



Department of  
Chemistry and Biochemistry  
UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO **COLORADO SPRINGS**

# Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook

Fall 2025



## Table of Contents

### [Welcome](#)

- What is the purpose of this handbook?
- What does it mean to be a GTA?
- Importance of GTAs
- Professional Ethics
- Who do I contact for help?

### [What does it mean to be a laboratory instructor?](#)

- Questions to ask your course supervisor
- The first day of laboratory: putting your best foot forward

### [What do I do with my time in lab?](#)

- Building a pre-lab lecture
- During the laboratory
- Concluding your laboratory
- Meeting with students outside the laboratory

### [Classroom \(er...Laboratory\) Management](#)

- Attendance
- Late Assignments
- Academic Misconduct
- Difficult Students
- Aggressive or Disruptive Students

### [More about grading](#)

- Grading tips

### [More about laboratory safety](#)

- Student guidelines
- Handling chemicals & equipment

### [Academic Integrity](#)

### [FAQs: Expectations & Instructor Autonomy](#)

### [How is my teaching evaluated?](#)

### [Recommendations for rehiring GTAs](#)

### [GTA Probation](#)

### [Other helpful resources](#)

### [Acknowledgements](#)



## Welcome!

Welcome to your new role as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Colorado Colorado Springs. We appreciate your contributions to the teaching mission of our department and to the College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences at UCCS. This handbook is provided to you as a resource as you develop and hone your skills as an instructor and to assist you in becoming comfortable in your new role.

## What is the purpose of this handbook?

The purpose of this handbook is to develop a training document and program for our incoming graduate (MSc) students participating in the UCCS Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry Graduate Teaching Assistant program. This document is a 'living' document and will be revised frequently. We invite GTA and faculty input.

The number of GTAs has increased in recent years, and our GTA instructors have requested more support regarding topics including:

- Getting Started
  - Using Canvas
  - Getting Keys
  - Where can I go (or not go)?
- Laboratory Safety and Safety Protocols
  - Required Safety Items (PPE, Dress code, Classroom Management)
  - Incident Reporting
  - Managing Safety Emergencies
  - Cleaning the Lab
- Chemical Stock and Equipment
  - Refills
  - Issues with chemicals or equipment
- Teaching
  - Good Practice 101
  - Equity in Teaching a Variety of Learners
    - Managing frustration when students “don’t get it”
    - Accommodation Letters
  - Time Management for Preparation and Grading
  - Grading Fairly, Writing Comments
  - Finding Your Voice
    - Balancing expectations and flexibility in teaching
  - Occupying the Teaching Space
  - Student Support Hours
  - Evaluations
  - Confidentiality
  - Academic Misconduct
- Access to Department
  - Chemical Prep Rooms
  - Front Office, Supplies, Copier
  - How to get keys
- Communication with Lab Course Lead(s)
  - Setting expectations for teaching
  - Getting feedback



- Asking questions
- Offering suggestions, feedback, lab improvements
- Writing a description of job duties to set mutual expectations

### What does it mean to be a GTA?

A GTA role is a wonderful position as you transition from the student role to instructor role. You will be supported by experienced faculty members and laboratory course leads as you teach undergraduate laboratories. In your role as GTA, you are expected to:

- **Teach four laboratory sections per year** with two laboratory sections in the fall semester and two sections in the spring semester. You will independently teach lower division laboratory courses or non-majors laboratory sections OR assist a faculty member in teaching upper division laboratories.
- **Prepare for your teaching assignments** by developing a pre-lab lecture, demonstrating proper use of scientific equipment or glassware, and assisting students in completing post-lab assignments as required by the laboratory section.
- **Complete grading tasks** timely and professionally.
- **Promote safe practices** in the laboratory by assuring that all chemicals and reagents are used safely, that you and your students wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) and follow safety guidelines.
- **Communicate professionally and frequently** with your direct supervisor (faculty member, laboratory course lead), safety and laboratory coordinators, and your students. You will be expected to use Canvas and your uccs.edu email in your professional communications.

Participating in the GTA program contributes to your training experience in your MSc degree. We anticipate that serving as a GTA requires approximately 11 hours per week. Remember that you are a student and will need to also focus on your own coursework, research (if appropriate), and other endeavors (writing and presenting work related to your thesis or non-thesis activities).

### Importance of GTAs

Many courses at UCCS, including our many laboratory sections, could not be offered at all without GTA support. Your role as a laboratory instructor allows us to offer many sections of laboratory courses, which contribute to the educational experience of undergraduate UCCS students. You also are able to connect with your students and provide informal mentorship, guidance on the major or courses in the department, and to help new students feel welcomed in our department and at UCCS. Your work matters!

