

FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH...

1. Enjoy yourself! A TA's positive and upbeat demeanor goes a long way in reducing stress and tension, while creating an environment conducive to learning.
2. Speak clearly and audibly in order to maintain students' attention and manage the classroom effectively.
3. During recitation classes, try to establish eye contact with your students. Let them know that they are more than welcome to ask questions.
4. If you have some difficulty speaking English fluently, do not make an impression that you don't have enough knowledge to teach. Always be prepared to answer any questions, and help students to come up with new solutions.
5. If a student asks a question and you have difficulties with his/her pronunciation, ask him/her to repeat the question until you make sure that you fully understand what's being said before providing an answer.
6. Learn how to pronounce different names correctly. Some names are pretty similar, so be careful not to make any mistake while grading homework, exams, etc.
7. If you have domestic students who use English script or cursive hand, and you are not familiar with their handwriting, feel free to ask them. Do not take anything for granted.
8. Make sure to have a clear and objective grading rubric. Be consistent in grading and treat all students fairly. This reduces the number of complaints you'll receive.
9. Although in some cultures it is acceptable for students to ask about their friends' grades, as an instructor of record, always keep students' records private.
10. When unsure of how to address cases of cheating, plagiarism, or copyright infringement, consult your supervising Professor. Do not be tempted to resolve the issue as is done in your home country.
11. When it comes to safety, students from different cultural backgrounds act differently in the lab. This may be because safety rules and regulations in the US are different from those in their respective countries. This is important to be aware of when you are a lab TA.
12. It's always good to establish a healthy relationship with your students. However, be careful about socializing with individual students, especially under circumstances that may be perceived as cultivating bias or favoritism.
13. Make sure that you know your duties and responsibilities from the outset, and work diligently to carry them out. However, do not feel obligated to exceed your work-week hours.

14. E-mail is always the preferred mode of communication. You do not have to give your cell phone number to your students. In fact, it is not recommended.
15. Be strict about your office hours and do not allow students to take your research time unless you are free or willing to give more help.

What domestic TAs need to know about International students:

1. Academic Integrity/Plagiarism: Rules about academic integrity/plagiarism in American universities must be made very clear. Copying directly from a source without citation, or copying classmates' work without crediting them are viewed very differently in some International cultures.
2. Deadlines: Deadlines are negotiable in some International cultures, so some students may not understand why work cannot be turned in late if they present a compelling argument for it. Clearly stated rules in the syllabus can help to clarify this.
3. Class Participation: In some cultures, raising one's hand, speaking up, and challenging the professor's authority are not allowed. Expectations for classroom etiquette should be clearly stated and modeled, especially for classes where participation is part of the grade.
4. Personal Boundaries: Some international students may not feel comfortable bringing up personal issues to the TA or professor. This makes it difficult to assess if there is something else affecting their academic performance. Discreet referrals to campus resources may be useful in this situation.

What International TAs need to know about Domestic students:

1. Diversity in America: Not everyone raised in the USA shares the same culture; there are regional, geographic, ethnic, and religious differences among American students. Thus, general assumptions are not useful.
2. Lack of exposure to other cultures: Some students may appear unfriendly or unwelcoming to their international TA if they have had little exposure to different cultures. By modeling good teaching/TA behavior, the international TA can demonstrate that international students are different, but not incompetent.
3. Language: Language barriers can be an issue for both international TAs and domestic students. An international TA's command of English will affect how domestic students respond. Lack of fluency in English may be viewed as lack of knowledge in general, or lack of knowledge in the subject matter. Overcoming these cultural stereotypes is not easy, but an international TA who is willing to approach the situation with humor and patience likely will receive positive responses from domestic students.