American University WASHINGTON, DC

Roles of Online Teaching Assistants (TAs) at American University

The instructor may ask you to do any of the following as an online TA:

- Write and post regular announcements

- Create student groups

- Reach out to students who are absent or missing assignments

- Post replies and moderate online discussions

- Review discussions and/or assignment submissions, provide feedback and submit grades

- Use a third-party tool (e.g., Voicethread)

- Host TA office hours online

Meet with your online instructor early on to ensure you have TA access to the course in the learning management system (LMS; Blackboard or Canvas). Find out what is expected of you and be sure you are comfortable using the corresponding LMS tools.

Online TA Checklist: Questions to Ask

As an online TA, you may be asked to grade assignments, moderate discussions, and send announcements. These tasks all incorporate digital tools. It is important to be familiar with the core functions of the LMS and any third-party tools you are asked to use. Consider asking these key questions to clarify your responsibilities:

Technical Skills

- Discussions: how frequently do I need to monitor discussions and make posts? Will I create new discussions?

- Quizzes: do I need to grade any of the quizzes or are they fully automated?

- Assignments: will I be grading assignments and providing feedback?

- Content: do I need to review any content? Any content edits should only be done upon direction of the instructor.

- Other: are there any third-party tools or additional platforms (e.g.,Voicethread, Zoom) used in this course? If yes, how do I need to use them?

Grading

- Entering grades: where do I enter grades? Note: most grades are entered in the tool itself (quiz, discussion, assignment) and some are entered directly in the grade section.

- Feedback: what are the expectations regarding personalized feedback? What are examples of good quality feedback?

- Rubrics: are rubrics used in this course? Are rubrics embedded in different tools?

Teaching Tips for Online TAs

Prepare for the Term and Schedule Your Time

Remember, all content (including assignment information, lectures and discussion boards) are developed and set up in the LMS in advance. At the start of term, take time to review them. Set aside regular time to complete your TA roles. Align this schedule with the frequency you need to be logging in (daily, every other day) and potential peak grading times. Learn the course schedule so you know what students should be doing each week. Advise students to set aside at least 10 hours per week to work on their online course.

Establish Social Presence by Communicating Clearly and Promptly

In the syllabus section, outline how students can contact you and a timeframe of when they can expect your response. With the instructor's permission, use the announcements to

communicate with the whole class. Announcements may include new or changing information regarding weekly updates, upcoming due dates, etc.

You can set up an "Ask the Instructor or TA" discussion board in your course. Be sure to highlight this discussion board in announcements. This is the ideal location for students to ask general questions about course content or assessments (). By encouraging students to use this forum, the whole class benefits from your answers and it reduces your email volume. Emails are more suited for private concerns such as accommodations or grades.

Make every effort to reply to emails or the "Ask the Instructor or TA" discussion within 24-48 hours during weekdays. If you plan to be away during the week, let the instructor know ahead of time.

Promote Meaningful Discussions

Discussions promote interaction and demonstrate social presence. Facilitate discussions by asking good questions, making connections, and responding to a variety of students.

- Ask for clarification when needed: *I'm unclear about your point X. Can you elaborate?*
- Challenge students by probing assumptions: *Can you connect this view to the readings?*
- Ask for alternate views or specific examples: *What is another viable solution to Y issue?*

Provide High Quality Feedback Throughout the Term

Ask your course instructor about the expectations regarding personalized feedback for the course assessments and what high quality feedback looks like. Let students know in advance when and where to access feedback. Remember to adapt your schedule to accommodate for peak grading times and to meet promised timelines.

Refer Students to Additional Supports

When students require technical assistance with LMS, direct them first to the "Help" link located in the LMS environment. If students continue to have technical problems with the LMS, they should be directed to American University Information Technology Support.

For additional support contacts for students, access the Academic Support Services in the CTRL Syllabus Guide

<div align="center">References</div>

Whiteside, A., Dikkers, A., and Lewis, S. (2014). The power of social presence for learning.

Retrieved from https://er.educause.edu/articles/2014/5/the-power-of-social-presence-for-learning