Acing your assistantship

How to be a great TA or RA

Typical duties of an RA

- A research assistantship may include:
  - Working in a laboratory
  - Literature review or writing
  - Field work
  - Collecting data
  - Data entry or programming
  - Working with a research team
  - Anything that helps move research forward

Typical duties of a TA

- A teaching assistantship may include
  - Teaching laboratories
  - Leading recitations or study sessions
  - Grading assignments
  - Preparing teaching materials or assignments
  - Driving on field trips
  - Holding office hours
  - Helping students with questions
  - Lecturing in class (not common)

Getting started

- Visit with your department head, major professor, or assigned course professor
  - Ask about expectations, duties, and time requirements
  - Ask about work schedule and make sure it does not conflict with your classes
  - Ask about required safety training for your position

TIPS for RA's and TA's

- Be safe!
  - Take and apply all safety training
  - Report unsafe conditions or practices
- Meet with your supervisor at least once a week to review questions or problems
- This is career training
  - Put in your best effort and strive to improve
  - Focus on doing a good job, not how many hours
- Cultivate a professional attitude
  - Be courteous and respectful to everyone
  - Learn and follow policies

Research tips

- Be careful and methodical
- Take good notes of procedures
- Read, read, read journals. Get a good bibliography program like EndNote
- Be a good research team member
- Ask before using unfamiliar equipment
- Think critically and look for improvements
- Strive to make positive contributions

Teaching tips

- Be prepared
  - Know the assignments. Prep lectures and materials.
  - Ask the professor about common difficulties
- Be polite and patient, always
  - Even if the question seems silly, or it's the 10th time
- Be fair
  - Every student deserves your attention
- Post and keep your weekly office hours
  - Most departments expect 2-4 hours per week

Grading tips

- Do the assignment/test yourself first
- Be as fair and consistent as possible
  - Use an answer key and rubrics
  - Look for understanding—not rigid repetition of the answer—and give partial credit if appropriate
  - Ask the professor if you need guidance
- Provide feedback to students
- Return graded assignments within one week

About FERPA

- The Family Education Right to Privacy Act protects against the release of personal, schedule and academic information, including grades and test scores

- Graduate instructors must follow the same policies as do faculty and staff

  - http://www.sdsmt.edu/Academics/Registrar/FERPA-Privacy-Act/

Quick FERPA do's and don'ts

- **Return graded papers to students in person**
  - Don't leave a stack and let them find their own
  - Don't post grades or scores unless identity is disguised
  - Don't give papers to a friend, parent, or roommate, even if the student requests it
- **Don't share or discuss a student's information** (personal, schedule, or academic) with anyone other than the course professor
- **Be VERY careful with class lists and grading records.** Never place them on a network location visible to students or the public. Avoid using cloud servers like GoogleDocs for these items.
- **Be VERY careful when forwarding emails** or using "Reply to All" when documents with scores or personal information are attached
- **Always use the BCC (blind CC) instead of the TO box** when emailing a group of students.
- If unsure what to do in a given situation, ask the professor or the Registrar for guidance

Resources

- Some helpful TA advice to get you started
- http://www.pgbovine.net/ta-tips.htm
- https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/connections/advice-your-first-year-teaching-assistant
- https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/grad-support/grad-teaching-development/teaching-assistants-role
- https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2015/08/28/experienced-professors-advice-new-teaching-assistants-essay
- https://www.gradschools.com/financial-aid/graduate-student-loans-assistantships/how-be-great-graduate-teaching-assistant