

**GRADUATE
TEACHING ASSISTANTS
HANDBOOK**

College of Education

Curriculum & Instruction

Purdue University

**Department of
Curriculum & Instruction**

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
PURDUE UNIVERSITY**

PURDUE
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Access this handbook online at:

https://collaborate.education.purdue.edu/edci/docs/TA_Handbook.pdf

University Teaching Assistant Policies and Procedures

Purdue University enrolls more than 39,000 undergraduate and graduate students on its West Lafayette campus each year. A key person in the University's instructional program is the Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). This handbook is designed to introduce you to the policies and procedures of Purdue University along with suggestions for developing into a responsible GTA.

As a GTA, you are an employee of Purdue University and certain rights and responsibilities go with your acceptance of that appointment. Some of the more important university policies that pertain to GTA's follow, but it will be to your benefit to become familiar with the *Faculty and Staff Handbook*, *University Regulations*, and *Removing Barriers* (links provided in the resource website). Taking a few minutes to become familiar with these policies and procedures now could result in fewer problems in the future.

A. The GTA and the University

1. Academic Freedom

It is the established and firm policy of Purdue University to provide, protect, and promote an environment of academic and intellectual freedom of scientific inquiry and publication and the freedom and responsibility of teachers to acquaint their students with the various sides of controversial subjects within their fields of subject-matter competency. In formally organized classes, lectures, seminars, etc., dealing with specific phases of academic instruction, members of the teaching staff may not subject students to their particular views and opinions concerning matters not related to the course of instruction itself. Faculty members (and GTA's) are presumed to be competent authorities in the subject matter of their formally organized courses of instruction; in other matters they are merely citizens and within the organized classrooms of the University have no right to inflict their views and opinions on issues extraneous to the course of instruction.

The faculty itself has pointed out that its members should be aware at all times that their activities and statements may reflect discredit as well as credit upon the University and they should conduct themselves accordingly, with due respect to the welfare and prestige of the University they represent.

2. Use of University Name and Stationery

Whenever representing Purdue in an official capacity, staff members will use the name of the University and will use Purdue stationery for official correspondence. In 139 years of existence, the University has built a reputation respected in fields of education throughout the world. The University does not wish to become involved in actions with which it is not connected officially. Thus, Purdue does not permit the use of its name or the University title of any of its employees in any announcement, advertisement, publication, or report if such use in any way implies University endorsements of any product or service.

B. **The GTA and the Student**

1. *Rights and Privacy - Student Educational Records*

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) affords students certain rights with respect to their educational records. The University interprets this to mean that student tests or papers shall not be placed in halls or anywhere other individuals have access to them and results shall not be posted in any form which permits one student to identify another student's results. The following website is a great resource for FERPA questions: <http://www.purdue.edu/GradSchool/Current/sippfaqs.html>

2. *Grades*

- a. Each GTA is responsible for becoming familiar with the procedures for reporting grades in the courses in which he/she is involved. See *Policy for the Posting and Dissemination of Graded Student Work*, Appendix A.
- b. Basis of grades. Each student shall be responsible for the completion of all required work, in each course for which he/she has enrolled, by the time of the last scheduled meeting of the class, unless his/her assignment to the course has been properly cancelled. Each student shall receive from his/her instructors a grade in each course for which he/she is enrolled at the close of the session. This grade shall indicate the student's achievement with respect to the objectives of the course.
- c. Semester grades. The following grades shall be assigned by the instructors and reported when they are called for by the registrar.

