



# **DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMICS**

**2023 - 2024**

## **Guidelines for Teaching Assistants**

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## Hours of Work, Workload Forms and Salary Rates

A full teaching assistantship consists of 180 hours of work per term (an average of 12 hours per week). Work may begin prior to the academic term and may continue beyond the end of the academic term. The distribution of work will vary depending on the structure and the requirements of each undergraduate course. Your responsibilities will typically include the following: attending class lectures, meeting with the course instructor, preparing for and conducting student conference sections, holding office hours, and grading written assignments, mid-terms and/or final exams. Although a full teaching assistantship works out to an average of 12 hours per week, it is typical that your work hours will be unevenly distributed throughout a term, with grading of papers and exams constituting especially time-intensive work periods. You should anticipate an increase in your workload with grading responsibilities during the mid-term and final examination period.

At the start of the course, professors and their teaching assistants must meet together to complete a workload form detailing the distribution of work for that particular course. This workload form is important in that it clarifies in writing the responsibilities of the teaching assistant. The completion of the form is required as laid out in the Collective Agreement between the University and the Association of Graduate Students Employed at McGill (AGSEM), and it aims at protecting TAs and minimizing any potential misunderstanding between the TA and the professor.

The Workload Form is found at:

[https://mcgill.ca/economics/files/economics/teaching\\_assistant\\_workload\\_formenglish\\_version\\_feb\\_2012.pdf](https://mcgill.ca/economics/files/economics/teaching_assistant_workload_formenglish_version_feb_2012.pdf) . The form is to be completed by the Course Supervisor by the end of the drop/add period. One copy of the completed form is to be retained by the TA, another by the Course Supervisor, and a third to be submitted to the Department administration.

### Salary Rates:

For 2023-2024 **\$33.03/hr** (180 hours = \$5,945.40) (90 hours = \$2,972.70)

Rates of pay include 6% vacation pay and 3.6% statutory holiday compensation.

Below are typical tasks expected of TAs. The specific tasks required will be agreed upon with the professors when completing the workload form.

### **Office Hours**

In the interest of providing assistance and clarification to undergraduate students when needed, TAs are expected to hold office hours for 1-2 hours per week. Space will be provided for this purpose and **you should notify students on the first day of class** where and when you will be available. Cubicle space will be available on the 1<sup>st</sup> Floor of the Leacock Building, in LEA 112; please sign up for timeslots electronically at the start of term (follow instructions that will be circulated) or sign up directly on the schedule that is posted to each cubicle door after the cut-off date for electronic sign-up.

Professors will also schedule office hours for the same purpose.

### **Attendance at Class Lectures**

If the TA is not sufficiently familiar with the course material and the professor's style, it is a good idea to attend the lectures regularly. Your grading and conference tasks will be easier if you have heard the lectures. If you have an occasional conflict, it is wise to keep the professor informed. New TAs should always attend lectures. Whether you attend or not should be confirmed with the professor.

### **Weekly Meetings with the Professor**

Each professor usually meets with their TA(s) for the purpose of setting guidelines, establishing the grading procedures, and discussing the topics/material for Conference sections. These meetings also provide an opportunity for you to discuss any concerns or difficulties you may have. You may also ask that your professor provide written guidelines, especially for grading course exams, papers and projects.

### **Conference Sections**

The purpose of conference sections is to clarify reading material or assignments, work on problem sets given in class, and to give undergraduates an opportunity for discussion, which may not be possible in larger courses. Professors will provide guidelines and topics for these conference sections.

TAs are expected to be familiar with the course reading material, the lecture material, and be prepared to discuss this material with the students in each section. You may have to spend some time in the library with reading material on reserve or with books provided by the professor. We are aware that your first few conference sections may be a source of anxiety. It is helpful to remember that if you cannot answer a student's question, you can promise to answer it at the next meeting. The more familiar you are with the course reading material, the easier your task as a TA will be. Generally, the Department tries to assign TAs to courses in which they have a demonstrated competence and some familiarity with the literature, but sometimes the gap

between the number of TAs available in a given field and the undergraduate course enrolments may make it difficult to achieve this matching.

During your conference sections, you should try to lead a discussion rather than give a lecture. If you bear in mind that your primary purpose is to help a professor in offering a course as effectively as possible to undergraduate students, you will find your task both easier and more enjoyable.

