

A Universal Guide to TA Onboarding Logistics

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the current Teaching Assistant (TA) onboarding and hiring process at Georgia Institute of Technology (GT) and identifies several key challenges that affect students. Our assessment shows that information about becoming a TA is spread across many departments and is often inconsistent and difficult to find. Some schools provide detailed instructions, while others offer little to no formal guidance. As a result, students, especially first-time TAs and international students, may feel confused or overwhelmed when trying to understand requirements and complete onboarding tasks. To improve the process, we propose a centralized, two-part onboarding resource that focuses on clarity and ease of use. The first part includes a visual flowchart that gives TAs a clear overview of the process and helps them quickly identify the steps relevant to their specific situation. The second part includes a step-by-step guide that explains each stage in simple language using screenshots and defined terms. Together, these resources will reduce confusion, save time, and make onboarding more accessible by presenting information in both visual and written formats. This approach will also reduce the need for faculty and head TAs to repeatedly guide students through the process, improving the overall efficiency of onboarding.

Assessment

All the authors of this guide have received TA offers, and $\frac{3}{4}$ are currently TAs. Through our personal experience, we have encountered the inefficiencies in the current TA hiring process firsthand. To get a comprehensive look at the current landscape of TA hiring at GT, we have looked at TA requirements of many schools and departments, as well as guides from Human Resources. Our thorough investigation reinforced our conclusion that the TA resources of GT are scattered and limited.

Application Process

There is not a unified resource for newcomers looking to apply for TA positions. Each school, department, and lab have their own TA requirements, and the clarity of this information varies substantially between the schools. Schools like the School of Computing Instruction list their hiring requirements and expectations on their own website, [SCI TA Requirements](#), but other schools, like the College of Engineering, have no formal instructions listed anywhere, even though they may follow a similar hiring process (Georgia Institute of Technology, College of

Computing, "TA Requirements"). School level siloing and long approval processes has led to this convoluted process, which the department leaders do not have the time to change due to their busy schedules. This leads to requirements that don't match across departments. For example, the [Undergraduate TA site of the School of Mathematics](#) contains similar requirements on academic standing compared to that of SCI, but SCI requires an A in the course that you TA for, whereas SoM doesn't (Georgia Institute of Technology, School of Mathematics, "Undergraduate Teaching Assistant"). These slight differences make it difficult to navigate for any students looking to weigh their options under different schools and courses. There needs to be a unified site that lists the differences between each school that can be used by candidates to make informed decisions during the application process.

TA Logistics

Second, all the logistics of being a TA, like receiving payroll, taxes, and orientation information, are scattered across different sites with no easy way to get to them and stay informed. For example, the [Apply to be a TA site](#) of SCI is separate from the other logistics, as SCI only evaluates the candidate's academic qualifications in the subject of teaching (Georgia Institute of Technology, College of Computing, "Applying to Be a TA"). To become a paid TA, the candidate also needs to follow the steps in HR, under their [Student Onboarding site](#) (Georgia Institute of Technology, Human Resources, "Student Onboarding"). This is where the candidate does the paperwork to get paid, which is very important. However, the mere existence of these steps is not mentioned on the SCI sites or any other TA requirements site from any school. Furthermore, the new TA orientation requirement is explained in [a separate site of TA Preparation and Development](#), with no mention in other places at all (Georgia Institute of Technology, Center for Teaching and Learning, "Teaching Assistant Orientation"). A candidate often needs to devote significant time to following these manual steps. The sheer amount of moving parts also exposes candidates to making errors. These hiring processes are more difficult for International Students on Visas. These candidates need to complete the OIE Check-in, complete and use GLACIER for taxes, and complete the I-9 form before their payroll. Any mistake there will bring more delays and frustration. The current state of application, orientation, HR processing, payroll, and taxes is all loosely scattered without a unified page or interconnected links for newcomers to navigate. This can lead to significant friction. On Reddit, one user even claims that "about 50% [of TAs] have had to go 1-2 months without pay" ([BlondeBadger2019](#)) because of these hidden dependencies of requirements (BlondeBadger2019). A unified site that explains all the necessary processes will significantly reduce any confusion.

Recommendations

Based on our assessment of current TA onboarding at Georgia Tech, we make five recommendations to improve TA onboarding at Georgia Tech. We propose a new two-part process consisting of a visual flowchart to guide new TAs through their options and steps in onboarding, along with a step by step onboarding tutorial with screenshots and helpful descriptions.

1. Centralize Onboarding Information on GT Website

For these materials to be effective, they need to reliably reach the TAs as they are starting their orientation. This has been a consistent major problem with TA onboarding in the past, so we

strongly recommend that this is done properly for these materials. We recommend that Georgia Tech establishes a public onboarding hub that aggregates all requirements and links, and outlines the entire process that a new TA needs to complete. We also recommend that this link is highlighted in the initial onboarding email that the TAs receive. Our hope is that these new materials and advertisement of these materials will address the current problem of scattered onboarding information without a clear sequential guide for helping people through the process. We have heard from many TAs that the onboarding process is confusing and there is a lot of information overload. We recommend reducing this through these clear processes that are distributed to the TAs immediately when they join so that their onboarding transition can be as smooth as possible, in place of the current disjointed materials. We want to create a general-purpose hub that all TAs can reference, no matter their specific department or class, to reduce confusion and administration burden. This will make it easier for the new TAs and lessen the load on the head TAs and professors who might have had to guide their new TAs through the process themselves.

