Teaching Assistants (TAs) play a very important role in connecting students and instructors. While providing teaching support to instructors, TAs are a key source of help for students. This document provides detailed information about teaching assistantship in the Department of Computer Science.

1. GAT explanation

A GAT (an abbreviation of “Graduate Assistant (Teaching)”) is a unit of teaching assistantship. The GAT assignment to students are determined by the admission committee and award committee based on academic performance, scholarship, progress in the program, and other funding supports. Graduate students in the Department of Computer Science are awarded 0–2 GAT units per academic year. Each full GAT is 204 TA hours, and each half GAT is 102 TA hours. Graduate students should discuss with their supervisor how GAT units should be spread throughout the academic year (over the fall, winter, spring, and summer terms). Since there are a limited number of courses offered in the spring and the summer terms, typically, holders of 2-GAT units use one full GAT unit (204 hours) in each of the fall and winter terms. Holders of 1-GAT units may choose to use half GAT unit (102 hours) in each of the fall and winter terms, but may also choose to use one full GAT unit (204 hours) in either the fall or winter terms.

If you have questions about your GAT awards, please contact the Graduate Program Administrator and Associate Head of Graduate Affairs. For questions about your GAT allocation to courses, please contact the Associate Head of Teaching & Learning.

2. Preparation

It is important that TAs and course instructors prepare all aspects of their course collaboratively and in advance. This section explores several key aspects of preparation.

2.1. Health and safety training

All employees at the University of Calgary have a shared responsibility for maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. Within your first 7 days of employment, you are required to complete a series of online training courses. As a part of the University’s Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS) responsibilities for health and safety have been defined for Employees, Supervisors, Managers, Visitors and Contractors. Please refer to Appendix B for detail instruction.

2.2. Obtaining course materials

After signing the TA contract, each TA may sign out a copy of the course textbook(s) from the Undergraduate Coordinator in the department main office (ICT 602). Textbooks must be returned to the main office by the last day of classes. The course instructors should also provide TAs necessary
materials (such as online resources, lecture slides, additional textbook, research papers) to prepare for the courses.

2.3. Knowing the policies

Academic Misconduct: TAs must report any suspicion of academic misconduct, e.g., plagiarism, to the course instructor(s). The TAs must **NOT** deal with these issues themselves. Instructors may ask TAs to help collect further evidence. The instructors should work with the department to deal with the issues of academic misconduct according to university policy. Should you have any questions about this, please contact Associate Head of Teaching & Learning.

FOIP: The Freedom of Privacy and Information (FOIP) Act has been in place at the University since September 1, 1999. All student coursework and grading information must be returned directly to the intended student either in person or in a student account (on any online system). The course work should also be kept in a safe place with only authorized access. It is **NOT ACCEPTABLE** to let students go through a pile of graded work to collect their own or to have access to other student work in any way.

Conflict of Interest: TAs may **NOT** tutor for a FEE those students that are registered in their tutorials. This is a Conflict of Interest. TAs should **NOT** make friends, flirt, date, or party with students. TAs should avoid having their friends in their class. It is best to transfer the friends to another TA to prevent a conflict of interest. However, TAs should still be polite and approachable to their students.

Copyright: Copyright-protected materials (including course notes, assignments, quizzes and presentations) provide by the instructors is for personal use only and can be shared provided it is permissible to do so under Canadian Copyright Law, university agreements and permission from the copyright holder. More information about this can be found at [https://ucalgary.ca/provost/copyright_update](https://ucalgary.ca/provost/copyright_update).

2.4. Familiarizing with department and course environment

Computer labs: Most tutorials and labs for 200- and 300-level courses are conducted in one of the rooms in the CPSC main lab located on the first floor of MS building. It is the TAs’ responsibility to familiarize themselves with the lab setting. All TAs must set up a CPSC account in order to use the department computing facilities. For any technical and account issues, please contact Faculty of Science Help Desk ([https://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/tech](https://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/tech)). The help desk in MS 151 in the main lab will be closed in the W19 term. For IT issues, please go to UCIT on the 7th floor of MS. If you have urgent issues while conducting tutorials, please visit MS 145.

Course website: Most instructors manage course materials online, mostly through a regular course website or an online learning system (D2L at U of C). Advanced learning systems such as D2L provide modules to handle quizzes, assignment submissions and marking, group work management, and more. Instructors should point TAs to the course website and inform TAs about the set of modules used for the course. It is the TAs’ responsibility to familiarize themselves with and regularly check the course website throughout the term. TAs should report any problem they encounter on the course website to the course instructor(s).

