



TEACHING ASSISTANT ALLOCATION COMMITTEE (TAAC)

Policies for CNAS Life Science TA Appointments

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The TA Allocation Committee (TAAC) Charge and Composition	3
TA Responsibilities	4
Mechanism for Requesting Life Science TAships.....	5
Overview	5
Graduate student requests for TAships	6
Instructor and Academic Coordinator requests for students as TAs.....	7
Criteria for TA Assignments	8
Academic considerations.....	8
Rank-ordered priorities for TAship assignment	8
Student evaluations of TAs	9
Appendices	
Appendix I: Life Science Graduate Programs in CNAS	10
Appendix II: Information needed for a Life Science TA application at TAonline	11
Appendix III: Instructions for Instructors and Academic Coordinators.....	12
Adding/Editing Description of Duties forms	
Appendix IV: Data Reports	13

This manual and other documents that support the Life Sciences TA allocation process, such as the TA Online Calendar with current deadlines, can be found at TAonline (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>)

The Teaching Assistant Allocation Committee (TAAC)

CHARGE

In 2004, the College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (CNAS) Dean's Office established the Life Sciences TA Allocation Committee (TAAC) to create a transparent mechanism for allocation of Life Sciences teaching assistantships (TAships). Allocation of these TAships is a complex process -- excellence in teaching undergraduates as well as training needs of multiple department-based and interdepartmental graduate programs must be accommodated. TAAC was charged with the following objectives:

- (1) To make the TA allocation process more transparent.
- (2) To define criteria to guide TAAC in the appointment of students to TAships.
- (3) To provide all graduate programs in the Life Sciences¹ a mechanism by which their students can fulfill requirements to serve as Teaching Assistants in a timely fashion.
- (4) To create an interactive forum to ensure that resources are appropriately distributed across departmental and interdepartmental graduate programs and that CNAS is meeting the educational needs of its undergraduates.
- (5) To ensure that TA workloads are appropriate and balanced across all Life Science classes at both the upper- and lower-division level.
- (6) To ensure that departments and interdepartmental graduate programs have an active voice in the TA allocation process.
- (7) To create a TA allocation process that allows both departmental and interdepartmental graduate programs to plan for teaching needs.
- (8) To ensure that students, faculty and programs understand the commitment made and responsibilities accepted when a graduate student is appointed as a teaching assistant.

In conjunction with UCR's Computing and Communications, TAAC developed the TAonline website (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>) and the materials that help guide students, Instructors, Academic Coordinators, and Major Professors through the TA allocation process. Currently, TAAC oversees TAonline and provides recommendations for the allocation of the appropriate number of TAs in the Life Sciences classes as well as the assignment of TAships to the Chairs of departments delivering the curriculum.

Department Chairs are authorized by the APM to appoint TAs (APM 410-24). Consistent with this authority, TAAC will submit to Department Chairs for their approval any recommendations for substantive changes to the TAAC policy described in this document

COMPOSITION

TAAC is composed Program TAAC representatives (one representative from each department-based and interdepartmental graduate program in the Life Sciences in CNAS; also referred to as the Program Advisor in TAonline) and Department TAAC representatives (one representative from each department employing Teaching Assistants). TAAC is chaired by the TAAC Coordinator (the Divisional Dean of Life Sciences, lifescidean@ucr.edu) with assistance from the Director of the CNAS Graduate Student Affairs Center (GSAC), who is the Staff Administrator of TAonline. TA recommendations to the Department Chairs are provided after discussion with full TAAC member participation.

¹ See Appendix I for a complete list of Life Science Graduate Programs in CNAS

TAAC members are appointed for one academic year by the Chair or Director of the respective department/graduate program. Appointments start in July of each year. Up-to-date TAAC membership tables can be found on the TAonline front page (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>).

