**Teaching Assistants & Readers**

Handbook

2022-2023 Academic Year

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**Columbia University**

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# Welcome!

September 2022

Dear Teaching Assistants and Readers:

Congratulations and welcome to your new Teaching Assistants and Readers positions at the School of International and Public Affairs. You are extremely valuable to the process of learning at SIPA, and I am grateful that you have joined our instructional community.

This handbook offers advice on everything from official SIPA policy to classroom management, and I expect it to be useful to you throughout your service.

I hope you find this experience academically enriching and intellectually challenging. I wish you every success as you embark upon this new endeavor.

Sincerely,

  
Hazel May

Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

# Important Contacts

##### **TA General Questions and Instructional Support/SIPA Office of Academic Affairs**

**SIPA Academic Affairs** [SIPA\_AcademicAffairs@columbia.edu](mailto:SIPA_AcademicAffairs@columbia.edu)  
 IAB 13th Floor, West Suite or 14th Floor, East Suite | M-F, 9am-5pm

**Photocopying:**

Karine Lafargue | Room 1323 IAB | kl2059@columbia.edu

General questions: Rita Agyiri | Room 1314B IAB | [ra2716@columbia.edu](mailto:ra2716@columbia.edu)

##### **TA Academic Issues/SIPA Office of Academic Affairs**

Andrew Johnson, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Academic Affairs  
 andrew.johnson@columbia.edu

##### **TA Appointments/SIPA Office of Student Affairs**

Tan Nguyen, Assistant Dean for Student Affairs   
[tn2102@columbia.edu](mailto:tn2102@columbia.edu)

##### **CourseWorks and Columbia Teaching and Learning**

Alyssa Famolari, Learning Designer II at Center for Teaching and Learning  
 505 Butler Library | af3367@columbia.edu

**Classrooms**

For ad hoc room reservations (e.g., review sessions), request at https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/students/room-reservations.

For semester-long recitation/lab scheduling, contact SIPA Academic Affairs at sipa\_academicaffairs@sipa.columbia.edu.

##### **Classroom Audio Visual Support**

SIPA IT Help Desk | Room 510 IAB | [sipaav@columbia.edu](mailto:sipaav@columbia.edu) | 212-854-0112

##### **Library Reserves**

Lehman Library | Room 300 IAB | [lehman\_reserves@library.columbia.edu](mailto:lehman_reserves@library.columbia.edu)

##### **Paychecks**

SIPA Human Resources | Room 408 IAB | sipahr@sipa.columbia.edu

# Introduction

This handbook facilitates your transition to your new Teaching Assistant or Reader role. The handbook outlines functional tasks you will find necessary to your role as a logistics manager for the semester. These procedures include items such as how to reserve classrooms for review sessions, how to make photocopies for class, and how to reserve library books.

Contact your professor first if you need advice in handling student concerns or leading discussion sections. Your professor will be an invaluable resource when assessing your own work in the classroom or managing students in the classroom. You should contact your professor as soon as possible before the semester begins. Your professor can relay information to you regarding the first day of class and their expectations for you for the rest of the semester.

# SIPA Student Officers’ Responsibilities & Limitations

Student officers of instruction are contractually bound to perform some specific activities. The information below is a guide that pertains to the general (and exceptional) activities of student officers of instruction.

**There are three types of SIPA student officers of instruction:**

| **Teaching Assistants (TAs)** | **Readers** | **Student Assistants** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * Work up to 20 hours per week. * Provide administrative support (i.e., photocopying, posting on CourseWorks, placing course material on reserve, requesting AV, etc.) * Hold office hours and lead recitations. * Assist with grading.\* | * Work up to 15 hours per week. * Provide administrative support (i.e., photocopying, posting on CourseWorks, placing course materials on reserve, requesting AV, etc.) * Hold office hours. DO NOT lead recitations. * Assist with grading.\* | * Work on average 10-12 hours per week. * Provide administrative support (i.e., photocopying, posting on CourseWorks, placing course material on reserve, requesting AV, etc.) * DO NOT conduct instructional duties (i.e., grading, leading recitations, holding office hours, etc.) |

\*All Teaching Assistants and Readers (i.e., ‘graders’) may only grade exams from an answer key provided by the instructor. Graders can prepare answer keys, but the instructor must check these keys before use. Peer grading of essay-type questions is prohibited. See *SIPA Grading Policy* in this handbook.

