
ILLINOIS TECH

TEACHING ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

2025-26

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General Information

Welcome and Introduction to the Handbook

Congratulations on being hired as an Illinois Tech Teaching Assistant! Teaching Assistants serve a vital role at Illinois Tech in supporting our faculty and assisting students, both undergraduate and graduate.

We are excited to partner with you to assist in fulfilling our university's Mission:

To provide distinctive and relevant education in an environment of scientific, technological, and professional knowledge creation and innovation.

Teaching Assistants (TAs) benefit the university's colleges and departments in numerous ways and TA roles vary greatly across colleges. In addition to the benefits you provide the university, you will also benefit personally and professionally as a TA by developing your own professional skills while also gaining valuable U.S. work experience.

Please note: The Illinois Tech Teaching Assistant Handbook is intended to serve as a general reference for Illinois Tech's TAs across all colleges and departments (*excluding Kent Law*) and is not intended to serve as a replacement for the Illinois Tech Student Handbook, which is updated annually. The most current Illinois Tech Student Handbook can be found at <https://www.iit.edu/student-affairs/student-handbook>.

Vice Provost Welcome

Teaching and learning are central to the educational mission of Illinois Tech. As a graduate student, you are benefiting from being mentored inside and outside the classroom by faculty who are committed to your education and professional growth. As a teaching assistant, you are participating in our university's central mission by partnering with instructors in serving our students. We are confident that your service as a teaching assistant will be an integral part of your education and professional development at Illinois Tech.

To facilitate your professional development and maximize your effectiveness as part of an instructional team, it is vital that you be knowledgeable about applicable laws and to develop best practices in pedagogy and student support. That is what this course is all about. In addition, you will have the opportunity to reflect on your experiences and receive guidance and mentorship from experienced faculty. As with any course or training experience, what you get out of this course is largely up to you; we trust that you will find this material beneficial and essential to your service as a teaching assistant, and please do not hesitate to reach out with questions and suggestions about this training.

Jeff Wereszczynski, Ph.D.

Vice Provost for Academic Affairs

Campus Map/locations

Illinois Tech has [four campuses](#) in the Chicagoland area. See below for the addresses of all campuses. Please note: Mies (*also formerly and often commonly referred to as Main Campus*) and Conviser Campuses are located in the city of Chicago. Moffett and Rice campuses are in the Chicago suburbs.

Mies Campus (MC)

10 West 35th Street, Chicago, IL 60616

312.567.3000

[Mies Campus Map](#)

[Mies Building Abbreviations](#)

Moffett Campus

Institute for Food Safety and Health

6502 South Archer Road, Bedford Park, IL 60501

708.563.1576

Conviser Law Center (CLC)

Chicago-Kent College of Law and

Stuart School of Business

565 West Adams Street, Chicago, IL 60661

312.906.5000

Daniel F. and Ada L. Rice Campus

201 E. Loop Road, Wheaton, IL 60187

630.682.6000

College/Department Contact Information

Generally, in each department or college there is one primary staff member who serves as the point of contact for all TAs. Some departments or colleges also appoint a Lead or Head TA to serve as a resource for other TAs. It is very important that you identify who that person is for your department and contact them directly with important questions. It's not unusual for supervising faculty to be unaware of requirements and policies regarding TA hiring and employment, which is why it's vital that you identify who in your department or college can assist you.

For the university directory, visit <https://www.iit.edu/directory> to search by department or person. When in doubt, ask your supervising professor for help or contact the person who completed your hiring paperwork in the department (i.e., the person who provided your TA offer letter.) If they can't provide the information to you, reach out to your department chair for assistance. Don't rely solely on contacting them by email if you need answers quickly.

Campus offices

See [here](#) for a one-page document listing Important Offices on Campus relevant to TAs. This is by no means an exhaustive list of policies, and can be amended or updated at any time, but is intended to serve as a quick reference guide for TAs.

Emergency Information

<https://www.iit.edu/emergency>

[Access Campus Emergency Guide here](#)

For campus emergencies, dial 911 or contact the [Office of Public Safety](#). Public Safety's emergency number is 312.808.6363 and their non-emergency number is 312.808.6300.

- If you are experiencing an emergency and are temporarily unable to fulfill your TA duties, please address your immediate medical needs first.
 - Then, contact your departmental point person and your supervising faculty to alert them that you are unable to fulfill your duties such as teaching a lab or recitation.
- If you are experiencing an *ongoing* issue preventing you from fulfilling your duties, please consult your department for guidance.
- If you miss more than two class sessions as a student, work with the Dean of Students to be excused or pursue a leave of absence, if necessary. Email the Dean's office at dos@illinoistech.edu.
 - Please note that this policy applies to *all students* regardless of TA status.
 - Medical information should not be provided to individual faculty regardless of what they may have written on their course syllabi regarding illness and absences.

For more information regarding emergency management and the services provided at Illinois Tech, please contact Katie Norton at knorton1@illinoistech.edu.

Classroom Emergencies

If you experience an emergency in your classroom, call Public Safety at 312.808.6363 or 911. If calling 911, please be prepared to give the name of the building and the address of the building.

Be prepared in advance by reviewing Public Safety's Be Prepared tips [here](#).

Lab Emergencies

If you experience an emergency in your lab, call Public Safety at 312.808.6363 or 911. If calling 911, please be prepared to give the name of the building and the address of the building.

For follow-up inquiries or additional lab training or guidance, please contact the director of environmental health and safety, Cindy Chaffee, cchaffee@iit.edu or 312-567-3084. Also visit <https://www.iit.edu/general-counsel/policies-and-procedures/safety-policy-committee>.

See [Lab Safety](#) below.

Academic Calendar, including Final Exam Calendar

Current and future academic calendars can be found on the Office of the Registrar's website: <https://www.iit.edu/registrar/academic-calendar>. The Final Exam Schedule can also be found on the Registrar's website at that same link.

As you know from being a student, the final exam period can be a very stressful time on campus. It is imperative that you plan ahead for how you will manage your own time during finals **and** remain responsive to your students who are also experiencing stress and anxiety around final exams and projects.

Please note that it is your responsibility to know when the final exams are for each of your TA courses. Each semester the Final Exam Schedule is updated after the add/drop deadline for the semester.

Discussing how you will handle final exams and grading is one of the many conversations you should have with your supervising faculty, and any fellow TAs for your TA course, throughout the semester. Please don't wait on your supervising faculty to approach you – be proactive in asking questions and seeking clarification. It's a skill you'll need professionally long after you're no longer a TA so developing your skills in this area will only help you grow professionally.

Initial Hiring Process

TA employment is processed through the Student Employment Office (SEO) in conjunction with the respective academic units. For the most up-to-date policies related to student employment, please review the Student Employment Handbook: <https://www.iit.edu/student-employment/policies-and-handbooks> and FAQs for students: <https://www.iit.edu/student-employment/students/faqs-students>.

Student Employment Office (SEO)

The SEO is in the Galvin IIT Tower at 10 W. 35th Street, 13th floor, 13F4-3. For a checklist and complete list of documents required to work on campus, please visit <https://www.iit.edu/student-employment/students/forms-and-documents>.

