

# Graduate Assistant Handbook

2008-2009

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# Welcome From the Dean



Dear Graduate Assistants,

I want to congratulate you on being selected as a graduate assistant at New Mexico State University. Your position as a teaching or research assistant will present opportunities for growth and development as well as numerous challenges. Theories of learning and the approach towards teaching have changed tremendously since I began my teaching career. We have learned that students have diverse learning needs that require a range of strategies to engage them in the process of learning and exploration. The approach toward teaching has also changed greatly. Learning can take place in traditional classrooms, labs, and web-based classes and through videotapes, electronic references, the television and service learning. For those of you that will be teaching assistants, the training workshop will help you learn about different ways that you can excite students about learning. The workshop is designed to help you gain new skills regardless of your level of experience.

I realize that many of you will become research assistants this year. Your position will allow you to challenge existing knowledge and engage in the process of creating knowledge. As emerging scholars, use this as an opportunity to develop research and communication skills. Speak to your advisor about presenting research findings at regional, national and international conferences and meetings. Please remember that today's research assistant can become next year's teaching assistant. Try to learn research as well as teaching skills. I strongly suggest that you keep a journal so you can record your experiences including your successes and challenges. I also advise you to work closely with your faculty. Ask for feedback on your performance and ask for advice on ways to deal with problems that emerge. Sharing your experiences and asking for advice will help you develop skills that will help you for the rest of your career.

The Graduate School sponsors workshops throughout the year. The workshops will allow you to meet other students and share your experiences. I look forward to working with you during your stay at New Mexico State University. In just a few years I look forward to watching you walk across the stage and receive your degree and join the ranks of our alumni.

Enjoy your journey with us,

Linda Lacey, Ph.D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

# Part I General Rules and Regulations

## Chapter 1 - Policies and Procedures

All graduate assistants follow general policies and procedures, regardless of their appointment. A Graduate Assistant (which consists of Teaching Assistants, Research Assistants, Laboratory Assistants and Administrative Assistants) is first and foremost a graduate student. Graduate assistants are typically hired in the assistant's major department but can be hired in other departments, offices and programs on campus provided they possess the relevant background.

### A. Types of Graduate Assistants

**Teaching Assistant:** A graduate teaching assistant is a graduate student appointed part-time (.25 or .50 FTE) by the assistant's department. The graduate teaching assistant's primary responsibility is in an instructional capacity. Graduate teaching assistants may lecture, lead discussion groups, serve as an assistant to laboratory classes, tutor students, proctor examinations, grade tests and papers, evaluate textbooks for adoption, and provide general assistance in the instructional process under the direct supervision of a faculty member. Graduate students with relevant prior teaching experience may be allowed to be the primary instructor (See "Formal Classroom Teaching" section of this handbook for additional details). If the teaching assistant's duties include instruction in a teaching laboratory or in an environment with hazardous or infectious materials or with hazardous equipment, the assistant will need to comply with University safety procedures and training requirements.

**Research Assistant:** A graduate research assistant is a student appointed part-time (.25 or .50 FTE) by the assistant's department. The graduate research assistant's primary responsibilities are research related. Graduate research assistants may assist faculty members in research and creative activities, perform administrative or editorial duties directly connected to research and creative activities, develop and evaluate instructional materials and/or curricula, or assume responsibilities for a designated research area under the direct supervision of a faculty member. If the student's task involves research or direct support of research in a laboratory or in an area with hazardous or infectious materials or involves operation of hazardous equipment, the assistant will need to comply with University safety procedures and training requirements.

**Lab Assistant:** A graduate lab assistant is a student appointed part-time (.25 or .50 FTE) by the assistant's department. The graduate lab assistant's primary responsibilities are in support of a faculty member's laboratory. The graduate lab assistant may assist the faculty member in designing the laboratory experiment, preparation and planning, running the experiment, supervise, teach, and grade other students in the lab, comply with University safety procedures and training, run web based searches, and cleanup laboratory at the end of the semester. Research in the lab leads to the graduate assistant's degree in the form of the thesis or dissertation. Lab assistants can work in departmental facilities on and off the main campus.

**Administrative Assistant:** these graduate assistants assist the administrative and support services on campus.

Much of the discussion in this Handbook focuses on teaching research and lab assistants on campus. Duties of administrative assistants vary from unit to unit. Roles and responsibilities are determined by the administrative or service support units.

## **B. Classification of positions and approved duties**

A full-time graduate assistant may be assigned a maximum total workload of 20 hours per week during the academic year. Graduate assistants, fellows, and trainees may accept supplemental employment with approval of the department head and the Dean or Associate Dean of the Graduate School. Such supplemental employment is limited to 10 hours per week. International Students are not allowed to work more than .50 FTE, or 20 hours per week.

### **Guidelines for Assigning Assistantship Duties**

#### ***Teaching***

Conducting recitation/quiz sections of large classes and conducting formal help sessions.

Laboratory teaching assigned in conjunction with the instructor in charge and in compliance with University safety requirements (see chapter 13).

Formal classroom teaching.

