

# ChemistryBiochemistry

## TA Tips

This is a list of helpful hints that have been compiled with the assistance of various graduate students to help you during your graduate career here at The University of Texas Chemistry & Biochemistry department. In particular, it is designed to help you with your teaching assignments. The featured comments that you will find throughout are quotes from current or former graduate students. You are encouraged to send comments, corrections, and suggestions to us so that this list can be a permanent resource for our future graduate students.



Email your suggestions for this list to [DrRuth@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:DrRuth@mail.utexas.edu)

We've found that the best way to figure things out here is to ask. Don't be shy! It is rare that you will have a question or problem that no one has ever faced before. Let whomever you ask know that you are a teaching assistant, especially the staff persons at the Undergraduate Course Office. Our department is quite big, and most people will have no way of knowing who you are unless you tell them.

*"I think it would be beneficial if everyone was informed that taking initiative is the number one way to find things out. Wander around the campus, go into buildings, and ask other students what is useful and where to go. It's a big place and if you need something done, there is probably somewhere close [by] to get what*

## Answers to Common Questions:

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## TEACHING

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### **? Why do I have a teaching assignment?**

All graduate students in chemistry and biochemistry must teach two semesters as part of their degree requirements. Usually, everyone teaches for their first year of graduate studies, unless they are on a scholarship or do not pass the language requirement. You may teach for more than two semesters if your professor is not willing or able to pay you as a research assistant or you would like more teaching experience.

### **? Do I have any say in what teaching assignment I get?**

In general, all first year graduate students are assigned as TAs for a lab course. Lecture TA positions are reserved for more advanced graduate students. In the future, you will be asked by the Graduate Advising Office, near the end of each semester, to find out from your supervisor whether or not they will be paying you as a research assistant. If not, you will need to find a TA position. Your order of preference for teaching assignments will be taken into consideration after the preferences of the teaching faculty are considered.

### **? How do I teach?**

You will learn all about being a teaching assistant when you take the course CH 398T: Supervised Teaching in Chemistry. This class is required for your degree, and you will most likely take it during your first semester.

*"Teaching takes a big time commitment and I always forget just how much time it all takes."*

*"...Although [you] have to be well prepared for each class, its okay if [you] cannot answer some questions. It's better to not know and admit it, than to start making stuff up."*

### **? Is there any university support for teaching?**

The Center for Teaching Effectiveness assists all UT teachers and is a part of the Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment (DIIA). They hold workshops throughout the year, maintain a useful pedagogy library, and provide individual consultations, to name just a few of their services. A portion of their staff is dedicated solely to TAs, providing a Graduate Student Instructor program as well as a program for International TAs. The archives of their online newsletter "TA Talk" (no longer active)

contain several helpful articles. The center also holds a workshop each year for first-time TAs, called The Graduate Student Colloquium.

<b>Center for Teaching Effectiveness</b>	<a href="http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte">http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte</a>
<b>Division of Instructional Innovation and Assessment</b>	<a href="http://www.utexas.edu/academic.diia">http://www.utexas.edu/academic.diia</a>
<b>Graduate Student Instructor Program</b>	<a href="http://www.utexas.edu/academic.diia/gsi">http://www.utexas.edu/academic.diia/gsi</a>
<b>International TAs</b>	<a href="http://itacert.cte.utexas.edu">http://itacert.cte.utexas.edu</a>
<b>TA Talk archives</b>	<a href="http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/tattalk">http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/tattalk</a>

**🔍 What should I do before my first teaching day?**

Ask the course instructor about the syllabus, the class roster, and their expectations of you. Begin reviewing the course material. Be as informed as you can be on the first class day. Start out positively, introducing yourself to your students, and finding some way to break the ice and get to know them. Let them know your expectations and how the course will proceed for the rest of the semester. Be enthusiastic!

**🔍 Who can I talk to about teaching problems?**

You should first speak to the course instructor. You may also get help from the CH 398T instructors, your peers, the Graduate Advising Office, or the Graduate Student Instructor Program (see above). If you have a problem with a course instructor—perhaps you feel the amount of work you’re being asked to take on is excessive—do not hesitate to talk to someone about it.

