

**Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies
Department of Social Science**

Teaching Assistant Handbook

2023-2024

1. INTRODUCTION

This Handbook is intended for all Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the Department of Social Science. The Department of Social Science is part of the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies and is home to eight distinctive interdisciplinary degree programs. Each program has a Program Coordinator and Program Assistant who, along with the course director, can answer questions and provide support. Your teaching assignment, with a few exceptions, will be to a course that belongs to one of these programs.

Although the Course Director (CD) for the course to which you have been assigned will handle a lot of the 'big' issues, TAs such as yourself are often the first point of contact for students and you play a critical role in the learning process. This Handbook has been designed to provide you with critical information which will help you to perform your role as a TA, including relevant department and university policies, the administrative and pedagogical aspects of your teaching role, and links to various university resources.

For more general information about TAs at York University, please check out the [Teaching Assistant Orientation page](#) from the Teaching Commons (as well as their [University-wide Teaching Assistant Handbook](#)). If you are new to York University, you may also want to refer to [this list of common acronyms](#) used at this institution.

This is a 'living' document which will be revised and updated each year. If any changes or updates are required, please notify the Undergraduate Program Director (updsosc@yorku.ca).

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

General

As a TA, your work is covered by the [CUPE 3903 Collective Agreement](#). Please refer to this document for information on general conditions of employment. You will be working under the direct supervision of a Course Director. TAs play a critical role and are essential to the success of courses. TAs are expected to attend lectures, hold regular office hours, run tutorials, and grade submitted work. TAs assigned to 9.0 credit courses will be responsible for one tutorial of up to 25 students and will meet with this group once a week for two hours. TAs assigned to 3.0 and 6.0 credit courses will be responsible for two tutorials of up to 25 students and will meet with each of these groups once a week for one hour.

Tutorial Assignments

Teaching assistants are assigned by program coordinators in consultation with the UPD. These assignments are to *courses* rather than to individual tutorials. Around the middle of August, your CD will contact all TAs assigned to a course and will determine specific tutorial assignments based on preferred timeslots and potential scheduling conflicts. The exception is CUPE Unit II TAs, who are assigned to specific tutorials at the time of hiring (although they may be willing to switch tutorials depending on their schedules).

Workload and Workload Documents

The workload for CUPE I TAs is determined by the Collective Agreement. The number of hours is capped at 135 for a single term course (i.e., Fall or Winter) and 270 for a full year course. These hours are allocated based on various duties, such as: lecture attendance; preparing for,

and conducting, weekly tutorials; weekly office hours; grading; proctoring; and attending meetings. Your CD will complete a [workload form](#) outlining these duties and indicating how these hours will be allocated. Your CD is responsible for arranging a time to meet with the TA group to discuss the workload form which, absent any concerns or objections, you will be asked to sign. For full-year courses, workload forms must be completed in September, and re-visited in January, when it is possible to assess the workload and make necessary adjustments to ensure that all TAs can complete the term without exceeding the 270 hour limit. CDs and TAs share the responsibility for ensuring that TAs can complete all required work without resorting to “overwork” claims.

An example of a completed workload document is provided in **Appendix C**.

Lectures

As per the terms of your TA contract, attendance at all lectures is **mandatory**. This is true whether it is the first or fourth time you are teaching in the course. It is important that you are present for announcements, to ensure you know how the material is being presented, and that the students see you in class.

Office and Office Hours

TAs are expected to hold at least one hour of weekly office hours. In most cases, these will be held in Ross S710, a dedicated TA room with both an open main space and three separate rooms (with sliding doors) for more confidential meetings. In consultation with your CD, you may also elect to offer hybrid or remote office hours through the use of Zoom.

TAs are responsible for notifying their CD of their office hours. You should also submit your office hours through the appropriate Unit 1 or Unit 2 [MachForm](#).

Photocopy Codes

If you require a photocopy code, please ask the staff at the front desk.

Tutorial Cancellations and Emergency Leaves

In cases of illness or personal emergency, please contact your CD to see if alternate arrangements can be made for your tutorial (e.g., two members of a teaching team covering each other’s tutorials for the week). If there is not enough time to make alternate arrangements, please contact your CD and your students (providing as much advance notice as possible) to notify them of the tutorial’s cancellation.

