



COLLEGE OF  
**Letters & Science**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Date: April 5, 2019

To: L&S Chairs and Directors  
L&S Department and Program Administrators

From: Shirin Malekpour, L&S Associate Dean for Teaching and Learning Administration

**Re: Setting up Lecturer (SA)s for Success, Some Effective Practices**

Lecturer (Student Assistant)s, also referred to as LSAs, are graduate students who will teach a course in place of faculty or instructional academic staff. This document is intended to provide departments with practices that will help LSAs succeed in their teaching role. HR and related policies for hiring LSAs are outside of the scope of this document but can be found in the L&S Knowledge Base.

Typically, LSAs are expected to

1. Set the course syllabus and class policies,
2. Prepare lecture material and deliver the lectures,
3. Prepare and assign assignments,
4. Prepare and administer exams and final projects,
5. Create rubrics for grading assessments, supervise grading and participate in grading
6. Supervise any Teaching Assistants (TAs) and graders,
7. Hold office hours and respond to students' communications,
8. Troubleshoot special cases,
9. Determine, or, for LSAs whose course has TAs, confirm final grades for the class.

Most LSAs are eager to do an excellent job, and the position may be an important opportunity to gain and sharpen skills of independent teaching on the way to a career in academia. However, we must make sure that LSAs do not delay their own degree progress, due to their eagerness to perform well and sometimes, their inexperience. It is essential that departments set clear expectations and provide comprehensive and organized support and guidance to their LSAs; such guidance helps LSAs stay on track in all their commitments and helps to ensure a quality learning experience for enrolled students.

The following is a list of recommended best practices to achieve these goals.

**Selection of LSA**

- Graduate student should be prepared and have the background to teach a course. In all but the most unusual situations, the student will have completed academic course work that puts them at least at the level of a master's degree.
- Ideally the graduate student has been a Teaching Assistant for the course before.
- LSAs are typically hired for courses numbered below 700 that do not carry the graduate attribute.
- Attention should be paid to ensure that the assignment will not interfere with the LSA's time to degree, and all parties, including the student, the advisor, faculty/staff in leadership roles such as Chairs, Directors of Graduate Study, and course coordinators, should be aware of and on board with the assignment and the amount of work it entails.

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## **Supervision of LSAs**

- A faculty or instructional staff member who has extensive knowledge of the course, the learning goals for its students, and the effort required to teach it should be designated as a supervisor and mentor.
- If needed or available, someone else within the department that serves as an instructional resource may also be part of the supervising team (e.g., faculty/staff who teach extensively in a similar class format, pedagogy experts, those with expertise in classroom technology, etc.).
- Supervisor(s) should meet with LSA before instruction begins to:
  - Establish and reach a shared understanding of workload expectations,
  - Provide course related material (see below) and guidance, and
  - Provide both general and department-specific guidance about the role of a lecturer and the responsibilities of supervising TA(s), if any are assigned to the class (see below).
- Supervisor(s) should meet or check in regularly during the semester to ensure expectations are met and to answer any questions and concerns the LSA may have. They should make themselves available to the LSA in a proactive fashion to offer help and guidance.
- Supervisors should make prior arrangement to observe the LSA's teaching. It is strongly encouraged that the doctoral advisor of the LSA make a classroom observation as well, both to assist in writing letters of recommendation and to provide an additional layer of oversight to the appointment.
- Supervisors should check in at the end of semester with the LSA to ensure grades have been submitted and make arrangements for the resolution of Incomplete grades, if any are assigned.
- Departments should develop and make widely-known any policies regarding the hiring, supervision, and evaluation of LSAs.

## **Course Material and Instructional Guidance**

It is helpful to make access to course materials and instructional guidance as comprehensive, organized, direct and clear as possible. In doing so, the department can guide and support the graduate students, so they spend time and effort efficiently and strategically. Supervisors should provide:

- Examples of course syllabi, schedules of lectures, grading schemes, assignments, previous exams, etc., and guidance on their deployment.
- Assistance with and training in setting up a Learning Management System (LMS) such as Canvas.
- Guidance on responding to student work, be it exams or papers.
- Assistance and guidance with administrative tasks such as
  - Course rosters
  - Room reservations
  - Access to AV equipment
  - Copying handouts
- Guidance on expectations for instructors regarding FERPA, sexual harassment policies, consensual relationship policies, Title IX, etc.

- Guidance on the formal accommodation process, for an accommodation that might be needed by the instructor as well as any that might be brought by students in the class via the McBurney Center.
- Assistance and guidance for interactions with special students, athletes, auditors, or students of special concern.
- Guidance for handling particularly challenging or controversial course content and dealing with disruptive or challenging students.
- Assistance and guidance on creating a positive classroom environment that is welcoming to all students and promotes engagement and active learning.

### **LSAs supervising TAs**

LSAs are, at times, tasked with the supervision of TAs in their classes. This arrangement makes close departmental supervision of the course even more critical, especially if both the LSA and TA/s are new to their roles. Expectations should be clearly communicated to both the LSA and TAs. We strongly recommend the departments to pay attention to the following:

- Assigning only experienced TAs to work with LSAs is encouraged.
- The LSA supervisor should maintain open lines of communication with the LSA and TAs making to give guidance on workload expectations, supervisory structure and course responsibilities.
- Regular weekly course meetings and communications between LSAs and the course TAs are recommended, with discussion focused on housekeeping items such as weekly tasks, arrangement for exams, and effective pedagogy, grading alignment across sections, and course troubleshooting.
- LSAs with supervisory roles should, under normal circumstances, visit course TAs' classrooms to observe classroom dynamics, confirm that expectations are being met, and evaluate TA performance. LSAs should be given guidance on how best to provide feedback to TAs under their supervision, and any department resources on TA evaluation (e.g., rubrics), should be shared with the LSA.

However, it is best if LSAs are not put in supervisory roles.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact L&S Associate Dean for Teaching & Learning, Shirin Malekpour ([shirin.malekpour@wisc.edu](mailto:shirin.malekpour@wisc.edu)).