TA Project

TA Handbook

RUTGERS

School of Graduate Studies

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Introduction

What makes a good teacher? Being a good teacher requires much more than knowing your way around campus or memorizing the rules and regulations of the university. Successful teaching demands a thorough understanding of the course material, a respect for students, a commitment to excellence, as well as a recognition of the need to examine, assess, and adjust your own pedagogical goals and philosophy as you go along.

The transition from student to student *and* teacher is a major one, requiring a conscious evaluation of your feelings about both roles. What expectations do you have for yourself as a student and as a teacher? How do they differ? How can these contradictions be resolved? How will your new position affect your relationships with undergraduates? How will you know how to act in front of a class? Will you model yourself on a favorite teacher, or is it best to be completely original? What kinds of demands will you make upon your students in terms of classwork, discipline, attendance, or grades? How can you ensure fair treatment of all students? What kind of relationship should you establish with your students? Distant or friendly, formal or informal?

These and a hundred other questions will probably present themselves to you. This handbook is not meant to be definitive or prescriptive but to offer suggestions about how to proceed based on the choices that others have found beneficial.

Neither this handbook nor helpful faculty members, however, can solve all problems: time and experience will, in the end, prove to be the most effective teachers.

Why TAs?

The teaching assistant at Rutgers, as at other major research universities in the United States, plays an important role in the education of undergraduates. Rutgers depends on teaching assistants to staff both introductory and advanced undergraduate courses. Today, it is a rare student who graduates from Rutgers without having been taught by a TA. With approximately 800 teaching assistants in the full range of disciplines, TAs are obviously essential to the running of the university. Furthermore, without teaching assistantships the university would be at a disadvantage in competing to attract the best faculty to work at Rutgers and would have difficulty meeting its obligation to train and develop the next generation of scholars and teachers.

The benefits of an assistantship to a TA are considerable. First, there are financial benefits, including tuition remission, which make it possible for some students to enroll in graduate school in the first place. In addition, TAs gain valuable experience in teaching at the college level, which will help when the time comes to look for a job. Finally, TAs have an opportunity to strengthen their own knowledge of their chosen field, since teaching demands not only a thorough understanding but also a constant rethinking of the subject matter. Teaching assistants and professors frequently comment on how much better they have grasped a subject after teaching it. Recognizing these mutually beneficial aspects of the assistantship may help TAs to feel more comfortable with their position at Rutgers. At least at first, many TAs may feel uncertain about their status in the university. As graduate students, they may feel that they have come a long way from their undergraduate days, but as teachers, they may feel that they have far to go. Although resolving this conflict may not be simple, working hard at professional development will make TAs feel more secure in their status as members of the teaching staff and help accelerate their professional growth. Keep in mind that TAs are needed, qualified, and respected members of the Rutgers community who have the opportunity to make a unique and important contribution to its educational goals.

Teaching and Research

What is the connection between research and teaching? Is there a connection between serious research and good teaching? Do undergraduates benefit from instructors who devote a considerable amount of time to research rather than to teaching full-time? What are the benefits for the students in having a TA who is engaged in teaching, studying, and research? What are the disadvantages of this arrangement?

Although the benefits teachers gain from research are generally clear to those engaged in it, people on the other side of the fence may question the efficacy of such a dual system. Undergraduates and critics outside of the academy often see the researcher as someone who is seeking to avoid the responsibility of teaching, someone in retreat from the "real world." The notion that jobs are, in fact, rigidly compartmentalized teachers teach, nurses nurse, waiters wait does not hold true. Almost any job combines many skills and duties; the most interesting fields are often those that intersect with others, where a person gets the opportunity to

integrate diverse interests and talents into a single satisfying job. Teaching in a research university such as Rutgers can be a very satisfying occupation. It is important also to note that it benefits not only the teacher but that teacher's students and society at large. The teacher/researcher, of course, is the obvious beneficiary; being paid to explore areas of interest in one's chosen field is a joy. In addition, having the chance to discuss new ideas with a group of interesting and interested students is a way of testing ideas. More importantly, the act of teaching provides a constant opportunity to rethink old questions, a process that often leads to new ways of looking at problems, even of solving them. Finally, in the end, the research may result in some real contribution to the field the sciences, the humanities, the social sciences that will benefit others in the discipline and the constituents served by it.

Undergraduates, of course, benefit also. The teacher who is currently involved in research, who stays abreast of the field is able to keep his or her teaching fresh: knowing about new ideas, new theories, new approaches to a subject are necessary to anyone actively involved in research. Students, therefore, are given a broader, more up-to-date view of the subject than might be available to a student with a teacher whose research ended when the degree was awarded. Students can be challenged and excited by a teacher whose subject seems open-ended and evolving rather than closed and final.

Undergraduates do have a legitimate complaint, however, when a faculty member spends precious class time on an arcane, highly specialized problem. Unless students have mastered the basics of a subject, they simply will not be interested in these matters. It is useful to bring in relevant ideas from research when they assist students in understanding the course material or when they offer opportunities for students to build upon their basic knowledge. TAs must balance their students' need to understand the basics thoroughly with their own desire to keep their students aware of the latest ideas in a field. Without the basics, these ideas are meaningless.

Another problem may arise when students perceive the faculty member or TA as too busy to work with them. Faculty members who spend all their time in the laboratory and make themselves inaccessible to their students are not, of course, meeting their obligations. The key to the success of the research university lies in the ability of its members to balance the roles of researcher and teacher; one role cannot take priority over the other. If either role is neglected, the faculty member or teaching assistant is not fulfilling his or her obligation to the university, to the department, and to the undergraduates.

Faculty members engaged in important research attract other talented faculty members to the campus, who, in turn, attract better graduate students and undergraduates. Research also brings needed funds to the university in the form of grants. Because a university takes its shape from the kinds of teaching and research it undertakes and is judged by its level of commitment to teaching and research, it is important that all members of the university community are aware of the nature of this commitment.

Your Teaching Assistantship

TA Appointments

The university awards teaching assistantships to promising graduate students. The individual department or program establishes its own procedures for appointment and reappointment consonant with university policy. The department or program also determines the specific TA assignments, which may include teaching your own class, leading a recitation/discussion/laboratory section as part of a larger class headed by an instructor, grading, laboratory supervision, or other academic duties as dictated by need.

As you already know, notification of a TA appointment is made by the department in a letter that sets out the basic terms of employment. Students are expected to respond to this letter as soon as possible, whether accepting or refusing the appointment. The term of appointment for teaching assistants is from August 25 to Commencement, but for payroll purposes runs from September 1 to June 30; all standard appointments are made for one year only. Appointment to a teaching assistantship one year does not guarantee reappointment the next year. Since all university appointments are subject to availability of resources, it is essential that you reapply each year, according to departmental instructions. All questions about reappointment should be directed to the individual department or program-to your graduate director, for example.

Hours and Duties

A full-time teaching assistant works normally at the maximum rate of fifteen clock hours per week (average your total hours worked for the semester by the number of weeks—some weeks, especially around exams, require more work while other weeks require less). The number of hours varies according to the time of semester. For example, TAs who are hired as graders should expect to put in more hours during those times of the semester when exams or papers are scheduled.

If you are unhappy with your assigned duties or feel overburdened by the amount of work and time you are expected to invest, try talking to other TAs within your own department to see if your experience is unusual and your expectations are realistic. (It is unrealistic to compare the workload of one department to another; because of the variety of duties and the disparity of disciplinary demands, what is usual in one program is by no means a measure for any other.) Discuss the cause of your displeasure with the department chair to see if changes can be made for the next semester. Most faculty members are sympathetic to the problems of the TA and try to be fair in their assignments.

If you feel, however, that you are being asked to perform duties which are inappropriate, or that you are being exploited or overburdened, do not suffer in silence. Speak to someone. You should not be putting in so many hours as a TA that your graduate work suffers. Your advisor is a good person to begin with, but if you get no satisfaction there, you should make an appointment with the course or department chair. If that does not help, then try one of the

deans of the Graduate School, who can determine whether your complaint is valid and, if so, help you resolve the problem. TAs should not be required to run personal errands for faculty or staff, or to work for so many hours that they are unable to complete their own work. Recognize the fact that you can say no to a faculty member who is overwhelming you with work. You are a professional and deserve to be treated like one.

Salary and Benefits

In addition to a salary, paid every two weeks during the contract year, the full-time TA at Rutgers is entitled to a variety of benefits, such as health and life insurance, dental insurance (an optional benefit for which the TA must pay a portion of the cost), and tuition remission.

Full tuition remission is given to all TAs on standard appointments; this will cover up to twelve credits a semester and six credits during the summer following a full-year appointment. To take advantage of this benefit, TAs must submit a completed RT100 form when registering for summer session. The RT100 must be signed by the department where the assistantship is *held* which may or may not be your home department. RT100 forms are available from the cashier's office, your program administrator, or online.

Getting Paid

Certain information must be entered into the university computer system before a paycheck can be issued; without this information, it is **IMPOSSIBLE** to get paid. Be diligent in completing and prompt in returning the forms the department mails to you, since it may take up to six weeks to activate a new name in the payroll system. If you have any questions, check with your department administrator.

International TAs must report to the Center for Global Services to complete the proper payroll forms. Contact the Center to learn the scheduled times for processing employment verifications (I-9s); this cannot be done on a walk-in basis. Until international teaching assistants complete employment verifications, their payroll papers cannot be processed (see information about the Center for Global Services).

Many students already have a United States Social Security number. If you do not, apply for one immediately. This is one piece of information required by the payroll department, without which you cannot be paid. If a problem arises at the beginning of the semester and your paycheck is delayed, speak to the department administrator to find out whom to contact to trace your check. If necessary, the department administrator may be able to process a request for an emergency check. Since this entails even more paperwork, however, it is best to try to get everything straightened out before the semester begins. Checks are distributed through the department on alternate Fridays, or you can arrange to have your checks deposited directly into your bank account by filling out the necessary form. Payments begin in September. For TAs appointed for the fall term only, payments run from September through January. TAs appointed for spring term only are paid on alternate Fridays beginning in February and running through

June.

Health Benefits

Off-Campus

In addition to the Rutgers Health Service, the university offers a variety of benefit plans from which all full-time TAs may select. To be covered you must fill out the necessary forms including a State Health Benefits Application at the beginning of the semester.

For information regarding medical plan choices, prescription drug plans, and dental coverage information call the Benefits Office 848-932-3990.

On-Campus

Comprehensive group health care facilities are available to students on the New Brunswick/Piscataway campuses. All full-time students are entitled to use the Rutgers Health Service, and TAs on standard appointments are considered full-time. (A standard teaching assistantship counts as six E credits, which combine with your other credits to give full-time status (see E-credits). Appointments are required by the health centers.

To establish a medical file and make treatment more efficient, try to use the same center for all your visits. Because Hurtado is the one center open all year, many resident students choose it as their primary facility.

The locations of the three student health centers for New Brunswick/Piscataway students are listed below. To make an appointment at any of the centers, call 848-932-7402:

Hurtado Health Center
11 Bishop Place, CAC
848-932-7402
Pharmacy 848-932-8033

Busch Livingston Health Center
110 Hospital Road
Livingston Campus
848-932-7402
Telepharmacy 848-445-3606

Cook Douglass Health Center
61 Dudley Road
Cook Campus
848-932-7402
Telepharmacy 848-932-8590

If the health centers are **CLOSED** you may call the RHS Advice Nurse Line at 1-800-890-5882

E-credits

Your teaching assistantship (standard appointment) carries with it six E credits. (Partial TA appointments have proportionally fewer E credits.) The E indicates that no credit has been earned toward the degree and no grade computed in the cumulative average. This means that if you are registered for at least 3 other credits of coursework or research you maintain full-time status in the university, thus insuring that you receive all the benefits of a full-time student.

Your Students and Their World

What is it like to be an Undergraduate?

Many TAs feel far removed from undergraduate culture, distant from that way of living and thinking, even though they themselves were undergraduates not so long ago. Having moved beyond the undergraduate to the graduate level, they may forget what it was like to be an undergraduate. The TA who can remember this experience, however, and empathize with the trials and stresses of undergraduate life may be able, in the end, to reach more students than those who view them from afar.

Although the life of an undergraduate may seem idyllic when looked at through the eyes of the overburdened graduate student, it is not quite as simple as memory makes it. Most undergraduates have a full schedule of classes, carrying at least twelve credits (often, sixteen or more). In addition to this, many undergraduates must work at part-time or even full-time jobs to subsidize their education. For many students, a job is a necessity: without it, they would be forced to leave school. Furthermore, many of these students are living away from home for the first time in their lives—an emotionally and socially demanding period. Clearly, students who are overwhelmed by work and social life will have difficulties investing the needed time to complete their coursework.

Once TAs recognize the fact that the life of the undergraduate is not always an easy one, they are in a position to adopt teaching strategies that acknowledge and alleviate the problems that come along with being an undergraduate. Perhaps the most effective first step TAs can take is to stop thinking about their students as an amorphous mass, “the undergraduates,” and to attempt to see them as individuals. Do not generalize (i.e., undergraduates are lazy, silly, shallow, unmotivated). Most students are sincerely involved with their education and willing to work hard to succeed.

Be understanding when students come to you with problems or with excuses for late or unsatisfactory work: they honestly do have tight schedules and may be under a lot of pressure. Help them if you can; don’t put another obstacle in their way. This does not mean that you should fall for every line they give you, but do not be so skeptical that you do not accept any excuses. Dealing with students in a fair and honest manner is the best policy. Try to help them find ways to meet their commitments to your class without losing control of other equally important parts of their lives.

The Student Body

What expectations can a TA have about a Rutgers student? In a university of approximately 55,000 students-37,000 in New Brunswick alone–you can, first of all, expect variety. There are more full-time students than part-time students, more women than men enrolled at Rutgers. Most of the students (91%) are from New Jersey.

Numbers and percentiles tell nothing about the ability of a given individual or the scope of

knowledge or range of experience a student may bring to your classroom. Avoid stereotyping students, since research has shown that student performance is often directly related to teacher expectation. One of the jobs of a good teacher is to identify and help develop an individual student's potential. So, the answer to the question posed in the opening paragraph of this section-what expectations should a TA have about Rutgers students-is that a teacher should expect intelligent and able students, each with a unique contribution to make.

Campuses and Schools

With a large and sprawling university and campuses spread throughout the state, Rutgers is larger than many cities, and, like a city, offers a variety of opportunities and experiences. Getting around may seem confusing at first, but a clear roadmap and a little curiosity will help you become oriented more quickly. Understanding the Rutgers system will be beneficial in helping you to feel at home on campus and enabling you to work more closely with your students. Recognizing which unit of the university your students come from will give you clues about their goals and lives and help you in referring them to the proper places if they come to you for assistance. In addition, evidence of your familiarity with the students' environment signals to them that you are also a member of their community, someone who may understand and sympathize with their problems.

Try to become familiar with the five New Brunswick campuses, not only because TAs can be assigned to any campus but also because you will feel more comfortable if you do so. Special events of interest are held on various campuses—lectures, movies, sporting events, etc.—so you will probably have occasion to visit all of them at one time or another. Although these campus complexes may at first seem widely scattered, all can be reached with campus bus service. This knowledge of the campuses and the difficulties students face getting to one campus from another will also help you understand the challenges your students tackle just reaching your class on time.

The New Brunswick area campuses are described briefly below.

Busch Campus, located across the Raritan in Piscataway, is the home of Engineering, Pharmacy, the Library of Science and Medicine, Mathematics, and most of the science disciplines, graduate and undergraduate student housing, as well as the Administrative Services Building which houses University Undergraduate Admissions, Registrar and Scheduling, and Business Offices. Werblin Recreation Center, classroom and office buildings, labs, the football stadium, golf course, and numerous athletic fields are all found on Busch.

Livingston Campus, also located in Piscataway, borders Busch Campus and is the home of the School of Business, the School of Management and Labor Relations, and some social science disciplines, as well as the Athletic Center, the ecological preserve, and James Dickson Carr Library.

College Avenue Campus, is the home of the School of Arts and Sciences decanal offices, the School of Communication, Information and Library Studies, the Graduate School of

Education, the School of Graduate Studies Dean's Office, the School of Social Work, as well as a number of humanities and social science disciplines.

Also on the College Avenue Campus is the Alexander Library, Financial Aid, and classroom buildings. Only a short walk from the train and bus service linking New Brunswick to New York, Philadelphia, Washington, Princeton, and other points of interest, it is the main administrative campus in New Brunswick.

Cook and *Douglass* Campuses, in New Brunswick, are adjacent to each other. Cook Campus is home to the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS). Along with many classroom buildings, residence halls, and labs, these campuses house the college Research Farm, the AgBioTech Center, the Levin Theatre, the Mabel Smith Douglass Library, the agricultural museum, the Eagleton Institute of Politics, and the Institute for Research on Women.

The range of the university is wide, not only geographically but also academically. Within the three campuses-Camden, New Brunswick, and Newark-there are twenty-three degree-granting divisions, eleven in New Brunswick alone.

There are two undergraduate degree-granting schools in New Brunswick. Each has its own goals and mission and policies concerning admissions, academic standing, and graduation requirements. Both, however, must meet common university standards. Each school has an administrative code that you will see on rosters, student grade reports, and with all course information. These codes will appear next to students' names on the grade rosters. For your information, these codes are listed with the school name below.

The undergraduate schools are:

School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) (01) is the undergraduate school for liberal arts and sciences;

School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) (11) as the land-grant college of Rutgers, builds on a well-established tradition of offering studies in the biological, environmental, food and nutritional, marine, and agricultural sciences.

In addition to SAS and SEBS, New Brunswick is home to five other units with a professional orientation:

Mason Gross School of the Arts (07) provides professional education in the arts, with concentrations in visual arts, theatre arts, music, and dance;

The School of Engineering (14) has as its objectives the sound technical and cultural education of the student and the advancement of knowledge through research;

Ernest Mario School of Pharmacy (30) educates and prepares students for practicing the profession of pharmacy in the community, medical institutions, organized health care facilities,

or the pharmaceutical industry;

The School of Business (33) is a two-year upper-division school offering programs in accounting, finance, management, management science and information systems, and marketing;

The School of Communication and Information (04) offers majors in communication and journalism and mass media.

As a TA, you will meet students from each of these schools and each of these campuses. Identifying a students' school may help you to understand the focus of a student's interest in your discipline: why he or she are taking your course, why his or her level of interest is so high or so low, what the rest of his or her program is like, and other pertinent facts. Of course, more will be learned by speaking with the student, but these codes are a start.

Beginning to Teach

TA Assignments

Your teaching assistantship assignment will be made by your department at the earliest possible date. Although you may have found out in June that you were awarded a teaching assistantship, you may not know the particulars of your assignment until late August or even early September. Obviously, it is in the best interest of all involved to make assignments as early as possible, but because of variables such as student enrollment, assignments are sometimes made quite late.

Although a late assignment may not present problems to a TA who will be grading, those assigned to teach may well be worried. Do not panic. Although others may have had more time to plan their courses, you can still have a successful semester if you sit down at once and get organized. The following sections may help you in doing so. Do not be shy about going to a faculty member for assistance. Every department should have someone to assist and advise TAs. Find that person and get the help you need to make yourself more comfortable.

