



Graduate Student
Orientation

**FACING THE UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCE:
CONVERSATIONS ABOUT COMPLEX
ACADEMIC INTERACTIONS**

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Please contact Kyle Reynolds at kreynol3@kent.edu with questions or for reproduction requests.*

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The Complex Conversations video monologues are thought-provoking professional ethics case studies for Teaching Assistants (TAs) to consider and discuss. These are *complex* in the sense that they pose multi-layered ethical dilemmas with no easy answers, and they are meant to foster *conversations* that might otherwise be avoided.

These monologues address a wide range of topics, including the following:

- Responding to students who appear to be overwhelmed or at-risk
- Responding to misconduct in relation to students, peers, and advisors/mentors
- Considering differences of a linguistic, ethnic, racial, social, gender/sexual, and/or religious nature in relation to teaching and learning
- Accommodating students with various learning differences and documented disabilities
- Negotiating professional roles and responsibilities
- Establishing and maintaining productive relationships within academia

The videos themselves do not offer sample responses to these topics. However, the accompanying resource packet offers a list of possible ways to handle each situation, recommendations and resources that TAs can provide to students and colleagues, advice for what *not* to do, and questions to prompt further discussion. We strongly suggest that you use the videos and the resource packet in tandem.

We'd like to emphasize that the situations discussed in each video are fictionalized accounts, and that the people providing the monologues are actors. These accounts may utilize and/or require the examination of stereotypes in order to engage graduate students meaningfully, if difficult, conversations. While these scenarios may seem exaggerated, they are purposefully provocative in order to call attention to ethical professional practices and broader campus policies and procedures. While general principles are worth exploring, and campus policies are certainly worth knowing, we believe it is important to remember that the particularities and complexities that inform any real-world situation often deserve to take precedent and may require actions beyond what is presented in this resource guide.

*****Please pay special attention to the list of possible resources at the bottom of the following pages.***

“Politics in the Classroom”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant in charge of your own course. While you are preparing for a class session, one of your students comes to your office hour and is visibly upset.

Teaching Assistant: Right before the start of class, my usually happy student came to the end of my office hour completely distraught. She told me that in her last class, the students had participated in a political discussion, which got very heated. Rather than moderating the discussion, she said that the professor allowed the students to talk freely. My student told me that the discussion quickly devolved into personal attacks, and the professor did nothing when fellow students shouted at her, called her names, and put her down for her opinion. She told me she felt harassed, with even a few classmates following her and calling her names because of her viewpoints. She was clearly upset, and frankly, so am I. What can I do?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Thank the student for sharing her experience with you. If comfortable with doing so, ask for further details about being followed, harassed, etc. in order to direct her to the appropriate resources.
- Ask the student what made her upset and if she were comfortable talking to the professor about the situation.
- Potentially suggest discussing this with the department chair, associate dean of the college, or academic advisor.
- Clearly outline classroom decorum and behavior policies in your own syllabi, referring to the Code of Student Conduct.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Encourage the student to contact her professor and/or advisor immediately.
- Suggest that the student call for a campus escort if she feels unsafe.
- Suggest that the student seek counseling or psychological services, if needed.
- Suggest that the student talk to the Student Ombuds, request a mediator from Student Mediation Services, or ask a University Steward for guidance.

What not to do

- Ignore the student’s fears about harassment from members of her class.
- Do not ask what her political views are that led to the situation.
- Contact the professor yourself about this issue.

Discussion questions

- What should the professor have done in this situation?
- What if you were a grading TA under the professor in question?
- What about if this student comes in late to your class instead of during office hours?
- What would you do if you were the professor moderating a political discussion in the classroom?

Resources

- Campus Safety <https://www.kent.edu/campus-safety>
- The Office of the Ombuds <http://www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2>
- Student Mediation Services <http://www.kent.edu/studentconduct/mediation>
- Counseling Center <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/centers/chdc>
- Psychological Services <http://www.kent.edu/psych>
- University Stewards <https://www.kent.edu/universitystewards>

“Coming Out”

Narrator: You are an openly gay teaching assistant, who also serves as the president of the LGBTQ student organization. One of your students approaches you after class and says...

Student: Hey! Got a minute? Listen, I know you saw me the other day with those guys tearing down the “Coming Out Week” posters. I was with my ROTC group, and they just started tearing them down, out of nowhere. I really felt ashamed. I mean... I know you’ve been honest with us about being gay and stuff, but I don’t want you to think I have a problem with that. I mean...I don’t. The thing is, I’m gay too, but nobody knows. I’m scared to tell anyone, especially some of my military friends. And I can’t imagine what my family would do. I’d rather die than let my dad down. Do you have any advice for me?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Let the student know that you are glad to hear that he trusts you enough to speak to you.
- Ensure the student that your classroom is an accepting environment in which everyone is welcome and that your office is a safe zone.
- Offer to walk the student to the Counseling Center in White Hall or to other emergency help, particularly if they are feeling suicidal.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest that because of your liaison with the LGBTQ student organization, you could help the student connect with another student in a similar situation. Rather than attending a group meeting, the student would be able to get one-on-one support and connect with someone who can relate.
- Suggest the student take advantage of campus resources, such as the LGBTQ Center and student organizations, which have experience in aiding students with concerns such as this.
- As always if a student mentions suicide make appropriate professional contact with the Dean of Students and/or Psychological Services.

