

**Department of Anthropology**  
**Teaching Assistant Handbook**



**Idaho State  
University**  

---

**Anthropology**

## **CONGRATULATIONS!**

You were awarded a limited-term graduate Teaching Assistantship (TA). You should have already received an official letter of appointment with details about the terms, compensation, and benefits. This handbook provides an overview of the Department of Anthropology's policies regarding TA-ships as well as some pointers to help you navigate and be successful in this new role.

Once you have received your Award Letter, please confirm within two weeks whether you accept or decline this offer of TA-ship by completing and signing the checklist/acceptance form and sending it to the address provided. Your appointment as a graduate assistant will not be official until we have received your written acceptance and have completed I-9, W-4, and STAR forms with the Office of Human Resources with acceptable identification (See <http://www.isu.edu/departments/humanr/hrpdflinks.html> for a list of "Acceptable Documents").

A TA is a full-time graduate student whose primary role is in an instructional capacity for undergraduate courses. We want you to know that as a TA, you are valuable to the Department of Anthropology and we hope that you will find value in this professional development opportunity. As a TA your duties may vary. These could include attending orientations/trainings, lecture in class, lead discussion groups, monitor and supervise laboratory courses, help tutor students, hold office hours, proctor examinations, grade tests and written assignments, etc. and generally assist faculty with tasks (e.g. scanning, making copies, etc.), under their supervision, in their instruction.

You are now a vital part of our most significant goal in the Department: the education of students. You will have a chance to see teaching from behind the scenes and in front of the podium, develop a professional relationship with faculty, and develop meaningful learning partnerships with undergraduate students. Each semester, the TA Coordinator will inform you of your assignment to one or more faculty and the hours expected with each.

This handbook is meant as a resource for new TAs and includes:

- Eligibility of appointment
- Benefits
- Roles and responsibilities
- Evaluation procedures

### **Eligibility for Appointment:**

Only students who are enrolled full-time and admitted into the MA or MS degree-seeking program in the Anthropology Department are eligible to receive a TA appointment.

Non-degree-seeking students are not eligible to receive assistantships. However, admission to the program does not guarantee that you will be awarded an assistantship as academic performance and other fiscal considerations are also evaluated among faculty to determine eligibility. The Idaho State Board of Education requires that TA's be full-time, fee-paying enrolled students, earn

9 graduate credit hours or more each semester of appointment, and maintain a 3.0 grade point average in order to retain financial support as a TA. Permission to take more than 12 credits or to can be granted by petition to the Dean of the Graduate School upon written permission, but this are not recommended.

Additionally, it is a Graduate School expectation that TAs be "in residence" during an appointment. This means that you MUST live in the general region of Pocatello or close enough to be on campus to complete your duties even if you are a TA for an online or hybrid (online and in-person) course. This should not be confused with "residency," which is a legal term for tuition pricing, etc. You can be a non-state resident, living in Pocatello and be eligible for a TA-ship.

### **Workload and Compensation:**

The primary purpose of awarding an assistantship is to support you in completing your academic program and encourage professional development for your future. As such, you will work no more than 20 hours per week during the semester calendar. Graduate TA stipends are not considered hourly compensation and you DO NOT need to complete an hourly timesheet.

You will be paid your stipend in accordance with university policy, normally every two weeks during the term of your appointment. Refer to your Award Letter for details on compensation amount, benefits, and timeframe of your appointment.

The TA-ship offers you a tuition and fee scholarship for the appointed awarded academic year at Idaho State University. This scholarship includes payment of in-state tuition and fees and a non-resident tuition waiver (if necessary). The assistantship scholarships DO NOT cover other fees like program fees, class/lab fees, malpractice insurance fees, transcript fees, and computing fees.

Though you can be employed by the University in addition to being a TA (with prior permission), this is not recommended as it may make it difficult for you to keep up with the requirements of your own courses and your duties as a TA. All graduate students are required to maintain a "B" grade average. If you fail to do so, this appointment may be canceled.

### **Time Management:**

One of the most important skills you should acquire while being a graduate TA is time management and understanding that time management is a learning process for both you and your students. However, there are a couple of strategies that faculty and experienced TAs recommend that you may find useful yourself or useful to help undergraduate students. Here are a few tips:

1. Clarify deadlines and office hours with your supervisor.
2. Always be available for office hours. If something comes up, notify your students and supervisor of cancellations or time changes.