The more prepared you are on the first day of class, the more secure you will be. No one, of course, can offer a blueprint for how to teach a class, but the following suggestions for preparation and organization of classes may give you some direction as you begin to plot your course.

The First Day

Not surprisingly, many TAs are particularly apprehensive about the first day of class, imagining all the things that could go wrong when they walk into the classroom. Although most TAs recognize that they do have the necessary background knowledge in a subject—acceptance to, and survival in, graduate school is a confirmation of this—many panic at the idea of conveying this knowledge to a group of seemingly uninterested and judgmental students. The transition from student/learner and somewhat passive receiver of knowledge to teacher/educator and active center of the class can be unnerving. Bear in mind that it is natural to be nervous on the first day; even experienced teachers feel anxious in facing a new class, a new semester. Taking the time to prepare well beforehand will help insure that the first class will go smoothly; indeed, it may even be fun.

As you walk into the classroom or lab on the first day, remember that students make certain automatic assumptions about the teacher, the first being that since you are the teacher you must know what you are doing. Your position—the person in front of the classroom—vests you with an authority that you may think unmerited, but your students will not. Use this knowledge to bolster your confidence before you step into the room.

The expectations of the students will certainly not carry you through an entire semester—you must, after all, demonstrate your competence as the semester goes on—but they may give you added courage on those first few days. Finally, remember that the students are probably feeling

more than a bit anxious and worried about how you, the teacher, will judge them.

Among the common fears expressed by new TAs are:

- What if I can't control the class?
- What if I freeze and am unable to think or speak?
- What if I lose my train of thought?
- What if a student asks me a question I can't answer?
- What if I give a wrong answer or make a mistake in presentation?
- What if a demonstration or experiment does not work properly?

Planning classes with care may help to eliminate some of these worries, but it is best to accept the fact that sooner or later you probably will make a mistake; it won't, however, be the end of the world. Consider beforehand how to respond to such a situation, and it becomes less threatening.

Although everything may not work out exactly as you planned, and, frankly, some lessons may just fall flat, this does not mean that you have failed as a teacher. Learn from your mistakes and go on; be assured that your errors will not seem as disastrous to the students as they do to you. If you realize that you have given incorrect information, correct it at once. Do not try to cover up your mistake; this will only make things worse. Admitting that you were wrong will not cause students to lose respect for you; refusing to admit a mistake may.

First Impressions

First impressions are important. What you do, say, and, even how you dress send out signals to the students in the class. Undergraduates often shop around for classes during the first week of school, so you will want to give your students an accurate picture of what they can expect over the semester.

Teachers can set a certain tone for the semester by their overall behavior and appearance. For example, a teacher who is not punctual sends a clear message to the students. (TAs, however, should not be dismayed during the first week by students who wander in late; they may have registration difficulties, problems finding classrooms, or miscalculating the time it takes to get from class to class. Be understanding.) Instructors, however, should iron out all minor problems beforehand—i.e., where the classroom is, how long it takes to get there—to set a good example. On the first day and throughout the semester, arrive on time and begin class promptly.

Some TAs, and instructors, arrive 10 to 15 minutes early to class most days. Having time to collect your thoughts and re-orient your focus toward class is one benefit. This technique also allows you to talk to your students informally, find out what other classes they take, and allows the students who are too shy to talk during class to ask you questions.

You may, of course, dress in any way that you feel is appropriate, but know that students will

interpret your dress in certain ways. Dressing a bit more formally than your students, who may be uncomfortably near you in age, makes an important distinction which may help to establish proper authority. A more formal or conservative jacket and tie or dress may make you feel more comfortable as you step into the role of teacher. This is not to suggest that you should go out and buy a new wardrobe or try to become someone you are not, but to remind you to consider the powerful messages clothing conveys.

The First Class

To begin, you must decide what you intend to achieve with your first class. Do you wish to plunge into the course work almost immediately, establishing a fast pace and a sense of purpose in the class? Or do you wish to spend the first day getting to know something about your students and letting them get to know you, taking time to establish an informal, more personal relationship with them? Each approach has its advantages and disadvantages; the choice depends upon your style as a teacher, your vision of the course, and your overall goals.

The most straightforward way to tell the students what to expect during the coming semester is to hand out a syllabus that gives the students a clear plan for the entire semester (see Preparing a Syllabus). The syllabus is a preview of coming attractions, presenting an overview of the course that will help students decide during the drop/add period whether or not to commit themselves to the class. This applies to recitation sections as well, although a recitation syllabus would be much shorter

Taking attendance, at least for the first two weeks of class, is an absolute necessity in order to help to establish an accurate class roster. Some departments require a teacher to report attendance numbers to them during the drop/add period (the first week of each semester) so that they can assign late-registering students to an appropriate section. It is in your own interest to comply with departmental policy regarding this—otherwise, you may find your class over- or underpopulated. Also, some departments require a report of absence-dates at the semester's end for students who have received low grades.

Again, in addition to monitoring student attendance, taking attendance daily also helps you to learn the students' names quickly. Making the effort to match faces with names tells the students that—to this teacher at least—they are individuals. Learning the names of your students is perhaps the single most effective way of demonstrating to them that the classroom will be a place where their individual ideas and personal development are valued. Of course, this is difficult if not impossible in a large lecture class, but in most lab sections, recitations, and smaller classes, it is possible. Some teachers ask that the students take the same places, at least for the first few weeks, so that it will be easier to remember names. Whether you call your students by their first or last names depends upon the relative formality or informality you wish to establish in your class, but try to be sensitive to all students. Do not make older students uncomfortable by addressing them as Mr. or Ms. if you are calling the rest of the class by their first names, unless they specifically request you to do so.

How should the students address you? Again, this is your own decision. The level of familiarity

you wish to establish is something that you, not the students, should determine. Let your openness, humor, sensitivity, and good-will establish a warm rapport with your students while maintaining the distance necessary to the teacher's role.

Whatever you choose to be called, inform the students at the beginning of the first class. Do not merely tell them that your name is Ann Smith. This forces them to decide whether to call you Ann or Ms. Smith, or Mrs. Smith, or Dr. Smith. Write your name on the blackboard at the beginning of class in the way that you wish to hear it all semester. Put it on your syllabus and on all other handouts. Tell them your name again when you introduce yourself. (You would be amazed at the number of students who do not know their instructor's name at the end of the semester; don't let your students be among these legions.)

So, what do you do after you have taken attendance, handed out your syllabus, and introduced yourself? Whatever you do, make sure that you have planned it carefully. Students feel more confident when they see that their teacher is organized and prepared. You will probably go over the syllabus, clarifying points about such matters as grading and your attendance policy where necessary, answering questions as they arise. Students have a right to know what to expect from a course in terms of workload, grading, and other matters. For lab instructors, it is often necessary to open the first class with a discussion of lab protocol and safety procedures.

These preliminaries will not necessarily take up the entire class period. Many teachers like to spend time learning about the students, gaining background information which may be used later in the semester. Some distribute index cards and ask the students to respond to a series of questions designed to give them an opportunity to describe the range of their knowledge in the subject and the outside interests they have that may be of use in planning discussions. Other teachers prefer having the students give information about themselves orally to the class in order to break the ice and accustom the students to speaking in class.

An alternate way of beginning the semester is by presenting a mini-lecture that gives a broad overview of the subject of the course and a general idea of various scholarly approaches to this field of knowledge. There is, perhaps, no better way to give the students an idea of what to expect from the course. One problem with this approach, however, is that the class will almost certainly change in size or composition by the second or third class, so some students will invariably miss the opening lecture. Some teachers save this lecture for the second class, when the students have already had time to do some preliminary reading in the texts. Students who do not arrive until the second or even third class may be at a slight disadvantage, but they will also understand that time in the class will not be wasted and their regular attendance is required.

Other teachers prefer to begin the semester with a discussion. This takes some of the pressure off the new teacher (although a discussion class presents its own unique challenges—see The Discussion Class) and signals to the students that the course will demand engagement and participation. The teacher should work to encourage everyone to join in. A discussion can be a valuable way of introducing some of the concerns of the class while allowing the teacher to gauge the levels of knowledge of the students. In addition, asking students to identify

themselves before they speak will speed up the name-learning process.

All teachers will decide for themselves the combination of practices that will strike the correct balance for their class on the first day. Here, as in all social situations, a number of factors come into play, the most forceful of which is the personality of the individual; in the end, who you are will determine the styles and methods of the class based on your personality, discipline, and teaching style.

Creating the Right Atmosphere

One of the hallmarks of a good teacher is the ability to create a classroom environment where all students feel comfortable, free to respond, to offer opinions, and to ask questions. This atmosphere will probably develop over the course of the semester, as you and the students begin to trust each other. Before this can happen, you, the teacher, must be comfortable. Although as a novice teacher you may be anxious, make an attempt to relax. Do not look upon your students as the enemy, waiting for you to make a mistake so they can jump on you, but consider them partners in learning. Both you and your students have things to teach each other, and both you and your students can make mistakes.

Never belittle or criticize a student for making a mistake. You must, of course, correct the error, but it is best to do this in a kindly and non-judgmental way. Students will only participate freely if they know they will not be castigated for making mistakes. Offer praise whenever possible but only when deserved. Teachers who say "very good" after every student response, brilliant or inane, run the risk of devaluing all praise and help neither the good nor the poor student.

All students in your class should feel they have an equal claim to your attention. Consider your non-verbal behavior. When you look around the class, do you tend to make eye contact only with certain students? Do you teach to one side of the room, thus encouraging students to choose desks on the other side to avoid your gaze? Be on guard against personal prejudices and unconscious stereotyping (see Our Common Purposes). Do you call on women as frequently as you do men? Do you find yourself letting class discussions be dominated by either men or women? Are there certain ethnic or racial groups with whom you feel uncomfortable? In your classroom, do you make eye contact with members of these groups as often as with others? Although teachers may be unaware of these habits, students will notice, so guard against them.

Don't feel obligated to be a stern disciplinarian at all times. Although you should expect students, for the most part, to conform to the rules you have set, be understanding when one comes to you with a legitimate excuse or a request for a special favor—an extended deadline or a make-up test, for example.

You do not have to grant every request, and repeated ones by the same student should be looked upon with suspicion, but hear the student out and then make a decision based on the circumstances, not on some arbitrary rule you have established (see Non-traditional Students).

In conclusion, listen to your students and treat them with respect and courtesy. Unless you do

this, it is futile for you to expect the same from them.

Bringing the World into the Classroom

The ideal classroom would be a place without walls or boundaries, where the students and the 'outside world' were continuously in contact, constantly interacting in interesting, often unpredictable, ways. In such a place, students could easily recognize how variously the subject matter of the class was connected to that world.

Although such a classroom is not physically practical, teachers do have an obligation to break down some of the walls that neatly compartmentalize knowledge and to help their students become informed, intelligent citizens. Teachers are much more than walking textbooks. Rather than limiting themselves to conveying a narrowly defined body of knowledge to their students, they can help them gain some real sense of the world beyond the classroom and beyond abstract problems or faceless histories.

Individual teaching styles will surely have an impact on the choices that TAs make. Some people feel very comfortable about introducing controversial topics or personal beliefs to their students; others feel that to do this goes beyond the bounds of the teacher/student relationship. Deciding how far to go may sometimes prove so problematic that the decision not to stray from familiar paths may be simpler. Fear of proselytizing or of giving biased or incorrect information intimidates many TAs—and these are legitimate fears—but these concerns should not stop teachers from examining their classroom strategies and considering how to broaden the scope of their classes, how to begin to help their students to make connections between the subject discussed in class and the rest of the world.

Many techniques are available for enlarging the scope of the class. Teachers can make sure that the readings for their class represent a number of different viewpoints. Students are often surprised to find that a textbook is not just an objective compendium of facts but a necessarily subjective reading of a topic that may not be universally accepted. It is useful to bring in guest speakers so that students hear an authority who is not in total agreement with the teacher. Finally, use your students? individual differences of opinions as a means of analyzing arguments and testing various positions.

By making the relationship between that which we speak about in our classes and that which affects the world around us explicit, we can help our students see their own connectedness to the world and help them to understand their own responsibilities towards improving and caring for that world.

Preparing a Syllabus

Before preparing a syllabus, the TA teaching a class for the first time should meet with the professor supervising the course to discuss his or her expectations for it. In many introductory classes with large enrollments, the syllabus is designed by members of the department. If you are teaching a lab or recitation section, your syllabus will almost certainly be defined by the

work to be covered in the lecture. In such classes, fewer opportunities exist for input by the TA. In some classes, however, TAs may have sole responsibility for the materials covered and the pace of completion. Although here, too, consultation with a faculty member can be useful, even essential, the final decisions may be left entirely up to the TA.

Preparing a good syllabus requires careful thought and some skill. Judging the amount of time needed for a given topic, providing the right amount of background reading, and considering the best times of the semester for tests and papers are subjects that require careful pedagogical and practical consideration. (For example, no exams may be given during the final two weeks of the semester.) The teacher who is constantly falling behind in the scheduled work is not doing the students a favor; students often see this as an indication that they too can fall behind. Although it is not necessary to be absolutely rigid about sticking to the syllabus, students appreciate a teacher who is able to organize his or her own and the students' time effectively.

The design of the syllabus will be determined largely by the subject matter. For example, some subjects, like history and literature, lend themselves to chronological arrangement, and others, such as science and engineering, may require organization around general topics. Whichever method you choose, it should be made clear to the students from the beginning. In addition, the overall connection between the class material and the text, the labs, or other elements of the course must be explained, by you, to your students. You are the expert in the room and part of your job is helping students understand these connections.

Alter your syllabus as little as possible after the semester begins. It is unfair—and, in some cases, against university policy—to change the course requirements after students can no longer change the section or drop the course. You cannot expect to remain on schedule at all times, but you should try to create a realistic syllabus that gives a good indication of what the class will achieve over a semester.

A good syllabus should:

- **CITE** the material to be covered—all texts, reserve readings, and other materials. Students also appreciate full citations, not just titles or authors' last names;
- **DETAIL** all course requirements, the number and kinds of exams and papers, and the dates they are due;
- **DEFINE** all policies on grading, attendance, make-up work, and class participation. For example, if students will be graded on a curve, explain what the method will be;
- **EXPLAIN** policies on plagiarism and academic dishonesty; set limits on group work, defining how independently you expect students to work on homework assignments (see Academic Integrity);
- **INCLUDE** your name, email address, your office location, office hours, and telephone,

home number if you wish (see Office Hours).

Choosing the Text

The choice of a text is a central consideration in planning any class. As a TA, you will find that in many of the courses to which you are assigned you have no input about the choice of books. Especially in courses with multiple sections, members of the department will choose what they consider the most useful books for the majority of students. In this case, you are not responsible for ordering books. The department will supply you with a desk copy of each book and, sometimes, with a teacher's guide. (Although a teacher's guide may at first seem a useful tool, most teachers soon find that they are better off without it; so approach such aids with caution.)

Review each book carefully and decide how you wish to use it. There will certainly be chapters you will want to stress, others you will wish to minimize. Consider how much supplementary material will be necessary for your students to reach the goals you have set for the course, either through photocopied materials that they can purchase or books and articles placed on reserve at the library (see Libraries for information on how to place materials on reserve; also Preparing a Reading List), or online materials available on Sakai.

What should you do if you absolutely hate a chosen text? You may want to speak to the instructor in charge of the course, explaining your reservations, perhaps suggesting another one. (Keep in mind, however, that almost certainly no change can be effected for the upcoming semester.) Although the instructor may sympathize with your complaints, he or she may still have valid reasons for choosing that book. Controversial texts—including those which you 'hate'—can be useful teaching tools for undergraduates if, and only if, they are explained and contextualized well.

The instructor may also suggest strategies for making the most of the book. Experience may even cause you to revise your opinion on its usefulness; or, if your reasons are compelling, the instructor may consider changing the text for the next semester.

In any event, you will almost certainly have to use the book in the upcoming semester. You may want to share your feelings with the class, giving the students your estimation of both the strengths and weaknesses of the text, but try to stress what you see as positive. If you are wholly negative, students may wonder why you or the department made them waste their time (and money) on what you are telling them is a book of dubious value. Remember, too, that these students do not have your advanced knowledge of the subject and may find the book very useful in helping them to understand the basics.

TAs who are given the freedom to develop their own booklist are confronted with a different set of issues. Among the factors a conscientious teacher will consider are:

- What are my goals for the course? Which book or books can best further these goals? The more clearly you formulate your plan for the semester, the more surely you can

choose the books to help you carry it out.

- Realistically speaking, how much material can be covered in a comprehensive way over the semester? Would it be better to choose excerpts rather than assign entire books? How much reading can students be expected to do, taking into consideration the level of difficulty of the texts? Experienced instructors in your department will have a fair idea of how much work students can or will cover. In some fields, for example, there are fairly standard 'rules of thumb' concerning how many pages of reading per class meeting can be assigned.
- How expensive will these books be? Is it better to order one large anthology and supplement it with photocopies or to order six or seven smaller books, which may be more expensive? Although cost should not be the only consideration, given the price of books today, this factor should be considered. Note, too, that if you choose to rely heavily on photocopied materials, copyright laws must be taken into account. This is the case whether you choose to distribute the materials in paper form or electronically via the library's website or a course website like Sakai.

Once you have compiled what you think is a good preliminary book list, take this along with your syllabus to the department chair or to an instructor who has already taught this course or a similar one. Ask his or her opinion of the list. Consider all suggestions—remember they have more extensive classroom experience than you—but, in the end, it is you who will determine the structure and focus of the course.

Once you have decided upon the booklist, you must complete a course book order form for the class. The department administrator will be able to provide you with the form. You may also place your order through the bookstore's website. Note: you will need to register to place an order.

These lists should be completed as soon as possible so that the books will be available at the bookstore by the first day of classes. Delayed book orders can wreak havoc on the most carefully planned syllabus.

Supplementary Materials

Many teachers choose to photocopy materials as handouts from various sources to supplement the text and their lectures. Your department administrator will be able to tell you the photocopy limit for your section. Most departments will copy a limited number of pages per class, per semester. If you go beyond this limit, you are charged at a per-copy rate. Since this can run into a substantial amount over the semester, ascertain the department's policy before you proceed.

Other instructors prefer to post such supplemental materials online on course websites—such as Sakai—so that students can choose whether to use printed or electronic copies for their time

in your class.

Some teachers prepare packets of materials that the students must purchase. Local commercial copy shops will usually copy, bind, and sell these packets to the students for a reasonable price. You can also check with the bookstore to see if they can make packets. It is your responsibility to make sure that you are not violating copyright laws with your packet.

Take care not to overwhelm students with handouts; the purpose is to clarify, not to make things more difficult.

Preparing a Reading List

An additional way to further students' intellectual development is by providing them with a supplementary reading list at the beginning of each semester. By encouraging your students to do additional reading in the subject and providing them with a list that reflects the diversity of the field, you are pushing your students to investigate a topic beyond the ordinary limits of the course.

When designing such a list of readings, always think of the student; that is, the works should be challenging but not incomprehensible to the typical undergraduate. Certainly include works of varying levels of difficulty but indicate the range on your list. An annotated list works best, with the teacher adding comments about the pleasures and difficulties of each book. If students would benefit from special information about an author, provide it. Biographical information about the author's life or historical period might also be useful.