What not to do

- Do not encourage or discourage the student from coming out, as this can have consequences for which you do not want to be held responsible.

Discussion questions

- In this scenario, the student approaches the TA. Under which circumstances should YOU approach a student about misconduct?
- If you were not gay, and a student came to you assuming that you were, how would you handle the situation?

Resources

- LGBTQ Center www.kent.edu/lgbtq
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Counseling and Human Development Center <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/centers/chdc>

“Overwhelmed Undergraduate Student”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant, teaching College Writing I. You are concerned about one of your student’s progress.

Teaching Assistant: In this week’s journal entry, Angela wrote how frustrated she was, and that she wanted to quit school. I know I’ve seen her looking tired recently and she’s been late to class. She seems reserved and she rarely participates. Is it the challenges of adjusting to college life, which is normal, or is it her job? She has told me she works late nights. Her journal entry shows some family and personal issues. She said she’s the first one in her family to go to college, and that her parents weren’t willing to provide their income information for financial aid. I’ve tried to reach out to her especially through her work, which is really just okay at this point. I mean...the rough draft of her research paper was terrible. She seems to have trouble with sentence structures and her outline is a mess. And then the notes she put at the end of her draft saying that she didn’t know what a reference page was! I recommended that she visit the Writing Commons but she said she was too busy. I feel bad and I’m concerned. But how much do I try to get involved? Is it within my responsibilities to reach out to her beyond issues of her academic work?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Assure the student that some of the concerns are valid and common among college students, especially first-generation college students who are paying for college without financial assistance from their parents.
- Suggest the student put together a schedule to help stay organized and on-track of assignments and account for time to visit the Writing Commons on campus.
- Emphasize that students are always welcome to receive assistance from the instructor during office hours, via email or by making an appointment. During these times, editing aid and guided feedback can be provided.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Explain to the student that the Writing Commons is a resource, which specializes in helping students with their writing and that tutors take students’ busy schedules into consideration.
- Encourage the student to make use of online writing resources such as Purdue Owl (owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/).
- Consult Financial Aid about policies with reference to reduce course loads.

What not to do

- Dismiss the student on the basis that she exhibits struggles adjusting to college life and financial independence.
- Give the student an ultimatum forcing her to decide between pursuing an education, a social life or a career.

Discussion question

- If the student were not a first-generation student paying for college out of her own pocket, in what ways would your response differ?

Resources

- Financial Aid www.kent.edu/financialaid
- Writing Commons www.kent.edu/writingcommons
- Academic Success Center www.kent.edu/asc
- Purdue OWL <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

“Disability”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant, teaching an 8am class, consisting of nearly 20 undergraduates. One of your students has narcolepsy and is often late or misses class because of her impairment and you think....

Teaching Assistant: Shannon is missing too many classes. The syllabus clearly outlines the attendance policy. When I went over it the first day, I wanted to be strict but fair. I thought I could make some exceptions with her because narcolepsy is a medical condition she can't control, but now it's also affecting her group work. Her group members emailed me saying they can't get in touch with her, and they don't know how to move forward. I understand their frustrations. When I spoke with Shannon about this the other day, she said she saw the emails but fell asleep and then forgot. She feels bad about the group but doesn't know what to do; neither do I.

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Tell the student that you are sorry to hear about her struggles.
- Emphasize that even though you empathize with her situation, you cannot excuse her absences without proper documentation, as this would be unfair toward other students in the class.
- Let the student know that you understand her unique circumstances and that you are willing to speak with the faculty advisor overseeing the course and/or the undergraduate coordinator in your department to get some suggestions on how to handle this difficult situation.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Ask the student for documentation from a physician explaining her condition and resulting challenges.
- Ask the student to contact her group members immediately and explain the situation to the extent that she feels comfortable.
- Encourage the student to contact Student Accessibility Services and inquire about services that might be available to her. Perhaps even offer to sit in with the student while she makes the call, if that makes her more comfortable.

What not to do

- Let the student's group know the reasons for her absence and lack of participation in the group project.
- Dismiss the student based on her medical condition.

Discussion questions

- Another student, who has missed an alarming number of class sessions, approaches you regarding his lack of presence and participation in the class. You tell him that you are sorry, but there is not much you can do if a student's alarm clock does not go off in time to make it to class. The student points out that he has noticed another student, Shannon, has missed a number of classes and is apparently “getting away with it.” How do you respond?
- How would your responses/suggestions for the student change if he had a learning disability or physical impairment?

Resources

- Student Accessibility Services www.kent.edu/sas

“Minority Student”

Narrator: A non-traditional (older adult), African American undergraduate student approaches you and says....

Student: Hi, I’m Monica from your communication class. I’ve been having some issues, and I don’t know where to turn. I wanted to talk to you as a fellow African American woman and mother. I am doing well in all my classes. I have a 4.0 overall GPA and an A in your class so far, but I’ve been struggling (sigh). I don’t know... just moving here to a small community, I find that I am not really fitting in. I mean... even at school my professors don’t seem to respect me. One thought I was actually cheating on a mid-term. Another professor called me out in front of everyone and asked me to speak on behalf of all African Americans. There was one time, right after I gave a presentation, the teacher told me he was surprised at how articulate I was. All of my professors are tenured and one of them is even the chair of the department. This is really bothering me. It makes me feel extremely uncomfortable. Do you have any advice for me?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Provide support to the student by stating that you are sorry to hear that she feels this way and that you are glad she feels comfortable talking to you about the situation.
- Listen to the student’s concerns without judgment of any parties involved.
- Ask the student whether she feels the same way in your class and assure her that your classroom is a safe environment in which tolerance and mutual respect are top priorities.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest the student speak with the professors involved by requesting a meeting or visiting their office hours. Encourage her to share her concerns openly and honestly, assuming the instructors did not intend any harm.
- If the student expresses discomfort with addressing professors directly, inform her that the undergraduate coordinator may be a helpful resource and may be able to provide advice as to how to handle the situation.
- Identify campus resources that are available to provide guidance in such matters (*see below*).
- Let the student know that a great way to feel a part of the campus community and meet people with similar interests is to become involved in student organizations (a full list of these organizations can be found at <http://www.kent.edu/csi>).

