

# Departmental Philosophy



- In BE, quality teaching is critically important
  - This is an SoE mandate
- Teaching experience via the TA mechanism is an important part of your education
- Instills a better understanding of our discipline
- Builds skills
  - Oral and written presentation
  - Leadership
  - Teamwork
- Puts you in contact with a faculty member who probably is not your advisor
  - Becomes part of your professional interactome
- Not to mention pragmatics
  - Offset to tuition

# TA Assignments in BE

- Dept. needs ~ 25 TAs per year
- How are assignments made?
  - Doug does it, with some faculty input
  - Doug knows student and instructor personalities
  - Goal is good fit based on student interest and skills
- Most of you are 2nd year graduate students
  - Several undergraduate TAs and postdocs
- BE grad students required to TA one term
  - More in most other departments

# FAQs about TAing in BE

- Do advisors/department get reimbursed for the time you are a TA?
  - Department gets “TA Slots” from Institute
  - Used to support you in first year
  - Those slots pay-forward to reimburse your later RAship
- Do TAs get graded?
  - Graduate TAs register for 20.960 (12 units)
  - TAing is part of your education
- How much time does it take?
  - SoE guidelines call for 20-24 hours per week

# Official TA Duties

## 8.0 GRADUATE STUDENT APPOINTMENTS

### 8.2 Appointment Categories

#### 8.2.2 Teaching Assistant

*The principal duties of a teaching assistant include **assisting** faculty members in classroom and laboratory instruction, **preparing apparatus** or material for demonstration, **conducting tutorials** and discussion sections, and **grading quizzes**. A full-time teaching assistant usually receives a scholarship to cover tuition costs, in addition to a stipend; a part-time teaching assistant may receive an appropriate partial tuition scholarship.*

# Specific TA Roles in BE

- Graduate lecture class TA
  - office hours, often some grading
- UG lecture class TA
  - office hours, grading exams, recitation
- In some lecture classes
  - run exam review sessions, pre-take exams, write extra practice problems, write homework solutions, clean blackboards
- Lab class TA
  - pre-run experiments, grading, high contact hours
  - safety is of utmost importance (moral, legal issues)
- Course development
  - on more *ad hoc* basis
- Ultimately, class- and instructor-dependent
  - Have expectations-setting meeting before classes begin

# General duties in all roles

- Know your students
  - Get pictures from Stellar/WebSIS
- Know your material
- Attend lecture and periodic (weekly?) staff meetings
- Sundry help within reason
  - Help maintain course web page
  - Track grades, etc. of students in your section
  - Make photocopies, bring items to class, library assistance
- Help assign final grades
  - You are the student advocate
- Note: formal lecturing is the instructor's job

# Resources to draw on

- SoE TA Resources
  - [http://engineering.mit.edu/education/education\\_resources/ta/ta-workshop.php](http://engineering.mit.edu/education/education_resources/ta/ta-workshop.php)
- Teaching & Learning Laboratory (Lori Breslow)
  - <http://web.mit.edu/tll/>
- TA/instructors from past years
  - look at past subject evaluations
  - examine materials from previous years
  - ask about problems that have come up
- Colleagues from the current semester
  - ask for feedback from instructor or other TAs
- Course management resources
  - Stellar (course management system): <http://stellar.mit.edu>
  - MIT libraries: can set up resource pages for your class
  - OpenWetWare: helps manage course materials, Q&A

# Know the Rules

- MIT Policies and Procedures
  - <http://web.mit.edu/policies/>
- MIT Chair of the Faculty Guidelines
  - <http://web.mit.edu/faculty/teaching/termregs.pdf>

For undergrad subjects:

- No academic exercises between 5-7 PM
- No night exams before 7:30 PM
- No Monday evening exams



# Issues to Consider

- Be consistent in your dealings with students
  - If there is more than one TA, be sure to communicate
- Students with disabilities
  - Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
  - Students must have a formal assessment
  - Student Disabilities Services: <http://mit.edu/uaap/sds/>
- Other sources of diversity
  - Race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic background, social skills, native language, country of origin
  - Office of Minority Education:  
<http://web.mit.edu/ome/programs-services/index.html>
- Missed work – what constitutes a reasonable penalty and what time lines are appropriate for make up?
- Illness – make sure the student is OK first, then deal with make-up issues
- Resources: **Academic Advisors**, Deans, Department Head, Housemasters, Medical Department, S<sup>3</sup>

# Academic Dishonesty

- What to look for
  - Session with past TAs will be informative
- How is cheating dealt with?
  - **Do not confront student by e-mail**
  - Several paths, but the following is typical:  
TA > Instructor > Department Head > DUE/DSL > Triage > Committee on Discipline
  - Check *Policies and Procedures*  
<http://web.mit.edu/policies/10.2.html>
- Medical issues may come up when the student is confronted – advise student to seek help
  - Again involve instructor, academic advisor
- MIT procedures regarding citations (plagiarism)
  - <http://libguides.mit.edu/content.php?pid=37801>

# Academic Dishonesty

- *Policies and Procedures* says:

## **10.0 ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT AND DISHONESTY**

### **10.2 Procedures for Dealing with Student Academic Dishonesty**

[MIT Policies and Procedures](#)

MIT assumes that all students come to the Institute for a serious purpose and expects them to be responsible individuals who demand of themselves high standards of honesty and personal conduct. Cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, deliberate interference with the integrity of the work of others, fabrication or falsification of data, and other forms of academic dishonesty are considered serious offenses for which disciplinary penalties can be imposed.

Some academic offenses by students may be handled directly between the faculty member and student, possibly with the assistance of the head of the faculty member's department.

# Other situations you may encounter

- I want a regrade.
- I felt sick so I missed the exam. When is the makeup test?
- My roommate is despondent. I have been staying up with her to keep her from hurting herself. I was unable to do the problem set.
- Can I have an extension?
- I overslept and missed the exam.

# Your First Meeting with Class Instructors

- **Discuss expectations**
- Go over the syllabus
- Understand collaboration/grading policies
- Primarily for UG courses – what do you say to the ‘How am I doing in the course?’ question
- If your Instructor does not approach you, be proactive

# Workload and Time Commitment

- What if the workload is too much?
  - On students
  - On you
  - What is reasonable for a TA?
    - The “book” says ~20-24 h/week
    - Including preparation time
    - If more than 25 h, talk with instructor
    - A student group size of ~25 is reasonable; you can get to know them reasonably well
- If a serious conflict arises...
  - Department Head
  - MIT Ombudsman: <http://web.mit.edu/ombu>



# Want to TA Professionally?

- Consider using your soon-to-be perfected TAing skills to help the next generation of MIT students
  - <http://web.mit.edu/mites/>
  - <http://web.mit.edu/seed/>
  - <http://web.mit.edu/stem/>