

Head TA Checklist

Beginning of the Year:

- Meet with Instructor and TAs to discuss roles
 - Go through syllabus
 - Try agree on putting on people the job description of TA/HTA/Instructor
 - Talk about regrade policies with the instructor
- Talk to previous HTA of the course
- Work with Instructor to get everyone access to course site on Sakai
 - “Instructor” for Head TA; “Course Builder” for others
- Organize TA sections and office hours, post for students
- Set up proctoring schedule
- Pandemic: talk about Gradescope with the Instructor
- Normal times: reserve rooms for grading exams

Before Exams:

- Email graders and set up meeting
- Plan for students with accommodations
- Set up extra TA review sessions, post for students
- Remind TAs of proctoring duties
- Assist with exam writing
- Plan for exam printing and transport

After Exams:

- Have detailed solutions and grading instructions
- Meet with graders
- Enter exam grades
- Return exams to students
- Remind students of re-grade policy

Weekly Tasks:

- Assignments
 - Announce/Collect/Grade/Return
- Prep sections
- Hold section and office hours
- Communicate with Instructor and TAs

General Advice

A successful Head TA will find great value in being proactive. Work hard early in the semester to understand what the Instructor's system is. Hopefully after today's session you will have a good sense of your likely responsibilities and the questions you should ask. You should also feel empowered to prompt the Instructor to get things done that you need. Running these large classes really is a team effort and relies on a Head TA who communicates early and often.

You are an important link between the Instructor and the other TAs, so you should also be proactive in terms of coordinating the other graduate and undergraduate TAs. Not only are you organizing all of the TAs, but you have authority that you can and should use. When the TAs or graders are not doing what they are supposed to do, you should do something about it. Bringing it to the attention of the Instructor, and involving administrators as necessary, is crucial to getting these problems addressed. It is always helpful to know about problems earlier rather than later.

FERPA & Harassment Guidelines

The Head TAs have access to sensitive personal information about the students, and they cannot share it. You should remind all of your TAs about this policy as well. Read more here: <https://registrar.duke.edu/student-records-resources/ferpa>.

Duke has several policies that prohibit harassment. Harassment is unwelcome conduct that is serious enough to significantly interfere with an individual's work, education, living conditions, or participation in university programs and activities. Sexual harassment (including sexual violence) is perhaps the most commonly understood form of harassment, but it is important to note that harassment on any basis (such as age, color, disability, national origin, gender or sex, genetic information, gender identity, gender expression, race, religion, or sexual orientation) can also occur. Read more here: <https://oie.duke.edu/we-can-help/complaints-and-concerns/harassment>.

Diversity & Inclusion

Diversity and Inclusion are critical to the educational mission of Duke University. The Duke University Institutional Statement of Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion: *Duke aspires to create a community built on collaboration, innovation, creativity, and belonging. Our collective success depends on the robust exchange of ideas—an exchange that is best when the rich diversity of our perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences flourishes. To achieve this exchange, it is essential that all members of the community feel secure and welcome, that the contributions of all individuals are respected, and that all voices are heard. All members of our community have a responsibility to uphold these values.* Particularly in economics, there is a history of exclusion for women and underrepresented minority groups. Exercise appropriate cultural awareness and remind your TAs to do the same. Read more here: <https://oie.duke.edu/>

TA Sections

It is usually up to the Head TA to assign each TA to a section. The section meeting times and locations are already set by Duke, and you can look these up in DukeHub. The Head TA and Instructor should have a meeting with all of the other graduate and undergraduate TAs during the first week of school to set expectations. The Head TA can collect everyone's preferences for section times and do their best to accommodate those preferences.

In Econ201 each TA also is expected to have 2 hours of office hours each week. Unlike the sections, these times and locations are not set. Typically, the TAs can choose whatever time and location they want and reserve the classroom themselves. The Head TA should collect this information and put it together in one place for the students.

It is useful to set a protocol for what to do if a TA has to cancel a section or office hours last-minute. If TAs know in advance that they will be gone one week, they should try to get another TA to switch or cover their section. However, in the event of an emergency cancellation, it is best for that TA to make an announcement on Sakai that emails the class so that students in their section don't show up to an empty classroom. That being said, emphasize to the TAs that this is a job, and they should avoid missing these obligations.