### Professional Ethics

GTAs represent the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, the College of Letters, Arts and Sciences, and UCCS. Always come to your laboratory section on time and prepared. Be fair and consistent when grading. Treat your students and colleagues with respect, and avoid comments or statements that are discriminatory, insulting, or incendiary. Remember to act with professionalism and integrity in your relationships with students and colleagues.

### Who do I contact for help?

We know that you are just learning how to teach, and you may be assigned to teach a laboratory that you yourself never took while an undergraduate student! Please ask for help, especially if you feel overwhelmed, unsure of your role, or if you have questions related to laboratory safety. You represent our department to our lower division students. Any of the persons listed below will be happy to answer your questions and address concerns.

**Laboratory Course Leads:**

| Name   | Laboratory ID    | Email  | Office Phone* |
|--|------------------|--|---------------|
| Niki Juhl                                      | CHEM 1201 & 1211 | <a href="mailto:njuhl@uccs.edu">njuhl@uccs.edu</a>   | x5208         |
| Dr. Elise Naughton                             | CHEM 1402 & 1412 | <a href="mailto:enaughto@uccs.edu">enaughto@uccs.edu</a>   | x3279         |
| Terry Geiger                                   | CHEM 3102 & 3112 | <a href="mailto:tgeiger@uccs.edu">tgeiger@uccs.edu</a>   | x5221         |
| Dr. Shelby Noland                              | CHEM 4002 & 4012 | <a href="mailto:snoland@uccs.edu">snoland@uccs.edu</a>   | x3414         |
| Dr. Suzannah Miller<br>and Dr. Bhagya de Silva | CHEM 4222        | <a href="mailto:smiller@uccs.edu">smiller@uccs.edu</a> ;<br><a href="mailto:wdesilva@uccs.edu">wdesilva@uccs.edu</a> |               |

\*Ask your direct supervisor if you may have his/her cell phone number and how they prefer to be contacted with questions (phone, email, or text).

**Safety/Stockroom/Laboratory coordinator (and **current** keeper of keys!):** Brett Mayer, [bmayer@uccs.edu](mailto:bmayer@uccs.edu), x5209

**Laboratory coordinator:** Sam Gee, [sgee2@uccs.edu](mailto:sgee2@uccs.edu), x3508

**Department Chair:** Dr. Dave Anderson, [danderso@uccs.edu](mailto:danderso@uccs.edu), x3154

**Department Associate Chair:** Dr. Janel Owens, [jowens2@uccs.edu](mailto:jowens2@uccs.edu), x3207

**Graduate Program Coordinator:** Dr. Carlos Diaz, [cdiaz3@uccs.edu](mailto:cdiaz3@uccs.edu)

**HR/Finance Professional:** AJ (Abigael) Vafiades, [avafiade@uccs.edu](mailto:avafiade@uccs.edu); Columbine Hall, LAS Dean's Office (COLU 2025)



## What does it mean to be a laboratory instructor?

The role of a GTA laboratory instructor is multi-faceted. While serving as a laboratory instructor, you may have the following responsibilities:

- Assign groups for laboratory activities
- Supervise data collection
- Teach laboratory notebook hygiene
- Respond to questions about technique or procedure
- Supervise the safe use of chemicals and reagents, including safe disposal of these materials
- Oversee proper use of PPE and general laboratory safety
- Demonstrate technique or procedure for equipment or instrumentation
- Provide pre-laboratory lectures
- Connect laboratory activities to lecture material
- Provide guidance on post-laboratory calculations
- Provide timely feedback and grades on laboratory assessments
- Communicate often and professionally with your students AND supervisor
- Alert your supervisor to problems in the laboratory (student behavior, laboratory procedure, etc.)

## Questions to ask your course supervisor

1. *Goals of the course:* What are the essential learning outcomes of the course?
2. *Audience:* What is the typical level and ability of incoming students?
3. *Structure:* Is there flexibility in how pre-laboratory lecture material is presented? Or is this a highly structured course where all faculty should cover the same information?
4. *Lecture & laboratory:* Are GTAs expected to attend the lecture portion of the course? The laboratory recitation/discussion section?
5. *Specific course duties:* Aside from duties listed above, what other duties are expected of me?
6. *Course policies:* Where do I find information on specific course policies? Am I expected to write a syllabus or build content in Canvas? How do I post grades? Am I responsible for posting material in Canvas?
7. *Department or GTA policies:* What if I am sick or unable to attend my assigned laboratory section?