What not to do

- Do not voice agreement or disagreement with what the student is saying and don’t confront the professors.
- Keep in mind that you are not familiar with both sides of the story and should refrain from judgment of any kind.

Discussion questions

- Would you handle this situation differently if the student did not have a 4.0 GPA?
- Would you handle this situation differently, if neither of the professors was tenured nor chair of the department?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2
- Women’s Center www.kent.edu/womenscenter
- Center for Student Involvement www.kent.edu/csi
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych

“Language Barrier”

Narrator: You are a non-native English speaking teaching assistant for a statistics course and one of your students approaches you after class with a concern.

Student: Hi, do you have a minute? I want to talk to you about some issues I’m having in your class. I am always there and I try really hard. But it seems like no matter what I do, I just can’t keep up and I’m getting bad grades. I haven’t come to your office hours before to talk to you about this because... I don’t really know how to say this... I think I’m not doing well because... I’m sorry but, I don’t understand you. No offense, but your accent makes it really hard for me to follow along. I always read and come to class prepared, but I’m getting tired of not doing well despite everything I do for this class. I appreciate you offering to help me during your office hours, but I shouldn’t have to put in all the extra effort to understand what my teacher is saying. I already spend lots of time on this class- much more than any of my other classes. You know, my parents pay for me to go to college and expect me to get good grades, but then I get teachers like you, who can’t even speak English. How am I supposed to do well? Statistics is hard enough as is!

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Listen to the student’s concerns carefully and apologize that she feels that way.
- Emphasize the opportunity for students to ask questions in class, during office hours or via email.
- Ask the student if she has specific questions or problems that you can address at present.
- Offer to post supplemental materials (e.g., slides, notes, hand-outs) on a course website or distribute materials via email to all registered students.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest the use of supplemental, course-relevant print resources that are accessible online or in the library.
- Suggest that the student study with one or more other students from the class.
- Inform the student of the opportunity to become an International Conversation Partner through ISSS. This may help him become more accustomed to different accents and dialects.

What not to do

- Do not get defensive. Instead, maintain your composure, remain open, and lead by example.
- Do not doubt your ability to teach or to communicate effectively.

Discussion question

- How would you handle the situation if a student were struggling with a different subject?
- How would you handle the situation if you were a native English speaking TA and your student tells you that he/she has difficulties with the materials due to the way you explain things?

Resources

- Math Emporium <http://www.kent.edu/mathemporium>
- Academic Success Center www.kent.edu/asc
- Speech & Hearing Clinic <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/hs/spa/speech-hearing-clinic>

“Student Misconduct”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant and one of your students has been demonstrating inappropriate behavior, and you think...

Teaching Assistant: I don't know what to do about Marissa. Last week, she stayed after class and asked me out for a drink. Seriously, I know things have been awkward lately. What started out as just a meeting during office hours, turned into staying after class almost every day! Before I knew it, she was bringing me coffee and asking me what I like to do outside of school. I was always polite, but when she asked me out, I had to be firm. I told her it's inappropriate for a TA to go out with a student. She was really upset about it, and now I haven't seen her all week. Should I email her? What do I say?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Apologize for having accepted the coffee and for possibly having sent the wrong message to the student.
- Restrict office hour discussions and other communications with the student to course-related subjects.
- If the student asks to meet with you in person to discuss what happened, ask a colleague to stay in the vicinity. You want to provide privacy for the conversation with the student, but it is beneficial to have a colleague present in case the conversation gets out of hand or accusations are made following the meeting.
- As an alternative to a face-to-face meeting, communicate with the student via email so that documentation may be retained.
- Be sure to notify your faculty supervisor overseeing the course and/or the undergraduate coordinator in your department of this development. It is better to be safe than sorry, should the student make accusations of inappropriate behavior.
- Email the student referencing her class attendance and emphasize the attendance policy outlined in the course syllabus, as you would with any other student.

What not to do

- Do not go out for a drink with the student.
- Do not make the student feel uncomfortable by showing your own discomfort with the situation.

Discussion questions

- How would you handle this situation if you felt attracted to your student?
- What would you do if the student's inappropriate behavior continued even after you addressed the issue?
- Would your stance change once the student is out of your class?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2
- University Policy Regarding Consensual Relationships And Other Relationship-Based Conflicts Of Interest www.kent.edu/policyreg/university-policy-regarding-consensual-relationships-and-other-relationship-based

“Advisor Misconduct”

Narrator: You are a first year teaching assistant and your advisor has made an overt sexual advance to you.

