

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 1 of 23

Heinz College Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy AY 2025/2026

The graduate degree programs administered by the Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy (Heinz College) use Teaching Assistants (TAs) to provide a high level of individualized, course-related help to students.

The purpose of this policy, the attached exercises, and the corresponding training session is to provide basic training and guidance for TAs to enable them to best assist students.

This policy manual should serve as the first reference if you are uncertain about how to handle a situation (such as grading, giving a review, handling requests for grade changes, etc.) or have questions pertaining to your assignment as a TA such as compensable time, timekeeping, or key contacts.

Additionally, we encourage new TAs to use the resources available through the university's Eberly Center for Teaching Excellence: <https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/>.

This policy covers the following topics to assist you in navigating through your role as a TA:

- I. Key Contacts
- II. Teaching Assistant Types
- III. Description of TA Responsibilities and Duties
- IV. Pay Practices and Timekeeping
- V. Code of Conduct
- VI. Administrative Issues
- VII. Holding Office Hours
- VIII. Grading
- IX. Review Sessions
- X. Attachments

I. KEY CONTACTS

- Conflicts with instructors: if you have a conflict that you are unable to resolve with an instructor, please contact Associate Dean Jackie Speedy

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 2 of 23

(School of Public Policy and Management) at jspeedy@cmu.edu or Associate Dean Andy Wasser (School of Information Systems and Management) at wasser1@andrew.cmu.edu

- PhD student pay issues/questions: Please contact Anja Hojka (ahojka@andrew.cmu.edu).
- Masters student pay issues/questions: For employment paperwork, timecards or pay for hourly TAs please contact Anja Hojka (ahojka@andrew.cmu.edu).
- All other questions/concerns: For other TA related questions or concerns or questions pertaining to this policy, please contact Lori Geraci (lgeraci@andrew.cmu.edu).

II. TEACHING ASSISTANT ELIGIBILITY AND TYPES

Eligibility

To be eligible for an appointment as a teaching assistant, a nominee must:

- be currently enrolled as a degree-seeking graduate student at Carnegie Mellon
- be in good academic standing and making satisfactory progress toward a graduate degree with no academic integrity infractions
- express interest in a TA position
- have received a grade of B+ or higher in the course for which you are being considered; however, typically TAs have received at least an A- in the course. You may also be eligible to TA a course that you have exempted. We do not advise being a TA until after you have completed your first semester.
- have the course instructor accept you as a TA

All appointments are contingent on being a graduate student in good standing during the period of appointment.

TA Types

The Heinz College has two (2) different types of TA roles. They include:

1. **PhD TA:** PhD students are paid semi-monthly (exempt) to align with their stipend payments.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 3 of 23

2. **Masters TA:** Masters Students are paid hourly, on a bi-weekly basis. Students paid hourly must submit their hours in the university's human resources system, Workday, for approval.

Note: TAs working remotely can be either a student in a master's or PhD program and will be compensated accordingly. Remote TAs must reside in the United States.

III. **DESCRIPTION OF TA RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES**

TA responsibilities and duties consist of the following:

1. Assist the instructor in preparing and obtaining materials for class
2. Attend class for the purpose of providing assistance
3. Hold office hours to help students individually or in small groups
4. Grade homework assignments and exams
 - a. *NOTE: While TAs may assign preliminary or suggested grades to homework and exams, final decisions regarding grades are made by the instructor.
5. Hold review sessions
6. Proctor exams
7. Complete and submit time bi-weekly in Workday according to the Bi-Weekly Pay Schedule (if paid hourly)

Each instructor will determine the extent to which an individual TA will be responsible for any or all of these functions. In some courses, instructors may choose to have TAs specialize in one or more of these tasks whereas, in other courses the instructor may rotate or divide all responsibilities equally among the TAs assigned to the course. All TAs are responsible for carrying out their assigned duties to the best of their abilities and within the framework outlined in this policy.

Students who are assigned as graders will only have responsibility for grading.