Credit Courses

- | | |
|----|--|
| A+ | Highest passing grade; |
| A | |
| A- | |
| B+ | |
| B | |
| B- | |
| C+ | |
| C | |
| C- | |
| D+ | |
| D | |
| D- | Lowest passing grade; passing minimal objectives of the course. |
| E | Conditional failure; failure to achieve minimum objectives, but only to such limited extent that credit can be obtained by examination or otherwise without repeating the entire course. This grade represents failure in the course unless and until the record is duly changed within one semester. It cannot be improved to a grade higher than D. When an instructor reports a grade of E, he/she shall file in the departmental office a statement of what is required of the student to receive the passing grade. |
| F | Failure to achieve minimal objectives of the course. The student must repeat the course satisfactorily in order to establish credit in it. |

Incomplete Work

I--Incomplete. A grade of incomplete is a record of work that was interrupted by unavoidable absence or other causes beyond a student's control, which work was passing at the time it was interrupted and the completion of which does not require the student to repeat the course in order to obtain credit. The incomplete grade is not to be used as a substitute for a failing grade. The incomplete may also be used to delay the awarding of a grade in courses (e.g., self-paced courses, mastery courses, and practicums) the completion of which normally requires one semester, but the structure of which allows specified additional time. An instructor may consult with the dean of students to determine whether the circumstances may warrant a grade of incomplete. When an instructor reports a grade of incomplete, he/she shall file an Incomplete Form in the departmental office stating the reasons for the grade and what is required of the student to achieve a permanent grade. He/she shall also indicate the grade the student has earned on the work completed, and the weight to be given to the remainder of the work in computing a final, permanent grade. The student must achieve a permanent grade in the course no later than the 12th week of the second subsequent semester of enrollment, or the incomplete grade will revert to a failing grade. If the student is not enrolled for a period of three years following the semester in which the incomplete is given, then the incomplete grade will be permanent. The grade will not revert to a failing grade, nor will the student be able to earn credit for the course by completing the work.

Directed Grades

The registrar is directed to record the following grades and symbols under special circumstances in lieu of semester grades:

- W-- Withdrew; a record of the fact that a student was enrolled in a credit course and withdrew from the course after the second week.
- WF-- Withdrew Failing; a record of the fact that a student, with a classification of 3 or higher, was enrolled in a credit course and withdrew from the course after the fourth week at which time, according to a statement from the instructor, the student was not passing in his/her work. This grade does not affect index computations. A grade of WF may be directed by the Committee on Scholastic Delinquencies and Readmissions..
- WN- Withdrew Not Passing; the same as WF for a credit course taken under the pass/not-pass option.
- IF-- Unremoved Incomplete-Failing; for a credit course in which a student received an "I" grade, a directed record of the student's failure to achieve a permanent grade by the 12th week of the second subsequent semester of enrollment. This grade counts in all respects as a failing grade.
- IN-- Unremoved Incomplete-NotPassing; for a credit course taken under the pass/not-pass option and in which the student received a PI grade. The same as an IF grade except that it does not affect index computations.

3. Grade Appeals System

A University grade appeals system has been established for the West Lafayette Campus. It includes grade appeals committees for each of the academic colleges/schools and a University grade appeals committee. The grade appeals system affords recourse to a student who has evidence or believes that evidence exists to show that an inappropriate grade has been assigned as a result of prejudice, caprice, or other improper conditions

such as mechanical error, or assignment of a grade inconsistent with those assigned other students. Additionally, a student may challenge the reduction of a grade for alleged scholastic dishonesty. In appealing a grade, the burden of proof is on the student, except in the case of alleged academic dishonesty, where the instructor must support the allegation. The only University authorities empowered to change grades are the instructor or, in the case of teaching assistants, the faculty member in charge of the course in question and the chairman/chairwoman of the University Grade Appeals Committee acting in behalf of the school and University grade appeals committee. (For details on the grade appeals procedures, committee composition, and conduct of hearings see the grade appeals system in *University Regulations* or the *Academic Procedure Manual*.)

4. Tutoring

The University interprets tutoring to mean giving instruction or assistance in University work to any student for direct or indirect payment outside of regularly scheduled class and laboratory periods. This does not refer to extra help sessions that instructors sometimes schedule for the benefit of students who wish to take advantage of such sessions, or to informal peer study groups.

No instructional staff member may tutor a student if the student is assigned to him or her for the course to which the tutoring applies, nor may instructional staff members prepare examination questions for a student or grade the examination paper of any student he or she has tutored for such an examination.

