

A Brief Overview of TA Responsibilities and Handling of Issues Within Undergraduate Courses

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What is a teaching assistantship (TAship)?

A teaching assistant (TA) is a **graduate student** whose **job** is to **assist** in **teaching** a (usually) **undergraduate** course.

isn't this obvious???



- **Graduate students** have already completed an **undergraduate** (UG) degree and are **role models** for UG students.



- Being a TA is a **job** that should be done **professionally**.

- A TA is supposed to **assist** the **instructor** who has designed/is running the course.

- A TA is an **educator** and part of the **teaching team**.



Why being a great TA is good for you

It's important to do good work as a TA!

- **Being successful** in any job you take is important.
- As a role model, you are **helping less experienced students** and contributing to their growth.
- **Learning to communicate** technical concepts is an important job skill in academia and industry.
- TAs are evaluated by students and instructors: great TAs can **win awards** but poor TAs can **lose their job**.
- Additional resources are offered through the TA

Project at <https://grad.rutgers.edu/professional-development/teaching-skills/ta-project>

Why are you here?

- You have been / will be assigned as a course TA for fall and/or spring semester.
- At Rutgers, undergraduate ECE course numbers look like **14:332:XXX:XX** (UNIT:SUB:CRSE:SECT), where CRSE represents the course number and SECT represent a section number unique to each lab/recitation.
- You are probably assigned to a section: go to <https://sims.rutgers.edu/rosters/> and log in to see the email for students. Please message the students at the beginning of the semester using Canvas announcements and/or email.
- If you do not know what class you are TA-ing, **let us know now**.
- If you have not heard from your course instructor about their expectations and your responsibilities, **reach out to them now**.

Responsibilities and Policies

What does a TA do?

What your responsibilities are as a TA will strongly depend on the specific course and instructor. Responsibilities can include:

- Teaching and assisting students in labs
- Teaching a recitation/section class (and preparation)
- Managing the course website (on Canvas)
- Grading homework, labs, pre-labs, projects, exams, quizzes, etc.
- Posting grades
- Attending meetings of instructional staff
- Proctoring/invigilating exams
- Developing course material (lab manuals, assignments, exams, writing solutions)
- Holding office hours, answering student questions online or by email.
- Attending lecture
- Collecting and organizing course

Office hours

TAs are **required** to hold weekly office hours. The department has office space available for TAs to use.

- Visit ECE Apps at <https://apps.ece.rutgers.edu/> to schedule your office hours. Students will also be able to use the above website to see when and where your office hours are.
- Keys for the TAs offices should be received from and returned to Mr. Kevin Wine (kevin.wine@rutgers.edu).
- If you have to cancel office hours due to an emergency (e.g. illness) or pre-scheduled conflict (e.g. conference travel), you should **inform the instructor and students** in the course as soon as you know.

TAs are representatives/ambassadors



In large classes, students may have more direct interaction with their TA than with the instructor.

- You have all done well in your undergraduate courses and are **natural role models** for the undergraduate students.
- TAs are the “face of the ECE department” for students: the **care you take in your work** represents the care the department has for students.
- TAs are employees of the State of New Jersey: **your actions represent not just yourself** but also the State.

ECE Apps – Section Assignments/Office Hours

<https://apps.ece.rutgers.edu>

ECE Apps – Course/Section Assignments

The screenshot shows the ECE Apps - Courses web application. The 'Courses' menu is open, and the 'New Assignment' option is highlighted. An arrow points from the text on the right to the 'New Assignment' option.

Navigation: Home Users Capstone **Courses** SPN Logout

Filters:

- Show only Assignment status
- Show only semester (Fall)
- Show only course number
- Show only course name
- Show only Assignments for section

Sort by: Course Number then by

1 Assignments found.

Status	Semester	Course	Section	Instructor	NetID
Active	Fall 2023	361 ELECTRONIC DEVICES	01	Kevin Wine	wine

1 Assignments found.

Footer: Contact Webmaster | Engineering Computing Services
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We don't know what section you were assigned to, so we need you to tell us.