TAs are assigned to assist with the course, not with an instructor's research or other activities, and should not assume responsibilities that encompass research or other activities unrelated to their TA assignment.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 4 of 23

IV. PAY PRACTICES AND TIMEKEEPING

On average, graders and TAs are expected to work 10 to 15 hours per week. TAs may not exceed 20 hours in one week and may not exceed 40 hours per week or 8 hours in a day in their combined jobs if they have more than one position at CMU. Instructors and TAs should agree upon the expected schedule and discuss hours worked in other positions at CMU. TAs are not permitted to work beyond scheduled hours and any hours beyond those that have been scheduled must be pre-approved by the instructor. Further, there are additional considerations for international and domestic students with other jobs which are listed below:

- **International Students:** International students cannot work more than 20 hours per week. If you are an international student, it is your responsibility to learn the provisions of your visa in terms of employment and to adhere to any employment restrictions.
- **Domestic Students:** If you are a domestic student and have other jobs as a student at CMU, you may not work in your combined jobs more than 40 hours per week.
- **California TAs:** If you are working in California, you may not work in your combined jobs more than 8 hours per day.

If a TA is consistently being asked to work more than the expected or agreed number of hours, they should first speak with the instructor. If there is no resolution, contact Associate Dean Jackie Speedy (School of Public Policy and Management) at jsspeedy@cmu.edu or Associate Dean Andy Wasser (School of Information Systems and Management) at wasser1@andrew.cmu.edu.

A. PhD Students:

- PhD students are paid semi-monthly according to the PhD handbook.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 5 of 23

B. Masters TAs (i.e. Hourly TAs):

- Hourly TAs pay range from \$17.00 per hour less applicable taxes and withholdings.
- Hourly TAs must submit their worked hours into Workday on time IN EACH bi-weekly pay period.
- As a reminder, any hours (e.g., sitting in class, meeting with instructor, grading, office hours) you work should be recorded, please refer below for a list of examples of compensable time.

C. Remote TAs and TAs in California and Washington, D.C.:

- Remote TAs must follow special instructions outlined in their offer letter which stipulates a variety of expectations such as reporting hours worked and checking in with the instructor, how equipment will be handled, etc.
- California TAs who have worked at least ninety (90) days in California are eligible to receive Paid Sick Leave under state law. Employees receive twenty-four (24) hours of Paid Sick Leave each fiscal year. Additional details regarding California Paid Sick Leave are available at:
http://www.cmu.edu/hr/benefits/benefit_programs/forms/california-paid-sick-leave-policy.pdf.
 - TAs located in Los Angeles, CA are subject to all pertinent local laws.
- TAs located in Washington, D.C. are subject to all pertinent local laws.
- Master's level TAs are not permitted to work in a TA position if they are outside of the United States (US). If you stop your work as a TA during the semester/mini, you must contact Lori Geraci (lgeraci@andrew.cmu.edu) or Anja Hojka (ahojka@andrew.cmu.edu) to end your employment immediately.

D. Compensable Time

Compensable time is all hours worked, which includes but is not limited to:

- Emailing/Texting work related communications

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 6 of 23

- Sitting in class
- Meeting with the instructor
- Grading
- Holding Office Hours
- Phone calls related to your TA responsibilities

V. **Managing Your Time:**

Initial Set Up: Initially, in order to appropriately manage your time, you may want to track how long it takes you to fulfill your duties, including prepping homework keys, review sessions, attending lecture, office hours, grading, maintaining course web page, and any other miscellaneous tasks, and make adjustments as needed. Additionally, it is recommended that you set office hours early in the semester, but not until you have a room reserved for them; Write solution sets clearly and ahead of time; Talk to individuals who had previously been a TA for the course to obtain ideas about how they managed their time; Utilize course notes, homework, and exams from previous instructors (even undergraduate examples sometimes) to enhance your effectiveness in office hours and review sessions.

Overtime/Adjusted Work Schedules: Hourly TAs are not permitted to work over their scheduled hours without prior written approval. TAs who are paid hourly cannot exceed 40 hours per week across all on campus positions. Please reference part A of this section (page 3) for more information about how many hours are permitted based on your status.

Electronic Communication: You will find that much of your communication with students will be through e-mail, since this is how many students prefer to communicate. However, it is important to set up some ground rules for e-mail and how you will help them through it. It is also particularly important to remember that anytime you read, respond to, or send emails, is considered worked time and therefore it is critical that you manage your electronic communications to ensure you are not working over your approved scheduled time. Some suggested ways to manage your

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 7 of 23

electronic communications so that you set the proper ground rules and ensure you are managing your time appropriately are:

1. Make an e-mail promise (ex: I will respond to every e-mail within 24 hours. I cannot promise, however, that I will respond in less than 24 hours).
2. Make rules about how you will assist in e-mail and the level of professionalism expected. Students may feel that it is OK to communicate in a blunter manner in e-mail than they would be in person or expect "special" treatment. It is important to make sure you uphold the same standards you would as if they were there in person in office hours and express your expectation that this be the case. Further, refrain from providing students with answers or other information you would not normally provide. Finally, avoid "double grading" via email.