In more serious cases of illness or injury, where a medical leave may be required, please contact Employee Wellbeing and notify the UPD. EWB makes all decisions regarding medical leaves and their duration.

In the case of the death of an immediate family member (or equivalent), all members of CUPE 3903 have access to paid bereavement leaves. Please inform the UPD if you are seeking such a leave and contact your union representative who will assist you in processing the leave.

Issues or Concerns

Should you have a concern regarding your CD, please speak first with the CD to determine if the issue can be resolved. If the issue persists or escalates, please reach out to the UPD.

3. TUTORIALS

Class Lists

TAs do not have direct access to official class lists. To obtain a list of your students, please ask the CD for your course to provide a class list for your tutorial group(s). These outline essential information on your students, including their email (please use the preferred email address when contacting students), as well as major and year level.

Switching Tutorials

Students wishing to change tutorials within a course may do so themselves through the online enrolment systems during the first two weeks of classes, after which they must seek permission from both yourself and the course director (see York University, [Important Dates](#) for specific deadlines). Please note that tutorial sections cannot be over-enrolled without the signed approval of both the TA and the CD. Over-enrolment is also limited by room capacity.

Classrooms

Should you have any concerns regarding your assigned classrooms, ask your CD to request a room change by emailing Alda Lone (alone@yorku.ca). Please provide the course code and term, the assigned room, and the time.

All classes and tutorials should end – and classrooms should be vacated – **ten minutes** prior to the official end of the class or tutorial (e.g., by 11:20am for a class that runs from 8:30am to 11:30am). This is to allow sufficient time for your students to exit and the next group to enter and get settled.

Classroom Technology

Most classrooms on Keele campus are outfitted with a standard slate of equipment (including computer, document camera, and projector). For classrooms that are not equipped with built-in technology, instructors can order equipment using their Passport York username and password. Details on this process as well as instructions and videos for using classroom equipment are available on the [Classroom Technology](#) website. Should you have any questions about classroom technology, or if you experience an issue during class, please use the phone provided in the classroom to contact service support at extension 55065. If you are unsure about using classroom technology, you may [schedule](#) a short demonstration during the first week of each new term.

eClass

eClass is York University's Learning Management System (similar to Blackboard, Brightspace, and Moodle at other institutions). eClass sites are automatically created for every course prior to the start of term, although CDs must manually add TAs before you gain access to the main eClass site (or, in some instances, to a tutorial shell for your specific group of students in the

course). If you do not have access to your course's eClass page, please contact your CD to arrange for this.

For further information on using eClass, please see York's [eClass site](#). Keep in mind that most of the "setting up" aspects of your course's eClass page will be your CD's responsibility.

Running Your Tutorials

Students learn best when they feel like they are part of a learning community. Creating a supportive, participatory learning environment will help to maximize student engagement. Good lesson planning and tutorial design are essential to creating opportunities for active and deep learning.

To ensure that all TAs are working within the CD's guidelines and expectations for tutorials in a given course, be sure to have a discussion with the CD about how to approach your tutorials. Keep in mind that this may vary considerably from course to course, with some CDs providing full lesson plans and/or discussion questions for your use and others encouraging you to develop your own best approaches to structuring tutorial time.

For information on how to structure your tutorials, check out Chapter 4.0: Classroom Strategies for TAs in the [University-wide Teaching Assistant Handbook](#) and consider participating in [the Department of Social Science's TA workshops](#).

4. GRADES AND GRADING

Approaches to Grading

To ensure that all TAs are working within the CD's guidelines and expectations, be sure to have a discussion with the CD about grading instructions, expectations, and practices. Some CDs use detailed grading rubrics or have specific processes to ensure grading consistency. TAs should ensure that they understand the CD's expectations in terms of timelines and types of feedback offered. In courses with multiple TAs, you may wish to work together, including with the CD, to mark a few assignments to ensure that everyone understand the grading expectations and instructions.

When grading student work, there are many things to keep in mind (such as consistency in your approach, appropriate feedback, alignment between numerical grades and written comments, and so on). To develop your skills as a grader, check out Chapter 8.0 Marking and Grading in the [University-wide Teaching Assistant Handbook](#) and consider participating in [the Department of Social Science's TA workshops](#).

