Undergraduate Missive
Fall 2014

Welcome

Welcome to the Department of Computer Science! This guide is intended to introduce you to our undergraduate teaching assistant program, something that will probably play a big role in your academic experience in the department. We're glad to have you around!

When should I talk to a TA?

You should go to TA hours when you have questions about course assignments and course material, but only after you have consulted the lecture notes, course texts, and any other course resources.

TAs are intended as a resource for you—**don't hesitate to use them**. Many of your TAs probably had the same questions when they were students in your course. They didn't become TAs for the complimentary private jet—they took the job because they like the material and they like to help students learn.

However, **you must try to answer your own questions before seeking help from TAs**. It's the best way for you to learn, especially when code is involved.

When can I talk to a TA?

You can talk to TAs about course material only while they're on hours and during other official times established by the course (e.g. labs, sections, and help sessions). Check your course web page for a schedule.

Your TAs are students too and have a right to get their work done in the lab, to seek help from *their* TAs, and to have a personal life outside the department. Furthermore, it's not fair for any one student to get extra help from a TA just because she or he happens to sit nearby in the lab or live down the hall. To this end, **you may not seek help from TAs while they are not on hours.** The average TA is friendly and knowledgeable—please don't take advantage of this by asking for help at other times, since this will put her or him in the uncomfortable position of having to say "no."

Can I get help from people who are not TAs?

In general, yes. However, help is always governed not only by the Academic Code but also by your course's **collaboration policy**, which should be documented in the missive for your course.

Most courses allow a limited degree of collaboration, but since all courses have different policies, be sure to study the policy closely and talk to your head TAs if you have any questions.

How do I find my TAs?

TA hours will be held in the TA rooms: CIT 271 (the Fishbowl), CIT 227 (the Moonlab), and CIT 219. When your TAs are on hours, you can find them there.

When **multiple people are waiting** for a given course, TAs will usually start a waiting list. Add your login to the list, then **wait in the hallway or Sunlab** for your TA to call or zwrite you.

The TA room is a place to get your questions answered, **not to sit and do your work**. Please do not "hang out" in the TA room. What's more, **machines in the TA rooms are for TA use only**—do not log on to those machines when you're not being helped.

When a TA is on hours, you can ask them questions **in person**. Zwriting (or mailing) individual TAs, even when they are on hours, is discouraged. Instead, **use the course mail alias** (e.g. `cs033tas@cs.brown.edu`) to contact your course staff. These aliases send to all TAs for the course and often the professor as well, and sending questions to the entire staff as opposed to individuals will get you answers a lot faster.

What about administrative issues?

For **administrative issues** such as account problems and special accommodations, you should get in touch with your head TAs. **E-mail** is usually the best way to do this, though most head TAs will make themselves available for administrative requests at the end of lecture and when they're around the department in general.

Please use publicized mail addresses (e.g. `cs004headtas@cs.brown.edu`) when contacting your head TAs.

When do I get my account?

Almost all courses require use of the department's undergraduate computing facilities to complete and hand in assignments. If you don't already have a CS account, it will be created for you during the first or second week of the semester. Course identities are also given to existing accounts at this time.

The department maintains a secure and reliable system. However, course work stored in your CS account is only as secure as the file permissions you set. Many courses use account setup scripts and install scripts to set initial permissions, but **you are responsible for maintaining appropriately restrictive file permissions on your files**. It is against the collaboration policy of most courses to let others share or copy your code, and having your code available through improperly set file permissions or printouts lying around is a form of allowing others to share your code. This may be a violation of course collaboration policies and is subject to the Tenets of Community Behavior.

Who are the Sunlab consultants?

The Sunlab consultants are paid to watch over the lab and to help people use their accounts. The on-duty consultant always sits at 9a, the node nearest the door when you enter CIT 143.

The consultants provide support for remote login, startups, and a reasonable number of programs on the ugrad Linux systems, as well as a basic level of support for the ugrad Windows machines. They also provide technical training through a series of mini-courses scheduled over the course of the semester.

The consultants are not TAs, and do not provide assistance on course material, course assignments, course-specific software, or course-specific account customizations.

The line between these, though usually obvious to consultants, is sometimes difficult for new students to determine. Please have patience while you're figuring this out, and you can expect the same from consultants.

Some students work both as a consultant and as a TA. Please respect the separation between these roles, and don't ask your TAs for course help while they're sitting at 9a.

Who are the SPOCs?

The SPOCs (Systems Programmer, Operator, and Consultants) assist in the installation, maintenance, development, and documentation of local software. In addition, they represent the off-hours technical support staff and assist with administrative tasks.

The SPOCs this year are **Cody Mello (cody)**, **Mike Burns (m)**, and **Peter Cooper (peter)**.

In general, you should first talk to a Sunlab consultant about technical problems. For technical issues beyond the scope of the consultants, you can contact the technical staff (including the SPOCs) by mailing `problem@cs.brown.edu`.

Who are the Meta-TAs?

The Meta-TAs are the two ugrads responsible for coordinating the TA program. This year, the meta-TAs are **Aisha Ferrazares (aisha)** and **Indy Prentice (indy)**. If you have issues or questions about the UTA program, you can talk to them.

What do I do if I have a problem with a TA? A consultant? A professor?

If you feel you have been treated inappropriately by a TA, your best course of action is to get in touch with a head TA for the course. If you feel uncomfortable talking to a head TA (or if your issue is with one of the head TAs), get in touch with the professor for the course.

For issues with the consultants, talk to the head consultant **DJ Hoffman (dj)** or the meta-TAs.

For issues with a Meta-TA, talk to **Tom Doeppner (twd)**, the Director of Undergraduate Studies. For issues with a professor (including Professor Doeppner), talk to the department chair, **Ugur Cetintemel (ugur)**.