

FAQ for Chemistry & Biochemistry Laboratory Teaching Assistants

TA Qualifications and Requirements

What expertise is needed of a Lab TA? TAs must be familiar with the techniques and calculations used in the experiments and be capable of solving problems on-the-spot to help students with their experiments. You must have completed the course (or course equivalent) and received a B or higher to be eligible to lab assist in a specific course.

What are the benefits of being a TA? You will develop your communication skills by interacting with the lab students during lab and by grading the lab reports. You will be finding out if you like teaching. The instructor with whom you work will get to know you and may be a good person to serve as a reference for a future scholarship or job/school application. You will likely learn a lot of chemistry by being involved in teaching the concepts and it is an activity you can put on your resume. You will get paid for it.

What information should the TA be aware of prior to coming to lab? The TA should read the laboratory safety guidelines, and be familiar with all of the safety requirements for students in the lab, including the dress codes. In addition, the TA should read each week's lab experiment prior to coming to lab and think ahead of questions students might ask during lab. If there are calculations involved in the lab, the TA should figure out how to do them and ask the lab instructor the day before the lab meets if they are unsure. (email should be sufficient).

How does the TA get on the payroll? All TAs must complete the student payroll card and return it to Judi Jongekrijg, the Administrative Assistant for the Chemistry and Biochemistry Department, in the Science Division office (NH 156). If you have not worked on campus previously, you will need to go to the Payroll/Student Employment Office, located in Spoelhof Center 370, to fill out the proper tax forms. You will need two forms of identification such as a driver's license, a social security card or passport. When the paperwork is completed, you will receive an "Authorization to Begin Work" card and this must be brought to the Science Division Office. No newly hired student may begin work without an authorization form. You will enter your time on the KnightVision Online payroll program in two week time intervals and you will receive a paycheck every two weeks on Friday. Direct deposit is available and strongly encouraged. For 2010-2011, TAs will be paid minimum wage, which is \$7.40 per hour.

Will the TA get paid for grading outside of lab hours? Yes. The TA is expected to keep a log of the hours spent on grading each week and enter it on Knightvision. Guidelines for grading including how much time is appropriate to spend grading will be provided by the lab instructor.

Do TAs have to purchase their own laboratory manuals and safety goggles? Laboratory manuals will be provided to TAs by the lab instructors. All lab assistants need to wear safety. The department does have a supply of extra goggles you may use if need be.

TA Etiquette

What is the expected behavior of a TA during lab? The TA is to act professionally at all times in lab and take the job seriously. The TA should enforce safety rules at all times and follow the rules by example. The TA should minimize idle chat with students (even if they are friends - do not show partiality to friends who are students in the lab). The TA should assist students while refraining from giving out answers to questions which the students need to answer through discussion with their lab

partner. Ideally, the TA should maintain an active presence by moving about the room to monitor and help students.

What if the TA needs to leave the lab for a short period of time? If the TA plans to leave the lab, inform the lab instructor prior to leaving. If the TA knows he/she will be away for 30 min or more during a particular lab, inform the instructor prior to the lab.

Can the TA check email during lab? Yes, but do it discreetly and not at the beginning of a lab or while the instructor is giving the pre-lab lecture.

TA Responsibilities in Lab

Is the TA expected to grade lab reports? In some labs (i.e. freshman and organic labs) the TA will be expected to grade the lab reports while in upper level labs the instructor will most likely grade them. However, the TA should keep in mind that he/she may be asked to provide grading assistance in upper level labs as well. Generally, grading rubrics and answer keys will be provided to TAs who must grade lab reports.

What recourse is there when a student disagrees with the lab grade? Listen to the student and tell him/her to write a short note as to why their lab report grade should be changed. Have them return the lab report, with the note attached, to you. The TA will reconsider it in consultation with the lab instructor.

Who is responsible for lab clean up? Each student enrolled in lab is responsible for their own glassware, keeping their bench area clean, and turning off the computer and monitor assigned to their bench at the end of lab. However, for each lab session, two students will be assigned “clean up duty”. Their responsibility is to ensure that the weighing scales and the surrounding area is clean, lab glassware is not left unclean on bench tops, waste paper is in recycle bins, and all computers and monitors are turned off. The TA should fill up empty solvent bottles at the end of lab, ensure that the students assigned for cleaning up do their duties, as well as that the students leaving the lab have put away glassware and wiped their bench area. If these requirements are not met, it is the TA’s responsibility, along with the Lab Manager and instructor, to clean up at the end of lab.

If students from other classes wish to use the computers in the lab are they allowed to during a lab? In general, the laboratory space and time is assigned to that particular lab. The TA has every right to tell students from another class to leave the lab area if their presence is a distraction. Provided other computer use is not a distraction, the computer user must be wearing safety glasses and aware of lab hazards to the same level as the student participating in the lab.

Is there a place to enter lab grades? You should request that your lab instructor add you as the TA for the course on Knightvision. This will give the TA access to the Gradebook on Knightvision, and all grades should be recorded there.

What is the TA’s responsibility in enforcing laboratory safety rules? The TA should provide one verbal warning to any student breaking laboratory safety rules. If several students are not wearing their safety glasses, the TA should make a general announcement in lab requesting students wear their safety glasses. Students who continually fail to follow safety rules should be reported to the lab instructor who will deal with the student.