

Teaching Support Positions Handbook for Students

*Dalhousie University
Department of Biology*

Contents

Contents.....	1
Applying for Teaching Support positions	2
Selecting which courses to apply for	2
Application and Selection Process	2
Teaching Support Staff Categories.....	3
Learning Assistant Salaries.....	5
Once you have been hired!.....	5
Payroll Information	5
Employment information.....	5
Tax information.....	6
Contracts	6
Keeping Track of your Hours.....	6
Setting boundaries	7
Support Services	8
Biology TS Committee	8
Union information.....	8
Workplace Accommodation	8
Student Services.....	8
Professional Development.....	9
Evaluations	9
Programs.....	9
Certificates	9
Co-curricular Record	9

Applying for Teaching Support positions

When you are thinking about which courses to apply for there are some important questions you should ask yourself as you are reviewing the job postings:

- 1) Will this teaching and learning experience push me to gain a deeper understanding of biology through teaching and practice new teaching approaches?
- 2) Do I have the time to dedicate to meeting all the position's requirements to the best of my ability?
- 3) Does this position help me meet my financial goals?
- 4) Does this position satisfy my graduate degree requirement?

To answer help you answer these questions, please read through the following sections before you look through the job postings.

Selecting which courses to apply for

When applying for teaching support positions, it is most common for applicants to gravitate towards courses in their specialized area of expertise which tend to be upper-level courses. It is safe and comfortable, especially if this is their first-time teaching. For some individuals, there is a lot of value teaching in your area of expertise. But there are a few things about teaching at the introductory level that you won't get from a group of highly motivated and interested upper-level students:

- 1) You will gain a deeper understanding of a broader range of concepts in Biology because there is no better way to learn something than to have to teach it—Giving you more confidence in your understanding of your chosen field.
- 2) You will need to employ a broader range of teaching techniques to engage students with varying motivations (just needs to pass vs. wants an A+) and backgrounds (from where they call home to whether they took biology in high school or not).
- 3) Students will have a broader range of career aspirations (from students in Arts just getting a science credit to those heading into a professional program and those who aren't sure yet to those who know exactly) which pushes you to connect the content to what will engage them.
- 4) You have the chance to model how to be an independent learner by walking students through how you would go about answering a question they asked that you don't know definitively the answer to (this happens a lot, even to the instructors!).

In the end, having a variety of teaching and learning experiences is the best bet for your growth as a teacher and communicator. Working with a variety of courses will give you the practice with the skills you need for academia, science communication/outreach or any career you have your heart set on.

Application and Selection Process

The process of applying for a teaching support (teaching assistant, demonstrator and marker) position is straightforward. You need to fill in the online application form (link below), that is then fed into a database where course instructors can view all the applications. To ensure that the selection process is fair, course instructors will redirect you to the application form, so please **DO NOT** email them about availability or with extra documentation. If an instructor wants extra information, they will get in touch with you.

The application form is designed to give everyone a fair chance at a position since it focusses on the areas of interest to course instructors regardless of previous teaching experience. There is an optional self-identification section to the form that you are not required to fill it out. It just helps us to get to know our candidates better and increase the diversity in our teaching teams.

Job Postings

To view the job postings, use the link found on the application form. There is also a link where you can view the previous year's syllabus of courses you might be interested in applying for.

You can find the application form here: http://admin.biology.dal.ca/TA/TA_form.php

Deadlines

Applications for the upcoming academic year will open on **June 15** (e.g. opens June 15, 2022 for the 022/23 academic year). The deadline for applications for courses offered only in the fall or the same course in both the fall and winter (e.g. most 2nd year courses are offered in both terms) is always **July 15** (e.g. July 15, 2022 for the 2022/23 academic year). The deadline for applying for courses only offered in the winter term is **Oct 1** and **May 1** for summer courses (e.g. Oct 1, 2022 and May 1, 2023 for the 2022/23 academic year).

Applying for each term

You can apply for each term independently, or for all courses at once.

- 1) **Each term:** If you do apply for each term, just be sure to leave terms you have already applied for or want to apply for in the future blank.
- 2) **Modifying your application:** You cannot modify your application form once it has been submitted but it can be deleted and resubmitted, if you are **not** already hired for a course in any of the terms. If you want to delete your application, you will need to get in touch with Allison Schmidt (aschmidt@dal.ca). We highly recommend that you only delete your application if you want to change the courses you applied for. If anything changes in your availability, that is okay we know to expect that and you will have the chance to discuss this with the course instructor if you are contacted, so no need to delete your application.