The different TAAC representatives have somewhat different roles in the process of assigning TAships. The **Program TAAC representative** (referred to as "Program Advisor" in TAonline) prioritizes the needs of the students in their graduate program while the **Department TAAC representative** prioritizes the needs of the course. The Program TAAC Representatives are encouraged to prioritize their student applications prior to the TAAC meeting. To do so, they may wish to consult with their program's Grad Advisor or Director as well as the Major Professor and his/her Chair, especially in terms of assessing financial need. In order to ensure that TA resources are allocated in an equitable fashion, TAAC may also wish to take into consideration historical data, such as the number of times a student has TA'd or the number of TAships that have been assigned to students in a Major Professor's lab (see Appendix IV).

The policies and mechanisms for TA allocation are iterated below. While these policies are designed to assure adequate communication between students, faculty, and staff, TAAC realizes that policies will need to be continually evaluated and refined to meet the needs of the Life Science majors. The current policies have been developed in consultation with departments and interdepartmental graduate programs, Graduate Student Staff Advisors, and Academic Coordinators.

TA RESPONSIBILITIES

A teaching assistantship (TAship; appointment as an Academic Student Employee [ASE]) is an internship, not a fellowship or gift. A graduate degree, particularly a Ph.D., implies that a student has mastered his/her subject area and is able to teach it to others. There are few better ways to master a subject than teaching it, so serving as a TA is an excellent preparation for qualifying examinations as well as a career development opportunity. Students should take their TA responsibilities seriously as an opportunity to be trained and obtain teaching experience. In accordance with this professional emphasis, TAs are evaluated at the end of the quarter by the students taking their course.

TAs play a critical role in undergraduate instruction by partnering with Instructors and Academic Coordinators to maximize the learning experience of all students. An excellent TA can excite students about the subject matter and enhance their learning experience. The qualifications and responsibilities of the TAs are outlined in the *Life Science Teaching Assistant Qualifications and Responsibilities* document, which can be found on TAonline (<http://Taonline.ucr.edu>). The workload for a 50%-time TAship is on average 20 hours per week; a 25%-time TAship is on average 10 hours per week. The Instructor will provide a written statement of the responsibilities for the TAs in the class.

TAAC understands that TAships requested based on a student's financial need may sometimes need to be relinquished (i.e., if a student is awarded a fellowship or his/her Major Professor is awarded a grant). During the TAship application process, the student and Major Professor will be able to update a student's application prior to initiation of the Fall, Winter and Spring TAship appointment deliberations. If changes in funding status occurs after this process has been initiated, the student should contact their Program TAAC representative as soon as possible.

The responsibilities and rights of TAs can be found at the UCR Graduate Division website at <https://graduate.ucr.edu/academic-student-employees-ase>

MECHANISM FOR REQUESTING LIFE SCIENCE TAsHips

The policies and mechanisms for TA allocation are iterated below. While these policies are designed to assure adequate communication between students, faculty, and staff, TAAC realizes that policies will need to be continually evaluated and refined to meet the needs of the majors. The current policies have been developed in consultation with departments and interdepartmental graduate programs, Graduate Student Staff Advisors, and Academic Coordinators.

Students: Each student applying for a TA position **MUST** log on to the <http://TAonline.ucr.edu> website every *quarter* to complete or update their application. ***Students who fail to confirm or update their information and submit by the deadline will not appear in the TAonline database, and hence cannot be selected by Instructors, nor be considered for a TAship by TAAC.***

It is critically important that accurate information be provided in your application. Any changes that have to be made in your application may:

- (1) cause an increased workload for your graduate program director and members of TAAC
- (2) effect the availability of TAsHips to other students in need
- (3) cause delays in the announcement of TAsHips or impact enrollment.

Overview:

The entire process is carried out online at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.

- 1) The **Staff Administrator** announces the opening of applications for Life Science TAsHips every quarter; an email is sent to all Life Science graduate students and faculty.
- 2) **Graduate students** apply for TAsHips during the two-week **open period**
 - Requests for Fall, Winter and/or Spring quarters of the following academic year can be made in April of the preceding year.
 - Students need to ***log in each term*** during the appropriate **open period** to confirm their previous selections and submit their application.
 - The current calendar for the **open periods** is on the front page at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
- 3) **Major Professors** approve of their grad students' request for a TAship at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
- 4) **Program TAAC representative** approve students' applications at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
 - "Program Advisor" is the term for Program TAAC representative in TAonline
- 5) **Instructors and Academic Coordinators** recommend specific students for TAsHips for the academic year at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
- 6) **Program and Department TAAC representatives** make suggestions for specific students for TA appointments to the entire TAAC membership at the TAAC meeting. Follow-up recommendations are typically done by email
 - recommendations are recorded at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
- 7) **Department Chairs** make the official appointment of TAsHips, using the data in TAonline
 - The Staff Administrator prepares the Letters of Appointment and sends to the TAs.

