS A TA?

A Note to Undergraduates about Teaching Assistants (TAs) at Rutgers

TAs are graduate students who have demonstrated excellence in their field and are working towards either a master's degree or doctorate in one of the Rutgers' graduate schools. They are struggling with the same problems as all students--papers, grades, time management, finances, etc. While carrying out the responsibilities of a TA, they must continue to make satisfactory progress in their own graduate work. Through the salary and tuition remission provided by the teaching assistantship, these students receive financial assistance that allows them to continue making progress towards their degree.

TAs are also teachers, in a position of responsibility and authority in the university. Their responsibilities, defined by the department for which they work, vary from department to department. Some TAs teach their own classes with departmental supervision; others assist faculty members, either through lecturing on special topics, running recitation groups or labs, grading papers, or composing, proctoring, and grading quizzes and exams.

TAs are critically important members of the Rutgers community who have a responsibility to provide the students with an intellectually challenging college experience. You should expect a high level of professionalism from your TAs. Since knowledge and experience in their field are the criteria by which TAs are appointed, you can be assured that they know their subject thoroughly.

TAs have much to offer even beyond immediate academic concerns. For example, while the majority of your fellow undergraduates are from New Jersey, TAs represent a broad cross-section of students, not only from across the United States, but from all over the world. A university community is a place where people of diverse cultures and backgrounds come together to study and learn; your experience with a TA can provide insights into another region or culture and help you to develop more global ways of thinking. If your TA has an unfamiliar regional or foreign accent, make an effort to listen carefully. Do not be afraid to ask questions or to request that something be repeated. Your ability to adapt to language differences can be seen as a measure of your own growing cultural sophistication. If you experience difficulties in classes taught by TAs, remembering that these teachers are also students may make it easier to approach them with your concerns. Most TAs readily empathize with the problems of students. And, as apprentice teachers, TAs generally welcome feedback, critical and complimentary, so be willing to initiate a dialogue. Ultimately, your own expectations and attitudes will help determine the quality of the experience—so enjoy it and make it a good one.

If you have any questions or concerns about Teaching Assistants, or need further information, contact the:

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