

Guidelines for TAs/ UGCAs in BIO Courses

- **TRAINING:** Unless they have taken BIO372C or CH372C, UGCAs must take either the TA Training Course offered by the Biology Instructional Office that is mandatory for TAs, or the one offered by TIDES.
- **CLARITY ABOUT THEIR ROLE:** Instructors, TAs, and UGCAs should meet jointly at the beginning of the semester to decide who is going to do what and put it in writing.
- **TA/UGCA/STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS:** TAs/UGCAs must be asked at the beginning of the semester to reveal if any student in the course is a romantic partner or a close friend. University policy states that a TA/UGCA cannot work in a course in which a romantic partner is enrolled. (This is the case even if the TA/UGCA has no direct authority over their romantic partner.) TAs/UGCAs should neither have direct authority over nor handle the grades of close friends. TAs/UGCAs cannot begin to date students in the course, whether they have direct authority over those students or not; they need to wait until the course is over.
- **TA/UGCA/STUDENT INTERACTIONS:** TAs/UGCAs should meet with students in the course only during official times – such as Discussions or Office Hours and only in classrooms or other official locations arranged by the Biology Instructional Office. Office hours should not be held in dining halls, restaurants, or other casual locations. TAs/UGCAs cannot give preferential treatment to specific students-- they should hold meetings only if they are accessible to all students in their charge. One-on-one help sessions are OK if all of their students can arrange to have one.
- **PROFESSIONAL DRESS:** TAs/UGCAs should be advised to dress professionally when they are interacting with students. (Smelly gym clothes and revealing clothing, for example, are inappropriate.)
- **PROFESSIONAL TONE:** TAs/UGCAs must adopt an appropriate professional tone with the students. The Instructor and the TA/UGCA are all on the same team whose mission is to help the students learn. TAs/UGCAs are not meant to side with the students against the Instructor, nor is the job of a TA/UGCA to help the students “deal” with the Instructor.
- **FREEDOM OF SPEECH:** Just as faculty do, TAs/UGCAs should clearly separate their personal speech as citizens from their speech as instructors in a classroom. If you are teaching something around which there is controversy, it’s completely fine to talk about it in the classroom. But you are not expected to start talking about controversial topics that lay outside the scope of the material. Outside of class, speaking as a citizen, your choice of topics is up to you.

Regents Rule 31004

Sec. 2 Freedom in the Classroom. Faculty members are entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing his or her subject, **but are expected not to introduce into their teaching controversial matter that has no relation to his or her subject.**

Sec. 3 Clarification of Role. Faculty members are citizens, members of learned professions, and officers of an educational institution supported by the State of Texas. **When the faculty member speaks or writes as a citizen, he or she should be free from institutional censorship or discipline, but should make it plain that the faculty member is not an institutional spokesperson.**

- **FERPA:** FERPA stands for Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. The bottom line of what you need to know is the following: In your role as TA/UGCA, you will have access to student grades and other information about the students. All information about the students is private information that you must not disclose *anyone*. If the student is over 18, that includes the students’ parents. It is

against FERPA for any one of us to even acknowledge to a parent of a person over 18 that the person is or is not a student at UT. See the website below for more details.

<https://registrar.utexas.edu/students/records/ferpa/faculty>

• **WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE CONCERNED ABOUT A STUDENT'S HEALTH / BEHAVIOR:**

You can do one or all of the following.

Contact the Behavior Concerns Advice Line: <https://besafe.utexas.edu/behavior-concerns-advice-line>

Contact the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center: <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Contact the CNS Counselor in Residence, Andrea Ortega: https://cmhc.utexas.edu/CARE_ortega.html