

Graduate Student Instructor Manual

March 2026 (updates made to document dated October 2025)

This manual is intended to provide general information for the Graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) of the Department of Physics and Astronomy.

Teaching Assignments

A half-time Graduate Teaching Assistant is paid for twenty (20) clock hours per week. If a GTA is assigned to teach a lab or recitation, up to eight (8) contact hours are required in the classroom. If a student is solely assigned to the Help Center, up to sixteen (16) contact hours are required in the Help Center.

A quarter-time Graduate Teaching Assistant is paid for ten (10) clock hours per week. If a GTA is assigned to teach a lab or recitation, up to four (4) contact hours are required in the classroom. If a student is solely assigned to the Help Center, up to eight (8) contact hours are required in the Help Center.

Assignments are made with consideration of the background and interests of the Graduate Teaching Assistant. Each semester (including examination period) is sixteen weeks long.

It is departmental policy to limit the teaching assignments, whenever feasible, so that a GTA has no more than two separate preparations to make. The teaching hours are arranged so that they do not conflict with the courses on which the GTA is enrolled. Holding to these policies may require that preliminary plans for teaching assignments be altered in order to complete the teaching schedule of the Department. The GTA may teach a recitation class, a laboratory class, assist with the preparation of course materials, work in the Help Center, or grade papers.

International Students: Oral English Proficiency Project

The University has instituted an Oral English Proficiency Project (OEPP) to ensure that language and cultural barriers do not diminish the effectiveness of GTAs whose native language is not English and who have not had experience in American undergraduate colleges. Non-native English speaking GTA's are required to take the OEPP screening upon entrance. Immediately on arrival on campus, such students should make arrangements with the Graduate Coordinator (Room 152), to take the battery of tests that OEPP administers during the orientation period.

A passing score allows the GTA to assume a role at the level of contact teaching. A low score will require the GTA to pass the remedial oral English course in the first semester or be registered for the next available course.

The satisfaction of this requirement is an important part of job performance, on which the level of subsequent financial support will be based, including the teaching opportunity during the summer session. Students from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan are also required to take this test.

As a result of OEPP evaluations, registration may be required in a special course, English 62000 "Classroom Communication for International Teaching Graduate Students".

Duties and Responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) may not cancel, be tardy, or shorten their assigned classes, labs, or Help Center hours without the explicit approval of their supervisor, i.e. the faculty member in charge of the course or the Senior Manager of Instruction.

It is the GTA's responsibility to find a competent replacement if they are unable to make it to their session, etc. for any reason, and to immediately notify the supervisor and the undergraduate office. The replacement should be someone currently holding a teaching assignment for the course or, if necessary, in prior semesters. The replacement should never be anyone without a current affiliation with the Physics Department or be paid for the service out of pocket by the GTA requesting replacement.

Help-Center hours continue through the Final-exam week. GTAs assigned to Help Center must also observe the rules given in the Help Center GTA Duties document. Since the Help Center does not open the first week of classes, the assigned GTA will be asked to help proctor make-up exams, to fill in for GTAs upon their absence, provide additional Help Center hours around exam weeks, or to partake in other PandA activities. The same requirement is made for recitation and lab GTAs for the weeks they do not hold classes.

GTAs are expected to serve as proctors in course tests and exams, and to participate in all course meetings and grading sessions. No replacements are acceptable without the supervisor's explicit approval. This means that GTAs should be accessible to campus during the week before classes and remain accessible until the Tuesday after Final-Exam week, excluding weekends and university breaks and holidays. If the GTA has travel for research, campus activities, etc. that removes them from the campus area, that information must be communicated to the immediate GTA supervisor.

GTAs are expected to follow their supervisors' instructions with respect to the manner of teaching, grading homework in a timely manner, etc. GTAs could occasionally be called upon to help with other tasks related to the teaching mission of the department. Those GTAs that were scheduled, but unable to work due to conflicts, sessions cancelled, etc., will be called upon first.

GTAs are expected to check both their Physics Department mailboxes and their e-mail at least once a day for instructions. If GTAs do not hold Help Center hours, they are expected to select at least one administrative office hour per week, during which students will be able to discuss matters (such as questions about how their quizzes and homework assignments were graded) unrelated to the concerns provided for in Help Centers.

University regulations forbid any Final exams or Recitation quizzes during the week preceding the Final-exam period (15th week of the semester) and any posting of grades by name or by any parts of the student identification number.

Required Course on Pedagogy

The satisfactory completion of PHYS 60500 (Pedagogical Methods for Physics Graduate Students; Sem. 1, 2 credits) by the first semester for the instructional staff is required of ALL instructors.

Evaluation Procedures

Each professor is asked to evaluate the work of the assistants assigned to his course at the close of the semester, on a scale with 5.0 as the maximum. Comments on initiative, the quality of work, and the suitability of the assignment are also invited. The ratings may be discussed in a private conference with either the professor giving the rating or the Senior Manager of Instruction.

Students in each recitation or laboratory section evaluate the performance of their instructor during the twelfth or thirteenth week of both spring and fall semesters as well as during the summer session. The evaluation is based on their responses to the items, "My instructor seems well prepared and is organized in class, etc." and "I would rate the overall performance of my instructor as" (excellent ... poor). The sets of evaluations will go to the instructors, and are available to the professors in charge of the courses and the Department administrators in charge of instructional activities.

A "performance index" is calculated for each instructor shortly after the end of the academic year. This index is used in the selection of instructors for a next level promotion. The computation of the performance index gives equal weight to two factors:

- ratings by supervising professors,
- (2) ratings by students

Unsatisfactory performance or non-performance of GTA duties may lead to a reduction or loss of financial support by the Department of Physics. It may also lead to later less favorable letters of recommendation to potential future employers.