Note: It is the responsibility of the Chairs to provide their TA budget request to the CNAS Dean's office on an annual basis in the Spring. The Chair may request funds for additional TA needs that arise during the year by submitting a request to the Dean's Budget Advisory Committee (DBAC).

Specifics on graduate student requests for TAships and Major Professor approval:

Section reformatted for clarity; Major Professor included; "Program Advisor" deleted

A **student** who is requesting a TAship must:

- be completing or have completed their first quarter in their graduate program. Students are not appointed to TA positions in their first term.
- have the requisite skill set for the class. TA evaluations by faculty and students will aid this evaluation process.
- complete TADP training (<http://www.tadp.ucr.edu/>) prior to first day of work as a TA.
- meet Graduate Division requirements for English Language Proficiency

The following sequence of steps must be **carried out on time** at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>:

- **Students** enter their data into the TAonline database.
 - Materials to be entered are listed in Appendix II and can be found at TAonline
 - Information from previous years, including TAships awarded, will automatically be transferred to the current application
 - TAonline will be closed to submissions after the deadline has passed.
- **Major Professors** approve and justify their student's application each quarter.
 - The Major Professor will receive an email from the TA Online system when their student's application is ready for approval
 - The application is not complete until the Major Professor approves the TA application at TAonline.
 - The Major Professor comments on the student's need and qualifications
- **Program TAAC Representative** approve the student's request for a TAship.
 - The TAAC rep prioritizes applications using the criteria for TA allocations (see below)
 - Recommendations for appointments are discussed at the full TAAC meeting.
- **Students** will be notified of TAAC allocations ~30 days prior to the start of a quarter.
 - TAships sometimes become available closer to the start of the quarter due to unanticipated changes in student enrollments
- **Students** must notify their Graduate Program's TAAC Representative of any changes in their need for a TAship as soon as possible.
 - This will allow TAAC adequate time to find another qualified student
 - Obtaining a GSR from their own or Major Professor's grant is preferable to continuous TAships.
 - Students with GSR support should not apply for a TAship unless they have a programmatic need.

Instructor and Academic Coordinator Requests for Student Appointment as TAs:

After the Program TAAC Representatives approve student applications, there will be a call via email for Instructors (faculty member, lecturer or team of instructors) and Academic Coordinators (AC) to request a specific student for the TAship(s) associated with their class.

- **Instructors/AC** can request specific graduate students to serve as a TA(s) for their class.
 - these requests are one of many criteria used in the TA allocation process
 - descriptive reasons are most useful when recommending specific students
 - <http://taonline.ucr.edu> *must be used* for all requests

- **Instructors/ACs** can exclude a specific student from being considered from their class.
 - Only union-designated reasons are allowed.
 - A drop-down menu is available at <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.

- The **Instructor/AC requests** will be evaluated by:
 - The graduate student's Program TAAC Representative
 - The TAAC Representative for the department offering the course
 - All designees are posted at TAonline (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>)

- **TAAC** will make every effort to ensure that Instructor/AC requests are honored
 - given the complexities in the TA allocation process, there is no guarantee.

- If the **Instructor/AC** would like to change the student requested as a TA (the initial application), the rationale for this change should be discussed with the appropriate TAAC representative.

- The **student** that is requested for a TAship must:
 - have the requisite skill set for the class.
 - TA evaluations by faculty and students may be consulted.
 - meet TA training standards (English Language Proficiency and completion of TADP) of the graduate program or department offering the course.

- Following TAAC Approval, the **Staff Administrator** requests Chair approval from the employing departments.
 - Once the Chairs approve the appointments, all students, Instructors, Academic Coordinators, personnel services, and other relevant parties are notified of the approved appointments by the Staff Administrator.