### **Suggestions for Running a Successful Conference:**

#### ***Be professional***

- Students take their cue from *your* behaviour
  - Be on time
  - Learn their names (for instance by asking everybody to introduce themselves at the beginning of each session).
  - Show an interest in the material *and* in them (if you don't care, neither will they)

#### ***Facilitate discussion***

- Prepare questions ahead of time (5-7 should be enough)
  - Ask open-ended questions that prompt discussion (avoid 'yes/no' – 'either/or' type of questions)
  - Allow a 'wait time' for their response (be prepared for stretches of silence)
  - Find something constructive in their answers (if you continually respond negatively, they'll stop participating)
  - Don't 'interrogate' them (avoid follow up questions which potentially embarrass the student)
  - Don't 'bluff' them (if you don't know something, that's okay – follow up on it at the beginning of the next conference)
  - Use the chalkboard (visual aids facilitate participation, and keep you from 'hiding' behind the lectern)
  - Don't over-manage the discussion (allow the discussion to go places you didn't anticipate – you can always steer it back on topic)
  - Be attentive to non-verbal signs (for confusion or boredom)
  - Always address the students (avoid talking to your notes; the chalkboard; or staring blankly into the distance)

#### ***Your first conference***

- Introduce yourself (be personable) and ask them to introduce themselves
- Speak slowly and have a drink to sip on (to break the pace if you start going too fast)
- Outline expectations (review the syllabus regarding conference marks/participation, especially if there will eventually be presentations)
- Solicit questions (but have your own as well)
  - As an icebreaker, ask a question for which there is no single correct answer and go around the room with it

- Check the time inconspicuously (remove your watch and place it in front of you)
- Check the audiovisual system beforehand, to avoid any technical issues on the day

### ***Keep records of everything***

- Keep a back-up record of all grades, attendance sheets, etc. – do not simply pass on the grades to the professor and think you're done (students can ask for grades to be reviewed up to a *year* later)
- Keep track of course policy. If a student asks for clarification on a policy (late submissions, missed conferences, re-grading procedure, etc.) and you are unsure, tell the student you will get back to them and consult with the course instructor or fellow TA. Always be consistent when applying policy.
- Documentation is important. Save correspondence related to your TAship, and keep a separate file for emails that relate to a specific situation such as a regrade request, missed assignment, claim of harassment, etc. If you meet with a student, colleague, or supervisor, take note of the date, time, and location of the meeting, and of what was discussed, any conflicts that may have arisen, and how the situation was resolved.

If you have any students in your conference sections who have inadequate language skills or who need assistance with writing skills or exam preparation, the McLennan Library offers undergraduate workshops on conducting research as well as on writing essays and term papers. Students should go to the information desk in the McLennan Library for more information.

If you have a student in your conference section with a learning disability, you should refer the student to the professor. The Office for Students with Disabilities (514-398-6009) can provide information, tutoring services and technical assistance.

### **Grading Exams**

Most TAs will have mid-terms and final exams plus essays, term papers, or projects to grade. McGill's credit and grading system is explained in the undergraduate program calendar, which you should read – you can find it at [https://mcgill.ca/study/2023-2024/university\\_regulations\\_and\\_resources/undergraduate/gi\\_grading\\_and\\_grade\\_point\\_averages](https://mcgill.ca/study/2023-2024/university_regulations_and_resources/undergraduate/gi_grading_and_grade_point_averages) . Within the framework of this system, professors set grading policy and standards for each course, and will also review the grades assigned. The professor should discuss the exam or assignment with you and should indicate what constitutes a model answer. If you have any doubts with respect to the professor's expectations, you should seek clarification. The professor retains the ultimate responsibility for assigning the grades in any given course and cannot delegate that to a TA. Therefore, professors may reserve the right to overrule a TA grading decision in the case of a student's request for re-evaluation, and must submit the grades (via Minerva) required by the University. TAs will naturally be involved in the calculation of grades that are entered on Minerva by the professor.

## Letter Grades at McGill

When a course is graded numerically, letter grades are assigned as follows for the purpose of calculations of grade point averages (only letter grades appear on the student's transcript):

Grade	Grade point	Percentages
A	4.0	85 – 100%
A-	3.7	80 - 84%
B+	3.3	75 - 79%
B	3.0	70 - 74%
B-	2.7	65 - 69%
C+	2.3	60 - 64%
C	2.0	55 - 59%
D (Conditional Pass)	1.0	50 - 54%
F (Fail)	0	0 - 49%

