

Mechanical Engineering Department's Guidelines on the Assignment of the Number of Teaching Assistants and Graders to Courses

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The teaching budget, which is determined and funded each year by the Cockrell School of Engineering, is the primary source of funding for teaching assistants (TAs) as well as lecturers, assistant instructors (AIs), professors of practice and professors of instruction. The operating budget, which is also budgeted by the Cockrell School of Engineering, is used to pay graders. The guidelines below were established to provide transparency in how these limited resources are allocated.*

TAs for Undergraduate Core Laboratory Courses

Currently there are five required undergraduate laboratory courses in the UG curriculum. The maximum number of TAs assigned for these courses is one 20 hour TA for every 24 students enrolled. Some areas have elected to operate their labs at a level of one 20 hour TA for every 30 students.

TAs for Undergraduate Lecture Courses

The maximum number of TAs assigned for these courses is one 10 hour TA for every 60 students enrolled. Lecture courses that have been assigned one or more TAs generally will not also be assigned a grader since one of the expected functions of TAs for a lecture course is grading.

TAs for Graduate Lecture Courses

The maximum number of TAs assigned for these courses is one 10 hour TA for every 40 students enrolled. Lecture courses that have been assigned one or more TAs generally will not also be assigned a grader since one of the expected functions of TAs for a lecture course is grading.

TAs for Elective Undergraduate and Graduate Courses that have a Laboratory Component

It is recognized that there is a range of laboratory activities that can occur in these classes. This could include 1) a dedicated weekly laboratory exercise that requires multiple hours to 2) a group project that is performed in addition to lectures, homework, exams, etc. to 3) a range between these two extremes. Because of the variations in laboratory activities across these courses the number of TAs assigned to these courses is handled on case-by-case basis.

It is also recognized that courses such as these that offer a hands-on component offer unique benefits to students. Nevertheless, the additional costs associated with these courses requires that the number, format, and content of these courses be vetted by the area and the appropriate departmental committee (UPC or GPC) to ensure that the courses are consistent with the overall curriculum and so that these resources are balanced across areas. Thus, BEFORE creating or modifying a course to add a laboratory component, the instructor should first obtain approvals from the area in which the course will be taught and from the UPC and/or GPC. The appropriate level of TA support will then be discussed with the Associate Chair for Academics.

Graders for Undergraduate and Graduate Courses

Graders are assigned at a rate of 1 hour per 10 students enrolled.

*To provide maximal support for faculty teaching activities, the Department allocates all available TA funds from its teaching budget. In years where the budget is more generous, additional TAs may be allocated beyond what is listed in this document. However, as the budget varies from year-to-year, a more generous TA allocation in a given year does not guarantee that this level of support can or will occur in subsequent years.