CRITERIA FOR TA ASSIGNMENTS

Any graduate student in a CNAS Life Science graduate program is eligible for a TAship via TAonline; their Major Professor does not need to be CNAS faculty. In contrast, a graduate student from a non CNAS program (e.g., Biomedical Sciences or Bioengineering) will not qualify for a TAship via TAonline, even if they are in a CNAS faculty lab. The only exception is when there are no other qualified CNAS students available.

There are numerous criteria used for assigning TAships. The criteria considered by TAAC are listed below and are consistent with the APM (APM 410-24).

Academic considerations (in no specific order):

- Course content should be matched as closely as possible to a student's expertise.
- A graduate student has expressed an interest in being a TA for a specific course.
- Graduate students are afforded the opportunity to be a teaching assistant at least 2 times in their graduate career.
- Course Instructors (faculty and lecturers) have requested a specific student as a TA for their course.
- Academic Coordinators have requested a specific student as a TA for their course. In the large undergraduate classes, some talented, experienced TAs are needed to provide "role" models for new TAs.
- Graduate students must have completed the TADP program or enrolled to complete it before the term to qualify for TAships.
- Graduate students must meet Graduate Division requirements for the Speak or TAST tests.
- Past TA performance (as represented in TA Teaching Evaluations) will be considered. Highly qualified, experienced TAs are assets to the instructors and their students.

Rank-ordered priorities for TAship assignment:

1. PhD students in CNAS Life Science Graduate Programs (see Appendix I) are considered in the following order:
 - a. Students who require TAships to meet graduate program requirements or have not yet TA'd for 2 quarters
 - b. Teaching excellence as determined by student evaluations and input from Instructors and/or Academic Coordinators
 - c. Students who have financial need
 - d. Students who have completed program requirements but have specialized knowledge that is required for the course
 - e. Students for which teaching would significantly enhance the ability to meet career goals

2. PhD students in CNAS Life Science Graduate Programs in their first 5 years of residence will receive a higher priority for TAs than PhD students who have exceeded 5 years in residency. The TAAC clock starts with entrance into the student's the current PhD program. Time spent in Masters programs at UCR or elsewhere is not taken in account.
 - a. Students in Year 6 of their program are considered before students in Year 7 and beyond.
 - b. Circumstances that TAAC will take into consideration for students in their 6th year and beyond (not in rank order):
 - i. Have fewer than 2 quarters of TAship (based on 50% TA equivalents)
 - ii. No other qualified graduate student is available to TA
 - iii. Leave of Absence (each quarter of approved leave allows for an additional quarter of eligibility)
 - iv. Change in Major Professor in Year 3 or beyond
 - v. Receipt of external fellowship that prevented/obviated the need to TA in years 1-5
 - vi. Other extenuating circumstances
 - vii. These circumstances can be used to justify the equivalent of one 0.5 TA position just once during times of limited TAships.
3. PhD students in CNAS non-Life Science graduate programs will receive a higher priority for TAs than students in non-CNAS graduate programs. Specialized knowledge, financial need, and career objectives are considered.
4. Thesis Master's students will receive a lower priority for TAs than a graduate student in any PhD Program. Thesis Master's students in Life Science CNAS graduate programs will be considered for TAs before Master's students in non-Life Science and non-CNAS programs. Specialized knowledge, financial need, and career objectives are considered.
5. Course-work Master's students in CNAS graduate programs may be considered for TAs when CNAS PhD, non-CNAS PhD and CNAS thesis Master's student needs have been accommodated. Specialized knowledge, financial need, and career objectives are considered.

Other considerations: Student Evaluation of TAs

Student TA evaluations, when available, will be taken into consideration in assigning TAs. Students with better student evaluations may be given priority in assignments. TAAC will keep in mind that students who have more TA experience are more likely to have higher scores.