VI. CODE OF CONDUCT

Balancing a TA position along with other responsibilities requires hard work and organization. The Heinz College programs consider the teaching assistant position a professional position.

Teaching assistants are expected to perform their duties in a professional manner and in accordance with the rules and standards of conduct established by the instructor, the College, and the University. TAs are expected to perform in accordance with the following standards:

- **Promptness and Reliability:** For office hours and review sessions, TAs are expected to arrive on time and stay until the end of the scheduled period for every session for which they are assigned. Hourly TAs may not work extra hours without prior approval. If any TA feels pressured to hold more office hours than have been formally assigned, they should talk to the professor about how to accommodate the students within the time you are able to commit.
- **PhD students ONLY:** Extra hours are at your discretion and sometimes it is helpful to stay late. However, you should not feel pressured to stay late.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 8 of 23

- **Priority and Attention to Work:** During scheduled work hours, a TA should make TA work the highest priority. If no students come for assistance, a TA may do their own work. However, as soon as a student requests assistance the TA should immediately devote full attention to the student's needs, and in no way discourage students from making use of the TA's services.
- **Confidentiality:** TAs must maintain strict confidentiality about the grades and performance of students.
- **Sensitivity:** TAs should be sensitive to the needs and feelings of the students in the course as well as to cultural differences. The role of TAs is to help the students learn, and TAs should never do anything to discourage students from seeking assistance.
- **Accuracy:** TAs should be accurate when providing information to students and when grading coursework. Errors should be promptly corrected when they are recognized.
- **Fairness and equity:** TAs should not play favorites with any students. All students should receive consistent assistance from TAs, regardless of any personal feelings the TA may have toward a particular student. A TA should not ignore questions from one student or favor questions from another. Also, a TA should not feel pressured by one student or one student group when others are waiting for help. You should establish a rotation system or sign-up list as soon as you realize this may be a problem. If office hours are insufficient to handle all student needs, discuss this with the professor.
- **Appropriate Assistance:** TAs should not provide "inside" information or assistance to any student that is not available to other students. In general, TAs should not provide the answers to assignments or "previews" of exams unless they are explicitly authorized to do so by the instructor. Inappropriate assistance to students will be treated as an academic violation and the TA and student in the course will be subject to the appropriate disciplinary action up to and including termination of employment for the TA. Often students will ask questions such as "**what is the exam going to be like?**" A good rule of thumb is to only provide

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 9 of 23

generalizations about topics to be covered. An even better approach is to discuss this with the instructor and determine how they would answer the question, so you can answer similarly. If you are unsure how to answer this or any other question, it's okay to say "I don't know" and offer to follow up with the student after consulting with the instructor.

- **Conflict of Interest:** A TA for a course is prohibited from making arrangements with students in the course to be paid for extra hours of tutoring. If a student needs more assistance than a TA can reasonably provide, the TA should contact the instructor or the Associate Dean. This is recommended in order to preserve objectivity and not invite accusations of bias.
- **Personal Relationships:** TAs are advised that it is not appropriate to date students in courses you are assigned to assist. It is expected that you make the instructor aware of close Pre-TA relationships. Where one student is in a position of authority over another: neither student should solicit or initiate an intimate relationship with the other; and any consensual intimate relationships must be disclosed and mitigated. A position of authority exists where a student serves as another student's teacher, TA, tutor, research supervisor, grader, resident assistant, community advisor, supervisor in a student employment role, or mentor designated by the university (such as orientation student leaders).
- **Instruction:** Although TAs may hold review sessions, it is the instructor's responsibility to teach new material. When the instructor is unavailable, the class should be rescheduled. At no time should a TA instruct a class in the instructor's absence.