- a) Three credit semester hours or equivalent. Such a course will constitute one-half (10 clock hours per week) of the student's required duties. Ordinarily, a student will be assigned formal classroom teaching duties only after passing the doctoral comprehensive examination. Students who have not passed the doctoral comprehensive examination, but have received a master's degree or equivalent (i.e., completed 30 or more graduate credits and passed the qualifying examination) from this institution may teach a course under close supervision of the professor (the professor will be responsible for determining the grades of the students). Also, students who have earned a master's degree from another institution may be eligible to teach a course after one regular semester of graduate work at NMSU. Additionally, students with relevant experience may be eligible for formal classroom teaching. A department head and academic dean for lower-division activity courses, applied music courses, noncredit courses, and 1-hour laboratory courses may make exceptions to these policies.
- b) Teaching six semester credits or equivalent will constitute all 20-clock hours per week of the required duties. Ordinarily, students will be assigned full-time (6 hours) formal classroom teaching duties only after at least one semester. Students with previous relevant experience may be assigned 6 hours of formal classroom teaching with the approval of the academic dean and Graduate School dean.
- c) An experienced member of the teaching faculty will supervise all graduate students assigned formal classroom teaching duties.

Graduate assistants that are new to teaching may contribute to the teaching mission in other ways such as:

- a. Proctoring examinations
- b. Grading papers
- c. Occasional teaching
- d. Other work in support of instruction

Graduate assistants supported by state general funds should not be used as research assistants. They can be used to collect/research materials related to the instructional mission of NMSU. above.

### ***Instructional Lab***

Graduate assistants supported by state general funds can be used as instructional lab assistants.

The professor in charge of the lab generates lab assistant duties. These duties vary from student to student but are generally consistent with responsibilities in running a laboratory. Ethical and NMSU lab safety requirements must be followed in the execution of lab duties (Part IV).

Laboratories can be on- (campus buildings, agriculture sites) or off- campus (such as White Sands, etc.). In either case rules and procedures designated by these sites must also be followed.

As with any graduate assistantship lab assistants with a .50 FTE work 20 hours and those with a .25 FTE work 10 hours per week. Departments must make every effort to stay within these maximums. Questions regarding the maximum hours per week related to FTE should be raised with the Dean or Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

### ***Other Graduate Assistants***

GA's in the support of instructional programs -Graduate assistants may be employed in positions directly supporting instructional programs at NMSU. Graduate assistants in these positions may devote all 20 hours per week to this service.

Administrative GA's – Graduate assistants can also be employed in support of departmental academic and instructional purposes.

### ***Research***

Professor(s) in charge of the research project create duties for research assistants. These duties will vary but are generally consistent with responsibilities related to developing, implementing and analyzing experiments. Research can be qualitative or quantitative in nature.

Students follow the rules for the ethical and safe practice of research. These include but are not limited to University policy and procedures on human subjects, animal care and environmental health and safety (Part III & IV).

As with any graduate assistantship research assistants with a .50 FTE work 20 hours and those with a .25 FTE work 10 hours per week. Departments must make every effort to stay within these maximums. Questions regarding the maximum hours per week related to FTE should be raised with the Dean or Associate Dean of the Graduate School.

## **Chapter 2 – Personal Matters**

You will more than likely have an opportunity to handle a number of personal situations in your assistantship, as you interact with students, faculty, and members of the department.

### **A. Teaching, Research, and Laboratory Assistantships**

Teaching assistants (TA's), Research Assistants (RA's) and Laboratory Assistants (LA's) at NMSU are critically important. Because many students depend on our skills for part of their education, TAs, RA's & LA's should not take their positions lightly. Because the process will be a learning experience for you, you may feel a bit uncomfortable as you begin your assistantship.

You may also encounter personal situations you had not anticipated or may not know how to handle.

***Your image.*** As a TA/RA/LA you are often in the position of being an instructor. You will probably be self-conscious during your first few experiences as a college-level instructor. Much of how you impress students reflects how you feel about yourself as an instructor. The image you portray to students reflects your skills and your knowledge of the subject matter.

***Personal confidence.*** Expressing self-confidence in your teaching, research or lab and knowledge of the subject adds considerably to portraying a strong positive image as a TA/RA/LA. You can enhance confidence building by being aware of the significance of self-confidence to your success. Good approaches to building self-confidence include evaluating your teaching, research, or lab skills, striving for improvement, and being prepared.

***Habits and mannerisms.*** We all have habits and mannerisms--some good, some not so good. Often we express different habits or exaggerate our typical habits when nervous or tense. You should make an effort to be aware of your habits because they may detract from or enhance your effectiveness as a TA/RA/LA.

***Evaluating your effectiveness.*** One of the best ways to assess your effectiveness as a TA/RA/LA is through student and departmental evaluations. Departments almost always provide TAs, RA's and LA's with evaluation forms at the end of the semester. A sample evaluation is provided in the previous chapter. Another useful way to assess yourself is to have a friend or another TA/RA/LA attend your class, lab, or recitation to observe you. Research assistants can request feedback on the research activities being conducted, such as reports, experiment evaluations, etc.

## **B. GA/Student relations**

A major part of working as a graduate assistant is attempting to understand and to get along with students in your classes, research teams and labs. Positive personal interactions between instructors and students are important and can be valuable for both. Below are some difficult TA/RA/LA /student situations you may encounter.

***Discipline problems.*** You are not likely to encounter serious student discipline problems. Learning how to manage minor class disruptions should enhance your confidence as an instructor. If you feel that one student is limiting the opportunities of others to ask questions and participate in discussions, you should talk with that student privately. Be careful not to stifle students' ambitions. Students who consistently create incidental disruptions are a problem and should be dealt with, but most do not intend to disrupt the class. Often, pointing their disruptive behavior will suffice to solve the problem. Of course, in private is always best to avoid embarrassment or potentially escalating the situation. Intentional disrupters are often students who are attempting to be noticed and detract from the learning process of other students while doing so. Such students often talk out loud, ask annoying questions, make derogatory comments, etc.