Grading and Grade Point Averages (GPA): Other Grades	
<b>J:</b>	Unexcused absence (failed); the student is registered for a course but does not write the final examination or do other required work; calculated as a failure in the TGPA and CGPA
<b>K:</b>	Incomplete; deadline extended for submission of work in a course
<b>KE or K*:</b>	Further extension granted
<b>KF:</b>	Failed to meet the extended deadline for submission of work in a course; calculated as a failure in TGPA and CGPA
<b>KK:</b>	Completion requirement waived; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA
<b>L:</b>	Deferred examination
<b>LE or L*:</b>	Permitted to defer examination for more than the normal period
<b>NR:</b>	No grade reported by the instructor (recorded by the Registrar)
<b>P:</b>	Pass; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA
<b>Q:</b>	Course continued in next term (applicable only to courses taken pre-Fall 2002)
<b>S:</b>	Satisfactory; equivalent to C or better in an elective course; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA See <a href="#">Courses Taken under the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) Option</a>
<b>U:</b>	Unsatisfactory; equivalent to D or F in an elective course; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA See <a href="#">Courses Taken under the Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) Option</a>
<b>W:</b>	Withdrew; a course dropped, with permission, after the Course Change deadline; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA

<b>WF:</b>	Withdrew failing; a course dropped, with special permission in an exceptional case, after faculty deadline for withdrawal from course, the student's performance in the course at that stage being on the level of an F; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA (Not used by Music.)
<b>WL:</b>	Faculty permission to withdraw from a deferred examination; not calculated in TGPA or CGPA
<b>NA or &amp;&amp;:</b>	Grade not yet available
<b>W- - or - -:</b>	No grade; student withdrew from the University, not calculated in TGPA or CGPA

For more information on these, please go to <https://www.mcgill.ca/oasis/academic/exams-evaluations/evaluations-and-grading> .



## Responding to the needs of Undergraduate Students

As a TA you will probably encounter a few difficult situations each semester. Official policies, reporting structures, and support programs are in place within both the Department and the University to help you and your students manage these situations. A number of resources are listed below.

### **1) Student Services**

<http://www.mcgill.ca/studentservices/>

Contact List: <http://www.mcgill.ca/studentservices/contact>

Brown Building, Suite 4100

514-398-8238

Student Services is available to full- or part-time undergraduate and graduate students who have paid tuition fees for the current session. The services and workshops offered cover a wide range of issues, from academic and professional support, to services specifically designed to address the needs of students in a variety of life circumstances. For a complete list of programs and services available to you and your students please see their website.

### **2) Student Wellness Hub**

<https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>

Email: [hub.clinic@mcgill.ca](mailto:hub.clinic@mcgill.ca)

Brown Building, Suite 4200

514-398-6017

The Wellness Hub offers support to undergraduate and graduate students for a wide range of academic, life-skill, psychological and vocational issues. Information shared in counselling is strictly confidential, released only with the student's written permission or if required by law. Students have access to immediate problem-solving, ongoing therapy and guided development.

### **3) Scholarships and Student Aid**

<http://www.mcgill.ca/studentaid/>

Email: [studentaid@mcgill.ca](mailto:studentaid@mcgill.ca)

Brown Building, Suite 3200

514-398-6013

Student Aid offers a variety of support services and financial options for students. Services offered by Student Aid focus on locating sources of funding, managing money and emergency financial support.

#### **4) Student Accessibility & Achievement**

<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>

Email: [access.achieve@mcgill.ca](mailto:access.achieve@mcgill.ca)

1010 Sherbrooke Ouest, Suite 410 (4<sup>th</sup> floor)

514-398-6009

Services provided by Student Accessibility & Achievement include learning supports, help with issues of accessibility (including classroom supports and access technologies to facilitate students work in lecture, with readings, etc.), and short- and long-term academic planning.

#### **5) Tutorial Services**

<http://www.mcgill.ca/tutoring>

Email: [tutoring.service@mcgill.ca](mailto:tutoring.service@mcgill.ca)

Brown Building, Suite 4200

514-398-6011

Whether you are having difficulty in a given subject, require assistance preparing for exams, or need a paper proof-read, their qualified tutors are there to help. The Tutorial Service is a peer tutoring service that matches your request for academic assistance with a qualified student selected from our bank of private tutors.

### **Plagiarism and Cheating**

Teaching Assistants should familiarize themselves with “Keeping it honest” <http://www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/>, a suite of policies and resources on academic integrity. If you encounter work that you suspect is plagiarised you should contact the course instructor and submit the work to them. According to Article 48 of the McGill Student Code of Conduct, course instructors do not have the authority to impose penalties for plagiarism or other violations of the Code. The course instructor has an obligation to report the case directly to the Faculty of Arts. You may need to write a letter and/or provide other documentation in order to explain the incident and provide evidence.

