
EXPECTATIONS AND POLICIES FOR TEACHING AND RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Department of Mathematics, University of Kentucky

Approved by the faculty on 8 December 2020.

This policy sets expectations for graduate students supported on an assistantship (teaching, research, or other). We use the abbreviations TA and RA, respectively, for Teaching Assistant and Research Assistant. We use the term *course coordinator* to refer to the overall coordinator of large multi-section courses, the term *supervisor* to refer to the direct faculty supervisor for an assistant, and the term *Mathskeller coordinator* to refer to the faculty director of the Mathskeller (math tutoring center).

1 BASIC EXPECTATIONS

1.1 GRADUATE SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS, TIME COMMITMENT, AND DIRECT SUPERVISOR

Each assistant must meet the appropriate eligibility requirements for their assignment as specified by the UK Graduate School. Requirements for TAs can be found at <https://gradschool.uky.edu/ta-types-teaching-credentials>, including requirements regarding credit hours and oral language screening scores.

Standard assistantships require a commitment of service for not more than an average of 20 hours per week, whether recitation leader, primary instructor, grader, or other assignment. Normally a single half-time appointment should require no more than 20 hours per week of assigned duties. Each assistant is assigned a faculty member (typically a course coordinator or faculty supervisor) to serve as the direct supervisor for the assistant.

1.2 TA TRAINING, PAYROLL INQUIRIES, AND GENERAL INFORMATION

Each TA must complete MA 601 within their first two semesters of employment as a TA. All TAs are required to attend mandatory start-of-semester TA meetings unless prior approval is obtained from their course coordinator and/or course supervisor. All TAs must be familiar with legal obligations related to their assignment, e.g., FERPA, Title IX mandatory reporting, etc.

Inquiries regarding payroll should be sent to either the Department Manager or the Administrative Assistant to the Director of Graduate Studies. All assistants need to be familiar with department policies regarding printing, syllabi, textbooks, web pages, travel requests, computer support, etc. These policies can be found in the Mathematics Department Manual, which is updated and distributed each fall by the Department Manager.

1.3 COMMUNICATION WITH STUDENTS, FACULTY, AND PEERS

During business hours, assistants are expected to respond promptly (generally within 24 hours) to electronic communications (email, Canvas, etc.) from faculty, students, and colleagues. Assistants are expected to be on time and prepared for any scheduled meetings. If an assistant will be unavailable for two or more business days, they should notify their supervisor/coordinator(s).

1.4 PROFESSIONALISM

Assistants must interact with students, colleagues, faculty, and staff in a respectful and professional manner and maintain a high level of overall professionalism.

1.5 COURSE MEETINGS, OFFICE HOURS, AND MATHSKELLER

TAs must be on time and prepared for class. Being prepared for class includes working through student activities prior to class, preparing presentation or lecture material, and having a plan for the structure of class each day. Office hour requirements will be specified by your course coordinator and/or supervisor. TAs must be on time and prepared for office hours. If TAs need to cancel office hours, they are required to announce this to their students in advance. TAs will be assigned a required number of Mathskeller hours each semester. TAs must be on time for their required Mathskeller office hours and must stay for their entire assigned time. TAs are expected to assist any student in the Mathskeller, not only students in their own recitation or course.

1.6 PROCTORING AND GRADING

Many TA assignments include proctoring duties for evening exams. Every TA needs to review the course exam schedule at the beginning of the semester to ensure their availability for proctoring. TAs must be on time for all proctoring assignments and plan to stay through the end of the exam. If a TA has a scheduling conflict on an exam day, they need to inform their supervisor/coordinator at least two weeks in advance and arrange an alternative work assignment.

Many TAs are expected to attend grading sessions for their courses. If a TA has a scheduling conflict on an exam grading day, they need to inform their supervisor/coordinator at least two weeks in advance and arrange an alternative work assignment.

TAs must grade and return all student work in a timely manner, including any written homework, quizzes, and exams. TAs must meet deadlines set by their coordinator and/or supervisor. If a TA is unable to return a graded assignment by the deadline specified by their coordinator and/or supervisor, the TA must inform their supervisor/coordinator and agree on a revised deadline. TAs are expected to meet reasonable grading deadlines; faculty supervisors and/or course coordinators should be mindful to set reasonable deadlines for completion of grading.