Selection

Candidates are selected based on their qualifications and the order of priority in the CUPE collective agreement as well as our department values, as outlined below.

1. New graduate biology students
2. Continuing biology graduate students who have not completed their teaching support degree requirement.
3. Previous teaching support staff (TSS) in biology if they have completed 2 initial terms as a TSS – they have priority for 2 consecutive years after they completed their second initial term, unless they are a graduate student, then they have priority for 3 consecutive years after they completed their second initial term.
4. Continuing biology graduate students that have completed their degree requirement
5. Undergraduate students in Biology
6. Graduate and undergraduate students from other departments
7. All other applicants

Hearing back

The hiring process can take up to the first week of classes but usually starts soon after the deadline. Course instructors will contact potential candidates with questions, to schedule an interview or send a job offer, the process is dependent on the course instructor. Given the sheer volume of applications received every year, we do not have the capacity to contact unsuccessful candidates. Therefore, if you haven't heard back by the last week of August, December, or April, then you likely did not get a position.

Teaching Support Staff Categories

There are 3 different TSS categories according to the collective agreement between the labour union that covers TSS (CUPE – see Support Services for more information) and Dalhousie University. These categories have different responsibilities and pay rates. Please see Table 1 for the definitions from the collective agreement and what that means for positions in Biology.

Demonstrator and marker positions can be combined because they are both paid hourly and have the same pay rate.

Biology Graduate Students: You are required to hold 2 learning assistant positions to satisfy to the teaching requirement for your biology graduate degree. The department requires that the positions be either a teaching assistant, demonstrator/marker or demonstrator only. Marker only positions DO NOT count towards your degree requirement.

The department also strongly recommends that you strive for diversity in your teaching experience by working for different courses.

Table 1: Definition of each of the teaching support staff (TSS) categories, teaching assistant (TA), demonstrator (D) and marker (M), according to the CUPE collective agreement with biology specific clarifications of the definitions where needed. TA and D definitions are numbered/lettered for ease of reference between columns. Keep in mind that TAs must have duties in all 3 points of their definition, whereas Ds do not. *Only TAs can mark student presentations and in-class participation. *Only TAs can proctor exams as part of their duties.

TSS Category	Definition	Biology Specific Clarification
Teaching Assistant (TA)	<p>TAs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) assist the instructor in the presentation and delivery of a course; AND 2) are required to directly interact with students; AND 3) their duties <u>include</u> a combination of A) tutoring, B) marking*, C) demonstrating, D) monitoring labs, E) conducting discussion groups/tutorials, F) proctoring*, G) field trips, and H) assisting with online teaching and I) other duties of a similar nature. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) We are defining presentation and delivery as: Leading wet and dry/data labs, discussion groups/tutorials and/or field trips using materials developed by the course instructor 3) A) Holding office hours, help sessions or meeting with students <u>outside of scheduled class time</u> B) Marking – all types of student work D), E) and G) considered above as part of assisting with the delivery and presentation I) Updating existing course materials and course related administration.
Marker (M)	<p>Markers are hired to mark and/or grade the written work of students.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Can mark and provide written feedback on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exams, tests, and quizzes • Assignments, term papers, lab reports (all levels) and other related assignments 2) Marking related administration 3) Updating existing marking rubrics as directed by the course instructor
Demonstrator (D)	<p>Demonstrators are hired to 1) assist students in the laboratory such as completing lab exercises, 2) conducting lab demonstrations, and 3) assisting in the setting up, and/or the taking down of the lab, and lab experiments.</p>	<p>We are defining laboratory as any place where students engage in hands-on-learning. For Biology this includes wet labs working with biological materials indoors and outdoors as well as dry labs working with concepts, processes, data and models.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assisting students with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wet labs and dry/data labs/experiments – in-person + online in the presence of an instructor 3) Assisting the instructor with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lab related data entry • Lab exams (set up/take down)

Learning Assistant Salaries

The salaries listed in Table 2 are from the most recent collective agreement (2016-2020) between CUPE and Dalhousie. Teaching assistants are paid for a specific number of contract hours whereas demonstrators and markers are paid hourly.

Once a new collective agreement between the union and the university is ratified, these numbers will be updated.

Table 2: Current teaching assistant, marker and demonstrator salaries according to the CUPE 3912 collective agreement 2016-2020.