## The first day of laboratory: putting your best (closed-toed shoe) foot forward

The first day of meeting your new students (up to 24!) can induce anxiety even in the most experienced faculty members. Here are a few tips and tricks for laying the groundwork for a successful semester:

- Follow the lead of your Laboratory Course Lead so that you are in sync!
- Know the course syllabus and specific course policies so that you can advise your students on their contents and purpose.
- Attend another laboratory section *before* you need to teach your laboratory. How does the faculty member you observe introduce the laboratory course and themselves to new students?
- Decide your plan of presenting material! The first day of class should typically include (and this list is not exhaustive nor a requirement):
  - An introduction of yourself and your role in the department. Be friendly but firm. You are the expert in this laboratory space, and your students must respect the rules of the laboratory!
  - Have your students introduce themselves. Perhaps bring in an icebreaker activity. (For example, have your students meet three other students in the class to share their name, major, hometown, and email or cell phone number so that they have a peer in the class to contact if they need help).
  - Discuss the course syllabus, specific course policies, attendance policies, and Canvas.
  - Describe your preferences regarding communication. Remind them of how and when they can reach you, especially if you have in person student (office) hours. **Share your [uwcs.edu](mailto:uwcs.edu) email address.**
  - Remind students where they can find the laboratory manual, required laboratory notebook, and PPE for purchase, as appropriate for the course.
  - Describe what the course will be about and let your enthusiasm shine!
  - Describe safety procedures or related safety quiz assignments, especially upcoming due dates for the required safety quiz.
  - Remind your students of upcoming deadlines or due dates for assignments.

Remember, you will not know all the answers. It is okay to tell a student, “I don’t know,” as a response to a question. However, it is up to you to find the answer! You want your students to feel comfortable with talking to you.



## What do I do with my time in lab?

### Building a pre-lab lecture

A pre-laboratory lecture is an essential part of good teaching in an active learning environment. You are providing structure to the day's meeting and emphasizing specific points - especially when it comes to safety or laboratory technique. You may also reinforce concepts presented in the lecture portion of the course. Here are some tips for building a successful pre-lab lecture:

- Speak clearly and loudly to be heard by all students. This is important in the laboratory space when there are loud fume hoods. *Ask if there is a microphone available if you feel you may need it.*
- Introduce your lecture or write an outline on the board of what you'll cover that day. **Emphasize the purpose of the laboratory.**
- **Ask your students questions** about the lab and content to engage students and assess their pre-laboratory activity knowledge.
- Repeat your key points in two or three different ways to connect with your learners.
- **Demonstrate technique** and explain quirks of equipment or instrumentation.
- Include examples where appropriate.
- Stress important points and be explicit. (Say, "Write this down.")
- **Emphasize safety** and appropriate precautions.
- Pause. Give time for your learners to ask questions.
- Don't read lecture material or content you've written on the board.
- Remind students how the laboratory activity reinforces content from the lecture.
- Spend time reminding your students about how they will use the data they've collected! This may include:
  - Use of Excel
  - Recording raw data in the laboratory notebook
  - Preparation and submission of graphs or tables
  - Post-lab calculations

If you're new to lecturing, practice your talk ahead of time and think about how you will use the board space effectively. Use clear and neat handwriting that is large enough to be seen and read clearly at the back of the room.

### During the laboratory

Remember, you continue to teach after presenting your pre-lab lecture! As your students begin on the laboratory activity, give them a moment to think about the material you've presented, to find laboratory equipment that they need, or to build a plan – especially if they have a laboratory partner. As the laboratory session gets underway, circulate about the laboratory to:

- Evaluate laboratory procedure and safety.
- Ask and answer questions. Don't wait for your students to engage you! They may be hesitate or shy to ask anything of you, especially early on in the semester.
- Ask strategic questions to gauge understanding. ("Now that you have these data recorded in your notebook, how will you graph them? What does this graphed information tell you?")
- Remind students to keep on pace as they only have a limited time in the laboratory. Are they making sufficient progress?
- Remind students to interact with each other!





### Concluding your laboratory

It may not be possible to have all students re-convene, but make sure you confer with each student or student team before they leave the laboratory. Remind them of due dates, post-lab calculations, and laboratory clean up procedures.

### Meeting with students outside of the laboratory

GTAs are welcomed and encouraged to use CENT 250 as a meeting space when having individual or small group appointments with students. Your student hours (or office hours) should be announced to your students at the start of the semester. Remind your students that these optional meetings are for the benefit of the students in the course. **Set limits about what this scheduled time may be used for!** (Ask your supervisor about how many hours a week you should plan for holding office hours). Topics for these optional meetings may include:

- Reviewing previously graded laboratory reports (especially if you have written, “let’s chat about this” as a grading comment)
- Reviewing post-lab calculations or finding errors in post-lab calculations
- Reviewing material related to the lecture (this is up to you!)
- Discussing courses in the major or department

If you have a student who wants to discuss problems they are having with their instructor/course/romantic partner/roommate/life/etc., refer them to, respectively, their course instructor/laboratory course lead/counselor/counselor/counselor/counselor. Set limits about what help you are able to provide. Beyond that, refer your student to other resources on campus (and see Other Helpful Resources of this document).

