Graduate Teaching Assistant Protocol
Department of Ecosystem Science and Management
Texas A&M University
Guidelines first adopted November 1, 2018

Purpose
The goal of this program is to offer qualified graduate students in good standing with the Department of Ecosystem Science and Management with opportunities to obtain education, training, mentoring, and experience in college level teaching, while simultaneously providing students in our classes with the best possible educational experience. Graduate students with career interests in college-level teaching are encouraged to participate in opportunities offered by the Graduate Teaching Academy (gta.tamu.edu), part of the TAMU Center for Teaching Excellence (cte.tamu.edu) to leverage their experience as a teaching assistant and gain valuable preparation for employment for faculty positions with teaching appointments.

Teaching assistants are a highly valued part of instructional learning in our department. Classroom, laboratory, and on-line teaching in ESSM courses carry high expectations for defining and communicating learning outcomes, lesson relevance, demonstrations, and assessment, as well as providing mentoring and guiding student discovery.

The Associate Department Head for Graduate Programs is responsible for coordinating and supervising this program, for ensuring TA compliance with required training, and for reporting data and trend analyses to the Department Head, Associate Department Head for Undergraduate Programs, and faculty.

Participation in the department teaching program can be fulfilled as follows:
1. As a paid Graduate Teaching Assistant (GAT)
   a. Half-time=20 hours/week (depending on size of assignment)
   b. Quarter-time=10 hours/week (depending on size of assignment)
2. As a paid Graduate Assistant Non-Teaching (GANT). These assignments are reserved for roles that involve logistical and/or technical support for a course.
3. As a paid hourly student worker (hours vary depending on load). These assignments are made for courses that require only intermittent and limited teaching support.
Steps Associated with Application, Compliance, Evaluation, and Selection of Teaching Assistants

1. TA Selection Process
If you are on a fellowship, you are automatically assigned a TA position for one semester each year. The graduate programs advisor will notify you of your assignment at least two months prior to the semester start.

a. Selections associated with fellowships and other awards: Many of our TAs are pre-selected based on awards and fellowships. These students are guaranteed TA positions for the time-period of their fellowship, as outlined in their offer letter.

b. Call for applications for Fall and Spring Semester TAs for the following year will be sent by email to faculty and graduate students by April 15 of the previous academic year. This call covers all course teaching needs not filled by pre-selected TAs, but also is an opportunity for pre-selected TAs to declare their teaching preferences. Assignments are announced in late May. Criteria for selection is described below in Section 4.

c. Round two: If any class needs are unfulfilled, a second round of applications for Spring Semester TAs will be called immediately, typically in November.

d. Every effort will be made to make TA assignments as quickly and efficiently as possible; however, some elements of the process are subject to delay and out of departmental control. Patience with the process is appreciated.

2. TA Course Assignments
a. Every effort will be made to match students with appropriate courses based on needs driven by courses, sections, number of students to be served, and responsibilities required. To the extent possible, graduate TAs will be matched with courses according to knowledge/experience. In cases where a TA is not as familiar with a course, informal education by the TA on course topics should occur.

b. Both instructors and prospective TAs are given an opportunity to provide input into the selection process. When students complete the application, they will list their course preferences in ranked order. An attempt will be made to assign the applicant to one of his or her top choices, although this is not guaranteed.

c. First priority is given to TAs pre-selected based on awards and fellowships. For any additional assignments, preference will be given to ESSM PhD students, ESSM MS-thesis students, ESSM non-thesis
students, and finally non-ESSM students whose advisor is in ESSM, in that order. We will also prioritize students nearing completion of their degree without other sources of funding. Program progress will be assessed with respect to the date of matriculation (including degree plan, proposal, prelims, time to degree). Exceptions can be made for non-ESSM majors to teach if qualified and no ESSM students are qualified.

d. Must be eligible to teach. See details of eligibility below.

3. Notification of TA assignment
Graduate students will be notified of TA assignments via email from the graduate programs advisor by May 31. This email will have an offer letter attachment for the student to complete in a timely manner. The letter will detail the teaching assignment, number of hours per week, and other specifics on health insurance and tuition and fees coverage.

4. Compliance and Eligibility
   a. The applicant’s academic schedule must match the assignment. We ask students to check their degree plans and course schedules well in advance and plan accordingly. Notify the graduate programs advisor immediately if there are conflicts.
   b. TAs must be in good academic standing. GPA will be assessed upon posting of grades at the end of the semester prior to assignment. They must also not be on probation for any non-academic reason.
   c. Verification of training requirements:
      i. Teaching Assistant Training and Evaluation Program (TATEP)
      ii. Hazard Communication Training
      iii. FERPA
      iv. Van training (if applicable)
      v. Others as required
   d. Verify examination scores for ELP program for International Students
   e. Written acknowledgement of ESSM Guidelines (this document)
   f. Approval of major advisor
   g. Some courses have specific requirements that must be met, such as a valid driver's license.