Position	Hours	Current Salary
Teaching Assistant	25	\$610.00
Per Term	35	\$854.00
	45	\$1,098.00
	65	\$1,587.00
	90	\$2,197.00
	110	\$2,685.00
	130	\$3,173.00
Per Academic Year	180	\$4,394.00
	260	\$6,347.00
Teaching Assistant*	Rate/hour	\$24.41
Markers and Demonstrators	Rate/hour	\$16.61

*up to a max of 20 hrs for positions or overtime less than 25 hours

Once you have been hired!

Payroll Information

If you have questions about payroll beyond what is presented below, please see contact Human Resources <https://www.dal.ca/dept/hr/contact-us.html>

New Teaching Support Staff

Go see Aileen Patterson in the Biology Main Office. She will need your banking information and your Social Insurance Number (SIN).

International Students:

- 1) You will need to get a Social Insurance Number (SIN) before you can be put on payroll. You can apply for this online here: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/services/sin/apply.html>
- 2) You will need a Canadian Bank Account so that you can set up direct deposit.
- 3) Although you do not need this for payroll, now that you are working you are eligible for MSI (Nova Scotia's health plan) and you can find the contact information here: <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/MSI/>

Returning Teaching Support Staff

Only see the office staff if your information (address, bank account, etc.) has changed.

Employment information

Employment period and pay dates will vary depending how quickly you get on payroll.

Fall employment periods are typically from: Sep 8 – Dec 31.

Winter employment periods are typically from: Jan 8 – Apr 23.

You will be paid every 2 weeks (2nd and 4th Friday of every month) for the duration of your employment. For graduate students, this is different from your stipend, so do make sure you are being paid and receiving the appropriate amount.

If you are a Teaching Assistant, your pay will be divided equally among the pay dates within a semester regardless of your start date. You do not need to report your hours. For example, a TA65 position that starts on Sep 8 will be paid the TA65 rate (\$1,587) divided by the number of pay periods remaining in the term (7) therefore the biweekly pay will be $\$1,587/7 = \226.71 . This means if your get on payroll the first week of Sep/Jan, you might get 8 pay periods or if you start the 3rd/4th week of Sep/Jan, you might only have 6 pay periods but you will always get that TA65 pay rate regardless of the number of pay periods.

If you are a demonstrator and/or marker, your pay is based on the number of hours you input on a weekly basis in Dalhousie's Time Entry System. You MUST contact Aileen Patterson in the main office, she will provide a guide for first time users.

Be sure to check your employment and pay information by going to the Employee tab →Employee dashboard→Pay information on DALONLINE: <https://dalonline.dal.ca/>

Tax information

Your income from your teaching support position is taxable by the Canadian and Nova Scotian governments. You can pick up the **TD1** tax forms from the Biology Main Office or get them from the Canada Revenue Agency website: <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/forms-publications/td1-personal-tax-credits-returns/td1-forms-pay-received-on-january-1-later/td1.html>

If you have questions about taxes, please see contact Human Resources <https://www.dal.ca/dept/hr/contact-us.html>

You can receive a code to electronically file your taxes for free on U File from the Canadian Federation of Students website.

Contracts

Whether you are a teaching assistant, demonstrator or marker, you **NEED** a contract. The course instructor **must** provide you with a detailed outline of your duties and the amount of time expected for each duty. This will come as a duties form that both you and the instructor of the course need to sign during your first meeting, prior to starting your duties. You should keep a copy for your records as well as send a copy to Aileen Patterson (aileen.patterson@dal.ca) to keep on file in the main office since this is their first line of information we look at if any issues arise.

Supervisors do have the right to reallocate time applied to duties and substitute or revise duties **without changing the total number of hours**. Some record of these changes should be made either on paper or via email with the course instructor.

Keeping Track of your Hours

If the course instructor does not provide you a shared way for you both to keep track of your hours, then you should keep detailed track of them yourself. You may need to do some calculations to get an estimate of about how much time you should be spending on working for the course as well as each task per week to use as a guide. You may want to set up a spreadsheet to keep track of your tasks on an hourly/daily and weekly basis. See Table 3 for an example.