Please note: Students are **NOT** allowed to start working until all required paperwork is submitted and the student and supervisor have been notified. Working without the proper documentation is illegal.

VERY IMPORTANT: You must enroll in, and attend HUM 601, as soon as you are hired as a TA. This is required even if you have not yet submitted your final documents or participated in your SSN appointment. HUM 601 is mandatory training for all university TAs. By not attending, you will miss out on valuable training and education related to being to your job as an Illinois Tech TA.

International TAs Hiring Process

Note: International students should review the steps outlined here as well as those listed above: <https://www.iit.edu/global-services/student-employment/campus-employment>.

- International TAs can begin working once they have submitted the required paperwork *including* applying for and receiving a receipt from the Social Security Administration office. Appointments can sometimes take multiple weeks to schedule so schedule an appointment as soon as you have your offer letter.
 - International TAs **do not** have to wait until the actual social security number (SSN) and card have been issued – just the receipt that you have applied for an SSN and approval from the SEO.
- Once the SSN card has been issued, students must bring their SSN cards to the SEO to update their SSNs in the university system. No exceptions. Otherwise, you will **not** be paid for your work.

Payment

All TAs should be compensated for the duties they perform. At minimum, this includes a monetary stipend and may also include tuition credits as well. Individual departments and colleges determine the amount of compensation for TAs and the hours required, which could range from 3 – 20 hours per week. The maximum number of hours any TA should work is 20 hours per week but the actual number you are being paid to work can be between three and 20 hours *on average*. Your TA offer letter should include this information.

TAs are paid by direct deposit and cannot be paid until all paperwork, including the SSN application receipt (not the actual social security card), has been completed and turned into the SEO. See more here about university payment policies and TA stipends [here](#) and [here](#) (4.2).

University Policies

As a U.S. higher education institution, Illinois Tech must follow many policies and procedures, which means that as TAs you are also responsible for knowing and implementing university policies. For many international TAs, these policies are often brand new and perhaps overwhelming to navigate.

Below we have listed the most important policies relevant to TAs and an overview of each along with the department overseeing that policy and contact information to guide you if you need more information or clarification.

Academic Honesty – Academic Affairs

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism and cheating

<https://www.iit.edu/academic-affairs/academic-honesty-guidelines>

Illinois Tech expects all students to maintain high standards of academic integrity. No student should have an unfair advantage over another through acts of academic dishonesty. As university TAs you are in the unique position of both enforcing academic honesty policies for your TA course and being responsible for upholding academic integrity yourself as a student. You are expected to do this while perhaps not being entirely sure what constitutes academic dishonesty, particularly in the age of generative AI.

Note: There are many types of academic honesty violations including misrepresentation of work submitted as your own, use of unauthorized assistance on tests, acquisition of answer sheets or solutions, deliberate obstruction of others' work or studies, or attempting to submit false or misleading information, along with intentionally assisting others in violating these standards.

At Illinois Tech, Academic Affairs is responsible for facilitating a culture of academic integrity on campus. All university community members are responsible for working toward a culture of academic honesty. This means as TAs, *and students*, you are expected to commit to practices of academic honesty and not committing academic dishonesty yourself. Learn more about the policies [here](#) in the Student Handbook outlining the Code of Academic Honesty all students must follow.

Learn more about the guidelines around academic honesty and different types of academic dishonesty [here](#) under Academic Honesty Process Overview.

Maybe right now you're thinking:

- *Why is academic integrity important?*
- *Why is this my responsibility as a graduate student?*
- *Why is this part of my job as a TA?*
- *Am I paid enough to take on this responsibility?*

Those are all good questions, and the short answer is academic integrity is **important** and by accepting a position as TA, it is your **responsibility** regardless of how much (or little) you are getting paid.

The entire university suffers when academic dishonesty is allowed to run unchecked without consequences. It could mean students graduating who didn't actually learn the content of their courses, or worse, their entire degrees. This can lead to distrust in Illinois Tech's brand or image locally and worldwide.

Maybe it means a student graduates and gets employed based on skills they never cultivated and someone gets hurt as a result of their lack of skills or knowledge. For examples of how this might be possible, think about what is required to be an architect, engineer, doctor, or scientist, just to name a few, although frankly all fields are impacted negatively when academic integrity is missing. In addition, just as importantly, when academic dishonesty becomes the norm rather than the exception, students who don't cheat can become discouraged and refuse to even try or work hard to learn when shortcuts would seem to serve them better and faster than doing the work themselves from the beginning. It creates a lose/lose situation in which everyone is negatively affected.

As a TA, your job is to enforce the instructor's and university's academic honesty policies. This may mean reporting your academic dishonesty suspicions to the professor for each graded assignment, or it could mean raising concerns about what appears to be widespread academic dishonesty violations. The types of academic dishonesty can vary according to the course and subject area. Sometimes, the solution might be as simple as the professor setting a clearer policy moving forward and informing students of the consequences of violating the policy on both a course and university level. Other times, it might require utilizing a plagiarism checker or AI detector or going further to require in-class or proctored tests or even verbal tests to verify students' knowledge.

The important thing to remember about academic honesty policies is that you are not allowed to violate them yourself **and** are in fact, required to enforce them with the students in your TA course. In the short term, not adhering to academic honesty policies could mean no longer being able to be a TA or being expelled from graduate school. Long term, you, and other students, hurt yourself if you take shortcuts and cheat especially given that you are investing a large amount of money for this degree and the knowledge you're gaining at Illinois Tech.

VERY IMPORTANT: Please note that as a TA you are not to confront students yourself about academic honesty – **that’s the instructor’s job and can not be delegated to a TA**. You can, and should, share your suspicions with your supervising faculty; you can, and should, compile any evidence or proof; you can, and should, enforce the policies set by the professor, but you can not confront students verbally or in writing about academic honesty yourself.

You can share the Academic Dishonesty Reporting form with your supervising faculty, which is available here: https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?IllinoisTech&layout_id=2

Concerns about Students – Community Reporting Form – Dean of Students Office

Illinois Tech offers an online form to alert relevant university departments about any concerns community members might have regarding students. If you are concerned about a student in your TA course or even a fellow classmate, you can use the form to alert university officials.

“Concerning behavior” could refer to academic concerns particularly a drastic decline in performance; general wellbeing concerns such as a change in demeanor or hygiene; threatening behavior by the student; or sexual misconduct or harassment, just to name a few examples. To report a complaint or incident or concern, including concerns regarding fellow students, please submit a report at www.iit.edu/incidentreport. Please note that your role in such circumstances is simply to report the behavior or incident; further action will be taken by the appropriate university staff.

Please note that anonymous reporting is allowed; however, if you share your contact information it is more helpful in the long term if the university needs to ask you follow up questions. Unless it is deemed absolutely necessary, your information will not be shared with the person about whom you are submitting the report.

Reporting Acts of Bias

If your concern is due to a perceived act of hate, bias, or discriminatory incident against you or other community members, there is a separate Bias Reporting form you can submit:

https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?IllinoisTech&layout_id=4. Unlike the Community Reporting Form to report concerns regarding students, this form is to report any bias you have experienced, or witnessed, on campus from other students, faculty, staff, or university guests. These complaints are handled directly by the Dean of Students Office.