Find out from the Instructor what material should actually be covered in sections. Sometimes it is just reviewing HW or answering questions; other times there may be something more formal the Instructor wants TAs to cover. Find out if attendance at section is required, and if students have to go to the section they are registered for in DukeHub.

Assignments

Find out from the Instructor how HW will be announced, turned in, graded, returned, and tracked. In Econ201 the HW is submitted on Sakai and is only graded for completion, so we don't have a lot of paper shuffling. If the problem sets are to be graded, you should use UTAs for that purpose. Have a plan for what to do with students who will inevitably email you or other TAs their late HW.

Exams

Get the dates of midterms and final exam from Instructor ASAP. Ask Instructor how many proctors are needed for each exam. At the initial TA meeting, have the other TAs commit to which exam date they will help proctor. Some Instructors may want the TAs to hold extra review sessions/office hours in the week leading up to the exam, though this scheduling can be done closer to the exam date.

You will need to reserve a separate room for the students who get extended time on the exam. This is something that should be done at the very beginning of the year. There will be a handful of students who get 1.5x or 2x the allotted time for each test. For example, in Econ201 the midterms were from 10-11:30 and so I would reserve a room in Gross Hall from 8am-1pm just in case some students have to come early and other students have to stay late - just reserve a huge block.

It is advisable to have students upload a scanned copy of their exam to Sakai prior to handing in their test. This will reduce cheating and help the re-grade process go smoothly.

Grading Exams

UTAs are not allowed to grade tests. Addie Stagg will send out an Excel sheet with all of the grader assignments at the beginning of the semester. You will need to reserve a room for grading purposes - EcoTeach Conference room is a good one to reserve because the graders can get a key and the exams can stay locked in there when nobody is around. Jennifer Becker can help with those reservations.

The week before the exam you should email the graders to remind them that the exam date is coming up. To facilitate grading, it is the most helpful if you and the Instructor both meet with the team of graders to go over (1) solutions to the exam, and (2) timeline and logistics for getting the grading completed. It is helpful if you get an affirmative response from graders that they can attend this meeting.

The best way to reduce re-grade requests is to provide a clear written and verbal explanation of the solutions to the exam and detailed instructions for how points should be allocated, especially in cases where partial credit is possible. To minimize inconsistency between graders, make sure the same question is graded by the same person. It is helpful if graders can mark where students earn points instead of where students lose points. Emphasize repeatedly the total number of points each section is worth.

Once the exams are graded, it will likely be your job to enter the grades in Sakai. UTAs should not have access to the gradebook. The Instructor will have to give you permission to access the gradebook on Sakai. Make sure you tell the graders to finish their job early enough so you can have plenty of time to alphabetize and enter the exam grades before they need to be returned.

For returning exams, you can check with the Instructor on how this should be done. On those dates, I usually am responsible for getting the exams from wherever they are stored to the classroom. I usually show up with two other TAs in the last 15 minutes of class and we just split the pile by last name and physically return the exams back to the students. Be particularly careful about FERPA considerations when returning exams.

Re-Grading Exams

Inevitably, there will be students who think they earned more points than they received. Every course should have an explicit re-grade policy (and re-grade deadline) for those students who think they deserve points back. This is, unfortunately, where cheating incidents tend to pop up. If students have not uploaded a copy of their exam into Sakai they forfeit their right to appeal the grade since there is no way to know what was written on the exam when it was graded and what may have been added after the fact.

My students are required to submit a written description of (1) the parts they would like considered for a re-grade, (2) their impression of what the correct answer is, and (3) how their answer differs from the correct answer. Students should discuss their requests with a TA, but the final appeal should be considered by either the Head TA or the Instructor. The re-grade policy emphasizes to students the following: If you agree that your answer was wrong but you “feel” you should have gotten more partial credit, we will likely not be able to give additional points to you – since this would require a re-grading of all other exams given that exams were graded consistently. I also tell students that for all re-grade requests, it is possible that I will re-grade the entire exam. Thus, the final score could be adjusted up or down as a result of a re-grade request.

Evaluations

At the end of the term, Ecoteach will send out a survey link for students to complete TA evaluations. TAs may think that this isn't all that important, but the evaluations are referred to in subsequent years for other jobs. I have found these evaluations to be personally helpful for (1) identifying my strengths and weaknesses from the student perspective, (2) revising and improving my teaching techniques each semester, and (3) explicitly referencing in teaching statements. The best way to increase response rates is to set aside time in class or section.