The best way to deal with intentional disrupters is to talk with them after class. You may find that attempts to correct them in front of the class will only fuel their desire to disrupt. It is important that you not get emotional in front of the class. Be firm and patient. When discussing the problem with the student, remain unemotional, concerned, and firm. Discuss what the student was doing, and why he or she was doing it; make it clear that the behavior must stop. If disruptions persist, consult with your supervising professor, department head or both. It may be necessary to drop the student from the course. If the situation becomes serious, ask the student to leave. If the student refuses to leave, dismiss class and immediately report to your department head. If you do encounter serious discipline problems, refer to the Student Code of Conduct (See next chapter).



toward all your students so they all learn the subject material equally well. A good approach is to determine your goals and expectations for students in advance and teach toward those, making adjustments in response to the class as a whole, not in response to the needs of a few good or poor students. Encourage good students and assist poor students, but not to excess. Try to balance your teaching efforts to accommodate all of your students with minimal special attention to a few. The campus resource guide in the last chapter of this handbook can help you guide your students to the help they may need.

***Bribes.*** Sometimes students will do just about anything for a grade. Although bribery is not common, it does happen. Most of us have enough good judgment to turn down suggestions or offers of money for grades and to discuss the problem with the student. Subtle bribery is more common and more difficult to recognize and contend with. It comes in many forms but generally occurs when a student attempts to do favors for you, to get excessively chummy with you, or to entice your sexual feelings in hopes that you will like him or her better and adjust your grading accordingly. Of course, students may also do all of the above simply because they like you. Whatever their motives, be careful not to favor students for personal reasons.

***International students.*** International students with a variety of educational, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds attend NMSU. Some international students may have problems in your classes because of language or different educational backgrounds. Others will have few problems and may be your better students. You must be aware of the potential problems of international students, particularly those resulting from language difficulties. If you have international students in your class, talk to them in private and ask them if they have trouble understanding you. If so, make an effort to talk more slowly and clearly in class; also, minimize the use of slang terms that may confuse them. Do not overdo it, though; you may annoy other students and prevent the international ones from learning new terms and pronunciations. Encourage them to ask you the meaning of words they do not understand, and encourage them to speak in class to enhance their knowledge of the English language and to gain confidence in using it. It is particularly important for TAs to be aware that international students often come from different cultural and educational backgrounds and may have trouble getting accustomed to some of our social and teaching practices.

### **C. GA/Faculty/Department Relations**

As a GA (TA/RA/LA) you are a member of your particular department. You will find your appointment much more enjoyable if you make an effort to establish good personal relations with the other members of your department. Communicate with other GAs, faculty, and staff members in your department. Get to know other people and make yourself known to them. Know what resources are available and where and how to get them. You will develop a more positive attitude about your position and responsibilities if you feel comfortable with the people around you. It is especially important that you get to know your supervising professor. When you have questions or problems concerning the course you are teaching, you should share them with that professor. If you recognize problems or disadvantages in the way the course is designed or structured, you should share your feelings with the supervising professor so that he or she will have a better idea of how the course is serving students. Getting to know other GAs on a personal basis will be beneficial to you. We all go through high and low times as GAs. The friendship and support of other GAs will be especially helpful to you. As you become more experienced, you will find that providing support and guidance to other GAs builds your confidence as an instructor and graduate student.

## Part II

# Teaching Assistants

### Chapter 3 - Preparation and Organization

#### A. Responsibilities

Departments assign graduate assistantships. One or more members of the graduate faculty of your department will guide and mentor you in your professional duties. Your supervisor(s) also will decide whether or not your performance merits further employment. So you should discover quickly which supervisor(s) will work with you, and then work to build a good rapport. Find out from your supervisor exactly what is expected of you before the semester begins. Ask questions when you are uncertain. Allowing a problem to go unaddressed could present unnecessary conflict. Your supervisor may ask to see copies of your exams or handouts, or may visit your class to observe you in action. Don't be intimidated by these checkups. Use them as a way to build confidence in your work and to establish a better dialogue with an expert teacher.

The amount of supervision you receive depends on your background, experience, and duties assigned to you. If your primary duty is to grade students' work, you will not need much supervision. However, if you are assigned a lecture, your coordinator should provide greater supervision. If the coordinator does not ask to see your exams and handouts, don't be afraid to ask her to look over your work before you give it to your students. Beginning teachers are often shy about seeking help. Don't be! Experienced teachers know the importance of cultivating friendships that allow collaboration with like-minded teachers. If you work to build community with other graduate students and faculty who can help improve your skills as and build your confidence, you will often find yourself more firmly in control of your teaching. Teaching is an art conducted in a context constructed with other people. If you isolate yourself from your colleagues, you will lose out. Talk with your course coordinator and colleagues regularly and often.

Graduate assistantships were designed to make students' lives easier. Even though you've agreed to the number of hours you will work each week, if you work beyond the required number of hours the assistantship quickly becomes a hurdle rather than a complement to your education. If at any time you have a problem related to your assistantship you cannot resolve with your supervisor, your department head, or the dean of the undergraduate college of which your department is a part, consider making an appointment to consult with the Graduate School associate dean.

#### B. Texts

Graduate teaching assistants will occasionally choose their own texts, but most often the text to be used in your course will be chosen by your department, and the department will provide you with a copy. You should be familiar with the material to be covered, including the exercises in the text. If you have not taught the course before, doing some of the exercises may be helpful. The more you know about the material, the better you will be able to assess its difficulty and appropriateness--and the better for your students.