**🔍 What happens if I find out that I love teaching?**

You could choose to do your graduate research in Chemical Education. The UT Graduate School runs a program called Professional Development and Community Engagement, which includes the Preparing Future Faculty internship and several professional development courses. Information about these programs can be found online at:

**Chemical Education Program**      <http://www.utexas.edu/research/chemed/lagowski/program.html>

**Professional Development and Community Engagement**      <http://www.utexas.edu/ogs>



**COURSES**



**🔍 What does a course name (ie- CH wxyz) tell me about the course?**

The first two letters of a course number tell you the department: CH is Chemistry. The first digit (w) tells you how much credit the course is worth. If the second and third digits (x,y) are between 01 and 19, the course is in the lower division, meaning freshman or sophomore-level. If they are between 20 and 79, it is

an upper division course, meaning junior or senior-level. Between 80 and 99, it is a graduate-level course. The fourth digit (z) may be used to designate courses designed and taught in separate semesters.

### **🔍 How do I get class rosters and why do I need them?**

Your course instructor will have a printed list of the class roster sent to them on the first class day. Students may add or drop a course until the twelfth class day, at which point an updated and final class roster will be sent to the instructor. You or your instructor must compare both lists and resolve any discrepancies. The course instructor can use UT Direct to give you authorization to download class rosters online, as well as access to the names, photos, and email addresses of your students. The TA Handbook, available in the department's undergraduate course office, provides more information about how to download and print rosters.

### **🔍 What are the differences between teaching lectures and teaching lab courses?**

The large number of lab sections in chemistry and biochemistry courses requires a large number of Teaching Assistants and a lot of organization to keep them running smoothly. Lab TAs will be responsible for ensuring that instruction, performance assessment, and safety standards are consistent across all sections of the class. Therefore, most lab TAs will be required to participate in extensive training and regular meetings, usually run by a lab director or coordinator.

Lecture TA positions are traditionally reserved for more senior graduate students who have more experience, and can better handle independently instructing a class. Their work varies widely and they work directly for the course instructor. Lecture TAs are also given proctoring assignments to help proctor exams for other courses.

### **🔍 What are the differences between teaching lower and upper division classes?**

Lower division classes are service classes for the university. They are attended by large numbers of undergraduates, who may or may not be Chemistry/Biochemistry majors. The upper division classes are smaller and more often attended by majors only.

### **🔍 What are the “student surveys” I’ve heard about?**

All teaching assistants, and many instructors, are the subject of student surveys at the end of each semester, in which your students anonymously evaluate your performance. Results of the surveys will be sent to you midway through the following semester. They feature your own scores, and the average scores received by all instructors in the college. These scores are available to all students and faculty members and any comments made by your students will be returned to you. It is wise to hold on to these survey results and comments, as they may help you when applying for teaching awards.

**Course Instructor Survey site**

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/mec/cis>



## LOCATIONS

### **🔍 How do I find a location on campus, given its building and room number?**

Each building on campus has its own three-letter abbreviation, WEL being Robert A. Welch Hall. (NOTE: WCH is the W.C. Hogg Building which is located adjacent to Welch on the West side. These

buildings are often confused because of their abbreviations.) The first digit of a room number on campus indicates its floor. In Welch Hall, the second digit refers to the wing of the building that the room is located in. There are four wings of our building, and five floors. All wings and floors have a building map, if you get lost.

**University Maps**     <http://www.utexas.edu/maps>

**❓ Do TAs get their own offices?**

TAs are assigned temporary offices during orientation week. It is to be used for work and research. Most TAs have a separate room or space for office hours and help sessions. It is wise to refer your students to this space, rather than giving them your office location, and ask them to contact you during class or via email.

*"Never hold office hours in your lab."*

*"I might suggest saying a word or two about the student who discovers where your office is and stops by whenever he or she feels like it, regardless of scheduled office hours."*

We recommend that you refrain from giving your students your personal or work phone numbers. You may opt for your contact information not to be released by the university by going to UT Direct (from the UT Home Page) and editing your personal info preferences.

**❓ How do I reserve a room in Welch Hall for extra help/review sessions?**

Drop by the Chemistry Undergraduate Course Office, WEL 2.212.

**❓ How do I get into Welch Hall after business hours?**

You will often need access to the building on nights and weekends. Most building entrances are unlocked on weekends. You will also be issued an "exterior WEL" building key when you get your office and lab keys.

**❓ What if I get locked out of my lab, office, or classroom?** Classrooms on campus should be unlocked at all times while classes are in session. During business hours (M-F 8am-5pm) you can ask to borrow a master key from the Chairman's Office in WEL 2.310. After hours, you should call campus police (911 or 471-4441), who will ask to see your UT ID.

**❓ How do I use the UT phone codes?**

Often you will see a phone number listed as just the last four digits. In this case, you are to assume that the prefix is **471-**. You only need to dial the last five digits of campus numbers when you are on campus. Therefore, you would dial **1-XXXX**. If a number is listed as **2-XXXX**, assume the prefix is **232-**. If the listing is **5-XXXX**, it is a **475-**number. To dial an off-campus number, **dial 9** first. To make a long distance call, you will need a special long distance code. Ask an administrative person in your lab or division to help you.