3. Let students know your limits. If you will not respond to them over the weekend or past 5PM on weekdays, let them know. But...keep in mind that you are expected to respond to both students and your supervisors within 24 hours on weekdays.
4. Use the ISU Academic Calendar online to stay up to date on the deadlines for course registration, withdrawal, holidays, and midterm and final grade due dates.
5. Use all resources available to keep an up-to-date schedule with automatic reminders. This can mean using the calendar in your phone for course due dates, events, etc.
6. Set up a weekly schedule with blocked out times for specific tasks and stick to it. For example, a regular day and time each week in which you hold office hours. Have those hours separate from a scheduled block of time you choose for grading assignments. And on your weekly schedule also include those days and times you will be working on your own course work and completing your thesis research, research project, or professional paper. Having a regular laid out schedule to refer to each week can be very helpful when busy weeks pop up and you feel overwhelmed. It may even help to preplan extra times for larger grading assignments or to block out study and writing time for your coursework according to syllabi in all your courses.
7. Have a comfortable area to study and work and make it a habit.
8. Work with a friend or a member of your graduate of TA cohort to keep each other accountable on keeping your set schedule.
9. Notify your supervisor immediately if personal or academic things come up which may prevent you from keeping a deadline.

### **Required Orientation/Trainings:**

All TA's are required to attend the Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientations administered by both the Graduate School and the Department of Anthropology during the start of the Fall semester of their appointment. These orientations provide overviews of policies and strategies for successfully interacting with students and faculty supervisors. Additionally, TA's should schedule an appointment with their faculty supervisor as soon as possible one assigned and **before** the course starts. TAs are required to be on campus one week prior to the start of the semester. Failure to report on time or premature departure at the end of each semester may lead to a reduction in pay or forfeiture of the assistantship.

The department will host professional development sessions throughout the semester/year. TAs are required to attend these and must contact the TA Coordinator immediately if there are conflict with attendance. Additionally, you are required to attend *at least one* other professional development workshop and/or seminar *per semester* hosted by the ISU Program for Instructional Effectiveness (PIE) **OR** volunteer for a Department, College, or Idaho Museum of Natural History outreach event (speak with TA Coordinator prior to an event about which events are acceptable) *per semester*.

These seminars/workshops/outreach events can be in-person or online, but you are required to show confirmation of your attendance to the TA Coordinator by "Dead Week" of the semester in

which the event occurred. Therefore, all of the above requirements must be completed within the year of appointment, but dispersed through two semesters.

Failure to complete these requirements can lead to termination of your appointment and ineligibility of being appointed a TA in the future.

<b>Examples of Professional Development Training</b>	<b>Examples of Outreach</b>
PIE “Faculty Workshop” ( <a href="https://www.isu.edu/pie/">https://www.isu.edu/pie/</a> )	Anthropology Day
PIE “Great Ideas in Teaching” ( <a href="https://www.isu.edu/pie/">https://www.isu.edu/pie/</a> )	International Archaeology Day
Be a guest instructor for a lecture or lab course	Indigenous Peoples Day
Moodle training ( <a href="http://www.isu.edu/itrc">http://www.isu.edu/itrc</a> )	Student Club events
Navigate training ( <a href="https://www.isu.edu/navigate/training/">https://www.isu.edu/navigate/training/</a> )	Darwin Day
RESPOND or suicide prevention training ( <a href="https://www.isu.edu/ctc/education-and-resources/trainings-and-workshops/">https://www.isu.edu/ctc/education-and-resources/trainings-and-workshops/</a> )	Bengal Welcome Week, Experience ISU, or similar recruiting events
Title IX ( <a href="https://www.isu.edu/title-ix/training-materials-/">https://www.isu.edu/title-ix/training-materials-/</a> )	Free Family Fun Day at Idaho Museum of Natural History
Other (pre-approved by TA Coordinator)	Other (pre-approved by TA Coordinator)

### **Reappointments:**

TA appointments are awarded on a limited-term basis, usually for no more than one academic year. A TA should not assume that they will be re-appointed for another term even if they did not receive a termination notification at the end of a term. Reappointments are contingent upon the availability of funds, satisfactory academic progress, work performance, completion of TA requirements, and need as determined by the Department of Anthropology.

### **Absence from Service and Termination:**

A TA should notify their supervisor in advance of an absence and, when possible, assist in obtaining a replacement or rearrangement of the duties. Excessive absences, regardless of the reason, are cause for termination before the end of the appointment period.

