Roles and Responsibilities of a TA

Dr. Leonard M. Lye
Associate Dean (Graduate Studies)
Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
Roles of a TA

Roles are many:

• subject expert and facilitator of learning
• role model and advisor for students
• assistant to a professor
• representative of a department/faculty
• employee of the university

TA acts as liaison, providing bridge and filter between student and instructor.

These roles may be very rewarding or very trying.
Duties

- assists with marking (most common)
- leading seminars
- discussions or laboratory sessions
- preparing teaching materials
- occasional lecturing in the absence of instructor
- Invigilation of tests and exams

Range of TA duties may be wide, but time devoted to duties should not exceed an average of 4-5 hours per week (56 hours total) per course.

Roles you will play and duties you perform as a TA vary from course to course.
Responsibilities

Teaching Assistants have responsibilities to:

(1) professional standards of the discipline,
(2) general academic standards of the university,
(3) Department/Faculty,
(4) students,
(5) professor being assisted,
(6) teacher
(7) themselves.

Diverse set of roles played by TA also carries potential for serious value conflicts.
Responsibilities (cont)

(1) Yourself

You are in the graduate program primarily as a student and should therefore ensure that:

(a) you get your own work done
(b) work is done within a reasonable amount of time
(c) do best job possible on your own assignments.
(2) Teacher

As a teacher, your responsibilities are primarily to students. Show that you want to help students with their learning. You should:

(a) ensure that students know who you are
(b) keep up with progress of course
(c) be familiar with course material
(d) be available to students, especially during your stated office hours
(e) use appropriate teaching methods and techniques.
As an assistant to a faculty member, your responsibilities are primarily directed towards that individual. It is your responsibility to:

(a) discuss with instructor exactly what your duties and responsibilities will be for course
(b) be familiar with textbook and course outline
(c) know technical details of course (e.g., number and weight of assignments)
(d) keep in contact with instructor of course.
(4) Professional

In your capacity as an expert, you are expected to represent department/faculty by being knowledgeable in subject matter of the course. Your responsibilities are to:

(a) do sufficient background reading so that you may answer the students' questions carefully and accurately
(b) remember your position in department, and not represent yourself as THE authority;
(c) be intellectually honest and admit when you don't know the answer to a student's question.
If you want to be a future professor, being a great TA is a good step to take.
Questions?