## COMPUTERS & INTERNET

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### ? Do I need a UT email address?

You will definitely need to have some type of email account and check it regularly. The university, the department, and many instructors/employers will use email as the primary way of communicating with you. Therefore, you should get in the habit of checking your email frequently if you don't already do so. A UT email account is free, and we recommend using it, at least for work and school purposes. If you decide to use a non-UT email address as your primary account, make sure that you can check it regularly and send and receive attachments. You can designate the address you'd like to be contacted at on UT Direct. On the **Computing Essentials** web page, you will find links to get you started with a UT email account. As a UT student, you may download free internet-related software from **BevoWare**.

**Computing Essentials**      <http://www.utexas.edu/computer/essentials.html>

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**BevoWare**      <http://www.utexas.edu/its/bevoware>

### ? What computer facilities are available in the Chemistry & Biochemistry Department?

Welch Hall features two computer labs (WEL 2.306, WEL 2.302) and an instructional media lab (WEL 3.428) that has a range of hardware and software available for loan to faculty and graduate students. These include laptops, projectors, color printers, a poster-size printer, etc. Staff members are on hand to assist you with your equipment and projects.

### ? What multimedia facilities are available in the lecture rooms?

All lecture rooms should have an overhead projector and a white board or chalk board. Do not assume that there will be chalk or dry-erase markers available. Bring your own; just in case (see Supplies). For problems with any classroom media equipment, contact the Media Consult Help Desk at 1-9173.

### ? What is a "technology classroom?"

The College of Natural Sciences has begun to add computer and multimedia systems to many of our lecture rooms, including LCD projectors, a touch panel control system, a document camera for displaying documents, specimens, slides, etc., Dell PC and Apple operating systems, VCR/DVD/CD players, etc. These classrooms now also feature web cameras that allow remote testing and troubleshooting of rooms from the help desk. You can learn to use these technologies either in an orientation session or on your own online. For more information and a listing of technology classrooms, visit the **Information Technology** website at <http://cns.utexas.edu/it/>

### ? How do I unlock the computer/multimedia console in a classroom?

Before your first class day, you will need to pick up a key in WCH 3.104 (W.C. Hogg) that will give you access to all classroom consoles. If you have an equipment issue, contact the help desk at 1-9173, or the Undergraduate Course Office at 1-1567.

### **What should I know about course web sites?**

You will receive instruction on web authoring as part of your TA course (CH 398T) and you'll also find out about places on campus where you can learn more. If you are asked to assist with web sites for course material, our ITS staff will help you get started and be listed on the departmental course web site directory.

**Chemistry & Biochemistry IT Services:** WEL 3.428, 1-2667, [webadmin@cm.utexas.edu](mailto:webadmin@cm.utexas.edu)

### **What is the online homework system?**

The online homework service is used by most freshman chemistry classes. You may want to consider using it in the classes you teach, if they are not already using it. Information and instructions on using the online homework system are available online and in the TA Handbook provided by the Undergraduate Course Office.

**UT Online Homework site** <https://hw.utexas.edu>

### **How do I deal with Scantron answer sheets?**

Large classes use Scantron forms to automate the grading of homework, quizzes, and exams. The Undergraduate Course Office has a scanner that reads and grades these answer sheets. Contact them with any questions you may have.

**Undergraduate Course Office:** WEL 2.212, 1-1567

### **How can I access the library's online resources when I'm not on campus?**

The department's Mallet Chemistry Library features a variety of electronic resources, such as current scientific journals, and chemical reference, indexing and abstracting services. Most of these resources are available off-campus with your UT EID. If you have connection problems, visit this help page:

<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/help/proxy.html>

### **What is WebSpace?**

WebSpace is a web-interfaced file storage system that is provided to you for free by the university. It provides 150MB of online disk space, allowing you to store important documents like homework, notes, papers, data, graphics, etc. You also have the option to share your documents with others by creating a directory, or publishing your own web page.

**WebSpace** <http://www.utexas.edu/its/webspace/index.php>



## DEPARTMENT RESOURCES

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### **Who, other than the course instructor, can I ask for help with various departmental issues?**

Many of your issues can be resolved with help of the department's Undergraduate Course Office in WEL 2.212, 1-1567. Some of the most common things they assist with are:

- Student registration
- Class rosters
- Check-out of textbooks and calculators
- Coordinating office hours and review sessions
- Stationery supplies
- Computers for generating and grading assignments, quizzes, or exams
- Grading and proctoring of exams, including Scantron sheets
- Grade recording
- Media problems
- Etc.