1.7 EXPECTATIONS FOR TAs ASSIGNED AS COURSE GRADERS

TAs who are assigned to serve as a grader for a course need to coordinate with their faculty supervisor at the start of the semester to determine what assignments they are responsible for grading and what the grading deadlines are. TA graders are expected to meet reasonable grading deadlines; faculty supervisors should be mindful to set reasonable deadlines for completion of grading. TAs assigned to be course graders should keep a log of their grading time.

1.8 EXPECTATIONS FOR TAs WITH A SPLIT ASSIGNMENT

It is sometimes necessary for TAs to be given a “split assignment”, i.e., an assignment involving teaching and/or grading and/or another assignment for more than one course. In these cases, TAs are not expected to work more than their 20-hour-per-week commitment. TAs with a split assignment should communicate with the Director of Service Courses regarding expectations for their assignment and workload.

1.9 RECORD-KEEPING

RAs are responsible for following all legal requirements regarding secure storage and confidentiality of research data. Prior to conducting research, RAs must consult with their supervisor regarding any requirements regarding data management.

TAs must maintain student grade records following course coordinator/supervisor instructions. TAs must follow all legal requirements regarding secure storage and confidentiality of student records. TAs are expected to record course grades in Canvas and/or myUK as appropriate; if a TA is unable to access course rosters or grading tools, they must immediately inform their supervisor/coordinator. TAs must ensure that grade records and final exams (if applicable) remain available to the department for the required length of time after the course ends (typically 12 months).

1.10 ACADEMIC INTEGRITY VIOLATIONS

If a TA suspects an academic integrity violation involving one or more of their students, they must immediately discuss their concerns to their supervisor/coordinator. If the TA and supervisor believe that the evidence might warrant an investigation, they will next review the evidence with the department chair or Director of Service Courses, as indicated by the UK Academic Offense Procedures: <https://www.uky.edu/ombud/academic-offense-procedures>

1.11 ADDITIONAL TASKS

TAs are expected to complete reasonable course-related tasks specified by their supervisor and/or coordinator, up to but not exceeding their 20-hour-per-week time commitment.

2 ABSENCE AND CANCELLATION POLICY

2.1 CANCELLATION POLICY

University of Kentucky policy is that instructors may not cancel class. Thus, the procedures in this section must be followed for obtaining a substitute in the case of an absence.

2.2 SHORT-TERM ABSENCES

If you are unable to teach your class (for one week or less) or perform your duties due to a short-term illness or other unforeseen circumstances, follow this procedure:

- Inform your supervisor and coordinator (if applicable) that you will be missing class. Provide the reason for your absence.
- Discuss with your supervisor and/or coordinator(s) the plan for covering other duties, such as office hours, grading, proctoring, or Mathskeller hours, as appropriate.
- If you arrange a suitable TA or faculty member in the mathematics department to substitute (preferably a TA who has experience teaching your course):
 - Provide the substitute with a clear lesson plan.
 - Provide your supervisor and coordinator with the name and contact information of the person substituting for you.
- If you are not able to arrange a substitute:
 - Immediately inform your supervisor, course coordinator, and the Director of Service Courses that you need their assistance finding a substitute.

2.3 EXTENDED ABSENCES DUE TO ILLNESS

If you are unable to teach your class for an extended time (more than one week) for medical reasons, follow this procedure:

- Inform your supervisor and coordinator (if applicable).

- Provide the Director of Graduate Studies and Department Chair with documentation from your doctor.
- Consult with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Department Chair to arrange an alternative work assignment.

2.4 ABSENCES DUE TO TRAVEL

If you are planning professional travel, follow this procedure:

- Find a suitable TA or faculty member in the mathematics department to substitute (preferably a TA who has experience teaching your course). Provide the substitute with a clear lesson plan.
- Inform your supervisor and/or coordinator, in writing, at least two weeks in advance. Provide the reason for your absence, the dates you will be gone, and the name and contact information of the person(s) substituting for you.
- Discuss with your supervisor and/or coordinator(s) the plan for covering other duties, such as office hours, grading, proctoring, or Mathskeller hours, as appropriate.
- Absences for professional travel are limited to two weeks total per semester, at most one week at a time, during Fall and Spring and one week during a summer course. If an exception to this rule is required, a written request must be sent by the advisor for the student, at least three weeks in advance, to the Department Chair.

