



School of Public Health



## Handbook for Teaching Assistants

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Welcome to the instructional team at BU School of Public Health! The Education Team looks forward to working with you. This document serves as a guide and reference to teaching assistants as they move through the semester. If you have any questions about the contents of this guidebook or if you need assistance, please contact [meerar@bu.edu](mailto:meerar@bu.edu). We are glad to help and appreciate your efforts on behalf of our students.

## Important Contacts

Office or function	Contact information
Add AV request to classroom reservation	<a href="mailto:sphregr@bu.edu">sphregr@bu.edu</a>
AV problems during class	Educational Media Center 617-638-3000
Blackboard Help	<a href="mailto:ithelp@bu.edu">ithelp@bu.edu</a>
BUMC building and grounds issues	BUMC Control: 617-638-4144
BUMC Public Safety	617-358-4444
General support	<a href="mailto:meerar@bu.edu">meerar@bu.edu</a> <a href="mailto:spheducation@bu.edu">spheducation@bu.edu</a>
Graduate Student Life	<a href="mailto:sphgsl@bu.edu">sphgsl@bu.edu</a>
On Campus Emergencies – BUMC	BUMC Public Safety 617-358-4444
On Campus Emergencies – CRC	BU Police 617-353-2121
Registrar’s Office	<a href="mailto:sphregr@bu.edu">sphregr@bu.edu</a>
Students in Distress - Non-Urgent Situations	Mary Murphy-Phillips <a href="mailto:mcmurph@bu.edu">mcmurph@bu.edu</a> 617-358-1750
Students in Distress - Urgent Situations	Behavioral Medicine 617-353-3569

# BUSPH Guidelines for Teaching Assistants

All Teaching Assistants are expected to have successfully completed the course or its equivalent in addition to the BUSPH Teaching Assistant Training Program. Full time TAs are expected to work 10 hours per week, three-quarters TAs are expected to work 7.5 hours per week, and half-time TAs are expected to work 5 hours per week.

Whether you are a new or experienced teaching assistant, it is important to have a conversation with your instructor at the beginning of the semester about their expectations regarding your contribution to the course. Each course presents unique challenges and different instructors may have different expectations. Ensuring that all members of the instructional team are on the same page will result in a better experience for yourself, the course instructor and your students. You can refer to the following table for some general guidelines on roles and responsibilities.

<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>
Evaluates student performance on homework sets, quizzes, examinations, and papers
Maintains an accurate record of student's grades
Strongly encouraged to attend class lectures
Communicates regularly with instructor
Assists instructor with all aspects of course management (Blackboard, preparing presentations, copying, distributing and collecting course materials, etc.)
Assists instructor with development or editing of course materials
Holds weekly office hours and/or review sessions
Arranges for outside speakers and guest lecturers
Responds promptly and professionally to e-mail requests
Refers students to SPH Tutoring and Writing Programs
Maintains confidentiality of student records and performance in accordance with FERPA
Performs other tasks as assigned by faculty

## Academic Policies, Grades and Grading

Teaching Assistants should discuss grading procedures and expectations with their instructor. If you are new to grading, it may be helpful to grade the initial set of an assignment with your course instructor. When grading, consistency is important. If you are splitting the grading responsibilities for an assignment with your instructor or another Teaching Assistant, make sure each grader clearly understands the assessment guidelines for the assignment.

Academic policies are available on the SPH Bulletin: [bu.edu/academics/sph/policies/](http://bu.edu/academics/sph/policies/).

If you are concerned that a student may have committed an act of academic dishonesty at any time during the semester, bring it to the attention of the course instructor immediately. Keep a written record of what has transpired and retain the original work in question.

## Audio/Visual Resources

Many of the instructional spaces on the Medical Campus are equipped AV equipment such as LCD projectors, computers, microphones, etc. In some cases, AV equipment can be delivered to a classroom as well.

To **add an AV request to a classroom reservation**, contact the Registrar's Office, [sphregr@bu.edu](mailto:sphregr@bu.edu). If you are having **trouble-using AV in a classroom**, you can also contact the Educational Media Center at 617-638-3000.

## Course Materials

Approximately two months prior to the start of each semester, instructors receive information on how to order textbooks and readers. Instructors often use a combination of textbooks, course readers, and online links.

### **Textbooks**

Textbooks are available for purchase through the BU Barnes & Noble bookstore located on the Charles River Campus at 660 Beacon Street.