#### C. Students and their backgrounds

In order to make judgments about the level and scope of instruction, you should be familiar with your students' backgrounds and where your course fits into their program. For example, suppose you are assigned to teach physics lab designed for engineers. You could safely assume the engineers probably have had more math and physical science courses than, say, English majors.

If you know something about the background of your students you can more easily avoid repeating lectures and exercises they have had in previous classes or that they will have in the future.

#### **D. Planning the semester**

Before the semester begins, outline a general timeline for the course, tentative test days, due dates for major projects and the like. Include a few slack days to your outline in the event you fall behind (it's inevitable). Because you are also a student, you should be careful about scheduling your classes. For example, it's probably a bad idea to schedule an exam the week before your master's oral.

#### **E. Preparing a syllabus**

If you are solely responsible for a class, a syllabus is the most important pre-semester work you'll do. A syllabus is effectively a contract between the instructor and students. In the syllabus the instructor communicates what the students should learn, how they will go about this, and under what learning conditions this will occur. You must make sure each student has a written copy of your syllabus, especially those who add the course late, or those who skip the first day of class. The role of the syllabus cannot be overemphasized. Legally, you must cover yourself. Some of the most important syllabus items are listed below:

***Prerequisites, corequisites, and placement exams:*** If courses require students to meet prerequisites or corequisites or to take a placement exam, syllabi should discuss these policies.

***Attendance policies:*** Syllabi should inform students whether or not attendance is required and whether there are specific penalties for absences or excessive absences. We recommend that syllabi note whether or not specific types of absences are excused, and whether or not students are responsible for making up missed work. If courses have rules regarding students who come to class late or leave early, syllabi should discuss these rules. Check with your department and the most recent edition of the *Undergraduate Catalog*.

***Withdrawals:*** Some instructors automatically drop students for persistent absences or persistent failure to complete assignments. If you want the option of dropping students from your course because of excessive absences, behavior problems, or other reasons, we recommend that your syllabi discuss your course policies on withdrawals.

***Grading scale and grade composition:*** Not all instructors use 10% of the total points possible in a course as a grading increment. You might choose, for example, to assign the last "A" in a course at 93% of the total points possible. Similarly, you might choose to use a more holistic grade composition than a simple numeric scale. Whether your grades are based on numbers or some other scale, it is very important that your syllabus include some indication of the relative weight of each component, as well as a description of the criteria used to determine each student's final grade.

***Incomplete grades:*** There are strict university, college and departmental policies governing the issuance of 'I' grades. Check with your department before giving an "I". Really, you should have a clear understanding of your department's and/or college's policies regarding incomplete as a grade before entering into a discussion with one of your students about an 'I' grade.

***Make-up work:*** Syllabi should discuss class policies for making up missed work. • Extra credit: If you will allow extra credit work to be included in the calculation of a student's final grade, we recommend syllabi include explicit policies on the matter.

**S/U standards:** The minimum standard for an S grade in an undergraduate course is a C, but instructors are free to set higher standards. If the instructor chooses to adopt higher standards, syllabi should note this.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** Syllabi should specifically address reasonable accommodation for students with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Encourage students who feel they may be disabled to visit Services for Students With Disabilities (SSD) in García Annex. SSD can assist them to obtain any academic adjustments or auxiliary aids (Accommodations to which they might be entitled). Please note that students should be discouraged from discussing the nature or specifics of their disability with anyone outside of SSD unless they are completely comfortable letting others know such personal information. Instructors need only know the specifics of the accommodation recommended by SSD and not the name, nature or specifics of the disability except as to explain the nature/importance of the specific accommodation. Assure students that any self-identification of a disability will be kept confidential.

**Cheating and plagiarism:** The university's policy on this issue can be found in the NMSU Student Code of Conduct. Some syllabi cite specific penalties or a range of potential penalties for various examples of academic misconduct. If syllabi discuss academic misconduct, we recommend that they also discuss penalties. This university's official policy on academic misconduct is as follows: *Academic misconduct:* Any student found guilty of academic misconduct shall be subject to disciplinary action. Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to the following actions: Cheating or knowingly assisting another student in committing an act of cheating or other form of academic dishonesty, Plagiarism, which includes but is not necessarily limited to submitting examinations, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, quotations, computer-processed, or other material as one's own work when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person, Unauthorized possession of examinations, reserve library materials, or laboratory materials, Unauthorized changing of grades on an examination, in an instructor's grade book, or on a grade report; or unauthorized access to computer records, or Nondisclosure or misrepresentation in filling out applications or other university records in or for academic departments or colleges.

**Other items:** We also recommend the following items as other important components of syllabi:

- Course description
- time and place class meets
- instructor's name
- office location
- office phone
- office hours
- title and edition of text
- important dates (tests, projects, last day to drop)
- list of homework assignments with due dates
- outline of material to be covered
- test policy (including make-up policy)
- homework policy

## **F. Time management**

It is important that your assistantship supplement rather than usurp your own studies; consequently, it is important that you prepare adequately for each session with your students. It is especially easy during your first semester or two of teaching to devote so much time to preparation that you have no time or energy left for your own academics. Decide how much time you can and should devote each week to planning for the class you're teaching and stick to it. One particularly useful way to help you maintain a diligent schedule is to sandwich your preparation time into other parts of your daily schedule. For example, if you decide you should spend two hours planning for each class or lab session, only begin planning two hours before the class actually begins. While some might argue this technique is too dependent upon "the last minute," it is one of the surest ways to guarantee you don't over prepare or subordinate the time you need for your other activities to your assistantship duties. Scheduling other activities around your daily preparation time might also increase the effectiveness of your planning by ensuring it does not spill into other areas of your life.

