

Policy Title:	Teaching Assistants
Policy Number:	2.1.2
Effective Date:	11/06/2003
Last Revision Date:	03/06/2025
Approved By:	ME Departmental Committee

Policy:

1) JOB DESCRIPTION, BENEFITS, AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- a) The duties typically performed by TAs include attending course lectures of, consulting with, and being trained by, supervising faculty; preparing for and leading classroom/lab sessions; holding regular office hours; grading examinations and other course assignments; maintaining grade book(s); and other supporting instructional duties as defined by the course instructor.
- b) Teaching Assistants (TAs) engage in professional activities of such a nature that the output produced or the result accomplished cannot be precisely measured in relation to a given period of time. In determining the amount of time expected for a TA assignment, consideration is given to such factors as type of instruction, number of students instructed, and all other factors, including those specific to the course or group of courses being taught. Fluctuations above and below the hours reflected in the appointment level are expected, corresponding to individual distinctions such as experience.
- c) The appointment level (33.3%, 50%, etc.) is based on the Department's determination of the amount of time it should normally take to perform the assigned duties including orientation and training. Satisfactory performance of those duties should not require an effort exceeding 360 hours per semester for a 50% appointment and 240 hours per semester for a 33.3% appointment. It is essential that TAs keep their activities within the hours allotted to their appointment percentage. If at any time it appears that this may be a problem, the TA must notify their supervising faculty in a timely fashion so that adjustments can be made. Total TA and grader appointment levels are limited to a 50% appointment or less. Exceptions to this policy can be granted in special cases and require both academic advisor and department chair approval.
- d) TA appointments include a stipend, the amount of which is in proportion to their appointment level, set according to Department and College and Engineering policy. For appointments of 33.5% or greater, medical benefits and tuition remission are included. However, per University policy, accelerated masters and named option students are not eligible for tuition remission regardless of their appointment level. Note that tuition remission does not include any special course or segregated fees.
- e) The supervising faculty has formal responsibility and authority for directing and monitoring the TA's activities. Much of the education progress of our students depends on the quality of the relationship between TAs and faculty. It is the responsibility of all parties to maintain an effective working relationship, but if problems occur that cannot be resolved, it is the responsibility of all parties to inform the (Asst./Assoc.) Chair.
- f) TAs are subject to the University's work rules.

- g) TAs must be graduate students (undergraduate students can be Undergraduate Assistants under certain, limited circumstances).
- h) TAs must facilitate the completion of teaching evaluations in their courses. These evaluations include end of semester evaluations and, per the direction of the course instructor, other evaluation methods. To facilitate completion, TAs should remind their students to fill out the evaluations and, if approved by the supervising instructor, provide time during discussion or lab section to complete the evaluations.
- i) TAs are required to attend College of Engineering and Department training sessions at the beginning of each semester that they teach. Absence must be excused in advance by the Department so that arrangements for alternative training can be made.
- j) Teaching assistants and graders who are assigned to a course(s) that is taught in-person must be present on-campus and capable of delivering their duties in-person. Online or remote TA or grader positions are not permitted.

2) SATISFACTORY PROGRESS FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN MECHANICAL ENGINEERING

- a) Overall grade point average:
 - (i) Masters students must maintain at least a 3.0 grade point average;
 - (ii) Ph.D. students must maintain at least a 3.25 grade point average and obtain approval of their program from the Graduate Committee in a timely manner. (A Ph.D. student is defined as a student who has passed the qualifying exam.)
- b) Enrollment:
 - (i) At least 8 graduate credits per semester if less than 50% time appointment
 - (ii) At least 6 graduate credits per semester if 50% time or greater appointment
 - (iii) 3 graduate credits per semester if a dissertator
 - (iv) At least 2 graduate credits if teaching summer school
- c) Advisor: TAs must have an advisor at all times.
- d) Progress toward degree: Advisor must agree that student is making satisfactory progress with respect to the qualifying exam, preliminary exam and thesis completion.
- e) Fees: All tuition fees must be paid according to University rules.

3) INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS / NON-NATIVE ENGLISH SPEAKERS

- a) International students on F-1 and J-1 Visas are at risk concerning their immigration status if they are employed for more than 20 hours per week during the academic year. This means the sum of an individual international student's TA, PA (Project Assistant), and student hourly help appointments may not exceed 20 hours of work or 50% time per week.
- b) A student who is a non-native speaker of English and is applying for their first teaching assistant position must demonstrate proficiency in spoken English before they are assigned classroom duties as teaching assistants. To demonstrate proficiency, a student must take and

pass the UW Madison SPEAK test. The test is available to enrolled students holding or under consideration for a teaching assistantship. SPEAK tests are offered throughout the year by the University's Program in English as a Second Language. SPEAK test scores cannot be sent to or accepted from other educational institutions. For further information and scheduling, see the UW Madison *English as a Second Language* (ESL) web page. International students who meet one of the criteria below may be exempt from taking the SPEAK test, and may be eligible to teach with no further English language testing requirements, at the discretion of the Department. Criteria for exemption include a score of 26/30 or higher on the speaking section of the iBT TOEFL test or a score of 8.0 or higher in the speaking section of IELTS.

4) TA APPLICATION, GUIDELINES, AND EVALUATION PROCEDURE

- a) After TA openings have been announced (late each semester for positions the following semester), applicants may apply through the Mechanical Engineering Department's *intranet* page (<https://intranet.engineering.wisc.edu/mechanical-engineering/>). Applications must be submitted prior to the announced deadline. In general, only a limited number of teaching assistantships are offered to incoming students.
- b) When evaluating applicants, the (Asst. /Assoc.) Chair of the Department or faculty member designated by the Chair, in consultation with instructing faculty, will consider:
 - (i) Pre-existing contractual commitment, if any (A graduate student with "guaranteed support" will be employed as stipulated in the original letter of appointment unless their graduate record or prior performance as a teaching assistant prove unfavorable.)
 - (ii) Factors relating to the academic mission of the department including the applicant's ability to effectively and safely teach courses, the Department's need for courses, and ensuring that graduate students in the Department have opportunities to obtain experience teaching in their profession.
 - (iii) Demonstrated proficiency in essential technical skills (e.g. welding) may be required in some courses.
 - (iv) Excellent English-speaking abilities and comprehensibility.
 - (v) Academic record, letters of recommendation, previous relevant industrial or teaching experience, record of satisfactory performance.
 - (vi) Satisfactory progress in degree program including grades in graduate course work, status not probationary, satisfactory fulfillment of MS, passing preliminary examinations, becoming dissertator (see Section C below, also see Regulations Governing Graduate Study for deadlines).
 - (vii) Compliance with all applicable University rules and regulations, including good standing in the Graduate School.
 - (viii) To qualify for a teaching assistant position, a graduate student must be enrolled in an academic program in the Department of Mechanical Engineering and/or have a primary research advisor with a 25% or greater faculty appointment in the Department of Mechanical Engineering. Exceptions can be made with department chair approval.
 - (ix) Favored consideration will be given to applicants who have previously taken and excelled in the course(s) for which they have applied.
 - (x) When applicants for a position are equally well qualified, consideration will be given to whether an applicant has available alternative sources of funding.
- c) The Department does not employ a teaching assistant for more than six semesters without

approval, prior to each semester, of the graduate student's advisor, the Graduate Committee of the Department and the (Asst./Assoc.) Chair of the Department.

- d) TAs are evaluated for re-appointment using the following:
 - (i) Numerical ratings by students, as measured by from end of semester course evaluations.
 - (ii) Qualitative comments by students, including comments included in the end of semester course evaluations or through informal channels, including verbal and written comments provided by students.
 - (iii) Written evaluations by supervising faculty.
- e) The Department requires supervising faculty to evaluate inexperienced TAs over the course of the semester. The evaluation may involve a planned visit to a classroom/lab section and a subsequent conference with the TA.
- f) TAs may request assignment to particular courses, and when in the Department's judgment the TA is qualified to teach the course, the course supervisor is agreeable to the assignment, and the department can staff its courses in a manner which it deems satisfactory, the TA's request shall be granted.
- g) The Department will notify appointed TAs of their tentative course assignments, if known, by August 1 for fall semester courses and by December 1 for spring semester courses.
- h) Students offered TA or grader positions will receive an official offer letter sent from the Department office (usually through email). The offer letter must be signed and returned to the Department office within the timeframe specified when the offer is made.
- i) Students wishing to decline an accepted TA or grader position must notify the department office in writing (usually through email). For positions declined within 21 days of the start of the semester, the student's academic advisor must provide a suitable substitute for the vacant position. Unfilled vacancies that result from TA or grader resignations within 21 days of the start of the semester will result in a disqualification from TA and grader positions for a period of two years. Exceptions to this policy can only be made with approval from the Department Chair or their delegates.