Click on "Courses" menu and then "New Assignment".

ECE Apps – Course/Section Assignments

Create Assignment
 Status:
 Semester:
 Year:
 Course:
 Section Number:
 New Notes

 Create Assignment

Select the course from the dropdown, and fill in your section number.

ECE Apps – Office Hours

The screenshot shows the 'ECE Apps - Courses' interface. The 'Courses' dropdown menu is open, and 'New Office Hour' is highlighted. Below the menu, a table displays one office hour entry:

Status	Semester	Day	Course	Instructor	Email	Room	Hours
Active	Fall 2023	Tuesday	223 PRINCIPLES OF ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING I LAB	Kevin Wine	kevin.wine@rutgers.edu	ECE 217	11:53 am-12:45 pm

Even though you may publish office hours on your CMS, we don't have access to all the Canvas pages and need all TA office hours in one location.

Select "Courses" and then "New Office Hour"

ECE Apps – Office Hours

Status:

Semester:

Year:

Course:

Room:

Day:

Start Time: (Hour:Minute)
 : AM PM

Stop Time: (Hour:Minute)
 : AM PM

New Notes

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Pick a course, pick a room, a day, and enter your hours.

If you have multiple office hours during the week, create a new entry for each session.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act



In the US, FERPA is the law that governs how student data should be handled. The university has policies on how student data should be handled:

<https://uec.rutgers.edu/programs-2/ferpa-student-privacy/for-faculty-and-staff>



- **Posting Grades**: Grades cannot be published publicly, either by the student's name, student identification number or social security number.
- **Returning Assignments**: Do not leave personally identifiable, graded papers unattended for students to view. Any graded papers (exams, quizzes, homework, lab reports, etc.) should be handed only in a manner that does not disclose the information of one student to another student.



FERPA: Part 2



In the US, FERPA is the law that governs how student data should be handled. The university has policies on how student data should be handled:

<https://uec.rutgers.edu/programs-2/ferpa-student-privacy/for-faculty-and-staff>



- **Student Correspondence**: Instructors/TAs may notify students of their individual grades via email, provided the email is sent from a University email account, to a University email account. Notification of grades may also be made via the use of a course management website.
- **Access to Other Student Records**: Instructors may not access other student academic records without demonstrating a “legitimate educational interest” in such information.



Academic integrity and cheating

Familiarize yourself with the academic integrity policies:

<http://nbacademicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>

See also <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/documentation/external-apps/turnitin/>

If you believe you that students are violating any of these policies (plagiarism, cheating, etc.), **before you speak with the student** please email the details to:

- The course instructor
- The Undergraduate Program Director, Prof. Sasan Haghani (sh867@soe.rutgers.edu)
- Dean Ilene Rosen (ilrosen@soe.rutgers.edu) (in CC).

We will guide you through the process.

Students with disability accommodations

Rutgers has an Office of Disability Services (ODS):

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

<https://ods.rutgers.edu/faculty/faculty-support/>

Federal legislation mandates that the University provide reasonable accommodations that afford equal opportunity for all students.

If a student contacts you regarding a disability accommodation, please contact the course instructor to ensure they have also spoken with the student and to confirm what the appropriate accommodation(s) can be.

Every student with an accommodation from ODS will have a person at ODS who is their coordinator.

Letter of Accommodation process

Students should obtain a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) verifying their disability.

- The letter will detail options for accommodations needed in class and/or in testing situations.
- Students can show the letter to TAs during office hours to discuss how accommodations will be implemented.
- All agreements on how the accommodations will be met must be in writing after they are discussed
- You should not ask personal questions about the student's disability unless they welcome it: keep the discussion on what accommodations would be appropriate.
- Disability information is **confidential**. At no time should the class be informed that a student has a disability, except at the student's request.

