HANDBOOK FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN COMPUTER SCIENCE
(FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS)

Fall 2019—Spring 2020

Department of Computer Science
226 Atanasoff Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50011-1041 USA
http://www.cs.iastate.edu

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1. Department Contacts for Teaching Assistants

- Nicole Lewis, **Graduate Program Administrator**, 225 Atanasoff Hall, nlewis1@iastate.edu
  *****First point of contact for all questions related to teaching assistantship.*****

- Dr. Pavan Aduri, **Director of Graduate Education**, 112 Atanasoff Hall, pavan@iastate.edu

- Dr. Gianfranco Ciardo, **Chair of the Department**, 226 Atanasoff Hall, ciardo@iastate.edu

- Liese Vanderbroek, 226 Atanasoff Hall, liese@iastate.edu (textbooks and other TA duty supplies)

2. Academic Calendar for Graduate Students

http://www.registrar.iastate.edu/calendar	**Fall 2019**	**Spring 2020**
University Holiday, offices closed		January 1
TA Duties Begin	August 19	January 6
Classes Begin	August 26	January 13
Last day to initiate registration through Access Plus	August 30	January 17
University Holiday, offices closed	September 2	January 20
Last day to submit graduation applications	September 4	January 29
Midterm Grade Reports due at 2:15 PM	October 18	March 7
Spring Break, no classes		March 16-20
Last Day to Drop full semester courses	November 1	March 27
Last Day to Cancel Graduation and to request Final Oral Exam	November 6	March 27
Thanksgiving Break, no classes	November 25-29	
Last Day for Final Oral Examinations	November 25	April 17
University Holiday, offices closed	November 28 & 29	
Last Day to submit signed Graduate Student Approval Form	December 3	April 21
Last day to upload thesis/dissertation	December 5	April 23
Final Exams	December 16-19	May 4-7
Graduate College Commencement	December 20	May 7
University Holiday, offices closed	December 24 & 25	
Final Grades due at 2:15 PM – last day for required TA duties	December 26	May 13
TA Duties End	December 31	May 15

3. Responsibilities as a Teaching Assistant

A teaching assistant (TA) works with one or more instructors (faculty members or student instructors) and assists in instructional activities. The instructor(s) acts as the supervisor of the teaching assistant, and is responsible for supervising and evaluating the work performed by the teaching assistant.

Typical TA-duties include the following…

1. **Grading assignments**—Homework, exams, projects, etc. The supervisor is responsible for providing solution keys and grading guidelines. TAs are expected to be fair and consistent in grading assignments. It is important to complete grading work in a timely fashion as instructed by the supervisor (taking into consideration the TAs own course work and time needed to grade each student-submission). In some of the courses, TAs work together in grading. This may require meeting outside the regular hours---evenings and/or weekends. The supervisor is responsible for finding the appropriate meeting times for this type of group grading.

2. **Holding office hours and answering student-questions**. During TA office hours, students will come with questions regarding lecture topics and assignments. The TAs are expected to be prepared on the course materials. TAs must be in their TA offices during the entire duration of the office hour. In the event, the TA needs to leave his/her office, the supervisor must be informed immediately and replacement must be provided to hold the office hours in the absence of the designated TA. The TAs are also assigned to answer student-queries via email or via online learning systems such as a blackboard and piazza. The supervisor will provide initial instruction regarding how the online learning systems will be used in the course.

3. **Proctoring exams**. The TAs will assist the supervisor in proctoring exams. If the exam time overlaps with the TAs' own class or exam, the TA will be excused. The TAs must inform their supervisor about such overlaps ahead of time.

4. **Holding recitation sessions**. Some of the courses have recitation sessions, where the TAs lecture on specific topics of the course material as decided and prepared by the supervisor. The recitations must not cover any topics that are not covered in the lecture.

5. **Preparing and holding labs**. Some of the courses have designated lab sessions. Typically TAs help students on their lab-assignments during these sessions. The TAs are expected to be prepared with the lab-assignments (e.g., learn about the system setup in the labs).

Almost all courses will include the first three TA duties. The remaining may vary from course to course depending on the course-needs and TAs' expertise level on the course materials. The above list is non-exhaustive. Other duties related to course-instruction can be given to the TAs by the supervisor. The supervisor is responsible for making sure that the duties assigned to a TA can be reasonably performed with the assignment TA appointment hours.

Academic Misconduct—ISU policies on academic misconduct: http://www.dso.iastate.edu/ja/academic.