Teaching Assistant: Whoa! I can't believe my advisor made a pass at me. We were talking in his office and when I went to leave he hugged me and tried to kiss me. I felt awkward just leaving so abruptly, but what could I do? It's really hard to be rude to him. He's so well-known, everybody loves him, and I thought that with his help I'd get a good research project going. And since he has so many professional connections, I was sure that I would get a good job once I graduated. But maybe I um... should have seen it coming. He's been texting me about non-school related matters, he keeps insisting on Facebooking me, he's always scheduling one-on-one meetings, and he frequently compliments me on my looks. I feel so uncomfortable, but I don't want to lose my assistantship. I really need to tell someone, but who should I speak to?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Attempt to remove yourself from the situation and avoid further one-on-one encounters.
- Request a confidential face-to-face meeting with the graduate coordinator and/or department chair to seek advice.
- Speak with the University Ombuds, who is trained to handle highly sensitive situations with confidentiality.
- Seek advice from Psychological Services. Confidential counseling services are available to all students.
- Consider finding another faculty member who could serve as your advisor. Even though an advisor's note-worthy professional expertise and reputation in academia are distinguishing characteristics, the ability to foster a trusting collaboration is just as important.

What not to do

- Do not remain in a situation that makes you uncomfortable.
- Do not continue to engage in or encourage non-academic communication via text or social media.

Discussion question

- How would you handle a situation in which you feel attracted to your advisor?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Sexual and Relationship Violence Support Services www.kent.edu/srvss
- The Women's Center www.kent.edu/womenscenter

“Psychological Issues”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant with both teaching and research responsibilities, so you have a great deal of interaction with your students. You enjoy your position and find that students love your teaching style and open door policy.

Teaching Assistant: Amanda is a pre-med student in my Chemistry II class. In our class together last semester, she also had a class with me, and she had a vibrant, outgoing personality. Amanda never missed a class and proved to be an exceptional student. She was early, sat in the front row, participated often, and consistently submitted high-quality work. Now, Amanda is always late, taking a seat in the back, never participating, and she just looks sad. She cries when she provides excuses for not submitting assignments or submitting poor-quality work. Yesterday she approached my desk to hand in her take home exam, which was due last week. I couldn't help but notice the deep, straight-lined incisions on her arms. I think she might be cutting herself. Do I get involved, or should I just ignore all of these signs that Amanda is obviously in need of help?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Consistently provide reminders of upcoming assignment due dates via email or at the end of class instead of at the beginning.
- Remain composed and wait for an appropriate time to speak with the student.
- If you decide to express your concerns, be sure to do so privately. Respect the student's wishes if she doesn't want to talk.
- Contact Psychological Services and/or CARE team and explain the situation.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest the student speak with her advisor about challenges keeping up with work in the course.
- Provide her with possible resources (see below), even if it is overtly through a broader class discussion to avoid singling her out.

What not to do

- Do not counsel the student yourself. Listen and then refer her to the appropriate resources.
- Do not bring attention to the student by asking questions or displaying overt shock. Do not ignore the situation.

Possible follow-up discussion questions for new TAs

- How would you handle this situation if the student's friend approached you to express concern?
- Knowing the kind of work Amanda is capable of and seeing obvious signs of her struggle, would you be more flexible with due dates? If so, how would you justify this flexibility that is not extended to all other students in your class?

Resources

- Women's Center www.kent.edu/womenscenter
- University Health Services www.kent.edu/uhs
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Counseling and Human Development Center <http://chdc.educ.kent.edu>
- CARE Team <https://www.kent.edu/psych/care-team-0>

“Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant who has a veteran with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD, in your class. You empathize with him, but his behavior is disruptive and affects other students.

Teaching Assistant: Bob has been experiencing consistent challenges interacting with fellow students and expressing his concerns to me in a respectable manner. I have reason to believe that he doesn't take kindly to being taught by a young, female teaching assistant from a foreign country. While I am aware of the reasons why Bob is irritable and impatient with others, and why he often reacts in anger, I cannot continue to allow him be offensive, or to display behaviors that would otherwise not be tolerated. On the anniversary of September 11, his conduct was most disturbing. He engaged in several angry outbursts, spewing insults and threats towards others- myself included. I am losing control of my classroom and my inaction is causing me to lose the respect of my other students. How can I show empathy for Bob's struggle to manage his emotions as a result of having PTSD and still maintain the safe, engaging learning environment that I must cultivate for all of my students?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Remain composed and speak to the student respectfully.
- Reference the conduct clause in the syllabus and reiterate that all students are expected to abide by it.
- Carefully plan class lectures, discussions, visuals and group activities, especially during “high-risk” or triggering times (e.g. May 4th; Sept. 11th).
- Prepare well for class and remain on-topic throughout.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest the student take advantage of campus resources, such as the Center for Adult and Veteran Services.
- Provide them with resources for Psychological Services.

What not to do

- Do not argue back and forth with the student.

Possible follow-up discussion questions for new TAs

- How would you respond if two students got into a heated argument over political differences, and requested your opinion on the matter?
- If you were unfamiliar with PTSD, what actions might you need to take to ensure that you can empathize with Bob's situation?

Resources

- University Health Services www.kent.edu/uhs
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Counseling and Human Development Center <http://chdc.educ.kent.edu>
- Portage County Veterans Services www.co.portage.oh.us/veterans.htm
- Student Accessibility Services www.kent.edu/sas

“Religion”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant who has inherited a class with a rigid schedule and strict policies. You have just informed your class of their midterm grades when you are approached by a disgruntled student who wants you to change the class attendance policy for religious reasons.

