ANATOMY

of a 20-hour-a-week teaching assistant appointment

If you’ve never been a TA, it may be hard to imagine exactly what you’ve signed on for. It's easy to think you’re getting paid for more than you’re doing – but believe us, YOU’RE NOT! By the end of the semester, a conscientious TA will have earned every penny of his or her stipend. Here’s a look at how. (Keep in mind these numbers are averages – no single TA will have exactly this experience.)

Semester Length and Total Work Hours

♦ Most semesters are 13 to 15 weeks long. 15 weeks makes for easy math, so let’s start there.
♦ 15 weeks X 20 hours a week = 300 total work hours a semester

The Average Week

♦ 20 hours a week breaks down like this:

+ 3 hours actual class time
+ 2 hours office hours
+ 5 hours preparation (including processing notes, reading, lesson planning for sections)

= 10 hours EVERY WEEK

♦ Which leaves extra hours for course exams/assignments:

◇ 10 hours a week to add to your EXAM/ASSIGNMENT EXTRA HOURS POOL
◇ 10 hours x 15 weeks = 150 hours exam/assignment extra hours for the semester
◇ Most classes have some combination of 3 major exams and graded assignments, so divide 150 hours by 3 = **50 hours per exam/assignment**

50 Hours for Each Major Exam/Assignment

♦ Which breaks down like this:

+ 6 extra office hours/appointments with students prior to the exam
+ 6 extra office hours/appointments after the exam
+ 38 hours grading, including:
  ◇ 3 hours to consult with the professor and fellow TAs to ensure consistency in grading
  ◇ 2 hours to record grades
  ◇ 33 hours for actual grading of each assignment

= 50 total hours

♦ Sounds like a lot, no? Once again, break it down the 33 hours (1,980 minutes):

◇ if you have 60 students, you’re talking 33 minutes per exam
◇ if you have 80 students, about 25 minutes per exam
◇ if you have 100 students, about 20 minutes per exam

◇ Eventually, you will get to the point where you can grade and provide constructive comments on three multi-page essays in 25 minutes, but it takes practice and experience.

♦ Be honest with yourself, your fellow TA’s and the professor you work with about how much time it’s taking you to fulfill your responsibilities. Ask for help if you need it.

Document Version: June 22, 2004