FERPA – Office of the Registrar

FERPA stands for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, which is a federal law that protects the privacy of student records. Essentially, student data, including your own, must be kept private from everyone except the student and instructor. As a TA, this applies to you as well

since you are required by law to abide by FERPA regulations. To learn more about FERPA, visit <https://www.iit.edu/registrar/students-and-alumni/ferpa>. See also [Student Guide to FERPA](#).

You can not share, intentionally or otherwise, student data with anyone who doesn't have an explicit need to know due to their professional role at the university, and others can not, and must not, share that information about you.

Examples of common FERPA violations include the following, *in no particular order*:

- Passing around a sign-up sheet for class that includes students' names and A#s, or perhaps even more information as well such as email, level (UG or Grad), gender, etc...
- Allowing students to collect their own assignments in which they are able to see other students' grades on the front page
- TAs or faculty talking about student grades publicly where other students can hear the conversation
- Discussing students in your TA course with other students, such as a TA talking with their friend, roommate, significant other about students in his/her TA course
- Displaying class grades publicly or in Canvas by name or A# or any method that isn't a random identifier and can't be traced back to individual students

If your supervising faculty violates FERPA, either knowingly or unknowingly, please remind them of the rules around FERPA. If you are being asked to violate FERPA, again either knowingly or unknowingly, please politely state that violates FERPA, a federal law, and refuse. Doing this won't be easy or particularly comfortable for most people, especially students who are confronting, and correcting, an authority member, but it is necessary. If confronting your supervising faculty or fellow TAs isn't possible in the moment, please contact the Registrar's Office immediately to seek guidance on how to handle the situation. registrar@illinoistech.edu

NOTE: FERPA violations are serious and can negatively impact the university in serious ways. This is one area in which neither policy nor practice are left up to instructor discretion and the policy must be taken seriously and followed. In other words, faculty aren't allowed to determine whether or not they follow the FERPA rules and guidelines. Protecting our students from FERPA violations is a shared responsibility of all faculty, staff, and teaching assistants.

Test your FERPA Knowledge: To take a short 'quiz' to test your FERPA knowledge, visit the university's FERPA survey [here](#). Your results won't be shared with your supervising faculty and are strictly for your knowledge and professional development.

For assistance with next steps after witnessing or perhaps inadvertently violating FERPA yourself, please contact registrar@illinoistech.edu.

Sexual Harassment/Misconduct/Discrimination – Title IX Office

Illinois Tech is committed to creating an environment for all students and employees that is fair, humane, and respectful. Title IX is a federal law simply stating that sex discrimination is prohibited in all university programs and activities, which also includes sexual harassment and sexual violence. Those who make complaints of sex discrimination are protected from retaliation under Title IX as well.

The Office of Title IX Compliance oversees Illinois Tech's response to Title IX sexual harassment within the university. Any member of our university community can submit an incident report regarding instances of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, or sex discrimination. Submit report here: www.iit.edu/incidentreport.

NOTE: TAs are *required* to report incidents of sexual harassment, misconduct, or discrimination due to your role as a Mandatory Reporter, also called Responsible Employee, of the university. Submitting a report online, by email, verbally, or in person are all acceptable methods to submit, but doing so is not optional once you have been made aware of sexual misconduct or harassment on Illinois Tech's campus or committed against an Illinois Tech student.

All students, staff, and faculty are required to complete annual training related to consent, reporting cases of sexual misconduct, available resources, and strategies for bystander intervention.

Important policies regarding dating fellow students while employed as a TA:

- ❖ As graduate TAs you are prohibited from dating undergraduate students. This applies to all staff and faculty at the university.
- ❖ As a TA you are also prohibited from dating fellow graduate students if they are a student in your TA course. If you are dating prior to the TA assignment, please inform your supervising faculty and hiring coordinator to be reassigned to a different course. If they are unsure of how best to proceed they can contact the Title IX coordinator for assistance.
- ❖ For more information, please visit the **Staff and Faculty Relationships with Students** section of the following website: <https://www.iit.edu/title-ix/policies-and-procedures/illinois-tech-policy>. Note that the staff and faculty policy contained there also applies to you as a TA.

Disability Accommodations/Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Center for Disability Resources

<https://www.iit.edu/cdr>

The mission of the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) is to ensure that qualified individuals with disabilities are provided an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from the academic and vocational opportunities available at Illinois Institute of Technology.

This means that you are responsible for educating your students on resources that are available to them on campus, and following any official accommodations you receive from the CDR in relation to individual student needs.

[Reasonable accommodations](#) are adjustments to policy, practice, and programs that "level the playing field" for students with disabilities and provide equal access to Illinois Tech's programs and activities. Some examples of reasonable accommodations include the administration of exams in a distraction-free space, note taking services, sign language interpretation, assistive technology, and coordination of accessible housing needs.

Note: This does not mean that as TAs you give extra help or assistance to students with seen (visible) or unseen (invisible) disabilities beyond the accommodations you are required to provide. Doing so can be perceived as giving some students an unfair advantage and beyond the scope of the reasonable accommodations being provided by the university.

Important to understand: The CDR doesn't diagnose students nor do they pay for testing. Students must complete a lengthy application process with extensive medical documentation in order to receive approval for accommodations. In addition, different students receive different accommodations even if they have similar diagnoses since the effect on the students can differ as can the reasonable accommodations that might be expected for different courses.

It's not unusual for TAs unfamiliar with the ADA or disability accommodations to misunderstand the purpose of disability accommodations or believe as TAs they are to provide the accommodations themselves. Please do not provide additional accommodations or those outside of the accommodations recommended by the CDR.

In order for a student to receive accommodations for any course, including your TA course, each student must do the following:

1. [Register](#) with the CDR, which includes a six-page application
2. Provide supporting, and recent, medical documentation in English or translated and notarized if in another language

- a. Must include history of past accommodations and academic adjustments
 - b. Must include recommendations for accommodations and explanations as to why each accommodation is recommended
- 3. Meet with the CDR to review policies and procedures and reasonable accommodations
- 4. Each semester, the student must submit their course schedule with faculty information in order for CDR Accommodation Letters to be issued to faculty
 - a. Each instructor approves the accommodations as requested or meets with the CDR if the accommodations are not possible for their particular course

See FAQs [here](#) regarding disability accommodations and the ADA. You can also email the CDR at disabilities@illinoistech.edu.

Code of Conduct – Dean of Students Office

<https://www.iit.edu/student-affairs/student-handbook/fine-print/code-conduct>

Did you know that Illinois Tech’s Student Code of Conduct forbids disruption of teaching, research, administration, and/or normal activities in the classroom? In other words, students are not to cause disruption to the classroom environment which may, or may not, include yelling, cursing, causing a disturbance, or any activity or disruption to normal university operations that infringes on the rights and opportunities of the Illinois Tech community?

If you encounter students who are being disruptive, please call Public Safety at 312.808.6363 while making sure that you are not putting yourself in harm’s way. Generally, it is not recommended that you confront anyone who is being disruptive. If you are teaching a class, lab, or recitation, and a student becomes disruptive, dismiss the class and call Public Safety for assistance.