**🔍 Who can I ask for help with the lab course I'm teaching?**

Most lab classes have at least one person who coordinates all the TAs for that course. Several labs have their own supply storerooms with personnel who may also be of help. The department employs one Lab Coordinator who supervises all teaching labs and storerooms.

**Kevin Connolly, Lab Coordinator:** WEL 4.132A, 1-4963 [k.connolly@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:k.connolly@mail.utexas.edu)

**🔍 If I teach an upper division or graduate lecture course, who can I ask for help?**

Ask your course instructor if he/she has their own personal administrative assistant who may help you. If not, the administrative assistant for your division should be able to help you. Their contact info can be found in the departmental staff directory.

**🔍 I have questions about other aspects of my time here in graduate school. Who can I ask?**

Your first point of contact should be the Graduate Advising Office. If they can't help you, they will point you in the direction of someone who can.

**Graduate Advising Office:** WEL 2.218, 1-3890

**Penny Kile, Graduate Program Coordinator** [pkile@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:pkile@mail.utexas.edu)

**Kimberly Terry, Graduate Admissions Coordinator** [kterry@cm.utexas.edu](mailto:kterry@cm.utexas.edu)

**🔍 Where do I get overhead transparencies, whiteboard markers, chalk, etc.?**

Contact the appropriate administrative person for your professor or division, or ask the Undergraduate Course Office.

**🔍 Where can I make photocopies?**

The Undergraduate Course Office has a copier available to lower division course TAs. Upper division TAs should ask their professor/division's administrative person if they have a copier available. If not, they may provide them with a copy card that can be used in campus libraries, or in the Welch mail room. For large numbers of copies (i.e.-quizzes, exams, etc.), take your originals to the UT Copy Center in WEL 2.228, 1-1657.

**🔍 How can I get multimedia equipment, such as computers or projectors to use in class?**

See questions in the "Computers" section above.

### ❓ **How do I get the textbook(s) for the course I'm teaching?**

The Undergraduate Course Office loans out textbooks for most classes. You can also ask to borrow one from your instructor or the Mallet Library.

### ❓ **Where can I get lab equipment built or repaired?**

**Glass Shop:** WEL 2.146, 1-7093

For glassblowing, design, construction and repair

**Mike Ronalter, Glassblower** [ronalter@mail.cm.utexas.edu](mailto:ronalter@mail.cm.utexas.edu)

**Machine Shop:** WEL 2.140, 1-7106

For wood and metal work, construction, repair, tools, etc.

**Terry Watts, Instrument Maker/Supervisor** [tgwatts@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:tgwatts@mail.utexas.edu)

**Instrument Repair:** WEL 3.206, 1-5354

For electronic instrument repair and vacuum pump oil changes

**Steven Hilsberg, Tech Staff Assistant** [hilsberg@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:hilsberg@mail.utexas.edu)

### ❓ **How do I get lab supplies, chemicals, etc.?**

If your lab coordinator or supply room personnel cannot offer assistance, you may need to try the Fisher Research Storeroom in WEL 1.202. Additionally, there are storerooms in other departments on campus that stock items not carried in Welch. Here are a few rules to keep in mind regarding the use of chemicals: Do not transport chemicals in the regular elevators. Use the freight elevator instead.

Be sure to transport chemical bottles using a rubber safety bucket and/or a trolley.

Once you have joined a research group you will be able to order supplies online, using your group's account number.

### ❓ **Where do I get refills for gas cylinders?**

Most gas cylinders are rented from the gas supplier. When you run out of gas, use a cylinder trolley and the freight elevator to return your empty cylinder to the Fisher Storeroom in WEL 1.202. Exchange it for a full one and remember to fill in paper work. Ask a storeroom employee for help.

### ❓ **What is the Pickle Campus?**

The J.J. Pickle Research Campus is located in northwest Austin at the corner of Braker Lane and Burnet Road. There are several research centers and facilities there that you may find useful.

**Pickle Research Campus:** <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/blsc/prc.html>

### ❓ **Does the department have its own library?**

Yes! The Mallet Chemistry Library is located in WEL 2.132 and is an outstanding resource for locating chemical information, much of which is now available in digital form and online. You will get a library orientation and introductory tour during orientation week.

Students often need help finding scientific information, and may ask you how or where to locate it. Take the time to familiarize yourself with some of the major research tools so that you can guide your students, rather than just telling them to "go look it up in the library." The information universe in chemistry is vast,

complex, and rapidly changing. Learning to navigate it efficiently will help you for the rest of your career. The most common chemical research tools include *SciFinder Scholar*, the *CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*, the *Combined Chemical Dictionary*, and the *Kirk-Othmer Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology*, among others. Links to each of these resources are featured on the Mallet Library website. If you or your student are unsure of which tool is appropriate to use in your query, either of you can ask the library staff for assistance.