The TAs are responsible for helping the supervisor to prevent and detect academic misconduct (cheating and plagiarism) and to foster academic integrity.

The supervisor will clearly state what constitutes academic misconduct in the course. Most syllabi have a statement similar to the following:

> Academic misconduct: Academic Misconduct in any form is in violation of ISU *Student Disciplinary Regulations* and will not be tolerated. This includes, but is not limited to: copying or sharing answers on tests or assignments, plagiarism, submitting a lab report for an experiment not performed or using data that is manufactured or collected by another person, entering student response data for another student or having another student enter student response data for you, using an inappropriate calculator during a quiz or exam, and having someone else do your academic work. Depending on the act, a student could receive an F grade on the test/assignment, F grade for the course, and could be suspended or expelled from the University. See the Conduct Code at http://www.dso.iastate.edu/ja/academic for more details and a full explanation of the ISU Academic Misconduct policies.

If a TA discovers or suspects a student of cheating, it must be reported to the instructor immediately! It is NOT the TA's responsibility to determine punishment or to judge a student's actions; however, it IS the TA's responsibility to inform instructor.

Performance—largely depends on how effectively the TA can help the students during he/her office hours and how well the TA can assist the supervisor in instructional activities such as grading. It is expected that any student admitted in the computer science graduate program are knowledgeable about the course materials covered in basic undergraduate courses such as data structures, algorithms, programming languages, etc. However, it is understandable that TAs may need some time review some of these topics before they can help others. It is, therefore, strongly recommended to read (and understand) the class lectures before they are being delivered in course, if possible, attend the class.

4. Employee Information

You will get paid the last day of the month.
- Ex: start date is on August 16, payment period ends on August 31, you will be paid on August 31.

Depending on your TA contract,
- ¼ time—10 hours—$945 per month *before* taxes. ½ tuition covered for PhD students, ¼ tuition covered for MS students.
- ½ time—20 hours—$1,890 per month *before* taxes. Full tuition covered for PhD students, ½ tuition covered for MS students.

Expect to work an <u>average</u> of 10/20 hours a week depending on contract time; however, some weeks may require more work while other weeks require less work. Keep track of hours spent weekly.

If you are not paid, please contact Nicole Lewis (nlewis1@iastat.edu).

5. Renewal of TA Appointment

Decisions concerning continuing TA appointments are made by the Department Chair, in consultation with the DOGE, and with input from faculty. Prerequisites for continuing:

- **Satisfactory Academic Progress:** the DOGE/Program Coordinator certifies it.

- **Satisfactory performance of assigned TA responsibilities:** This is determined based one or more of the following written evaluations from TA supervisors, student evaluation, and/or other appropriate forms of input.

- **English proficiency:** Applicants must achieve **Level 1 or 2 SPEAK-TEACH** test rating Exceptions to this rule are allowed only based on departmental needs.

- **Application for (renewal of) TA appointment:** Application must be completed before the departmental deadline for applications for renewal of TA appointments ultimately based on department needs.

6. Teaching Excellence Award (TEX)

The purpose of the TEX award is to recognize and encourage outstanding achievement by graduate students in teaching. Candidates for this award must satisfy the eligibility requirements specified by the graduate college (http://www.grad-college.iastate.edu/academics/awards/tex/) and must be nominated by his/her faculty supervisor with whom he/she has worked as a teaching assistant. The nominations are reviewed and evaluated by the Computer Science graduate committee. The award includes cash prize from the Computer Science department, letters, certificate of appreciation, and honor cord (to be worn at the time of graduation).

7. Absence Guidelines

When a TA accepts a position, he/she has the obligation to be present during the dates of their assigned course-session (with the exception of university holidays that may fall during the session) until all grades are completed and submitted for the course. If a TA cannot conduct the TA-duties due to emergency (e.g., serious illness), he/she must inform the supervisor and graduate program coordinator/DOGE so that necessary arrangements for replacements can be made.

If a TA needs to leave Ames on a weekday (with the exception of university holidays) for any reason other than a sudden emergency (personal reasons, professional meetings), the TA must check with the graduate program coordinator and supervisor before making any travel arrangements. It is also necessary that the TA files an absence request form and gets approval before leaving Ames in such situations. The absence request form is available at…

https://www.cs.iastate.edu/graduate-student-teaching-assistant-absence-request

8. TA Office Locations

For COMS 113, the TA office hours will be held in Atanasoff B02. The faculty instructor for the course, Dr. Sukul, will organize the TA hours as discussing with the TAs assigned for this course.

