Guidelines for Graduate Teaching Assistants & Learning Assistants

Computer Science II - Spring 2019

Department of Computer Science & Engineering

University of Nebraska–Lincoln

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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.

In addition to a traditional lecture, we've produced dozens of lecture/tutorial videos for students to view before and/or after lecture. The actual lectures will also be recorded and made available. We also have extensive required reading (mostly from my free textbook but also supplemental resources).

During the weekly labs, students will be randomly paired up and expected to complete several peer programming exercises. They are expected to complete the labs in the lab time and are graded only on completion.

The course is structured such that each assignment is a phase in an overall project. The topic and specifics change from semester to semester, but each has the same basic structure of iteratively building a full database-backed application. Each phase is due on Fridays at midnight. Preceding each phase, students will submit a design document draft that will be evaluated and returned to them for improvements. The design document serves several purposes including giving students an early experience in technical writing, providing an impetus for an early initial design phase, and to keep students on track and thinking about the project as a whole.

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 (assignments and design document drafts)
- 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.

Course Leaders will have similar responsibilities as Learning Assistants but may be asked to assume the responsibilities of other Learning Assistants (such as assigned grading) in some cases. Course Leaders should also attend the weekly coordinating meetings and take on a larger "leadership" role among the Learning Assistants.

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) within the designated area for the course
- Be in regular communication and hold weekly coordinating meetings with the instructor

Communication

- Piazza is our primary means of communication, use it and encourage students to use it.
- If you receive email or canvas notifications from students, answer them 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 or the individual(s) that it is intended for.
- 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 are due on Fridays at midnight. Randomized grading assignments will be sent out prior to the due date/time.
- Design document drafts are due (hardcopy) in class on Thursdays 1 week prior to the due date of the phase.
- 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 comple-

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

tion Learning Assistants should be available via piazza and/or 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 the instructor team as soon as possible. Course Leaders or GTAs may be responsible for helping to resolve the issue by either temporarily helping with grading or shifting grading assignments.

Directives

- All assignment 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 the instruction team.
- 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.
- By default the online rubric in canvas does not indicate to the student who graded the assignment. To help the students, you are *required* to include a final comment on the assignment so that the student can easily identify you. Be positive and encouraging regardless of how well the student did. You may also 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.