

# First-year MFA Teaching Assistants in Studio Art

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## ***Description***

Teaching Assistantships are 2-semester appointments for (usually first-year) MFA students. This funding opportunity from the graduate School began in Fall, 2006 for stand-alone programs (those without PhD). It was originally designed to give classroom experience to students who may be eligible for full course responsibility Teaching Fellowships (TF) later in their MFA program. The program has expanded to encompass assignments that have a broader definition of support to undergraduate teaching. The program benefits the student financially with partial tuition remission and stipend. The student is responsible for 10-15\* hours per week, supervised by one particular faculty or staff member, ideally assisting a single, designated class or area. These hours are somewhat flexible, in that some weeks might have tasks that require more hours and some less.

*\*Some students on other merit assistantships from the graduate school may also serve as TAs. The number of hours required may be more, depending on the scholarship.*

## ***Procedure for appointments***

Depending on need, TAs will be assigned to a specific faculty or staff member on a semester or yearly basis. The primary role of the TA is to support the undergraduate teaching mission of the studio area. Work performed can include a range of duties from facilities maintenance to direct assistance to a particular class as outlined below. The chair will issue a call for requests from faculty to have a TA appointed to their class or area. In making the request, faculty are encouraged to give an indication of the TA duties that will be performed. Assignments are made by the chair in consultation with the Assistant Chair and/or the Director of Graduate Studies. Decisions are final.

## ***Evaluation***

Feedback is generally given directly between the TA and supervising staff during routine meetings. Supervising staff write end-of-semester evaluations based on performance. Students will also write a self-evaluation and provide feedback on their experience at the end of each semester.

## ***Conflict***

While most TA assignments are smooth and positive experiences, conflicts do occasionally arise. The department understands conflict to be a natural part of living and working with others. To resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise among us, we ask you to observe the following steps:

1. Make a diligent effort to resolve the issue in direct, civil communication with the individual or parties involved. Most of the time, adopting an attitude of seeking clarification and allowing perspectives to be voiced can diffuse problems.
2. Should any issues arise between the TA and supervising faculty/staff that cannot be remedied with direct communication, parties are encouraged to contact the Department chair to discuss the matter before it becomes an insurmountable problem.

## **TA ASSIGNED TO A SPECIFIC CLASS**

### ***Responsibilities for TAs***

1. Weekly meetings with supervising faculty/staff to review week's plan
2. TAs attend the class being taught (for a twice-weekly class – this is 6 hours)
3. Assist in preparations for the class. Duties should be those pertinent to the operation of the class (not routine housekeeping or personal assistance to the faculty member.) Such duties may include:
  - Help plan individual class sessions
  - Gather materials or prepare classroom for demonstrations.

- Monitor classroom for housekeeping issues that should be reported to Department Manager (Lindsay Fulenwider) or Art Lab Manager (Pat Day)
  - Gather/acquire slides or digital images for presentations or lectures
  - Participate in critiques
  - Prepare readings for electronic reserve or Blackboard
  - Assist in maintaining Blackboard site if one is kept for the class
  - Other research related to needs of the class
4. Assist students during the class with technical or artistic advice
  5. May occasionally run the class or a part of it with guidance from faculty member
  6. May cover the class when the faculty member is out of town (not more than a couple of times per semester)
  7. Monitor some outside-of-class activities directly related to assisting undergraduate students or their work, such as kiln firings, monitored lab work, mounting exhibitions, or performance events. These should be arranged in consultation with the faculty.
  8. Assist with logistics of hosting visitors specific to the class.
  9. With guidance from faculty, TAs may assist in grading, but cannot assign grades without faculty oversight.
  10. With supervising faculty approval, some of the required hours may be earned by attending a workshop that has relevance to the teaching mission. For instance, Center for Faculty Excellence workshops or Informational Technology workshops (such as Blackboard)
  11. All TAs will keep track of hours spent and duties performed. This should be reviewed at the weekly meeting with the faculty member and be available for any mid-semester and end-of-semester reviews.
  12. TAs assist with the departmental clean-up during the exam week at the end of each semester.

***Faculty/Staff Responsibilities***

1. Weekly meeting with TA to review work to be done and to review work log. It is important for faculty to be very clear about expectations for the Teaching Assistant.
2. In addition to the direct needs of the class at hand, faculty should provide information and guidance on the profession of teaching. These things might include:
  - Showing how to make slides or digital presentations
  - Show how to prepare other visual aids for a class
  - Discuss class design, objectives and approach
  - Discuss rationale for class projects (technical objectives, aesthetic objectives)
  - Discuss grading strategies and criteria
3. Faculty must respect the need for MFA students to schedule their non-TA time effectively and spend time in their own studio. It is important to notify TAs well in advance of work that will require more than the designated number of hours per week.
4. Supervising faculty must participate in interim (after first 6 weeks) and end-of semester TA meetings with other TAs and Department Chair.
5. Supervising faculty must write an end-of semester performance review that will be submitted to the Chair within 1 week of the end of the semester and which will become a part of the student's permanent file.

## **TA ASSIGNED TO AN AREA:**

### ***Student Responsibilities***

1. Weekly meetings with supervising faculty/staff to review week's plan. It is important to note that TAs working in an area (ie: Art Lab, Digital Lab, Photography, Printmaking...) may have several faculty who have needs. Your appointment however is supervised by ONLY one person. Requests for your labor should be directed to that supervisor.
2. Assist in area needs. Duties should be those pertinent to the operation of the classes taught in that area. (not personal assistance to the faculty member) Such duties may include:
  - Classroom/lab maintenance
  - Equipment maintenance
  - Supervising after-hours, evening or weekend open lab hours for area students with specific project needs as arranged through your supervising faculty/staff
  - Assisting area faculty with specific projects (as requested through your supervising faculty)
  - May cover area faculty classes when faculty members must be out (not more than a couple of times per semester and these must be coordinated through/with your area supervisor)
3. Professional development opportunities. If time allows, some of your hours may be spent on professional development related to teaching. Make requests for workshops (Center for Faculty Excellence) or other opportunities directly to your supervising faculty/staff.
4. Assistance with end-of semester departmental clean-up during exam week.

### ***Faculty/Staff Responsibilities***

1. Weekly meeting with TA to review work to be done and to review work log. It is important for staff to be very clear about expectations for the Teaching Assistant. And to make sure the level of work requested is sufficient, but does not exceed the student's available work hours
2. In addition to the direct needs of the area at hand, staff should allow for development opportunities relating to teaching if possible. These things might include:
  - Assisting an area faculty member on a specific undergraduate class project that might benefit from additional TA support
  - Allow TA to cover area faculty classes if hours allow
  - Attend Center for Faculty Excellence teaching workshops
3. Supervising staff must respect the need for MFA students to schedule their non-TA time effectively and spend time in their own studio. It is important to notify TAs well in advance of work that will require more than the designated number of hours per week. TA work hours should be distributed evenly over the semester.
4. Supervising faculty must write an end-of semester performance review that will be submitted to the Chair within 1 week of the end of the semester and which will become a part of the student's permanent file.