**SIPA Policy defines the responsibilities of student officers of instruction and MUST BE FOLLOWED:**

* Time commitment limitations must be respected.
* Although other student officers’ responsibilities may vary, only someone with the formal designation of a SIPA TA can lead recitations or hold discussion sessions.
* TAs or Readers can assist in grading with an answer key but cannot grade essay questions open to interpretation.
* TAs or Readers can proofread and post problem sets to students but cannot be held responsible for creating course materials.

**TAs, Readers, and Student Assistants are STUDENTS:**

* TAs, Readers, and Student Assistants have their own coursework, classes to attend, and a job search to conduct in the spring. Professors are aware of students’ time constraints generally, but not individually. Each student officer is responsible for alerting the Course Instructor to any schedule conflict in a timely fashion.
* TAs and Readers can hold open office hours for at least two hours weekly. Your office hours should be scheduled at a different time than the instructor’s hours to enhance the benefit to students.
* Some professors ask student officers to create answer keys for problem sets or exams. This practice is acceptable; however, professors must check the results carefully and should always be aware of the time commitment of the TA or Reader in question.

**COMMUNICATION is key:**

* Course Instructors must provide student officers with syllabi and reading lists to post on CourseWorks one month before the course begins.
* TAs and Readers should meet with the Course Instructor regularly during the semester to discuss instructional strategies and class progress.
* TAs and Readers should not discuss student performance or grades in open areas or with other students.
* The first step in resolving any individual student problem should be the TA or Readers consulting with the Course Instructor.

**FORWARD PLANNING is essential:**

* Student officers should have an early distribution of materials from Course Instructors to avoid last-minute preparation for class.
* All photocopy jobs must be pre-approved by the OAA Academic Department Administrator staff (Rm 1314B). Large jobs can be printed at Village Copier or CU Print Services in the Rm 106 Journalism building. This process may take up to four days for large jobs. Student officers should never use their own funds to pay for copies at the request of the Course Instructor because they may not be reimbursed.
* TAs and Course Instructors should agree well in advance on a list of approved TA substitutes in the case of emergency or illness.

**Following the rules above…**

**SIPA Student Officers of Instruction CAN:**

* Assist with A/V needs, following SIPA IT rules.
* Keep course records of grades and attendance.
* Respond to student emails (though ultimate responsibility rests with the Course Instructor)
* Prepare and conduct recitations on topic sessions (TAs only).
* Have photocopies made for course materials.
* Assist with course-pack preparation.
* Place course materials on reserve.

**SIPA Student Officers of Instruction CANNOT:**

* Handle grade appeals.
* Work holidays or regularly on weekends (except for student program assistants working in the SIPA computer labs).
* Sign timesheets for student workers.
* Assist instructors with personal tasks.

# Section I: The Library

**3rd Floor International Affairs Building | |**[**lehman\_reserves@library.columbia.edu**](mailto:lehman_reserves@library.columbia.edu) **| 212-854-3547**

**Placing Books on Reserve**

Placing books and other library-ready materials on reserve can be done either electronically through

Library Web or in person at the Lehman Library reserve desk on the third floor of the International Affairs Building. TAs should become familiar with the submission procedures, paying close attention to the copyright policy. Library policy and the online submission form can be found at:<https://library.columbia.edu/services/reserves.html>

**Taking Books out of the Library for a Professor**

To check books out of the library on behalf of a professor, you will need to obtain privileges as the Professor’s Deputy Borrower. There are two methods for attaining deputy borrower status: a paper form requiring the professor’s signature or the online method done by the professor on the<https://library.columbia.edu/using-libraries/borrowing.html>

# Section II: SIPA IT and Audio Visual Services

**Room 510 International Affairs Building |SIPAAV**[**@columbia.edu**](mailto:sipaav@columbia.edu) **| 212-854-0112**

**Classroom AV and Hyflex Technology**

Audio Visual and Hyflex services are available to SIPA students, faculty, and administration in the SIPA electronic classrooms (SIPA eRooms), self-service rooms and Kellogg Center in the International Affairs Building (IAB).