For all other undergraduate courses, the TA office hours will be held in Pearson 145. For all graduate courses, the TA office hours will be held in Atanasoff B04. **Please email Nicole Lewis (nlewis1@iastate.edu) your designated TA hours after consultation with instructor.**

Atanasoff B01 is a graduate student lounge and Atanasoff 115 is a study-room for graduate students. **These rooms are not to be used for TA office hours!** These two rooms can be used for grading and preparation. ***No TA duties should be done in your major professor's lab/office space!***

Other rooms are available to reserve for study/group session: any conference room in Atanasoff Hall and any conference room in the basement of Pearson.

9. Printing/Copying

Student Support Group (SSG) will set up a PaperCut account to print materials necessary for TA work. Information will be provided. Location of Printers: Atanasoff B01 and 115.

10. Grievance

If a TA has any concern with his/her TA-assignment involving supervisor, other TAs and students, exceptions to TA contracts, etc., then the TA must contact Nicole Lewis, graduate program administrator. Typically the DOGE (if he/she is not part of the TA-concern) and/or the department chair are informed as well to resolve the concerns.

11. Dos and Don'ts

Check you Iowa State email regularly. Respond to emails regularly. You will receive various TA-related emails from your supervisor and graduate program coordinator, and you must not ignore them.

All email communication regarding TA work must be through your Iowa State email.

Before the first day of your TA assignment:

- Once you are informed about your TA assignment, contact your supervisor to learn about the topics that will be covered in the course. In most cases, the course will have course-pages used in the previous semesters, which will include lecture materials, assignments, etc.
- Find out (from your supervisor) whether there are any TA orientations for the course. The department will hold TA orientation a week before the classes start.
- Setup an appointment with your supervisor to meet in the first week of your assignment to discuss specifics of TA duties, office hours, etc.
- Visit classes.iastate.edu to check the class time.
- Start talking to other TAs from the same course. It is likely you will have someone who has worked as TA for the same course before, and you will be able to learn a lot about the scope of the TA work from your colleagues.

First week of your TA assignment:

- TA assignment starts a week before the classes start. On the first day of the week, you may need to come to the department to attend departmental TA orientation.
- You should meet with your supervisor in the first week of your assignment.

Office hours:

- **Be prepared and punctual**—If you need to leave for a brief moment leave a note at your office desk/door.
- Be polite, patient and respectful.
- Encourage students to attend your office hours.
- Schedule office hours at the bottom half of the hours (e.g., 11:30—12:30) if possible since the classes are typically at every hours. (e.g., 11:00—11:50, 1:10—2:00)
- If you cannot answer a question or if you are not happy with the answer you have for a question during the office hours (there is nothing wrong with not knowing everything), follow up. Ask your fellow TAs, discuss with your supervisor and get back to the student with the question.

Evaluating assignments:

- **Be consistent and fair**. It is often useful to grade the same question in all student submission in one pass to avoid inconsistency. Follow the guidelines provided by your supervisor. Do not hesitate to ask questions about grading. (e.g., note the exceptions to the guidelines)
- **Student grades are confidential** and you must not discuss grades with anyone other than the student and the supervisor.
- **Keep supervisor in the loop** and inform him/her when you start grading and if you are expecting delays. (due to longer than expected grading time per student-submission)
- Discuss with your supervisor how you should look for **academic dishonesty.** (in some course, the supervisor will ask you to use software tools to detect possible plagiarism in programming assignments)

Proctoring exams:

- Be prepared to answer queries regarding exam questions. That would mean you must review the exam questions and discuss with your supervisor about the solutions before the actual exam.
- You must not provide the solutions to the exam questions during the exam. Clarifying what is asked in the question does not amount to presenting the solution.
- Walk around the exam room so that all students get the opportunity to ask you questions if they want to.
- Do not tolerate academic dishonesty and report to your supervisor immediately.

Handling Difficult Situations:

- **Stay calm.**
- Be patient.
- **Listen** to the issues/concerns (regarding grading) and try to address them.
  - Be open to dialogue and discuss a resolution.
  - You must not do any re-grading assignment without prior approval of your supervisor.
  - You must not allow late submission of assignment without prior approval of your supervisor.
  - Use "I" not "You"---"I don't think I received that email" instead of "You never sent it."
- If you feel offended by any student behavior, **report** to your supervisor and graduate program coordinator.