Recognize the difficulties an undergraduate might have with certain texts and be honest about them. A student may still choose to read one of the more difficult books but may struggle with it a bit longer before giving up because you have given warning of the potential problems. If students have been alerted to the difficulties, they will not consider it a personal failing if they have trouble understanding the text—they may even view mastering the book as a personal challenge.

Constructing a 'For Further Reading' list is valuable, even in classes where students are not required or expected to do outside reading. It signals to the students that you view the subject as an ongoing pursuit, one of sustaining interest, that the student will continue to study over a lifetime. Occasionally alluding to these texts in class or choosing interesting examples from them may help to motivate students to read the texts at a future date. Such lists also give the teacher an opportunity to demonstrate to students the arbitrariness of boundaries between disciplines—the science or math teacher who includes fictional works, the literature teacher who recommends anthropological studies, the psychology teacher who includes a book of poetry on the list—all stretch the boundaries of the disciplines and the intellectual boundaries of the students in a challenging way.

Record Keeping

Before the semester begins, consider the kinds of records that must be maintained on students and devise a workable system for doing so. The University mandates that all grades be kept on file by the instructor for at least one year; some departments also keep final exams for that period of time. Many experienced teachers suggest that you keep this information for as long as possible but certainly for at least five years.

Student attendance and performance should be accurately reflected in these records in as detailed a manner as is practical. All letter or number grades for quizzes, exams, homework, and in-class work must be properly recorded. In addition, many teachers find it useful to reserve a space next to each student's record for a brief final evaluation of his or her strengths and weaknesses (one or two sentences at most). This brief note may assist you in the future when the student asks for a letter of recommendation.

Take time to record all information clearly and accurately. You will have to refer to this information several times in the course of the semester: at mid-semester when it is time to issue warning notices, at semester's end when you are calculating final grades, and at any time in the semester when you meet with students to discuss their progress in the course. These tasks will be much less time-consuming if your grade information is in order.

Some instructors keep all grades on file on a computer. This may simplify the task, but computers being what they are, it is essential to keep a backup copy of all records. Also keep in mind the possible security risks: who else will have access to your records? Perhaps the best way to manage electronic record-keeping is to print out and maintain updated hard copies throughout the semester for use in class and as a backup in case of major computer failure.

In fact, it is a good practice for all TAs to keep a second copy of their students' grades. Make it a habit to photocopy the current semester's gradebook or hard copy of a spreadsheet version of your grades as the term progresses. Although this may seem overly-cautious, one hears enough stories about lost or stolen grade books to warrant this precaution. If you lose your records, the burden of proof for a grade is on you, and the resulting problems could become a bureaucratic nightmare.

Rosters and Drop/Adds

Class Rosters are available online. This web-based application assigns two roles to instructional faculty:

READ - can view and download Class Rosters, and can submit warning grades.

ADMINISTRATIVE - can view, download, submit warning grades, and can grant and revoke privileges to others.

You should have been assigned a role by your department chair or dean's office. To access your roster online, you will be prompted to provide your NetID and password. You should already have a NetID, but if you don't, visit the NetID website to create and/or activate your account.

Contact your department chair if you have questions or need clarification regarding your role in relation to class rosters.

The online electronic rosters are updated as students change their registration. Do not attempt to add the names of students who do not appear on your roster and do not attempt to delete the names of students who have not attended.

Some students do considerable 'shopping' for courses during the first weeks of a semester; others will be deregistered after the first two weeks of classes because they have not paid their current term bills. (Once these students pay their term bills, their courses are automatically restored; they do not have to reregister for their classes.) During the first week, students may add classes (please consult your department regarding specific special permission number procedures); during the first two weeks, students can drop courses without incurring any penalty. For the next six weeks a 'W' will be recorded on the student's transcript. After eight weeks, a student can drop a course only with the permission of the dean; after the 12th week of classes, a student can drop a course only with the permission of both the college dean and the faculty member teaching the course. Hence, course rosters are often in considerable flux. When you submit final grades for the semester, you will have an opportunity to indicate that a student has *never attended* or add a student's name and RUID number to the roster; hence, you should keep careful records throughout the semester.

Warning rosters are generally available between the fourth and seventh week of the semester. You will be notified of the specific due date for warning rosters. The first hourly exam or some substantial graded assignment should be scheduled and graded before the seventh week of classes so that students who do poorly and are in danger of failing can be notified.

The Warning Roster will list all of the students registered for your class. If a student's name is not listed, please send the student to their dean's office to properly register.

Warning grades are as follows: ***W1*** = Warning for poor performance; ***W2*** = Warning for poor attendance; and ***W3*** = Warning for both poor attendance and poor performance; comments should also be entered next to the warning grades.

The final roster is the Grade Roster. Grades must be submitted within 48 hours of the final exam as scheduled by the university. Instructors are expected to submit final grades using the on-line electronic roster system; however, in special circumstances instructors may consult with their departmental staff regarding procedures for submitting final grades via a paper roster. It is vital that you submit both your Warning Roster and your Grade Roster in a timely manner.

For undergraduate students, you may submit a grade of either A, B, B+, C, C+, D, F, NG, TZ, or TF. (Note that minus grades are not permitted.) Assign a grade of NG (no grade given) to a student who has not attended the course. The NG will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA; however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the NG will convert to an F, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of TZ when a student is unable to complete the semester's course work due to a verifiable emergency situation; reach

an agreement with the student as soon as possible as to how the course should be completed. The TZ will have no immediate effect on a student's GPA, however, if the situation is not resolved within the following semester, the TZ will convert to an F, and the GPA will be recalculated accordingly. Assign a grade of TF if the student does not complete the course work required, or has not taken the final exam. The TF will be calculated into the GPA immediately. If the course work is not made up within the following semester, the TF converts to an F. (Similarly, instructors can submit TD, TC, TC+, TB, or TB+ grades if the instructor believes that the student should receive that letter grade even if s/he completes no further work for the course. T grades can never be lowered.) Please consult with your department regarding procedures for submitting changes of grades after the semester has ended.

Only when submitting the Final Grade Roster may you add a student's name to the roster, providing the student has been attending your class the entire semester. Please add the student's RUID number, school, and grade next to the student's name. If, at the end of the semester, the student has still not registered for the course, the grade will not appear on the grade report (or on the student's transcript) until the student contacts the office of the academic dean of their college or professional school and receives written permission to have the course added.

The Classroom

You will be assigned a specific classroom or lab when you are given your first roster at the beginning of the semester. If possible, go and look at the classroom before the first class meeting to judge its suitability. The logistics of scheduling an enormous number of classes make it almost impossible to get a class location changed once the assignments are made, but if the classroom is totally inappropriate for the course you intend to teach (in size, available facilities, etc.) report the problem at once to the departmental administrator or to someone at Scheduling and Space Management. This department will attempt to accommodate you, but changes can be made only when essential

Facilities Maintenance

Although what happens in the classroom is naturally much more important than the physical appearance of the room, no one should have to spend a semester in an unpleasant environment. When you look at the classroom or lab for the first time, take note of its physical condition. Is the classroom clean? Do all of the lights work? Does the heat/air conditioning work? Are there enough desks? If you will need a podium, does the room have one? Is there an adequate supply of chalk and erasers? Are there broken windows or locks? In most cases the classroom will be at least adequate. If there is a problem, however, act at once to remedy it. An annoying buzzing light will distract even the most interested student, just as an overheated classroom will lull even the most attentive to sleep.

Facilities Maintenance (848-445-1234) should be notified in the event of problems with plumbing, air conditioning, repairs, maintenance, classroom supplies, or broken locks. The operator will refer your problem to the appropriate department for necessary action. If it is an

emergency, the operator can radio to one of the workers to respond immediately.

Non-emergency requests may include:

- No chalk, missing eraser;
- Chalk or whiteboard damaged;
- Missing tabletop podium, instructor's table or chair;
- Need more table arm chairs or there are too many table arm chairs in the room;
- Manual screen is broken or not working well;
- Classroom is dirty, too hot, too cold;
- Window treatments are torn, missing, or broken;
- Missing light bulbs;
- There is a leak;
- There are pests (ants, mice, etc.)

Office Hours: Getting an Office, Scheduling, Uses, Problems

Getting an Office

The university requires that all teachers make themselves available to their students outside of class for advisement, so TAs with teaching assignments should be assigned office space at the beginning of the semester. Office assignments are usually made before classes begin or during the first few weeks of the semester. Because of the shortage of office space in most departments, it is likely that you will have to share your office with several other TAs. Teaching and class schedules are so varied that this presents fewer problems than may seem probable at first.

Unfortunately, in some departments, space is at such a premium that TAs who grade or teach labs and recitations may be without office assignments at the beginning of the semester. If you find yourself without an office, act as soon as you can. First, ask your department administrator for suggestions about what to do. If no help is received from this quarter, speak to the instructor with whom you are working. Some faculty members allow TAs to hold office hours in their own offices at times when they will not be using them.

If you are unable to coordinate times with a faculty member, consider other suitable places for your students to meet with you. Try to find an unused classroom where you can meet students undisturbed or an area in one of the libraries where conversation is possible. Be sure to announce in class where and when you will be available, and then be there faithfully at the appointed time. Sometimes these unofficial locations can be a plus, the casual setting making

students more comfortable about approaching and speaking to you, but the TA may have to work harder to sustain an appropriately formal teacher/student relationship.

Problems

If a student comes to you with personal problems, you should listen; but remember that you are not always qualified to help. Do not attempt to be a counselor or psychiatrist. You can best assist the student by knowing where to find help and by urging the student to make an appointment with a more qualified person, perhaps letting the student make the call from your office phone. If possible, walk the student over to the appropriate office. Always be supportive and understanding, but recognize your limitations (see Troubled Students; Counseling Services for Troubled Students.)

A problem some TAs encounter is the student who comes once a week for office hours and wants to just sit down and chat. Although this may not always cause a problem, at times it can be very frustrating. Other students may see this student in your office and assume that you are busy, possibly putting off students who have valid reasons for seeing you. Be frank in a case like this. Kindly, but firmly, tell the student that although you would like to talk, other students should also have the opportunity to discuss the class. Stress the fact that you will be more than willing to discuss any legitimate problem. Of course, if you suspect that the student's frequent visits are symptoms of an emotional problem, you will want to help the student to receive the proper counseling (see Counseling Services for Troubled Students).

Another possible concern is the student who comes to your office at hours other than your office hours. If you are not engaged in any particular work, you may decide to see the student; but if the student is one who generally seems apprehensive or appears to be under some stress, you should welcome the opportunity at any time to open up the lines of communication. Use your own judgment about the student's needs. But, if you have budgeted your time carefully and set this period aside for your own work, your students should be expected to respect your decision about office hours except in extreme cases. Explain to these students that you cannot speak to them now, but that you will gladly see them during your regular office hours or perhaps sooner at an agreed-upon, mutually convenient time.

Making the most of your office hours is a fundamental way of ensuring that your students make the most of your class. A teacher who is able to establish personal contact with most of the students early in the semester not only helps the individual students but the class as a whole.

Scheduling

The importance of maintaining regular office hours cannot be overemphasized—students must feel that they have access to their teachers. No matter how good a teacher you are, if the students feel that you are inaccessible, too busy to meet with them, they will feel cheated and may lose interest in the class.

The amount of time an instructor schedules for office hours is a decision to be made by the individual, based on the needs of the students. Most instructors agree, however, that one or

two periods a week are simply not enough. Student schedules are so varied, with classes spread around so many campuses, that meetings may sometimes be very difficult to arrange. Some teachers find that scheduling office hours before or after class works out well because many students try to avoid scheduling back-to-back classes.

Consider the needs of your students before setting office hours. Holding your office hours at reasonable times makes it clear to your students that you do wish to meet with them; holding office hours on Friday afternoons at three o'clock or on Monday mornings at eight o'clock insures your seeing only the most industrious or desperate students. As a rule, it is probably best to establish a minimum of two periods a week for office hours while letting students know that you are available for conferences at other times by appointment. Sometimes you may set up appointments with the students in the library, if that is more convenient for both of you, or in one of the student lounges. If you are teaching a large section, you must expect to set aside more than two periods to accommodate all students who wish to speak to you.

You may wish to supplement these face-to-face office hours with online office hours. One useful way to do so is to use the Chatroom function in Sakai. This chatroom is available only to your students and the conversations are archived online. This feature makes it particularly useful for review sessions so that students who were unable to participate in real time are able to read the transcript of your answers to questions posed by other students.

It is vital to remember that, since the chatroom is viewable by all students, it is not suitable for personal discussions about grades, makeup work, etc. Although there are such limitations, students often appreciate online office hours because they can 'attend' regardless of where they are (home, dorm, between classes, break at work, etc.) Online office hours are a good supplement to face-to-face office hours but are NOT a substitute.

Uses

After setting aside the required time for your office hours and announcing them to the students, what then? Who makes the next move, you or the students? If you sit back and wait for the students to appear at your door, you are letting a great opportunity pass by. Some students will finally materialize (usually late in the semester when they are worried about their final grades), but for the most part you will spend some quiet and undisturbed hours in your office over the semester. This is great if you plan to use your hours as a time for class preparation or paper grading, but it is not so great if you hope to establish strong and positive relationships with your students.

Some suggestions for getting students to come to your office:

- During office hours, keep your office door open. Let the students know that you are there and available.
- When students do come into your office, put your work aside and make them feel like welcome guests, not intruders. For some students, it takes an enormous amount of courage to go and speak to a faculty member face to face. Do not justify these fears by

scaring the students away.

- When you meet with students, look at them and listen. Put your work away, and give them your undivided attention. Let them do the talking. Pay attention. Look interested. Be interested.
- Come into class a little early, stay a bit late, and chat with your students. If you establish a friendly relationship with them in the classroom, they will be less hesitant about coming to see you later.

Do not discount the importance of this kind of contact for your students and yourself. One-on-one teacher/student tutorials should be the norm, not the exception. No two students learn in the same way, and such office visits help you to discover the various ways students approach the course.

Office hours are valuable not only for the students but also for the TAs. A few students coming in with the same problem should suggest to you the topics that need to be explained more clearly, the concepts or assignments that have been misunderstood by more than one student. In addition, instructors can gain some valuable feedback from the students about their effectiveness as teachers. If students trust you and feel comfortable, they will be able to express their feelings about the weaknesses and strengths of your class; and the information can help you improve your classroom performance.

How can students be motivated to come to the office? First, the instructor can remind the students frequently of the scheduled hours and other appointment possibilities. Tell students regularly that you are there every week, same time, same place, and that they should not hesitate to bring up any difficulties they are having in the class. Many teachers require that all students schedule an appointment before or after the first paper, or after the first exam, so that their progress can be discussed. Once students find your office for this required appointment, they are more apt to make a return visit. If you write a comment on an essay—"Why not come and talk to me about this in my office?"—most students will interpret this as a command rather than a suggestion. Many students who would not initiate this contact are, nevertheless, grateful for the opportunity to let the teacher get to know them a little better. And, again, once the ice has been broken, the second visit becomes much easier.

Attendance Policy for TAs

If, for any reason, you are unable to conduct a class for which you are scheduled, notify the department or the appropriate person as soon as possible. Missed classwork must be made up at some point in the semester, placing a future burden on the TA and on the students. If the TA is in charge of a lab section, a substitute must be found because in most cases the students will not be able to make up the lab. Students would be justified in complaining about a TA who misses classes or who is regularly late just as you have a responsibility to speak to a student with these problems.

Everybody, of course, becomes ill at one time or another or has an emergency which prevents

him or her from attending to duties. In these situations, do what you can to make your absence cause as little disruption as possible in both your own life and in that of your students. Know beforehand the department's policy on absences and the appropriate person to notify about them.

Attendance Policy for Students

The question of an attendance policy is one that TAs should decide before the beginning of the semester. A clearly established policy will avoid many problems, but to be effective any policy must be enforced consistently and equally. This is not to suggest inflexibility; exceptions can and, at times, should be made, but if every case becomes an exception, then policy—and part of your credibility—flies out of the window. So, make these decisions at the beginning and then follow through as much as is realistically possible.

How strict an attendance policy should be established? Official university policy is that attendance "shall be expected." This is generally interpreted by faculty and administration to mean that attendance is required. How closely should a TA monitor the attendance of individual students? Clearly, in a large lecture class, taking attendance is time-consuming and difficult to manage unless the instructor is willing to circulate a sign-in sheet at every class. Even in smaller classes, however, where it is possible to monitor attendance, some teachers are reluctant to establish a strict attendance policy because they feel that college students should be allowed more freedom than high school students and should be free to attend or not attend as they choose. Many teachers do not want to waste class time in taking attendance.

There are, however, compelling reasons for requiring attendance and more or less painless ways of managing the necessary record-keeping. Perhaps the most important reason for regulating attendance is that it forces you to learn your students' names very quickly. You may be surprised at how soon you recognize students by name, and at that point you can take attendance quickly and silently at the beginning of the class period. In addition, by setting a limit on the number of absences, the teacher is signaling to the students that what takes place in class is important. You are not merely rehashing what the professor said in the lecture class, or restating the material found in the text, but you are using your recitation, lab, or lecture to enlarge the students' understanding of the topic. Taking attendance may also assist you at the end of the semester when compiling grades. Your decision about a student with a true borderline grade could be influenced by the student's attendance and participation; in cases such as this, being able to match a face with a name is helpful (see The First Class).

The Craft of Teaching

The Lecture

The most traditional form of college teaching, and still the most common, is the formal lecture. Nearly all university courses, even those which are dominated by discussions or lab work, require the instructor at one point or another to deliver a lecture. Contemplating their first lecture frightens many new TAs and causes much unnecessary anxiety. Thoughts of abject failure—losing one's train of thought, omitting vital material, boring the class—plague many TAs. As with so many other aspects of teaching, careful preparation can at least lessen the problems that lecturers may encounter.

Before beginning to compile material for a lecture, it is useful to pose a few questions: What is the purpose of the lecture? Is it meant to introduce entirely new material, or is it intended to summarize material already covered? Is the lecture an expansion of materials covered by the text, or is it a review? How is the substance of the lecture related to the text or the lab materials? The answers to such questions will help to determine the focus of your lecture, and then you may begin to shape your lecture.

One of the toughest problems faced by new teachers is in judging the abilities of their class. The material presented must be challenging enough so that students are not bored, yet not so difficult that they are lost, overwhelmed, or discouraged. Striking a reasonable balance between these two points may take practice—and even experienced teachers sometimes misjudge—but you will soon hit your stride.

Many new instructors tend to over-prepare because they think they must know everything written about a topic before they can teach it, or they are afraid that the students will ask difficult questions. TAs should realize that it is always possible to say to students, "I don't know, but I'll find out." In addition, remember that students are probably not as interested as you in the current scholarly debates and controversies. Later on, when they have a fuller understanding of the field, they may be interested, but first give them the basic information. On the other hand, you do not wish to insult your students by presenting a lecture so elementary that the students barely need to listen (and certainly won't as the semester progresses). You should assume that your audience is composed of intelligent, interested adults who, while they may not have deep knowledge of the field, are capable and desirous of learning.