Student: I am very frustrated that you have absolutely no consideration for religious obligations that limit a student’s availability for attending class. The only class sessions I missed were those held on High Holy Holidays. I already suffered by missing important lectures held in my absence. Why should I be punished further by having attendance points deducted? This is discrimination! I am asking that you consider my situation and reconsider the class attendance policy. If you don’t count the Holy Holidays I missed, you would see that I have perfect attendance.

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Let the student know that you are happy that he decided to express his concerns to you.
- Take a few days to consult your department chair about the best way to handle a situation like this, according to University policy.
- Remain composed and non-confrontational when relaying your final decision on the matter to the student. Be sure to reference policy where appropriate.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest that the student also look into University policy regarding accommodations or modifications to class times for religious purposes.

What not to do

- Do not deny the student’s request for consideration until you have given an appropriate amount of thought to the matter and have spoken with the department chair, your advisor, or ascertained University policy.
- Do not tell the student not to sign up for Friday classes.

Possible follow-up discussion questions for new TAs

- Would your response differ if the student approached you the first week of class?
- Would your response differ if you shared the same religion?

Resources

- Policy Register (Attendance Policy, 3-01.2) www.kent.edu/policyreg
- International Friendship Program <https://www.kent.edu/international/international-friendship-program>

“Plagiarism”

Narrator: You are an English Composition teaching assistant who has just discovered that one of your students heavily plagiarized a final paper that is worth 40% of her grade, and you feel strongly that the plagiarism was intentional. You meet with this student to tell her she has received an “F” on the paper, and she says...

Student: Please don’t fail me on the paper. An “F” on the final paper basically means I’m going to fail this course, and this is the only class I have left in order to graduate. I realize that I made a few mistakes in the paper, like not citing sources or using quotation marks, but I’ve been under a lot of stress recently. I just lost my grandfather whom I was very close to, and it’s been really hard on me. It took all the strength I had just to finish and turn in the paper, so I cut some corners and copied and pasted in some places. Given my circumstances, is what I did really that big of a deal? Can’t I just go to Plagiarism School or something?

Possible ways to handle this as a TA

- Tell the student that you’re sorry for her loss.
- Explain that Plagiarism School is for students who commit plagiarism that is more likely due to poor preparation for college or inadequate writing skills rather than students who intentionally plagiarize.
- Clarify that you intend that your decision should serve as a learning tool for her for the future.
- Report her to the Office of Student Conduct and contact your supervisor and/or coordinator.
- Refer to the syllabus and policy.

Suggestions you can provide the student

- Refer her to Purdue OWL for future references.
- Refer to the syllabus and academic policy on plagiarism.
- Suggest that the student communicate with their professor in a proactive manner rather than a reactive one when they are facing issues that might hinder their performance.

What not to do

- Do not simply ignore plagiarism—address it now because it may otherwise hinder her academic or professional success in the long run.
- Do not feel guilty about addressing and/or punishing her wrongdoing.

Discussion question

- What would you have done if you felt the student may have committed an unintentional act of plagiarism, such as a student who may not understand what plagiarism is?

Resources

- KSU Plagiarism Information <http://libguides.library.kent.edu/plagiarism/faculty-info>
- Purdue OWL <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl>
- Writing Commons www.kent.edu/writingcommons
- Plagiarism School <https://www.kent.edu/plagiarism/plagiarism-school>
- Administrative Policy Regarding Student Cheating and Plagiarism <https://www.kent.edu/policyreg/administrative-policy-regarding-student-cheating-and-plagiarism>

“Conflict of Interest”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant and your department chair’s daughter is in your class. She approaches you after the first day of class and says...

Student: Hey! Let me introduce myself. My name is Jane, and I’m the chair’s daughter. I wanted to bring that fact to your attention—well, that I’m his daughter—because I’ve heard rumors that this class can be challenging, and since my dad is who he is, both he and I expect that I’ll do very well regardless of the rigor of the work. Of course I’m not expecting special treatment from you or anything, but still—do you understand what I’m saying? Are we on the same page?

Possible ways to handle this as a TA

- Welcome her to the class and say that it is nice to meet her.
- Tell her you are sure she’ll do fine if she completes the coursework on time and does it well.

Suggestions you can provide the student

- Recommend resources like tutoring, additional books/readings, study spaces, your office hours, etc.
- Emphasize equality, fairness, and that the purpose of the class is to learn.

What not to do

- Do not feel pressured to give preferential treatment to her.
- Do not gossip with other TAs or faculty about the student’s request.
- Do not tell her father about the request; doing so would violate the student’s privacy under FERPA.

Discussion questions

- What would you do if your academic advisor approached you and hinted at giving preferential treatment to his son or daughter in your class?
- What would you do if you noticed that one of your own friends or relatives were pre-registered for your class?
- What would you do if the student was an athlete?

Resources

- Academic Success Center: Tutoring www.kent.edu/asc

“Social Media”

Narrator: You are a graduate student who tries to be friendly with peers in your department and you are all Facebook friends and share teaching resources and support through it. One of your fellow graduate students, however, has been posting negative comments about other department individuals recently and is creating issues.

