Acing your assistantship

How to be a great TA or RA
Typical duties of an RA

- A research assistantship may include:
  - Working in a laboratory
  - Literature review or writing
  - Field work
  - Collecting data
  - Data entry or programming
  - Working with a research team
  - Anything that helps move research forward
Typical duties of a TA

• A teaching assistantship may include
  – Teaching laboratories
  – Leading recitations or study sessions
  – Grading assignments
  – Preparing teaching materials or assignments
  – Driving on field trips
  – Holding office hours
  – Helping students with questions
  – Lecturing in class (not common)
Getting started

• Visit with your department head, major professor, or assigned course professor
  – Ask about expectations, duties, and time requirements
  – Ask about work schedule and make sure it does not conflict with your classes
  – Ask about required safety training for your position
TIPS for RA’s and TA’s

• Be safe!
  – Take and apply all safety training
  – Report unsafe conditions or practices

• Meet with your supervisor at least once a week to review questions or problems

• This is career training
  – Put in your best effort and strive to improve
  – Focus on doing a good job, not how many hours

• Cultivate a professional attitude
  – Be courteous and respectful to everyone
  – Learn and follow policies
Research tips

• Be careful and methodical
• Take good notes of procedures
• Read, read, read journals. Get a good bibliography program like EndNote
• Be a good research team member
• Ask before using unfamiliar equipment
• Think critically and look for improvements
• Strive to make positive contributions
Teaching tips

• Be prepared
  – Know the assignments. Prep lectures and materials.
  – Ask the professor about common difficulties

• Be polite and patient, always
  – Even if the question seems silly, or it’s the 10th time

• Be fair
  – Every student deserves your attention

• Post and keep your weekly office hours
  – Most departments expect 2-4 hours per week
Grading tips

• Do the assignment/test yourself first
• Be as fair and consistent as possible
  – Use an answer key and rubrics
  – Look for understanding—not rigid repetition of the answer—and give partial credit if appropriate
  – Ask the professor if you need guidance
• Provide feedback to students
• Return graded assignments within one week
About FERPA

• The Family Education Right to Privacy Act protects against the release of personal, schedule and academic information, including grades and test scores

• Graduate instructors must follow the same policies as do faculty and staff
Quick FERPA do’s and don’ts

• Return graded papers to students in person
  – Don’t leave a stack and let them find their own
  – Don’t post grades or scores unless identity is disguised
  – Don’t give papers to a friend, parent, or roommate, even if the student requests it

• Don’t share or discuss a student’s information (personal, schedule, or academic) with anyone other than the course professor

• Be VERY careful with class lists and grading records. Never place them on a network location visible to students or the public. Avoid using cloud servers like GoogleDocs for these items.

• Be VERY careful when forwarding emails or using “Reply to All” when documents with scores or personal information are attached

• Always use the BCC (blind CC) instead of the TO box when emailing a group of students.

• If unsure what to do in a given situation, ask the professor or the Registrar for guidance
Resources

- Some helpful TA advice to get you started
  - http://www.pgbovine.net/ta-tips.htm
  - https://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/connections/advice-your-first-year-teaching-assistant
  - https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/grad-support/grad-teaching-development/teaching-assistants-role