Once you have decided upon the depth of material to be covered, you can begin to prepare your notes. Perhaps the worst way to give a lecture is by writing out the entire "script" beforehand and reading it to the class. Unless you are an exceptionally gifted speaker, this will alienate and bore your students. Beginning instructors may feel more confident with a typed text in front of them, but this confidence is gained at the loss of some excitement and much spontaneity.

Instead, prepare a good outline for yourself, including all the main topics, sub-topics, sub-sub-topics, illustrations, examples, and anecdotes, detailed enough so that you will not

unintentionally omit anything of importance. For some teachers, four to five pages are more than enough for an eighty minute class, while others may need more or fewer. Using an outline rather than a prepared text allows you to pace your lectures. If a point at the beginning produces a flood of questions, time can be made up later in the lecture by eliminating some of the less important points. This is almost impossible to do if you are reading a tightly organized essay/lecture.

Do not try to cover too much in one lecture. Thoroughly explaining two or three points may be considered a real achievement. During the second half of the semester, when instructors begin to feel the pressures of time, they may try to cram two lectures into one. This usually does not save time in the end because the students rarely absorb it all, and you will probably end up spending time in the following weeks answering questions and clearing up the confusion caused by the double lecture.

Although instructors are discouraged from presenting an essay as a lecture, a lecture should be modeled on the basic elements of a good essay, with a clearly identified beginning, middle, and end. Students need to understand very specifically what you propose to talk about and how it relates to other course materials. One piece of advice, found in almost every text on teaching, offers three steps to preparing a successful lecture: Tell them what you are going to say. Say it. Tell them what you said.

Many teachers like to begin class with an amusing story, an anecdote, or a news item that is related to materials already covered or about to be covered in the class. This works as an effective transitional device for the students, easing them gently from whatever they have just left—their previous class, their job, their friends—to the work at hand in your class. Beginning the class in this way helps students to relax and makes them more receptive to the work that follows.

In editing your lecture so that it fits into the allocated time, avoid cutting out illustrations, examples, and anecdotes. A successful lecture is one that helps the student to comprehend the point, and often an apt illustration or example can make the difference between merely covering the material and actually teaching it. Students remember well-chosen examples and vivid illustrations.

It is a good idea when planning a lecture class to reserve some time for students' questions and responses. If you plan to cover two main topics, pause midway to give the students a chance to ask questions or make comments. Reserve time at the beginning of each class for questions. Remember that the purpose of a good lecture is to make students think, to raise questions, and to provoke responses. Allow time for this to happen. A successful lecture does not remain a monologue but develops into a dialogue.

What do students want from a lecture? First and foremost, they want to understand the material presented, to feel that the time spent in a classroom has been worthwhile. To insure this, the materials must be presented in a clear and organized way. Although you should strive to make your lectures seem natural, almost conversational, they should never be sloppy. Give

your students an outline of each lecture. Either write the outline on the board or provide the students with a photocopied handout. This outline can be a distillation of your own outline, perhaps listing only the main ideas. The benefits of this handout outweigh the small amount of time that it will take you to prepare it. The students can follow your lecture more easily and identify the major and minor points without difficulty. In addition, just having a piece of paper in hand gives many students a feeling of confidence in the instructor's organization of the lecture and of the entire course.

A lecture that is coherent and organized further benefits from a lively presentation. Enthusiasm is always appreciated. Teachers, like any other public performer, must work on their delivery and movements. If your speech is difficult to understand or if your delivery unanimated, you may soon lose the interest of the class. At least at first, check and evaluate yourself regularly. Below are some of the things you should be aware of when you begin to lecture:

- Concentrate on your audience, not your own fears. Think about what they are experiencing rather than your own anxiety.
- Don't be static. A lecturer who stands or sits almost motionless for the entire class is a lecturer who had better have some pretty exciting material to keep the class interested. Use natural hand gestures as you speak and move around the class a bit, at least from the desk to the blackboard.
- Make eye contact with the students. Avoid keeping your eyes glued to your notes or fixed on some invisible point on the back wall or ceiling of the room. Making eye contact with the students will help you gauge how the lecture is being received by the students.
- Listen to your voice. Do you speak loudly enough and enunciate distinctly? Does your tone of voice change when emphasis is needed, or do you speak in a monotone? If you sound bored and uninterested, your students are apt to lose interest. Do not speak too quickly when trying to cover a large amount of material. If the students cannot understand you, they will not understand the material.
- Avoid filler words and phrases like "er," "uh," "oh," "hum," "you know." It is far better to pause than to fall into these annoying patterns of speech. Beware of repeating the same words over and over again—"really," "certainly," "actually," "whatever"—so that they become naggingly repetitious.
- Do you use the blackboard/whiteboard or other audio-visual aids to break up the monotony of one voice speaking? Even the most exciting public speaker knows that visuals are a sure way to regain an audience whose attention is fading.
- Always remember: you are talking to real human beings. Treat them as you would like to be treated.

The Discussion Class

Discussion classes may at first seem a godsend to the new and nervous TA; however, running

an effective discussion group often requires more skill, preparation, and perceptiveness than lecturing. Relying upon the students' participation and, to some extent, their good will, the discussion class will sink or swim at the level of student involvement. It is up to the teacher, therefore, to insure as full participation in the class as is possible, something which can be fostered through careful planning, unflagging enthusiasm, and a little bit of luck. Although it may seem contradictory to suggest that planning is needed for a kind of learning that seems based on a spontaneous exchange of ideas, there is always the prospect that the class may degenerate into a listless and undirected conversation that fails to achieve the educational goals you have set.

The shape of any discussion class is determined in large part, of course, by the kind of class you are teaching. In some courses—many humanities courses, for example—lively exchange of ideas is the very heart of the class, with most of the class time devoted to class discussion based on assigned readings. The students are assigned material to read, and they then come into class prepared to talk, to question, analyze, or offer opinions. In other courses, discussion forms a less central but no less important function. Many times the discussion class is an adjunct to a larger lecture class, allowing students to investigate crucial points in more depth than is possible in the lecture hall. In between these two types of classes are a whole range of classes which use discussion to a greater or lesser degree. Not all subject matter lends itself to a discussion. A teacher interested in conveying specific information and facts would do well to give the students the information in a lecture or a handout and then, perhaps, use that material as the basis for a future discussion.

All instructors who make use of the discussion format—and, at one time or another, that is almost every instructor—must begin with a few basic questions. These questions will simplify and define the aims of your class and help you to begin to plan your class.

The pivotal question is: what is the purpose of the discussion? Is it meant to reinforce ideas introduced during a lecture or from the reading or to explain them in more detail? Is the purpose to allow students to make connections between the abstractions presented in the text and their own lives, or are discussions meant to introduce new material, to start the students thinking in a new direction? How are the topics under discussion related to the overall aims of the course? In some cases, these questions will be answered by the course supervisor, so it is necessary for the TA to consult with him or her before the semester begins and to maintain regular contact over the semester (see TA/Faculty Relations). Having begun to formulate answers to these questions, the TA is ready to start planning a discussion class.

Before conducting a discussion class, instructors should make an outline of what they hope to cover in the class. This outline need not be written in stone; the TA should be flexible in moving from topic to topic and in allowing the students some latitude in the range of their discussion. With as much thoroughness as is required in preparing a lecture, an instructor should go through the details of the discussion, deciding which points are absolutely necessary, which are less important, and which can be omitted entirely. Once these priorities have been established, the instructor should formulate thought-provoking questions that may lead the students toward the decided-upon topics without dictating responses. One of the keys to a good

discussion group is recognition of the fact that it is not a lecture. Do not panic if your first question fails to produce the desired response. Give the students time to think, to formulate an answer. If students seem lost, recap a bit so that they may better see what you are proposing with the question. Like a good conversation, a good discussion must evolve naturally.

In spite of all your preparations, a discussion class will only limp along unless the students are motivated to participate. Occasionally, a teacher will encounter a class that for one reason or another never catches fire, but most classes with a little encouragement and planning profit from discussions.

It is important for a teacher to establish a classroom climate conducive to the free exchange of ideas. Students should feel able to give wrong answers without being humiliated, to explore ideas without being censored. If the class seems reluctant to join in the discussion, try placing the desks in a circle. Having the students face each other forces them into making eye contact, into involvement with the rest of the group, rather than leaving them feeling isolated and disconnected. The other benefit of placing the desks in a circle is that the importance and the authority of the instructor seems temporarily minimized; the teacher becomes less threatening because he or she is no longer a dominating presence in the front of the class. By sitting down with your students, you broaden the burden of authority—you are still the teacher, but you seem more approachable and the students feel, if not an equal responsibility, at least an increased sense of complicity in the class.

Be encouraging to your students. Show them that you are paying attention to what they are saying. Make eye contact. Offer an appropriate comment when they finish speaking. Do not just allow them to speak and then go on to another topic without acknowledging their contribution. Make positive comments about their responses if possible. Use discretion, however; do not say 'very good' if the answer was not very good. Students dislike this type of dishonesty and will begin to distrust and devalue all that the teacher says.

The enthusiasm of the teacher for the topic will almost always spark student interest. Enthusiasm does not mean effusiveness or exuberance but a keen interest in and excitement about the subject matter. If a teacher's manner is uninterested and uninteresting, even the most exciting topic will fall flat. A quiet, reserved teacher is as capable of projecting intensity for and involvement with a subject as a volatile and outspoken one. Do not try to cover your genuine interest in your discipline with a facade of detachment or with sarcastic comments. Express your ideas and feelings honestly, and your students will soon follow your example.

The Recitation Class

Another form of discussion class is the recitation class, a small sub-group of a larger lecture class, which meets regularly as a supplement to the weekly lectures. Found primarily in the sciences, social sciences, and mathematics departments, the lecture sections are usually taught by faculty who supervise the TAs responsible for their recitation classes. The faculty member will generally determine the purpose of the recitation class, although the TA will shape the class

in an individual way.

In these classes, as in all other discussion classes, the ends dictate the means. What is the class meant to do? Is the class period a review session meant to further explain material already covered by the lecture? Is the TA meant to introduce new material or to broaden the students' ideas of specific aspects of the lecture material?

Running an efficient recitation requires the TA to have a firm grasp of the course material and to keep up with the course readings, labs, and lectures. Most departments require TAs to attend all lectures for the course, an extremely useful practice. Some TAs may grumble at having to spend time sitting through introductory lectures, but there are sound reasons for doing so. First, although the syllabus may give TAs a general idea of what is being covered in class, only attendance at the lectures will show the depth and quality of the coverage, allowing the TA to estimate the materials to be covered in the next recitation. By attending lectures the TA is assured knowledge of any potentially confusing event in the lecture (a misinterpreted word or phrase, a weakly presented blackboard demonstration). Only a shared witness can penetrate students' often inadequate recall of events.

The TA is also in a position to analyze whether the lecture was a good one. Were all points clearly and comprehensively explained? If so, the next recitation class may include a quick review of some of the main issues, followed by an application or extension of the idea. If it was not a good lecture—muddy explanations, confusing organization, too many irrelevant digressions—then the TA may need to spend the next recitation clarifying and developing this material. A TA will soon begin to recognize those points in the lecture that will most likely present problems to the students, but the TA should be prepared in the recitation to answer all questions, not just those he or she thinks will present problems. As one Physics Department TA pointed out, "Be prepared for the worst. If you go to class having prepared 95% of the problems, you can be sure that a student will have a question about the problem you didn't do. And that problem will be a tricky one."

Many TAs are surprised at first to discover that the advanced problems which they find fascinating are not really of interest to an undergraduate in an introductory course; remembering how basic the introductory course is will help you to avoid presenting materials too advanced or esoteric for your students. Finally, attending lectures gives you an opportunity to observe a more experienced teacher, one you may (or may not) choose to use as a model in the future.

No matter how well prepared you are, students will not respond if they perceive the class as a waste of time. Let the students know at the beginning of the semester that the recitation class is not just a rehash of the lecture but an opportunity for the students to grapple with problems they may not thoroughly understand, to broaden their knowledge of concepts, and to give them some practice in applying the things they have learned. Demonstrate that you are sensitive to their concerns and that they will have some control over the materials and topics covered in the class.

Some instructors find that a good way to involve everyone in the class is to ask the students to be ready at the beginning of the class with a question that they would like to have answered. You might start the class by writing all of these questions on the board (in your own shorthand). This takes only a few minutes and will give you an idea of the areas where students are having problems and give them a sense of participating in the shaping of the class. As you write the questions down, group them according to subject matter. Quite frequently, you will find that several students have questions about the same material.

An alternate way of involving students is by outlining on the board the topics that you think need to be covered and having the students rank them, deciding which they find the most urgent. This method has the advantage of giving you more control over the contents of the class while still allowing the students some voice.

The Laboratory Section

Teaching a laboratory section demands all of the skills necessary for teaching a lecture or discussion session and more. A lab instructor must first know the materials of the class, which means working closely with the lecturer, attending lectures, and keeping up with the course readings. Lab instructors who also teach recitation classes will have a good idea of how much the students know. If you are not teaching a recitation, however, speak to some TAs who are; they will be able to give you a realistic idea of what the students understand and where their weaknesses lie. It is essential that before you send your students to work on a lab demonstration they understand its objectives, its relationship to matters that have been introduced in the lectures, and the methods they are to use in the lab. Your opening lecture should also point the student to the kinds of analysis and evaluation he or she are expected to make in the lab; the point, after all, is not the lab itself, but the results, correct or incorrect, which lead to various interpretations.

Careful planning is essential in teaching a successful lab section. Preparing a brief lecture to begin the lab, one that helps to focus the students on the problem at hand and covers all of the points that need to be articulated without overwhelming the students, is a difficult task. So that students understand the end goal of the lab and do not feel that they are merely repeating a meaningless exercise, prepare handouts or use the blackboard to provide them with a clear overview of the demonstration. Many instructors like to use a few minutes at the beginning of the section to review the lab from the previous week and establish some connections between that lab and the current one. (It is rarely worthwhile to review a lab at the end of a period; by then, many students have gone off, some are still working, others cleaning up—in other words, to return to the order of the beginning of the period is almost impossible.)

Most lab courses have a supervisor who is responsible for the labs, holds weekly lab preparation meetings, and is available to help with problems. You, however, are ultimately responsible for the success and safety of your own lab. A lab instructor should always go through all the steps of the demonstration at least once before conducting each lab class. This alerts the instructor to possible problems the students may encounter. If you teach a lab later in the week, you may wish to ask other lab instructors where their students encountered

difficulties. (You can be sure that every lab presents its own difficulties.) For labs that necessitate the use of unfamiliar equipment, the TA is required to take time to demonstrate its use, thoroughly and carefully. In some labs, students may be reluctant to handle the required materials because of squeamishness or fear; in others, they are just so confused by the topic that they are unable to interpret the results in any meaningful way. Knowing beforehand where trouble can be expected saves valuable time.

Lab instructors should arrive early to make sure that all equipment is in working order and the needed supplies are available. Although instructors should make their students clean up after the lab, you will want to double-check before your class begins to make sure that all equipment is intact. Do not depend on someone else to do this for you. When something goes wrong, as it invariably will, it is you who must salvage the lab for the students.

Before the students begin work, it is often necessary to organize them into groups. Do not leave this to chance. Take charge. Demonstrations that require the students to move from table to table should also be planned carefully; otherwise, chaos will almost certainly reign as all the students rush to the first table.

While the students are working, your presence should be felt in the room. Do not just sit in the front of the class, waiting for students to come to you with problems. Circulate around the room, making sure that all students are making progress. Ask them how they are doing and what they are doing. Take an active role, offering suggestions and assistance when needed.

Lab safety must always be a major concern. All TAs need to be informed about the necessary safety precautions, since the lab instructor is responsible for the safety of the students. Although vigilance is necessary in all labs, extra caution must be exercised in introductory courses.

Anyone who teaches a course faces the problem of students with different levels of interest in, and commitment to, the class. In a lab course, however, inattentive students pose a real danger to themselves and the entire class. Clowning around in the lab can cause serious trouble, and it is up to you to see that order is maintained. Warn students at the beginning of class about any potentially hazardous materials they will be handling. Write warnings on the blackboard and repeat them often throughout the class. Make sure that students wear safety goggles and other equipment as necessary. If you are not sure about the possible dangers of a material, ask the professor in charge of the course. You cannot be too careful. Students who refuse to comply with safety regulations should not be allowed to continue with the lab.

Teaching a lab is not all worry and work; it has its rewards too. Perhaps more so than in any other class, a lab teacher will witness the excitement of active learning. Students, glad to be participating rather than just taking notes, become involved in the work. Also, the more informal atmosphere of the lab, with students often working in pairs or teams, makes it easier for students and instructors to get to know each other.

The Foreign Language Class

Most foreign language departments in the university have already established ongoing training and support programs for their TAs. As language courses, especially introductory ones, require the mastery of certain lessons in a set sequence, the course outline is often determined beforehand and is common to all instructors teaching that course. Within these limits, however, the TA will certainly find room for individual creativity.

New TAs would do well to recall their first foreign language class and the feelings they had at that time. Try to remember that sinking feeling in your stomach as you were suddenly faced with the prospect of learning a whole new grammar and vocabulary. Perhaps more than in any other course in the university, the students in introductory language classes feel vulnerable and insecure. A situation where a person is suddenly unable to communicate coherently can be profoundly disturbing. The task of the instructor is to enable the students to get beyond their fears to a state where language acquisition is possible.

One way to make language classes less threatening and reduce some of the tensions inherent in this kind of course is to use audio-visual materials and props. Try to be creative in choosing materials. Besides the standard audio-visual materials (e.g., slides, films, videos, and CDs), TAs should consider including cartoons, posters, food products, advertisements, toys, games, and whatever else they can bring to a classroom to enliven it.

Language classes are usually divided into discrete segments and most teachers agree that, as a rule, these separate parts of the class are a necessity. Although the teacher may certainly vary the class occasionally, the many demands of learning a language are best served by maintaining these divisions: introduction, drill, and conversation.

Language classes, like all others, should begin informally, giving the students a chance to settle in and make the mental transition to the material at hand. The instructor may wish to begin with an anecdote, a joke, or an observation—in the target language, of course. This first part of the class can also be used for taking attendance, making or returning assignments, going over homework, or clearing up unfinished business from the previous class. It is pedagogically sound to conduct the entire class in the foreign language, so that students do not view language acquisition as an empty classroom exercise, divorced from the matters of everyday life. Language teachers have a very real advantage in getting to know their students through informal conversation in the language at the beginning of a class.

Drills, which are an essential part of every introductory language class, offer perhaps the greatest challenge to the teacher. Nothing is duller than a rote drill. The TA who can make this part of the class interesting and lively has accomplished much. Be imaginative. If possible, use visuals and props during the drills. Try to personalize the drills, using students' names and relating the drills to their individual interests. This evidence of your interest in them as individuals will make your students feel more comfortable, and you will be rewarded by more intense student involvement in the class. This section of the class is the place to introduce new material, which should always be as closely related to the drills as possible.

Conversation is, of course, at the heart of every language course. Engaging your students in

conversation may be difficult at the beginning, but with a little encouragement and playfulness on your part, they will usually respond. Be sure that you converse; questions and answers are not a conversation. Praise your students when you can. If they perform well, let them know it. Breaking the class up into small groups, or even pairs, for conversation sometimes helps overcome inhibitions; if the students make mistakes, they are only failing in front of a small group, not the whole class.