Stipends for Graduate Student Instructional Staff

The monthly stipend for the graduate student staff varies according to their step (pay level) classification.

Teaching Assistantship in Later Years

Financial assistance in the form of Teaching Assistantship is primarily intended for the graduate students in the first two years, before a student begins a Ph.D. thesis research under a major professor.

Once thesis research begins, the preferred form of financial support is the Research Assistantship, normally paid out of the research grants, held by the major professor. It is important for the student to be able to devote much of their time and effort to their research.

All Teaching Assistantships requested for those already engaged in thesis research will be reviewed by the Department Head for the circumstances that may require this form of support. Also, there are special rules governing the Teaching Assistantships requested for those whose major professors do not have regular appointments in the Physics Department, as well as for those who have been in our graduate program for longer than 6 years.

Vacations

GTA's are granted vacation during the periods of the academic year when classes are not in session. GTA's should check with the professor in charge of their assignment concerning attendance requirements during these periods.

The following are NOT vacation periods:

- The week prior to the first day of classes for spring and fall semesters.
- The period between the end of classes and the final date for submitting grade reports (the Tuesday following the end of examination week).

The Board of Trustees adopted a policy on parental leave that also applies to graduate student employees.

Summer Opportunities

There are limited openings for summer employment in the Department of Physics. The Department cannot guarantee summer employment, but applications for summer jobs can be made in the spring semester. All summer jobs are limited to two months.

Tutoring Opportunities

There are students who seek private tutoring for Physics courses beyond the Help Center (that we provide as a part of our normal instructional activities). To assist those students, the Department normally maintains and publishes a list of those Physics graduate students who wish to offer tutoring services for a fee. However, all arrangements are strictly between the students and private tutors. The Department does not sanction, and is not responsible, for any such arrangements.

In addition, TAs cannot tutor students from the same course that they are assigned to teach. International students are not eligible to work as paid tutors under their visa restrictions (unless in very rare cases, a special prior permission has been granted by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services).

Resources and Services for Graduate Student Instructional Staff

The Undergraduate Office is located in Room 144. The administrative assistant has a stock of textbooks and office supplies that might be necessary for your teaching assignment. Also, if you need typing and duplication services for your classes, the assistant will help with the arrangements. Please submit such work at least 24 hours before the copies are needed.

The student-faculty shop is in Room 41. Access to the machines is limited to students who have been certified as proficient by the shop director, Room 39. They can also arrange for instruction in use of the machines. The machines are to be used only for

research-connected projects. Any problems with physical facilities in the building should be brought to the attention of the Building Deputy, Room 1, Phone 7-491-1303.

Staff Benefits Available to Instructors

There are a number of no-cost (or reduced-cost) benefits available to instructors. Some of these are listed below:

Purdue Recreational Sports Center:

For more information, visit <http://www.purdue.edu/recsports/>. The CoRec is located at 355 N. Martin Jischke Drive, West Lafayette, IN 47907. The CoRec serves as the playground for Purdue students, faculty, and staff, as well as spouses.

Convocation Tickets:

Every year Purdue University is visited by many professional entertainers presenting programs of a cultural nature.

Sports Tickets:

Season tickets to football and basketball games can be purchased at staff discount rates. Ticket purchase forms are circulated through campus mail at the beginning of each season, and at the end of the school year. A new instructor is required to present evidence of employment by the University when making the initial purchase of a staff season ticket. The appropriate statement can be obtained from the Office of the Department Head.

Medical Facilities and Health Insurance:

Graduate Instructors have unlimited use of the out-patient facilities at the Center for Healthy Living. This includes treatment of colds, minor injuries, some psychiatric care, as well as any necessary physical therapy. However, lab work (e.g., X-rays, blood samples, etc.), surgery and major medical expenses are not included.

Health insurance is available through the University, which will provide coverage of major medical expenses up to certain limits. Spouse and dependents can also be covered under this plan. Brochures describing this program in more detail are circulated at the start of each semester.

NOTE: *International students are required to join the health insurance program.*

Disability Related Resources

Purdue is committed to providing equal access and equal opportunity to all students, with or without disabilities, in all facets of university life. As a part of this commitment, the University strives to provide the professional expertise necessary to promote universal access. This applies to both you as a student and/or instructor and your students.

The services include testing for the establishment of disabilities, Braille and tactile diagram translation, scribes, certifications for testing time accommodations, help with employment and dealing with the laws related to disability, referrals to other service providers, and many other aspects. Most of the services are provided through the Disability Resource Center (DRC) of the Office of the Dean of Students.

Disability-related issues specific to your duties as a graduate instructor are mainly handled through the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE), which offers many services such as mediation and providing grants for corrective devices.

In addition, the Advisory Council on Disability Issues is available to help students who need career advice or assistance working with instructors who have concerns about implementing academic accommodations.

Ombudspersons for Graduate Students

Graduate students with problems related to interactions with other graduate students, faculty, or staff, or those related to their teaching duties, or academic work which cannot be resolved through their academic advisor, have at their disposal a mechanism for addressing such issues. The Department of Physics has a faculty member who serves as an ombudsperson.

It is their responsibility to help graduate students resolve these types of problems. Another possibility is to consult the peer ombudspersons provided by the Graduate School. Please refer to the Graduate School for this option. If a problem cannot be resolved with the help of these persons, or if you are uncertain which Ombudsperson to contact, please bring the matter to the attention of the Physics Department Head.

Emergency Phone Numbers:

- **911 to reach Fire, Ambulance, and/or Police**