Your safety and that of the other students in the course is always the university’s top priority. After the situation has been diffused, please seek help from the Dean of Students Office, your department, and/or Public Safety for assistance in determining next steps. Depending on the situation, additional training or support might be needed in the classroom or lab. Depending on the severity of the situation and the student’s actions, disciplinary action may be taken. Always report any disruptive situations that occur so you, and the other students, can be supported appropriately.

Retaliation/Whistleblowing – General Counsel’s Office

webmaster.iit.edu/files/general-counsel/policies-and-procedures/procedure_p4_investigations_and_complaints.pdf

Illinois Tech encourages students (and faculty and employees) to report alleged or potential misconduct or wrongdoing to a university official or anonymously on [EthicsPoint](#). Neither Illinois Tech nor any supervisory employee or faculty member of Illinois Tech should take any retaliatory

action against an Illinois Tech faculty member, student, or employee because he or she, acting in good faith, discloses, threatens to disclose or is about to disclose an activity, policy or practice that the employee reasonably believes violates the law or Illinois Tech policy or procedures. In simple language, you should not experience retaliation because you reported a perceived wrongdoing.

Illness/Emergencies – Dean of Students Office

See also [Emergency Information](#) at the beginning of the guide.

Note: If you are seriously ill or experience a medical emergency requiring you to miss two or more days of classes, you must contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@illinoistech.edu. Students in your TA course should also contact the dean's office if they're sick, and should not be sharing their personal medical information with you or their professors under any circumstances.

Ethics – Center for Study of Ethics in the Professions (CSEP)

<https://www.iit.edu/center-ethics> csep@illinoistech.edu

Illinois Tech's CSEP serves as a resource for all university community members with a mission: *To educate students as responsible professionals, to reflect on the wider implications of scientific progress, and to contribute to the shaping of technology in accordance with fundamental human values.*

TA Expectations

As an Illinois Tech TA, you are expected to fulfill your job responsibilities while following the policies and procedures of the university. Below we have listed some general guidelines regarding TA roles and responsibilities, but your department is responsible for providing more department-specific guidance and training as to your specific role.

Roles

TAs at Illinois Tech range from graders who work exclusively assisting faculty “behind the scenes” to those who attend and assist in classes, run recitations, hold office hours, and teach labs independently. Regardless of your specific role, your primary responsibility is to assist your supervising faculty with a specific course or courses. This requires you to be clear on your job responsibilities and requirements which can differ greatly from one TA to the next.

Responsibilities

You have a responsibility to:

- Complete course-related tasks assigned by your supervising faculty
 - This includes but is not limited to assisting with early warning/intervention data collection, assisting students directly within reason and within the assigned hours

per week, directing students to resources to aid in their success at Illinois Tech, and other duties as assigned provided they aren't outside of the scope of work considered appropriate for a TA.

- Keep student information private from other students, friends, or any person not directly affiliated with the course
 - Confidentiality is required by the federal law, FERPA, but also by professional expectations and obligations of confidentiality around student data.
- Promptly grade and provide feedback on items you are grading
 - “Promptly” - typically within one week of submission by student
- Answer e-mails from your students or your supervising faculty promptly
 - “Promptly” - within one (or at most, two) working days
- Monitor student work for ethics violations including – but not limited to – plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty
 - Not commit academic dishonesty violations yourself – no exceptions!

Be sure to discuss these responsibilities with your supervising faculty in order to align on expectations and responsibilities.

TA Rights

As an Illinois Tech TA, you have the right to the following:

- A safe workplace free of harassment
- Clear guidance on your job and responsibilities
- Understanding of how to successfully meet expectations regarding your TA role
- Adequate training to perform your job satisfactorily
- Support from supervising faculty and department
- To be respected as an instructor or assistant
- Fair compensation for your work
- Access to reasonable supplies needed to properly run your course, recitation, or lab *or other duties*

**adapted from Physics' Teaching Assistant Guidelines document*

TA Checklist – Complete After Hiring

review immediately after being hired as a TA

Congratulations! You have just been hired as an Illinois Tech TA and perhaps you are a bit unsure of what the job will entail. Review this [Checklist](#) to determine the questions you need answered

after being hired and before starting work, if at all possible. This is not an exhaustive list but should help you get started.

Please note: The key is to ask questions and communicate with your supervising faculty and your department. Don't wait on your supervising faculty to initiate conversation or set expectations – they also expect you to be proactive!

In addition, do not rely on the department to voluntarily share all the information that you need. They could be busy, dealing with an emergency, or still hiring hundreds of new TAs for the term, among other things. You are responsible for seeking out the information that you need to successfully perform the role. At minimum, be sure to review this [Checklist](#) and get answers to the questions contained here. If you'll be working with other TAs, reach out to them as soon as possible to coordinate your efforts. Working as a TA requires a lot of individual work along with extensive team work with your supervising faculty and fellow TAs – all good professional skills to develop now.

Questions to ask your department

If you answer no or not sure to either of the questions below, contact your Hiring Coordinator immediately:

- Offer letter – does it specify the number of hours you should work *on average* per week?
- [Checklist](#) – do you have answers to the basic questions contained on the form?

Questions to ask your supervising professor

1. What is my role specifically? What do you need me to do?
2. What are your expectations with respect to returning graded materials, response times to inquiries from students or you, holding office hours, the use of AI tools by students and myself, etc.?
3. Are other TAs working on this course?
 - a. If so, how do I contact them?
 - b. How do you prefer we divide up the work?
4. Should I (or a fellow TA) attend each class session?
 - a. Should I (we) only attend before major assignments/exams?
5. Should I have access to the course's Canvas page and if so, can you add me as a TA?
6. How should we communicate?
 - a. What's your preferred contact method?
 - b. How often should we communicate?
 - c. Can we schedule regular meetings throughout the term?
7. When are your Office/student hours for this course?

- a. Should I set my own Office/student hours or do you want to approve them first?
- 8. What are your expectations regarding what TAs can handle alone and when we should contact you?
 - a. Can you provide guidance related to course policies? When should I consult you regarding any deviation from the course policies?
 - i. Examples include whether or not to accept late work, how quickly grading should take place, how much feedback to offer students on their assignments, how to handle suspected cheating or plagiarism, just to name a few
 - b. When academic dishonesty is suspected, how do you want me to alert you?
 - i. Note: It is not the TAs responsibility to confront students with academic dishonesty violations. The university considers that task and responsibility to be solely upon faculty to handle and report.
- 9. What are the relevant dates and deadlines for this course?
- 10. Are there any other expectations or requirements not already mentioned such as attending class sessions, dividing up the class sessions so a TA is always present, holding study sessions throughout the semester or at key times, proctoring exams, providing resources to students, substitute teaching the course in your absence, informing faculty of student trends around failing grades, poor attendance, etc...?

Departmental Information to share with Teaching Assistants

Departmental Checklist

to be completed by each hiring department

Teaching Assistants at Illinois Tech vary greatly from students in their first year of a Ph.D. program to international master's level graduate students who have just arrived in the U.S. for their very first semester at a U.S. university to fifth year co-terminal/accelerated students. Many international TAs at Illinois Tech, who make up the vast majority of TAs, do not have prior work experience in the U.S. or at the very least, they do not tend to have work experience at Illinois Tech or in higher education.