**Mallet Chemistry Library:** WEL 2.132, 495-4600 <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/chem/>

**Questions:** [chem.@lib.utexas.edu](mailto:chem.@lib.utexas.edu)

**David Flaxbart, Librarian** [flaxbart@uts.cc.utexas.edu](mailto:flaxbart@uts.cc.utexas.edu)

These campus libraries may also be of use to you or your students:

**Engineering Library:** ECJ 1.300 <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/engin>

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**Life Sciences Library:** MAI 220 <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/lsl>

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**Physics, Math, Astronomy Library:** RLM 4.200 <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/pma>



## SAFETY

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### **?** What should I know about safety in the chemistry building?

There are a few standard laboratory safety classes that are required for all people working in this department, some of which are taken online. You will learn more about these classes at orientation.

The departmental safety section of our website includes links to material safety data. UT Environmental Health and Safety also features safety information on their website, along with the UT Lab Safety Manual, and a number of additional safety classes that you may want to take.

**Chemistry-Biochemistry safety information** <http://cm.utexas.edu/safety>

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**UT Environmental Health and Safety** <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/ehs/index.php>

### **?** What should I do if a medical situation occurs in my class?

You will be given specific instructions on what to do, including administering first aid, sending for help, and notifying stockroom personnel if necessary. If you judge the situation to be life-threatening, call emergency services at 9-911 and/or UT Police at 911. If it is not that serious, call UT Urgent Care at 5-NURSE. If you think it is appropriate, send the student (accompanied by another student or an instructor) to the health center main desk in SSB, or to Urgent Care in SSB 1.408C if it is after hours.

### **?** What should I do if a fire alarm goes off while I'm teaching?

You will be instructed on this topic, as well. Basically, you must have your students stop working and leave the building in an orderly fashion, taking their belongings with them. Exit the building through the nearest stairwell (do not use elevators), and gather in a group across the street from the building. Follow the instructions of the nearest fire marshal, and take a head count of your class.



## STUDENTS

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**?** **What should I do if a student seems to be overloaded with classes, or is ill-prepared for my course?**

The Undergraduate Advising Office would appreciate you bringing this to their attention. Call them at 1-3097, or drop by WEL 2.216.

**?** **What should I do if I notice a student is having trouble reading/writing/taking tests/using a calculator/etc.?**

Suggest that the student contact the University Learning Center which offers tutoring, academic counseling, learning disorder testing, and classes that may be helpful. They welcome walk-in visits and appointments.

**University Learning Center:** JES A322A, 1-3614 <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc>

**?** **How do I handle a case of suspected cheating or plagiarism?**

You will see a presentation on this subject in your TA Class, CH 398T. Contact Student Judicial Services for further questions. Some basic things to keep in mind are:

Do not accuse the student immediately.

When proctoring exams, you cannot stop a student from finishing their exam, but you can ask them to move to another part of the room.

Quietly ask another proctor to watch and see if they notice the same behavior.

Make sure you know the names of all students who may have been involved.

You may confiscate any cheat sheets you find during or after the exam.

If you find evidence in the work submitted, show it to your class instructor.

**?** **What should I do if a student comes to me with personal problems and I feel he/she may be a danger to themselves or others?**

The UT Counseling and Mental Health Center is open to all registered students. They have a 24-7 hotline you or your student can call at 471-2255. If necessary, arrange to walk the student over to the health center immediately. If you encounter a violent situation, call 911 to speak to campus police.

**UT Counseling and Medical Health Center:** 5<sup>th</sup> floor SSB, 1-3515 <http://www.utexas.edu/student/cmhc>

**?** **What should I do if I experience my own personal problems, depression, suicidal or violent thoughts?**

In addition to the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center, open to all students, you also have access to the Employee Assistance Program. You may call them for immediate assistance 24-7 at 1-3399.

**Employee Assistance Program:** FAC 250, 1-3366 or 1-3399 <http://www.utexas.edu/hr/eap>



## ADDITIONAL HELP



### **Help!!!**

One of your best resources for support is your peers. The TA course CH 398T is basically a large group of people going through the teaching process for the first time together, forming an instant support network. There are several other student groups you can join that may be helpful as well.

A good way to learn what's happening in your department is to engage with your peers whenever you can. Rather than heading home as soon as your classes or work is finished, stick around your office or lab and get to know your fellow researchers.