Colloquium Scheduling for TAs

- If you have recitation, Lab, or Lecture assigned to you on Wednesdays from 10:20 – 11:40 then you CAN NOT register for Colloquium (16:332:699)
- Do not hold your Office Hours on Wednesdays from 10:20 – 11:40 as this conflicts with Colloquium

General Tips

Ask questions!

This may be the first time you have taught.

- What you think a TA should do (e.g. from your UG) may not be what is expected here.
- Find out from the instructors what they expect and be in regular communication with them.
- Ask questions if anything is not clear. You don't want to be surprised by unexpected obligations.
- If you learn that something is going wrong in the class be sure to notify the instructor (and ECE staff, if applicable) as soon as possible!



Common issues to watch for

There are several mistakes that new (and even more experienced) TAs make:

- **Being chronically late** or skipping sections without sufficient notice: this is disrespectful and unprofessional.
- **Dismissing student questions as “dumb”** or making them feel “dumb”: remember they are learning this stuff for the first time!
- **Going too fast/not asking questions:** it's easy to just barrel through without checking in: once students get lost they may stop paying attention.



A foundation of mutual respect

Overall, students should respect you (since you are their teacher) but you should also be respectful of the students.

- Rutgers is a public university but students/their families still have to pay a substantial amount for tuition.
- They deserve a TA who is reliable, knowledgeable, and supportive.
- Students should be respectful and professional in their interactions.

As an “authority figure” you set the tone for the interactions with the students.

Time management

Balancing your TA obligations with other obligations can be tricky:

- TAs also take classes, do research, have families, etc.
- Structure your schedule so that you have enough time to take care of your TA obligations.
- Inform the instructor of any planned travel (e.g. conferences) you have.
- Try to arrive at least 10 minutes **before** a class/lab
- If for any reason you cannot make an in-person commitment (lab, recitation, office hours, etc.) be sure to inform the students, instructor, and department staff as soon as possible.

First impressions and establishing expectations

It is very important to establish expectations at the start of the semester!

- In your first class/lab, introduce yourself to the students and how you would like to be addressed.
- Tell them what parts of the course you are responsible for and what role you play in the instructional team.
- Tell them when/where your office hours are and what the best way of communicating with you is (e.g. email, Canvas, etc.)
- Tell them what they can expect from you/what you can commit to them.

Communication about course information

As with many things, **clear communication** is critical:

- **Communication with students:** Make sure you communicate clearly with the students about important information on grading, grading criteria, due dates for assignments, assignment submission requirements, etc.
- **Communicate with the course instructor and the department:** Make sure to let the instructor and department know of any travel plans, issues you might have with your assignments, issues with the students, etc., in a timely manner.

Lab Courses

Lab courses: safety matters

Many of our TAs will be helping with hands-on lab sessions.

- All lab TAs have to go through lab safety training. Please contact Kevin Wine (kevin.wine@rutgers.edu) for details on how to register for a safety training session. You will not be able to teach the lab without passing the training session.
- Please make sure to make all arrangements in advance.
Students should not have access to the lab without the TAs present.
- Students may have widely varying prior experiences with using lab equipment. You should make sure that students are also following safety guidelines.

Lab courses: being prepared

TAs need to get to the lab well prepared and support questions from the students.

- Please use the first few weeks of the semester to do all the labs for the lab course, if possible. This will make you better prepared.
- Be in the lab 10 minutes prior to the starting. You will need to get and return a key to the lab from Kevin Wine (kevin.wine@rutgers.edu).
- Make sure the students in your section know the lab schedule and if students miss lab, follow up with them. They may have never taken a lab class before and do not understand the expectations.

Lab setup and takedown

The TA is responsible for ensuring that equipment/experiments are set up and put away properly. This is why it is important to arrive early!

- Make sure all required equipment for the experiment is available and in working condition.
- Students must put away the probe kits properly: they should learn how to do this.
- Make sure to check that no equipment is missing at the end of the lab, and make sure probe kits are correct.
- In any case of missing or damaged equipment please contact Kevin Wine (kevin.wine@rutgers.edu).

