BIO 492 – Seminar in Undergraduate Classroom Instruction

Course Description (for Undergraduate Bulletin)

Required of all undergraduate Teaching Assistants for lecture-based courses in those semesters they teach. Course provides instruction in areas such as course content and its effective communication, fair and constructive grading techniques, and management of course records. Specific duties will vary depending on course needs.

Course objectives and topics

This course is intended to support students acting as a teaching assistant (TA) for a lecture course in Biology. Although the role of a TA can vary from course to course, it typically involves many of the activities listed below. The faculty sponsor (normally the primary instructor for the course the TA will be supporting) will provide a list of specific expectations to the TA. Possible responsibilities include:

- Supporting faculty instruction efforts through tutorials or office hours
- Grading examination, problem sets, and/or student papers
- Writing quizzes and/or exam questions
- Tracking student attendance
- Maintaining student records

Gaining experience in these areas may be especially useful for undergraduates considering careers in education.

The faculty sponsor will provide the TA with guidance in carrying out the required activities through preliminary instruction and subsequent feedback. However, this is also intended to be an experience that promotes self-sufficiency, and the TA must be capable of some independence in carrying out their responsibilities.

Course requirements and grading criteria

Students are expected to carry out their assigned responsibilities to the best of their ability. General expectations include:

- Attendance of faculty-TA meetings
- Interacting with course students in a courteous and professional manner
- Reporting any suspected academic dishonesty to the course instructor
- Refraining from giving unfair assistance or penalties to any course student.

Additional requirements may include:

- Attendance of course lectures
- Keeping assigned office or tutorial hours
- Maintaining careful records of student grades and attendance
- Generating quizzes or exam questions that are thoughtful, clearly written, and reflective of course content.
- Using a rubric to grade student work, and providing useful comments to explain scoring decisions and promote improvement in future work.
- Meeting relevant deadlines for these tasks

Each faculty sponsor will develop their own grading scale depending on the expected duties of the TA, the difficulty of these duties, and the previous experience of the TA. In general, a TA who meets all the above expectations would receive a perfect score in the
course. Failure to meet some expectations would result in a deduction from this score. For example, based on a 100 point scale, potential deductions might include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Penalty</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unexcused absence from lecture</td>
<td>2 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unexcused absence from office hours</td>
<td>5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inadequate or ineffective grading (with failure to correct the issue)</td>
<td>2-5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unprofessional interaction with a student or instructor</td>
<td>2-5 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to keep accurate records</td>
<td>2-10 points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tardiness in completing assigned work (grading, question writing, etc.)</td>
<td>2-5 points/day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Failure to comply with course procedures (e.g., unauthorized handouts, inappropriate assistance during exams)</td>
<td>10+ points</td>
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<tr>
<td>Biased grading</td>
<td>20+ points</td>
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</tbody>
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The TA’s final grade would then be assigned based on the following scale:

- A: 90-100%
- B+: 85-89.9%
- B: 80-84.9%
- C+: 75-79.9%
- C: 70-74.9%
- D: 60-69.9%
- F: 59.9% or below

**Class cancellation policy**

Teaching assistants are expected to be present at lectures, office hours and tutorials as arranged with the course instructor. Cancellation policies for these meetings should be described in the syllabus for the course the TA is supporting. Cancellation of TA-faculty meetings or other events will be handled via direct or electronic communication. All course activities are cancelled if campus is closed.

**Academic Honesty**

As in all courses, a student in this course (i.e., a TA) should not present the work of others as their own or in any other way deceive the course instructor about the nature of the TA’s efforts in the course. Beyond this, however, there are additional dimensions to the concept of academic honesty, as indicated further above.

Teaching assistants may not unfairly aid a student by biased grading of course materials, or by provision of quiz or exam materials before general release, or by altering a grade book or attendance records. Similarly, they may not unfairly harm the grade of a student by biased grading, alteration of records, or withholding of materials provided to other students.

Teaching assistants are also expected to inform the course instructor of any suspected academic dishonesty by either students in the course being TAed or by other TAs. A report should be made as soon as is practical. Supporting evidence, when available, should also be kept and provided to the course instructor. Teaching assistants should not themselves take any formal action in response to suspected academic dishonesty, but instead leave this to the course instructor.

Finally, TAs are bound by the same confidentiality requirements as faculty members with regard to student grades. Student scores and attendance records should not be shared with anyone expect the course instructor(s), and other course TAs with approval of the instructors.