When a new TA is hired, please share the following [Checklist](#) with them:

- **Name** and contact information of supervising faculty
- **Course(s)** for which the student will be a TA
- Contracted number of **hours** per week
 - In some departments, all TAs work 20 hours per week and in others it varies from 3-20 hours per week.
 - Please specify in the offer letter how many hours are expected *on average* per week. Do not assume the TA knows what is standard for your department.

- **Contact** information for the primary **staff** member who is to be contacted with any questions or concerns not directly related to course content
- **Contact** information for the **Lead** or Head TA in the department, *if applicable*
- **Relevant dates** and information related to university-level training
- **Relevant dates** and pertinent information related to departmental-specific training
- **Relevant dates** and/or links or information related to university deadlines of importance to the TAs as students, employees, or teaching assistants. Do not assume the TAs know the important deadlines.
- **Work authorization:** TAs can not begin working until they've completed all necessary paperwork and have been authorized to work by the Student Employment Office (SEO).
 - It's not uncommon for faculty to misunderstand federal guidelines around employment and assign work to TAs before they're authorized to begin. This puts the TA in danger of being terminated as a TA at Illinois Tech or worse, encountering consequences in the future regarding their immigration status.

TAs, be sure you know the answers to all questions contained on [this checklist](#). If not, go back to your hiring department and ask until you are clear on the answers.

Departmental – Supervising Faculty Checklist

to be completed by all faculty working with TAs

In addition to the information listed above in the Departmental Checklist, supervising faculty should meet with all TAs at the start of each semester to ensure they are fully aware of the information listed here:

- Course syllabus and course policies
- Your preferred contact method
- Office/student hours for the course for both you as the Instructor of Record and your TAs themselves
- The TAs specific roles and jobs for which they are being paid as a TA *for your course*
 - *Please note that TA roles are typically course-specific and not generally assisting faculty with all tasks required of them at the university.*
- Your expectations regarding what they can handle alone as TAs and when they should contact you
- Guidance related to course policies-- examples include whether or not to accept late work, how quickly grading should take place, how much feedback to offer students on their assignments, how to handle suspected cheating or plagiarism, just to name a few
 - Of note: When academic dishonesty is suspected, it is not the TAs responsibility to confront students with academic dishonesty violations. The university considers that task and responsibility to be solely upon faculty to handle and report.

- Relevant dates and deadlines for your course
- Access to course materials and systems such as Canvas and lab supplies and equipment
- Any other expectations or requirements such as attending class sessions, dividing up the class sessions so a TA is always present, holding study sessions throughout the semester or at key times, proctoring exams, providing resources to students, substitute teaching the course in your absence, informing faculty of student trends around failing grades, poor attendance, etc...

Mentoring and Evaluating TAs

Teaching Assistants perform a vital role at Illinois Tech assisting both faculty and students in delivering and learning course content and meeting our educational objectives as an institution.

It is highly recommended that TAs and supervising faculty meet multiple times throughout the semester, particularly around high-stakes exams and assessments such as mid-terms and final exams. TAs often need ongoing mentoring and support to satisfactorily meet the demands of their positions, especially if they new to being your TA or new international TAs.

Many international TAs gain their first work experience in the U.S. while working as TAs at Illinois Tech. For domestic TAs with prior work experience, many are new to working in higher education. Regardless of prior work experience, TAs desire and need to receive feedback on their job performance. As such, each supervising faculty member should be evaluating their TAs work and fulfillment of TA responsibilities not only to determine if they should be hired again in the future but also to provide guidance and professional development as they move toward the global workforce.

If your department offers guidance around TA Evaluation, please follow their lead, but if none is offered, please take the necessary steps individually to mentor, guide, and evaluate your TAs. They are not just providing a vital service for the university – this is their opportunity to develop their professional and transferable skills for the workforce and perhaps academia in the future.

Information regarding Illinois Tech's undergraduate student population

Illinois Tech is unique in that more than one-third of our undergraduate students are considered first-generation college students, which means they are the first in their families to attend college or university. It also means that many undergraduate students may not be as familiar

with the on-campus support services available to them as their peers who come from families where many people have successfully graduated from college already.

These students, alongside international students, may need additional support or encouragement to seek out on-campus services. The services are “free,” or already paid, based on student fees, so not utilizing them is a waste of money.

All Illinois Tech faculty and staff want to see our students succeed. As a TA, your role gives you the opportunity to support student success due to how closely you work with students whether it’s in a course, lab, recitation, study group, or office hours.

For more information on our current student population, please visit [here](#).

Advice from Illinois Tech Undergraduate Students to TAs

Undergraduate students can offer valuable insight into the TA role at Illinois Tech. Illinois Tech undergraduate students themselves have offered the following advice on working with Illinois Tech’s undergrad students. Please note that whether or not you work with undergraduate or graduate students all of the same advice applies.

To do:

- ✓ **Introduce** yourself to the students early in the semester. Ideally, your supervising faculty should introduce all TAs to the class.
 - Do this in person in class or if necessary, digitally through Canvas or email.
- ✓ **Create** a welcoming environment particularly in labs, studios, or recitations.
 - Be approachable.
 - Be kind.
 - Show empathy.
- ✓ **Offer** chances to interact with the students in your TA course.
 - Join class sessions.
 - Offer study or review sessions.
 - Hold consistent office hours and make sure the students are aware of them.
 - Engage through Canvas: discussion boards, uploading videos and resources, providing solutions to sample problems, outlining FAQs.
 - These actions are particularly important before large assessments or projects are due and especially before mid-term or final exams.
- ✓ **Be open** to questions without making the undergrad students feel stupid for asking.
- ✓ **Give** good explanations to student questions, particularly from undergrads who often don’t have a background in the subject.
- ✓ **Grade** consistently for the course with the other TAs and the professor.

- Be transparent about grading standards.
- ✓ **Be understanding** about the workload of undergrad students. Your class isn't their only course but course expectations still remain.
- ✓ **Know** the course policies and procedures.
 - Remember: The syllabus is a resource for you as well. Reference it often.
- ✓ **Communicate** more with the professor regarding what is and is not working in the course.
 - Advocate for the undergrad students.
 - As a student yourself with more recent experience with learning the course content, you may be able to provide valuable insight into the areas in which the undergrad students are struggling.
- ✓ **Understand** the higher-level content for the course in which you are a TA or learn it.
 - Undergrads have expressed concerns about TAs not having more than basic knowledge of their course's content.
 - If you aren't qualified to TA for the course, speak to your supervising faculty about the content, attend class sessions, and study the material yourself.
 - In other words, stay ahead of the undergrads regarding what you know of the subject matter.

Note for TAs working with graduate courses: Many Illinois Tech TAs assist with graduate-level classes and not undergraduate courses, but generally the same advice applies as in working with undergraduate classes. However, you may find that as a graduate-level (non-PhD) student, you could be assisting as a TA in classes in which you have friends, roommates, or even family members enrolled, which can put you into a unique and uncomfortable situation. In this case, you may have additional challenges to navigate which are discussed more in depth in the TA Challenges section below. Remember that FERPA applies in all situations if there isn't an educational "need to know" regardless of your personal relationship with the students in your course. Fellow students rarely, if ever, have an educational or professional "need to know" information about fellow students.