Timelines for Grading Submitted Work

Your CD may provide you with a list of dates by which your students' assignments should be graded. In general, submitted work should be graded and returned to students within **two** and **no more than three** weeks of the due date. This provides students with not only a sense of how they are doing in the course, but also feedback that may be valuable for future assignments.

You will be chiefly responsible for recording and keeping track of your students' grades while the course is in session; however, keep in mind that the finalizing of grades in the course is **solely the CD's responsibility** (including the submission of letter grades, full grade

breakdowns for the course, completion of any required “grade anomalies” forms, etc.). Similarly, your responsibility for students’ grades does not extend beyond the end of the course; any grade reappraisals or grade corrections will be handled by the CD or the department after the course has ended.

Extensions, Make-up Tests, and Deferrals

There is no universal policy for extensions on coursework or make-up tests while a course is in session. Your approach to this should be determined in consultation with your CD. The course syllabus may also outline clear policies around these matters.

Students may request to defer submission of assignments and the writing of exams beyond the regular end date of the final exam period. TAs do not have authority over deferrals. Instead, please direct these students to the CD.

Tests and Exams

For courses with TAs, it is normally expected that the TAs will serve as proctors (and this will be included in their workload form). If you are unable to serve in this capacity, please notify your CD as soon as possible so that alternate arrangements can be made.

Alternate Exams

Students with exam accommodations are able to write their exams in one of the Alternate Exam rooms on campus. These are scheduled at the same time as the official exam for the course. It is the responsibility of the student to make these arrangements and the CD to ensure Alternate Exams receives a copy of the exam. The TA’s responsibility is only to grade the student’s exam after it has been written.

5. ACADEMIC HONESTY

It is critical that students be made aware of the [Senate Policy on Academic Honesty](#) and educated on what qualifies as breaches of this policy. Although this may be included in course syllabi and eClass pages, you may also want to draw your students’ attention to the policy directly.

Breaches of the Senate Policy

Where cases of suspected academic dishonesty are discovered, TAs are obligated to report these to the CD immediately. It is solely the CD’s responsibility to handle suspected academic dishonesty after you have made a report to them. Under no circumstances should a TA discuss a suspicion of plagiarism with a student. The suspicion should be reported immediately to your CD.

Types of academic dishonesty you may encounter (and correct ways to respond to these) include:

- If it is a suspected case of **cheating**, collect the test booklet from the student, provide a new test booklet and instruct them to continue writing. Note the time on the booklet.

- If it is a suspected case of **plagiarism**, note two or three suspected instances and provide copies of the original sources. If using Turnitin, identify the original source of the idea (highlight the passage and provide the page number).
- If you suspect that a student has falsified data or has attempted to mislead readers (e.g., citing sources not actually used), provide the CD with a written explanation and any documentation you have for considering it a case of **dishonesty in publication**.

Students may want to discuss this matter with you after you have reported it to your CD. Although you can go over general policies and approaches to academic honesty, please inform your student that any suspected cases of academic dishonesty are handled by the CD only. Direct the student to the CD to discuss any open academic honesty cases.

Where the CD determines strong evidence of a breach exists, they will initiate an exploratory meeting with the department's Academic Honesty Committee and, if necessary, determine a penalty in consultation with members of this committee. The contents of exploratory meetings are confidential, although the CD may inform you if and how a penalty needs to be applied to work by one of your students.

To reiterate, the TA's role in this process exists only at the very beginning and, occasionally, the very end: reporting a suspected breach to your CD and, at the CD's direction, applying a penalty to the student's work when it is found to be necessary.

Deterring Plagiarism

Especially in first-year courses, you may be the first point of contact for student learning the expectations for academic honesty in a university setting. Some tips for helping your students to learn these expectations include:

1. Review, explain and have your students sign the [Academic Integrity Checklist](#).
2. In your tutorials, familiarize students with the [Senate Policy on Academic Honesty](#).
3. Set aside time in tutorial to go over proper citation practices with your students.

Further information on Academic Integrity, and additional resources for both CDs and TAs, can be accessed through following link: <https://www.yorku.ca/unit/vpacad/academic-integrity/instructors-and-tas/>

6. STUDENTS

Students in Need of Academic Support

[Academic Advising Services](#) help students answer questions about degree requirements, specific courses, student services on campus, and ways to enter particular degree programs.