If an instructor or student charges that a TA has not been performing adequately, the TA will be given an opportunity to present their case prior to any decision being made about the appropriate sanction. Failure to perform adequately in a teaching assistant position or violation of University, College or the TA policies may result in the appropriate corrective action up to and including termination. If you are dismissed, you will be prohibited from serving as a TA for any other course at the Heinz College.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 10 of 23

VII. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

At the beginning of the semester, you must meet with the professor for whom you will be a TA. During this meeting you and fellow teaching assistants for the course (if applicable) will need to discuss and determine responsibilities to be carried out by each of you.

It is important to discuss and agree upon a defined set of responsibilities with which you will be tasked. It is also strongly recommended that you write these defined responsibilities down and/or email this information to the instructor for their review to ensure you are both in agreement in the event there are any questions later.

Sometimes, an instructor might assume that you “know how to be a TA” and won’t specifically talk about which aspects of course management that will be your responsibility. Therefore, below is a set of key topic items that you should be aware of and ask about in your initial meeting.

- **Class Attendance:** The official Heinz policy is that TAs are required to attend lectures as part of their responsibilities. The only exception is if you have explicit permission from the instructor to exempt out of this responsibility. There are definite benefits to attending class, including familiarity with the material and the concepts emphasized, which leads to reduced prep time and greater comfort level with material when assisting students.
- **The Number of Office Hours:** Typically, it is expected that TAs provide 2-4 office hours, depending on your other responsibilities. The instructor will generally want you to spread them out if there are multiple TAs for the course. Bear in mind that you will likely need to hold weekend or evening office hours, especially if you are the TA for an evening course. It is important that you understand the expected office hours and when they should be scheduled.
- **Review Sessions:** With multiple TAs for a course, usually doctoral students give the review sessions. However, this is not always the case. If you are interested in doing so, let the instructor know your preferences but either way ask if there will be review sessions and who will be holding them.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 11 of 23

- **Answer Keys:** You should ask who will make the answer keys for the homework and how soon in advance will they need to be available. Generally, it is important that answer keys are made by the time the first TA has office hours following the distribution of the homework assignment, however the individual tasked with making the answer keys and the timing is at the discretion of the instructor.
- **Homework Policy:** Another important piece of information you should acquire in your first meeting is what the homework policy will be for the class. It is essential that you know this policy well and adhere to the policy throughout the semester. For example, there have been disagreements because a person may think other students were receiving preferential treatment when they were allowed to turn their assignment in late, etc. because the TA did not follow the policy.
- **Grading:** If there are multiple TAs, you will need to ask how grading will be divided up for homework and exams. Typically, this is on a rotation basis but not always.
- **Other Logistics Related to Homework:** Additional questions to ask are:
 - How should homework be returned (in class, in recitation)?
 - Should students only use student ID numbers or names?
 - Will answer keys be included?

Much of this is procedural, but it is nice to know how the instructor will be doing this. Feel free to offer suggestions based on your experiences in other courses.
- **Record and Maintain Grades:** Generally, TAs are responsible for recording and maintaining the grades. However, this may not always be the case, therefore you should ask who will record and maintain grades.
- **Academic Dishonesty (Cheating):** Cheating is a sensitive matter, so it is important to clearly understand what the instructor in your class would like you to do if you suspect cheating on homework or exams that you are grading.

NOTE: Cases of cheating are often related to homework. Some instructors allow collaboration on assignments while others insist that

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 12 of 23

each student (or group of students) prepare their homework submissions completely on their own. As a TA, you should learn exactly what level of collaboration the instructor allows. When grading, be aware of and do not ignore cases of strong similarities between multiple homework submissions. However, it is not your job to pursue a case of suspected cheating with a student, and you certainly do not want to accuse a student of cheating. These issues should go directly to the instructor before homework assignments are returned to the students. More details about how to handle these situations should be discussed with the instructor and you should not deviate from the instructor's direction.

Getting the answers to the above listed questions early will establish your role in the course and prevent things from slipping through the cracks. While the instructor very well might bring these things up, it is your responsibility to get these answers if the instructor doesn't. Although you should follow all directives given to you by the instructor throughout the semester, you should also be able to be flexible (as directed) to change processes as unexpected things arise. This is especially important with first time courses or instructors.

