Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistants & Learning Assistants

Computer Science I

Department of Computer Science & Engineering

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

Overview

The instructor sets policies in the syllabus which all students are expected to read, understand and adhere to. Every Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and Learning Assistant (LA) is expected to read, understand and also follow these policies. Often, students will attempt to violate these policies or ask for special consideration. Do not speculate or otherwise discuss possible exceptions to these policies. Direct them to the instructor and follow up with the instructor if necessary.

- Be prepared. Be aware of the course content and expectations. You are responsible for knowing the material so that you can effectively explain and demonstrate it to students. Be able to complete the assignments, labs, etc. yourself. If you have doubts or concerns engage first with your course leader or GTA supervisor and/or other LAs. If you cannot resolve the issue, ask the instructor for clarification.
- Manage your time. You have made a commitment to this course and will be expected to fulfill it. Work and plan ahead. Be aware of upcoming due dates in this course as well as your own courses, research, personal obligations, etc. Plan ahead and make appropriate accommodations if you know there will be an excess of work during a period of time.

Course Structure

This course is structured with a single large lecture section with the capacity to enroll nearly 300 students. Despite the size, it is our goal to foster a greater sense of community among these students in our department and in our discipline.

The course is a traditional CS1 course covering basic CS1 topics using the C programming language (offered as our traditional CSCE 155E). However, in addition to a traditional lecture, we've produced dozens of lecture/tutorial videos for students to view before and/or after lecture. We also have extensive required reading (mostly from my free textbook but also supplemental resources).

We have doubled the number of weekly lab sessions meeting on Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Tuesdays, students are paired up and expected to complete several peer programming exercises (for those familiar these are the traditional labs that have been in this course before). They are expected to complete the labs in the lab time and are graded only on completion.

The second section (Thursdays) is a "hack section" in which they are allowed (and encouraged) to collaborate with as many other students as they wish. They complete small programs or pieces of code that are then submitted to our online grading system. Right now, the plan is to have these hacks due on Fridays at midnight. In addition, there are be several (usually 5) programming assignments each student is expected to complete individually. There is also 1 midterm and 1 final (both are open book/note/computer and require live programming exercises).

General Responsibilities

Learning Assistant will have several responsibilities in addition to the responsibilities and expectations of the Learning Assistant program.

- Assisting in 2-3 weekly lab and hack sessions
- Grading all materials
- Mentoring and helping students in additional office hours, hack sessions and online via Piazza
- General administrative duties (entering grades, paperwork, etc.) as needed
- Other duties may include course development, materials development (solution keys, future exercises, etc.) and other tasks identified by the instructor.

Graduate Teaching Assistants will have the following general responsibilities

- Supervising lab/hack sessions and assisting students in them
- Supervise grading and ensure that all assignments are graded in a timely manner, shifting of responsibilities when issues arise, and ensuring quality and consistency in grading
- Holding regular office hours (at least 2 per week) in the SRC or other designated area
- Be in regular communication and hold weekly meetings with the instructor

Communication

- Piazza is our primary means of communication, use it and encourage students to use it.
- If you receive email from students, answer it, but redirect them in the future to Piazza. If the question/answer would be of benefit to the class as a whole, post the question/answer to Piazza and inform the student they can find the answer there.
- For communications among instructor(s), GTAs and LAs, use Piazza but make it a private message, viewable only to TAs/instructors.
- If a question has been asked/answered before, link to the original post as your answer.
- Be professional in all your communications, be courteous and helpful.
- Be prompt in answering communications. No question or email should go unanswered for more than 24 business hours.[1]

Grading

Timeline

- Assignments and weekly Hacks are due on Fridays at midnight. Grading assignments should be sent out prior to the due date/time.
- Learning Assistants are required to have completed their assigned grading by 5PM the following Tuesday (or within 48 business hours of the due date). Upon completion Learning Assistants should notify their GTA supervisor and be available via email for any issues that need to be resolved.
- Graduate Teaching Assistants should have everything reviewed and any issues resolved by 5PM the following Thursday at which time grades will be released to students.
- If Learning Assistants face any impediments or issues to completing their grading on time, they should discuss this with their GTA supervisor who will be responsible for helping to resolve the issue by either temporarily helping with grading or shifting grading assignments. If a GTA cannot resolve the issue, they should consult with the instructor.

[1] Within 24 hours but only on business days, i.e. excluding weekends and holidays

Directives

- All grading is done through the online webgrader system.
- Time is limited and it should not be wasted trying to troubleshoot code that won't compile or run. If the code is ungradeable or does not compile/run then take at most 5 minutes to look over the code. If the issue can be fixed within that time frame, back up the original, fix it, note the differences (via code comments) and grade accordingly. If you cannot resolve the issue within 5 minutes, assign the student a zero and move on. This will require you to login to the command line and edit the files directly. Note that the original copy stored in the webhandin system will remain.
- Grade in accordance to the rubric through Canvas. If the rubric does not address something or there is a *reasonable* uncertainty, discuss it with your GTA supervisor.
- Grade in a consistent manner, both between individual assignments and with other graders. There should not be a significant variation in points deducted or awarded for similar mistakes or work. Consistency and grading quality will be checked by your GTA supervisor.
- When you deduct points, give clear and reasonably detailed reasons and justifications for doing so. Good feedback is essential for the students' learning experience. Put in efforts to provide constructive feedback and positive feedback for good work.
- The online rubric in Canvas should indicate your name to the student, but just in case, clearly indicated it in the comments. Add comments to make any notes on changes or other administrative items (corrections, regrades, etc.)
- In general, unless otherwise stated, the formatting of output is left up to the student. As long as output formatting is reasonable and conveys *just as much* information as the expected output, it should be graded as correct.