Common TA challenges

As a TA, you may find yourself having to navigate challenging situations with students and/or faculty in unexpected ways. While this guide is not intended to be fully comprehensive of all situations you might encounter, we hope you will gain insight into how to best move forward when navigating challenging aspects as a TA. See [Case Studies](#) below for more information on how to navigate common TA challenges.

Resources – On-campus

Illinois Tech offers many resources to assist you as both a student and a TA providing a resource for other students. The most relevant offices for TAs are listed below. Other on-campus resources can be found [here](#).

ARC – Academic Resource Center

The Academic Resource Center offers free peer tutoring, exam reviews, workshops, and computing and printing services for Illinois Tech students. Currently, the ARC offers limited graduate tutoring but does offer undergraduate tutoring so it is a good resource for your UG students who might be struggling in your TA course. arc@illinoistech.edu
<https://www.iit.edu/arc/about>

Canvas – Learning Management System

<https://www.iit.edu/cli/canvas>

Canvas is the university Learning Management System utilized by Illinois Tech. Most of your grading and interaction with students online should happen through Canvas unless your supervising faculty utilizes a different system. The Center for Learning Innovation (CLI) offers workshops on Canvas to assist you with course grading and course development in order to fulfill your TA responsibilities. You can view resources online [here](#) and/or contact them through the OTS ticketing system at supportdesk@illinoistech.edu.

Click [here](#) to learn more about adding a TA to a course in Canvas so you can assist your professor with this task if needed.

Career Services

<https://www.iit.edu/career-services>

Illinois Tech's Career Services office provides comprehensive career services and resources for Illinois Tech undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni including events throughout the year both in person and virtually. Please note Career Services is not a job placement service but will assist you so you are as prepared as possible throughout your job search.

Center for Study of Ethics in the Professions (CSEP)

<https://www.iit.edu/center-ethics>

CSEP educates students as responsible professionals, reflects on the wider implications of scientific progress, and contributes to the shaping of technology in accordance with fundamental human values.

Communications Lab

Illinois Tech’s Communications Lab offers free 50-minute in-person and virtual tutoring sessions with a range of differently specialized tutors. They can assist with writing assignments, lab reports, midterm papers, presentations, slide decks, creative essays, personal statements, and more in order to help you become a more effective and confident communicator. Whether you are having trouble drafting a thesis statement, deciphering an assignment rubric, structuring an argument, or simply proofreading, the Communications Lab will work with you at any stage of your project. In-person meetings and walk-in visits will take place on the upper level of the Galvin Library, around the corner from OTS. Make appointments [here](#).

ELS – English Language Services

<https://www.iit.edu/els>

English Language Services (“ELS”) works with Illinois Tech’s multilingual undergraduate and graduate students, focusing exclusively on the relevant academic communications skills needed for success in the U.S. classroom and working world. Throughout the academic year, ELS offers a range of services to the international student community including courses, workshops, consultations, and conversation groups. Contact ELS at els@illinoistech.edu.

Galvin Library

<https://library.iit.edu/>

Galvin Library offers many resources for students and TAs beyond a quiet place to study. For TAs specifically, the TA Library Guide is updated annually with resources benefiting TAs regardless of your specific role at Illinois Tech: [TA library guide](#).

[Subject-specialist librarians](#), aka professional researchers, are available free of charge to assist you and your students with getting started conducting research, identifying strong sources, and evaluating citations generated by generative AI, just to name a few.

OGS – Office of Global Services

<https://www.iit.edu/global-services>

The Office of Global Services provides assistance to international students, faculty, and scholars at Illinois Tech on matters pertaining to immigration status, personal, and cultural adjustment. The Office also assists Illinois Tech students who are interested in studying abroad. Throughout the year, the Office of Global Services coordinates various educational, social, and cultural programs open to all Illinois Tech students, faculty, and staff. Global@illinoistech.edu

Ombudsperson

The Ombudsperson seeks to facilitate the resolution of disputes between students, faculty, and staff at all levels within Illinois Tech's Mies Campus. In essence, the Ombudsperson is a mediator, who acts with neutrality and impartiality in an effort to achieve mutually agreed upon outcomes. The Ombudsperson is committed to seeking a fair resolution of disputes, but the Ombudsperson does not have the power to impose a resolution. The university ombudsperson cannot provide legal advice; conduct formal investigations; or change rules, policies, and procedures. The Ombudsperson can be reached via email at universityombudsperson@illinoistech.edu.

Advice from fellow Illinois Tech TAs

Time Management

Overwhelmingly when Illinois Tech TAs are asked their biggest struggles in juggling graduate school while also being TAs, time management is always their number one concern and cause of stress and anxiety. Adding to that the unique challenges of being a TA while simultaneously doing research, searching for internships or jobs, navigating cross-cultural challenges, completing course work, and juggling many other demands personally and professionally, and it can quickly become overwhelming for TAs (*and faculty*).

Time Management Tips

- ✓ Develop a working time management system and stick to it.
 - What worked for you in your undergraduate program or prior to becoming a TA may not work now having to manage your own courseload, research, projects, and your TA responsibilities. The sooner you develop a system, the better.
 - Schedule time to grade and complete your TA work.
 - You will find that some times are more conducive to effective grading than others.
 - If you wait until you have free time, you will never have enough time.
- ✓ Working as a TA is a job and requires approaching it as such. Jobs require dedication and discipline. Being a TA is not the same as receiving a scholarship and requires commitment and responsibility.
 - If you are unsure of what is involved, reach out to your department coordinator and supervising faculty.
- ✓ Take time at the beginning of the semester to map out all important deadlines: deadlines for your research, your courses, your TA course, and important personal dates and events. Then plan backward so you can determine when you need to begin prepping for projects and

exams, when you should begin grading, and when you need to prioritize your TA work vs. your schoolwork and vice versa.

- Your future self will thank your past self for doing the work of planning and organizing your calendar accordingly.

Other Tips from TAs

Though this list is by no means exhaustive, the following advice has been shared by many Illinois Tech TAs over the years and could be helpful to you as well:

- ✓ Learn who in your department can answer questions and use them as a resource – staff, faculty, fellow TAs.
- ✓ Find out your supervising faculty's expectations regarding grading, comments, feedback, providing answers, and ask questions when you do not understand or are unclear.
 - Frequent meetings are highly recommended.
 - Never assume you know the answer based on how things were in your last TA course or in your home country.
- ✓ It is okay to set boundaries with students and faculty.
 - You are not required to be “on call” 24/7 nor should you regularly work beyond your contracted hours per week. This includes faculty.
 - You should not give your personal cell phone number to students nor should you speak about TA matters through social media. After telling the students to contact you through university email, it's perfectly acceptable to ignore inappropriate requests to contact you.
- ✓ Set boundaries early with any friends or roommates who are students in your TA classes. This can often be the hardest situation to navigate as a TA.

Best Practices in working with students

Many Illinois Tech TAs begin the job without having had any teaching or tutoring experience in their past. Perhaps you're a new Ph.D student and being a TA is required as part of your program or perhaps you did really well in a course and the professor asked you to be a TA for the next term or maybe you just thought it sounded like a good way to receive a paycheck and/or a tuition stipend. Regardless of your reason for accepting a TA position or how exactly you became a TA, you have a responsibility to uphold the university's standards around working with students.