5. End of Semester Scheduling

The 16th week of the regular semester is scheduled such that each section or course has one two-hour class period during that week. Faculty members may use this last period in any way they see fit, including comprehensive end-of-semester tests. (As a result, this 16th week is commonly referred to as the “final examination period,” although many faculty will use the period for purposes other than examinations.) If no educational purposes will be served by any type of meeting during the 16th week because the educational objectives of the course have been achieved, a department may dismiss this class meeting. The final examination period is intended for the end-of-semester examination. No examination or quiz may be given during the week (three days in summer session) preceding the final examination period of the semester.

6. Students with Disabilities

Once academic adjustments and/or reasonable accommodations are in place, students with disabilities are expected to meet the same academic and conduct standards as their peers without disabilities. Services may include, but are not limited to, testing accommodations (extended time, distraction-limited environment, scribe, alternate format), document conversion (e-text, audio-taped text, enlarged print, Braille, tactile diagrams), use of readers, note taking, tape recording of lectures, sign interpreters, real-time captioning, assistive listening devices, priority seating, and accessible schedules.

In order to request disability services, a student must register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) and provide documentation of his or her condition. The documentation must be prepared by a licensed healthcare professional and must include specific guidelines. Once documentation is received, a DRC specialist is responsible for evaluating the information and making an eligibility determination. If eligible,

accommodations are determined on an individual basis. The DRC will provide those students with an “instructional accommodations letter” that describes how the student’s disability affects his or her access to certain course activities, materials, and/or evaluations. It is the student’s responsibility to present this letter to instructors and discuss how accommodations will be handled.

7. *Student Class Absences*

Only the instructor can excuse a student from class or course responsibilities. Excused absences are not provided for students by the Purdue University Student Health Center or by the Office of the Dean of Students. Some absence circumstances, (i.e., extended illness away from campus or an unexpected death in the immediate family) however, may not allow timely and direct contact between instructor and student. Under these circumstances, the Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted to relay information to a student’s instructors. This procedure will establish a foundation for the student and each class instructor to discuss later the academic situation resulting from unavoidable absences.

8. *Honesty*

Instructors may proctor examinations at their own discretion unless some other policy is adopted by the department in which they work or the course coordinator. In cases of student dishonesty, if the student, instructor, and course coordinator concerned can resolve the case agreeably to all, the matter shall be considered settled and the action taken reported to the dean of the school/college in which the instructor teaches and to the dean of students. If the matter cannot be settled satisfactorily between the student, instructor, and course coordinator, or if the situation calls for a stronger penalty than punitive grading, the case should be referred to the dean of students. Dishonesty in connection with any University activity constitutes misconduct for which students may be subject to administrative action or disciplinary penalties. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty. (See *University Regulations or Academic Procedure Manual, page 0-47*).

9. *Student Conduct*

While freedom of thought and expression is the lifeblood of our academic community, the maintenance of civility is a precondition to the vigorous exchange of ideas, and it is the policy of the University to promote civility in all forms of expression and conduct. The University thus believes that any expression or act of intolerance or discrimination -- whether based on race, gender, religion, color, age, national origin, disability, status as a Vietnam-era veteran, or on any other basis--is repugnant and inimical to our most basic values.

Students are responsible for observing the policies, rules, and regulations of Purdue University. These, in general, state the expectation that Purdue students will at all times conduct themselves as responsible citizens. Failure to show respect for duly established civil laws or University regulations will be handled by the Office of the Dean of Students in conformance with the various policies and regulations.

10. *Nondiscrimination Policy*

Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity,

understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life.

Purdue University views, evaluates, and treats all persons in any University related activity or circumstance in which they may be involved, solely as individuals on the basis of their own personal abilities, qualifications, and other relevant characteristics.

Purdue University prohibits discrimination against any member of the University community on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability, or status as a disabled or Vietnam era veteran. The University will conduct its programs, services and activities consistent with applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and orders and in conformance with the procedures and limitations as set forth in Executive Memorandum No. D-1 which provides specific contractual rights and remedies. Additionally, the University promotes the full realization of equal employment opportunity for women, minorities, persons with disabilities and Vietnam era veterans through its affirmative action program.