Lab grading

Lab assignments and grading policies should be clearly explained to the students in the first lab and given in writing: coordinate with the instructor and post the rules on Canvas.

- **All reports handed in by students should include a standard cover page.** Please contact Arletta Hoscilowicz (room EE124; email: ah860@soe.rutgers.edu) to get the template for the cover page.
- Grading lab reports is time consuming: be sure to plan accordingly. Individual grades for labs should be posted promptly. **Grades should be posted within two weeks of the lab report due date.**
- Be sure to **use a rubric and give feedback to students** so they can learn/improve for the next lab (more on this later).

Checking in on how the course/lab is going

It is important to get feedback from students to check on how the course is going.

- The Office of Teaching Evaluation and Assessment Research at Rutgers sends a mid-semester evaluation to students.
- Our Department Administrator, Ms. Arletta Hoscilowicz, will post periodic surveys for students on the lab site for anonymous feedback.
- You can also check in with the students (informally) to see how to adjust your teaching to be more effective.

Grading

Grading

In many classes, TAs are expected to grade/mark homeworks, quizzes, lab reports, and/or exams

- Coordinate with the instructor about the timeline for grading. Typically, grading needs to be complete and grades posted **no more than two weeks** after the due date.
- Grade assignment/exams fairly/equitably and **provide a rubric for grading**, especially for complex tasks/problems. Communicate with students so they know the rubric and reasons for the grade they earned.
- Students may have questions or want to contest/appeal grading decisions. Be sure that you and the instructor **establish a process for appeals** and be prepared to discuss with students during office hours.

Transparency prevents complaints

Making the rules and communicating the criteria/rubric to the students can help cut down on complaints.

- Make all due dates clear and post them on Canvas.
- Make any late submission policies (if any) clear.
- If you are designing the grading rubric:
 - Coordinate with other TAs to ensure consistency.
 - Make sure that the rubric is fair and applied equally.
 - Run it by the instructor.
 - Make sure the students know it. Remind them periodically.
- When you grade, give feedback to the students and refer to the rubric.

Student Work Retention Policy

Student Work is:

- Exams
- MidTerms
- Final Exams
- Homework
- Lab Reports and Pre-Lab Reports

All graded student work must be retained for 1 year.

Work older than 1 year must be disposed of as per Rutgers policy – in the special bin in the ECE kitchen Rm 102

Do not dispose of student work in the regular recycle bin!

Final grades

The instructor should make it clear how the final grade is calculated and who is responsible for submitting the final grade.

- Final grades submission due date in the fall semester is around the beginning of January and for the spring semester it is around mid-May. Please check with Ms. Arletta Hoscilowicz (ah860@soe.rutgers.edu) for grade submission deadline.
- **Do not make arrangements to travel before the end of final exams without consulting the instructor first.**
- Grades can be submitted electronically either through the Roster or Canvas.
- **After the grades due dates, you will not be able to submit grades electronically.**

Grading: absences and missed assignments

Course policy should detail make-up policies for assignments. Students may have **planned** absences (e.g. a conference or religious holiday) or **unplanned** absences (e.g. illness).

- Students with prior conflicts should let you know at the start of the semester. Remind them at the beginning of the semester to report these absences.
- If a student has an unplanned absence, they should inform you as soon as possible and within two weeks.
- You should refer them to Dean of Student office (<http://deanofstudents.rutgers.edu/>) for an Absence Verification letter
- If a student has a verified excused absence, they should be allowed to make up for an assignment.

Grading: longer term or chronic absences

Sometimes students have more significant (not one-off) absences.