It is often useful to have students talk about their lives outside the classroom or to role-play in order to practice conversation in various everyday situations. In addressing "personal" questions to students or assigning roles for conversation practice, instructors should take care to avoid embarrassing the students. Avoid overly personal questions. Be careful about gender stereotyping and sensitive to matters of sexual orientation. For example, it should not be assumed that all students date members of the opposite sex. Such assumptions might embarrass, offend, or anger students and may serve to distract these students from their efforts to learn the language (see Our Common Purposes).

To a large extent, the climate that the TA establishes determines the success of the class. The TA must be sensitive to the inhibitions and embarrassments experienced by someone first learning a language, yet he or she must still be able to facilitate conversation. Give the students time to answer your questions and to respond to your statements. Do not help them before they need it; let them make mistakes and then gently correct them. Never lose your temper or answer sarcastically. Avoid monopolizing the class conversations, showing off your own fluency. Listen carefully to student comments and give a thoughtful response.

Beginning to learn a language must be seen as a series of small steps and minor victories. Language teachers should cheer these victories and make an extra effort to give encouragement, confidence, and support to their students.

In the Field

In many disciplines, work in the laboratory or classroom is enriched by trips into the field to explore the subject matter of the class in a hands-on way. Amy Clifton, a former TA who received her Ph.D. from the Geology Department, offers the following guidelines to consider when planning to take students into the field:

- Students should be properly prepared before going out into the field...know where they are going and what they will see before they get there. They should have been previously introduced to whatever skills or techniques they will be using to gather data (if that is the goal of the trip);
- Provide the students with a handout that describes the purpose and goals of the trip, the route, the stops that will be made, and includes a map;
- Field trips should be "hands-on" rather than "show and tell." Students should have to perform some task while out in the field, whether it be gathering real data, making written descriptions or illustrations, or taking notes in order to write a field trip report. A

finished product that is to be graded can be a good incentive for a student to be more attentive and serious in the field.

Some logistical issues to consider:

- Make sure you know your own responsibilities and liability on a field trip;
- Make sure the vehicle you are given to use is safe and gassed up and that you are comfortable driving it. Check that there is a spare tire and a jack and any safety equipment you might need in case of a vehicle breakdown;
- Make sure you know what to do in case of emergency or accident, and bring a cell phone with you;
- Make sure you know where you are going, or have good directions (including maps);
- It is always preferable to have more than one TA or a faculty member with you on a field outing. It is not a good idea to take large numbers of students to the field unless there are enough TAs;
- Make sure you have decided long before trip day what you will do in case of bad weather (i.e., postpone to a "rain date" or go "rain or shine").

How Students Learn

Teaching cannot be merely a matter of imparting a quantity of facts, but must provide students with a way of understanding and integrating the materials into their own experience. Teachers who are alert to the ways students learn can endeavor to structure their courses to meet these needs.

Teachers can help increase student learning in most cases by employing a few simple strategies. Two techniques that influence student learning are frequent tests and the use of study groups.

First, students perform best in classes where they are frequently checked on their knowledge. This means that courses which have only a midterm and a final do not provide the students with as effective a learning environment as courses where tests are more frequent. The use of weekly quizzes and writing assignments helps the students to focus on the material and to quickly discover in which areas their understanding is weak. Of importance here is quick turn-around time. Whenever you give a quiz, make sure that you return it to the students by the next class. There is no need for lengthy comments or analysis on your part—a sentence or two noting the good and bad points is all that is needed. If you procrastinate and give back quizzes or other minor assignments only after you have gone on to another topic, the results do not help the students in any meaningful way; at that point most students will only care about the grade.

Another way of regularly checking up on student progress is by asking students to come up with a question about the assigned readings to be handed in before each class, or to have them answer a single question about the material at the end of class. Again, in order for the students to gain maximum benefit from these assignments, it is essential that these small exercises be returned as quickly as possible. You don't have to write long comments on these quickie quizzes. If students do not do well, they know the areas where they are weak and will have time to seek help before a major exam or paper (see Testing).

Second, students learn better when they work and study in groups. Students who work in groups are more inclined to go through every question or problem they need to know; it is more likely that they, as a group, have a range of knowledge that covers all of the necessary problems. Students studying alone may have gaps in their knowledge, causing them to skip over complicated problems, or they may get stuck and spend far too much time struggling with a single difficult problem. Teachers cannot force students to study together, but they can use certain strategies to encourage students to adopt this effective study habit (see Students in Groups).

Active Learning

Twentieth century educational theory has almost universally emphasized the fact that education is not a passive process. According to Dewey, Piaget, and many others, learning takes place most effectively when the learner enacts the process of acquiring information rather than merely receiving that information. When active learning occurs, the student is able to assimilate the subject matter into his or her overall way of perceiving the world, rather than having it remain isolated from other ideas and concepts. This makes the learning more meaningful and enhances retention.

In many academic fields, active learning is the norm. One would not think of teaching most sciences without a lab section or mathematics without problems to solve. Similarly, even historically-oriented musicologists would be expected to have gained some degree of competence in performance.

Instead of merely regurgitating the current literature on an historical problem, students might work directly with primary sources—perhaps relating to an aspect of local history—to understand the historical process. It is not to be expected that students will make a real contribution to the field, but the students will gain a new understanding of the overall processes of investigation of the fields. They will achieve an awareness of the difficulties that are involved in the production of knowledge and learn to be more critical of the opinions of experts. Student historians, for example, will come to realize that the historical narratives they read are constructed from interpreted documents and recognize the limitations of such interpretations.

This is not to say that your work should ignore the function of conveying information. A student should not graduate from college without knowing the details of the French Revolution or the basic outline of Plato's metaphysics, nor should he or she leave school unaware of Vermeer or

Shakespeare. College is merely the first stage in a habit of learning, so a major function of a teacher's work must be helping students acquire the tools of learning, an area in which the techniques of active learning can play a major role.

Asking Questions

Whether designing an exam, leading a discussion class, directing a lab, or even lecturing a large section, the quality of the questions that you ask your students determines the quality of the response and, ultimately, the kind of learning that takes place. Asking the right questions forces students to take a more active part in the class, leading them to formulate their own opinions based on the materials presented.

Avoid closed-ended questions that require a yes, no, or any other single word answer. As soon as the student responds, it is once again up to the teacher to carry the burden of the discussion. If the teacher wishes complete control over the direction of the class, these kinds of questions are fine, but they do little or nothing to raise the interest level of the class or encourage student engagement.

Some teachers pepper their lectures with rhetorical questions to which they expect no answer or a collective one. Since no real thought is required to respond, students know that they can remain on the borders of consciousness and still 'contribute.' Better to pause in a lecture occasionally to ask real questions, questions with answers that indicate that the students are following the arguments presented, that advance the arguments, and invite the students to expand upon them. This not only provides a welcome break from the monotony of a long lecture, but also tells the students that they are expected to listen, think, and participate.

Students in Groups

Effectively transforming the conventional teacher-centered class into a student-centered one entails, for most teachers, a radical alteration of the classroom situation, with both a revision of pedagogical strategies and a reformation of classroom dynamics. To begin, teachers must deliberately work to alter the traditional model of classroom activity, that is, be willing to change the patterns of teacher/student interaction. In doing so, the burden of responsibility for student achievement shifts from the teacher alone to both teacher and students, as learning becomes a collaborative enterprise.

Begin by analyzing your role in the class and the goals you have set. For groups to work successfully, the teacher must be willing to give up some control. In group situations, the teacher's role is one of unobtrusive guide: determining the final destination, mapping out the way, and then signaling to the students when they are getting off the trail or stopping them when they are pursuing a false one. Try not to lead students by the hand, but don't abandon them either. You are the person with the special knowledge, and you have to make sure that

the students begin to acquire an understanding of this knowledge. With careful preparation, a teacher can meet both of these goals—giving strong support while allowing students the freedom to make discoveries—when working with groups. For example, at the beginning of class, the teacher can provide each group with an outline of the materials that need to be covered. This outline should reflect the same degree of preparation that a lecture on the topic would demand. The job of the students then is to work together to fill in the blanks in the information, to go through the process that leads to the conclusion you are suggesting.

Establish groups with care. The easy way to divide up the class would be to separate the students according to where they are sitting; this is not, however, the best way. These groups too often will contain students who are friends and have very similar backgrounds, or students with the same level (high or low) of motivation and commitment. Usually it is more effective to organize them according to interests, ability, and academic background, insuring that each group has the skills necessary to perform well on the tasks you will set out for them. By using the information you gather from your students on index cards on the first day of class (see The First Class)—majors, minors, special interests, related courses, etc.—you have the ability to organize effective groups. Try to be creative in matching students and in your efforts to suit the tasks to the talents of the group. For out-of-class assignments, consider, too, where students live; make it easy for them to meet.

Work to overcome students' natural reluctance to participate in group activities. Students often resist working in groups. Over the years, they have been conditioned to look to the teacher alone for all the answers and so perceive group work as a waste of time. Teachers often find it difficult, even in class discussions, to persuade students to talk to each other—more often than not they look at and speak to the teacher, even when they are directly responding to a statement by a fellow student. Work to have the students listen and speak to each other. In class discussion, ask them to relate their answers to other students' answers, thus guiding them to attend to the responses of others. Use your knowledge of the strengths of the students to show them ways to work through a problem together, rather than just giving them the answer.

Be patient. Students cannot unlearn old behavior overnight. Trusting their own ideas or the ideas of their fellow students may be a new experience for them, but it can, in the end, be a rewarding one.

Testing

Most teachers agree that the object of testing is not merely to rank students; tests are valuable diagnostic tools, ways of assessing student performance in order to facilitate learning. Well-designed tests give teachers an opportunity to review and, if necessary, revise their methods. Good exams are fair, a challenge to the students, a reflection of the goals and materials covered in the course, and an accurate index of the ability of each student in the class. They do not just happen but are the result of careful planning. TAs would do well to consult with their advisor or course coordinator on this topic early in the semester

(see TA/Faculty Relations).

Tests act as a kind of broad mirror of the work done over the semester; exams should present no major surprises for the student who has attended class and kept up with the readings. It should be clear to the students from the lectures and homework which materials to focus most strongly on in their study. Consider providing students with a written proportional breakdown of areas to be tested—that is, a pre-test handout indicating how many points of the test correspond to a particular area of focus. Even if you do not do this for students, such an exercise may help you prepare tests. Test yourself: do your questions foci faithfully mirror your class time foci? If not, plan your class better so that your tests are not surprises for students. If tests seem totally divorced from classwork, students may have little inclination to attend classes from that first test onward.

TAs can help students do well on exams by offering extra review sessions—either in person or online, for students who are interested, giving them a chance to go over materials about which they feel unsure. Another way to assist students is by providing them with study questions and/or sample problems that show them what they can expect from the exam.

Although each exam will be different—its final form determined by subject matter and course goals—some common issues confront all instructors when making up an exam. Three crucial issues that influence the composition of any test are raised below.

1. First and foremost, the teacher should be clear about what he or she wishes to test. Is the test meant to measure knowledge of specific facts? Is it meant to demonstrate the students? ability to deal with certain facts or theories in an original and comprehensive way, or to make connections among a group of texts or ideas? The answer to these questions will usually determine the type of test, objective or essay (or possibly a combination of the two). Test questions should reflect the kinds of assignments the students have been doing all semester and should never be something entirely new. The teacher should also try to determine beforehand the value of each answer and the range of acceptable responses to each question.

2. How important should each exam be, and how much weight should each carry in the course grade (see How Students Learn)? A midterm exam will seem most threatening to students for whom this exam and the final exam will largely determine their grade for the class. Many educators feel that it is more beneficial to students to give several tests over the course of the semester, making each test equally important, thus eliminating the "do or die" element of only one or two significant grades. Tests given on a regular basis are also aids to the teacher who wishes to know if the majority of students are keeping up with the class. Another advantage is that when a student's entire grade does not rest on one or two major exams, there is less likelihood that the student will feel pressured to cheat on the exam. In addition, the instructor will have to consider the

relative difficulty or ease of questions on the test. A too-easy exam will turn off the smarter students, just as one which is unrealistically difficult will turn off the average ones. A range of questions may be the best solution. Some teachers suggest that every test should contain some questions which all of the students in the class will be able to answer. These questions will act as positive reinforcement to the less advanced students in the class and give them some needed encouragement to persevere.

3. How can the teacher make sure that the exam will be beneficial to the student? Tests can be an effective way of providing feedback to the students on the work they are doing in your classroom, but, in order for this to happen, the student must be motivated to look beyond the letter grade assigned for the work. A student who just looks at the grade and then files away the exam gains nothing. Arrange for students to come speak to you in your office about the exam. Use class time to go over those questions that a large number of students answered incorrectly. Be aware of the fact, however, that this may be less an indication that the students do not know the material than that your question was ambiguous or misleading.

Some teachers suggest letting the students participate in creating the exams. The ability to form a good exam question is an indication that the students have a full understanding of the course material and of the goals of the course, and their input gives them a greater investment in the exam. You may not wish to do this on the midterm, but certainly by the time the final exam comes around, your students should be prepared to help write the exam. Essay exams lend themselves to this kind of pre-test exercise. Some teachers even use this as part of the exam itself, asking the students to formulate what they consider a good exam question and then answer it.

After composing an exam, put it aside for a day or two and then reconsider your work. Is the wording of all the questions clear and unambiguous? Is it realistic to think that students can complete the exam in the time allotted? Have you covered all of the material you need to cover? If after re-examining the test you still feel that the exam is sound, then carefully consider and write out your 'ideal' responses to all questions. This exercise is doubly useful. First, by checking your answers with the questions, you can see if they truly elicit all the information you desire. If your responses added more information than the question demanded, you may wish to rewrite the question to be more inclusive. Second, this exercise will help you when grading the exams if you use your own responses as a model for student answers. Evaluate the exam again after the students have taken it. Was it too difficult or simple? Did students misunderstand any of the questions? Do you see areas where the class as a whole missed some vital piece of information? No matter how satisfied you are with the exam, there is a good chance that not all the students will feel the same way. Listen to your students. Although you are not obligated to agree with them, you will discover where your expectations and theirs did not coincide, information that you can use to your own and your students' advantage in future semesters.

Grading

"What did I get?" or, even worse, "What did you give me" are questions which can reduce teachers to despair. After spending long hours carefully reading and commenting upon a student's essay or exam, teachers are discouraged when the student's sole interest is in the grade. Handing back the first graded assignment to a class should not be a traumatic occasion for teachers or students. Unfortunately, it sometimes is. Teachers feel discouraged because their students did not meet their expectations; students are angry because their grades are lower than they expected. Ideally, however, students will be thinking in terms of "What grade did I earn?" As Dr. Jeff Smith of the University of Otago points out, if your class time is well-planned and your students are aware of the material for which they are responsible, unpleasant disappointment or resentment can be avoided (see Testing).

Like it or not, testing and grading are integral parts of the educational process and central elements of most courses to many students. Decisions about grading should be made with care since your grading policy, more than anything else, will be scrutinized, discussed, and, sometimes, contested by your students. Many TAs worry at the beginning about whether they should be a 'hard' grader or a 'soft' one, but, in fact, this is not the question. Rather, TAs should worry (if they must worry about something) about whether or not they grade fairly and consistently. Do not be surprised to find out that fairness is foremost in the students' minds, too.

How can a teacher insure fairness in grading? This begins by establishing a clear standard of grading at the beginning of the semester. Students should be told what quantity and quality of work is necessary to get an A, B, C, etc. If the grade will be determined strictly by numerical grades awarded on a series of tests, the student should know how each one will be weighed in the final grade and what material the student must master to achieve the highest grade. The weight of class participation, labwork, the effect of attendance, and the possibility of make-up work and exams should be laid out. If a class is to be graded on a curve, the method should be explained to the students at the beginning. This is all part of the contract that a good teacher makes with a class at the very beginning of the semester. Remember too that first-year students may need more detailed explanations of grading practices and standards than more advanced students. All students, however, will be less anxious about grades if they feel from the first day that the system their teacher uses is fair and sensible.

Remind students that there are certain acceptable standards of written English to which they must comply. Students might argue that it is not fair to penalize them for their writing style in classes other than English, since all that really matters are the facts (i.e., what they say, not how they say it). By emphasizing high standards for written English early in the semester, those students with writing problems will be encouraged to seek help. Consequently, reading and grading exams will be a less difficult task for the teacher.

A TA who is grading for another professor must discuss these issues with the professor at the beginning of the semester so that there will be no later misunderstandings. The faculty member

and the TA (or TAs) must agree on the grading criterion for that class (see TA/Faculty Relations).

Many teachers tell students at the beginning of the semester that they should feel free to come to them during office hours to discuss grades. If a student does come to you with questions about a grade on an essay or exam, listen carefully to the student's inquiry. Although you may decline to change the grade, you might discover that exam questions were more ambiguous or essay assignments less clearly defined than you thought.

If students feel that they merited a higher grade on an essay or term paper, you should always offer to reread it. The possibility exists that you did not read as carefully as you should have the first time. Do not be intractable: you are, after all, human and can make mistakes. But do not allow yourself to be manipulated or bullied into giving another grade. Some students try to coerce teachers into giving them a better grade—telling them that they will not get into medical school (or law school, or graduate school, etc.) or that their parents will kill them if the grade is not raised. These considerations should not sway you. Fairness to all your students demands objectivity and equal standards. If you cannot resolve a grade problem with a student, do not allow yourself to get into an argument. Offer to have the appropriate person in the department read the paper, perhaps the course supervisor or the department chair. Know ahead of time the name of the person in your department to whom you can refer these kinds of problems.

A TA should, of course, consult with members of the department to discover that department's special policies on grades. For example, in some departments, grades are assigned on a strict bell curve. TAs must be clear on the department's policy and develop a system in conformity with it.

Instructors should post grades (only using a secure system like SAS Gradebook or the gradebook feature in Sakai) as soon as possible after final grades are completed. So that students may have time to discuss their final grade with you, all instructors should schedule at least one final office hour after the semester ends.

Occasionally students will come in to challenge their final grades. If large numbers of students complain, you will need to review your own performance. Did you make clear to students at the beginning of the semester how grades were to be calculated? Did you send out warning notices or speak in person to students in danger of failing? Listen carefully to each student's complaint and then show the student how you arrived at the grade. Remind students what would have been necessary for a higher grade. Students are often very emotional at this time of year, so take care not to get into shouting matches with them. If you cannot reconcile a student to his or her grade, he or she must register the concern in writing to the department chair or other appropriate person and to the office of the dean of the faculty offering the course.

The bottom line is that students must be protected from arbitrary or capricious treatment. The answer, then, is to be clear on what is expected, fair in evaluation, and articulate in pointing out the pros and cons of any piece of graded work.

Students' Rights to Privacy

All students in the university have a basic right to privacy, and it is the responsibility of the TA to respect and safeguard that privacy. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, commonly known as FERPA or the Buckley Amendment, dictates that information about students cannot be released without their express permission. Although this ruling most directly concerns staff members working in offices that deal with academic transcripts, disciplinary records, psychological files, and placement office credential files that contain letters of recommendation, TAs too must take care that student grades, records, and identifiable information are handled in a confidential manner.

NEVER discuss one student's grades with another student or with any other person. Of course, you may discuss students with those who have a professional 'need to know,' such as other faculty members involved with that student.