Teaching Assistant: For the past week, Kyle has been making negative comments on his Facebook page about other people in my department including graduate students and faculty members. Yesterday, I saw several posts from Kyle about my advisor that were really degrading and some even profane. Kyle is taking a course with him this semester and apparently is unhappy about his grade on the last paper. For example, one post stated: “I cannot believe his feedback—this is ridiculous! Why is he allowed to teach a graduate course when he clearly doesn’t know what he is talking about? He’s such a moron!” Is it appropriate for me to address Kyle on his comments, given that Facebook is “outside” of the department? What if my advisor finds out? There’s already a lot of tension within the department, and no one’s saying anything.

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Delete the student from your personal Facebook page. If necessary, block him.
- If you must discuss the issue with the offender, be sure to be calm, and non-confrontational. Stick to general statements about etiquette, maintenance of a safe learning environment for all students, and diversity in teaching and learning. Suggest that he visit the Career Services Center, as they can explain the importance of representing yourself professionally in social media.
- Talk to the graduate coordinator and/or the department chair.

What not to do

- Do not add your students to your personal Facebook page. Professional social networks like LinkedIn and Research Gate are much better alternatives.
- Do not approach the offender to initiate discussion about his post if no other student expresses a concern to you.

Discussion questions

- What if the TA saw a post about a student being at Cedar Point at a time when the student should have been in class?
- If the offending student approaches the TA, inquiring about being blocked from the TA’s Facebook page after initially having his friend request accepted, how should the TA respond?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds <http://www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2>
- Career Exploration and Development www.kent.edu/career

“Frustrating Supervisor”

Narrator: You are a graduate student who is working as an administrative assistant. Your supervisor has very high standards, which you generally welcome, however it appears that what is expected of you is not realistic and the situation is beginning to negatively affect your wellbeing.

Administrative Assistant: My supervisor is very strict—she personally checks that I am at work on the dot every day and that I never leave a minute early. I've also heard her saying bad things about me behind my back. I do the best I can, and I give 100%, but I often have anxiety about coming in to work. For example, she has blamed me numerous times for not completing tasks that she never told me to do in the first place! Sometimes I think she is callous just to reinforce her authority. Last week, I had the flu, but I was too afraid to call in sick, as she's threatened to find another GA if I miss work. She isn't the kind of person who would be sensitive to my concerns, but all of this is really starting to affect my studies and life outside of work because I'm so stressed. What should I do?

Possible ways to handle this situation as a GA

- If possible at all, try to have an open and honest conversation with your supervisor. During the conversation:
 - Try to focus on the facts, rather than your emotions, especially since you already suspect that your supervisor is not likely going to be particularly sensitive to your concerns.
 - Try to bring suggestions to the table that would help avoid frustrations about tasks you were never told to complete, but you were expected to complete. For instance, you could suggest starting a log in which you record assigned tasks, as well as indicate the progress you have made on each of the tasks.
 - Try to frame the conversation with your supervisor less like a complaint, but more as a concern for the productivity of your collaboration. Making suggestions (e.g., the previously mentioned log) that would help facilitate a more seamless and less frustrating experience for both parties involved will show that you are trying to make things better and that you are solution-oriented.
- Ask for a confidential meeting with your academic advisor. Given that your advisor has once been in your position as a graduate student and has experience navigating difficult situations in a work environment, he/she may be able to provide useful advice.
- If you would like to address this issue with your supervisor, but do not feel comfortable doing so on your own, consider contacting the Student Ombuds, who could serve as a mediator in these types of situations.
- If you feel like the stressful work environment is negatively impacting your wellbeing, consider making an appointment with Psychological Services.

What not to do

- Do not gossip about your supervisor to other GAs or anyone else in the office.
- Avoid being confrontational or passive aggressive toward your supervisor.

Discussion questions

- What if you heard your supervisor's previous GA say that his/her experiences were similar to yours?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Human Resources www.kent.edu/hr

“Authorship”

Narrator: You are a research assistant who has been writing a research paper with a faculty member. When the paper is published, you are surprised to see that you are not listed as an author.

Research Assistant: I’m shocked and hurt that I wasn’t listed as an author, or even acknowledged for the months I spent researching and writing this paper. It’s not like I just proofread it for him—I contributed—by writing the literature review, methodology, and results, not to mention playing an integral role in the design and logistics of the study. The faculty member often referred to it as “our” research, only to snub me in the end! I can’t believe he would do that to me... I mean... I’ve heard the argument before that faculty members don’t *technically* have to list graduate assistants as authors, since we’re “getting paid.” But using that logic, faculty members get paid too! I think I deserve to have this paper listed on my CV, but it’s already been published. Should I talk to him? What should I do? Is there anything I *can* do?

Possible ways to handle this situation as an RA

- For future research, get clear and upfront answers about the roles and expectations of you in the project, so there are no grey areas regarding authorship, order, and what that (your job/the research?) entails.
- Use this situation as a learning tool for when you are in a leadership position.
- Consider asking for a confidential meeting with the graduate coordinator just to let him/her know what happened.
- For future research, sign a contract that specifies authorship order and expectations of workload.

What not to do

- Don’t start gossip and possibly ruin someone’s reputation. Take the high road on this one.
- Do not burn any bridges. At the end of the day, academic disciplines are rather small and people know each other.

Discussion question

- What if this situation arose despite having a clear agreement about authorship? I.e., what if the student was led to believe that he/she will be an author and ended up not being one?
- What if this situation did not happen to you, but to a peer?
- What would you do if you knew a faculty member or peer was using stolen data in his/her research?