You can provide students with a style guide; go through examples of paraphrasing, footnoting, etc.; remind students of what constitutes plagiarism; inform your students of the process and consequences of plagiarism.

### **Sexual Harassment**

The Department of Economics supports McGill University’s regulations concerning sexual harassment and expects its TAs, professors, and students to comply with both the letter and the spirit of those regulations.

Sexual harassment is defined in the University Regulations Concerning Complaints of Sexual Harassment as “a display, by word or deed, of sexual attentions toward another individual or group of individuals of a nature which may reasonably be considered to be vexatious or abusive.” Sexual harassment can take many forms, and can include comments or jokes of a sexual or suggestive nature, some forms of physical contact, requests for dates or other forms of inappropriate contact/attention, or any behaviour that persists after the target has expressed discomfort or a desire that the behaviour cease.

### Various bodies at McGill are available to address harassment:

- **SACOMSS (Sexual Assault Centre of McGill Student Society)** is a SSMU student service that offers information and support on sexual assault. SACOMSS runs a helpline and walk-in service. See <http://www.sacomss.org/> for more information.
- **The Office of the Ombudsperson** is mandated to provide informal, confidential, neutral intervention in situations of conflict. The Office of the Ombudsperson offers support for a variety of conflicts that arise in the university setting, and can be contacted for information, to clarify policy and procedure, to assist in both informal conflict resolution and official grievance processes, and more. More information on the Office of the Ombudsperson is available at <http://www.mcgill.ca/ombudsperson/>. The Ombudsperson can be reached at 514-398-7059 or at [ombudsperson@mcgill.ca](mailto:ombudsperson@mcgill.ca).
- Official claims of sexual harassment at McGill are addressed by the **Policy on Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination Prohibited by Law** [https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy\\_on\\_harassment\\_and\\_discrimination.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/policy_on_harassment_and_discrimination.pdf) and should be reported to a Harassment Assessor. Detailed contact and procedural information is available at <http://www.mcgill.ca/harass/>.

### Student Relationships and Dating

Teaching assistants should also be aware of the problems and misunderstandings which may arise from having relationships with undergraduate students of a non-professional nature. These problems stem not only from a perception of bias in marking exams and essays, but also in assigning conference participation scores. For that reason, the Department of Economics prohibits TAs from dating or having relationships of a non-professional manner (e.g., sexual) with students enrolled in an undergraduate course for which they have evaluation and supervisory responsibilities. It is the duty of the TA to inform the Department if such a personal relationship exists.

These relationships can take many forms, and include things such as attending social events together, meeting with students for non-course-related reasons, meeting with students in non-public places (e.g., your respective houses), sexual relations and dating. None of this is to say that you cannot play a mentoring role for undergraduates, but rather that you must, when it is your duty to evaluate a student, ensure that you conduct yourself in a professional manner, and that your disposition towards the student's performance is not biased because of a personal relationship. If such a non-professional relationship exists or arises, teaching assistants may then take one of four courses of action:

- 1) Terminate the relationship
- 2) Decline a supervisory role
- 3) Request a re-assignment to another course or section
- 4) Affirm that the student involved will enroll in the course at a later date

### General Advice:

Report conflicts as soon as possible. If you encounter a conflict or inappropriate behaviour you should tell someone, whether it is the course instructor, a trusted professor in the department, or a peer or colleague. Some conflicts such as re-grade requests and plagiarism cases should be dealt with by the course instructor, not the TA. If you are in conflict with the course instructor, you may want to consult with a trusted peer to decide how best to proceed. In the case of plagiarism, it is strictly the duty of the professor to deal with the matter, and you should not attempt to handle the matter yourself.

Tutoring a student in the course for which you are a TA would constitute a conflict of interest and consequently is not permitted.

Teaching assistants and members of the academic staff are expected to comply with the McGill University Regulation on Conflict of Interest adopted by the University Board of Governors on June 15, 2009. The Regulation can be found at:

[https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/conflict-of-interest-regulation-on\\_0.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/secretariat/files/secretariat/conflict-of-interest-regulation-on_0.pdf).

### **Effectiveness/Evaluations**

TAs are evaluated by students via Minerva course evaluations, and can access the results directly.

Professors also prepare an evaluation of TA performance. A copy of this form can be obtained from your supervising instructor or from the Department.