Assignment boxes: Some courses accept only assignment submission in paper form. Assignment boxes on the 2nd floor of the Mathematical Sciences building (in the open area by the elevator) will
be setup for these courses. Please see the Undergraduate Coordinator in the main office to obtain the key and the procedure to access the assignment boxes.

2.5. Being competent
It is the TAs’ responsibility to prepare themselves with required (teaching, technical, and language) skills for TAing their assigned courses, and to continuously improve their skills over time. Incompetence will result in being removed from the position at the risk of losing GAT funding. Contact the course instructor if you need guidance or resources to gain such competence.

Teaching: TAs must demonstrate adequate presentation skills, including being organized and able to use appropriate visuals to present tutorial/lab materials. TAs must also have adequate language and interaction skills to understand and respond to student queries. The Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning (http://ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/) offers seminars and courses for TAs throughout the year. Our department also offer TAiR support (see Sec. 5) for all TAs.

Technical: Instructors must inform TAs of the programming language, tools, and software used in the course. It is the TAs’ responsibility to prepare themselves to meet the technical requirement in order to be competent to TA the course. TAs should seek help and communicate with the instructors if they encounter difficulties.

Language: TAs are expected to communicate in English fluently. TAs not demonstrating satisfactory language skills may be removed from the position at the risk of losing GAT funding. Please see the department guideline “Graduate Students with Language Problems” for details (http://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/files/cpsc/guideline_language_problems_feb_2005.pdf).

3. Main duties
TA duties may vary from course to course. Below are common duties for most courses. Please refer to the TA contract for the actual duties for individual courses. The TA contract should be prepared by the course instructor(s) and should be reviewed by the course instructor(s) and TAs in their first meeting at the beginning of the term. It is the responsibility of the course instructor(s) to ensure that the TA contract reflects real duties and expected hours of commitment for the course. It is the responsibility of the TA(s) to fulfil the duties within the expected hours upon signing the contract.

3.1. Lectures
Instructors who adopt the flipped-classroom model, may require TAs to attend some or all of the lectures. The schedule and the preparation materials (such as guidelines, exercise questions, and solutions) should be provided by the instructor. TAs are responsible to study the materials, be prepared to answer questions, and to attend the lecture.

3.2. Labs/Tutorials
Instructors are responsible for providing lesson plan for tutorial sessions prior to each tutorial session. Sample lesson plan can be found at: , In addition to the lesson plan, instructors may also provide TAs with exercise questions, solutions, and any necessary materials to prepare for the tutorial. It is the responsibility of the TA(s) to study the materials and be competent within the course domain. TAs should come to tutorials/labs prepared, and are expected cover the material outlined by the instructor. TAs are not required to cover additional material in labs, but if they choose to, this material must first be approved by the instructor. For example, if a TA wishes to
present material from a previous course exam during a tutorial, he/she must first seek for approval from the instructor.

3.3. Assignment support
When releasing an assignment, instructors should provide TAs with necessary materials (e.g., complete or partial solutions) and information (e.g., marking rubric) to ensure they are prepared to properly assist students with the assignment. TAs are responsible for studying the materials and preparing to be competent to help students on the assignment. In the meantime, TAs are responsible for not disclosing solutions and for ensuring fairness in the level of support provided to individual students.

3.4. Assignment and Exam marking
Overall, course instructors are responsible for evaluating a minimum of 50% of the course materials.

After each assignment submission deadline, instructors should provide TAs with solutions and detailed marking guidelines, as well as a definite deadline for returning the grade. TAs are responsible to mark the submissions legitimately and fairly according to the guideline by the grading deadline.

TAs may be asked to assist in marking exams. It is the responsibility of the course instructor(s) to provide solutions and marking guidelines, and to ensure that the marking is done legitimately and fairly. It is recommended that exam marking be supervised by the instructor at all times to ensure that marking is done consistently and thoroughly.

3.5. Exam invigilation
TAs may be asked to help with the invigilation of midterm and/or final exams, especially for courses with large enrollments. Instructors should provide TAs further instructions on this.

3.6. Course development
TAs may be asked to develop course materials such as assignments and exercises as long as it is clearly defined in the TA contract.

3.7. Student contact:
TAs may be asked to assist students with their needs outside the classroom. This may be in the form of office hours, email, or an online discussion board (such as the D2L discussion board or Piazza). TAs may ask the department for access to a quiet and private room for their office hours so that their lab mates will not be disturbed by frequent student visits. Instructors are responsible to ensure sufficient TA hours are allocated prior to assignment deadlines.