The Chair or Graduate Coordinator of the appointing unit may make TA assignments and re-assignments whenever warranted. TAs are responsible and required to fulfill their assignment throughout the semester as outlined in an appointment letter until they receive a revised letter by

the appointing unit. There are both voluntary and involuntary reasons that a unit can terminate an assistantship/associateship.

In those cases, where the job performance of a TA is not meeting expectations, the supervising faculty member should advise the student, both orally and in writing. The supervising faculty should attempt to help the TA improve their performance before terminating the appointment. Additionally, a supervising faculty member, TA Coordinator, Graduate Coordinator, and/or Chair of the academic unit should document the reasons for the actions to terminate prior to the end of the appointment term. If a TA is unable to continue an appointment (voluntary termination), they must inform the supervising faculty member in writing of the reasons for the action. Reasons for involuntary termination may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Change in academic discipline (major)
- Academic or scientific misconduct
- Poor academic performance or excessive absences
- Misconduct in assigned duties
- Unsatisfactory performance in assigned duties
- Breach of ISU Student Code of Conduct
- Incapacitation of the TA appointment for an extended period of time
- Professional misconduct
- Misuse of university assets, including but not limited to computing resources

Termination, voluntary or not, could result in the student being responsible for the tuition and fees previously paid by acceptance of the TA position.

### **Rescinded or Modified Offers:**

The Department has the right to rescind or modify TA offers during the appointment term, given reasonable cause. Reasons for the rescinding or modification of offers may include, but are not limited to the following:

- Change in Department of Anthropology's financial situation
- Student misconduct or poor TA evaluation
- Change in student's academic discipline or enrollment status
- Failure of student to accept offer by deadline indicated in offer letter
- Failure of student to complete required orientations or trainings as indicated in offer Letter

The TA Coordinator must issue a formal letter outlining causes for resending or modifying an offer.

### **Evaluation and Resolving Challenges:**

All graduate students are expected to maintain the same conduct and professionalism as ISU faculty and abide by official ISU policies. Your faculty supervisor(s) will conduct a mid-semester and end-of-semester periodic review and a written evaluation of your performance, which will be

used to determine your continued appointment. This evaluation will address your ability to complete the tasks you were assigned, work independently and with fellow TAs, your ability to initiate tasks and creatively identify and find solutions to challenges, and your professional behavior with students and faculty. You will see a copy of this completed evaluation and can meet with your faculty supervisor to reflect upon your performance and set plans to improve or maintain your performance. Not meeting expectations as outlined by your supervisor, regardless of the reason, are cause for termination before the end of the appointment period and ineligibility for future appointments.

For sample evaluation documents, see Appendix A.

In accordance with the “Hierarchy of Contact” list below, TAs should consult with faculty supervisor(s) and the TA Coordinator about specific policies regarding absence from service, not meeting expectations of appointment, or issues with supervisors or students.

If issues remain unresolved, please seek assistance through the appropriate University office (Disability Services, Title IX, Dean of Students, etc.). Similarly, if a student approaches you about issues they are having in the course, you can refer them to this same order of contact.

<b>Hierarchy of Contact</b>	
1.	Supervisor/ Course Instructor
2.	Department TA Coordinator
3.	Department Graduate Coordinator
4.	Department Chair

### **University Conduct Policies:**

Idaho State University is committed to providing an environment free of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation based on sex for the entire university community, including TAs. As a TA, you are required to adhere to the official ISU Policies and Procedures which can be found at <https://www.isu.edu/policy/>. As a TA, you are also required to be familiar with and abide by all ISU and Department policies, including statements about inclusivity on the Department website.

### **Advantages of Being a TA:**

1. Helps with financing your graduate education and living expenses.
2. Gives you a role in everyday life in the department. You will have an office, a desk, a mailbox, you will get well acquainted with the other TAs and the staff and faculty.
3. You get a chance to review subjects as you teach or learn new topics from a teaching point of view.
4. Helps you develop self-confidence in public speaking, thinking on your feet, interacting with students.
5. Important employment credential for your CV or resume. You will gain skills planning course lessons, giving lectures, and other teaching preparatory activities.

6. Teaching is rewarding and can be a creative act. You will serve as a role model and inspire student learning in and out of classes. You will likely also help first-year students or first-generation students adjust to a college setting and encourage their success. You are an important contribution to undergraduate education at ISU.
7. Your collaboration with faculty can provide advice, mentoring, and references for future degree programs and employment.

