



GUIDELINES FOR UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS (UTAs)

Approved by the College Curriculum Council on May 25, 2021

Introduction

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants (UTAs) play an important role in Brown's learning environments. Over half of undergraduates at Brown work as a peer educator before leaving the University. As students, UTAs bring a unique perspective on learning course content and can provide a different level of support for their peers. Ideally, faculty would be working with UTAs as partners and collaborators as a teaching team that leverages UTA experiences as students to design, facilitate, and evaluate course content.

These guidelines were revised to help create a consistent and equitable UTA and student experience while at Brown, an experience where all concerned are dealt with fairly and equally. You are encouraged to discuss the guidelines in an initial meeting with your UTAs to help foster collaboration and ensure that UTAs are engaging effectively in their work. The guidelines were revised using research conducted by UTAs at Brown as well as a committee of instructors, staff, and undergraduates.

Recommended Learning Objectives for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants:¹

- Critically reflect on their teaching practices and any biases to support and engage all students in the learning process;
- Collaborate with instructors on improving course learning goals and creating equitable teaching and learning environments by giving and receiving critical course feedback;
- Create a community of learners across course TAs, students, and instructors;
- Identify and effectively communicate key concepts in their respective course(s) with students;
- Develop professional skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, ethical conduct, mentorship, and time management;
- Effectively engage with course concepts to enhance their own learning;
- Incorporate teaching and disciplinary skills to their everyday lives.

A. Best Practices for the Equitable Recruiting and Hiring of UTAs:

1. **Develop a clear, transparent hiring process.** In order to ensure fair and equal access to UTA positions, practices for hiring UTAs will be transparent and include a clear and accurate description of expected roles and responsibilities, ideally aligned with the recommended University learning objectives above and the department's learning

¹ Instructors and departments may adopt one or more of these learning objectives and are advised to develop their own learning objectives.



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objectives for UTAs; how students will be chosen to become a UTA; how they will be evaluated and supported; and avenues for addressing any challenges that may arise. It is imperative that all students have an equal opportunity to apply for UTA positions. All positions must be posted in Workday, the University Human Resources system of record, and should be advertised widely among student groups. Students may not work before they have applied and have been formally hired through the Student Employment Office. (Note: If a student will continue in a UTA role in a subsequent term, the position end date may be extended; the position need not be reposted.) Department managers and instructors are encouraged to contact [University Human Resources](#) with questions.

- 2. Think creatively about the required skill-set.** It is critical that instructors consider multiple factors in hiring, including how prospective UTAs have worked through challenging experiences and content within the course (for example, as opposed to simply reaching out to invite students who earned an “A” in the course to apply); their ability to communicate effectively; and their ability to foster an equitable learning environment.
- 3. Advertise posted positions widely.** Relying on word-of-mouth alone is strongly discouraged as it disadvantages students who may have strong qualifications for the position but may have fewer social connections (see Brown’s [Student Worker Manager training](#) for guidelines as well as the 2019 national research study on on-campus student employment, “[Employing Student Success](#)” for additional guidance on equitable hiring processes). Students could be directed to the posted position in Workday through channels such as in class, Today@Brown, Center newsletters (e.g. Brown Center for Students of Color, Curricular Resource Center, Global Brown Center for International Students, Undocumented, First-Generation College and Low Income Student Center, etc.), and Departmental Undergraduate Groups.
- 4. Get to know applicants.** Whenever possible, interviews should be incorporated into the hiring process, as they provide instructors with the opportunity to engage more directly with prospective UTAs and allow applicants to elaborate on how their skills and experiences will add to the learning environment. If current TAs will be participating in applicant interviews or other aspects of the hiring process, they should receive guidance and support around hiring best practices. Final decisions about hiring should be made by the instructor and not students.
- 5. Notify UTAs promptly.** Once hired, students should be notified of their UTA assignments in a timely manner to allow them to adequately prepare and receive training for their position.



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B. UTA Support and Professional Development:

1. Instructors should refer to the UTA Recommended Learning Objectives. In addition, Departments might develop their own as they craft UTA responsibilities and consider feedback and assessment.
2. Ideally, instructors should provide UTAs with written guidelines and expectations for their position before the start of the semester they will work. Guidelines should include an explanation of the UTA's duties and responsibilities (including attendance in course meetings, office hours, communications with students, etc.), relevant learning objectives, and a workload statement describing the anticipated weekly time commitment.
3. Departments must provide adequate training to make UTAs aware of their responsibilities as teachers, and the power dynamics associated with their role, as well as any relevant departmental and University policies, procedures, rules, and resources. Completion of the [Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning UTA Orientation](#), available online and asynchronously, or departmental UTA orientations in coordination with the Sheridan Center, should be required for all new UTAs. Time should be allocated, and students should be compensated for time to complete required training.
4. Course instructors should provide consistent support and professional development for UTAs, including regular evaluation of teaching assistant roles and responsibilities; pedagogical development focused on improving teaching, communication, and disciplinary skills; and clear structures for reporting alleged misconduct, grievances, and conflicts (see Sheridan's "[Effective Strategies for Working with Undergraduate TAs](#)").
5. Instructors should arrange and attend regular weekly meetings to clarify course content and expectations (or maintain close communication about these matters with UTAs through other means).
6. Instructors should ensure that UTAs receive feedback from both the course instructor and the students in the class - whether individually or collectively (the student course feedback instrument allows courses or entire departments to add a question about the efficacy of the group of UTAs). Departments must make such feedback available to UTAs at the very least in the end-of-the-term course evaluations.

C. Teaching Responsibilities, including Assessment of Student Work:

1. UTAs should schedule regular office hours to enable students in the class to meet with them easily, either in person or virtually. Departments should make space available for



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this purpose as needed.

2. The Faculty Rules and Regulations (Part 4, Section 11, Rule II. F.) includes the following policy statement about UTAs:
 - a. Only instructors may assign final grades, whether for a single assessment or the full course. However, UTAs may evaluate and give feedback on student work under the following parameters: Undergraduate students who have been explicitly hired to grade course assignments will work collaboratively with course instructors on how assignments should be graded to ensure an equitable evaluation of student work.
 - i. Any recommendations on evaluations and grades by undergraduate graders must be adequately reviewed and judged by the responsible instructors.
 - ii. The instructor should re-evaluate work appraised by undergraduate graders if asked to do so by any student.
 - iii. As a general rule, UTAs may not be asked to grade subjective examinations or papers without extensive faculty oversight.
 - iv. Where possible, grading should be done anonymously so that the identity of the student being graded is not known to the grader.
 - v. Under no circumstances should UTAs evaluate or, in the case of Head TAs, supervise, the work of friends or family, or others with whom they have a significant relationships; in the event that a UTA learns that they are evaluating the work of a friend or family member, the UTA is expected to recuse themselves from reviewing the student's work and should send assignments to another UTA or to the instructor.
 - b. Teaching responsibilities and expectations for full-time enrolled undergraduate teaching assistants (UTAs) should be explicit and should adhere to the College Curriculum Council's Guidelines for Undergraduate Teaching Assistants. Classes and other kinds of group sessions taught or facilitated by undergraduate assistants must be directly supervised by the instructor in charge of the course. Such supervision shall usually consist of frequent meetings with the undergraduate assistants to discuss pedagogical matters and/or occasional attendance at discussions led by undergraduate assistants. The direction of laboratory sessions, field trips and projects by undergraduate teaching assistants is permissible, provided such individuals do not bear primary responsibility for any formal instruction. UTAs may be asked to design course components (e.g. assignments or



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discussion section materials), but such course design must be in collaboration with the course instructor and never the sole responsibility of the UTA. Any course design work must be explicitly included in the UTA's stated responsibilities and must be included in the total hours worked for the purposes of compensation. If there are changes in responsibilities and expectations of UTAs, the course instructor will inform the UTAs in a timely manner.

E. Workload and Compensation:

1. Instructors should ensure that the assignments given to UTAs can be completed in no more than 12 hours per week. Brown students are enthusiastic volunteers and teachers, and UTAs have to find a balance between their teaching and their academic work. Instructors should give UTAs adequate time to complete their TA responsibilities.
2. UTAs hired as student workers must be paid at a reasonable hourly rate (see the Human Resources [website](#) for guidance) and expect to work no more than 12 hours per week in alignment with the Campus Work-Study Guidelines published on the [Office of Financial Aid](#) website. (Note to Department Managers: this expenditure must be reported using the subcode dedicated for undergraduate assistants.)

F. Student Safety and Privacy:

1. UTAs may not be solely responsible for high-risk laboratory experiments (e.g. working with hazardous chemicals, animals, etc.) or other similar exercises without proper training and laboratory supervision.
2. UTAs may also not be involved in the investigation of academic misconduct of fellow students: if a TA suspects another student of being in violation of the Academic Code, they should report this suspicion to the instructor, who will take charge of the matter.
3. In order to protect student privacy, UTAs may not receive, review, or assess student health records or dean's notes. Course [syllabi](#) should provide instructions for students seeking accommodations or flexibility; instructors should reiterate these instructions in class early in the semester.