[Remember that romantic relationship\(s\) with your students is prohibited](#) until that student is no longer enrolled in your class and receiving a grade from you.



## Classroom (er...Laboratory) Management

It is important that you are aware of and that you enforce course policies – refer to the course syllabus provided by your supervisor. Your supervisor is also aware of department or UCCS policies. When developing how you will manage the laboratory space, remember that ensuring a safe learning environment is paramount. Your policies should always enforce the golden rules of safety and respect.

### Attendance

Your laboratory supervisor has a specific laboratory course attendance policy that is articulated in the course syllabus. Refer to this policy and enforce it. You may also want to confer with your supervisor about what constitutes a valid excuse for missing a laboratory class meeting.

### Late Assignments

Again, your laboratory supervisor will have a specific course policy that dictates how and when late submissions will be handled. Refer to the policy and enforce it.

### Academic Misconduct

Sadly, instances of academic misconduct will occur. We have a special department policy on this topic, which is included in this document (see [Academic Integrity](#)). The UCCS Student Academic Ethics Code Policy is also included in the [Other Helpful Resources](#) section. Remind your students of these policies.

Bottom line: If you suspect an instance of academic misconduct, gather and save the evidence. Share your concerns with your laboratory course lead.

### Difficult Students

If you have a student who is challenging your presentation of information, respond in a positive way to encourage critical discussion. If you have a student who is challenging your authority and questions your role as instructor in the laboratory, ask for help. Your laboratory course lead, department chair, or associate chair are all willing to engage in conversation with your student.

You are always welcome to invite a difficult student to meet with you individually in office hours. By delaying a meeting, a student may have had a chance to diffuse their heightened emotional state and engage in an informative conversation.

### Aggressive or Disruptive Students

There is absolutely no reason for you to spend precious laboratory time engaging with a student who is acting aggressively towards you or disrupting learning of fellow students. If such an instance occurs, immediately call campus police (x3111 on a campus phone, 719-255-3111 by cell) to remove the disruptive student. Continue with your course instruction. When the laboratory meeting concludes, share what happened by email with your laboratory supervisor and the department chair. **Be sure to file an [incident report](#) with the Office of the Dean of Students within 24 hours of the incident.**



## More about grading

Your supervisor for the laboratory will have specific grading policies, but note that you are responsible for evaluating your students' work and performance in the class. Remember that your students use their previously graded laboratory reports to improve future submissions (well...ideally, this would be the case). At any rate, your students have the right to prompt and professional feedback. Use appropriate marks, explanations, and corrections. You may also have to explain why you gave limited credit. If you have a rubric available to assist in evaluating assessments, use it!

### Grading tips:

- Don't give in to pushy students and don't quibble over points. (Offer to re-grade the entire laboratory report).
- Be fair and be willing to fully explain why you took points away.
- Be consistent in grading! Use a rubric.
- Keep grades confidential! Do not leave graded laboratory reports out in an open space for your students to retrieve. Return graded assessments to the individual student and that student only.

## More about laboratory safety

As the instructor and authority figure in the laboratory, good safety procedures start with you! Model good behavior by wearing appropriate attire, PPE, and clipping long hair back. Your students will follow your example. You have the right to ask a student to leave the laboratory if they engage in unsafe behavior, refuse to wear appropriate attire or PPE, or require multiple corrections.

Academic laboratories, in addition to teaching fundamental technique and data collection, are also the incubators for life-long safety practices. Encourage your students to think about safety, risk assessment, and prudent laboratory practice. Remember that your students are inexperienced chemists. Explain to them the hazards and how to minimize risk or exposure when using those hazards.

The following information are taken (nearly) verbatim from the American Chemical Society's [Student Laboratory Code of Conduct](#):