5. Instructor requests for TAs and other teaching support (GANT, TI, hourly student workers, etc.)
   a. Instructor requests for TAs will be communicated by email to the Associate Head for Graduate Programs no later than April 1 for the following year (both fall and spring terms). At this time, faculty can
also request preferred TAs. Requests made after April 1 will be handled on a case-by-case basis. Please provide a full description of job duties and estimate time spent on various tasks. In addition, provide justification for the request using the criteria listed herein.

b. Typically courses that require TA support meet at least one of the following criteria (in priority order):
   i. Course has a lab
   ii. High enrollment
   iii. Projects requiring additional instructional support
   iv. Writing intensive course
   v. Field trips
   vi. Frequent graded work
   vii. Online courses requiring web-based instruction support

c. Selection of undergraduate courses that will get TA support will be based on departmental teaching needs driven by courses, sections, high-impact activities, and number of students to be served (see criteria above). Requests for graduate TAs for a course may be denied based on a fair assessment of departmental teaching needs and budget constraints. Therefore, not every course meeting the above criteria will be eligible. Examples include a low enrollment course with a lab, or high enrollment course without projects and whose exams can be graded using scantron.

d. Courses that have historically required TAs will be reassessed annually to ensure they continue to meet ESSM requirements for TA support, based on current job duties and time requirements.

e. Graduate courses are not a priority for TA support, as they tend to have low enrollment and more specialized instruction. However, requests for graduate TAs will be evaluated on a case by case basis using the above criteria. See section 4 below for details on approved responsibilities for these TAs.

f. Given the limited departmental funds for TA support, some courses with TA needs may have to fill those needs using undergraduate teaching interns.

**Paperwork, ELPE, and Benefits**

1. **Paperwork Process**
   For TAs to be placed on payroll, the following steps must be taken:
   - Successful completion of a background check.
   - Student’s ability to provide employment eligibility documentation required by federal law, and if applicable, compliance with Selective Service law.
- Schedule an appointment to complete all necessary paperwork with Miki McClenton, ESSM business coordinator, at mmcclenton@tamu.edu or 979.845.5034.
  - You will need to bring the following items with you:
    - **US Citizens:**
      1. Social security card (physical card)
      2. Driver’s license
    - **International Students:**
      3. Passport
      4. Any information regarding your status (I-94, I-20, visa, etc.)
- Paperwork must be completed in a timely manner, prior to the first day of classes. TAs will not be able to work until their paperwork is completely processed. This affects the student's ability to be placed on eCampus as “instructor.” Once the paperwork is complete, then the TA can be added into the course on eCampus.

2. Title Code Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GAT</th>
<th>GAR</th>
<th>GANT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Teaching Assistant</td>
<td>Research Assistant</td>
<td>Non-Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD Tuition</td>
<td>Covered by department if on fellowship or COALS if TA only</td>
<td>See faculty advisor for information on tuition coverage</td>
<td>See faculty advisor for information on tuition coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MS Tuition</td>
<td>Partially covered by COALS, the rest covered by dept if on fellowship, otherwise faculty advisor covers</td>
<td>See faculty advisor for information on tuition coverage</td>
<td>See faculty advisor for information on tuition coverage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pay</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Biweekly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health insurance covered by dept?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
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3. ELPE Requirements for International Students
International graduate students who wish to serve in teaching positions can certify for English proficiency before enrollment by achieving requisite scores on the oral component of the following standardized tests: TOEFL,
International graduate students who wish to serve in teaching positions and have not met certification requirements prior to enrollment can certify by passing the oral section of the English Language Proficiency Exam (ELPE) offered by Testing Services on the Texas A&M campus.

**Eligibility levels for international graduate students serving in teaching positions**

**Level 1:** Students eligible for teaching assignments

**Level 2:** Students conditionally eligible for teaching assignments for one semester only but must simultaneously participate in Center for Teaching Excellence English Language Proficiency (CTE-ELP) instruction and achieve a certifying score on the oral section of the ELPE by the end of the semester.

**Level 3:** Students not eligible for teaching assignment. Students should participate in spoken language training (such as those offered by CTE-ELP or other independent English language instruction providers) to assist them in meeting English language proficiency requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level #</th>
<th>TOEFL speaking section</th>
<th>IELTS speaking section</th>
<th>PTE speaking section</th>
<th>ELPE oral exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>&gt;=8.0</td>
<td>&gt;=85</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>23-25</td>
<td>7.0-7.5</td>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;23</td>
<td>&lt;7.0</td>
<td>&lt;75</td>
<td>65</td>
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Expectations, Duties, and Responsibilities

1. Terms of Employment
   a. As employees of ESSM, TAs are expected to adhere to all policies and procedures set forth for student employees. TAs are subject to termination for misconduct or not fulfilling their responsibilities.
   b. TAs are expected to maintain close contact with their instructors via email and be reachable by telephone in case of emergency.
   c. If you are unable to fulfill your duties for any reason, contact your immediate supervisor (the instructor of record, typically) immediately.
   d. Report any issues or concerns in a timely manner to your advisor, instructor, or the Associate Department Head for Graduate Programs, as appropriate.