2.5 OTHER ABSENCES

Any other predictable absences not covered by the previous sections must be approved at least three weeks in advance, in writing, by your supervisor or course coordinator.

3 EVALUATIONS OF ASSISTANTS

3.1 TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Each TA with classroom responsibilities will be formally observed by a faculty member each semester. For each TA, a separate end-of-semester TA evaluation will be completed by their faculty supervisor and/or course coordinator. These evaluations are added to the permanent graduate school file for the TA. The evaluation forms used for these evaluations can be found on the Math Department TA Professional Development Website: <https://math.as.uky.edu/ta-professional-development> Each TA with an assignment that does not involve classroom teaching will be evaluated by their supervisor.

If desired, a TA may submit a written request to the TA Professional Development Coordinator or the Director of Graduate Studies for an additional informal evaluation from a faculty member in the department.

3.2 RESEARCH AND OTHER ASSISTANTS

Graduate students employed in an RA or other assistantship will be provided with a letter of evaluation from their faculty supervisor at the end of each semester. This letter should identify areas of strength and suggested areas for growth (if needed). These letters will be included in the department student records maintained by the DGS and/or Administrative Assistant to the DGS. Each semester, an RA has the option (not required) to provide a letter of response to their evaluation, to be included in their department student records.

4 PROCEDURE FOR ISSUE MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

4.1 ISSUES RELATED TO DISCRIMINATION, HARASSMENT, SEXUAL MISCONDUCT, OR ADA COMPLIANCE

If any department member encounters an issue related to discrimination, harassment, sexual misconduct, or Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, they should follow the reporting procedures provided by the UK Office of Institutional Equity and Equal Opportunity: <https://www.uky.edu/eeo/>

4.2 ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY TEACHING ASSISTANTS

If a TA encounters any issue, for example (but not restricted to) a difficult situation with a student, excessive workload, lack of communication from peers or faculty, etc., the following process should be used.

1. The TA should report the issue to their faculty supervisor and/or coordinator(s). The TA and supervisor and/or coordinator should attempt to resolve the issue together.
 - a. If there is an issue *involving* the supervisor and/or coordinator(s) which the TA is not comfortable discussing directly, the TA may skip to the next step.
2. If the issue cannot be resolved by the TA and supervisor and/or coordinator(s), then the TA should report the issue to the Director of Service Courses and the Director of Graduate Studies.
 - a. The TA should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The DSC and/or DGS will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue. If needed, the DSC and/or DGS will informally consult with the graduate committee and/or undergraduate committee and/or the department chair to develop these strategies.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved working with the DSC and/or DGS, then the TA should report the issue to the Department Chair.
 - a. The TA should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The Chair will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue.

If steps 2-3 in this process are reached, the Director of Service Courses will keep a record of the issue and the process through which the issue was managed.

4.3 ISSUES ENCOUNTERED BY RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

If an RA encounters any issue, for example (but not restricted to) issues with data privacy, excessive workload, lack of communication from research team members, etc., the following process should be used.

1. The RA should report the issue to their faculty supervisor. The RA and supervisor should attempt to resolve the issue together.
 - a. If there is an issue involving the supervisor which the RA is not comfortable directly discussing, the RA may skip to the next step.
2. If the issue cannot be resolved by the RA and supervisor, then the RA should report the issue to the Director of Graduate Studies.
 - a. The RA should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The DGS will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue. If needed, the DGS will informally consult with the graduate committee and/or the department chair to develop these strategies.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved working with the DGS, then the RA should report the issue to the Department Chair.

- a. The RA should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
- b. The Chair will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue.

If steps 2-3 in this process are reached, the Director of Graduate Studies will keep a record of the issue and the process through which the issue was managed.