Student TA evaluations are conducted through the iEval online system and provide valuable feedback to the TAs. The results are available in TAonline when the student applies for a TA position. Graduate Advisors and others who have a need to know can gain access to the evaluations through the Student Affairs Officer for the student's Graduate Program. Accomplished TAs are more likely to be recognized and nominated for awards when evaluations are distributed to persons responsible for oversight of teaching and to the students' advisors.

Appendix I: Life Science Graduate Programs in CNAS

BCMB – Biochemistry & Molecular Biology

BPHY -- Biophysics

CMDB – Cell, Molecular & Developmental Biology

EEOB – Evolution, Ecology & Organismal Biology

ENTM—Entomology

ENTX – Environmental Toxicology

GGB – Genetics, Genomics & Bioinformatics

MCBL -- Microbiology

NRSC -- Neuroscience

PLBL – Plant Biology

PLPA – Plant Pathology

Appendix II: Information needed for a Life Sciences TA application at <http://TAonline.ucr.edu>

CRITICAL: If a student has applied for a TAship previously they **MUST** log on every quarter to confirm the accuracy of their request and/or update their application materials. **Students who fail to confirm or update their information and submit by the deadline will not appear in the TAonline database, and hence cannot be selected by Instructors or considered for a TAship by TAAC.**

Note: If a student has applied for a TAship using the TAonline system, their previously entered information and TAships will be automatically entered into their TAonline application.

Students: please collect the following information to complete your online application:

- (1) The UCR graduate and/or undergraduate classes that you have taken that qualify you to be a TA in a life science class [you will need to know your grades]. You will be able to select UCR classes from a pull-down menu.
- (2) The graduate and/or undergraduate classes from other universities that qualify you to be a TA for a specific class [you will need to know your grades]. You will have to type these in.
- (3) If you have a strong mathematical or physical science background, and would like to be considered for a CHEM, PHYS or MATH TAship, please include these classes too.
- (4) Previous TA experiences. TAships provided from Fall 2008 forward will be downloaded into your application automatically. Previous TA experiences from other institutions or at UCR before Fall 2008 will need to be entered manually.
- (5) TADP status
- (6) Speak or TAST exam status
- (7) Reasons for the TAship request (meeting graduate program requirements, financial reasons, promoting career goals). Have a conversation with your Major Professor.
- (8) Number of quarters a TA is needed
- (9) Quarters you cannot teach due to internships, field work, etc.
- (10) Special requests or considerations for the TA Allocation Committee.
- (11) Would you be interested in a 25% TAship if the opportunity is available?
- (12) Look at the list of classes offered and the qualifications for each of the classes. This is located at TAonline (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>).
- (13) Prioritize the courses for which you would like to be a TA and the courses for which you are qualified to be a TA and enter them in the TA Requests section. TAAC is not always able to give a student their preference for a TAship due to the number of requests and criteria used in the TA appointment process.
- (14) If you have spoken to an instructor and know that you will be requested as a TA for a specific class, please indicate this in the appropriate place in your application.

Appendix III: Instructions for Instructors and Academic Coordinators

Adding/Editing Description of Duties forms:

TA Online (<http://taonline.ucr.edu>) is the source of record for Teaching Assistant (TA) Appointment Letters and supplemental Description of Duties Forms for College of Natural and Agricultural Sciences (CNAS).

- Instructors will receive an e-mail from the system (including a hyperlink) notifying them that <http://taonline.ucr.edu> is available to edit or add Description of Duties form(s)
- Description of Duties forms from prior quarters are pre-loaded into the system so most courses will have forms already available and only minor edits should be needed
- The Descriptions of Duties forms will automatically be sent with TA appointment Letters approximately 30 days before the quarter begins to assist faculty in complying with the UAW notification requirements
- Instructors will be notified when the letters and forms are sent to the TAs. Should subsequent changes be needed, instructors may make the edits in the system and then contact Kathy Redd (kathy.redd@ucr.edu) who will re-send the new Description of Duties to the TAs.