### **Course Readers**

Course readers are a compilation of articles, book chapters, and other resources that faculty have selected for the course. Unless otherwise noted, the resources in course readers are required. Students purchase course readers directly from Barnes and Noble.

### **E journals at the BU Alumni Medical Library** - <http://med-libwww.bu.edu/>

If you are having trouble accessing articles through this portal, please set up a session with one of the reference librarians who will be happy to walk you through use of the website. You can also access all of the Boston University libraries at [bu.edu/library](http://bu.edu/library). You will need a BU login and Kerberos password to access the BU library network.

### **Downloading and printing articles**

Please consider saving some trees and save your articles on your computer rather than printing them

out. If that doesn't work for you there are several low cost options for printing your articles.

### **Libraries**

BUSPH students are eligible to receive 100 free pages (equivalent of 200 images if you use double-sided printing) during EACH of the following two time periods:

- January 1 – June 30
- July 1 – December 31

The 100 free pages can be picked up on any date during each of the two periods. Students must show a valid Boston University ID in order to receive their copies/prints. Afterwards a copy card can be purchased and additional copies made at \$.12 per copy. For information on printing at the Mugar Library on the Charles River Campus please visit [bu.edu/phpbin/myprint](http://bu.edu/phpbin/myprint).

# Blackboard

Course information, assignments, and syllabi are often posted on a course webpage at [learn.bu.edu](http://learn.bu.edu). The instructor is responsible for creating and populating this website. You may be asked to add additional materials during the semester. You will need a BU email address and Kerberos password to access Blackboard. For help with setting up your Blackboard course web and utilizing the software effectively, please visit <http://www.bu.edu/tech/services/teaching/lms/blackboard/instructors/>.

## Resources

- [Sign up for a Blackboard Learn training](#)
- [Blackboard Learn Introductory Video](#)
- [Assessments](#), includes:
  - Adding an assignment
  - Student assignment submissions
  - Adding a test
  - Creating a rubric
  - Adding a rubric to an assignment
- [Collaboration Tools](#) – Blogs, Wikis, and Journals
- [Grade Center](#), includes
  - Creating a grade center column
  - Organizing columns
  - Grading assignments
  - Grading assignments with a rubric
  - Working offline with the grade center
- Technical support: [bu.edu/help/blackboard/](http://bu.edu/help/blackboard/)

## Blackboard vs. Faculty Link

Blackboard and the Faculty Link are two separate web-based systems used by Boston University. The Faculty Link is a secure, official Boston University server site that allows faculty to access their course lists and submit grades. Blackboard is a course-specific online tool used for dissemination of course information and communication.

### Important things to know about Blackboard and the Faculty Link:

The class list on the Faculty Link is the real time, official class list. It does not include students sitting in the class to remediate or alumni auditors. Students may drop classes online, and you will not know if they drop the course until they no longer display on the class list in the Faculty Link.

When a student registers for a course, they are added automatically to the Blackboard list; however, when they drop they are not automatically removed. The instructor or TA needs to remove these users manually.

Students are often confused about the difference between information posted on Blackboard and information posted on the Link. The grade submitted by faculty via the Faculty Link is a student's official grade. Grades posted on Blackboard are not official. As a Teaching Assistant, you may be asked about these differences. You will not have access to the Faculty Link.

# Leading Discussions

When leading discussion sessions, it is important to consider your audience. The students in attendance are often having trouble with one or more aspects of the course. Remember that you are there to help. Always keep an enthusiastic attitude while leading discussions, and be careful not to talk down to students who may not be grasping a concept fully. Try to be conscious of your body language and enunciation. Sometimes it is the small details that can differentiate an engaging and useful discussion from one that leaves students feeling uninspired. Consider the following:

- Students *must* feel comfortable talking to each other. To encourage this, generate a warm climate at the beginning of the course.
- You may have different students from week to week. It may be useful to begin each discussion session by summarizing the topics covered during the previous session.
- Establish criteria for a good discussion at the beginning of the course. Spend a few minutes letting the students generate these criteria themselves. (One way is to have each student introduce themselves by completing this sentence: "When I am in a small group discussion, I usually...")
- Encourage your students to be responsible for bringing good issues for discussion to the session.
- Sometimes controversial events or issues will jump-start a discussion. Go around the room and let every student comment.
- Consider the physical set-up in the room. Can students see each other, or are they sitting side by side in rows facing the front of the room? Is it possible to create a circle or a semi-circle?
- Listen. Respond in a way that indicates that you *heard* and *understood* the question or the comment. Validate questions by either expanding on or challenging them, and encourage students to challenge *you*.
- Rephrasing a question or comment is a good way to make sure the other participants understand and are fully engaged in the discussion. It also gives you a little extra time to formulate your response.
- Give students time to respond. A few seconds can feel like a century, but students need that time to process the question.
- Tell the students in advance what the discussion topics will be.
- Prompt students with a variety of questions that require different levels of thinking.
  - Some questions can be answered with information from general experience or from basic knowledge of the discipline.
  - Some questions require that students explain the relationship between different ideas, using this to form general concepts.
  - Some require students to apply concepts and principles to new data and different situations.

Sometimes students may try to use the discussions as a forum to air their grievances with the course or instructor. This is not the best use of your time or the student's time. You can encourage students with grievances to speak with you or the instructor after class.

# Communication Skills Programs

## **Peer Writing Coach Program**

The [Peer Writing Coach Program](#) helps students strengthen their public health writing skills by offering student-directed writing appointments facilitated by trained peer coaches. Peer coaches can assist students at any point in the writing process. They primarily work with students on improving their organization, flow and clarity. Peer coaches do not edit or proofread student writing for grammar or citation errors.

## **Public Health Presentation Skills Program**

The [Public Health Presentation Skills Program](#) helps students strengthen their oral communication skills. Presentation skills appointments are available for students looking to practice presentations and receive feedback from a peer coach on slides, posters presentations, speech outlines, and/or oral communication skills!

Both programs are open to students enrolled in an SPH class. Students can make in person or virtual appointments for both individual and group sessions. Visit <https://bu.mywconline.net/> to book their appointment!

# Core Course Tutoring for MPH Students

The core course tutoring program is a free peer tutoring program for MPH students who are at risk of failing to meet the minimum grade required (B-) in the MPH core courses. Students are referred to the program by their core course instructor. For more information, please contact Ryann Monteiro, Program Manager for Student Mentoring, at 617-358-4542 or [sphtutor@bu.edu](mailto:sphtutor@bu.edu).

# Students with Disabilities

All students face challenges and deserve a fair chance to succeed and to be treated with respect. Some students may require accommodations due to learning or other disabilities. If you believe that a student may have a learning disability, or a student has requested extra time on exams or projects due to disabilities, you may refer the student to the [BU Office of Disability Services](#). Students must be approved for these accommodations through this office, and instructors would be notified by Graduate Student Life that they have been approved. If you have any questions, contact Mary Murphy-Phillips, Director of Graduate Student Life, [mcmurph@bu.edu](mailto:mcmurph@bu.edu) or 617-358-1750.

# Resources for Students in Distress

Sometimes life at Boston University can be stressful for students as they face the challenge of a highly competitive academic environment and begin to assume a variety of roles and responsibilities. If at any time you feel a student expresses any feelings of depression, hopelessness, self-harm, or suicide, please contact your instructor, and **Mary Murphy-Phillips, Director of Graduate Student Life (617-638-5059)**.

If it is after hours, you may call Boston University Behavioral Medicine (881 Commonwealth Avenue) at 617-353-3569. Behavioral Medicine providers are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. If you are on campus and think that the situation is out of control, call Boston University Medical Campus Public Safety at 617-358-4444. Please program this number into your mobile phone.

If you are off campus, call 911.

## Identifying Students in Distress and Crisis

Individuals dealing with personal issues or problems tend to show signs that they are struggling in some way. However, when symptoms of distress are persistent over a long period of time or when they interfere with academic responsibilities and social relationships, it may be a cause for concern. Please review a list of signs that may indicate that a student is struggling here: <http://www.bu.edu/shs/behavioral-medicine/helping-someone-in-distress/>

## Boston University Resources

- [BU Behavioral Medicine](#): offers a range of mental health services to our students. They strive to keep the BU community healthy and thriving, so students should not hesitate to call if they need:
  - Assessment and diagnosis
  - Brief treatment, including therapy and psychiatry for a variety of mental health issues
  - 24/7 on-call service for mental health emergencies (617-353-3569)
  - Referral to community resources for longer-term care
  - Phone consultation for students, parents, and BU faculty and staff
  - Outreach and prevention programming
- [Mental Health Resources](#): Trouble sleeping? Anxiety getting in the way of daily demands? Access step-by-step guides to make lasting changes to mental health.
- [Terriers Connect](#): The Terriers Connect training program teaches members of the Boston University community to identify signs of distress, develop effective skills for communicating with and supporting students, and provide accurate information about referrals to mental health professionals. Terriers Connect is committed to creating a community at Boston University that understands the conversations that surround mental health are hard, but necessary. Trainings are offered for faculty, staff, and students who are interested in becoming official “gatekeepers” within the program.