### Student Guidelines

- Students should behave in a mature and responsible manner at all times in the laboratory and other instructional sites. All inappropriate behavior is especially prohibited.
- Students must read all laboratory and safety operating procedures before conducting an activity and must follow all verbal and written instructions carefully. If you are unsure of the procedure, ask your instructor for help before proceeding.
- Students must not touch any equipment or chemicals unless specifically instructed to do so.
- Students must not eat, drink, apply cosmetics, chew gum, touch contact lenses, wear acrylic nails, or conduct other unsafe activities in the laboratory. Wash hands thoroughly with soap and water after participating in any laboratory activities (including setup, hands-on, and takedown).
- Students must perform only those experiments authorized by the instructor.
- Students will receive training related to the locations and operating procedures for all applicable personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Students must not enter or work in the laboratory unless an instructor is present.
- Students must never enter chemical storage or preparation areas.
- *Students should be trained and know the location of and how to operate all safety equipment and engineering controls in the science classroom and laboratory. This includes the eyewash station, the deluge shower, the fire extinguisher, the fume hood, and the safety blanket. Students should also know the location of emergency master electrical and gas shutoffs and exits.*
- Students' backpacks, books, or other items are to remain in an area designated by the instructor and should not be brought into the laboratory area, to prevent potential cross-contamination involving chemical hazards and potential slip, trip, and fall hazards.
- Student work areas should be kept orderly and uncluttered and should be cleaned at the end of each laboratory investigation or activity.
- Students must turn off all gas burners and electrical equipment and follow local instructions in the event of a fire drill, lockdown, or other emergency during an investigation or activity.

### Handling Chemicals and Equipment

- Students must not return unused chemicals to the reagent container. Always properly dispose of all chemical waste as directed by the teacher.
- Students must never enter or remain in the science laboratory areas unless accompanied by an instructor or a designated UCCS employee.



- Students must wear eye protection that complies with the American National Standards Institute/International Safety Equipment Association (ANSI/ISEA) Z87.1 +D3 standard (indirectly vented chemical splash goggles), a nonlatex apron, and nitrile gloves whenever chemicals, heat, or glassware are used by either the teacher or the students in the laboratory.
- *Students should always wear appropriate personal apparel in the laboratory and avoid wearing loose or flammable clothing. Full footed, closed-toe shoes are required. Flip-flops, sandals, or open or exposed footwear are prohibited. Long hair should be secured in a bun.*
- [Students must report any incident](#) (including all spills, breakages, or other releases of hazardous materials) to their instructor immediately, no matter how insignificant it may appear. This should include all injuries such as cuts, burns, breathing problems, or other signs of physical harm. Students are encouraged to also report incidents that do not result in physical harm, so that lessons can be learned from these “near misses”.
- Students must never remove chemicals, equipment, or supplies from the laboratory area.
- Students must carefully examine all equipment before and after each use and report any broken or defective equipment to the teacher immediately.
- Students need to be aware of critical information about use of hazardous chemicals in the laboratory. Your instructor will review the important points on Safety Data Sheets (SDS) relative to hazardous chemicals that students will be working with and will post the SDS in the laboratory.
- Chemicals and reagents must be disposed of properly per instructor directives.

## Academic Integrity

### Introduction

Observing high ethical standards is integral to the reliability of and trustworthiness of our academic community. Academic integrity describes the behaviors and actions of students, faculty, and staff to build and maintain trust in our work. In our academic community, all students, faculty, and staff are accountable for their work and actions. Here, we outline our Academic Integrity principles, expectations of our academic community members, and protocols for addressing concerns related to violations of our principles.

### Policy on Academic Integrity and Expected Conduct

The Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at UCCS will uphold the following principles of academic integrity to [ensure our department vision and mission](#). These principles of academic integrity follow:

1. All students, faculty, and staff receive appropriate credit for their ideas, results, assessments, and other scholarly accomplishments.
2. The work and ideas of other scholars is properly cited and attributed.
3. All students should receive fair treatment, support, interaction, and evaluation such that no student gains inappropriate advantage(s).
4. The quality and value of our undergraduate and graduate degrees are maintained because we value and practice academic integrity.

### Expectations of Academic Conduction for Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry Members

All persons associated with our department, including faculty, students, and staff, are reminded to:

- Act with personal integrity and responsibility,
- Uphold the department and university policies regarding academic integrity,
- Respect intellectual property,
- Create learning, research, advising, and mentoring environments that are:
  - Fair, open to ideas, and safe;
  - Free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, dishonesty, misrepresentation, and abuse;
  - Free from violations of academic integrity principles or academic misconduct (defined below).

#### Faculty members are expected to:

- Clearly define when and how students may collaborate or cooperate on course assessments;
- Establish an academic environment that promotes academic integrity to prevent academic misconduct;
- Be proactive in recognizing possible issues and violations of misconduct;
- Report instances of academic misconduct timely and confidentially to the instructor and/or faculty advisor, who will share information with the relevant instructor; and
- Discuss instances of academic misconduct with suspected students and report the situation to the department chair, who has the prerogative to take further action if necessary.

#### Students are expected to:

- Read, understand, and acknowledge the [UCCS Academic Ethics Code Policy](#);



- Complete all course assessments, whether they be examinations, quizzes, laboratory reports, problem sets, essays, presentations, etc., **privately** unless otherwise specified by their course instructor;
- Submit individual work that was privately completed unless specified by the instructor;
- Properly cite all sources; and
- Report instances of academic misconduct timely and confidentially to their instructor and/or advisor.