[SPARK](#) (Student Papers and Academic Research Kit) is a 13-part online tool which helps students to identify and develop the skills required to write academic essays, each of which takes about 10 minutes to complete. Topics include time management, library research, academic reading, and revising draft essays.

[The Writing Centre](#) is where students can book one-on-one writing support appointments, receive online writing support, take courses, and ask questions about improving their writing.

[The Learning Commons](#) provides resources to students on topics such as finding articles and books, referencing, developing a thesis statement, time management, and editing.

[The ESL Open Learning Centre](#) offers free language support for any York University student who is currently learning English as a second or additional language in a York University ESL program or is currently enrolled in academic undergraduate or graduate degree programs. Students can book an appointment online.

Difficult or Disruptive Students

Cases involving difficult or disruptive students should be brought to your CD's attention. Where these cannot be resolved through either interventions in the classroom or one-on-one meetings, your CD is advised to consult the UPD.

Should the behaviour continue or escalate, we may choose to reach out to the [Office of Student Community Relations \(OSCR\)](#) and the Associate Dean, Students. They will provide further advice on the appropriate remedy and, in more serious cases, may decide to remove students from the classroom and potentially from the course entirely.

Should the situation ever arise where you feel threatened by a student, or a situation becomes potentially dangerous, please contact Campus Safety at ext. 33333 or call 911.

More details on policies around disruptive students are included in **Appendix B**.

Students in Distress

In cases where students are experiencing personal difficulties (e.g., personal or family challenges, issues with physical or mental health, etc.), they should be made aware of available university supports and resources including:

[Student Counselling, Health, and Well-being](#) provides walk-in counselling services, short-term therapy, and connections with other students.

[Good2Talk](#) is a free, confidential helpline for Ontario post-secondary students, providing professional counselling and information, and referrals for mental health, addictions, and well-being. It operates 24 hours every day of the year.

[York University's Centre for Sexual Violence Response, Support, and Education](#) can assist students with referrals to medical services, academic accommodation, and safety planning.

[The Centre for Human Rights, Equity and Inclusion](#) strives to provide fair resolution of human rights-related conflicts and complaints from faculty, staff, and students.

Should you receive information that a student is in immediate crisis or distress (e.g., references to suicidal ideation or thoughts of self-harm), you may provide the student with information on immediate crisis services and, if necessary (and you know of the student's location), call 911. For more information on identifying and responding to students in distress, please consult the [Guide for Faculty and Staff](#).

Accommodations

Students may request ongoing accommodations for a variety of reasons (e.g., learning disability, anxiety disorder, etc.). In order to receive a formal accommodation, a student must be assessed by [Student Accessibility Services](#). If their accommodations are approved, the CD will receive an accommodation letter outlining their recommended accommodations (typically, extra time on exams and flexibility around deadlines).

Once your CD has approved the student's accommodations, it is the CD's responsibility to communicate those accommodations that will specifically impact your interactions with the student and their work (e.g., recommended flexibility with deadlines). Please keep in mind that this information is confidential.

Students may not require all recommended accommodations; it is up to them to indicate to you if and when their approved accommodations need to be activated (e.g., flexibility with deadlines at only one point in the semester).

As noted above, where students have accommodations for tests and exams, it is their responsibility to book exams through the Alternate Exam Centre.

For further information, please see the [Senate Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#).

7. GENERAL QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS

Should you have any questions or concerns that are not covered in this handbook, please do not hesitate to reach out to the UPD (updsosc@yorku.ca).

