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Shoals Marine Laboratory TA Manual

Introduction

Shoals Marine Laboratory (SML) operates a seasonal field station on 95-acre Appledore Island in the Isles of Shoals, an isolated cluster of islands six miles off the Maine and New Hampshire coasts. SML is jointly operated by Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire.

Appledore Island is ideal for fieldwork. The surrounding waters are clean and cold, the tidal range is large, and marine and terrestrial organisms are abundant and diverse. SML's primary mission is marine science education and research experiences for undergraduates and high school students. We also offer non-credit, adult and family education programs. Appledore has no town or permanent residents. Our 18-building facility is located in the center of the island; four private cottages exist on the island's south side. SML generates its own power and operates its own water systems. SML uses the *R/V John M. Kingsbury* and *R/V John B. Heiser* for teaching, research, and to transport passengers and supplies. The *R/V Storm Petrel*, *R/V Acipenser*, several inflatables and two sailboats round out SML's fleet of vessels.

Shoals Marine Laboratory TAs

As a Teaching Assistant (TA), you will be viewed differently by faculty, staff, and students and held to a different standard. In addition to the academic duties associated with TAing your course, you will often be the first person to observe signs of stress and other behavioral characteristics of your students. Consequently, your duties are important not only for individuals of your class, but also for the overall Shoals community. After reviewing this TA manual, please read and understand [The Appledore Island Handbook](#).

TA Duties

Teaching Assistants normally arrive on Appledore Island on the Sunday afternoon before classes commence on a Monday. (Faculty arrive at this time as well.) You will be met at the Appledore dock by SML staff, who will direct you to your room, assist with necessary paperwork, and help move equipment to the class rooms/labs.

On Sunday evenings, both before and during your class, you will attend a Faculty/Staff meeting in which the next week's activities will be 'finalized' and coordinated with concurrently running classes. This is a good time to inform the Lab Coordinator of any needs for the following week (e.g., frozen squid, field supplies, etc.), as logistics of living on an island often require 2-3 days for delivery.

SML staff are committed to helping you get the most out of your TA experience, and look forward to welcoming you as part of the Appledore Island community. Most of the time, you will be interacting directly with the Lab Coordinator for day-to-day class activities (e.g., getting/setting up video equipment, specimen collection, etc.). For special needs/concerns, however, you can contact Dr. Jim Coyer (james.coyer@unh.edu, 603-964-9011 Island Office). The Island Coordinator (603-964-9011) also can provide assistance when necessary.



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If you need to use a small boat (inflatable) you must coordinate and PLAN AHEAD with Jim (who will then work with SML Captains). Bear in mind, that use of small boats and radio requires instruction and check-out by one of the Captains. Diving operations will require additional certifications (contact Mike Rosen or Jim Coyer).

If you need to go to the mainland independent of your class, please arrange the trip with your faculty and sign up for vessel space with the Island Coordinator (603-964-9011). You may travel on any vessel to or from the mainland at no charge on a space-available basis as long as you are listed on the passenger manifest.

The SML drug/alcohol policy is clearly stated in *The Appledore Island Handbook*. Please read and understand this policy. Violation of this policy will lead to immediate termination of your Taship. For students in your course, please note that alcohol may not be consumed by students in SML courses at any time or anywhere on Appledore Island (residence halls, etc.), even if the student is 21 years or older.

If you are 21 or older, you may be invited to special functions at Bartels Hall (reserved for staff), the 3rd floor Founders Hall (reserved for Faculty), and/or K-House (reserved for the Director and other faculty/seminar speakers). Only in these areas and under these invited events, are you allowed to consume alcohol if over 21. Keep in mind that you may not enter any of these areas unless specifically invited. At no time should the consumption of alcohol take place in front of students or be discussed with students.

Housing for TAs

SML staff will assign you a room based on island housing needs. If you have a concern about your housing assignment, please see the SML Island Coordinator; do not just move your room without permission. TAs under 21 years of age cannot be housed on the 3rd floor of Founders Hall with faculty. TAs for high school courses will serve as RAs in the high school residence halls (the female TA in the girls' dorm and the male TA in the boys' dorm). SML TAs will not be asked to share a room with a student.

Professional Behavior of TAs

Cornell University and the University of New Hampshire (and SML) adheres to The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) with respect to the rights of students to their education records as stated at: <http://courses.cornell.edu/content.php?catoid=14&navoid=3140>.

