TA Best Practices for 121 & 123

Outside the Lab

Review all materials. I have provided you with quizzes, HW assignments, PowerPoints, etc. But YOU are still responsible for the content of these items. Review them carefully, before our meetings and before your students, and report any issues to me via email.

Read ahead. You should read the lab one week ahead to make connections for your students and help them know what to expect.

Attend all Lab Meetings. Be on time and prepared. Before each meeting, it is your responsibility to go over all materials to be covered in the coming week: quizzes, HW, PowerPoint, etc. Be ready to discuss any issues with the prior lab and any issue you foresee with the coming lab.

Changes to provided material. Of course, if you find typos, incorrect information, or inconsistencies, make the changes needed and let me know ASAP. If you want to add a "personal touch" please do! But, if you want to make big changes to content, bring your ideas to the lab meeting the week before so we can discuss. This is important for consistency across all our sections, and because if you have a great idea, we might want to implement it!

Observe. If you are a new TA, you must observe one section each week, before you teach. If you are returning, please do this as you see fit.

Complete the pre-course and post-course checklists. Both are imperative for successful opening and closing of your course.

Grades. You should never be more than 1 week behind. The only exception here is for posters in 123. You should download and save your grades in Blackboard every few weeks as back-up.

Exam grading. The best way to grade exams is one page at a time. Grade all the page 1s, then page 2s, etc. This increases objectivity, consistency, and the likelihood you may recognize cheating. Do not enable student viewing of exam statistics in Blackboard. Show the students the class distribution and averages when you pass back the exams. Never pass back exams until all students in all sections have completed the test. Do not let students keep the exams. Let students make appointments with you if they want to go over the exam. If your exam mean is under 70%, please discuss with me.

Final grades due 1 week after the lab final. No excuses.

Record your time. Set aside a few minutes each week to record your time on your TA time sheet. These data help me understand how changes made to these courses affect your time.

Participate in WKU assessments. You MUST provide information necessary for the 5th week assessments (and others) as it is requested from you by WKU. Not optional. Also, follow through with your 5th week intervention to be determined in consultation with me.

Careful correspondence. Be sure your students know to only email you from their WKU accounts and to always include their course and section number. You should save every student email in a separate folder. Forward any problematic correspondence to me immediately. Understand that nuance does not come across in email. Be respectful and polite, even when you need to say no. Try to return emails within 48 hours. This can be difficult given the daily deluge. It helps to "flag" all student emails so you can go through them quickly when you have time.

Office hours. You do not keep office hours, but you should let your students know they can schedule a meeting with you via email.

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Do not accept late work. This is in both syllabi. Do not go back on this without a university recognized excuse with documentation. Do not go back on this.

Keep exit slips. For recording purposes in case there are ever questions about participation grades or attendance.

Announcements & Reminders. Use these options to help your students stay on track. Most are freshmen, and still working to establish the skills they need to succeed in a university setting. Only correspond with your whole class through the Blackboard announcements; these are permanent.

Missing Class. The need to miss class is very rare. But if this is the case, email Mountjoy and the other course TAs ASAP to schedule coverage.

Learn more about Blackboard. There are many useful tutorials online. Use them.

Learn the students' names. This is a game changer. Use the Lab Group Sign-Up sheet and student photos in TopNet to assist. The sooner the better.

Explore our Organization Site. All course materials are located here for your convenience.

In the Lab

Students should address you as Mr. or Ms. On day one, when you introduce yourself, just add, "…and you can address me as Mr. Smith." Students appreciate the clarity and it separates you from them.

Be 10 minutes early to lab, every day. The lab may have been left messy or items may be missing from prep. Spend this time finding everything you need, signing in, getting the projector ready, reading notes from other TAs about the week, etc.

Dress appropriately: business casual. Nice jeans (no holes) are OK with business-style shirt. Wear closed toed shoes. Nothing dirty or wrinkled. Dress has nothing to do with your skills as a scientist or educator, but perception is important, especially because you are close in age to your students.

Do not use personal electronic devices. Stay off your phones & laptops. This time belongs to your students, not you. Do not grade in the lab.

Be kind, polite & respectful, always. Do not ever denigrate your students no matter how bad their choices may be. Praise personally but caution without personal investment.

Join your students. Sit with them. Go around group to group. Spend your time with them. Questions come up this way and it builds social capital.

Leave the lab clean and prepped. Train your students from Day 1 to do this for you. If/when they do not, you must. It is your responsibility to leave the lab completely ready for the next section.

Discuss your research. Discuss your own work in the context of the lab as much as possible.

Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC) Forms. Over the first few weeks students will ask you to sign these. **Do not.** They are supposed to give you a copy. Bring it to our lab meeting so we can discuss the requested accommodations. Then, if they are reasonable, you and I will sign, keep a copy, and provide a copy to the student. If they only have one copy and won't leave it with you, take a photo of the form for us to discuss and tell the student to bring a copy to the next class. Save and flag all SARC-related emails you receive. Be sure you and I have all your SARC-related forms on file. Alert me immediately if there are any SARC-related issues.

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Common Student Questions

Will we get a study guide/ have a review session? No study guides, no review sessions. Students are overly reliant on these. Part of the studying process is figuring out what to study. If we tell them, it is a disservice. Study sessions are not ever helpful. Pools of all the quiz questions are available on Blackboard as study tools for the midterm and final.

Can I go to a different section? Not without a University recognized excuse and a Make-Up Lab Request form.

I had a technical problem with Blackboard! This is a common excuse but rarely the case. Tell your students if this does happen, to take a screenshot of the problem and include it in an email to you immediately. Also, let your students know that everything on Blackboard is trackable. You can tell if "something closed early," or if "it wasn't available." IT can tell if Blackboard shut down for some reasons or if other issue arose.

I submitted on time, but it shows up a late? If a student pushes submit at 10 AM and the assignment is due at 10 AM, it will show up 1 minute late. They should not be submitting right at the due time.

Can I have extra credit? There is one extra credit opportunity in both course for 10 points. Occasionally you might give 1 or 2 during lab (for best titration endpoint or for IDing the most trees), but do not give any other extra credit assignments. Never give one student extra credit without making it available to everyone.

Can I have a different partner/group? The answer here is usually no. Point out the peer review form and how they can use it to evaluate their group at the end of the semester. But this really needs to be addressed on a case-by-case bias. Notify me if it comes up.