Faculty, TAs and Readers must request training for regular use of the equipment in a SIPA eRoom. For information on SIPA e-room training and access, please visit <https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/sipa-it/av-services/eroom-training-access> or contact SIPA AV directly at [SIPAAV@sipa.columbia.edu](mailto:SIPAAV@sipa.columbia.edu).

**Reserving the Computer Lab**

For courses requiring the use of the SIPA computer lab or to reserve the computer lab outside your regularly scheduled class time, contact SIPA Academic Affairs (sipa\_academicaffairs@columbia.edu).

TAs are responsible for ensuring that there are only as many students as there are computers. No one is allowed to double-up at computer stations, sit on the floor, or use the extra chairs at the back of the room. Please ensure that class ends promptly to facilitate the next class's timely start.

# Section III: SIPA’s Office of Academic Affairs (OAA)

**13th & 14th Floor IAB | Hours: Monday through Friday, 9 AM - 5 PM**

OAA provides the following support: TAs can process small photocopy jobs, gain approval for photocopy jobs of up to 200 pages, sign up for available office space, and obtain assistance in ordering desk copies of books. OAA will also order chalk and erasers.

##### TA and Reader Office Hours

SIPA TAs and Readers must keep at least two hours per week available to students in their section. Please be considerate when choosing the hours so that students may be able to see you easily. TA office hours should be scheduled at a different time than the instructor’s office hours to maximize the benefit to students.

We recommend that you offer your office hours in the study areas of the Lehman Library, remotely via Zoom, or at a local coffee shop (e.g., Publique). Limited office space is available after adjunct faculty members have signed up for office hours. TAs can email sipa\_academicaffairs@sipa.columbia.edu to inquire about availability after the second week of classes.

##### PDF & Photocopying Course Materials

The Libraries at Columbia provide access to scanning workstations in all locations. Now, smartphone apps use the phone’s camera to scan and create high-quality .pdfs. Uploading material to a course management system requires a Fair Use assessment for each scan. For more information about Copyright and Fair Use, please refer to the Columbia University Copyright Advisory Office website at <https://copyright.columbia.edu/basics/fair-use.html> and <https://copyright.columbia.edu/basics/fair-use/fair-use-checklist.html>.  
  
If you cannot make photocopies yourself, the staff in OAA can make copies within 24 hours if the request is less than 200 impressions total. All larger copy requests must be authorized with a signature by Rita Agyiri or Karine Lafargue in the OAA office (Rm 1323) and processed by Print Service (Rm 106) in the Journalism building or by Village Copier on Amsterdam Avenue. Any large job requires at least 48 hours of advance approval before the date when the copies are needed. Try to anticipate the professor’s needs well in advance of these deadlines. Please do not incur your own expenses--even at the professor’s request--as you may not be reimbursed. Full copies of copyrighted materials cannot be reproduced in OAA or at Village Copier or Print Services.

##### Ordering Course Books and Desk Copies

Each course instructor will order the books for the course online with the Columbia bookstore. It is a good idea to continually check with the bookstore and inform the instructor whether the correct amount has arrived. You can contact the textbook publisher directly to obtain desk copies for the instructor or TA. If the publisher requires departmental confirmation, please contact Rita Agyiri or Karine Lafargue in OAA at 212-854-3213 or 212-854-3239.

##### Classroom Reservations

TAs are provided at least one weekly recitation time. Please contact your supervisory faculty or program director if you need to change your assigned meeting time.

**Please note that access to your regularly scheduled classroom will end on the last day of classes.** After this time, you will need to contact SIPA Academic Affairs for review sessions. We ask that you check the room availability and provide us with your room and time preference to help speed up the booking process.

Check Room Availability: <https://ems.cuit.columbia.edu/EmsWebApp/BrowseForSpace.aspx>. (Note: You can filter the spaces by clicking "Add/Remove Locations" and then selecting the building. To view SIPA spaces, select "International Affairs Building.") and provide your room and time preferences.