## **G. Preparing for lectures**

If the class is using a textbook, it is advisable to begin by reading the relevant section of the text. Next, you might try obtaining a different textbook and using a relevant section for preparing your lecture notes. Using another textbook is perfectly appropriate for this purpose. When constructing an outline, be brief (it's better to talk from brief notes than to read from extensive ones) and leave space for supporting material such as statistics, anecdotes, and examples. Preparing lecture notes within a day or two of class allows you to incorporate incidents, comments and questions from the preceding classes as well as to adjust your timing for presentation. Lecture notes should be opened, covering more material than you anticipate presenting during the lecture period. In this way, you will be prepared to use the full instructional period. But do not attempt to cram too much into a lecture. Adjust the rate of presentation in order to maximize student comprehension.

## **H. Preparing for lab sessions**

Understanding the experiment. Unpreparedness is one of the easiest ways to lose student confidence. Carefully read each experiment in advance, making sure you understand its purpose, the experimental setup, and any calculations. It is often desirable to run through an experiment in advance or at least discuss it with the course instructor. Prestudy. You should require a prestudy of each experiment. Unprepared students waste much valuable time. One way to ensure students will study an experiment in advance is to give a short quiz at the beginning of each laboratory period. Also, you should always check the lab and storeroom to see that all materials are available. Safety. You can avoid most accidents if you anticipate them and warn students. As a graduate assistant, a part-time NMSU employee, safety training is a requirement for all work involving lab chemicals, hazardous materials, infectious materials and/or potentially hazardous equipment.

Safety rules should be explained and enforced. A safety lecture during the first meeting is a good idea. Students should be aware of hazards and should know where all safety equipment is and how to operate it. TAs and their students should always be safety-conscious. A student lab safety guide is provided in the program section of the NMSU Safety website (<http://www.nmsu.edu/safety>).

## Chapter 4 – Presentation Techniques

*You cannot afford to think of being here to receive an education; you will do much better to think of yourselves as being here to claim one. One of the dictionary definitions of the verb “to claim” is: to take as the rightful owner; to assert in the face of possible contradiction.*

*“To receive” is to come into possession of; to act as receptacle or container for; to accept as authoritative or true. The difference is that between acting and being acted-upon . . . and it can literally mean the difference between life and death.*

Adrienne Rich - *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence*

Keep in mind that the more components of reading, writing, speaking, visualization, and listening you can incorporate into your teaching, the greater the chances your students will have for long-term recall of the information you present.

### A. Delivering Lectures

Establish a friendly rapport with your students. Begin with some thoughts on the current topic or by taking care of administrative details that require attention. Begin a lecture by highlighting the important features of the previous lecture. This serves to bring the students’ attention “up to speed” and to promote a sense of continuity. Also, let students know if they can interrupt or if they should save questions and comments until the end of the lecture. Be aware of your students’ response to your delivery. Are they attentive, confused, distracted, or bored? Are they taking notes and asking questions? Make a conscious effort to note what evoked positive responses and what evoked negative ones.

- Create a good listening environment.
- Speak clearly, loudly, and at a proper pace.
- Make eye contact with everyone in the room at least once during the lecture.
- Avoid saying “uh” and “you know.” A simple pause to think is far more effective than rambling.
- Be enthusiastic about your subject. Nothing ruins a good lecture more than a lack of enthusiasm on the part of the lecturer.
- Use examples, stories, and anecdotes. These can serve to illustrate certain points effectively and add color to your lecture. They are excellent attention-getters, and audiences tend to remember them long after they forget the rest of a presentation.
- If you use slides, overhead projections, or other visual aids, be sure that you can operate the equipment and that it works properly. Visual aids should fit smoothly into the lecture presentation.
- Be on time and watch the time. The normal attention span for audiences is less than 30 minutes.
- If your presentation must be longer, give the class a short break or spend a few minutes on other, unrelated business.
- Consider what techniques particular speakers use that have impressed you as a listener. What works well for one speaker may not work well for another, but do not be afraid to use imaginative or innovative approaches.

### B. Generating Questions

Generating questions from your students is part of the process of teaching them how to learn. By the time a student reaches college, he or she usually has learned not to ask questions. Not asking questions has been expected and rewarded. Your responsibility in the classroom or lab is to help

reverse this attitude. This requires more than just allowing time during class for questions. Often it requires more than encouraging your students to ask questions.

Following are some suggestions for using questioning as a teaching approach: Develop essay type questions that require students to ask themselves questions. Grade students on both the quality of their questions and the quality of their answers.

- Present lecture material in a “questioning format,” i.e., introduces the subject matter in the form of conceptual questions. Avoid using definitions and lists of factors unless the nature of the subject matter requires specific answers. Learn to respond to questions with questions rather than with answers.
- Assign reading material and then require students to ask questions about assigned readings. If students have no questions, lecture on material not covered in assigned readings. This will motivate students to ask questions if they do not understand the material.
- Begin class with a call for questions on the assigned material.
- Finally, devote a certain amount of class time to helping students develop good questioning skills. Assist students in learning how to ask conceptual and other types of questions relevant to the course content.

### **C. Discussions**

Discussion sessions allow students to take a more active part in the learning process. Before a discussion session, know exactly what you want to accomplish. Do you want students to apply newly learned skills, mull over new material, work on problems, or become motivated to do research? Focus. Students should have a clear idea of what the instructor expects of them. If you don't, they won't.