Resources

- Office of Student Ombuds www.kent.edu/studentaffairs/student-ombuds-2
- Student Legal Services www.kent.edu/sls

“Online Teaching/Grade Dispute”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant for an online Psychology Course, and one of your students consistently fails to meet weekly discussion board requirements. After receiving his midterm report, this student requests a meeting to talk about his low participation grade.

Teaching Assistant: Posting timely contributions to the discussion board is a crucial element of any online course. However, Mark’s posts are always late, if he even posts at all. He is meeting with me to dispute his grade. In the email, Mark explained that in addition to this being his first online course, he has family responsibilities and does not always have time to make posts on the discussion board. He also feels that his other work has been excellent, and that “participation” should not be such a large portion of his grade. I agree—he does produce good quality work in his assignments—but I still feel like it’s his responsibility to actively participate, just as he would in a face-to-face class. I plan to review the syllabus and course policy when we meet. Still, I can’t help but wonder if I should reconsider the structure of the online course.

Possible ways to handle the situation as a TA

- Arrange a face-to-face meeting with the student to explain the syllabus requirements fully.
- In the future have all students in the online section fill out an electronic signature page during the first week that indicates that they have read the syllabus (course contract) and understand all of the requirements fully.
- Offer make-up assignments for the student to make up for late work, but remember you must be willing to extend this offer to all students in the class for fairness.
- Email the creator of the course to see how they handled similar issues in the past.
- Remember to document all interactions with the student initiating a dispute.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Explain to the student that course policies and procedures are created and must be adhered to, to ensure that all students are treated fairly.
- Explain that even though this is still an online course, participation is a crucial aspect of the learning environment, and discussion posts are how that is achieved online.
- Suggest tips and strategies for time management that will help the student meet his discussion post requirements despite family conflicts.

What not to do

- Do not be rude or get into an email argument with a student.
- Do not change the structure or policies of your course during the semester.
- Do not make special accommodations for this student you are unable to make for the rest of the class and without a documented legitimate excuse.

Discussion question

- How would you handle this scenario if his other assignments were not good quality?
- How would you handle this situation if the student had time conflicts because of sports instead of family responsibilities?

Resources

- Office of Continuing and Distance Education www.kent.edu/cde
- Academic Success Center www.kent.edu/asc

“Academic Rejection”

Narrator: You are a fourth year doctoral student who hopes to graduate this Spring. After waiting for feedback for several months, you just received notification regarding two articles you submitted for publication in peer-reviewed journals.

Graduate Student: I can't seem to figure out this publishing game! First, they ask me to revise and resubmit one of the articles, which my advisor said was positive because it wasn't outright denied, but I'm not so sure, because judging by the feedback, they want me to redo so much of it that it will basically be a new project! Between teaching and working on my dissertation, it's not as if I have much free time on my hands! And as if that wasn't bad enough, my second article got flat out rejected! I can't believe this! I don't know what to think... Should I take my dissertation in a whole new direction? Obviously my study isn't well received. I spent months waiting on feedback, only to find out they didn't even get accepted! How am I going to get a job, without publications, once I finish my PhD? And how am I going to get my dissertation finished if I need to focus on publishing before I complete it and enter the job market?

Possible ways to handle the situation as a student

- Remember that rejection and criticism is part of academia. Rejection does not mean that the work is not of value, but rather it just may not be publication-ready yet.
- Seek out advice from your peers and faculty about their experiences with publishing.
- Consult with your academic advisor or dissertation committee regarding these experiences. Get feedback on what changes you could make to successfully publish.
- Review the feedback and see how you may be able to improve your academic research and writing.
- Consider searching for other journals or publication sources to which you could submit your articles.

What not to do

- Do not question your whole dissertation or make impulsive, drastic changes.
- Do not ruin your opportunity to revise and resubmit by being rude to the journal editor or posting your grievances to social media.
- Do not become confrontational or negative towards the publishing groups or those who try to assist you. Be open and use criticism to improve your work.

Discussion question

- Would you react differently if first time or published before?
- What if this situation happened to your colleague and he/she came to you for advice on how to handle the situation?
- What if the article had co-authors that did not want to make edits based on reviewer comments?

Resources

- Academic Advisor www.kent.edu/graduatestudies
- Writing Commons www.kent.edu/writingcommons
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Counseling and Human Development Center <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/centers/chdc>

“Personnel Changes”

Narrator: You are a doctoral student who has successfully completed candidacy exams and the dissertation proposal. Two semesters into writing your dissertation, you get an alarming email from your advisor.

Graduate Student: So, I just got an email from my advisor stating that this is going to be her last semester here. She gave no explanation or advice on how to proceed on my dissertation without her... I've heard horror stories about dissertation committees, but I never thought it could happen to me. How could she just leave!? There are rumors that she didn't get promoted to full professor, but I'm not sure if that's why she's leaving. As a graduate student, I try not to get caught up in departmental politics, but it's often hard to avoid, especially now that it impacts me directly!! She was the only faculty member in the department with a genuine interest in my research topic, and the background to support it. I know the remaining faculty can't be happy about taking on all of her students... I have no idea where to begin!

Possible ways to handle the situation as a student

- Discuss with your advisor about how you should proceed with her. That professor may have some advice on how she can help you make good progress before she leaves and she may will be willing to stay on as an outside member.
- Talk with your graduate coordinator to see could be done to make sure you can still make progress on your dissertation. There should be a contingency plan (or at least some precedent) for what should be done with a person's committee when the chair or a member is no longer working at the university.
- If your advisor is unable to remain on the committee, look into options of faculty outside of the department or within the college's network of other campuses that may be interested in your topic and able to be an extra committee member.