### **Challenges of Being a TA:**

1. Time management will be an important aspect of your adjustment in graduate school, especially as a TA/RA. The students you engage with will insist on your attention and expect you to help them. When you are trying to balance that with taking your own courses, doing research, writing a thesis, and your personal life, you may feel overwhelmed. You will need to develop new study and time-management skills and remember to prioritize all the new things you find on your plate.
2. You are not the final authority for a course, but you may be allowed to make many decisions. The drawback to this authority is that you will occasionally be faced with confusing or frustrating dilemmas. Some of the hard decisions about final grades and problem students, however, must be referred to your faculty supervisor, so when in doubt ask for help.
3. If students approach you with mental health issues please refer them to the appropriate service on campus or your supervising faculty member. Make sure to set boundaries and limits for your advising.
4. You are probably inexperienced and likely to make a number of mistakes during your first semester or two as a TA. Nothing could really prepare you for this assignment. You may be asked to teach in a course that you have never taken as an undergraduate, and you may worry about keeping one step ahead of your brightest students. You may also be discouraged when your students aren't putting forth the effort needed to succeed. When they do poorly, you may be tempted to blame yourself too harshly as a teacher for their shortcomings as students. A student's success is as much their responsibility as it is yours.
5. You may discover you are not a "born teacher" and do not enjoy the give-and-take of an undergraduate classroom. Almost all TAs get better with experience. If you don't, at least you will have learned that teaching is not for you and can plan your future accordingly.

### **To Ask the Course Supervisor/Instructor:**

- Goals of the course: Are there course prerequisites? What are the course learning outcomes? Is there flexibility in the way course content is presented? What is the level and range of abilities of typical students? What are the expectations for student performance?

- Structure: Is my section a highly structured course with each TA required to cover the same information and give the same tests, or is there more latitude in determining the material?
- Course/Meetings: When and where does the class meet? Are recitation and lab TAs expected to attend lectures?
- Specifics of your section, lab, or other duties: What are my responsibilities for preparing lectures? Does the TA evaluate student work? Create quizzes, test, and assignments? What kind of content and scope for these assignments? Number and types of questions? For instance, multiple choice, true/false, short answer, etc.
- Course policies and materials: What are the policies for attendance? What is the department procedure for handling student requests to drop or add the course? Getting or creating a course and/or section syllabus? How do I post grades? How do lab or recitation grades contribute to students' course grades? Are there assigned textbooks and readings? Does the course have a web page or a WebCT component?
- Department procedures: What are department procedures when I am sick or have another necessary absence? What is appropriate dress when teaching?

#### **To Ask Experienced TAs in Your Department:**

- Roles TAs play in the life of the department: What are the department's expectations? Are we required to attend faculty meetings? Serve on committees? Socialize? How do we find out about departmental policies and activities? Getting things done in the department, e.g., copying, getting coffee, selecting a major professor?
- Departmental guidance and support for TAs: Are there weekly TA meetings? Do we attend course lectures? Are mentors available? What is the expected turn-around time for grading? What ethical issues might TAs face?
- Approximate amount of time a TA spends: How much time will I spend preparing for class? Meeting with students during office hours? Grading papers and tests?
- Experiences other TAs have had with your assigned course: Is this a difficult course for undergraduates? On what areas of the course do they need the most help? What are students' attitudes towards class?

**Graduate Teaching Assistant Application**

**Department of Anthropology**

*(Applications due by March 5)*

**Name (Last, First):**

**Bengal ID:**

**Phone:**

**Email:**

**Semester and Year applying for:**

**Have you held a Teaching Assistantship in Anthropology before (circle one): Y / N**

**Faculty Advisor:**

**Disciplinary Focus:**

**GPA:**

**Expected Graduation Date (Semester and Year):**

**What other funding have you received since entering the program?**

**Description of desired work assignment (e.g. specific courses or topics, etc):**

**Description of previous teaching experience, if any:**

*Please submit this application, along with your CV, to Dr. Samantha Blatt, [samanthablatt@isu.edu](mailto:samanthablatt@isu.edu). Incomplete applications will not be considered. Please note: you must be admitted to the ISU Anthropology Graduate Program and a full-time enrolled student to be eligible. You will be required to attend a TA orientation the Fall semester of your appointment.*

**Idaho State University, Department of Anthropology**  
**Supervisor Evaluation of Graduate Assistant**

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student name: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID#: \_\_\_\_\_

Supervisor name: \_\_\_\_\_

Did the student complete the expected hours?: (circle Y or N)      Y                      N