A discussion session can range from being highly directed to nondirected. Each has its advantages, but once you have chosen a particular format, be consistent. Do not take over a discussion that was to be nondirected if things do not go the way you would like. During the discussion, encourage participation, keep students talking to one another about the same topic, and try to help students have insights into the material. You can do this in various ways.

Pay attention to group dynamics. Decide whether to ask questions of a particular individual or of the whole group. Calling on an individual may get a slow class going, but it also releases others from the responsibility of formulating answers for themselves. Directing questions to the whole class may mean waiting longer for a response.

Leave sufficient time after asking a question before answering it yourself, repeating it, rephrasing it, or adding further information. Wait at least 30 seconds before making any change in your question. Leaving sufficient time between asking and rephrasing gives students time to think and shows that you are more concerned with their learning than with being reinforced by quick and constant responses.

Avoid calling immediately on the first person ready to answer or approving immediately of a correct response. This prevents other students from evaluating responses themselves and interrupts their thinking.

Encourage students to sit at the table or in only one row of a circle so they can all see each other as well. Some students like to hide behind others; try to bring them out. Look around the whole group after asking a question, making eye contact with each student; ask students sitting in

all parts of the room or around the table for their responses during a session. After a student has responded, ask another person to comment on the response rather than commenting on it yourself. These behaviors indicate that you want the whole group to be involved and that your role is minimal.

Positively reinforcing all responses—correct or incorrect--helps create a safe environment in which students can speak out and try new ideas. Reinforcing correct responses can be done with verbal comment and even facial expression; reinterpreting incorrect responses is more difficult. Avoid teasing comments.

Have students nominate topics for discussion. These can be problems, confusions, or just interesting points. List the nominations and then have the group or groups pick the ones they wish to cover.

If the discussion group is large, you may want to divide it into smaller units, each dealing with the same topic or with different, related topics. Float from group to group giving guidance and answering questions.

Once a little prodding on your part has focused the discussion, students may begin discussion among themselves. Then you may become a mediator, moderator, and summarizer. A good discussion leader keeps his or her intervention to a minimum and gets the students involved in the material.

Create a good climate for a discussion session. Get to know and use the students' names and make sure that the students know each other's names. Try to hold the discussion in a good room — for example, one with chairs around a table. You might vary where you sit from time to time.

When students ask questions, try to get them to find answers for themselves.

If arguments develop, resolve the disputes by appealing to objective evidence and not authority of position. Disputes can often form the basis for later assignments.

Keep the atmosphere as relaxed as possible. Let the students be spontaneous and excited about learning. Your goal is to help all students in a group learn.

Usually, a questioning strategy is necessary for a discussion session. Questions can be classified by the thinking process required in order for students to perform. You should strive to vary questions types among the following:

- Definitional questions ask the learner to define a word, a term, a phrase, or a situation. The response to a definitional question gives descriptive characteristics, a label, or a specific instance or example. This type of question is typically used only in a lecture setting.
- Empirical questions ask learners for facts, comparisons or contrasts among the facts, explanation of events, conclusions based on facts, or inferences that go beyond the facts on hand. This type of question is commonly used in a discussion session.
- Evaluative questions ask learners to give responses stating their own personal value judgments.
- Value judgments are used to praise, blame, commend, criticize, or rate something. Evaluative questions deal with attitudes, feelings, morals, personal beliefs, and policies.

## **D. Reviews**

You can help students review material for an examination in a number of different ways. An oral review, involves highlighting particular areas of important material. This does not mean that you talk about the exact material that will appear on the examination only. Your job is to let the students know the subjects and topics they should have learned. You may want to hand out a review sheet as well. Review sheets are good for students since they can use them as checklists while studying. Tell students whether the review will cover everything on the exam or whether they can expect to be tested on material you did not review.

For a question review, allow students to ask questions on the exam material. It is important to tell the students ahead of time that a question review session will be conducted to allow them time to go over the material and gather any questions before the review. Remember, it is your job to clear up isolated misunderstandings or misconceptions, not repeat lectures. For instance, you may want to tell a student of a better way to learn a particularly difficult concept or even refer the student to another text that covers the same material but from a different perspective. Combining a questioning review with an oral review may be the most advantages.

Conducting a review for an examination can be useful to the student in these ways:

- A review refreshes students' memories. It helps students recall topics they may have forgotten.
- A review shows student's material you consider most important and least important, allowing your students to set priorities in their studying.
- A review encourages students to ask questions on material they do not fully understand, especially if you indicate there is a high probability the material will appear on the examination. Also, students may feel more comfortable asking questions during review than during lectures because they know review sessions have been set aside for this purpose.

From the instructor's standpoint:

- Review helps determine which material is particularly important and should be included in a test.
- A review can even serve as a rough outline of the examination itself.
- By taking note of the type of questions students ask during a review, you should have a good indication of the effectiveness of your teaching ability. Are there areas of the material where many of the students have questions or express misconceptions?

## **Chapter 5 – Testing and Grading**

As a TA/RA/LA you may be required to prepare exams, quizzes, and grade student's work.

### **A. Homework**

Homework and quizzes are used to help students keep up with material covered in class and find weak areas needing more work before the exam. The following guidelines concern homework assignments and constructing quizzes.

- Be sure homework relates to material covered in class.
- Give students adequate time to do the homework.
- Decide in advance if late homework will be accepted and, if so, any penalty.
- Decide in advance if homework prepared by students working in pairs or groups will be accepted.
- Return graded homework as soon as possible, within a week.