When returning exams or papers, do not allow other students to pick up papers for their absent friends. Return written work only to the student concerned—not even email is a secure way to report grades to students. Be very careful when posting grades. Posting grades by student identification numbers or by student names constitutes a violation of students' right to privacy. Remind students that the university is prompt in releasing grades. Students may visit the online SAS Gradebook to find their grades a week or two after the instructor is required to submit them if you-or the faculty member-decided not to post grades via SAS Gradebook or Sakai.

The Chalkboard/Whiteboard

The chalkboard and whiteboard, used with care and forethought, can be valuable classroom aides: to illustrate an argument or demonstration, to outline or organize material, or to work out complicated problems. Instructors should consider how to use the board to its best advantage and try to incorporate boardwork into their lesson plans as often as possible.

1. Start with a clean slate. At the beginning of every class, erase all material from the previous class even if you do not plan to use the board. Erase everything. Leaving the odd word, equation, or phrase on the board may distract some students. Those students who invariably arrive late to class may assume that you wrote those cryptic words and phrases on the board and so will faithfully copy all into their notebooks. One TA related how totally perplexed she was at the assignment a student handed in until she spoke to the student and found out that the student had arrived late and mistakenly copied and dutifully completed the assignment for an earlier class.

2. Organize the material you put on the board. Do not write everything on the board, only the essentials. Clearly label all diagrams, problems, and sections of an outline.

3. If your handwriting is difficult to decipher, print slowly and carefully. Come to class a

few minutes early if you must, to write out long outlines or assignments. Write firmly and legibly enough so that students in the last rows can read without a problem. You may want to check this out beforehand. Write something on the board, then sit in the last row and try to read it. If there are any problems, adjust your handwriting accordingly.

4. Do not stand in front of the board, blocking the students' view. Give them a chance to copy what they need before going on with the lecture. Step aside, allowing the students adequate time. Especially when writing complicated equations or charts on the board, take care not to explain the problem as you write. You will either write unclearly or speak unclearly. After writing the entire equation on the board, turn fully to the class and point out the steps as you describe them.

5. Do not erase anything before the end of the class if you can avoid it. If you must erase, erase details rather than main ideas or concepts. Before erasing, ask the students if they have copied everything. Of course, as you move from one section of the lecture to another, you can erase the board, but, again, make sure that the students have a last chance to copy.

6. Although some instructors like to use colored chalks, avoid them unless you are sure that the chalks are visible from the back of the classroom. Especially in larger lecture halls, these chalks may add to the difficulty of reading the board. If you feel impelled to use colored chalk, make frequent trips to the back of the classroom to check on visibility.

Teachers' Aids

Resources for TAs

TAs who are aware of the many resources available at Rutgers are in a good position to help their students make the most out of their years at the university; TAs who do not know where to recommend their students to go to overcome academic problems or broaden their understanding of a subject will be shortchanging them. Especially in these lean times (budget-wise), when teachers may face even larger classes than usual, such *extras* may make the difference between a student who merely takes a course and one who really gains insight into a subject.

Most TAs already know what remedial programs exist in their own department for the students (i.e., peer tutoring, formal study groups, etc.). If such support does not yet exist in the department, TAs may wish to help students set up informal groups or even match up willing students as study partners, for one-on-one tutoring. All students have a right to receive at least enough support to see them through the course.

Once the students' basic academic needs are met, the TA can look beyond the classroom and the printed text to try to find other means of increasing student learning. For example, students appreciate being offered the opportunity to become 'real' scholars—to learn how to do research, to go out into the field, to seek out connections between two or three different fields—and TAs can help their students take the first steps towards realizing this goal by providing them with the inspiration and the tools to do so.

Sending students to the library to do a research paper is the most practical way to get students involved in research. It is not enough just to assign a paper, leaving the students to sink or swim. It is necessary to introduce them to the proper methods and procedures, making sure they feel at home in the library. Many TAs feel insecure about their own library-literacy and worry about passing on to their students their own unsophisticated skills; this need not be a problem, however, for the library offers many types of introductory instruction for students. Even better, TAs can take advantage of the library staff's willingness to train teachers to be competent library instructors so that they can design, plan, and carry out an effective introduction themselves.

Course goals and objectives will determine what, and how, material is presented, but imagination is also important when designing a course. Be aware of the various programs being offered throughout the university. Assigning students to participate in an on-campus event—a lecture, a concert or play, a tour or lecture at the Zimmerli Art Museum can introduce students to something entirely new or help them to see old things in a fresh way. Do not overlook the use of films and videos. A well-chosen film can supplement coursework in both the sciences and the humanities. For example, a critical examination of a science-fiction film could begin a conversation on the limits and the possibilities of science or raise important ethical issues in a way that will certainly elicit student interest and response. Arrange for screenings at a few

different times so that all can participate.

The possibilities are endless for the creative teacher. Know what is available and consider ways of using these resources to help your students learn.

Libraries

Your university ID card allows you access to all of the libraries within the university and their holdings of more than three million volumes. The system's various units (listed below) on the university's three campuses support a broad range and depth of faculty and student research in a wide array of disciplines. To search Rutgers' libraries collections, find articles, and a myriad of other services, visit the Libraries' website.

The system's largest divisions are the Alexander Library on the College Avenue Campus and the Library of Science and Medicine on the Busch Campus, both in New Brunswick. The former houses the principal collections of research materials in the humanities and social sciences, and the latter contains the principal research collections in science, technology, psychology, medicine, engineering, and pharmacy. Most of the libraries maintain one or more reserve reading rooms. Each unit in the system is accessible to all members of the university community through an online catalog and intra-library loans. In addition to the collections internal to the Rutgers library system, members of the faculty and student body have access to other libraries through cooperative arrangements which link Rutgers to the Princeton University Library, the State Library in Trenton, and to other libraries in the region. Ask the librarian to find out if a specific library is included in this arrangement.

In addition, as a resident of New Brunswick, Piscataway, Highland Park, or any other town in the surrounding area, you can be issued a public library card for one year, renewable yearly if you continue to reside in the town. Proof of residency is required. Students should also remember that one of the great research libraries of the world, the New York Public Library, at 42nd Street and 5th Avenue, is easily accessible by train or bus from New Brunswick. TAs who are in charge of a course may wish to place materials on reserve at one of the university libraries. To do this, go to the Reserve Request webpage, click the library on the campus where your class is taught, and fill out the form.

To speed up the request you should also gather the required information together before you go to the form—it requires the date the material is assigned, the author, title, publisher, edition, call number, and location (you can copy and paste this information from IRIS). The library staff prefers that *they* request the materials rather than you requesting them individually and then taking them to the library. Any personal material to be placed on reserve should also be brought in at this time. It is recommended that you submit your list of reserve materials at least two months before the semester begins, that is, in early July for the fall semester and in early November for spring.

The library will also place any handouts you have on Electronic Reserve. Placing handouts on electronic reserve enables your students to access the material online. As with placing books or

magazines on reserve, material should be submitted at least two months before the semester begins.

Graduate students are permitted to borrow books from the Rutgers Libraries for an entire semester. At the end of the semester, the books must be returned or renewed. If you need a book which is already out on loan, you may recall the book through the library's online service or by filling out a form at the circulation desk or requesting the book within IRIS. The book must be returned within a given time, or the borrower will be charged rather steep daily fines.

The libraries have a number of electronic information sources, including: online databases, links to online databases at other public and university libraries, Articles+, and others. It is not enough, however, for the university to have such equipment: students and faculty must be library-literate, knowing what to use for a specific project and how to use it efficiently and effectively.

TAs can arrange to have their students receive an introduction to the library, or, what can be much more useful in the long run, the library staff can teach a TA how to organize and conduct a workshop session. In either case, the tutorial will focus directly on the specific types of material that the students will need for their research projects. A teacher who is aware of the available information resources can create assignments that utilize them fully, enabling students to write papers with an increased number and improved level of sources.

To schedule a program, contact the appropriate library. For more information, visit the Libraries' website.

Language Center

The Language Center contains materials for all languages studied at the university. To some extent, all students in language classes are required to use these facilities, so foreign language TAs will receive information from their departments telling them about the materials available and arranging times for their orientation at the Language Lab. As the lab is an integral part of language instruction in the university, all TAs teaching a foreign language should familiarize themselves with the lab as early in the semester as possible.

Other TAs, too, should be aware of the existence of the labs and know that their services are available to anyone in the university. All students or faculty members may use the labs to improve their language skills. Along with the usual audio materials, the labs also have video and computer materials.

Learning Centers

The Learning Centers provide academic support programs for undergraduates. Among the objectives of the Centers are: to provide diagnostic services to assist students in identifying the appropriate Learning Resource Center service to meet their needs; to provide study skills assistance through individualized and small group methods; to offer additional instruction to

students who need help in regular coursework through peer tutoring and supplemental instruction programs; and to refer students to other university services as appropriate.

Writing Centers

Writing Centers provide tutoring for students who are enrolled in Writing Program Classes (expository writing to advanced business and scientific writing classes).

Math & Science Learning Center

The Math & Science Learning Center provide support services to students in introductory math and science courses. Among the services offered by the Center are: free tutors; review sessions; use of microcomputers; and access to course materials, including old texts and exams. In addition, study space is available. The Center is meant to function not only as a tutorial center, but as central meeting places for students in mathematics and the sciences.

Computing Services

The Office of Information Technology (OIT) is a service unit organized to provide information technology planning services in support of the University's instructional, research, and service mission. OIT maintains a vast data network, multi-user systems and servers, web hosting, email, spam filtering, and mailing lists creation, as well as the myRutgers portal—a personal, customizable, web-based information portal that makes campus services and information faster and easier to find and manage.

In addition, OIT also provides computer training, free/discounted software, site licenses for the Rutgers community (such as free virus protection software), courseware systems for online delivery of instruction, numerous computer labs, teaching labs, a Digital Media lab where faculty can access instructional software, and a lab with large Sun Unix servers.

The services and facilities provided by OIT are supported by the following divisions: Campus Computing Services provides primary campus computing support for faculty, students, and staff for Camden, Newark, and New Brunswick/Piscataway;

Enterprise Systems and Services is the university business unit responsible for the design, implementation, operation, maintenance, and evolution of central information technology (IT) facilities supporting the university community;

The Office of Instructional and Research Technology provides coordination for the use of information technology throughout the University in support of instruction and research.

Media Center

The Media Center, located in the Douglass Library, houses the Rutgers libraries' audio and video collections. A catalog is available at the center or at its website. The center has several

screening rooms which may be reserved for group viewings. Reservations for film and video showings should be made as early in the semester as possible, even if you are planning to watch the material in the classroom.

Students, staff, and faculty may also borrow videos overnight for personal use. There is no charge, but an ID card must be left as security.

Digital Classroom Services

Digital Classroom Services—part of Scheduling and Space Management—maintains over 240 classrooms throughout the New Brunswick/Piscataway campuses.

Staff are available to assist you Monday through Thursday (8:00am to 10:00pm), Friday (8:00am to 6:00pm), and Saturday (8:30am to 1:00pm). During the winter and summer breaks, hours are 8:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday. They may be reached at 848-445-3612.

Information regarding the size, location, and permanently installed equipment in the classrooms is available on online. The website also contains instructions and videos explaining the operation of the systems and equipment.

If a situation arises where you find yourself teaching in a classroom that is not fully equipped to meet your audiovisual media equipment needs, complete an online request form.

English as a Second Language

The Graduate English Language Learners Program (Grad ELL) provides special assistance to non-native speakers of English, offering small classes in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Class size is strictly controlled so students receive individual attention in improving their English language skills. Its services are available to all Rutgers students.

Newly arrived international students are screened by this program to make certain that they have achieved a level of competence in English which will allow them to perform well in their classes. Students whose language skills are found deficient must take classes until they reach the required level of proficiency.

For more information about the programs offered, contact Grad ELL.

Center for Global Services

The Center for Global Services—located on the College Avenue Campus—coordinates services in New Brunswick for all international students, faculty, and staff. All international students should report to the Center as soon as possible after their arrival.

Programs have been set up by this office to orient the students to the university, the community, and American culture. For example, the International Friendship Program pairs up newly arrived international students with individuals or families from the area who will help

introduce the students to New Jersey/American culture.

Many other programs of interest to the international community are coordinated by this center. In addition, the center provides information regarding legal issues, travel, employment, medical care, insurance, and other matters of concern to international students. International TAs should maintain contact with this office during their stay at Rutgers, and other TAs will want to remember this resource when working with international students.

Zimmerli Art Museum

The Jane Voorhees Zimmerli Art Museum is a valuable educational resource. In addition to a fine permanent collection, the museum presents temporary exhibitions each semester.

TAs who would like to use the museum's resources but are unsure how they can integrate art into their course or uncertain about how to begin, should contact the Curator of Education, who can arrange for an introduction to the museum and its holdings.

Campus Information Service

Through its components of RU-info and RU-tv, Campus Information Service (CIS) serves as Rutgers' central source for information and referral and is a credible, accessible gateway to Rutgers and its community. RU-info also oversees the Calendar of Events.

In addition to offering a multitude of channels in its video network, RU-tv provides opportunities for student production, university programming, and academic support. The university community may utilize the RU-info Channel to publicize events, and departments find RU-tv's academic review sessions a helpful tool.

RU-info: 732-445-INFO (4636)
Text questions to: 732-662-2664

Helping Yourself

TA/Faculty Relations

Departments employing TAs have a responsibility to provide those TAs with the support they require. Although all programs may not officially designate someone by the title "faculty advisor," they all should designate a person to whom TAs may go with questions or problems.

Your assignment as a TA will determine the nature of your relationship with your advisor. If you have been assigned to teach a recitation or lab section, or to grade papers, the faculty member who teaches the lecture section of the class will usually be the person to whom you go with your problems. In courses where there are multiple TAs, it is absolutely necessary to work closely to coordinate class methods and goals—how the class will be shaped, what kinds of exercises and tests will be used—so that each TA's assignments will be consistent with the rest. If you are a section teacher in a multi-sectioned course, there may be a course coordinator who can help you.

Those TAs teaching single-section upper level courses for which there is no apparent advisor should approach the department chair, who will act as advisor or may recommend another faculty member more knowledgeable about that particular course. Establish a link between yourself, your course, and the department at the beginning of the semester to insure yourself of the assistance you require throughout the semester and to let the department know that you are interested in doing everything possible to make the course a good one. Clearly, your TA assignment will determine how much contact you have with your advisor; some TAs will be fairly independent while others will work very closely with him or her.

By talking to your advisor before the beginning of the semester, clear guidelines about responsibilities can be established. Decisions about testing, grading, content, and division of work may be made at this time. The TA can learn what the departmental expectations for the course are and what freedom the TA has in designing or determining the shape of the course. Discussing these issues beforehand eliminates what could develop into serious problems later in the semester. A TA telling the class one thing and the faculty member telling it something different can lead to confusion in the class and tension between the TA and faculty member.

Be honest and open with your advisor, but also be polite. At times, you may find yourself in the middle, between the students and the advisor. Do not feel that you have to relay every critical statement that one makes to the other. This is not your job. However, you should be prepared to act as a liaison when there are serious complaints. The instructor should be informed when a majority of students have what seem to be valid complaints about the way the course is being conducted. A word to the instructor can defuse what could turn into an explosive situation. Be tactful, of course. No one wants to be told that he or she is a bad teacher.

Constructive criticism from your advisor can help you in your professional development; accept this criticism gracefully and maturely. Course advisors recognize that TAs are apprentice teachers and may benefit from their greater experience. They are a helpful and valuable

resource, one which should not be overlooked or ignored.

Department Administrators

There are few people in the university who can help you as much on a day to day basis as your department's administrator. They are the people who best understand those university procedures through which you will have to wend your way. If you are not sure about something—whom to call, when a deadline falls, or how to get some needed information—in most cases, the department administrators will have the answer. Of course, do not burden the administrators with problems that you can figure out for yourself because most of them already have their hands full, but when you are really at a loss, they will almost certainly steer you in the right direction.

International TAs

Most of the problems faced by international TAs are the same problems faced by U.S. TAs, but because international TAs are not only new to Rutgers and to teaching but also to this country, it is possible that some unique concerns may trouble them.

Perhaps the greatest concern of international TAs is language. They worry that they will not be able to understand their students or that their students will not be able to understand them. This is, of course, a very real concern and one that can lessen only as the TA gains experience as a speaker of English. To hasten the process, TAs should try to immerse themselves in the language: listen to television and radio; read American newspapers and magazines; speak English as often as possible, seeking out native speakers with whom to practice speaking and listening skills.

Knowing what to expect in the classroom may make the first months easier. Be aware of the fact that your accent may be unfamiliar to many of your undergraduates (90% of your students are from New Jersey, a state which has its own distinct brands of regional English), so you should speak slowly to give them a chance to get used to your accented English. When you introduce yourself on the first day (being sure to write your name on the blackboard), you may wish to tell the students what country you are from and why you are here at Rutgers. Students who understand a little about a person's culture and background are more willing to give that person a chance and make the small exertion necessary to understand an unfamiliar accent.

Let your students know that you care about them and are interested in them. You may wish to explain that you hope the classroom will be a kind of partnership where both parties have something to offer. You look to them for help with correcting any initial difficulties you may have with the language. They can look to you for expertise in the subject you are teaching. Working together, you can both benefit.

Make it clear to the students that you expect them to let you know when they don't understand something you say, and promise to do the same for them. If a student asks you a question you do not understand, ask the student to rephrase it. Don't worry that saying you

don't understand will compromise your authority; pretending to understand when you clearly do not will do much more to undermine your authority and lose your students' respect. During the first few weeks at least, pause often to ask students if they are following you, if they have any questions, and wait for an answer. Let them know that you really do want them to tell you when they are having difficulties. Make sure that during your lectures you write all key words on the board so that you are sure the students are understanding them correctly.

To avoid having students use your accent against you, i.e., telling you that they misunderstood you so they did not complete their homework or study for a test (do not worry, very few students will do things like this), give the students handouts detailing all assignments or write them on the blackboard so there can be no misunderstanding. A clear and detailed syllabus will prevent many of these problems.

American students may seem very different from students in other countries. International TAs are sometimes shocked at first by what they perceive as a lack of respect towards them as teachers. Understanding some of the differences in American students may help to alleviate this shock. One way of doing so would be by sitting in on some undergraduate courses in the university during your first weeks as a TA. This will allow you to see the varieties of accepted classroom behavior and the kinds of student/teacher relationships common in this country.

In the United States students come from a wide range of backgrounds. Some of your students may be older than you expect; many will be holding part-time, or even full-time, jobs. The dress and manner of your students may be quite casual; do not interpret this as a sign of disrespect. Classrooms are sometimes quite informal. American students will often question or even disagree with something the teacher says. This is accepted classroom behavior and is not meant hostilely or as a challenge to the teacher's authority; the class is perceived as a dialogue rather than a monologue.

You will probably make some mistakes. Try to laugh at them and make them work to your benefit. By demonstrating to the students that you care and by displaying enthusiasm for your subject, you can limit the number of problems you encounter in your first few months as a TA.