APPENDIX A: STAFF DIRECTORY

Alda Lone	alone@yorku.ca	Course schedules; room assignments and bookings; finalizing grades; and exams.
Lucy Cozzolino	lucym@yorku.ca	TAs, including emergency replacements.
Jacquie Selman	jselman@yorku.ca	Academic honesty (including grade changes); grade reappraisals; student awards.
Lauren O'Brien	soscac@yorku.ca	Office allocations; guest speakers and other course-related expenses.
Susan Fiorello	fiorisue@yorku.ca	BUSO
Pamela Lamb	lambp@yorku.ca	CRIM and HESO
Elvisa Zjakic	elvisaz@yorku.ca	AFST and ISS
Nathalie DiLorenzo	natd94@yorku.ca	LASO and WKLS
Lillian Lee	lhmllee@yorku.ca	Gen Eds. & Unaffiliated Courses
UPD	updsosc@yorku.ca	Issues with students; issues between TAs and CDs

APPENDIX B: POLICIES TO ADDRESS DISRUPTIVE STUDENTS

1) Academic Honesty & Student Code of Conduct

As a Faculty that is committed to promoting a fair, respectable and trusting learning environment, LA&PS has specific regulations around the academic honesty and conduct of our students. The intense demands of a university education can create the temptation to breach these ethical and legal standards, but doing so may result in serious consequences for you.

<https://www.yorku.ca/laps/decisions-petitions/academic-honesty/>

2) Statement of Policy on Free Speech

<https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/free-speech-statement-of-policy/>

3) Disruptive and/or Harassing Behaviour in Academic Situations, Senate Policy on

<https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/disruptive-andor-harassing-behaviour-in-academic-situations-senate-policy/>

4) Hate Propaganda (Guidelines)

<https://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/policies/hate-propaganda-guidelines/>

5) Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities

<https://oscr.students.yorku.ca/student-conduct>

The *Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities* is the set of identified values that the York University community is expected to uphold. The Code upholds a philosophy and practice that is intended to balance a set of principles: support, accountability and education. Non-academic student conduct falls under the jurisdiction of the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities. All students and student groups/governments are expected to conduct themselves in a way that promotes an atmosphere of civility, diversity, equity and respect in their interactions with others. Behaviour that is inconsistent with these values may be held accountable through the CSRR.

Application of the Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities

This Code applies to (a) conduct on University premises, and (b) conduct not on University premises but which has a real and substantial link to the University. Examples of such a link would be: University-organized or University-sanctioned off-campus events including non-academic conduct during experiential learning opportunities; University-organized or University-sanctioned events where students are acting as delegates or designated representatives of the University; social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, e-mails, etc.) activity related to the University; off-campus behaviour that has implications that will or may adversely impact a University community member on campus from a safety/security of person perspective; off-campus conduct that would negatively affect the reputation of the University; off-campus conduct that is motivated by issues or events that relate to the University.

APPENDIX C: SAMPLE TA WORKLOAD DOCUMENT

**YORK UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE
ASSIGNMENT OF DUTIES TO TEACHING ASSISTANTS
(Original to Teaching Assistant & copy to Assistant to the Undergraduate Director
& Course Director)**

James Williams	CRIM/SOSC 1650 6.0 A
Course Supervisor	Course#
Teaching Assistant	Tutor 1
Sec/Tut.# and No. of students per group (where applicable)	TA Position (eg. Tutor 1) LA&PS/Social Science
	Faculty/Department

ASSIGNED DUTIES (AS TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS)
(TAs need to be assigned duties in all categories)

DUTIES	DETAILS	HOURS	
		SEPT. Meeting	JAN. Meeting
Tutorial Hours	120 Minutes x 12 Weeks	24 hrs.	24 hrs.
Lecture Attendance	120 Minutes x 12 Weeks	24 hrs.	24 hrs.
Office Hours	60 Minutes x 12 Weeks	12 hrs.	12 hrs.
Preparation	120 Minutes x 12 Weeks	24 hrs.	24 hrs.
Grading: Assignments	One Assignment (30 min. per)	25 hrs.	25 hrs.
Tests & Exams	One Exam (25 min. per)	21 hrs.	21 hrs.
Meetings	Two Meetings	2 hrs.	2 hrs.
Invigilation	One Exam	3 hrs.	3 hrs.
Lecturing			
Other (Please detail)			
TOTAL HOURS: (Max. 270 per full Teaching Assistantship; 135 per term)		135 hrs.	135 hrs.

SEPT. MEETING DATE: _____

JAN. MEETING DATE: _____

Signature of Teaching Assistant

Signature of Teaching Assistant

Signature of Course Supervisor

Signature of Course Supervisor

***Hours allocated should take into acct. no. of students X time per assignment or test.**