### Intellectual Property

All course materials provided to students by their instructor are considered intellectual property of the instructor and UCCS. These course materials include, but are not limited to, lecture slides or notes, problem sets, exams, answer keys, study guides, outlines, etc. Students are actively encouraged to use these materials provided by their instructor to support and foster learning. In instances in which the instructor has encouraged collaborative learning, these materials may be shared with peers in the course who are registered and enrolled. Unauthorized distribution of these materials to any website, such as Chegg, PaperCoach, School Solver, etc., either during or after the semester, is strictly prohibited. Uploading course materials that are provided by your instructor to third party websites, even if modified for your personal use, is a violation of our academic integrity principles.

### Academic Misconduct

Our department defines academic misconduct to include:

- Cheating
- Plagiarism
- Misrepresentation
- Falsification
- Unauthorized collaboration
- Obtaining prior knowledge of examination materials in an unauthorized manner
- Selling or offering to buy assessment materials (answers to examinations, quizzes, problem sets, laboratory reports, etc.)
- Using a commercially prepared paper or other materials, including materials found on tutoring sites like Chegg or School Solver, in whole or in part, for academic credit
- Submitting the same or similar work for separate courses without express permission from instructor(s)
- Altering or falsifying academic records or evidence
- Intimidating peer students or faculty member
- Providing non-valid or false excuses to change an assessment time or date for unfair advantage
- Taking an examination or other assessment in place of another student
- Deliberately destroying or damaging another person's academic work
- Recording and/or disseminating instructional content without permission of the instructor
- Research misconduct
- Violating course policies defining academic conduct
- Using university resources in an academically dishonest manner

### Procedures for Addressing Instances of Academic Misconduct

If a student is accused of engaging in some form of academic misconduct by a peer student or by a faculty member, these procedures are followed:



1. Peer students who suspect academic misconduct by a fellow student should report the incident to their instructor, department chair, or to the provost with any supporting evidence.
2. In the case where a faculty member suspects academic misconduct, that faculty member should provide the student an opportunity to respond to the suspicion and associated evidence, as deemed appropriate by the instructor, within two weeks of the violation. Communication and discussion of the suspected violation will be conducted in a manner to protect the confidentiality of students, though other department faculty members, including the department chair or associate chair, may be alerted. Accused students should contact the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs concerning rights, processes, and procedures. In cases where a faculty member observes suspicious behavior, they may choose to issue a cautionary letter to the student prior to filing a formal complaint.
3. When there is clear and convincing evidence of academic misconduct and after discussion with the student, the faculty member is authorized to award a course grade of **ZF**. This course grade indicates academic dishonesty by the student, and it is an irrevocable mark on the transcript. Furthermore, the student is immediately dropped from the course and prohibited from participating or engaging in the course. The instructor must report the incident, in writing, to the Dean of Students office via the department chair and attach all relevant documentation.

Students and faculty members are encouraged to review the [UCCS Academic Ethics Code Policy](#) for additional information.

#### **Acknowledgements:**

Thanks to Terry Geiger for initiating this conversation and for providing documents. Several policy statements were reviewed in developing this document. For additional resources and information, please see:

[UCCS Academic Ethics Codes Policy](#)

[Chemistry Code of Conduct](#), University of Utah

[Academic Integrity](#), School of Engineering, Rutgers University

[Academic Misconduct](#), University of Washington

[Academic Conduct Policy](#), Chemical Engineering, UC Santa Barbara

[Policy on Academic Integrity](#), College of Engineering, Cal Poly Pomona





## FAQs: Expectations & Instructor Autonomy

### Expectations:

What does “being prepared” for lab mean?

- Be in the lab space early (if possible), have white board/projector ready.
- Pre-lab lecture prepared.

Do you expect me to read and reference the GTA handbook?

- The handbook is a resource of for you to reference as needed.

What happens when I need lab coverage?

- Inform your lab course lead when you are seeking coverage and who is covering your section.
  - If you have a preplanned absence, find coverage as early as possible.
  - In an emergency (unexpected event within 24 hours of your lab), ask for coverage immediately. Send an email to all lab instructors for your course requesting coverage. Everyone should respond to the email.
  - If you know an instructor that can cover your course, call/text with them and alert your lab course lead.

What happens if I feel overwhelmed?

- We promise you, you are not alone.
- Reach out to your lab course lead – we are here to help and support you!
- Here are the services offered by UCCS
  - Dean of Students
  - MOSAIC
  - Wellness Center

Who do I ask when...

