# TA orientation

## joining the teaching staff

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# Outline

contacts

colleagues versus students

communication

tutorials

grading

administration

# contacts

- TA coordinator (which course are you assigned to)? heap@cs

- Application page
  http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~heap/tapp/

- HR matters (sign contracts, get paid...) lisab@cs

- Profession development: your course supervisor and the TA training program http://www.utoronto.ca/tatp/

- Your union, CUPE 3902, Unit 1
  http://www.cupe3902.org

# being collegial

We have confidence in you, and pay you accordingly. Instructors, and other TAs, are your colleagues.

- ask questions, offer opinions
- work efficiently
- explain your strengths *and* weaknesses

You're part of a team, responsible to the instructor(s), other TAs, *most importantly* to the students.

# communicate regularly with your instructor

- notify her about your progress
- notify him about issues that arose in tutorial, or if you had to deviate from the tutorial plan
- notify her if you have any difficulties, will miss a deadline, or are *beginning* to go overtime on grading

Your supervisor should *not* have to send you email to check that you've completed a task that you've agreed to complete.

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# tense communication

Occasionally there is tension between teaching staff. Usually this can be resolved by informal, respectful, communication. Respect the instructor's responsibility for running the course. The instructor must respect your right to reasonable working conditions. Be a good colleague, but don't work for free.
If information communication doesn't work:

- contact the TA coordinator (me) or the Undergraduate Chair (Karen Reid) for advice or intervention

- if you aren't comfortable with that, contact your union

Usually a fair solution can be worked out.

# typical duties

- lead tutorials
- hold office/lab hours
- grade assignments
- grade tests, exams
- other duties that help deliver the course

# start of term

Set a good tone at the very first contact.

- ▶ check out the room, sight lines, acoustics, equipment
- ▶ arrive a bit early the first day, chat, write up your contact info, introduce yourself
- ▶ speak, write, type clearly
- ▶ explain how you expect tutorials to work: interaction, checking whether material is absorbed, noticing the interesting bits
- ▶ offer tips, get them talking, ask questions, use eye contact
- ▶ have fun

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# delivering tutorials

Your tutorial brings the university down to human scale. You'll need some time to prepare:

- your instructor should allocate time and resources
- ask what the main idea to be conveyed is
- use questions, eye contact, exercises, etc.
- vary small group, large group
- try using the board, handouts
- make and recover from mistakes
- show why you care about the material

# grading

- maximum feedback
- maximum fairness
- maximum efficiency

. . . is there a problem here?

Some typical sub-tasks:

- know the assignment, read it, ask questions, possibly develop or amend solutions or grading scheme
- grade, record grades
- return work

# grading communication

- there may be problems with the solutions or grading schemes
- there may be several graders
- the instructor may have erred or need to save grading time

# good cop, bad cop

Mostly you are on the students' side, but sometimes you're the bearer of bad news (grades).

- point out they were graded consistently
- point out that you can't change the grading scheme
- fix clerical errors on the spot (initial it)
- listen carefully to more substantial complaints, take notes, but don't re-grade on the spot
- find out the instructor's policy on re-grades

# TAship offers

The TA coordinator offers TAships three times per year, see
http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~heap/tapp/
There are two overlapping sources of TAship guarantee:

- ▶ a certain number of TAships per academic year are guaranteed (if qualified, and applied for) in your acceptance letter.

- ▶ a second, overlapping, guarantee comes from the Collective Agreement about 20 months into grad school

Often the two guarantees cover exactly the same hours, but the second guarantee adds some flexibility. Read the note at
http://www.cs.toronto.edu/~heap/tapp/ and your
Collective Agreement for (lots of) details.

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# training

New TAs are eligible for 3 hours paid training, in addition to your TA work. We are planning a workshop for October, together with TATP. Details to come...

Unfortunately, we don't have an evaluation of TAs by instructors at term end, and the student response to evaluation forms has been very low. Feel free to ask your instructor for informal advice or a reference.