Teaching Assistants DOs & DON’Ts

WHEN DEALING WITH STUDENTS:

Don’t get stuck believing there is only one right way to approach an assignment, or one correct perspective.

Don’t give a lot of criticism, especially negative criticism. Do provide a lot of constructive feedback. Praise good work and honest effort.

Don’t isolate yourself. Do increase your availability. Be accessible. Give students your undivided attention when they come by during office hours (mail can wait and you can ignore the phone). Make sure you show up on time for your scheduled office hours, and stay for the entire scheduled period.

Don’t wait until a big project is completed or a major paper is written to give your students feedback. Do check on progress early and regularly.

Don’t expect students to perform poorly, but if they do, don’t assume that they are stupid or “shouldn’t be in the university”. Do believe in your students’ competence and work with them. Students will live up - or down - to your expectations.

Don’t fail to make your expectations and deadlines clear. Do remember that communication is important. To be most effective, communication needs to be two-way.

Don’t wait until the end of the quarter to evaluate your students’ progress. Do evaluate information on a regular basis throughout the quarter. Find the areas in which they are having difficulties while you still have time to help them with their problems.

Don’t be autocratic. Do get student input. Ask for suggestions. Find out what their concerns are. Welcome student contributions to the course curriculum.

Don’t make unreasonable or insensitive demands. Do provide your students with ample time, information, and resources to complete assigned tasks.

WHEN DEALING WITH SUPERVISORS

Don’t work in the dark. Do check with your supervisor. Make sure you understand your supervisor’s expectations, priorities, deadlines, etc.

Don’t be too proud (or timid) to ask for help when you need it. Do try to determine where and why you are having difficulties.

Don’t expect your supervisor to read your mind. Don’t assume he or she is aware of problems in the sections to which you have been assigned. Do communicate. Let your supervisor know about your potential problems and areas in which there are difficulties. Ask for help when needed.

Don’t accept assignments that are beyond your abilities, or that you consider to be unfair. Don’t try to do the impossible (you’ll fail) or ignore stress signals. Do let your supervisor know when you’re feeling overloaded. Inform your supervisor when you feel incapable or unqualified to perform a given assignment. Ask for help. Look for ways to simplify tasks or to work more efficiently.

Don’t think you have to like everyone in order to work well with them. Do accept differences in personality and workstyle; cooperate.

Don’t let yourself become bored or unchallenged. Do take the initiative. Find ways to improve your teaching. Assist your fellow TAs. Look for ways to enhance the course.

Additional Suggestions

Use other side if necessary