For more information and proper guidance on room reservations, visit SIPA’s Classroom Reservations website: <https://www.sipa.columbia.edu/students/room-reservations>. Please contact SIPA Academic Affairs directly ([sipa\_academicaffairs@columbia.edu](mailto:sipa_academicaffairs@columbia.edu)) with any questions.

##### Library Room Reservations

To reserve rooms in Lehman Library or any other Columbia Library, please visit Columbia University Libraries link below. Once confirmed, pick up the key at the Lehman Library circulation desk. Like other library materials, the key is checked out on your library account.

<https://seats.library.columbia.edu/>

##### CourseWorks

Please contact SIPA Academic Affairs at sipa\_academicaffairs@columbia.edu if you have access issues with your course site.

##### Zoom

While all courses at SIPA are in-person, Zoom can be used to facilitate office hours and to stream courses for COVID reasons, particularly during the add/drop period, so waitlisted and interested students (non-registered students) can view the course content. Faculty and TAs can use Zoom Class Sessions on their CourseWorks site to create meeting links for their courses.

[TAs and Readers can request Zoom Pro here to access a licensed account.](https://fs23.formsite.com/SIPA/g0s5mnzlip/index.html)

##### Course Evaluations

Course evaluations are automated online through CourseWorks. Course evaluations usually run during the last week of classes and the first week of final exams. Although this is a busy time for students, the timing ensures that all course evaluations are completed before grades are posted (in addition, the Office of Academic Affairs ensures that instructors do not see course evaluations until they have submitted grades). An email with instructions on completing course evaluations will be sent to all students at the appropriate time.

Each evaluation includes a question and comments section for the TA’s performance. If you would like a copy of the TA portion of your course’s evaluation, please contact SIPA Academic Affairs (sipa\_academicaffairs@columbia.edu) after the evaluation period has ended.

##### Paychecks

You are strongly recommended to sign-up for Direct Deposit. If not, you will receive a paycheck distributed by SIPA Human Resources. Checks must be picked up with signature in person in room 408 International Affairs Building during the posted pick-up times.

**Assignments, Final Exams, and Papers**

Please note that graded assignments, exams, and papers may not be left in public or open spaces for students to pick up. These assignments should be distributed in class or during instructor or TA office hours. If you are responsible for distributing graded final exams and/or papers, please distribute these materials at special office hours or have students provide you with stamped, self-addressed envelopes in which you can mail the materials after they have been graded. If students are not sent and/or do not request their exams or papers, the Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) recommends faculty members keep the exams for at least 120 days and preferably for one year. As TA/Reader, you are responsible for returning all final papers and exams to the course instructor.

##### SIPA’s Grading Policy

The grades submitted for core courses are required to have an average GPA between 3.2 and 3.4, with the goal being 3.3. The instructor will have further information on the grading policy, and TAs responsible for grading should coordinate with the instructor to ensure they understand the grading scale for the course. In addition, SIPA recommends (but does not require) that courses with enrollments over 35 have an average GPA between 3.2 and 3.4, with the goal being 3.3.

*All Teaching Assistant and Readers ‘Graders’ who are SIPA students may only grade exams from an answer key provided by the instructor. Graders can prepare answer keys, but the instructor must check these keys before use. Peer grading of essay-type questions is prohibited.*

##### Academic Integrity Statement

The statement below **must** appear on all syllabi. If it is not on the syllabus for your course, please mention this to the instructor.

*The School of International & Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures.*

*Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research. Cut and paste the following link into your browser to view the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct and access useful citation and attribution resources:* [*http://bulletin.columbia.edu/sipa/academic-policies/*](http://bulletin.columbia.edu/sipa/academic-policies/)*.*

*Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.*

##### Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning

CTL provides a range of resources for graduate student instructors. Be sure to review the range of workshops, courses, discussion groups, and more here:<https://ctl.columbia.edu/graduate-instructors/>

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# Section IV: Best Practices for TAs and Readers

School of International and Public Affairs

**Adopted Spring 2016**

*1.* *Statement of Integrity and Professionalism for all TAs/Readers*

TAs and Readers are expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism. SIPA has adopted the following statement, which is to be signed by all students accepting an assistantship and shared with all faculty supervisors:

*By accepting this assistantship, I agree that I will uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism, including but not limited to the following: I will treat any information about performance by individual students as confidential and not to be shared with anyone other than the professor and other members of the teaching team. I will exercise the utmost fairness in any grading conducted for the class. I will promptly inform the professor if there could be any possible “conflict of interest” or appearance of a conflict of interest with a student; this could include, but is not limited to, roommates, capstone partners, friends, family, or romantic partner (or former partner), as well as individuals with whom I might have had a serious argument or dispute. (TA/Reader does not have to tell the professor about the nature of the potential conflict of interest.)*

*2.* *Professors’ Initial Meeting with TAs/Readers*

It is recommended that professors meet with their TAs/Readers in advance of classes to cover the following matters and anything else necessary to prepare for the course.

a. *Responsibilities, roles, and expectations*

Professors should review the statement of integrity (above) with their TAs/Readers, and professors should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of TAs/Readers, as well as their own role in the course.

b. *Confidentiality*

TAs/Readers should not engage in gossip or rumors about students or faculty.

If TAs/Readers receive material from students during the semester (e.g., problem sets, exams, papers, or any other material with student information), the TAs/Readers should return all documents no later than the end of the semester to the appropriate student or professor (according to guidelines established by the professor). TAs/Readers should NOT leave graded exams, blue books, or relevant materials in a common area or in plain view, like immediately outside a professor’s office or TAs/Readers’ office or in a mailbox – unless these materials are in individual envelopes, sealed, and clearly labeled with the student’s name. Alternatively, students can pick-up their graded materials directly from TAs/Readers during office hours. Graded materials that have not been retrieved, should be returned to the professor.

If TAs/Readers use semi-public university computers (e.g., labs, libraries, etc.) to process scores, grades, or any students’ material, the TAs/Readers should delete any relevant files at the end of the session (including emptying the “recycle bin”). TAs/Readers must use their CU email account for any email exchanges with students.

*c. Grading*

The professor should remind the TAs/Readers that the final responsibility for all grading rests with the professor. SIPA TAs/Readers should, in no instance, grade major essays or papers (Ph.D. TAs may grade longer papers). If the professor provides clear guidance about expected answers, TAs/Readers may grade problem sets, exercises or short-answer exams, or short memos. Short memos should be no more than three pages in length (preferably two pages) and worth no more than 20% of the course grade.

Instructions for grading may be developed with the assistance of the TAs/Readers but are the final responsibility of the professor. These instructions should include specific point allocation for each element of a correct answer (or deductions for incorrect answers). Some professors distribute grading rubrics for specific exercises to students, either in advance of the exercise or when it is returned. It is recommended that the TAs/Readers and the instructor separately grade a sample memo or answer, and then discuss the expectations for that item and their respective grading of it. If the TA/Reader has any doubts about the answer key or grading rubric, point allocation, or any other aspects of grading, she/he should contact the professor.

It is recommended that the professor consider instructing students to put their name or UNI on the back side of a separate page at the end of the exam or memo so it is not visible to the grader until he/she finishes grading and looks for it.

One useful strategy to reduce any appearance or possibility of bias is to have students' exams graded by two TAs/Readers. This will only be feasible if a class has more than one TAs/Readers, and instructors will have to exercise judgment about whether this is the best way to use the time of the TAs/Readers, but it is a possibility to consider.

The professor should discuss the process for responding to students’ concerns about grades. The best practice is to maintain an explicit policy that allows students to appeal to the professor for a re-grade if they have concerns about the grading by the TA/Reader.

*d. Academic Integrity*

The professor should remind TAs/Readers that, in the event of suspected academic dishonesty, the TAs/Readers must immediately inform the professor. The professor will determine how to proceed, and the TA/Reader should not contact the student involved in such matters unless requested to do so by the professor.

*3. Information for Students about Grading*

The professor should make clear to students in the syllabus and/or at the initial class session:

• the specific responsibilities of TAs/Readers;

• that the final responsibility for all grading rests with the professor;

• how grades are determined and the process to appeal grading by TAs/Readers.