# Safety

## **Boston University Emergency Preparedness and Response Procedures**

To report an emergency or suspicious activity: Call Public Safety at 617-358-4444 on the BUMC campus or the Boston University Police Department at 617-353-2121 on the Charles River Campus. Please program these numbers into your mobile phone.

Students are required to be on the Send Word Now system and will get emergency communications as events unfold. Emergencies cover a range of events from weather to chemical spills to violence. Students can edit their contact info at [bu.edu/sph/students](http://bu.edu/sph/students). To view or change your information, open the "Personal" tab and select "Address and Phone."

Teaching assistants who are not current students are urged to join the Boston University Alert System, 'Send Word Now' so they get emergency communications. To be notified through the Send Word Now system, access the BUworks central portal at [ppo.buw.bu.edu](http://ppo.buw.bu.edu), click on "Employee Self- Service", open the "Personal Information" tab, and select "BU Alert Information."

## **Emergency Closing Information**

In the event of an emergency, notices will be posted to [bu.edu/sph/students](http://bu.edu/sph/students).

In the event of weather-related cancellations of classes, the following schedule will be observed:

- **10am classes or earlier:** A decision will be posted no later than **7am**
- **1pm classes:** A decision will be posted no later than **9am**
- **2:30pm classes:** A decision will be posted no later than **12:30pm**
- **6:00pm classes:** A decision will be posted no later than **3:30pm**

Email messages will be sent to faculty, staff and students in the event of closings, but may not arrive immediately if email servers are busy. We recommend checking the Insider and Student Insider for messages. In the event of class or campus closings, a message will also be posted to the BUSPH main telephone number: 617-638-4640.

## **Emergency Situations in the Classroom: Shelter in Place**

Although it is unlikely that we will ever have a classroom emergency that will require the occupants to shelter in place, it is helpful to know what to do in case the situation arises. No matter where you are, the basic steps of shelter in place will generally remain the same:

- If you are inside, stay where you are unless directed to evacuate or you determine that the building you are in is unsafe. If you are outdoors, proceed into the closest building or follow instructions from emergency personnel on the scene.
- Locate an interior room to shelter inside. If possible, it should be above ground level and have the fewest number of windows. If sheltering in a room with windows, move away from the windows. If there is a large group of people inside a particular building, several rooms may be necessary.
- Shut and lock all windows (for a tighter seal) and close exterior doors.

- Turn off air conditioners, heaters, and fans. Close vents to ventilation systems as you are able. (University staff will turn off ventilation systems as quickly as possible).
- Make a list of the people with you and ask someone to call the list in to BUPD or BUMC Public Safety so they know where you are sheltering and who is with you. If only students are present, one of the students should call in the list.
- Await further instructions. If possible, visit the BU or BUMC main webpages for incident updates or call the BU Information Line 617-358-SAFE (7233) which will have prerecorded instructions.
- Make yourself comfortable and look after one other. You will get word as soon as it is safe to come out.

### **Evacuation**

An evacuation will be considered if the building you are in is affected or people must move to a location of greater safety. If the fire alarm sounds, always evacuate. In the event of an evacuation, please gather your personal belongings quickly (purse, keys, BU ID card, etc.) and proceed to the nearest exit. Do not use the elevator. Once you have evacuated the building, proceed to your primary rendezvous location.

### **BU Alert**

BU Alert provides free notification by email or text message during an emergency. If you receive a BU Alert notification during class, you are encouraged to share the information immediately.

### **General Classroom Safety Tips**

- Know your building location, name and classroom each semester you teach
- Know the locations of safety features in and near your classroom, including fire extinguisher
- Know where the nearest staircase is (in general, do not use elevators in emergencies)
- Bring your cell phone to class
- Program the following numbers into your cell phone:
  - Emergency contact person at BUSPH: Mary Murphy-Phillips, 617-335-9884 (cell)
  - BUMC Public Safety: 617-358-4444
  - 911
- Keep your classroom door closed at all times
- Plan how you and your students will exit the building quickly in an emergency