Workload Management

Class preparation, grading, and your own graduate work will all place competing demands on your time. To avoid a crisis situation, draw up some general rules at the beginning of the semester. You may not always be able to keep them, but you should try to adopt them as general guides. Among the kinds of guidelines that you may wish to consider:

- When you establish priorities (and sometimes you must), remember your own graduate work. Your first responsibility at the university is your graduate work, and, thinking practically, you must realize that the assistantship is dependent upon successful completion of your own courses.
- Do not let work pile up. When you receive a set of papers to be graded, don't toss them

into a corner until the time comes when you can do them all at once—that time will never come. Large blocks of free time are extremely difficult to find once the semester gets underway. Instead, calculate how many papers you would have to read every day in order to return them within a reasonable time (perhaps one week), and then find that much time. If you have thirty students in a class, reading four or five papers each day would finish the task in a week.

- Be ready to ask for help. If, as the semester progresses, you find yourself consistently behind in both your graduate work and your teaching, it is time to reassess your methods. Speak to your faculty advisor about your problems.

Stephanie Donato, a career development and placement specialist, offers the following helpful hints:

- Rank all tasks in their order of importance. This will give you a realistic perspective on the tasks you face;
- Make an outline of all deadlines you must meet before the end of the semester. This relieves pressure; rather than worrying about all of the deadlines, you can focus more sharply on the imminent ones;
- Enter all tasks and deadlines in a date book or calendar; highlight them with a bright yellow marker;
- Looking at this date book or calendar daily will allow you to maintain a realistic notion of what remains to be done. Write a reminder two weeks before each deadline so that you may plan accordingly, allowing yourself enough lead time to complete each task;
- Flag important dates in the date book or calendar;
- Make a daily "to-do" list. Every day, before you begin your work, look at this list. Handle the most critical tasks first;
- Manage interruptions. Do not let yourself be deterred from major tasks by email, telephone calls, or other distractions.

Assessment/Evaluations: Why?

Your class seems to be going smoothly. The students obviously like you. You feel pretty confident. In spite of this, you recognize the fact that there is always room for improvement, so you would like to get a second opinion. You may not be the best judge of your own effectiveness as a teacher, especially so early in the semester. Many instructors, therefore, welcome an evaluation during the first third or half of the term. This is a good idea for all teachers, because to wait until the end of the semester for an evaluation of your teaching performance is to put your students at risk.

What the students say on the final evaluation or how they do on their final exam or paper may permit you to draw some conclusions about your teaching, but if the conclusion is that your

teaching was ineffective, it is certainly too late to repair the damage.

Some departments have already established a system for evaluating TAs, while in others the TA may have to initiate the process. Do not view evaluations as an intrusion or a punishment but as a means to enable you to become a better teacher. TAs are often surprised at how a seemingly simple comment can make a big difference in the effectiveness of their teaching. No one is born knowing all the tricks of a teacher—some are intuitive, some stumbled upon, and some passed from teacher to teacher during an evaluation. Since all methods of evaluation have their limitations, do not consider one negative comment a condemnation of your teaching. Do not be demoralized or depressed by negative evaluations. They do not mean that you are a poor teacher; however, they can be a means of helping you to become a better one. A single comment should not be given too much weight; several that focus on the same problem should be given serious thought.

Assessment/Evaluations: Faculty/Peer

Different departments have different ways of handling class observations, but the most common form is the faculty evaluation. Most typically, you will meet with the faculty member both before and after the observation. At the meeting before the class, discuss your goals for the class. Ask the observer what he or she will be considering in the evaluation. Provide the observer with your course syllabus, a list of all assignments, and a copy of any readings to be used in the observed class.

So that the students do not feel uncomfortable because of the presence of the evaluator, you may want to explain beforehand to the students that there will be an observer in the class but that the person is there to evaluate you and not them. On the day of the observation you may wish to introduce the observer to your class, but some instructors prefer not to, letting the evaluator enter and be seated without comment. Although you may feel nervous, try to conduct your class in the usual manner.

Schedule another appointment with the observer as soon as possible after the day of the observation. At this meeting, your stated goals are discussed in relation to your actual performance. Your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher will be discussed, and some general comments about your teaching style may be added. In addition, some evaluators provide the instructor with a written summary of the observation.

If your department does not provide this kind of formal one-to-one observation, you might ask a faculty member to observe your class. Someone who is currently teaching or has previously taught the course would be a good choice.

Some TAs feel more comfortable in setting up peer evaluations. Peer evaluations can be structured in much the same way that faculty/TA evaluations are. You and another TA or, perhaps, a group of TAs can observe each other's classes. Observing other TAs gives you a sense of what they are doing with the same materials and may help you to see their mistakes and

learn from them.

Assessment/Evaluations: Student

It is generally useful to have the students' opinion about your teaching as the semester unfolds. The university student rating forms are usually completed at the end of the semester, but this is too late for you to do anything to redeem that semester. Some teachers pass out index cards at regular intervals in the semester so that the students can tell them how they are doing as a teacher. Consider preparing your own evaluation form, or using or modifying TAP's mid-semester evaluation form, to give to the students during the first third or half of the semester.

The Teaching Portfolio

In your first semester of teaching or serving as a TA, you should begin to collect materials for a teaching portfolio. A teaching portfolio provides a profile of you as a teacher. It is a solid collection of evidence detailing the effectiveness of your teaching and reflections on that evidence.

An increasing number of colleges and universities are using teaching portfolios to help them make hiring, tenure, and promotion decisions. A teaching portfolio can also help faculty members write reference letters for you, as they will be able to read exactly how and why you've been teaching and tailor their reference letters accordingly. While a teaching portfolio can help you get a job, it can also help with teaching awards and research grants. With time, a teaching portfolio will document the evolution of your teaching and will aid your personal and professional development.

For every course you teach, you should take notes that describe the course, how you taught it, and why you taught it the way you did. Gather syllabi, copies of any assignments you created, including exams and paper topics, and any handouts you made. Your portfolio should also include evaluations of your teaching. In addition to student ratings or evaluations, you can ask a faculty member to observe your class and write an evaluation. If you attend a workshop, take a course related to teaching, or participate in any other activities to improve your pedagogical skills, document it in your portfolio. Evidence of an interest in teaching and efforts to develop your teaching skills may make you stand out as a job candidate. For more information on the teaching portfolio, visit the Center for Teaching Advancement & Assessment Research's (CTAAR) Teaching Portfolio webpage.

Other Considerations

On Writings

TAs will soon discover that Rutgers undergraduates possess a wide range of writing skills. Some students will be fairly good writers, others competent ones, and still others less than competent. Although TAs may wish to assist their students in improving their writing skills, given the demands of teaching and graduate work, they will probably not be able to offer more than cursory assistance with these problems.

The quality of student writing, however, should be a concern of all instructors, not just those in the English Department. The student who is unable to write clearly will be at a disadvantage both in college and afterwards. In fact, an ability to express ideas coherently in both speech and writing can often determine the course of one's life. A. Bartlett Giamatti (the late President of Yale) has suggested that "all of us are what we say we are—that as individuals and as a people we define through language what we have been and what we will be, and that a group of people who cannot clearly and precisely speak and write will never be a genuine society."

This is not an overstatement. The problem of language deficiency, oral and written, is a troublesome one for our society as a whole. TAs who overlook their students' problems in writing are not doing them a favor. If the students do not receive the help they need here at the university, they probably will never receive it and both they and society will suffer.

Although virtually all students at Rutgers are required to take an introductory writing course—Expository Writing—some poor writers do slip through the cracks. TAs with such unprepared students in their classes will face problems when assigning essays or written exams because these students must often be given extra help before they can even begin to write. Students who are unable to shape a thesis statement or organize their ideas coherently will not be able to produce a readable essay, a problem for both teacher and student.

When should TAs get involved with student writing problems? A good standard by which to judge the writing is this: does the student's grammar, organization, or syntax interfere with a reader's understanding of the work? Do the enormous number of punctuation or spelling errors distract the reader from the content? Do the readers have to stretch their imagination to construct the meaning because the essay is so poorly written? The answers to these questions will determine your response to the student. If the problems are serious, it is the responsibility of the teacher to get help for that student.

The most effective way to deliver this assistance is by referring the student to one of the college writing centers. You may refer students informally, by suggesting in conversation that they would benefit from tutoring, or you can write a note to the students on their papers; more formally, you could complete one of the forms provided by the Writing Program Office to recommend students for tutoring. By filling out the form, you will be sure to receive reports from the tutor about the student's attendance and progress.

What should a teacher do about less serious problems, such as the student who does not understand one point, the use of possessives, for example, or who writes awkwardly but, in the end, coherently? It is always a good practice to note these errors on the student's paper so that he or she is aware of the fact that there is a problem. Once alerted to the problem, many students will speak to the teacher about it or seek help elsewhere. Of course, you may have to pressure some students to work on their writing problems, perhaps by discussing them when the student comes to your office during the semester. Be supportive and positive when you bring up the subject. If you can honestly do so, try to find a way of praising the students while correcting them: "You're too good a student to have these kinds of problems in your writing."

If, however, the students are already struggling in your course, you will probably not want to overwhelm them by criticizing grammar and style. Failure to communicate clearly, however, is often a failure to understand, so by focusing on the main problem—how they are going to pass your course—you may be on your way to solving these secondary (to your course, at least) ones.

Except in these drastic cases, however, the TA should be prepared to bring the problem to the student's attention, and, if needed, push the student into seeking the help necessary to overcome it. Sometimes just pointing out patterns of mistakes to students will motivate them to improve their skills. If a large number of students in your class make similar errors, you may want to discuss them briefly when you return papers or you may wish to recommend a good stylebook for all of the class at the beginning of the semester. Be sure to call attention to errors in writing in some way, because to ignore the problem is to reinforce it.

Although some TAs may at first protest that teaching writing is not their job, it should become obvious upon reflection that any improvement in a student's writing will also help to improve the student's performance in the course.

Non-traditional Students

The non-traditional student, often an older student with a career or a family, or both, has become a strong presence on American university campuses over the past thirty years. Non-traditional students must meet the same standards as all students, but, often, because they are only attending part-time, they will take more time to complete their degree requirements.

Unlike the lives of many 'traditional' Rutgers students, those of non-traditional students will probably not be centered around the university. Their schoolwork is important to them, but they are equally committed to their jobs and families. This is not to suggest that they are less interested in their education; for the most part, they are dedicated and demanding students, often more actively involved in their education than other students. In many ways, they are closer to graduate students—and TAs—in their dedication and commitment than to most undergraduates.

Many of these students have responsible jobs that have accustomed them to carrying out assignments independently.

This experience may make them more demanding as students, less tolerant of wasted class time, poorly-prepared lectures, and careless grading. Changing requirements, policies, or due dates mid-semester, while never a good idea, could cause severe hardships for these students whose time is necessarily carefully budgeted. Always be clear about requirements, whether work is voluntary or required, extra or no credit.

Your policies on deadlines and attendance may have to be more flexible than is usual. A student may have to travel occasionally for her job. A sick child may prevent another from completing his paper. All the work, of course, must be completed, but deadlines should not be totally inflexible.

Because non-traditional students often have a much wider range of experience than traditional students, classes with these students are often livelier and more challenging to you as a teacher than those with only traditional undergraduates. If you have questions about grading and registration requirements for non-traditional students, transfer students, or part-time students, contact the SAS Office of Academic Services.

Student Athletes

At Rutgers, as at most U.S. universities, sports are an important part of undergraduate culture. Some of your students, in addition to their obligations to their classes and their jobs, will be committed to one or more varsity sports: football, soccer, basketball, golf, tennis, wrestling, to name just a few. Or, students may participate in the band or on the cheerleading squad. Because travel is often involved in such activities, these students may sometimes have to miss class or even an exam. One of your responsibilities as a teacher, however, is to insure that these activities are not allowed to interfere with the progress the students make toward a degree.

As most people are aware, there have been some notable scandals in college athletic departments over the past few years: student athletes exempted from normal college requirements, teachers pressured to alter grades or lighten coursework, etc. Rutgers has always avoided these problems, stressing academics over athletics. Students who participate in such programs at the university understand that they must meet certain academic standards or they lose eligibility.

Students who are involved in a sport at the university should inform you of this at the *beginning* of the semester and give you their travel schedule. If there will be serious conflicts over the semester, it is best to discuss how to resolve them at the very beginning. Approximately a week before each trip, the student will bring you a letter, signed by the coach and an athletic academic advisor, to remind you of the upcoming absence. Students who tell

you that they are unable to attend class but fail to produce such letters should not be officially excused. A NCAA regulation says that students may not miss class for practice, only for official games.

Student athletes are responsible for making contact with their instructors as soon as they return from a trip. Although they have been excused from class, they are still responsible for finding out what went on in the class and completing the assignments. If a student athlete in your class seems to be having a difficult time keeping up, be sure to speak to the student. Do not assume that the student is just a 'jock' and not really interested in the course; given the often difficult schedule of classes, practices, and games, it is not surprising that some students feel enormous pressure and may need some extra help.

Students with Disabilities

Changes in federal law over the last few decades have opened up opportunities in higher education for people with serious disabilities. Today, any institution that receives federal funding must make its programs accessible to those with disabilities. Since Rutgers has complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the number of disabled students at the university has sharply increased. You, as an instructor at Rutgers, have a responsibility to see that the rights of these students are not violated.

Some TAs may feel uncomfortable at first with a disabled student because they have never had contact with a person with a disability. Once they have a disabled student in their class they will realize that in nearly all respects they are just like the other students. Be careful to treat these students fairly: neither avoid them nor single them out for special treatment, and take care not to insult them by treating them as unusual or by patronizing them.

A sensitive teacher can greatly reduce the obstacles a disabled student faces. Remember that while in some cases the student's disability will be obvious, in many others you will never know about it unless the student tells you. Make it easy for a student to tell you. At the beginning of the semester, make a general announcement inviting students to come to your office or to speak with you privately after class about any questions or problems they may foresee in your course.

Create an appropriate atmosphere for conversation so that the students will feel comfortable speaking to you about their disabilities, and demonstrate a willingness to help them in whatever way you can. As a member of your class, the disabled student should be held responsible for the same material as the others. You may and should, however, make any reasonable accommodations you can to assist the student in completing the course requirements.

What kinds of assistance or accommodation should you expect to arrange? This will vary

according to the student and should be determined and confirmed by the Office of Disability Services. All disabled students have a coordinator to assist them in securing the proper accommodations. (You can find out his or her name by calling 848-445-6800.) For students who have not yet met with their coordinator, they should be directed to the appropriate person to secure the proper documentation. After meeting with the student, the disability coordinator will write to you verifying that the student has a disability and describing the necessary accommodations. A student with a hearing problem may simply ask you to reserve a desk near the front of the classroom. Some students may need to record lectures or to have a scribe take notes for them. Others may require longer times for exams or labs. By working together—you, the student, and the ADA coordinator—a solution will be found that works best for all involved.

Difficult Students

New TAs will soon discover that, for the most part, Rutgers undergraduates are hard-working, courteous, and well-behaved in class. Occasionally, however, instructors will find themselves faced with a student whose behavior threatens to at least sidetrack if not disrupt the course entirely. Taking swift and firm action early on, before your authority is seriously compromised, is the best policy for all concerned—for you, the other students in the class, and the unruly student. Being able to identify problems before they escalate will help you to maintain control of the class and the materials being presented.

Prevention is always better than cure. Establish certain standards at the beginning of the semester, adhere to them as the course goes on, and many problems can be averted. Explain to your students on the first day that attentiveness and participation are required. (Although most students understand this without being told, a brief discussion of expectations at the beginning of the semester leaves you standing on firmer ground if problems do develop.)

Make it clear that students are not only expected to attend class but to be there mentally. Reading newspapers, listening to music, text-messaging, chatting with classmates, shouting out comments, passing notes, doing homework for other classes, eating, chewing gum loudly—all these activities disturb others in the class and help to undermine the decorum of the classroom. In addition, they signal a disregard for classmates. By requiring participation in the class the teacher is informing the students that they are expected not only to keep up with the work but to be actively involved in the class. Again, setting these ground rules will not guarantee a problem-free class, but they discourage some kinds of behavior before they begin.

Perhaps the most common problem a teacher faces is the student who, for any variety of reasons, feels the need to monopolize class discussions or to blurt out answers before anyone else has a chance to respond. These students inhibit the quieter students, dampen the enthusiasm of the less shy, and cause resentment and anger against themselves and against the teacher who allows them to dominate the class.

One such student is the very bright student, who usually sits near the front of the classroom where it is easiest to make eye contact with the teacher. What this student contributes to the class is generally worthwhile, but the student soon begins to dominate the discussions. At the

beginning of the semester at least, the student is often implicitly encouraged in this behavior both by the other students and the teacher. The other students in the class are relieved that they do not have to respond because they know that this vocal student will; the instructor—especially the new and nervous instructor—will be happy that someone is responding, that questions do not fall flat upon a wall of silence. Soon, however, problems may develop. Students will never become wholly engaged in the materials if they feel that the class is a dialogue between the teacher and one or two students. They will soon resent the fact that the course focuses upon a single student rather than on the class, and this resentment can easily turn into hostility by the end of the semester. Because there is no necessity for responding, other students will invest less time in the class, often coming unprepared, thus excluding themselves from any chance of future participation. The end result is a class which is disengaged, a course which lacks the depth that it could have derived from a full range of student responses, and a teacher whose class has failed to excite the students.

From the beginning of the semester, a teacher must work hard to engage all students. Give the students a minute or two to formulate an answer after asking a question. Do not be afraid of silence. Look around the entire class, making eye contact with as many students as possible, to let them know that they are visible and valuable members of the class. Call on students who have not raised their hands. Frame questions toward the individual interests of specific students: the index cards the students filled out on the first day may give you some insights here (see The First Class). If they are unable to answer the first time that you do this, almost certainly they will be better prepared the second time. If a student gives an incorrect or vague answer, work with this student awhile; do not merely pass on quickly to the dominating student from whom you know you can get the desired response. The bright student should certainly not be ignored, but others must also be given the opportunity and the encouragement to participate.

If, in spite of these precautions, the student continues to monopolize the class, take the student aside after class and discuss the situation as you see it. Explain that although you recognize the value of the student's contributions to the class and the depth of the student's knowledge in the subject, you also see the value of involving the whole class in the learning process. You may wish to involve this student in your attempts to make the rest of the class more responsive. Most bright students readily acknowledge their own over-eagerness and are willing to give the other students in class an opportunity to respond before they do, especially if their teachers make it clear that they appreciate the student's ability and intelligence.

If a student interrupts others or shouts out the answer without waiting to be called on, make it clear immediately that this behavior is not acceptable. Even in a class discussion, where spontaneity is desirable, students should recognize the rights of others and treat them with courtesy. A discussion should never turn into a free-for-all, and you, the instructor, should act as moderator of the debates, exercising some control over the students, directing the discussion and its participants (see The Discussion Class).

A related problem is the student who is forever volunteering answers that do not really respond to the questions you have asked or that tend to move the class away from the topic

under discussion. This is not to say that there is only one answer to any question, but that some students have learned in high school that the best way to get high grades is by bluffing their way through a class. Rather than discussing the text or the issue under consideration (about which they often know very little), the student will relate long stories based on personal experiences or introduce material from another class, neither of which have relevance to the topic at hand. The natural conclusion of the teacher is that the student does not understand the material or has not prepared for the class. The result of the student's response is to get the class off track and cause a carefully planned syllabus to fly out the window.