Procedures:

- Log in to <http://taonline.ucr.edu>.
- Choose “Instructor” from your welcome menu
- You will see a list of the courses for which you are assigned as an Instructor in the system. If a course is missing from your list or a course appears for which you are not the Instructor, please notify Kathy Redd (kathy.redd@ucr.edu) as soon as possible and she will correct the system.
- Use the Edit button to view or edit Description of Duties from the last time the course was offered. Once you are finished, click “Save” and then “Back” to return to the course list.
- If no Description of Duties has ever been entered for a course, the course list will show “+New Description of Duties” in place of the Edit button. When you click this link, a fillable form will appear where you may indicate the duties for the course. When you are finished, click “Save” and “Back” to return to the course list.
- When you are finished with all of your courses, you may Exit the system.

Note: Instructors should review or enter a form for each course; even if the form is not reviewed, the existing Description of Duties form will be sent to the TA(s).

Special Circumstances:

Courses with Co-Instructors – Only one description of duties form may exist for a single course section. All Instructors for each section have the ability to edit the forms; *edits will overwrite previous entries when the form is saved*. You must coordinate entries with your co-instructor and agree on who will edit the form or parts therein.

Appendix IV: Data Reports

In order to help TAAC members do their jobs in an efficient fashion, and to produce the best and most equitable assignment of TAships, various data reports will be made available to TAAC. Some of these can be generated directly from TA Online while others require pulling data from other sources. TAAC Representatives may use these reports as needed to prioritize students for TAships.

Reports available in TA Online for TAAC Member Use

All reports can be exported to Excel but may require manual curation to correct for anomalies. Please consult with the Staff Administrator if you have any questions.

Applications Query

Provides information about TA Applicants for a specific term. Has selection options for numerous data elements and the ability to select search criteria to return applicants in certain categories. Does not include assignment information.

Application Summary Report

Provides summary information about TA applications. Allows criteria selection that limits results by Academic Year, Quarter, Date Range, Graduate Program, Department, Application Status, and Course Request Department. Generates application information for individual students that can be filtered and sorted.

Appointment Report

Provides information about TA appointments by Program and Subject Area. Allows criteria selection that limits results by Academic Year, Quarter, Program, and Subject Area. Generates appointment information for individual students that can be filtered and sorted.

Assignment Report

Provides information about TA appointments by Major Professor -- single, multiple or all Professors can be selected. Can also include students assigned to UNAS classes or students Without Assignment. Has criteria selection that limits results by Academic Year, Quarter, Major Professor, and Applicant Type (Date Approved- means Appointed, With Assignment, Without Assignment). Generates assignment information for individual students that can be filtered and sorted.

List of Applications in Need Re-Submittal State

Generates a list of students who previously applied for TA positions but have not submitted an application for a new term. Allows selection by term. Applicant names are click-able to get to student application.

Query Tool

Robust Query Tool that allows a variety of Criteria and Output Field selections by Student Application and TA Assignment.

TAship Percentage Query

Provides information about appointed TAs organized by individual sections of courses. Allows criteria selection that limits results by Quarter, Subject Area, Course, Student Last Name, Student ID Number, and Percentage. Results can be filtered and sorted.

TA Signed Appointment Letter Upload Reminder Report

Provides information about dates that Appointment Letters and Reminders to upload signed letters are sent to students. Allows criteria selection that limits results by Academic Year, Quarter, Student Last Name, Student First Name, Student ID Number, and Subject Area. Results can be filtered and sorted.

List of Students who received more than 2 Upload Reminders

Provides information on appointees who received more than two reminders to upload signed letters. Allows criteria selection that limits results by Academic Year, Quarter, Student Last Name, Student First Name, Student ID Number, and Program. Results can be filtered and sorted.

Examples of the non automated reports include:

Data on student TAships

e.g., the number of times that a student has TA'd over the course of their career at UCR

Data on the ratio of TAships to the number of students mentored as a Major Professor

e.g., the total number of TAships awarded to a faculty member divided by the number of students they mentor as a Major Professor

The Staff Administrator will make these reports available to the TAAC Representatives on an annual basis in Spring quarter upon request. These reports will also be available to Chairs and Program Directors who may wish to use them during the process of assigning a student to a PI's lab. The Chair may request the Department analyst to combine this information with GSR support from the PI's grants in order to assess the ability of the PI to support the student without over reliance on TAships.