

## The end of semester... and beyond

The end of semester brings with it expanded responsibilities and duties for teachers. TAs might have to design or grade final exams, evaluate written work to assign final grades, or contend with a variety of increasingly urgent student demands. At the same time, graduate work deadlines may be approaching, and TAs must acknowledge their own academic responsibilities. What follows are suggestions for dealing with end of semester issues, as well as tips for summer activities.

### Workload Management

As the workload increases towards the end of the semester, it is difficult to maintain your normal routines. To avoid a crisis situation, it is necessary to prioritize your responsibilities. Foremost should be your own graduate work. Your first responsibility at the university is to your graduate program, and your assistantship is dependent on successful completion of degree requirements. Also, do not let work pile up. Distribute your work evenly over the available time, instead of waiting for that large block of time that will never appear (it is easier to grade 6 papers a day for 5 days than to grade 30 papers in one day).

### Availability

During the last few weeks of the semester some students may approach TAs for last minute help, tutoring, or discussion: office hours may become teaching sessions, and there may not be enough time to address all of the students adequately. It is therefore a good idea, although not obligatory, for TAs to schedule extra office hours and/or extra appointments near the end of semester. If you are not planning to offer expanded office hours or additional appointment slots at the end of semester, inform your students as early as possible so that they will have plenty of time to plan for a regular office hour visit.

### Anxiety

Remember that undergraduates, too, are facing end of semester pressures, and many of them are beginning to panic. Attendance may become increasingly sporadic. Some students will

## University Senate completes TA Review

Recently, the University's Senate Committee on Instruction, Curriculum and Advising conducted a "Review of Teaching Assistant Training" and prepared a series of recommendations that the Senate subsequently adopted. The recommendations address numerous TA-related issues, including: Undergraduate Concerns About TAs, TA Training, International TAs and Language Issues, Hiring and Compensation, and the number of TAs employed at Rutgers. The full text of the review is available online at <http://senate.rutgers.edu/tatrain.html>. Recommendations include the following:

- Each department should have a "specific responsibility for assuring that the [TAs] are trained and supervised in their teaching."
- With respect to international TAs, "...ESL staff should meet with the department in charge of supervising [TAs] to expedite the testing of students and ESL staff should be invited to participate in department training sessions."
- The committee recommends that, "where possible, departments should arrange for some kind of interview process before graduate students are hired..." as TAs.

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ask TAs to consider assigning extra-credit or make-up work. TAs should decide beforehand whether this is fair to the rest of the class; whatever the decision, keep students informed of the policy. In some cases, TAs who have made their policies about attendance, office hours, grading policies, and make-up work clear at the beginning of the semester, and have reminded students periodically of their expectations, will still be faced with complaints. At the very least, however, the explicit and consistent communication of class policies will establish a reasonable response to student complaints.

Occasionally, a student who is particularly worried about his or her performance may become combative and try to manipulate a TA into accommodating certain demands, but it is important to adhere to established policies. The key to dealing with such situations in class is not to let yourself or the other students become infected with the panic that may be generating the combative tone. Address concerns

fairly and honestly, but if the classroom dynamic is unduly disrupted by such conversations, then they should be conducted outside of class.

Finally, end of semester anxieties can lead to more serious issues, such as troubled students (see the March 2001 issue of TapTalk for information about identifying troubled students and getting them the counseling help they require) and violations of academic integrity (see the accompanying article on p. 3).

### Summer Suggestions

After the end of semester—when exams and papers have been marked, comments written, extensions granted, emergencies dealt with, and grades turned in—the thoughts of many TAs turn to anything but teaching. For many TAs, the summer represents a chance to return to the perhaps neglected activities of graduate student life, such as research, studying for qualifying exams, and working on a dissertation. Whether you bury yourself in the library, travel across the country, or head straight for the beach, do not abandon all thoughts of the classroom only to find yourself re-inventing the wheel when the fall semester arrives. In this spirit, TapTalk offers some suggestions for a productive TA summer break.

· Some TAs will, of course,

remain on campus to teach during the summer session; this often represents a TA's first opportunity to have sole responsibility for a course, or to teach a more advanced course than is generally available during spring and fall semesters. See the TAP website (<http://taproject.rutgers.edu>) for specific suggestions for preparing for a summer teaching assignment.