- Do not change set policies in the middle of the semester or follow them haphazardly.
- You cannot be defended against problems if you are not consistent.

## B. Tests

Testing need not always be secret. Some instructors are quite forthright in divulging the contents of a test before it is given. If your objective in giving a test is to ensure learning and increase thinking skills, then consider how much surprise questions help you reach that goal. As Grant P. Wiggins wrote: “Understanding is best assessed by pursuing students’ questions, not merely by noting their answers.” Whatever your testing method, consider its full implications and whether or not they create a disadvantage for students with various learning styles. Consider also the test’s format on the page.

Generally, you should keep the following items in mind when constructing tests:

- Design tests that make students think rather than one require simple memorization--a well-developed set of thinking skills promises to give learners higher success at problem solving in a wider variety of contexts.
- Make sure tests apply to material covered in readings, lectures, and labs.
- Have frequent, shorter tests rather than one or two long tests during the semester.
- Start tests with the easiest questions/problems and move on to more difficult ones.
- Make sure tests are not too long for time allotted.
- Grade all tests one answer at a time for all of the students so that you can get a better comparison among students, or conduct item analysis.
- Avoid trick questions.
- Essay tests are more likely than other traditional test forms to require deep thought and encourage true synthesis of knowledge. Essay exams can also reinforce basic literacy.
- Decide and inform students in advance of the importance given to spelling, mechanics, and grammar.
- Grade papers as anonymously as possible, in order to grade the content of the exam and not the personality associated with each student’s name.
- Decide in advance what you are looking for in the answers. Base points you give for the questions on how many of these points the student has covered.

Matching tests are seen to emphasize rote memory, not deep thinking. If you use them, bear in mind the following:

- Possible answers should be of a consistent nature, such as all dates, all names, etc.
- The number of answers from which to choose should be the same or greater than the number of questions.
- Keep the answers short.
- Include in the directions whether answers can be used more than once and the basis for matching, such as similar or opposite.

Multiple-choice tests also emphasize rote memory. Keep in mind the following:

- Make one answer clearly the best.
- Avoid using irrelevant answer possibilities.
- Avoid answers like “none of the above” or “all of the above.” They do not necessarily test knowledge; rather increase chances of students guessing.
- Avoid using letter or number patterns for the answers (e.g. A,D,D,C/A,D,D,C/A,D,D,C).

When using short-answer and fill-in-the blank tests do the following:

- Do not use too many blanks or students will not have enough clues to answer the question.
- Put the blanks at the end rather than the beginning of an item.
- Make the blank a key word rather than a common one.
- Word the statement so that there is only one correct answer rather than several ambiguous ones.

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When using true/false tests, good for specific facts or term definitions, do the following:

- Be sure the statement is unequivocally true or false.
- Avoid using more than one idea in the same question. While one might be true, the other might be false.
- Avoid double negatives.
- Avoid indefinite terms such as “in most cases.”
- Avoid using answer patterns.

### **C. Make-up policy**

Establish in advance the acceptable reasons for allowing students to take make-up exams—school activities, doctor-excused illnesses, etc.

If you make a new exam, be sure to make it similar in difficulty to the first.

Have the student take the exam in a place where he or she will not be disturbed by other students.

### **D. Grading**

- Departmental grade books
- Make your grade book neat.
- Do not leave the grade book lying around where students can easily look at it or alter it.
- Grades are confidential.
- Update the grades directly in the book as opposed to making notes of the grades and later putting them in the book. Notes are easily lost.
- Grade reports. Be sure to let students know how they’re doing before drop days, particularly those doing D or F work.
- Posting grades. Grades are posted on the web very soon after instructors turn them in to their department, and can be accessed by the students individually.
- It is against university policy to post grades publicly.

## **Chapter 6 – Presentation Tools**

In addition to lecturing, you can use audiovisual equipment, handouts, blackboards or dry-erase boards, field trips and other techniques to encourage student learning.

### **A. Audio visual equipment**

- Used correctly, audio visual equipment enhances a lecture.
- Make sure equipment is available and in the classroom a few minutes before class.
- Make sure equipment works beforehand.
- If the equipment is not in the classroom or does not work, check with the department office.
- Make sure the information on the screen is large enough for everyone to see and read. You may have to go to the back of the room to check this.

## **B. Blackboards/Dry-erase boards**

If you are referring to something on the board, try to move around so that you will not block any one person's view all the time.

Until you become accustomed to using a blackboard, you may want to come to class early and write something on the board and then go to the back of the class and make sure you can read it. Make sure students have enough time to copy what you have on the board. After class, erase the board for the next instructor.

## **C. Field Trips**

- The most critical aspects of field trips are planning, preparation, and legal responsibility.
- Decide on the purpose of the field trip.
- Check out all equipment and supplies in advance.
- Make students aware of the purpose of the field trip in advance and require any necessary preparation.
- If you want to operate a University vehicle for any trip, you must obtain a NMSU driver permit, which requires a valid driver's license (driving history will be checked) and a Defensive Driving Class (or proof of previous attendance at a nationally recognized equivalent). The Environmental Health & Safety office provides the class monthly. The training schedule is posted on the safety website. There is a fee for the class.
- Students and non-employees are not covered under any circumstances by the university's insurance coverage. Graduate students probably are not covered. (This is determined by whether or not the travel falls under required job duties.) Student trip accident medical insurance is available for NMSU-authorized or -sponsored student trips from the Central Purchasing Office, located in Academic Research Building C, near the Genesis Center, or by calling 646-2916.
- Develop alternative plans in case of bad weather or transportation problems.