2. Roles and Responsibilities
   e. Teaching duties performed typically include:
      a. Teaching laboratory sections
         i. Lab material setup and maintenance
         ii. Explaining lab assignments to class
         iii. One-on-one student assistance
      b. Teaching computer lab sections
         i. Explain assignment to class
         ii. Troubleshoot and maintenance of software
         iii. Assist students with assignments
      c. Assist instructor with field-based activities
         i. Driving students to/from field locations
         ii. Assisting students with field activities
         iii. Providing logistical support for field activities
      d. Holding office hours
      e. Assisting individuals and groups with project/writing assignments
      f. Hosting discussions on web-based forums
      g. Grading assistance. Must adhere to FERPA rules for confidentiality. See section 4 below for graduate-level courses.

3. Expectations for faculty
TA assignments are valuable learning opportunities for graduate students to gain experience as teachers. Faculty are expected to communicate TA expectations clearly at the beginning of the semester and set reasonable expectations for weekly duties. Faculty are encouraged to check in with TA at least once a week to communicate about student issues and provide guidance
4. Guidelines for TAs teaching in courses with graduate students enrolled*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty Responsibilities</th>
<th>TA responsibilities</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independently developing course content, objectives, assessment.</td>
<td>Assisting students with projects and homework, as approved by course instructor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructing students in course, with exception of guest lectures.</td>
<td>Occasional guest lecturing and content-based instruction is acceptable, but TAs should not regularly instruct courses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading graduate student assignments.</td>
<td>Communicating due dates and other information to students in email or in person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Holding office hours.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Letting course instructor know if any conflict of interest issues arise.</td>
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</table>

*Also applies to stacked courses

To be completed by graduate teaching assistant prior to semester start:

I, ____________________, have reviewed the graduate teaching assistant protocol as outlined above and agree to adhere to all policies while fulfilling my role as a teaching assistant for the department of Ecosystem Science and Management.

__________________________ __________
Graduate TA signature          Date
Appendix A: UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING INTERN (UTI) POLICY

The number of Graduate Teaching Assistants available in ESSM is not adequate to meet the teaching support needs of our undergraduate programs. The ESSM Department has been expanding the use of undergraduate students as teaching interns to support faculty teaching in undergraduate courses with laboratories and writing intensive components. The use of undergraduate students to support teaching should be viewed as an opportunity for the UTI to gain experience and develop teaching skills, not just provide labor.

This policy statement has been developed to inform faculty of the criteria used for consideration and approval of requests for employment of UTI.

COURSES: UTI will be considered for laboratories and writing intensive courses. All instructional materials and tests for the course should be developed by the faculty instructor of record. UTI should be under direct supervision by the instructor of record.

DUTIES: UTI may be used to assist the instructor with course prep work, record keeping, conducting labs, assisting students during laboratory classes and during office hours outside of class, and grading exams with keys provided by the instructor. In Writing Intensive courses, UTI may provide one-on-one assistance to students, review and mark students’ writing assignments, and other duties to assist the instructor. UTI should not provide the final grade on writing assignments in Writing Intensive courses. UTI should never work more than 20 hours/week and frequently less to respect the student’s need to focus on their academic work.

QUALIFICATIONS: UTI should be students who have completed the course that they will be assisting with exemplary grades and performance. They should also have the breadth of supporting coursework and experience to effectively assist students enrolled in the course. They should have an overall GPA >3.0 and demonstrate integrity, leadership, and good communication skills. It is expected that the faculty requesting the student will be personally familiar with the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the UTI.
APPROVAL OF REQUESTS: The Associate Department Head for Undergraduate Programs will send the faculty a call for requests for UTI during the prior semester. The call for Fall semester will be sent in April and the call for Spring semester will be sent in November. Requests for Summer UTI will be sent in February. All requests will be evaluated by the ESSM Executive Committee consisting of the Department Head and the Associate Department Heads relative to the guidelines set forth in this policy and relative to the amount of funding available. Consideration will be given to the specific needs of each course and also to giving all requests consideration within the funding limits.

EXPECTATIONS: UTI will demonstrate ethical professional behavior at all times in the conduct of their duties. They should remember that their behavior while working and during off hours reflects on the department and university, not just themselves. They are expected to treat all students with respect and fairly at all times in the conduct of their duties. Breaches of conduct will be considered as grounds for termination of employment.