The Beginning TA’s Guide to Instruction at UC Davis 2013-2014
# Table of Contents

Table of Contents ................................................................................................................................................. 1

Chapter 1: Getting Started ..................................................................................................................................... 2

  What is a UC Davis Teaching Assistant, Anyway? .............................................................................................. 2

  Yikes! I’m the TA! .................................................................................................................................................. 5

  Icebreaker Activities ............................................................................................................................................. 11

  Tips for International TAs .................................................................................................................................. 13

Chapter 2: Developing Classroom Skills ............................................................................................................. 22

  Leading a Discussion .............................................................................................................................................. 22

  Tips for Encouraging Participation .................................................................................................................... 25

  Giving Clear Presentations .................................................................................................................................. 29

Chapter 3: Grading and Giving Feedback ........................................................................................................... 33

  Grading Student Work .......................................................................................................................................... 33

Chapter 4: Becoming Professional ....................................................................................................................... 36

  The Ethics of Teaching ......................................................................................................................................... 36

Chapter 5: Improving Through Time ................................................................................................................... 40

  Professional Development for TAs ..................................................................................................................... 40

  Opportunities for TAs ........................................................................................................................................ 41

  Building Your Teaching Portfolio ..................................................................................................................... 42

  Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning ............................................................................................... 44

Further Resources for TAs ................................................................................................................................... 46

Acknowledgements ................................................................................................................................................ 46
Chapter 1: Getting Started

What is a UC Davis Teaching Assistant, Anyway?

Teaching Assistants (TAs), as the name implies, assist the instructors of record (usually faculty members) with instructional responsibilities for undergraduate- and graduate-level courses. But what does that really mean?

At UC Davis, full-time registered graduate students may serve as Teaching Assistants. In order to work as a TA, a graduate student must have at least a 3.0 cumulative grade point average. Each department has its own application and deadlines for its TA positions. Graduate students may apply to work for any department, regardless of their own academic affiliation. Typically, TA applications are due during spring quarter each year prior to instruction (and yes, you must reapply every year); however, some departments accept applications year-round and fill positions as they become available. If being a TA is a priority for you, it’s a good idea to communicate regularly with a department’s TA coordinator to make sure you get your applications in on time.

TA positions, also commonly known as “TAships,” are paid positions and are normally either 25- or 50-percent time, though occasionally other percentages are offered. Partial remission of in-state fees accompanies TAships that are 25-percent or higher. A 25-percent TAship means the TA is expected to work eight to ten hours per week on average on teaching related duties, and a 50-percent TAship means sixteen to twenty hours on average. A graduate student may be a TA for a total of 15 quarters during their enrolment in graduate school, but an extra three quarters may be allowed through a Petition of Exception to Policy filed with the Office of Graduate Studies (for a maximum of 18 quarters).

What Does a TA Do?

Your specific responsibilities as a TA will vary between discipline and department, and will depend on the expectations of the instructor of record. In general, the following are responsibilities expected of a TA:

- **Attend lecture:** It is common for beginning TAs, and TAs who are new to a course, to attend lecture. At the very least, attend the first day to be introduced to your students. Attending lecture will expose you to the course content in the same manner as your students. When you attend lecture, you are also more accessible to your students and can integrate your teaching with the instructor’s more smoothly. That said, attending lecture may also take time away from other activities, such as giving feedback on assignments. Ask the instructor what her or his expectations are for the whole term.

- **Facilitate lab or discussion sections:** In addition to three hours of lecture run by the instructor each week, most courses have weekly discussion or lab sections. Usually these sections are the responsibility of one or more TAs, depending on how many sections there are (see next bullet). The degree to which a TA has autonomy over the content and structure of a lab or discussion will vary from course to course. It is a good idea to talk to other TAs and find out what they are covering in their classrooms and speak with the professor to find out what they expect you to cover and how. Note that this generalization does not apply to most lower-division language and literature courses; in those courses, there is no differentiation between lecture and discussion, and the TA takes on almost all of the teaching responsibilities. However, a faculty member still serves as the instructor of record.
• **Collaborate with other TAs for the course:** Many large enrollment courses will have multiple TAs. Working together may help to keep grading consistent across sections. Also, if emergencies arise, TAs can help each other.

• **Hold weekly office hours:** This requirement (whether you hold one or two hour-long sessions a week) varies between courses. If a designated location for hosting office hours is not suggested, you may have students visit with you in your office or at another public location. You are not expected to prepare materials for office hours (though you may if you want to) – usually you are expected only to be available to help students with any questions they bring.

• **Prepare individual exam questions:** It is common for a TA to contribute some questions to an exam, especially if material covered during discussion section is complementary to lecture and therefore relevant for assessment. It is also common for professors to ask their TAs to proofread an exam before giving it to students. This is to make sure questions are worded clearly and the formatting is correct.

• **Proctor exams:** Handing out exams, especially in large classes, requires multiple hands to be efficient. You may be asked to be present only during the beginning of the exam. However, in many classes you will be expected to sit with students as they take their exam, answer questions about wording on the exam, keep track of time and be vigilant for wandering eyes.