- Chemicals are out?
  - Intro and Gen Chem – 1) Sam Gee, 2) Brett Mayer, 3) Lab Course Lead
  - Organic Chem – 1) Brett Mayer, 2) Lab Course Lead
- Instruments are not functional?
  - Intro and Gen Chem – Sam Gee
  - Organic Chem – Brett Mayer
- Canvas is down?
  - When Canvas is down, check for an email from OIT.
  - If needed, reach out to your Lab Course Lead.
  - If assignment due dates need to change due to an outage, the Lab Course Lead will handle it.
- There is a mistake in an assignment?
  - Your Lab Course Lead will address how they would like mistakes addressed.
  - For Intro and Gen Chem lab instructors –
    - Please know Dr. Elise, Tisha, and Niki see our group as a team of creative, strong, seasoned, and new instructors. Everyone has something to offer. We trust your judgment if changes or updates need to be made to information pages or assignments in Canvas. We ask for (1) good communication about these changes via email and (2) please complete the required changes. In the spirit of the universal design for learning, if you



have an idea, thought, or concern about our new labs, prelab quizzes, etc., please share that information with your team to develop the best course for our students.

How long do I have to grade student work?

- For Intro and Gen Chem – have student work graded within a week of submission. If there are extenuating circumstances, please alert your Lab Course Lead and keep your students informed.
- More details will be provided by your individual Lab Course Lead.

How often should I communicate with my students?

- Types of communications include Canvas announcements, emails (Outlook, Canvas, Portal), Starfish, or Student Support Hours.
- Different courses and lab sections require different amounts of communication. Some special circumstances may require additional communication.
- Ask your Lab Curriculum Coordinators for specifics on general lab communication.

How do I work with a student?

- Who has accommodations?
  - It is the student's responsibility to inform you of their academic accommodations. You should receive an email from Disability Services with a link to "Accommodate." Click on "Accommodation Letters." Read the student's accommodation(s) carefully as these are legally binding. Electronically sign the document.
  - Work with the students as directed. You can ask your Lab Course Lead for guidance if needed.
  - It is a good idea to respond to the student's Accommodation letter via email, while cc'ing your Lab Course Lead supervisor, to how these accommodations will be included and learning supported throughout the semester. This establishes communication with your student too.
- Who has been injured?
  - Alert Brett Mayer and your Lab Course Lead with details about the incident. They may provide guidance on whether the student needs to seek medical attention.
  - [Report any incident](#) - including all spills, breakages, or other releases of hazardous materials - no matter how insignificant it may appear. This should include all injuries such as cuts, burns, breathing problems, or other signs of physical harm. You may report incidents that do not result in physical harm, so that lessons can be learned from these "near misses". There may be paper incident forms in your lab room. Ask your Lab Course Lead which method of reporting they require.

## Autonomy

Can I make my own decisions?

- It is essential that all sections receive the same material and quality of instruction. Providing one section with additional tools, handouts, etc., does not provide all students to the same educational access.
- Here are situations we expect you to handle:
  - Small errors in Canvas assignments – fix the mistake and alert your Lab Course Lead that it was fixed.
  - Prepare your pre-lab lecture – you may use the white board, the projector, or a mixture.
  - Alert Sam or Brett about chemical refills. If they are not available, refill the containers as necessary.
  - Make the necessary accommodations for students who have documented letters.

What happens if my students leave the lab "messy" or I come into a lab and it's "messy"?



- It is expected that you walk the lab after the last student has left. Clean any areas missed, as the lab should be ready for the next section.
- As the instructor, you have the autonomy to handle cleanliness issues with repeat offenders, e.g. all students stay until the lab is cleaned, students check out with you, students have to walk you to their station, etc.
- If you need advice on how to handle lab cleanliness, reach out to your Lab Course Lead.

Can I go “off book”?

- If you come across supplemental materials that you believe will improve the students experience, please share with your Lab Course Lead so all students have access to this content.
- You have a prescribed experiments that are required. However, if there is a teachable moment, please take the time to explain the situation (reaction, safety, results, etc.).
- If you get questions that ask for content beyond the lab, you may address the questions if you feel comfortable, or refer them to the course Lab Course Lead.

I’m serving as a teaching assistant for an upper-division lab (4222, 4012, for example). What are my responsibilities?

- Work with your laboratory supervisor (Dr. Noland, Dr. De Silva, Dr. Miller) and establish a list of job duties so that the expectations of your role in teaching or grading are clearly defined. If you feel comfortable taking on additional roles, such as curriculum development or troubleshooting experiments/equipment, then ask. However, these additional duties often require significant time and expertise, and you shouldn’t be responsible for carrying these duties. Remember that your GTA role is only about 11 hours per week.
- Write out your job duties at the start of the semester and agree to your shared contract.
- Ask your laboratory supervisor if you need to hold office hours or help with grading. Many upper-division labs require a lot of writing, so the grading for these courses can be much more in-depth and require more time to complete.