11. *Antiharrassment Policy*

It is the policy of Purdue University to maintain the campus as a place of work and study for faculty, staff, and students, free from all forms of harassment. In providing an educational and work climate that is positive and harassment-free, faculty, staff, and students should be aware that harassment in the workplace or the educational environment is unacceptable conduct and will not be tolerated.

To determine whether a particular act or course of conduct constitutes harassment under this policy, the alleged behavior will be evaluated by considering the totality of the particular circumstances, including the nature, frequency, intensity, location, context, and duration of the questioned behavior. Although repeated incidents generally create a stronger claim of harassment, a serious incident, even if isolated, can be sufficient.

Department Teaching Assistant Responsibilities

1. Attend staff meetings. The professor in charge of the course will normally schedule regular staff meetings. These meetings are to insure that all sections of the course are treated equally, to avoid confusion and misinformation, and to share ideas so that everyone can benefit from the collective expertise. Be sure to attend those meetings.
2. Be informed.
 - a. The course coordinator will set course policy. Be sure that you know what it is. If you do not understand the policy, ask.
 - b. Find out how much flexibility you have in handling your class. Depending on the nature of the course and your experience, the course coordinator may give you a great deal of latitude or very little. Look before you leap.
 - c. Discuss your class load so you and the course coordinator have the same understanding about how much time you will devote to your teaching duties and how that time will be spent.
 - d. Find out about grading. Ask to see old tests and scores. Learn how much input you have in determining student grades.
3. Be visible. Go to lectures or other class meetings scheduled by the professor, even if you have no specific responsibilities at those meetings. Know what is happening in the course and when it is happening.
4. Read the assignments. Know what the students are reading and prepare notes on important topics. Give explanations in your own words.
5. Be available:
 - a. After class if possible. Answer questions while they are fresh in students' minds.
 - b. During office hours. Schedule office hours. As a rule of thumb, you should schedule one hour per week for each credit hour that you are teaching (e.g., a 3 credit course would result in 3 office hours each week.). **These hours should be announced in class and posted on your office door.**
6. Return assignments. Assignment policies will be set for each class by the faculty member in charge of the course. Assignments should, of course, be graded and returned to students as soon as possible.
7. Establish your credibility. Tell students who you are, your background, why you are here, and what you can do for them.
8. Don't try to bluff. If you don't know an answer, say so. Be a resource person; help students look for and find an answer.
9. Don't overstep your authority. Always remember that you are assisting a faculty member. That faculty member is ultimately responsible for the course. If you disagree with a policy, by all means express your concern to the professor in charge, but you must abide by course policy.

10. Treat students with respect and dignity. Treat students as you would want to be treated. Be diplomatic, fair, and sympathetic to all views. If there are serious problems, bring them to the course coordinator. They may know of options for resolving conflict that you are not aware of.
11. Right to privacy. Always respect your students' right to privacy. Graded assignments, quizzes, and tests must be handed back directly to the student. This right to privacy is mandated by federal law. **Under no circumstances should you leave graded material in an unprotected location for students to pick up.** See Appendix A for departmental policy.
12. Be professional. Refrain from criticizing other TA's or professors in front of your students. Doing so destroys class morale and undermines the credibility of your colleagues. The Golden Rule is a good rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.
13. Term of appointment. You are a member of the Purdue teaching staff employed for the academic year. **Your term of appointment begins one week prior to the first day of class and it extends through the date when final grades are due.** Academic year employees do not earn vacation time, but may take vacation when students have vacation. If you must be absent from duty for any other reason (illness, jury duty, etc.), you must file a Form 33a.
14. Teaching evaluations. Teaching/course evaluations are to be conducted prior to the end of each semester. See *Teaching Evaluation Procedures*, Appendix B.

