COM 318 TA procedures

Welcome to COM 318! I try to teach a lively class that is engaging to undergraduate students. I also hope that you find your TA assignment to be good preparation for your own future coursework (like COM 518) and future teaching assignments at Purdue or wherever you accept a job after graduation.

You will be assigned approximately 1/3 of the students in class. This will likely be somewhere in the neighborhood of 125 students, give or take. Your interactions with students will be likely be limited to going over exams with students who want to learn more about which questions they got wrong, fielding appeals on specific exam questions (which rarely happens), and grading mini-papers (which will be submitted and graded online). Other duties are listed below, but I believe that you will find that most weeks, the time you spend will be only a few minutes in excess of actual in-class time, plus a small fraction of your office hours. The significant exceptions to this will be when you coordinate the formatting, production, and grading of one of the three exams, and the two weeks that you will spend grading mini-papers (about 3 ½ weeks before the end of the semester).

**Dropbox**

I will have a Dropbox folder set up where you can all access lectures, syllabi, and exam questions. This will allow us to easily share materials for the purposes of exam construction, student inquiries, etc. If you do not already have a (free) Dropbox account, please set one up.

**Semester-long tasks**

TAs will be assigned one of the following ongoing tasks for the semester:

* Wireless microphone: This needs to be picked up at the main office before class and returned immediately after class. Also, the person in charge needs to keep a fresh battery available “on the side” (not turned into the department) in case the current battery dies in the middle of class. New batteries can be ordered through the front desk secretary and charged to my “development account.”
* Classroom computer start-up: Before class, the computer needs to be opened and the audio system activated to warm up. The current lecture should be opened and all video/audio clips opened to make sure everything is working properly. This takes a few minutes, so the person assigned to this role should arrive in class at least 10 minutes before the start time.
* Announcements: From time to time, announcements will need to be sent out via Blackboard/email to students in the class. These might be reminders of policy, upcoming deadlines, changes to class schedule, etc. The tone should be upbeat and friendly.

Additionally, because I’m now running all of my lectures and media clips directly from Dropbox rather than dealing with the instability of Purdue technology services, TAs will rotate responsibility for “driving the bus” at the front of the room. You will toggle between lecture and media clips and make sure that the audio for the mic is switched back on after video clips. The person at the font of the class can also be the person writing exam questions for that day. (The other two TAs will periodically monitor for violations of the technology policy, but are free to do other things if they choose.)

**No-technology policy**

For the first two weeks of the semester, expect that there will be a number of violations of the no-technology policy. Approach the person using their phone or laptop (or other electronic communication device) and ask for their Purdue ID. (They can also provide a drivers license.) Write down their name and/or ID number. Return their ID and let them know that they’re in violation of the policy. They will lose half a letter grade off their final grade for each violation.

**Email communication**

When students email you with a question or a request for an appointment, please respond within 36 hours (Monday through Friday). If an inquiry requires time to respond, provide a prompt initial response to let them know that you’re working on providing an answer.

If there is a disciplinary issue or a grade appeal, please cc me on the email so I am aware of what’s going on. Similarly, if a student emails me to complain about something, know that I will always speak with you before providing a substantive response. My default position will always be to back my TAs.

**Grading papers**

The students write one short mini-paper for class. The “all-or-none” grading rubric we use should allow TAs to grade quickly. However, it is helpful if you can provide a sentence or two of comments for each paper. Each TA grades 1/3 of the papers and handles the appeals for their “section.”

Students turn in their papers on SafeAssign, which is designed to catch plagiarism, including self-plagiarism. Please alert me to any troubling papers you come across.

TAs should get together after grading about 7-10 papers to make sure you are on the same page when it comes to giving credit for each category. Please make every effort to have all papers graded within two weeks of the due date.

**Exam construction**

* TAs will take turns writing 3 exam questions for each class period. One question should come from the reading (i.e. material not covered in class). The other two should come from lecture. If an extended video clip is shown (say, 10 minutes or longer) and discussed at any length, it is good to have an exam question on that. Questions should be fairly easy without being completely obvious.
* All exam questions should be uploaded into the “COM 318 Exams” Dropbox folder (and appropriate subfolder for Exam 1, 2, and 3) at least 1 ½ weeks before the exam. I like to try to give exams on a Thursday. That means having questions uploaded prior to the previous Thursday.
* I will do an initial edit of the pool within a few days of the upload (usually a Friday), deleting or re-writing questions that need work. This usually leaves a pool of about 38-40 questions.
* The TAs then review the questions, making additional suggestions, edits, and comments suggesting deletion of problem items or response options. This usually happens by Sunday or Monday morning at the very latest. The TA in charge of formatting the exam then has a day or two to complete the task and order printing of the exam.
* Students who use the testing center request a date and time via an electronic system. We have to approve these dates/times in advance. Any TA can go in and do the approval but please be sure that the start time/day for the exam is the same as for the rest of class unless you have my approval first.
* Each TA will take a turn at being in charge of exam formatting, production, and administration.

There are a number of tasks involved:

* + Shuffle the items to avoid large groupings of questions on a single topic.
  + Number and format the exam. Make sure there are 33 questions!
  + Make two different versions of the exam: Version A (and C) and Version B (and D)
  + Order photocopying of the exam for the number of students enrolled. 25% of the copies should be for Version A on pink paper, 25% of the copies should be for Version B on blue paper, 25% of the copies should be for Version C on green paper, 25% of the copies should be for Version D on yellow paper. Versions A and B should collated (alternating colors) as should versions C and D. (We will then be ready to distribute the stacks to alternating rows in the classroom.) Hand-deliver the exams to the copy center—please do not send electronic files.
  + Get an adequate number of scantron forms from the front office.
  + Get pencils.
  + Drop off hard copies of the exams (do not send electronic copy) to the disability testing center. (Pick up completed exams afterwards.)
  + We will sort the exams by TA at the end of the exam period.
  + Take the completed Scantrons to the IDP office in the basement of Stewart.
  + Please ask for their help in making sure that grades are NOT RELEASED to Blackboard until after we have reviewed student responses to exam questions.
  + The IDP grading form should request breakdown of individual scores. This will allow us to more easily find people who didn’t fill out their Purdue ID #.
  + Pick up the item analysis forms as soon as they are ready and give them to me ASAP.
  + Hand-grade the testing center scantrons or give them to the testing center to run.
* I will review the item analysis printouts and check for “bad questions.” The exams will then either be re-run or test scores can be released.
* I like to try to get exam scores back to students a week after the exam, barring unforeseen problems.

Before exam day:

* Stuff scantrons into exams. There should be two piles of exams: one that alternates between pink and blue (version A & B) and another pile that alternates between green and yellow (version “C” and “D”).

On exam day:

* Whoever was in charge of doing the exams can bring them to class, though a little help from a second person would be nice because this much paper is heavy!
* Please get there as early as possible. Instruct students to fill in every row, beginning in the front.
* Pass out pencils to those who need them.
* I will sign proctors in and out.