For example, if you have a 65 hr position and the term is 13 weeks long, then you should be spending ~ 5 hours per week on the course. This may vary if duties vary on a week-to-week basis, but it gives you a good benchmark. You should also calculate this information for specific duties. For example, if it says in your duties form that you are to spend 30 hours marking over the 13 weeks then you should be spending ~ 2.3 hours marking per week. This is an approximation since some weeks you might not do any marking while others you may do more, if this is the case, you may want to ask the course instructor how much time you might expect to spend on marking each assignment. However, if you are to do marking every week this is a good estimate that you can use as a benchmark and if you are still going over

Table 3 Example hours spreadsheet where the green rows automatically calculate the total number of hours from the rows for each lab below so they can be compared to the indicated total hours for each task. The notes column is to specify in more detail where time was spent, especially for the other category.

		NOTES
Hired	90	
Worked	0	
Marking (/52 hrs)	0	
Prep (/5 hrs)	0	
In-Lab time (/22 hrs)	0	
Brightspace DB (/4 hrs)	0	
TA Meetings (/7.5 hrs)	0	
Other (/2.5 hrs)	0	
Lab 1	0	
Prep		
TA Meeting		
Time in Lab		
Marking A1 Final		
Marking A1 re-submissions		
Brightspace		
Other (specify)		
Lab 2	0	
Prep		
TA Meeting		
Time in Lab		
Reviewing A2 Draft		
Marking A2 Final		
Brightspace		
Other (specify)		
Lab 3	0	
Prep		
TA Meeting		
Time in Lab (includes all parts/weeks)		
Comments on A3 Design Worksheet		
Comments on A3 Methods Draft		
Reviewing A3 Draft Manuscript		
Marking A3 Final Manuscript		
Brightspace		
Other (specify)		

this time after your first couple of assignments (it takes a couple to get the hang of things – usually this is accounted for in the hours estimate) or you are taking double or triple the time on the first assignment, then you should chat about this with the course instructor. They should be able to offer some tips and tricks to help reduce the marking time specific to their course.

If you are working on duties that were not accounted for in your duties form (like student emails for example) and they are taking a significant amount of time, this should be brought to the course instructor right away so that your duties can be adjusted or a different solution for those unaccounted-for duties can be found.

Having conversations with the course instructor about your hours at least a couple of times per term is a good idea to keep them up to date on your workload as well as make any needed changes to ensure that you are within your contract hours.

Setting boundaries

Two of the most common issues that we see arising with teaching support staff are:

- 1) Being asked to work more than their hours without being compensated
- 2) Being available to students 24/7

The following are recommendations from the committee on how to address these issues:

- 1) **Under no circumstance should the course instructor be asking learning assistants to work without being compensated.**
 - a. Additional work during the academic term: Sometimes course instructors have additional work related to the course that is currently in progress. It is tempting for course instructors to ask TSS to take on these extra tasks but if you do not have the time in your contract, *you must let them know*.
 - b. Side projects: Sometimes side projects come up that course instructors would love a volunteer to assist with. There is nothing wrong with course instructors seeking volunteers to help with aspects of a course, like helping to develop a new activity or updating sections of the lab manual or anything else that isn't part of the day-to-day operations during the term. These can be great opportunities to develop new skills or hone existing skills and add to your CV. However, you need to realistically assess the time you have to invest in this commitment, and you should never feel like you have to take something on if you don't want to. If this has come up in an in-person setting, our advice would be to let the instructor know that you will think about it and get back to them in a couple of days. Take your time to think about it, talk to friends about the opportunity and how you feel. If you decided to not take up on the offer, write the instructor an email graciously declining the offer and perhaps recommend someone else who might be interested that is not currently affiliated with the course instructor (ie. who is not their current graduate student or TSS).

2) **Teaching Support Staff are not expected to be available to students 24/7.**

We all want to be available to students to help BUT we also need to create boundaries with students so that we can take care of ourselves since student emails can take an immense amount of time and are often very repetitive (i.e. the same question). You need to give yourself permission to put some boundaries on answering emails in the evenings and weekends. No course instructor (or students for that matter) should expect you to be available 24/7 but sometimes this is what ends up happening.

One approach that works well is to NOT give out your email address but create a dedicated discussion board on Brightspace for your students to post their questions (allowing an anonymous posting option is very helpful) and instead direct all student questions there. Frame this as building an FAQ for the course. This way students can easily find answers or post questions anytime that they are working but it also has the bonus that you need to sign in to engage with the questions and not get tempting inbox notifications. This will cut down on the time you spend answering questions outside of lab time since you won't be repeating yourself answering the same question(s) over and over again.