- If the absence of a student is repeated, or lengthy such that the student cannot make up missed work in a timely manner, the student should see a dean in the SOE Office of Academic Services @ EN B100; <http://soe.rutgers.edu/oas/contactus>) to discuss options of withdrawing from one or more courses.
- Absences longer than 2 weeks or for chronic health conditions, students should be referred to the ECE department Undergraduate Program Director, Prof. Sasan Haghani (sh867@soe.rutgers.edu) for advising on available options

At the End of the Semester

- Clean up the Lab
- Return the Keys to your TA Office and the Lab to Kevin
- Remove all your personal items from the TA Office. You may or may not be TA the next semester or be in the same office.
- Leave student work product (exams/homework/labs) in the locked file cabinet in the TA Office

ABET Measurement

ABET (the organization that does accreditation for engineering colleges) requires that we track student performance.

- **Instructions will be sent during the semester: follow them!**
- Specific assignments (homeworks/labs/projects) may be selected for ABET measurement.
- You will have to make a copy of those assignments/student work that will go into the ABET report.
- ABET has its own rubric so for those assignments you may have to grade twice.
- You only need to do this for the selected assignments.

Troubleshooting

Getting help for various issues

There are always bumps and hiccups during the semester.

- If you have issues accessing your course roster, please contact John Scafidi (scafidi@rutgers.edu).
- If you have issues with Canvas, inform the instructor, other TAs, and John Scafidi. File a ticket at: <https://canvas.rutgers.edu/canvas-help/>
- If you have questions about the undergraduate curriculum more generally contact Pamela Heinold (pamela.heinold@rutgers.edu) and the Undergraduate Director, Prof. Sasan Haghani (sh867@soe.rutgers.edu)

Troubleshooting student behavior

Sometimes there are issues with a particular student that you may not know how to address. Before confronting the student:

- Document any and all details about the issue.
- Send the information to the instructor, the Undergraduate Program Director and the Graduate Program Director.

Issues of this type can range from

- Academic misconduct (cheating)
- Disruptive behavior in class/lab
- Inappropriate behavior in office hours or in personal interactions.

Emergency/unplanned absences for the TA

You may be ill or have some emergency or unplanned reason for missing some of your TA duties.

- If there are multiple TAs for your class, try to coordinate/arrange for a substitute.
- Make sure to notify the instructor, the students, and the department by emailing Pamela Heinold (pamela.heinold@rutgers.edu) and Arletta Hoscilowicz (ah860@soe.rutgers.edu).
- The most important thing is to communicate clearly and quickly with the rest of the teaching team so they can make the appropriate arrangements. **That is the professional thing to do.**

Help Needed: SOE Intro to Engineering

- Save the Date: the week of November 6th - November 10th, there will be no regularly scheduled labs.
- ECE is hosting the SOE Intro to Engineering course that week and all 5 lab rooms and TA support are needed to conduct these sessions (~950 students split in 8 sections)
- More information to come!

Teaching With Technology Workshops 2023

The [Office of Teaching Evaluation and Assessment Research](#) and the [TA Project](#) are offering a [series of workshops](#) designed to develop technological skills and enhance teaching. Attend four sessions and earn a certificate. All workshops will be held remotely via Zoom from 10:00 - 11:20am.

- [Introduction to Canvas](#): Thursday, September 7
- [PowerPoint Tools for Teaching](#): Wednesday, September 13
- [Introduction to Prezi Next](#): Friday, September 15
- [Creating Excel Spreadsheets for Grading](#): Tuesday, September 19
- [Introduction to Box](#): Wednesday, September 27
- [Making Conference Posters in PowerPoint](#): Wednesday, October 18
- [Accessibility Tools for Teaching](#): Wednesday, October 25
- [Universal Design for Learning](#): Monday, October 30
- [PivotTables in Excel](#): Wednesday, November 8
- [Using Media in PowerPoint](#): Wednesday, November 15
- [Intermediate Prezi Next](#): Thursday, November 30

A large, faint watermark of the Rutgers University seal is visible in the background. The seal features a central sunburst design surrounded by a circular border containing the text "RUTGERS THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY".

RUTGERS

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Discussion