Course Syllabus and Course Policies

In U.S. higher education, course syllabi function as contracts outlining the requirements of the course and course policies. Often students may ask questions that are answered easily by referring to the course syllabus. As TAs, your job requires that you follow the course syllabus, and direct students there as well.

When in doubt, first start with the syllabus and then if questions remain, contact the supervising faculty of the course for clarification. Note: As a TA, it is not your job to amend the course syllabus or deviate from course policies. You should always seek permission first before deviating from documented course policies even if you do not agree with the policies set by the professor of the course or if you are being asked by students to disregard the rules.

Some faculty extensively list every class session and the material and content being covered in each session along with course learning outcomes. Other faculty list only their policies and a brief overview of course material and assignments. Regardless of how much information is contained on the syllabus for each course, you are responsible for knowing the information contained there, both your own courses and that of your TA course. Please note that not reading and/or retaining the information contained on a course syllabus is not considered a valid reason for requesting exceptions or submitting late work.

In other words, not reviewing the syllabus does not mean the information contained there isn't relevant to you or that you are excused from not knowing it.

Lab Safety

Illinois Tech recognizes the importance of safety and is committed to providing a safe and healthy campus for all of our students, faculty, staff, visitors and contractors. Safety is an integral part of campus life. Nothing is more important than the safety of our community. Awareness of safety procedures and processes prevents harm and injury to those in our community contributing to the overall success of Illinois Tech. All TAs should participate in Lab Safety Training in Canvas annually. In addition, clarify with your faculty supervisor whether any additional training is necessary for the labs that you will be working in.

For questions regarding proper lab procedures or safety training, please contact Cindy Chaffee, director of Environmental Health and Safety cchaffee@illinoistech.edu (312) 567-3984.
<https://www.iit.edu/ehs>

Professional Development and Transferable Skills

After graduate school, many TAs seek careers outside of academia, but the skills gained while working as a TA are transferable to all other fields in which you might find yourself working after you leave Illinois Tech. Consider your teaching assistantship as professional development and relevant work experience beneficial to your future career, including gaining skills not limited to working on teams, supervising others, working independently, meeting deadlines, working under pressure, and remaining flexible, just to name a few. In addition, you will leave graduate school having navigated tough situations, worked independently and in teams, worked under extreme time deadlines and pressures, and much more. All of these skills are useful to a future employer and as an entrepreneur, and all can be utilized as experience in a job interview or when pursuing additional higher education.

For international TAs or domestic TAs who began graduate school without extensive work experience, being a TA can jumpstart your career giving you vital work experience for both your CV/resume and for job interviews. When you're completing your TA work, don't lose sight of how valuable the work you are doing is both to our university and your future career!

Case Studies

Please review the 'real-campus' Case Studies listed below as examples of some of the challenges you may experience in your TA role and suggestions of best practices for resolving the issue. Please note that not all situations have an easily resolvable solution and some might not have any solutions at all.

You are expected to seek support from your supervising faculty and the relevant departments on campus as needed. The university [Ombudsperson](#) is also a valuable resource in navigating conflicts between students, faculty, and staff.

Case Study #1

Jiu is TA for a graduate Computer Science course and her roommate Li is enrolled in the course. Jiu tries to never talk about the course outside of class or office hours and certainly never at their apartment.

However, Li constantly asks Jiu questions when they're at their apartment about the next assignment, how Jiu is grading the course, why Li has lost points, and even who is failing in the course. Jiu reiterates her ethical requirements around the course and explains that due to FERPA and confidentiality requirements, she can't share anything with Li. Li continues to pressure Jiu sometimes multiple times a day.

Jiu is so frustrated by the situation that she tries to never be home at the same time as Li, even going so far as to stay overnight at a friend's house or even the library.

How should Jiu handle the situation with her roommate, and student, Li?

This is a challenging situation and one that TAs for a graduate course could find themselves navigating. It's not unusual for TAs to find themselves with acquaintances, friends, or even roommates in their TA courses. Regardless of the relationship between students and TAs, the same rules apply.

- FERPA laws apply regardless of relationship between the person asking and the person with the information. Jiu can't share any information with Li about any other students in the class.
- Academic integrity and the university's Code of Conduct prevent Jiu from sharing any information about current or future assignments or tests with Li as that would give her an unfair advantage and wouldn't be fair to other students.

Proposed Solution:

Since the situation has progressed to the point of Jiu avoiding going home and now being bullied by her roommate, she should involve others at the university to help her navigate this situation. The Dean of Students Office might be able to work with her department, in this case Computer Science, to move her from her current course to another one. In addition, the university might pursue sanctions against the student and require her to go through a Judicial Board process for more formal consequences. The bottom line is that there are options that don't involve Jiu having to tolerate Li's behavior. University resources and staff and faculty are available to assist.

Case Study #2

Sam is an Architecture TA for a large undergraduate course. One day the professor asks Sam to attend a class session to assist with an in-class activity. Just when class is about to dismiss, the professor tells the students to grab their most recent projects from the table on the front. Sam looks over and notices that all of the projects have grades clearly written on the front page allowing all students to see their classmates' grades. Sam knows this is a FERPA violation, but isn't sure what to do in the moment while standing at the front of the classroom.

How should Sam handle the situation in the moment with only a few minutes left of class?

Unfortunately, this is a very common situation that TAs often find themselves in. In large classes it can be difficult to individually hand back class papers, projects, and assignments especially with limited time between classes.

- Sam is correct that this is a FERPA violation, which means it's also a violation of federal law.
- Violating FERPA can have serious repercussions for the university.

- It is a violation of students' privacy to share information about their results. Regardless of whether or not they scored well or poorly on the tests is their private business and no one else's.

Proposed Solution:

In the moment, it can be difficult to speak up especially speaking up in order correct one's supervisor. However, in this case, it's necessary and required. Sam can quickly tell the professor that they can't return the projects with grades visible on the top and offer up alternative solutions. Other solutions could be moving into the hallway and asking students to show their student IDs to collect their assignments while Sam distributes them one by one. For anyone needing to rush off to a different class, Sam could collect the projects and tell the students they can meet with him during Office/Class Hours to collect them or even set up an appointment in order to pick them up.

After offering a solution that works for the students, it's important that Sam speak to the professor about how to prevent this situation in the future. Often FERPA violations result from faculty not realizing that the rules (laws) have changed and university and classroom practices, such as returning projects, must adapt as well. To be clear, it's never easy to speak up, and confronting one's boss and supervising faculty is even harder but it's a necessary part of the job when TAs observe violations taking place.

Case Study #3

Lee is a master's level ECE student in his second year of his graduate studies. He did really well in his TA course his first semester and is excited to be a TA this term. His supervising faculty provides rubrics for all assignments and meets with Lee weekly to ensure he knows how she wants him to grade the student's work in the course. After the first assignment, Lee releases all of the grades on Canvas simultaneously after carefully following the instructor's rubric. The next day at his Office Hours, a group of students show up together and begin arguing loudly about their grades and asking for additional points. Lee knows that according to FERPA he can't discuss their grades with them as a group, but all of the students verbally waive their FERPA rights and begin demanding more points.

