IV

INTEGRITY IN ASSESSMENT
STRATEGIES FOR TAS

TEACHING ASSISTANTS ARE VITAL to both undergraduates and faculty—and as such they commonly find themselves overworked in both capacities, under-prepared in one or both, and caught in the dexterity-demanding position of being asked to play catch-up *and* juggle numerous competing demands. In addition to being graduate students and researchers, TAs often take on the role of the instructor of record in courses, but do not have the privileges that faculty have. Much of what a TA knows about her work comes through "on-the-job" training.

A number of aspects of academic integrity are specific to teaching assistants. First, a teaching assistantship is, in a sense, an "entry level" academic position. The mechanisms of teaching are relatively new to TAs, many of whom have a lot of experience being a student but are new to being on the other side of the podium. Second, a TA's experience as a student may serve as an excellent resource for understanding the undergraduate perspective—or it may not. There might be a good number of years between a TA and his students, the TA may be from another culture, or the TA just may have been a different kind of student than the ones he has in his class. In any of these cases, the TA will find himself out of touch with the spectrum of student habits and attitudes—and so be susceptible to surprise. Third, a TA is often in a unique situation, having some authority but not complete control of the planning and implementation of the course. This means negotiating multiple agendas, teaching or reviewing material she did not select and may not be very familiar with, and often deferring to an instructional style that she may not share. Fourth, the TA is most often a busy graduate student herself who is expected to prioritize her own research yet devote considerable time to the class she is TAing for. Assessing students—their conduct, their learning, their participation, their mastery of material, and their

honesty or *dis*honesty in producing and submitting work often falls to TAs, as they oversee labs and sections, proctor exams, and grade tests, among other tasks. This section is targeted at reducing the time spent in learning the ropes, preventing conflict, and helping the TA handle conflicts and other unexpected situations when they inevitably arise.

Kevin Yee and Patricia MacKown, authors from the University of Central Florida, offer an extensive list of methods used by students to cheat on exams in large lecture courses. The list is useful beyond its immediate application of detecting or preventing certain behaviors: it can be used to deflect some of the surprise (and appreciation for student ingenuity!) that may blind a TA in the moment and keep him from dealing with the behavior. In lieu of the ideal proctoring situation, this list stands as a reminder of the effort of students to challenge the constraints of their environments to achieve their own goals, and includes 37 tactics used by students to bring outside information into a testing environment to impede genuine assessment. Sarah Bolton offers a comprehensive guide to academic integrity for the large lecture class, focusing her chapter on climate and preventive pedagogy. From her experience in a General Chemistry course, Bolton speaks to the simultaneous forces of anonymity and competition that contribute to the character of large classes and create particular concerns for their teachers. Brian Udermann and Karrie Lamers extend Bolton's work by giving ten tips for bringing out the best in a large lecture class. These techniques have wider applications, and TAs of any size class may find these tips helpful in building a productive classroom culture.

Michael Smithee offers reflections about a different type of assessment TAs are frequently asked to undertake: that of assessing international students' cultural awareness and understanding of American university expectations so as to distinguish between mistakes, misunderstandings, and deliberately inappropriate academic behaviors. As Smithee makes clear, an important part of this skill involves examining and coming to understand the way one's own culture influences one's understandings and expectations. Danielle Schuehler Sherwood's chapter on the "dreaded" lab report has the most to say to a hard-science audience anxious about made-up data and textbook answers. But for readers who have not been near a beaker since high school, it gives an illuminating look at the pressures and products of scientific investigation. Being a TA means something different to each discipline, and thus the circumstances wherein assessing students can raise issues of integrity have a wide range. A commonly referenced issue is plagiarism. This is perhaps a product of the high anxiety surrounding changes in electronic culture and the disparity in tech savvyness between many students and their instructors. In her timely evaluation of electronic plagiarism detection systems, Tyra Twomey gives insight into this high-profile yet controversial software. She shares research that exposes its

weaknesses as a surveillance tool but also highlights its strengths for teaching citation styles.

Experience is a wonderful teacher, and this section will not rob you as a TA of this most excellent (if humbling) instructor! If you are a TA, we hope that this section gives you valuable information in an accessible format. If you are a lead teacher, we hope that you take something away that you can apply to the courses you teach (and, potentially, the TAs you work with). In either case, trust your instincts and know your school's policy. This will instill the confidence you need to confront academic integrity violations and give you your own ideas for communicating effectively with your students, so that you understand each others' positions and expectations.