VIII. **HOLDING OFFICE HOURS**

Students generally feel that the extra one-on-one assistance provided by prepared TAs can be very helpful. To maximize your ability to provide these services:

- **Be prepared.** Keep abreast of what the instructor teaches in class. Read the book assigned to the class and go to the lectures. Know and be able to explain the concepts that are being tested on the homework and exams.
- **Obtain a copy of the assignment in advance** so that you can be prepared for office hours.
- **Don't tell students the answers** to homework problems; help them get the solutions themselves. Try using other examples that are similar to the problem, walking through each step of the thought process needed to get at the solution, reviewing the material by asking

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 13 of 23

questions about what was done, or having a student solve another problem for you.

- **Ask to see a student's lecture notes** when they are having trouble with a particular concept. You may be able to find the misconceptions from the lecture in the notes.
- **Be patient.** Students have different learning styles and speeds. Students having trouble with a subject often fail to get the point the first time you work with them. Repeat and summarize frequently or ask simpler questions which lead up to a more complex problem. In testing comprehension skills, the simplest questions require a yes/no answer. These are followed, in increasing order of difficulty, by one-word answers, simple definitions, short answer, and problem-solving questions.
- **Be on time for office hours**, stay in the office or post a note where you can be found (and be there). If you must reschedule your hours, announce the change in class and send an e-mail message with the rescheduled times. Tell the students about the change BEFORE it occurs. If you have an emergency, contact the instructor as soon as possible so that the proper arrangements can be made in your absence.
- When multiple TAs are used for a course, they should **distribute their office hours during the week** to accommodate the maximum number of students in the class.
- **Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** Giving a student information you are unsure of may solve the immediate problem but destroys your credibility if you're wrong. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so, and promise to ask the instructor and get back to the student. If you accidentally mislead a student, tell the student as soon as you discover your error.

IX. GRADING

TAs provide a valuable service to instructors by grading assignments and exams. While accuracy is obviously important, so is consistent grading, especially in classes where a large number of TAs are used. The following strategies may increase accuracy and reduce bias and inconsistency in grading.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 14 of 23

- Keep up with course material (Hint: going to class is the easiest way to do this).
- Meet with instructor; make sure that you understand problems on assignments and the instructor's objectives.
- Look thoroughly over homework problems (for office hours and grading).
- Each homework set and exam should have a detailed answer key approved by the course instructor. The key should provide the correct answer and number of points assigned to each problem, and an indication for how to give partial credit. Sometimes the instructor will provide you with the key.

Grading standards

- Quantitative assignments (e.g., problems, programming, etc.):
 - Clearly enumerate all of the "subparts" of the problem and assign point values to each (take a piece of paper, and do a point breakdown for the entire assignment, deciding how much each part is worth and then how much to take off for each type of mistake). Some instructors will do this for you.
 - Check a couple of papers to see how students are answering the question before you begin grading.
- Qualitative assignments (e.g., essays):
 - List objectives of the assignment (what must be written to get full credit, how much for style or structure, etc.).
 - Read through and rank papers (approximately) by quality. Then go back and assign grades.

Grading Consistency

- For classes with multiple TAs:
 - Assign one TA to each problem or a set of problems.
 - Take turns grading entire assignments.
 - Check each other's work to ensure that grading is done at the same level of difficulty/expectation.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 15 of 23

- Have all TAs in the same room grading simultaneously so that questions and concerns can be addressed on the spot.
- For classes with one TA, grade problem by problem, and shuffle papers between problems.

One of the main objectives of these strategies is consistency. Ensuring that each student's work is graded similarly to the work of their peers is imperative. Further, maintaining consistency helps to reduce the amount of time you spend discussing grades with students and handling re-grade requests (if the instructor has given you this responsibility).

Commenting on Assignments and Exams

An appropriate comment does not criticize, judge, or blame; it simply states what was expected as an answer and tries to identify what went wrong.

- Comment on positive aspects.
- Don't abbreviate when writing comments and make them legible.
- Don't write paragraphs. Writing a thorough answer key will help speed up your grading time – "refer to answer key."
- If a person had real difficulty, do not cover the assignment or exam in red ink. Grade it and let the instructor know. One strategy commonly used is to attach a note to the assignment/exam encouraging the student to come see you or the instructor to clear up misunderstandings or difficulties.

Plagiarism or Cheating

- The Heinz College takes incidents of cheating and plagiarism very seriously. In many instances, TAs will be the first to notice potential cases of cheating (e.g., while grading you come across two papers that are identical, etc.).
- Inform the instructor immediately if you suspect students have cheated. Do not try to resolve the issue on your own.

