Your Teaching Assistantship (TA)

Most of you will be working as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for two undergraduate classes in each Fall term, and for another two classes in each Winter term. This job is important to the undergraduate students in the course, the instructors you assist, and ultimately to you as a unique learning experience.

Essential to making this the best experience is ongoing and timely communication between you and the instructor you are assisting. This will mostly be your responsibility and communication styles may vary from instructor to instructor. Be sure you know how your instructor wishes to communicate and be sure to check your University of Waterloo e-mail account daily (e.g. YourUserID@uwaterloo.ca).

A TA in the Faculty of Mathematics is payment for 80 hours of work, over 16 weeks. This means an average of 5 hours per week but as with communication styles, workload distribution will vary from instructor to instructor and course to course. For example, typically more TA time is taken around midterms and exams. This also means that you may have to adjust your own study habits to accommodate the TA requirements; conversely, the instructor may need to make some accommodation for your midterm and exam needs. If the latter is the case, please inform the instructor as soon as possible – a successful TA depends critically on flexibility, responsibility, and good communication between the TA and the instructor. Whatever the distribution of hours the total should be about 80 hours. Keep track of your hours and keep the instructor informed of them.

You will represent Computational Mathematics to all you interact with and your example as a TA (through your enthusiasm, interest, mathematical and communication skills) will impress and influence others. Be prepared, be responsible, manage your time, and be enthusiastic. Remember, the TA system is a large part of what makes our graduate program possible (through the funding you earn via TA work), and it is crucial that all parties involved play their role and carry out their expected tasks.

Working as a TA will challenge you to be part of educating others. As we well know, this can be a very interesting and rewarding experience. We wish you all the best with your TA employment.

Please keep this and the following two pages for your future reference.
Some detailed guidelines:

- Always make good and clear arrangements with the instructor of the class you TA for and keep communication open. The instructor will assign work to you. If anything is unclear, try to clarify it with your instructor. Throughout the term, if you have any questions about your role as a TA, or if any issues arise with your TA job that cannot directly be worked out with your instructor, contact the CM Graduate Advisor or the right away, and they will answer your questions or help you to resolve the issue.

- About proctoring and marking exams:
  - Most TAs will be for large 1st or 2nd year undergraduate courses with many students and sections. Midterm and final exams have to be proctored and marked at a time when you may be very busy with your own coursework and exams. Therefore, it is very important to plan your time ahead carefully. You will be expected to stick closely to the arrangements that are made with you by your TA instructor about when to proctor and when to mark.
  - Having an exam yourself on the day you are expected to proctor or mark does not normally excuse you from proctoring or marking, except for the time that you are physically at your own exam. Many large exams are marked in group by all TAs and instructors of the class, on the day of the exam or the next day, and arrangements may be such that everybody is required to stay until all the marking is done. Again, there may be some flexibility but this is at the discretion of the instructor.
  - In exceptional circumstances, for example if you have two exams yourself on the two consecutive days that would normally be used for proctoring and marking, you can expect more flexibility from your TA instructor (e.g. you might be allowed to mark later, or the marking of the exam can be shifted one day later for everyone involved). If you are in such a special case, make sure to discuss this with your TA instructor well in advance, and also let the CM Graduate Advisor or CM Director know about this.
  - It cannot be overemphasized that arrangements for proctoring and marking are typically made well in advance. Inform your TA instructor as soon as you know the schedule of your own exams. If your exam schedule is not known at the time that the TA instructor’s exam is set, inform both the TA instructor and the instructor of your courses so as to avoid conflict if at all possible.

- About marking:
  - Remember that there may be other correct answers to a question than the one on the answer sheet. In mathematics, there are many ways to derive or prove a result. If you are unsure, consult another TA or an instructor. Do not deduct marks unless you are certain that the answer is incorrect – not matching the model solution is not sufficient.
- It is sometimes better to adopt the attitude of giving marks for correct reasoning, rather than deducting marks for mistakes. Ask the instructor.

- Be on time for tutorials and exam proctoring and marking.

- Be proactive and make sure you get to do your share of the work (for example, make sure your name is on the name list for the tutorial centre, if you have TA duties there). You are part of a team and should not shortchange the students or your peers.

- Be responsible - try to help organize the class such that the undergraduate students have a good learning experience. Be engaged and take pride in your TA work.