4.4 ISSUES REGARDING SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF DUTIES BY TEACHING ASSISTANTS

If a faculty supervisor and/or course coordinator and/or Mathskeller coordinator encounters an issue regarding satisfactory completion of duties by a teaching assistant, the following process should be used.

1. The supervisor and/or coordinator(s) should inform the TA of the issue. The supervisor and/or coordinator(s) and the TA should attempt to resolve the issue together.
2. If the issue cannot be resolved by the supervisor and/or coordinator(s) and TA, the supervisor and/or coordinator(s) should report the issue to the Director of Service Courses and Director of Graduate Studies.
 - a. The supervisor and/or coordinator(s) should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The DGS and/or DSC will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue. If needed, they will informally consult with the graduate and/or undergraduate committee and/or the department chair to develop these strategies.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved working with the DSC and/or DGS, then the coordinator(s) and/or supervisor should report the issue to the Department Chair.
 - a. The coordinator(s) and/or supervisor should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The Chair will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue.

If steps 2-3 in this process are reached, the Director of Service Courses will keep a record of the issue and the process through which the issue was managed.

4.5 ISSUES REGARDING SATISFACTORY COMPLETION OF DUTIES BY RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

If a faculty supervisor encounters an issue regarding satisfactory completion of duties by a research assistant, the following process should be used.

1. The supervisor should inform the RA of the issue. The supervisor and the RA should attempt to resolve the issue together.
2. If the issue cannot be resolved by the supervisor and RA, the supervisor should report the issue to the Director of Graduate Studies.
 - a. The supervisor should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The DGS will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue. If needed, the DGS will informally consult with the graduate committee and/or the department chair to develop these strategies.
3. If the issue cannot be resolved working with the DGS, then the supervisor should report the issue to the Department Chair.
 - a. The supervisor should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The Chair will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue.

If steps 2-3 in this process are reached, the Director of Graduate Studies will keep a record of the issue and the process through which the issue was managed.

4.6 OTHER ISSUES

For other issues encountered by TAs, RAs, faculty supervisors, or others related to TA/RA duties, the following process should be used.

1. The individual encountering the issue should contact the Director of Graduate Studies and report the issue.
 - a. The DGS will assist with developing strategies to resolve the issue. If needed, the DGS will informally consult with the graduate committee and/or the department chair to develop these strategies.
 - b. If the issue is related to a teaching assignment, the DGS will inform the Director of Service Courses regarding the issue.
2. If the issue cannot be resolved working with the DGS, then the RA should report the issue to the Department Chair.
 - a. The individual should communicate the issue at hand and what attempts have been previously taken to address it.
 - b. The Chair will assist with developing strategies for the advisor and advisee to resolve the issue.

The Director of Graduate Studies will keep a record of the issue and the process through which the issue was managed.

5 CRITERIA FOR PERFORMANCE-BASED RENEWAL AND NON-RENEWAL OF ASSISTANTSHIPS

5.1 TA RENEWAL

TA renewals are determined in a meeting of the mathematics faculty each Spring. To be eligible for a TA renewal, a TA must (A) meet the basic expectations for academic progress in the graduate program and (B) have completed their previous TA assignments in a satisfactory manner.

5.2 TA NON-RENEWAL

Graduate student Teaching Assistantships are typically not renewed beyond the maximum length of time specified in their initial acceptance and TA offer letter. Thus, graduate students who reach their maximum length of support should not expect a renewal of their TA position.

Performance-based non-renewal of a graduate student TA position can occur for two reasons. First, if said graduate student has not met the basic expectations for academic progress in the graduate program, as specified by the UK Graduate School, the Mathematics Department Graduate Handbook, and/or their previous TA renewal letter, their TA position might not be renewed. Second, their TA position might not be renewed if said graduate student has a record of unsatisfactory performance based on any of (A) regular evaluations, (B) additional evaluations, and/or (C) department documentation of unsatisfactory performance following from our procedure for issue management and resolution. If a graduate student will not have their TA position renewed, they will be informed by the department in writing.

5.3 RA RENEWAL AND NON-RENEWAL

For grant-funded RA positions, RA renewal and non-renewal decisions are made at the discretion of the Principal Investigators for the award, subject to any conditions for such decisions stipulated by the grant proposal or funding agency.