

SUNY FREDONIA

Guidelines for the Use of Undergraduate Learning Assistants

These guidelines are intended to clarify the appropriate use of undergraduates as “learning assistants.” A point of pride for SUNY Fredonia is that undergraduate courses are taught by qualified faculty, most of whom hold advanced degrees, and that an effort is made to maintain class sizes that allow faculty to get to know their students and facilitate faculty-student and student-student interaction. The appropriate use of undergraduate learning assistants can enhance the teaching/learning experience, particularly in cases when it is necessary to offer courses in a large-lecture format, and can also be of benefit to those students chosen to serve as assistants.

By definition, a *Learning Assistant* (LA) is an advanced undergraduate chosen by faculty to assist in the delivery of a course taken by less-advanced students. An LA should have taken and performed well in the course for which they are assisting.

The experience of serving as an LA is an opportunity for the LA to learn as well as to serve. Among the advantages of using LAs are the following:

- In large-enrollment courses, students have the opportunity to work one-on-one or in small groups with an LA, thus deepening their understanding of course material.
- Students see a role model of a successful student in that field of study.
- Possibly, in addition to the Learning Center and the instructor, students have an additional option for tutorial support.
- More reticent students in a class may find interacting with an LA “less threatening” than interacting with the instructor.
- With the aid of LAs, an instructor can better implement certain learning activities, such as group work, that may otherwise be difficult to manage in a large-enrollment course.
- LAs can provide instructors with valuable feedback re student learning, helping to improve course delivery.
- LAs are able to review and deepen their understanding of basic material in their chosen fields of study.
- LAs gain experience which may help them land “TA” positions when they apply for graduate study; that is, the LA role can be a valuable “resume builder” for applying to graduate schools (or employment).

Appropriate Roles for Learning Assistants: Subject to approval (refer to the “Implementation” section), the following methods for utilizing learning assistants are appropriate.

TUTOR

- Meet with students to provide assistance with assignment criteria and format.
- Use Learning Center techniques to help students get started on assignments and guide them toward success.
- Answer student questions concerning course policies.
- Know and be able to help students use relevant course technology.
- *Instructor Responsibilities:* Make sure LAs understand assignments; develop/provide guidelines and practice in the art of tutoring (such as those used by the Learning Center); ensure that LAs understand course policies and practices, and are familiar with all course technology.

DEMONSTRATOR/PRESENTER

- On occasion, present content to the class under the supervision of the instructor.
- On occasion, assist in the design of instructional materials or the integration of technology.
- *Instructor Responsibilities:* Provide LAs with information sources and maintain close collaboration and supervision to ensure presentation quality; provide feedback and suggestions for improvement following the presentation.

FACILITATOR

- Assist with taking attendance.
- Help with class set-up/take-down (e.g., set up for labs and studio sessions).
- Help manage class activities (e.g., help answer questions and keep students on task).
- Help observe class participation and understanding and report observations to the instructor.
- *Instructor Responsibilities:* Ensure that LAs are familiar the class protocols to be employed; provide access to equipment and materials needed; hold debriefing after class.

PROCTOR

- Aid in the distribution of exam materials.
- Answer simple questions concerning exam protocol, or direct questions to the instructor.
- Act as an additional pair of ears and eyes; help ensure that the exam environment is fair and secure, and discretely report any untoward activity to the instructor.
- *Instructor Responsibilities:* Go over procedures for exam distribution; provide guidelines for proctoring (e.g., types of questions that may be addressed); be present during the exam.

GRADER

- Understand the rubric to be used.
- Apply the rubric to grade the assignment.
- Report any difficulties or “gray areas” to the instructor.
- Report the grades to the instructor and provide feedback to the instructor on class performance.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- *Instructor Responsibilities:* Go over the rubric to be used and be sure it is understood (perhaps provide a practice session, or grade a few assignments together); receive feedback from the LAs on the grading process, ideas for rubric improvement, and class performance; enter grades into the gradebook and return the assignment to the class; handle any student questions or concerns; stress the importance of and ensure confidentiality.

Implementation: Any undergraduate serving as a learning assistant must be enrolled in a formal course (perhaps for 0 credits). This is to provide for regular contact between the instructor and the LAs, give LAs transcript documentation for their experiences, and ensure that, via the course syllabus, all of the responsibilities and expectations of the LAs and the instructor are accounted for.

Such courses will be approved via the usual process involving the department, the dean, the Academic Affairs Committee, and the Vice President for Academic Affairs. (Any course of this type that existed prior to the implementation of these Guidelines must be resubmitted for approval.) Once approved, minor course revisions may be made with the approval of the department and the dean.