APPENDIX A

Department of Curriculum & Instruction Policy for the Posting and Dissemination of Graded Student Work

It is the policy of Purdue University to comply with the requirements of the Federal “Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974” (as Amended), concerning the disclosure of student records. A complete description of this University policy regarding student rights and institutional responsibilities can be found in Executive Memorandum No. C-51.

According to University policy, grades are considered a part of a student's educational record and will not be released or posted in any personally identifiable form. Graded student tests or papers shall not be placed in halls or anywhere other individuals have access to them. Results of student work shall not be posted in any form that permits one student to identify another student's results. Acceptable alternatives for posting and dissemination of graded student work include:

1. Posting of grades by using a system of random numbers or letters or other symbols, not personally identifiable, known only by the teacher and the individual student.
2. The return of graded papers by course instructors directly to individual students. Take care that the student's grade does not appear on the front page of the exam or paper; use envelopes or enter grade information on the last page.
3. The mailing of grades and/or student work in self-addressed, stamped envelopes.
4. The dissemination of graded student work by course instructors at a specified time and place.

Course syllabi should indicate how graded student work will be disseminated and the length of time graded student work will be kept by the instructor after a course is completed. The Dean of Students Office recommends that graded student work that is not picked up by a student at the end of the semester should be kept for 30 days into the next semester (excluding summer session). Students who wish to file a grade appeal must do so within 30 days of the next semester.

Note: It is intended that the choice of alternative method for disseminating grades and student work should be left to the individual teacher. However, the use of clerical or other departmental assistance is not an acceptable alternative.

APPENDIX B

Teaching/Course Evaluation Procedures

Student evaluation of faculty and teaching staff is an important component of our teaching program and is one form of feedback towards our teaching objectives and performance. Such evaluations are required by the Department of Curriculum & Instruction for all courses.

General Principles:

1. Teaching assistants should communicate with course coordinators before submitting course evaluation requests. The coordinator may have specific questions they want included on all evaluations of a particular course.
2. Course coordinators will have access to the evaluations of all instructors of the course for which they are responsible. They will review the evaluations and discuss any concerns and/or complaints that have been raised by the evaluations with the individual and/or the department head.

Online Course Evaluations

With the implementation of the online evaluation system, evaluation items must now be submitted to CIE well in advance of the end of the semester. To facilitate ordering your evaluation items, please use the request form. Please identify PICES items from the [online catalog](#) by number. In addition, the new system will permit you to have your own custom items. To request custom items, simply forward a Word document of the items along with your request. The College of Education now has 7 core questions which will be requested for all COE courses – unless you indicate otherwise. You may have a maximum of 36 items total. You may request the same set of items from past semesters and at some point you will be able to go online to select or draft items. Results will become available to you immediately after grades are posted at the end of the semester.

Actual Evaluation dates have not been determined yet

- Instructors will be notified when online surveys will be available for completion and submission to the students.
- Students will also be notified when evaluations are available. They will receive several reminders if they have not submitted their surveys.
- Instructors will receive 3 emails informing them only of the percentage of students who have not submitted their survey.
- Instructors may access their results the day after grades are due.
- Instructors will receive an email with instructions on how to log into the system. You may log in at: <https://courseval.itap.purdue.edu/etw/ets/et.asp?nxappid=WCQ&nxmid=start&s=8>.

Watch the Monday Memo for more information and details

• EDCI Online Course Evaluation Request Form

•
•

SEMESTER: (Ex: Fall 09) _____

INSTRUCTOR NAME: _____

•
•

| Course# | CRN | Section # | Previous Term questions (Y/N) | If Yes, list term/course/section | Cross Listings (course & sec#) | Instructional Type | Question Numbers |
|----------------|-------|-----------|-------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------|---|
| Ex: EDCI 20500 | 18281 | 001 | N | | | LEC | PICES 2, 18, 133, 405, 406, 407, 408 |
| Ex: EDCI 51000 | 18560 | 001 | Y | FA08/EDCI 51000/002 | CHM 69500/001 | LEC | Custom questions – see attached Word document |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
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- PICES questions can be found at: <http://www.cie.purdue.edu/search/files/catalog.pdf>
- Maximum 36 questions