3.8. Communicating with instructor(s) of record
At the beginning of a term, instructors and TAs should discuss the form (e.g., in-person meeting or email updates) and frequency (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly) of their communication channel. It is important to establish a good communication channel for effective teamwork.

3.9. Other duties
Instructors may ask TAs to perform other course-related duties in addition to those described above as long as the duties fall within the scope of the TA contract. For duties outside the scope of the TA contract, instructors must seek department approval first.
4. Managing TA duties
TAships provide students with opportunities to enhance their technical skills and to develop communication skills, teamwork skills, interpersonal skills, and leadership skills. These are all essential skills that employers look for. Excellence in TA performance can earn students awards and other teaching-related positions. However, TAship may be demanding and hard to manage alongside busy academic and research agenda. This section provides tips and resources for common challenges.

4.1. Acquiring required skills and knowledge
All graduate students are expected to be competent to TA any 200- and 300-level undergraduate course. Please review the TA contract carefully and openly discuss your concerns about competency and job requirements with the course instructor(s). Signing the TA contract implies that the TA agrees to be competent (having adequate technical and teaching skills) for the position. It is the responsibility of the TA(s) to remain competent throughout the term. Extra effort (e.g., brushing up on a programming language or fundamental concepts in the course domain) and time spent towards ensuring one’s competency for the position should not be counted against the TA hours. TAs are highly encouraged to communicate with instructors to clear the expectations and be prepared for the course.

4.2. Balancing course work, research, and TA duties
TAs often find it to be challenging to balance course work, research, and TA duties. Thus, it is essential to be competent for TAing the course so that duties may be completed within the designated hours. Treat the hours defined in your contract as a “data plan” similar to what you probably have with your cell phone provider. When the time needed to fulfil a specific duty becomes a concern, keep accurate track of your hours and be fair. Please keep the instructors regularly appraised of how many hours you have used and how many hours remain in the contract. Instructors and TAs may review the duty in concern and seek for a resolution. After all, each half GAT is only 102 hours, which is an average of about 7–8 hours per week.

In case of scheduling conflicts between TA duties and other academic or research commitment (e.g., course exam and conference travel), TAs must communicate the matter with instructors well in advance. The instructor(s) and TA(s) may work together towards a solution. It is not acceptable to leave the duty without notifying with the instructors.

4.3. Managing Emails
Email and online support may be very time consuming and not as effective as in-person communication, especially when it comes to diagnosing a program. TAs may easily go over their contract hours when trying to address all questions via email. It is recommended to address only quick questions via email, common questions in online discussion boards, and leave others to contact hours (including tutorials, office hours, or appointments).

4.4. Communicating with instructors
It is important to establish a good communication channel for effective teamwork. Please be open to the instructor and seek their advice when encountering problems. It is better to discuss the concerns and issues openly instead of ignoring them.

4.5. Engaging with students
Teaching and interacting with students can be a rewarding experience. However, sometimes conflicts can occur – especially over assigned marks. If a student requests a reappraisal of a mark, use the rule of sober second thought. Offer to take a second look at the item in question and see if the assigned mark reflects the sober second thought. If it does, confidently communicate to the student that the mark is a fair assessment, and explain why and where she/he lost the marks. Most students will politely accept this and move on. If the student still disagrees, refer the matter to the instructor. Remember that verbal abuse is not acceptable under any circumstances, and report any instances to the instructor.

4.6. Grading
Before evaluating an assignment or exam, it is important to have a clear understanding of learning objectives covered and key points for written questions. The course instructors are responsible for providing solutions and grading guidelines. Do not be afraid to consult with the instructor at any and all stages of the marking. Below are few useful tips:

- Be fair and consistent.
- Provide clear and constructive written comments. Good comments can be effective at reducing regrading requests.
- Communicate with the instructor(s) and other TAs from the same course for better consistency.
- Honour the grading deadline. Notify the instructor(s) of any challenges in meeting the deadline as early as possible.
- Follow the marketing rubrics and clarify with the instructor(s) when in doubt.
- The instructor has to be available to answer questions in a timely manner.
- Be open-minded when grading. There might be more than one approach to the question. Carefully review the entire answer and try to follow their logic. After all, looking for points to reward instead of points to deduct, results in feedback that appears to be more assuring and encouraging. Grading is one of the main criticisms students have about university courses — harsh grading can make the course seem like a weeding-out rather than an intellectual exercise.