2. Establish a Dedicated TA Support Channel

Georgia Tech should offer support to TAs as they go through the process. This could be in many forms, such as a monitored help email inbox (eg: ta-help@gatech.edu), question portal, or phone line. This will help TAs get answers to onboarding questions in real time, and help them become unblocked with this process so they can instead focus on providing quality education. Currently, TAs who are confused have no clear place to turn other than emailing individual administrators, posting on social media platforms, or asking friends. A monitored help line would reduce delays and give a clear point of contact if any problems arise. A FAQ page built from common requests to this page would also help reduce work on the support staff's side.

3. Create a Visual Onboarding Flowchart

We will design a flowchart in Canva that gives TAs an overview of the entire onboarding process that they have to complete. This will help them see where they are at in the process, understand if there are specific parts they should skip to, and show them their options in the process. It will route the TAs to the parts in the step by step guide most relevant to them and their specific situation. This is extremely helpful because if a TA is just reading through the entire guide, they might get lost or waste time and brainpower on steps that are not relevant to them for whatever reason. This flowchart will help them easily pick out what steps in the guide to skip to and focus on. Like we previously mentioned, there are many different situations a new TA could be in – they could be an international or domestic student, they could be a for-pay TA or a for-credit TA, or they could still be picking which option works best for their situation. This will allow the TA to understand what they have to do for their custom situation. We also recommend that this flowchart serves as a quick-reference checklist that the TAs can bookmark or print out so they can cross off when they have finished each step.

4. Develop a Comprehensive Step-by-Step Onboarding Guide

We will also create a comprehensive onboarding step-by-step guide that walks new TAs through each administration step in clear language and with helpful accompanying visuals. We recommend that this is written for a first-time TA who has no prior experience in working, HR processes, tax documentation, or anything else. Every step will be paired with screenshots so the

TAs can follow along with the guide. It will also be linked to the flowchart so they can see what steps in the flowchart correspond to what parts of the guide. We recommend that this guide covers the full onboarding experience from initial offer and pre-boarding paperwork (such as I-9 verification, tax documentation, access to training portals, signing up for TA class), to even later steps like how to file tax returns. This guide will be in chronological order so it is extremely easy for TAs to follow along with. We will explain what each field, acronym, and new word means so that first-time TAs can understand. We will all explain the distinctions between the various situations new TAs might be in, so that the TA going through the process can ensure they are doing the right things.

5. General Recommendations

We also recommend that these materials are designed with accessibility in mind. This should include proper color contrast, readable font sizes, clear alt text descriptions, and content at a reading level appropriate for non-native English speakers. The latter is especially important as many TAs are international students who do not have English as their first language, and might be confused by administrative jargon that they are encountering for their first time. Defining acronyms and terms will also be very important for keeping this clear. We also recommend that these materials are mobile friendly, as many students might pull this up on their phone. This might mean that the flowchart has to be designed for both horizontal and vertical layouts, so that students can easily scroll and tap to zoom in on specific steps. We recommend that this fits all Title II requirements to satisfy the ADA legislation.

Goals and Audiences

The goal of our training resources is to make it easier for new TAs to get onboarded and start becoming productive members of the Georgia Tech teaching community. This audience includes people who haven't TA'd before, but more specifically may include people who've never held any paid job before or international students who are unfamiliar with US processes and taxes. General information that is necessary to know for all new employees at any company like I9 documentation, taxes, logging hours, responsibilities, and expected conduct may be completely foreign to some of the people we will be addressing with these materials, and that's the gap we are trying to fill for that portion of our audience. The other part of our audience may have worked in jobs before and be familiar with this general widely-available and widely-applicable knowledge, but what will still be foreign to them as a new employee of Georgia Tech is the university's specific policies, internal tools, and procedures. Even more specifically than that, people may be experienced working at Georgia Tech but never in the department they are now a TA for. Each department (like the CoC or the College of Physics) has their own set of information that all their employees must be familiar with. Our goals are to provide useful tools to audience members who might fall into any one of these buckets, and to not alienate any one group by skipping the subset of the training that they need.

Writing and Design Choices

Our writing and design choices will focus on making the content clear, accessible, and easy to follow for a wide range of users. Since many TAs may not have prior experience with hiring and administrative processes, we will use simple, direct language and avoid unnecessary jargon. If some technical terms or acronyms are necessary, we will explain them clearly so that users can

understand each step without outside help. We will also organize the content in chronological order to match how TAs move through the onboarding process to help reduce any confusion.

Information Formats

In addition to writing style, we will present the information in two main formats: a flowchart and a detailed guide. The flowchart provides a quick visual overview that helps students understand the big picture and find the steps that apply to them. This is especially helpful for those who want to navigate the process efficiently without having to read the whole guide. People typically find visuals very intuitive, which is why we want to make this in a flowchart of various decisions/branching points so that the new TAs will be able to easily locate where they need to be. We will use consistent color coding to distinguish between different types of steps so that the TAs can easily orient themselves within the larger process. The detailed guide will support this by offering step-by-step instructions along with screenshots that will demonstrate exactly what users should expect to see. We will organize the guide into clearly labeled sections that align with the steps shown in the flowchart, which will create a strong connection between these two resources and help students find the relevant information faster.

Accessibility

We will also prioritize accessibility and consistency across the materials so that students can easily navigate and understand how different parts relate to each other. We will ensure to have clear headings, readable fonts, and consistent color coding as these will help users quickly recognize patterns and locate information. These design elements will be applied uniformly between the flowchart and the tutorial, which will allow users to move between two resources seamlessly. We will also consider mobile accessibility to ensure that the materials can be easily viewed and used on phones since many students may rely on mobile devices. In addition, the overall structure will be designed to be flexible and easy to maintain so that future contributors can update the content, add new steps, or adjust instructions as processes change without needing to redesign the entire resource.

References

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