How should Lee handle this situation in his Office Hours?

It's not unusual for TAs and faculty to experience pushback from students regarding grades. However, there are many issues here that prevent Lee from speaking with the students at this moment.

- Discussing grades with multiple students is a FERPA violation, and FERPA rights can't be waived verbally, only in writing.

- Demanding grade changes and yelling, or arguing loudly, is a violation of the university's Code of Conduct.

Proposed Solution:

Lee should first remind the students that FERPA laws prevent him from speaking with them as a Group, and FERPA rights can only be waived in writing with the Registrar's Office. Then, he can suggest that they make individual appointments to meet with him so he can go over their assignments and the rubric to explain how the grade was awarded. He can also explain that any future conversations will be regarding their assignments and how the students earned their grades and not a grade negotiation as that is not the process nor is it appropriate to expect a grading negotiation.

Lee should also explain to the students that he will inform the professor of their concerns so that she is aware, and knows that they visited the office demanding a grade change. He should also add that they are always welcome to contact the professor directly with any grading concerns they might have since she created the rubric and told Lee how to grade according to it.

After the students leave, Lee should document the experience and inform the professor so he's protected in case the students complain and so he has a record of what has taken place in case it happens repeatedly or escalates given how loud the students were being.

Case Study #4

Asha is a first-year Ph.D student juggling her Biology research alongside her coursework and teaching obligations. She often struggles to get started each day feeling overwhelmed by all the tasks she needs to accomplish. Despite feeling as if she can't possibly find time to get it all done on a daily basis, she doesn't want to ask for help because she's heard doing so can affect her chances of getting a good recommendation from her advisor. She begins to prioritize her own coursework and research over that of her students and the lab she's teaching. She even begins coming to the lab unprepared to run the session and is visibly flustered. Students are starting to complain to the professor that she's taking too long to return their lab reports and in doing so they aren't getting a chance to learn from their mistakes and improve before the next assignment.

What can Asha do to reset her semester and complete all of her priority tasks?

At some point or another, most, if not all, graduate students attempting to juggle graduate coursework alongside a job or research, or both, struggle to manage it all. It can be done but probably not without help and guidance and a strong system of time management and boundaries.

- Resources exist both on and off campus and Asha does not have to navigate this alone.
- It might take some time but there are solutions, which may not be easy or solved overnight but can help her recover the semester, her professional standing at the university and with her students, and move forward in her program.

Proposed Solution:

First, it sounds like Asha's mental health is starting to suffer from intense overwhelm and stress. As an Illinois Tech student, Asha can seek out free counseling services at the Student Health and Wellness Center (SHWC) on campus with trained counselors who are incredibly experienced in working with stressed out graduate students. They can help Asha in managing the overwhelm and setting realistic goals. In addition, Asha needs a good time management system and one in which she blocks off time for important and urgent tasks each day allowing time for breaks and a mental reset. Instead of planning to work for hours uninterrupted each day, Asha should utilize the Pomodoro technique, which is 25 minutes of work followed by a five-minute break repeated four times with a longer break after the fourth 25-minute period. Research shows that having a scheduled break helps retain focus in short periods more so than attempting to work for hours at a time without taking breaks.

Asha should also seek out the advice of her supervising faculty and fellow Ph.D students in her department. Everyone has felt overwhelmed at some point in their graduate school careers and can share tips relevant to their shared field and professional goals. Perhaps her supervising faculty can even help her in the short-term to complete the highest priority tasks for her lab and help to set up a schedule that will allow her to manage her time more consistently moving forward.

International TA information

Although Illinois Tech does not have a formal International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Program yet that is focused exclusively on the needs of ITAs, we do have resources to support you and will be continuing to build our ITA resources in the future.

For now, we have included some initial resources below. In addition, HUM 601, required of all new TAs at Illinois Tech, incorporates many cultural elements and policies that are often unknown to ITAs particularly those new to the U.S. higher education system.

U.S. higher education system

In the U.S., students typically start formal education around five years old with Kindergarten and continue through 12th grade (~17-18 years old) graduating from high school with a high school diploma. Upon completion of high school, many students choose to study at a college or four-

year university. Depending on the quality of the U.S. high school and exposure to higher education study in their families, many students may enter Illinois Tech for undergraduate programs with vastly different ideas of what university life and classes will require. Illinois Tech enrolls more than one-third first-generation students each year meaning that one-third of our incoming students are the first in their families to pursue higher education beyond high school. As such, they might not be aware of the “culture” of higher education or even the best ways to study and “be a student” in higher education even if high school was easy for them academically.

Many international graduate TAs are surprised to discover that some students may have little experience or background knowledge in their chosen graduate programs leading them to seek more assistance from the TAs than the TA can provide. A frequent TA question is regarding how you can help your students when they need more basic information than is provided in the course. Currently, the [ARC](#) primarily serves undergraduate students but the services will be expanded to include more graduate tutoring as well. In addition, it could be helpful to pull together resources online and add them to your TA course on Canvas so the students can review the information on their own time. It is not your responsibility to reteach course material or the course’s background material in order for them to pass your TA course. Doing so would go beyond the scope of your role as a TA. Please bring those concerns to your supervising faculty so they can assist you in navigating the situation.

Transferable skills

Just as TA work includes transferable skills for working on teams, managing up and down, setting boundaries, meeting deadlines, and so much more, working as an international TA provides valuable U.S. work experience that can be applied to your future career whether that is in academia or industry.

Resources

In addition to the many [resources](#) already mentioned both on campus and [online](#), below we have listed resources that might be of particular interest to international TAs.

Online Resources relevant to your TA work

- Illinois Tech TA Library Guide – [Teaching Assistants and the Library](#)
 - This guide details the various ways teaching assistants can help their faculty and their students use the library.
- TA video links
 - Thriving as a Graduate Teaching Assistant:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLypD7ES3tSh1MtCFWUjz9hrgQM8Z5RqdK>

- Time Management Tips:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtt9sX4WTYY&list=PLSdtOs8aX2M2MM6w6NVUrXD6U74mPiATS>
- Navigating Grade Disputes (1-hr long workshop):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQMOLU_rB50
- Critical Incidents:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iH4BhsklGHA&list=PLkCfyYgU5DFm6nt10U83fhTUcN7cFodBS>

International TA resources

- **SPEAK** – SPEAK is in-person English conversation groups facilitated by English Language Services for 10 weeks each fall and spring semester. Join other students, faculty, and staff to chat in English about fun, low pressure topics while working on your listening, speaking, and cross-cultural skills and making friends from across campus. [English.iit.edu/speak](https://english.iit.edu/speak)
- Online resources – English Language Services faculty have vetted and compiled a list of online resources to assist Illinois Tech students in increasing their English communication and cross-cultural skills <https://www.iit.edu/els/student-resources/online-resources-help-you-practice-english>

Online Resources to Help you Practice English

- **Free e-book:** *Bridges United States Academia for First-Generation and International College Students* <https://temple.manifoldapp.org/projects/bridges>
- The University of Minnesota has created online videos to assist you in independent study while increasing your English skills. <https://ccaps.umn.edu/esl-resources/students>