What not to do

- Do not panic! Your faculty want you to graduate and will support you during this process.
- Do not talk negatively about the situation in front of other students or faculty.
- Do not assume that the professor's actions are specifically geared towards harming your progress or that you are the only one experiencing a negative impact from this decision.

Discussion question

- What if more than one committee member leaves?
- What if you do not get any prior notice, such as if a professor passes away?
- How might the situation be different if the student were even closer to defending?

Resources

- Academic Advisor www.kent.edu/graduatestudies

“Dealing with Prejudice”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant, teaching a World History class. You have been approached by one of your female students during your office hours.

Student: I know you may not be the right person to contact regarding this matter, but one thing has been troubling me lately. I have been receiving negative attention due to my Muslim identity. In addition to suspicious glances, people on campus have criticized my appearance. Specifically, while I was walking to class the other day, another student approached me and referring to my hijab said, “Why don’t you take that stupid thing off of your head?” I was so shocked! I didn’t even know what to say because I was so upset. I am not sure how to respond or whom to contact. This situation is starting to affect my academic performance and well-being.

Possible ways to handle this situation as a TA

- Thank the student for bringing this situation to your attention.
- Listen thoroughly to the student while discussing possible options in handling the situation.

Suggestions you can provide to the student

- Suggest the student take advantage of campus resources, such as the Muslim Students’ Association, to receive support from students with concerns such as this.
- Suggest contacting Campus Police if she is feeling threatened by a student/staff/faculty member.
- As always if a student mentions or threatens suicide make appropriate professional contact with Psychological Services or the Counseling and Human Development Center.

What not to do

- Dismiss the student’s concerns and tell her to ignore it.

Discussion question

- What if the comment was made by a faculty or staff member?
- What if the victim were a professor himself/herself?

Resources

- International Women’s Group <https://sites.google.com/a/kent.edu/iwg/>
- Women’s Center <https://www.kent.edu/womenscenter>
- Counseling and Human Development <http://www.kent.edu/ehhs/centers/chdc>
- Office of Global Education <http://www.kent.edu/globaleducation>
- Gerald H. Read Center for International and Intercultural Education <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/cie>
- University Policies on Discrimination <https://www.kent.edu/policyreg/university-policy-regarding-unlawful-discrimination-and-harassment>

“Incorrect Address”

Narrator: You are a teaching assistant, who is part of the transgender community, and you are responsible for facilitating a lab sessions. During the semester you are encountering some issues with address...

Teaching Assistant: I am a new TA in my department, and I am also transgender. I’ve been so excited to finally present as myself and I’ve updated my Flashline materials, my identification cards, and introduced myself with my pronouns and name. Early in the semester, my professor came to the first lab session of the class and dead-named me (called me by my former legal name) in front of the entire class. Even though I’ve told the professor and my students my name a few times, I’m now being addressed by my dead name repeatedly, which is disrespectful and distracting to the learning environment. I’m worried about this becoming a trend—how do I address this issue?

Possible ways to handle this situation

- Reach out to the LGBTQ+ Center, Pride, the Counseling Center, and/or Psychological Services for resources, support, or suggestions. Your health and wellbeing are paramount in this situation.
- If you feel unsafe or threatened, call Campus Police for emergency and/or escort services
- Request an in-person, professional meeting with the professor to discuss the issue, with or without a mediator or your coordinator, depending on your comfort level
- Document your meetings and classes in writing, just in case you need evidence for Title IX
- If you haven’t updated all KSU documentation with your correct name, update those materials as soon as possible
- Update your signature line and/or Blackboard with your proper name and pronouns
- You are under no obligation to come out to anyone. Having a conversation about being transgender with your students or supervisor is your choice. You are not a problem and being who you are is not creating a problem.

Suggestions for creating an affirming classroom space

- Suggest department-wide training opportunities with Safe Space Training and Trans 101
- Asking students to introduce themselves with their name and pronouns on the first day and offer mid-semester semester check-ins—we recommend you allow students to write this out and collect it to reference
- Link resources for KSU campus and the surrounding community for the LGBTQ+ community on Blackboard and/or on the syllabus
- Don’t assume anyone’s pronouns. If you are uncertain, default to they/them. It is correct, even in the singular.

What not to do

- Do not let the situation slide when it bothers you, but try not to allow it to dominate the teaching and learning environment either--it’s okay to call for help if it is too much to handle.
- If a situation in or out of class becomes hostile, prioritize your physical safety and wellbeing

Discussion questions

- In this scenario, you are the TA who is experiencing this issue. What would you do if this were happening to a student in your class?
- Would your approach differ if you or a student had a name change for any other reason (divorce, marriage, adoption, or preference)?

Resources

- LGBTQ Center www.kent.edu/lgbtq
- Title IX Coordinator <https://www.kent.edu/sss>
- Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion <https://www.kent.edu/diversity>
- Center for Sexual & Relationship Violence Support Services <https://www.kent.edu/srvss>
- Pride Kent <https://www.kent.edu/csi/pride-kent>
- Psychological Services www.kent.edu/psych
- Counseling and Human Development Center <https://www.kent.edu/ehhs/centers/chdc>