If NO, please explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Please identify below the primary tasks for which the student was responsible. Assess the student's performance on those tasks on the scale to the right. Assessment of performance measures are Exceeds Expectations (EE), Meets Expectations (ME), and Does Not Meet Expectations (DNME).*

Activity/Task/Responsibility

_____	EE	ME	DNME
_____	EE	ME	DNME
_____	EE	ME	DNME
_____	EE	ME	DNME
_____	EE	ME	DNME
_____	EE	ME	DNME

*Please assess the student's performance in the following:*

Dependability	EE	ME	DNME
Initiative	EE	ME	DNME
Cooperation	EE	ME	DNME
Professionalism	EE	ME	DNME

Other comments and suggestions for improvement:

\_\_\_\_\_

Overall evaluation of the student's performance: (circle one)      EE      ME      DNME

**Appendix A**

## Meeting with your supervisor

The following is a list of topics and questions TAs and supervisors should discuss to lay the foundation of their working relationship for the semester. While this exchange can take place via e-mail, an in-person conversation is highly recommended.

### *Course Logistics*

- Verify the TA has been assigned to the correct course
- Verify class days and times
- How many students will the TA be responsible for?
- What are the objectives of the course? Is it a prerequisite for majors? General education for non-majors?
- Who will supervise the TA? How? How often?
- Will there be other TAs for the course?

### *Responsibilities*

- How will the responsibilities of the course be divided between the TA, the supervisor, and (if applicable) other TAs?
- What will be the TA's responsibilities? Will the TA:
  - Lead discussions regularly? Occasionally? When the instructor is absent?
  - Lecture regularly? Occasionally? When the instructor is absent?
  - Tutor and/or give individual assistance?
  - Organize group help/review sessions?
  - Conduct/supervise laboratory exercises?
  - Keep track of and obtain supplies and materials?
  - Give demonstrations?
  - Prepare for/clean up after labs?
  - Use AV equipment? Be responsible for getting/returning this equipment?
  - Attend lectures? If so, how often? If not, how will the TA be updated on course progress?
  - Prepare course materials (such as syllabi, exams, quizzes, manuals, guides, assignments, experiments)?
  - Grade (papers, projects, reports, quizzes, examinations, participation, attendance)?
- Discuss the TA's office hours: how many hours should the TA hold per week? When? Where? Should they coordinate with the instructor's office hours?

### *Policies and Procedures*

- What is departmental procedure for handling such problems as plagiarism, cheating, and grade appeals? What should the TA do if they notice these issues?
- What are department procedures for grades? What are the instructor's practices and policies for grading?

- How much help is too much? What kind of assistance should/shouldn't the TA give students?
- How should the TA handle emergencies (such as lab emergencies)?
- If the TA is responsible for scheduling AV equipment, how do they do so?
- What should a TA do, and whom should they contact, if they are unable to attend a class session?
- Should the TA handle disputes, or will the instructor? Should the TA report student concerns with lectures, exams, and/or course materials?
- What are the guidelines for TA communication with students? For example, should the TA copy the instructor on all e-mail communication with students, or only notify the instructor if there is a problem?

### ***Goals and Evaluation***

TA-ships are important professional development opportunities, and supervisors should encourage and assist their students to make the most of them:

- Discuss the TA's strengths and weaknesses as relates to their responsibilities and to the subject matter of the course. How can the TA take advantage of these strengths to succeed as a TA? How can they use their TA-ship to improve on their weaknesses?
- What does the TA want to gain from the TA experience, and how can the instructor foster progress towards these goals?

### ***Performance Review Guidelines – TAs as Instructors of Record***

This is the guide for supervising faculty to evaluate a TA. If a graduate student you supervise is the instructor of record for a course, you are encouraged to observe their class at least once per semester. The purpose of this observation is to provide helpful feedback for the TA as they continue to develop their teaching style and skills. It also provides you the ability to comment on their teaching skills in letters of recommendation.

When observing a class, considering the following review process:

1. Ask the TA to provide you with a brief description or lesson plan for the day of observation.
2. As you observe the class, take notes that you can use to give feedback to the TA.
3. Consider class elements such as the following:
  - How the TA uses the classroom space, technology, and materials
  - How the session is organized
  - The suitability of the content
  - The TA's communication style
  - The instructor-student interactions
  - How the TA works to fulfill and/or adapts their lesson plan
4. If you find it helpful, you might consider using the observation rubric on the next page.
5. After you have observed the class, share your feedback with the TA. Provide them with written comments that they can refer to later. In addition, an in-person discussion about their class is highly valuable.