# **Part III Research Assistants**

## **Chapter 7 – General Responsibilities**

Departments, but more importantly, professors in charge of particular research projects will regulate the duties of the research assistant. Duties vary across research assistantships but the general duties may include the following:

- General Research Duties
- Conducting literature searches,
- Reviewing/summarizing manuscripts,
- Developing annotated bibliographies,
- Writing portions of manuscripts
- Preparing/submitting the paperwork for Human Subjects Participation
- Collecting data
- Running the experiment

Discuss expectations with your supervisor, department or the professor in charge of the research. Expectations can focus general job responsibilities, end product(s) expected, contributions to conference papers, journal articles, or research proposals.

Also discuss what you expect from your supervisor, department, or professor in charge of the

research: types of support needed to be successful, when and how evaluations are conducted, mentoring to be received, and the possibilities of publishing joint papers.

In some cases, the research assistant will help the professor conceptualize and operationalize research studies. In these cases, the research assistant may use the study as part of the thesis or dissertation requirements.

In addition, when publications are submitted, the research assistant may be responsible for the editing of manuscripts.

Research assistants may also be expected to present the results of studies at local, regional, state and national conferences and meetings.

### **Human Subjects Policy and Procedures**

The Office of the Vice President for Research has established the procedures to be followed when conducting research involving human subjects.

The Office of the Vice Provost for Research provides information on the functions and responsibilities of the IRB, and procedures on submitting an application for IRB approval. The web site for the Office of the Vice President for Research provides information on a variety of topics pertinent to the research assistant (<http://www.nmsu.edu/Research>)

### **Animal Care Policy and Procedures**

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee approves protocols for studies or classroom activities that require the use of animals. New Mexico State University complies with the U. S. Public Health Policy Guidelines and the application for the use of animals is also found on the web site for the Office of the Vice Provost for Research.

Environmental Health & Safety requirements Graduate assistants must comply with employee requirements as related to environmental health and safety. Specific training and conduct is required for those graduate students that use, work or do research within University science, engineering, agricultural, shop, and laboratory facilities. Generally these requirements apply to teaching, research and lab assistants but may involve other graduate positions as well.

For information on the use of humans and animals in research, go to the following web site <http://www.nmsu.edu/Research>

## **Part IV Laboratory Assistants**

### **Chapter 8 – General Responsibilities**

Departments, but more importantly, professors in charge of particular laboratories will regulate the duties of the lab assistant. Duties vary across lab assistantships but the general duties may include the following:

#### **General Laboratory Assistant Duties**

- conducting literature searches,
- reviewing/summarizing manuscripts,
- developing annotated bibliographies, and writing portions of manuscripts
- preparing/submitting the paperwork for Human Subjects Participation or Animal Use and Care application

- preparing and planning the laboratory experiment
- running the experiment
- collecting data
- supervising/teaching/assisting other students in the lab
- cleaning the laboratory at the conclusion of the experiment

Discuss expectations with your supervisor, department or the professor in charge of the laboratory. Expectations can focus general job responsibilities, end product(s) expected, contributions to conference papers, journal articles, or research proposals.

Also discuss what you expect from your supervisor, department, or professor in charge of the laboratory: types of support needed to be successful, when and how evaluations are conducted, mentoring to be received, and the possibilities of publishing joint papers.

In some cases, the lab assistant will help the professor conceptualize and operationalize research studies. However, regardless of conceptualization, the lab assistant's work in the laboratory will meet the degree requirements in the form of the thesis or dissertation.

In addition, when publications are submitted, the lab assistant may be responsible for the editing the manuscripts.

Lab assistants may also be expected to present the results of studies at local, regional, state and national conferences and meetings.

Human Subjects Policy and Procedures and information regarding the Use of Animals in research can be found at the Office of the Vice President for Research web site.

Lab assistants must comply with safety requirements set forth by the Office of Environmental, Health and Safety. Additional information can be found on the following web site (<http://www.nmsu.edu/~safety>).

## Part V Critical Resources

### Chapter 9 – Teaching and Research Resources

**Library.** As an instructor of undergraduate students, you hold a responsibility for introducing them to library resources. The Zuhl Library Reference Desk, 646-5792 is a good starting point.

**Electronic Journals.** A number of electronic journals are available through the NMSU library. These can be found at <http://lib.nmsu.edu> by selecting Electronics Journal Link.

**Workshops.** The Library offers a variety of workshops throughout the year. For a complete listing of workshops, dates and times visit their web site.

**Teaching Academy.** The Teaching Academy provides a variety of workshops on teaching. The workshops are available to both graduate students and faculty. The Teaching Academy can be reached at 646-2204.

**Math Success Center:** <http://www.math.nmsu.edu/msc/>  
**Phone:** 646-2203 **Location:** Walden Hall, Rm. 101 & 102  
 Tutoring for students enrolled in select undergraduate courses.

**Writing Center:** <http://www.nmsu.edu/~english/resources/writingcenter.html>

**Phone:** 646-5297 **Location:** English Building, Rm. 102

Provide essay critiques, one-on-one grammar instruction, feedback and assistance on writing assignments.

**Counseling & Student Development Center:** [www.nmsu.edu/~counsel/counseling.html](http://www.nmsu.edu/~counsel/counseling.html),

**Phone:** 646-2731, **Location:** García Annex, Rm. 100 Provide counseling services for students at no charge. Group, individual relationships, stress eating disorders, incest survivors, gender and family issues; crisis assistance offered on a “walk-in” basis. Also offer the Choices Program and Safe Ride.