Job Description for Physics & Astronomy Student Lab Assistants

Responsible to: Instructor, laboratory manager, and department chairperson

Primary functions:
To assemble and prepare necessary laboratory materials before scheduled laboratory.
To assist the laboratory instructor during the (entire) laboratory period.
To put away laboratory materials after completion of laboratory.
To grade laboratory notebooks submitted by the students, and maintain record of student scores.
To raise concerns and provide feedback to the instructor regarding students’ performance.

Necessary skills, abilities, and qualifications:
1. Completion of course in which student is assisting, or higher-level course, with minimum grade of B.
2. Understanding or capacity to learn laboratory content at a level sufficient to be able to perform all the labs independently and answer questions about them.
3. Excellent interpersonal skills for interacting with students during laboratory period.
4. Ability to “think on one’s feet” for answering students’ questions and trouble-shooting during lab.
5. Must be careful, fair minded and objective when evaluating student work.
6. Must be respectful, courteous, prompt, and completely dependable.
7. Must be able to maintain confidentiality.

Basic Expectations
It is important for student assistants to remember that their employment is precisely that: employment. With it come responsibilities and expectations. To avoid misunderstandings, the department has agreed to the following general considerations.

Student assistants are an important component of the department’s pedagogical efforts, and we expect student assistants to act responsibly and professionally. Very basic expectations include:
1. being polite and courteous at all times
2. seeking to be helpful, both to the faculty member and to students in the class
3. being prompt in meeting scheduled appointments
4. completing all requested work in a timely and conscientious manner.

Specific Expectations for Student Lab Assistants
1. The student assistant and faculty member should agree on what is expected of the student with regard to preparation for the scheduled lab. In most cases, the student will be expected to get all materials prepared for the lab and place it on carts or on tables. Materials should be cleared off tables and carts rolled away if the next use of the room is a different lab. The final session’s assistant must clear the cart.
2. The student assistant should not only be present in the laboratory during lab time, but should be continually circulating to assess progress, to pose questions, and to offer assistance when needed.
3. The student assistant should grade the labs on a schedule that is made in consultation with the supervising faculty member. It is very important that students taking the laboratory receive feedback on their work, and consequently lab write-ups must normally be evaluated weekly.