Please note that photographs of students fall under FERPA jurisdiction. FERPA authorizes disclosure of directory information (such as photographs) without consent of the student for use by the university UNLESS students have filed a 'no-release' request. All SML students (and everyone who comes to SML) are given a 'media release' form prior to arrival on Appledore that gives SML permission to use photographs, but it is important to realize that some choose not to sign the release. Consequently, TAs must take care in releasing recognizable photographs of students by electronic/social media means and should do so only through the SML office.



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Sexual harassment is a form of protected-status harassment. Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other oral, written, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature may constitute sexual harassment. Specifically, speech and other expression occurring in the context of instruction or research will be considered sexual harassment if: 1) It is meant to be either abusive or humiliating toward a specific person or persons and 2) It persists despite the reasonable objection of the person or persons targeted by the speech. All members of the seasonal teaching staff at SML, should read the University of New Hampshire's policy on Discrimination, Discriminatory Harassment, and Sexual Harassment at: <http://www.unh.edu/hr/harassment-policy.htm>.

Please set aside some time to read the information posted online for our [faculty](#). We also recommend that TAs browse through the [online information for students](#).

Specific behaviors on the part of TAs demonstrate that they are serious about their desire to develop professional competence. The following list is not exhaustive, but serves to illustrate the type of behavior expected of professionals at Shoals Marine Laboratory (*adapted from: A Handbook for MSU Teaching Assistants 2011– 2012*)

1. While you are a TA, you are representing SML to your students and to the public, whether on the island or off the island.
2. Learn to enforce course policies fairly. Be firm and uphold standards. This may involve making decisions that disappoint others.
3. Be a reliable worker. If a student, a colleague, or a teaching team is depending on your input, get the task done well and on time.
4. Know the context and the limitations within which you work. If you are not authorized to change rules or make decisions, do not act unilaterally. Confer responsibly with professional colleagues and faculty supervisors to determine what you may and may not do.
5. Respect the dignity of all students. This includes putting aside your personal biases and requires that you exercise care in the use of social media while on Appledore:
 - a. Posting photos or video of students in your class while you are a TA is prohibited (see FERPA statement, above).
 - b. Never post any comments about students online.
6. Maintain proper boundaries between professional and personal relationships. Romantic relationships between TAs and students are prohibited while you are a TA at Shoals Marine Laboratory. Unlike other professions, teaching occurs at what Parker Palmer calls “the dangerous intersection of personal and public life”¹. Your work as a TA is not like the personal work of a therapist. Your primary duties **do not** include guiding individual students, one by one, on a personal journey during which intimate confidences are shared.
7. Restrain your responses to student conflicts. Attempt to hear and understand their concerns. Remember the ways in which you bear the greater responsibility in your relationship with students.
8. Deal responsibly with problems of course organization and sensitive relations with co-workers.



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Make reasonable criticisms in planning meetings, not in class with your students. Deal maturely and ethically with the frustrations and difficulties that attend any intense teaching experience.

9. Be cautious and discreet about the use of academic or personal information about your students. Respect privacy.

Knowledge and skill in one's discipline is the first requisite of being a teacher or a professor. In addition, you must adhere to a professional code of conduct, which demands skill and restraint, as you meet the challenges and difficulties of the profession with dignity and balance. It may take years to develop a sense of one's self as a competent, discerning professional, but it is important for new TAs to take the first steps of that journey.

Monitoring Responsibility of TAs

As a TA, you will interact with your students for several hours each day, both in the classroom/lab, at meals, and in residence halls. Everyone on Appledore Island should feel safe, comfortable, welcome, and included at all times. Consequently, you will be in a position to notice behavior changes that may indicate rising levels of stress or anxiety. While moderate levels of stress often result in peak performance, high levels of stress often lead to a break down. Common indicators of high stress are (from Cornell University Gannett Health Services):

1. Emotional: irritability, anger, sadness, anxiety, arguments/fights, showing extreme reactions, expressions of disinterest, apathy, or hopelessness
2. Cognitive: decline in academic or work performance; impaired concentration, memory, reason or decision-making; being out of touch with reality
3. Behavioral: missing classes or work; sleep or eating problems; changes in hygiene or appearance; social withdrawal, smell of alcohol; frequent health issues; anxious or jittery behaviors

If you suspect that any of your students may be experiencing high levels of stress, consult with your faculty supervisors. Ultimate resolution may require assistance of trained staff members.

¹ <http://www.couragerenewal.org/parker/writings/heart-of-a-teacher>



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