4.7. Managing conflicts
Occasional situations occur in which the instructor(s) may be in breach of contract. This is almost always not intentional on the part of the instructor(s). The following are examples, which may or may not be reasonable requests:
- The TA is asked to stay in the lab beyond the contact hours;
- The TA is asked to grade material from another course;
- The TA is asked to assist with research activities or personal tasks of the instructor.

It is always best to be open and gently remind the instructor of the situation. If the conflict cannot be resolved at this level, either party may report the problem to the Associate Head of Graduate Affairs (see 4.8).

4.8. Reporting problems
Throughout the term, if either the instructors or TAs note mismatches between the contract and the TA performance, they should discuss and try to resolve the issues immediately. When resolution is not possible, either party may file a report by submitting a Ta/Instructor Problem Report (http://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/files/cpsc/ta_problem_report_form.pdf) to the Associate Head of Graduate Affairs.
5. Supports for TAs

The TA in Residence (TAiR) is a dedicated TA role for providing confidential mentorship and training to TAs. Throughout the term, the TAiR provides the following supports to TAs:

- TA workshop: This is a 2-hour workshop providing essential TA training. It is highly recommended for first-time TAs. Other TAs are also welcome at the workshop.
- Tutorial observation and feedback: The TAiR will visit selected tutorials throughout the term. He/She will observe the tutorial and provide feedback to TAs. TAs may also request the observation. All results from such observations remain confidential between the TAiR and the TA.
- Experience Share Program (ESP): This is a series of 1-hour sessions for TAs to share their experience and to support each other. TA award holders may be invited to the session to provide advices.
- Office hours: TAiR offers office hours to provide one-on-one consultation for TAs.

TAs, especially new TAs are encouraged to track their TA hours and concerns and discuss them with TAiR as early as possible.

Both the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning (http://ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/) and the Faculty of Graduate Studies (https://grad.ucalgary.ca/current/student-services) provide many useful seminars and workshops on teaching and managing graduate studies.

6. TA evaluation

The purpose of the TA evaluation is to provide TA feedback for improvement as well as reference for award selection. This section states the departmental policy for TA evaluations.

6.1. Evaluation methods

The purpose of the TA evaluation is to provide TA feedback for improvement as well as reference for award selection. This section states the departmental policy for TA evaluations.

TAs will be formally evaluated by:

- **Student Evaluations:** students are requested to complete a TA Evaluation Form for each of their courses, near the end of each term.
- **Instructor Evaluations:** instructors will submit a performance report for each of their TAs at the end of each term.
- **Problem Reports:** Instructors and the TA will jointly fill out TA/Instructor Problem Reports (see 4.8) as needed throughout the term. An instructor uses this form to identify an issue with a TA and conversely the TA can identify issues with the instructor.

Informal evaluations will be sought as necessary. This may include any of the following:

- Soliciting detailed comments from instructors and/or TAs
- Asking the TA’s students for comments on performance
- Assigning a selected evaluator to observe the TA and report on performance

6.2. Evaluation outcomes

The formal evaluation results are used to:

- Help select nominations for TA performance awards
- Help identify excellent TAs as mentors and coaches for new TAs
• Help identify TAs who performance needs to improve and what kinds of remedial actions may be appropriate
• Provide written documentation to support the evaluation of unsatisfactory performance

Recognizing Excellent Performance: Excellent TA performance is recognized through TA awards every year. The formal evaluation results will be used to identify nominees for TA awards and candidates for TAiR position.

Dealing with Unsatisfactory Performance: In the event that an instructor feels a TA is not performing their duties, the instructor must first discuss the issue with the TA and they should together fill out a TA/Instructor Problem Report. If the issue remains unresolved, the instructor may request the intervention of the Associate Head of Graduate Affairs by providing he reports documenting the issue and attempted resolutions.

Consequences of Unsatisfactory Performance: The Associate Head of Graduate Affairs will deal with unsatisfactory TA performance either due to poor summary evaluations or due to issues raised through Problem Reports. The Associate Head will discuss the issue with the TA and record the issue in the TA’s record. In addition, the Associate Head may deal with the problem in one or more of the following ways:

• Replacing TA duties with a requirement to successfully complete specified training chosen to improve teaching and communication skills. For example:
  • Taking English courses
  • Taking teaching courses or seminars
  • Apprenticing as a TA
  • Working with a mentor
• Reassignment of the TA to a different course
• Reassignment of the TA to other duties
• Suspension of TA duties and termination of remuneration

The TA will normally be given a second chance at a further term of TA duties, but in the event that the TA’s performance is again unsatisfactory, TA duties and TA remuneration will be revoked.
Appendix A:

Key contacts:
Graduate Program Administrator: Maryam Salamati <msalamat@ucalgary.ca>, ICT 602
Associate Head of Graduate Affairs: Dr. Faramarz Famil Samavati <samavati@ucalgary.ca>, ICT 602
Associate Head for Teaching & Learning: Dr. Jalal Kawash <jkawash@ucalgary.ca>, ICT 706
Assistant Head for Academic Integrity: Dr. Nelson Wong <nelson@cpsc.ucalgary.ca>, ICT 702
Undergraduate Coordinator: Katie Cummings <cummingc@ucalgary.ca>, ICT 602
TA in Residence: Arkady Eidelberg <aeidelbe@ucalgary.ca>
Appendix B: Letter from Faculty of Science

Welcome to the Faculty of Science.

All employees at the University of Calgary have a shared responsibility for maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. Within your first 7 days of employment, you are required to complete a series of online training courses. These courses will orient you with the policies and procedures needed for your employment.

As a part of the University’s Occupational Health and Safety Management System (OHSMS) responsibilities for health and safety have been defined for Employees, Supervisors, Managers, Visitors and Contractors. These responsibilities can be found on the Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) website under the “Your Responsibility” tab: http://www.ucalgary.ca/safety/organizationalcommitment

Completion of EHS training is required by all employees of the University of Calgary. Employee means an individual who is a worker as defined under the OHS Act and includes both University employees and non-employees such as post-doctoral scholars and students who are performing work on behalf of the University or their instructor. To ensure all new hires know their rights and responsibilities for maintaining a safe and healthy work environment, individuals will automatically be enrolled into the most current version of two University mandated courses:

- Occupational Health & Safety Orientation
- Hazard Assessment Training

Further required EHS training has been identified by the Faculty of Science due to our proximity to higher risk locations such as chemical and bio-containment laboratories. This includes:

- Incident Reporting and Investigation Training
- WHMIS 2015

Further training requirements will be identified on your job specific Hazard Assessment and Control Form (HACF). This document should be provided by your Supervisor and reviewed in your first week of work and all required online courses should be completed within your first week of work. Required in-class courses should be taken as soon as possible based on course availability.

A full listing of available EHS training with direct links to registration can be found on the EHS website under the “Training” tab: http://www.ucalgary.ca/safety/courses

Once registered, you will be able to access your online learning through the “My U of C” portal under the tab pathway: MyWork / Direct Access / PS Enterprise Learning. Further instructions for registration, accessing, and launching your online learning can be found on the EHS website under the training tab.

Once training is complete, you will be able to access and print your certificates of completion directly from the PS Enterprise Learning system. You should also be recording completion of courses and document review on a “Site Specific Health & Safety Orientation Checklist” or “Laboratory – Orientation and Training Record”. This can be found on the WHS Website under the Training tab. Your Supervisor will need a copy of this document for their records.

The Environmental Health and Safety team works collaboratively with University of Calgary clients and stakeholders to promote environmental health and safety strategies and systems. We foster a safe working, learning and research environment through the provision of consultative, educational and
evaluation services. Should you have any questions, please contact Molly Chisholm, RVT, RMLAT | OHS Partner, Faculty of Science | Environmental Health and Safety | T: 403-220-3278 | C: 403-880-1600 | mchishol@ucalgary.ca | calgary.ca/safety.

The University of Calgary is a leading Canadian university located in the nation’s most enterprising city. The university has a clear strategic direction to become one of Canada’s top five research universities by 2016, where research and innovative teaching go hand in hand, and where we fully engage the communities we both serve and lead. This strategy is called Eyes High, inspired by the university’s Gaelic motto, which translates as ‘I will lift up my eyes.’ For more information, visit ucalgary.ca.
Key events and resources (to be updated for each term)

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<td>Aug 27</td>
<td>2pm – 4pm</td>
<td>ICT 516</td>
<td>CPSC TA Orientation</td>
<td>Dr. Mea Wang (Associate Head of Undergrad Affairs)</td>
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<td>Aug 28</td>
<td>2pm – 4pm</td>
<td>ICT 516</td>
<td>CPSC TA Workshop</td>
<td>Henrique Pereira (TAiR)</td>
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Other important resources:
- GSA Collective Agreement: [http://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/files/hr/gsa-ca.pdf](http://www.ucalgary.ca/hr/files/hr/gsa-ca.pdf)
- CPSC Graduate Policies and Forms: [http://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/graduate/current_students/academics/policies](http://www.ucalgary.ca/cpsc/graduate/current_students/academics/policies)