Anger, however, is not the best response. It is always preferable to try to avoid this situation in the first place, by formulating questions carefully in class so that students are forced to relate the answer to the text or the matter under discussion in class. If the student ignores your pointed question, as such students often do, ask the student to relate the answer to the question more specifically. If the student is unable to do this, you should ask him or her a direct question about class preparation: Have you read the text? or Have you worked out all the steps of the solution? If not, suggest that the student see you after class and at that time you should kindly, yet firmly, explain the inappropriateness of that student's responses in class and the necessity of paying attention to the assignments and class focus. When once informed point-blank that bluffing is not useful, the student will usually stop this behavior.

Another problem is the genuinely disruptive student. You will sometimes encounter students who sit together (usually in one of the back corners of the classroom) and talk and laugh throughout class. Directing a pointed comment at this group may remind them of the expected behavior. "Did you wish to add something to the discussion, Mr. X?" will let them know that their behavior has been observed and that they are not behaving in an acceptable manner. You should also speak to them after class, individually whenever possible. If you wish, you can ask that they no longer sit together during your class. Most students will not persist in this kind of behavior once you have very clearly let them know that you will not allow it.

Other students may signal their lack of interest in the class by reading newspapers or magazines during class, eating, doing homework, or passing notes. Try to catch the eye of these students, letting them know in a non-verbal way that you do not approve of their behavior. Or, if the students are so engrossed in the activity that you cannot catch their eyes, ask a direct question of these inattentive students, and they will certainly not be able to answer. Often this is enough to discourage such behavior. If this doesn't work, however, ask them to stop at once and tell them to see you after class. Do not ignore these students for to do so only encourages others to participate in this kind of behavior.

Students who make offensive remarks in the classroom must be informed at once that their behavior is unacceptable. Make it very clear from the beginning of the semester that this can never be tolerated in a university classroom. Sexist, racist, homophobic, and xenophobic remarks should be confronted on the spot. If the student seems genuinely not to understand the problem, explain why the remark is unacceptable. But if the student clearly means to offend, you should respond sternly and quickly. This is one classroom situation where a show of anger may be justified. If, after being spoken to, the student persists in such behavior, you may

have to appeal to the Dean's Office of that students particular school for further action (see Creating the Right Atmosphere; Our Common Purposes).

In most situations, however, the basic rule is not to embarrass the student in class. Embarrassment does little to help change the student's behavior and may inhibit the other members of the class from contributing. Never let a student feel 'put down;' this intimidates and usually turns off future participation.

Academic Integrity

No student should be allowed an unfair advantage through the use of dishonest methods. According to studies completed at Rutgers, a high percentage of Rutgers undergraduates have cheated at one time or another during their years at the university. Although teachers may try to deny or ignore this fact, ignoring it only complicates the problem. Until academic dishonesty is confronted as a serious problem, little will be done to change the situation.

Examples of academic dishonesty cover a wide range of behaviors, including: copying homework, plagiarizing, buying term papers, and cheating on exams. Some students are fully aware they are cheating, while others may not identify their actions as such. Teachers who work to establish honest and trusting relationships with the students in their classes rightly view cheating as a violation of that trust.

Some teachers deny that their students cheat because it seems to be a personal affront and some realize that students do cheat, indeed even suspect certain students of cheating, but refuse to act upon their suspicions. They may worry about causing the student irreparable damage, of ruining the student's life, or they may just wish to avoid an unpleasant scene or the process involved in going through a university hearing. So, for whatever reason, they remain silent, but to remain silent is to participate in the student's dishonesty.

How should a teacher react to cheating? Finding a correct and measured response to this problem troubles many TAs. Overreacting may do more harm than good although it may signal to the students the seriousness with which you view the offense. It could be said that overly-suspicious teachers invite students to cheat. Students feel challenged to 'put one over' on the teacher. Teachers who refuse to recognize the possibility of cheating may also be leading their classes to do just that.

The fact is that students are under a lot of pressure. Given this pressure, some students find it difficult to resist the opportunity to cheat when it is presented. As a teacher, it is your obligation not to put the students in a situation where cheating is easy. This is not to throw the burden of blame for cheating on the teachers—as some students invariably do—but to safeguard the integrity of your class and protect the rights of all students in the course.

Prevention

How can a teacher guard against cheating? First, by making the students believe that there are good reasons for behaving honorably. Most instructors would do well at the beginning of the

semester to spend a few minutes talking about academic integrity. Reading aloud the university policy on academic integrity is often a sobering experience, for the students learn that the teacher is obligated to report all violations for investigation. In order for you to carry out your responsibility to the university, you have no alternative but to report suspected violations of the code.

Explain that the university is an institution based upon the free exchange of knowledge. To plagiarize another's work knowingly, falsify data, or give or receive assistance on exams or other work is to violate the basic principles of the academy. Explain very carefully that plagiarism does not merely mean copying someone's words without properly crediting them, but copying their ideas also. Many students have a limited and unusual idea of what constitutes plagiarism, a legacy of their high school English classes. Correct this misperception. Set limits for your students on the first day of the semester. Explain the meaning of group work and where and when it is appropriate.

The Research Paper

The research paper can be an opportunity for the student to become familiar with the research materials available at the library and the process of original scholarship, or it can be an occasion for dishonesty. Everyone by now is familiar with the term-paper mills (if you are not, do an online search for "term paper") where a student can buy a paper. Fraternities are also notorious sources of recycled papers. To avoid receiving purloined papers, take some time to insure that your students submit their own work. Some suggestions for prevention follow.

- Take time to develop a good topic. Set very definite parameters to the assignment. Even when strict limits are set, some students will try to get away with a paper on a related topic. Be firm about the range of topics.

- Don't use the same essay topics every semester. Besides making the reading of the papers more interesting for you, it removes a source of easy temptation from the student's path. Choose a topic that will definitely require the use of current research.

- If practical, insist that the students hand in outlines, working bibliographies, and photocopies or scans of note cards as they proceed. A cursory reading of this material is generally all that is necessary, but if you have any questions about the papers you will have something to which you can refer.

- If possible, meet with the students before they hand in their thesis statements. Discuss the papers they plan to write. Make recommendations of sources for the papers. Tell students that they may be expected to discuss their papers and its sources at a later meeting.

If, after all this, you think a student has handed in someone else's work as his or her own, you

must act. First, try to find the source if it is a clear case of plagiarism. If you are unable to locate the source, then you should show the paper to another faculty member who is familiar with the topic and may be able to help. Without discovering the source, you will have a difficult time proving plagiarism. If you cannot pinpoint the author, but you still have serious doubts about the paper's source, speak to the student. You might ask some specific questions about the paper, what the student means by certain words and phrases, or ask questions about some of the sources cited in the paper. Do not accuse the student directly of cheating. Explore the situation with such questions as "I was interested in your statement . . . ?" or "I don't understand how . . . ?" or "Can you tell me how you came to this conclusion?" etc. In the absence of a satisfactory response, you are left with no alternative but to refer the matter for review.

Cheating on Exams

Make it difficult for students to cheat on exams. Try to make the atmosphere comfortable within limits. Some teachers suggest bringing in soft drinks or snacks for their students; this is certainly not necessary, but it does help to relieve some of the tension and pressure felt by students in an exam. You will find that taking some reasonable precautions will discourage most of your students from cheating.

- Don't use the same exams every semester. Besides telling the students that you are a lazy and disengaged teacher, it makes it very easy for them to get a copy of the old exam.

- Give the students many small tests and papers rather than one or two large ones. This relieves some of the pressures which cause students to cheat in the first place.

- If possible, use short answer or essay exams rather than relying solely on true/false or multiple choice questions. If you do use multiple choice or true/false, make several different versions of the exam, with the order of the questions scrambled. Printing the exams on different colors of paper also helps.

- After making up a test, take care to keep it in a secure place. Do not leave tests lying around the office or in your departmental mail box.

- On the day of the exam, ask the students to seat themselves in alternate seats and rows so they will not be tempted to cheat.

- Set definite rules on what students can carry into the classroom. Ask them to leave all other books and materials, cell phones, MP3 players, bags, and hats at the front or sides of the room. Allowing students to carry materials to the desks increases the likelihood of cheating.

- If students are allowed to bring calculators into the exam, decide in advance if there are to be any restrictions: are programmable calculators permissible? Will students be allowed to share calculators?

- Distribute the blue-books to the students yourself; students who provide their own bluebooks may be tempted to write notes in pencil somewhere in the book. Have students begin writing on page two, or six lines down on the first page—whatever you choose—to prevent them from substituting pre-written tests. In addition, put some sort of distinct mark on the blue-books so you can be sure that books have not been smuggled in.

- If the exam is held in a large, crowded classroom, make sure there are enough proctors. Many departments will hire them for you—just ask your department secretary or advisor.

- Walk around the classroom during the exam. Do not leave the classroom unattended. If you sit down, do so in the back of the room.

- If you see a student cheating during the exam, take action immediately. A student who seems to be trying to look at another student's paper may be stopped with a meaningful look. If the student continues to look, insist that the student move to another part of the room. If a student is looking at notes during the test, you should take the test and the notes and speak to the student after class.

If you do find clear evidence of cheating on an exam or a paper, remember that you are obligated to report the case to the faculty advisor for the class or to the department chair. You are required to report any incident of suspected academic dishonesty. The student will get a fair hearing, but if found guilty, will be penalized for this act. Cheating by a single student is eminently unfair to the others in the class; it is your obligation to protect the rights of honest students. If you do not, they in turn will feel cheated by you.

Please read the entire Academic Integrity Policy.

Catching Internet Plagiarism

With the ease of cutting and pasting and the vast amounts of material available, the web offers endless opportunities for quick, easy plagiarism. But while cheating is easier than ever before thanks to the Internet, the Internet is also highly useful for catching those same cheaters. Many students do not realize that their instructors will use the Internet, too, to identify cases of plagiarism. The Internet is a wonderful tool for combating plagiarism; not only can you search for the plagiarized sources, you can also find tips from other instructors on preventing and finding violations of academic integrity.

You can minimize the possibility that students will download/purchase an entire paper by giving specific, detailed assignments that are unlikely to exist in any database of papers, and by changing the assignments every year. If students are coming up with their own paper topics, have them discuss their ideas with you in advance and turn in drafts, outlines, and preliminary bibliographies.

As experienced instructors know, lazy (or confused) students may 'borrow' phrases and paragraphs from material they find on-line and insert them into their papers without quotation marks or attribution. They may also hand in papers that were written entirely by someone else. Students can find archives of free papers on the Internet (some sites ask students who use the site's papers to post papers of their own), sites offering already-written papers for sale, and sites which promise to write papers on demand to fulfill a particular assignment. You may find it educational to visit some of these sites yourself. Some popular free sites are Anti Essays and StudyMode.

If you suspect that a student has cut and pasted parts of a paper or if some of the language of the paper differs markedly from the rest or from what you would expect of a student, you need to follow through on your suspicions. When particular phrases strike you as unusual, for example, (they sound overly polished or technical or academic), search on those using the Internet. Type in the exact phrase, sentence, or paragraph with quotation marks around it. You may also want to search Google Books.

If the search produces any matches, follow the links to the web sites and determine whether the student has copied the material without attribution. The online retailer Amazon.com recently introduced a feature which allows visitors to the site to search for words or phrases within the texts of many of the books it sells. This may help you discover whether a student has taken a portion of text from a book. Whatever you do, document your searches, writing down or book-marking the relevant URLs (addresses) and printing out pages which contain matching text.

If the paper, as a whole, doesn't quite conform to your assignment or in some way seems suspicious to you (too many sources, sources that you don't trust, footnotes which don't seem to go with the text, a complete lack of footnotes), the student may have acquired the entire paper online, either from a free site or from a paper mill which sells term papers. David Alan Black of the Department of Communications at Seton Hall University warns that papers purchased from on-line sources are unlikely to show up by searching on phrases using a search engine. Sites which sell papers may not post the papers themselves online—students will be able to download the paper once they have paid for it, or they may have it emailed, faxed, or mailed to them. (You will probably be able to find papers from free sites by searching on a phrase.) While you may not be able to track down the paper itself, if you search using the title of the paper, you may find it in a listing in an on-line catalog of papers, if the student hasn't bothered to alter the title. For more tips, visit Heyward Ehrlich's (Department of English, Rutgers Newark) website, Plagiarism and Anti-Plagiarism.

You may also wish to use Turnitin, which is available on Sakai to all instructors.

If you do find evidence that a student has engaged in plagiarism or any other form of cheating, don't take action on your own, like failing the student or tearing up his or her paper. Following University procedures protects you and ensures fairness for your students. Speak to the chair of your department and visit Rutgers' academic integrity website for instructions on how to report violations of academic integrity.

Information Technology

TAs who can find ways to effectively integrate instructional technologies into their teaching practices will enhance both their students' learning experiences and their own marketability. In addition to basic email, Internet, and computing services, Rutgers University provides a variety of technological tools to enhance your teaching, including mailing list services, software for posting course materials online, instructional microcomputer labs for hands-on use during class time, a media lab for the creation of graphical materials, and digital library resources. In addition, your department may have discipline-specific software available.

Technology changes, and so do the resources available at Rutgers. Keep yourself current by attending the available workshops.

The Internet and the Classroom

An easy way to integrate technology into your teaching and to develop your students' information literacy skills is to have them use the Internet to find material to use in class. The Internet can become a supplement to your textbook or regular reading list, offering the most recent information and a wide array of opinions.

Depending on the topic and your goals for the classroom, it can be hard to find trustworthy information on the Internet, so if you're going to use the Internet in your classroom, you should discuss strategies for identifying reliable Internet sources. Make sure students understand that the information they find online probably hasn't gone through a filtering process like editing or peer review. Let students know that they need to ask the following kinds of questions to begin to evaluate information they find online:

Who is the author and what are his or her credentials? Does any institution (corporation, organization, university, government body, etc.), support this website? Does the institution exercise quality control over the content? How might the content of the website be biased by the author's affiliation with the supporting institution? When was the content created, and how recently was it updated? What is the apparent purpose of the information (to persuade, inform, entertain)? Who is the intended audience?

Troubled Students

You can expect students to come to you with personal problems as the semester progresses.

For a variety of reasons, students often confide in TAs during personal crises. Listen to your students. Keep the lines of communications open. Even if the problems of the students seem trivial to you, do not treat them lightly. Remember that many of your students are living on their own for the first time and trying to cope with increased academic and social demands. Your compassion and understanding could make a big difference in their lives.

Some students won't come directly and ask for assistance but may send you signals about their difficulties in other ways. There are a number of signs which can alert you to the fact that a student may be in trouble.

- Marked decline in quality of course work, class participation, quality of papers or test results; increased absence from class or failure to turn in work.
- Prolonged depression, suggested by a sad expression, apathy, weight loss or gain, sleeping difficulty and tearfulness.
- Nervousness, agitation, excessive worry, irritability, aggressiveness or nonstop talking.
- Bizarre, strange behavior or speech.
- Extreme dependency on faculty or staff, including spending much of his or her spare time visiting during office hours or at other times.
- Marked change in personal hygiene.
- Talk of suicide, either directly or indirectly such as, "I won't be around to take that exam anyway" or "I'm not worried about getting a job, I won't need one."
- Comments in a student's paper that arouse concern.

If you are unsure about the severity of the student's problem, or the steps which should be taken, a consultation with a staff member from Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) will help you to evaluate the problem and offer some suggestions for assistance. Always remember that you are a TA—and most of you will have no mental health provider training—so the extent to which you can directly help students may be limited.

Never try to force a student to go to counseling. Inevitably, this is counterproductive. Encourage the students in whatever way you can, and let them know that you are concerned and willing to help, but do not try to strong-arm them. Too much pressure will make them retreat, perhaps cutting them off from their only avenue of assistance. If, however, you suspect the student will harm themself or others, you should contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) immediately. They will be able to guide you through the process of making sure the student and their classmates are protected.

Undergraduates are not, of course, the only ones subject to depression and anxiety; graduate students are just as likely to suffer from these problems. TAs should acknowledge the fact that they are human and may sometimes need help; they should also recognize the fact that their unique position in the university—both teacher and student—produces special problems. There is no need to wait until the pressure is unbearable. The sooner you seek help—for yourself or

your student—the better.

Counseling Services for Troubled Students

Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) provides personal counseling and psychological services for students at Rutgers. All university students, including those in the graduate and professional schools at Rutgers, are eligible for this free and confidential service.

Matters involving counseling are kept strictly confidential. No information about a student is released without the student's permission, not even the fact that he or she consulted a counselor. No record of his or her visit to the Counseling Center is retained on permanent university records, so it cannot appear on a transcript or any official record.

The staff consists of clinical and counseling psychologists and social workers. Among their specialties are short term psychotherapy, marriage and relationship counseling and education, group dynamics and group psychotherapy, coping with stress, test-taking anxiety, family issues, and phobias. The main center is located at 17 Senior Street on the College Avenue Campus.

Scarlet Listeners is a peer counseling service available to students needing information, counseling, or referral to campus or community agencies. Their telephone hotline is 732-247-5555. A TA who is unsure where to direct a student can call Scarlet Listeners and receive assistance. However, your best bet would be to contact Counseling, ADAP & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) at 848-932-7884.

Our Common Purposes

Most of us recognize the need to exhibit sensitivity to our students and colleagues on very delicate subjects. We would not make jokes in class about serious matters like religion or death; neither would we make personal remarks about someone's physical appearance. In general, we try to treat others as we ourselves would like to be treated, with sensitivity and respect.

Since many TAs are still taking courses, they are able to empathize with their students as students, to understand what it feels like to be on the other side of the desk. But treating students as you would like to be treated does not necessarily mean that you should assume that they are all exactly like you. In fact, it is vital that you recognize, acknowledge, and respect each student's individuality. When you stand in front of a classroom or meet with students in your office, you can assume that all are students at Rutgers, but beyond that it is risky to assume anything. Otherwise, a thoughtless joke or a careless word can cause discomfort, even pain, to someone in your class. Be aware of the power you have to wound others and guard against doing so.

Students must also be held to the same standard of behavior, and one of the responsibilities of the TA is to help students understand this; it is a necessary part of their education. A large number of Rutgers students are from New Jersey and have little experience with people outside of their own race or ethnic group. Others have come from countries where cultural attitudes

are radically different. Lack of experience, however, does not excuse intolerance. As TAs we must address problems when they arise, to help our students learn to understand and accept people who are different.

TAs should be careful not to single out any group as inferior or superior, to make jokes or derogatory remarks about any person or any group on the basis of age, race, nationality, or sexual orientation. If you are guilty of making remarks that are racist, xenophobic, or homophobic, your statements will certainly be found offensive by some members of the class and may personally hurt others. Some students will see your expression of these attitudes as acceptance of this type of behavior and be encouraged in their own prejudices and hatreds. Education should be a process which opens the students up to a wider range of experiences and possibilities, not one which narrows or hardens old attitudes and prejudices.

Perhaps the most important point is that the TA should always treat the students with respect and try to be sensitive to their individual needs. Placing a student in an uncomfortable position either through words or actions is unnecessary and cruel. Understand that the relationship between a student and a teacher is a professional one; respect that bond and refuse to exploit it.