If office hours are part of your duties and you find you are feeling overrun, maybe you want to have “open lab” style office hours where students can drop in to work on their assignments with the support of the TSS but they can also help each other if you are busy. Perhaps you can combine or come up with new approaches to ensure there is a variety of support options for the students but all with clear boundaries for the you, and students. If you are still feeling like you are spending a lot more time on this, make sure to talk to the course instructor to brainstorm some ways to provide the needed student support **within your contract hours**.

Support Services

Biology TS Committee

If any issues arise that you are not comfortable discussing with the course instructor, please get in touch with one of the Teaching Support Committee members to help you find the best way forward. Keep in mind that we may discuss your situation among the committee to get more perspectives on how to proceed but the person you reached out to will consult with you before anyone takes any steps.

Allison Schmidt – department LA coordinator and second year representative (aschmidt@dal.ca)

Todd Bishop – First year representative (todd.bishop@dal.ca)

Patricia Lane – Upper-level representative (Patricia.Lane@Dal.Ca)

Kate Ortenzi – Graduate student representative (ortenzi@dal.ca)

Ellie Weise – Graduate student representative (EMWeise@dal.ca)

Union information

You are unionized through the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), LOCAL 3912 - <http://www.3912.cupe.ca/>

The current collective agreement between the Union and Dalhousie University is expired and a new agreement is in the works. Regardless, we maintain the regulations outlined in the expired collective agreement until a new collective agreement is ratified by union members.

The Union has also put together a helpful Teaching Assistants Guide for DAL TAs – that can be used by all TSS.

<https://3912.cupe.ca/documents/ta-guide/>

Contact Information:

Room 3618, Killam Library

Tel: 494-8872, Fax: 494-6344,

Email: cupe3912@dal.ca

Web: www.3912.cupe.ca

Facebook: [CUPE Local 3912](#)

Twitter: [@CUPE3912](#)

Workplace Accommodation

As a TSS you are an employee of the university and are therefore entitled to workplace accommodation. Information on employee accommodations can be found here - https://www.dal.ca/dept/university_secretariat/policies/human-resources/employee-accommodation-policy.html

Student Services

Remember that your job is to assist students to the best of your ability with the content of a specific course. You may be faced with issues that are beyond your job description and training, in these cases you need to refer students to the appropriate on campus services equipped to assist the student or the course instructor.

Some of the most commonly used services include: Accessibility, Counselling, Library, Studying for Success and the Writing Centre. Below is a link to all the on-campus services. You should familiarize yourself with the services and their mandate so that you are ready to direct students to the correct resource. If in doubt, ask your instructor!

https://www.dal.ca/current_students.html

Professional Development

Evaluations

Your students will be asked to complete an on-line evaluation of your performance at the end of the semester. It is worth your while to find out when it will happen so that you can emphasize to your students the importance of the evaluation in your professional development and encourage them to fill it out. TSS often get a larger response rate if they do this.

There are no formal supervisor evaluations of your performance, but you are **STRONGLY** encouraged to talk to the course instructor about your performance at various stages of your work as a TSS. This way you can build on your strengths and identify areas to work on throughout the semester. This will also give you time to try different approaches to see what works best for you and your students.

Programs

Teaching Assistant Professional Development Day - Every Aug/Sep – free but you must register here:

<https://www.dal.ca/dept/clt/events-news.html>

Professional Development opportunities through the Centre for Learning and Teaching:

<https://www.dal.ca/dept/clt/events-news.html>

Certificates

Graduate and Post-Doctoral

Certificate in University Teaching and Learning (CUTL)

For doctoral and post-doctoral students interested in continuing to develop their teaching practice. For more details please see the Centre for Learning and Teaching site here: <https://www.dal.ca/dept/clt/services/CUTL.html>

Undergraduate

Certificate in Science Leadership and Communication

For all undergraduate students in science interested in pursuing a career with a significant science communication aspect (e.g. teaching, journalism, outreach). For more details see the certificate site here:

<https://www.dal.ca/faculty/science/earth-environmental-sciences/programs/certificates/certificate-in-science-leadership-and-communication.html>

Co-curricular Record

Get your work as a TSS and other not-for-credit experiential learning experience recognized on an official Dalhousie document! See details on how this will benefit you, what is recognized and how to get it on your record here:

https://www.dal.ca/campus_life/career-and-leadership/career-leadership-programs/co-curricular-record.html