Miscellaneous

- If you are recording grades, keep a hard copy after every update. Keep it private.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 16 of 23

- Put grades on the inside cover, not on the outside where visible (potentially embarrassing if the graded assignments are passed around during class).
- Return homework in random or alphabetical order. Never return ordered by scores.
- If you just don't understand an answer (illegible, poor grammar) ask another TA or the instructor for grading procedure in that case.
- Don't change a grade unless you believe that you have been unfair or have made a mistake. When a student requests a grade change, review their answer. If you decide not to make any grade changes, explain why deductions were made. If you can't resolve the situations, refer the student to the instructor. You can avoid requests for grade changes by checking your grading and writing appropriate comments before assignments are returned to students. Note, this does not mean that you should give full credit to everyone just to avoid having to deal with unhappy students.
- Re-grade requests are one of the most sensitive situations a TA has to deal with. Often it is useful to have the student put their change request in writing (some instructors make this policy). Another approach to handling re-grade requests is to take the student's homework or exam and tell them that you will review it and get back to them later. This will help alleviate any awkwardness or pressure that is felt between the student and TA in these situations.
- Don't discuss grades with other students or TAs in other courses.
- Return grading assignments on time. When the assignment is given, you should know when it is expected to be completed and returned.
- Don't tell students their grades prior to officially handing back the assignment.
- In many courses, students should use an identification number in place of a name. When this is not done, TAs should avoid looking at the name of the student who submitted the assignment or exam.
- Double-check your grading at the end.
- When an answer is blank, put a line through it in ink.

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 17 of 23

X. REVIEW SESSIONS

Although review sessions can be very helpful, students find them a waste of time when the TA comes unprepared. To hold good review sessions:

- **Set an agenda.** Know exactly what you want to cover and write an outline of the order in which you will present the material. Select only three or four major topics to cover in one session. Use illustrations, examples, or keywords to help students remember the major points. Announce the agenda for the review session at the beginning of the class period.
- You should **prepare answers to problems before holding the review.** Having worked out the problems ahead of time will help avoid unexpected problems and make you more comfortable with explaining the material in general.
- **Keep eye contact** with your audience. Get students involved in discussing examples and answering questions. If the room is large and the number of students is small, ask them to fill the front seats.
- **Summarize periodically.** Focus on the main points and remind students what the important ideas are.
- **Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know."** No one is perfect. When you can't answer a question, say so and promise to get back with the correct answer later. Then do so, either in person, on the e-mail system, or a post on Canvas.
- **Distractions.** Ask students who are distracting the class if there is a question or problem. If not, ask them to stop talking immediately. By allowing students to disrupt the class, you lose control of the session and allow them to hurt the rest of the students.
- **Specialized problems.** If you find that only one or two students are having trouble, offer to help them after class to keep the rest of the students interested. Don't carry on a one-to-one conversation with a student who interrupts with irrelevant questions or a question that may be important but requires a lengthy answer. Too many questions by the same person can disrupt the flow of the review session and make the other students lose interest, especially when the questions are not

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 18 of 23

important. Offer to discuss the student's questions more fully after the review.

XI. **ATTACHMENTS**

- **Attachment A:** EXERCISE: REVIEW OF PRIOR TA EXPERIENCES
- **Attachment B:** CHALLENGING SITUATIONS: Office Hours and Grading

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 19 of 23

Attachment A

EXERCISE: REVIEW OF PRIOR TA EXPERIENCES

“Think Back to Last Year” Exercise: Please take a few moments to respond to the following questions.

1. What were some of the unprofessional or frustrating things that TAs did or did not do while you were a student?
2. What were some of the helpful or useful things that TAs did for you?

Heinz College of Information Systems and Public Policy	ACADEMIC SERVICES		Doc No:	1
			Initial Issue Date	
			Revision Date:	07/25/2025
Teaching Assistant (TA) Policy and Procedures			Revision No.	7
			Next Revision Date:	TBD
Preparation: Lori Geraci	Authority: Ann English	Issuing Department.: Academic Services	Page:	Page 16 of 23

2. Challenging Situations—GRADING:

1. Student has the right answer but doesn't show any work.
2. Student has the right answer but used the "wrong" method.
3. You are proctoring an exam and you think you see a student looking at someone else's exam.
4. Two students turn in assignments with very similar work (same code, same errors)