## How is my teaching evaluated?

At least once per semester, your teaching will be observed and evaluated using the rubric below. Evaluation of your teaching is never meant to be punitive but is meant to help you improve as an instructor. In instances where we observe negligence or poor mastery of subject material, we will engage in an improvement plan.

As a new GTA, we certainly welcome and even encourage you to observe seasoned instructors who are teaching other sections of your laboratory course. You may connect with your laboratory supervisor or other faculty member to observe any aspect of teaching: pre-lab lecture, on-going data collection, or post-lab activities. Observing experienced faculty members will help you to develop your confidence and build your own classroom management style.

### GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANT (GTA) MID-SEMESTER EVALUATION

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>GTA Student Name</b>     |  |
| <b>Evaluator Name</b>       |  |
| <b>Course name or ID</b>    |  |
| <b>Section number</b>       |  |
| <b>Week of the semester</b> |  |

Use a rating system where:

| 1              | 2                 | 3            | 4                    | 5           |
|----------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Unsatisfactory | Needs Improvement | Satisfactory | Exceeds Expectations | Outstanding |

Considering your role as a supervisor, please rate the GTA instructors on the following:

1. **Teaching and presenting abilities to stimulate student interest**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

2. **Mastery of subject material**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

3. **Responding to their students' needs or concerns**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

4. **Responding to you (as a supervisor)**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

5. **Timeliness of grading**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

6. **Accountability, self-discipline, and independence**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed



7. **Enforces safety and promotes a culture of safe laboratory practices**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

8. **Overall rating**

1      2      3      4      5      Not observed

Any other concerns or comments?



## Recommendations for Rehiring GTAs

We believe that all of the GTAs hired in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry are competent in their understanding of chemistry and their ability to teach lab. However, it is possible that a GTA may not exhibit the qualities that can only be demonstrable on the job, and as a result, that GTA may not be rehired, or in some cases, terminated. The Department Chair and the faculty member in charge of the lab the GTA has been teaching will work in coordination to agree whether or not to rehire that GTA.

The following lists some of the issues that may be grounds for not rehiring a GTA:

- Multiple valid student complaints against the GTA. These may include, but not be limited to, comments that might be considered racist, ageist, discriminatory, or degrading toward others.
- Demonstration of disrespectful or demeaning behavior or lack of professionalism towards any members of the department faculty or staff.
- Failing to follow the instructions of the lab course lead or other faculty or staff members associated with the lab.
- Modifying the laboratory curriculum without lab course lead approval.
- Frequently providing incorrect information to students regarding concepts or procedures.
- Not returning graded assignments to students in a timely manner, except under extenuating circumstances (snow days, campus closure, etc.).
- Not attending a lab to which they are assigned and not providing at least 24-hour notice to the lab course lead or to the department chair, except under extenuating circumstances.
- Arriving late to lab.
- Not requiring proper PPE in the laboratory, not wearing it themselves, or otherwise allowing unsafe laboratory practices.
- Eating or drinking in the laboratory during lab.
- Not cleaning up the lab at the end of the session.

There may be other expectations of GTAs that are dependent on the course they are teaching that may be applicable.

## GTA Probation:

In some cases, a GTA may be rehired on a probationary basis. These are the conditions in which a GTA may be rehired if s/he has not adhered to the requirements above.

- The Department Chair and the lab course lead(s) must both agree that rehiring this GTA is in the best interest of the students and the department.
- The GTA agrees that a subsequent infraction of any of the above criteria will result in immediate dismissal during the semester.
- After one semester with no further issues, the GTA will be considered no longer under probation.



## Other Helpful Resources

Graduate School:

[UCCS Graduate School Policies & Procedures](#)

UCCS Policies:

[UCCS Student Code of Conduct: Policies & Procedures](#)

[UCCS Sexual Misconduct Policy](#)

[Protected Class Discrimination Harassment](#)

[Office of Institutional Equity Investigation Procedures](#)

[Student Academic Ethics Code Policy](#)

[Student Classroom Behavior Policy](#)

Safety:

[Environmental Health & Safety](#)

[Reporting a safety incident or near-miss](#) (reminder: also contact Brett Mayer at [bmayer@uccs.edu](mailto:bmayer@uccs.edu) and your laboratory curriculum coordinator)

[Hazardous Materials Management](#) (this page includes a link to [Laboratory Safety](#))

[Lab Safety Manual](#)

## Acknowledgements

[Iowa State University TA Handbook](#)

[Drexel University TA Handbook](#)

[Prudent Practices in the Laboratory: Handling and Management of Chemical Hazards](#), The National Academies Press, 2011

American Chemical Society's [Student Laboratory Code of Conduct](#)