· It has become a truism that one of the most desirable attributes to have on the job market is evidence of dedication to both scholarly and pedagogical pursuits. One way to cultivate the latter is to turn your ideas about teaching into a conference paper or perhaps even a journal article. There are numerous publications and organizations that discuss teaching in general and in specific disciplinary contexts; find an appropriate forum, spend a couple of weeks researching and writing, and add your voice to the conversation. Another option for professional development is to work on your Teaching Portfolio, which is a formal account of your teaching experience and accomplishments. The TAP Teaching Portfolio Guide contains recommendations for keeping thorough and accurate records, a set of guidelines for writing an effective teaching statement, and templates for documenting information for each course you teach or assist;

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## Maintaining Academic Integrity

With semester's end rapidly approaching, many students find themselves with either too many commitments, or as a result of poor time management, not enough time to study or complete assignments. Unfortunately and inevitably, some students find a quick solution in academic dishonesty. Whether paraphrasing a quotation without giving proper acknowledgment to the author or writing test answers on their shoes, cheating is unfair to all involved, from the instructor to the honest students. Furthermore, as an instructor you have an obligation to report all instances or suspected instances of academic dishonesty. However, an instructor can take a proactive approach to academic dishonesty. Here are a few tips that may reduce the opportunity for students to cheat and make it easier for you to identify those who still choose to engage in academically dishonest behavior.

### Testing

**-Do not use the same exam every semester.** If students have one of your past exams, they should be familiar with your testing style, not with the answers to the test you are about to give.

**-Short answers are better than true/false or multiple choice.** Short answers better reflect the student's knowl-

edge, as the guessing element is eliminated and the greater the detail required, the harder it is to copy.

**-If possible, have students separated by one seat on all sides.** The greater the space between students, the more obvious the dishonest attempt.

**-Have students check their bags at the door.** Students do not need their book bags beside them when taking tests. In fact, the presence of bags, books, and folders can only encourage dishonesty. Students should leave all non-essential objects at the front of the room.

**-Provide blue-books for students.** If you provide the blue-books, this eliminates the possibility of students bringing blue-books that contain pre-written notes or answers. If you cannot provide blue-books, ask them to start their answers on an arbitrarily determined line or page, and have all outlines and notes during the exam be confined to a similarly determined page.

**-Be Alert.** Do not leave the testing room. If you must sit down, sit at the back of the room. If you are reading a book or otherwise not paying attention, you are inviting students to cheat.

### Papers

**-Assign detailed topics.** If the assignment parameters are narrowly defined, the likelihood of 'internet' papers, papers from other courses, or work done by other students being turned in is lessened.

**-Discuss the assignment with students individually.** If your class is small enough, require that students discuss their ideas before turning in a paper. Ask for outlines, drafts, or simply require that the topic get your approval. Not only will this allow students to work through their ideas (which is always good) but the end result should be in line with the prior discussions, outlines, drafts, et cetera.

These are only a few suggestions, but a starting point nonetheless. Preventative measures make students think twice about academic dishonesty and will ensure that those students who decide to cheat will find it difficult to do so.

### Get In Touch!

Tap Office:  
<http://tapproject.rutgers.edu>

Graduate School - NB:  
<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>

TA Helpline: 932-11TA

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they are available at the TAP Office, 25 Bishop Place, CAC.

· Finally, the summer is a good time to work on next fall's round of grant and fellowship applications. The Graduate School-New Brunswick (<http://gsnb.rutgers.edu>) Rutgers Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (<http://orsp.rutgers.edu>) and the Center for Humanities and Social Science Research (<http://chaser.rutgers.edu>) offer centralized repositories of information on grant and fellowship opportunities within and outside the University, as well as guides to grant and proposal writing.

# TAP Calendar

4/3	<i>Workshop: Proposal Writing in the Sciences</i>	4:30p.m. <sup>3</sup>
4/10	<i>Teaching Summer Classes: Course design, book orders, syllabus preparation</i>	12 noon <sup>2</sup>
4/12	<i>Dissertation and Thesis Workshop:</i>	10:00a.m. <sup>1</sup>
4/19	<i>Workshop: Academic Integrity</i>	12 noon <sup>2</sup>
5/17	<i>Commencement</i>	
5/21	<i>Workshop: Proposal Writing in the Humanities and the Social Sciences</i>	9:00a.m. <sup>3</sup>
5/21	<i>Workshop: Proposal Writing in the Sciences</i>	9:00a.m. <sup>3</sup>

1. Please call (732) 932-7034, or email Barbara Sirman at [sirman@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:sirman@rci.rutgers.edu), if you plan to attend a workshop.

2. Workshops at at the Graduate School-New Brunswick, 25 Bishop Place, CAC. Please call (732) 932-7747, or email Alex Bachmann at [abachman@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:abachman@rci.rutgers.edu), if you would like to register for a workshop.

3. Presented by the Center for Humanities and Social Science Research (CHaSeR). For details and to register contact Teresa Delcorso: (732) 932-2705 or [delcorso@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:delcorso@rci.rutgers.edu).

## Teaching Assistant Project

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