• **Provide feedback and grading:** A TA may be asked to grade an exam, or a portion of an exam in collaboration with the instructor of record, other TAs, or a Reader (this is another type of position graduate students may hold; see below). Grading of the exam can range from taking Scantron multiple-choice forms to be scored at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) to using a pre-written answer key to discussing and devising an answer key with the instructor. Similarly, with written assignments, grading autonomy may vary; you may have to write your own rubrics or work closely with a Reader and/or the instructor to assure assignments are graded quickly and fairly. If the discussion or lab portion of the course is graded, you are responsible for determining this portion of the students’ overall grade. Whether grading exams or written assignments, you may also be asked to provide feedback to the students in the form of written comments.

• **Advise the instructor of record of cases of plagiarism and issues with student conduct:** While a TA has autonomy and authority in their own classrooms, student behavioral issues should be discussed with the instructor of record. Often this may only require copying the instructor on email communication. For further information about plagiarism, see “Handling Suspected Cases of Plagiarism and Cheating,” below.

• **Guest lecture:** If you are interested in teaching, it never hurts to seek out opportunities to "guest lecture," or teach a unit in the lecture portion of the course. Find out at the beginning of the term if the instructor of record plans to miss any lectures due to travel obligations and offer to fill in, using the instructor’s lecture notes. Alternatively, if a lecture topic is closely related to your own research interests, ask if you may present your research and lecture on the topic. You never know what will happen until you ask!

As a TA, you are not responsible for:

• Creating the instructional content of the entire course;
• Selecting student assignments for the entire course;
• Planning an entire examination;
• Determining the final grade for students (without supervision of instructor of record);
• Providing the entire instruction of a group of students enrolled in a course; or
• Adjudicating charges of plagiarism or student conduct issues.

Teaching Assistants at UC Davis are represented by a union, and the hours and type of work done by TAs are outlined in a TA contract that is updated regularly. If you have a question about the guidelines for TA labor, you will find more information about the Academic Student Employee (ASE) unit and the AGSE/UAW union at:

• [http://www.uaw2865.org/](http://www.uaw2865.org/)

What Are the Benefits of Being a TA?

Gaining teaching experience as a graduate student is a valuable source of professional development. As a TA you will find yourself in a leadership position and will learn leadership skills that you can use throughout your career. It is also an opportunity to think deeply about your discipline, or a related discipline, and convey your passion for a topic to your students. Often we learn the most about a topic by teaching it to others! Teaching and learning may extend outside of the classroom. It is not unusual for undergraduate students to volunteer for, or work with, graduate students who served as their TAs. Working as a TA also allows you to form close personal relationships with faculty other than your advisor and committee members. And as a TA you are paid, you receive healthcare coverage, and your in-state fees are partially remitted. You may TA all year at 25- to 50-percent time, and during the summer sessions you are permitted to TA up to 100-percent time. Finally, if you plan to work at a teaching-focused institution, such as a California State university, a small liberal arts college, or a community college, when you finish your degree, having lots of teaching experience will make your application more competitive.

What Are the Challenges of Being a TA?

Teaching takes time. As a graduate student you will find yourself juggling multiple areas of interest and responsibility. You will have to allocate your time to fulfill these responsibilities in order to meet your students' expectations, your advisor's academic expectations, and the expectations you set for yourself. Teaching takes practice. But remember that TAs are not expected to be expert teachers upon stepping in to the classroom. Set realistic expectations for yourself, and be sure to ask for help when you encounter areas of difficulty. This Guide to Instruction is one source of information, but you can turn to other resources as well, including senior graduate students, the TA Consultants, departmental administrators and other resources detailed in “Opportunities for TAs” in Chapter 5.

Other Paid Positions for Graduate Students at UC Davis

Graduate Student Researcher (GSR): As a GSR, a graduate student will be paid between 25- and 50-percent time and receive full fee remissions. There are no instructional requirements for this position, and they are not affiliated with any particular course. Often grad students will work as a
GSR on projects for the major advisor or committee members. Alternatively, GSR positions may be available for administrative work in areas outside of a graduate student’s academic responsibilities.

Reader: This paid position, also for full-time enrolled graduate students, is 25 percent or hourly with partial in-state fee remission. There are no instructional responsibilities associated with these positions, and they generally require very minimal to no contact with students. Readers are responsible for grading assignments and exams. These responsibilities may be split with TAs, depending on the course and the amount of grading required. It is possible for instructors of record to require Readers to attend lecture in order to increase familiarity with course content. These additional hours are included in the requirement for the position.

Associate Instructor (AI): Senior graduate students in some departments have the opportunity to serve as instructors of record for specific courses. These positions may require a separate application process. It is rare for students in the sciences and engineering to find AI positions, and much more common for students in the social sciences and humanities to teach such courses.

How to Get Started

Apply to TA for classes that interest you, and during your enrollment at UC Davis try to teach a diverse array of classes. Once you have accepted a position, contact the instructor of record and ask to meet with her or him to discuss expectations. Your fellow graduate students, faculty advisor, departmental administrators and the CETL are all excellent sources of information. Remember to ask lots of questions!

Yikes! I’m the TA!

How to Navigate Your First Teaching Experience

TAs and students alike usually are anxious about their first few class sessions. However, the beginning days can be exciting if handled properly, and will set the tone for the rest of the quarter. Below are some tips on how to successfully navigate those first few classes.

Overcoming Nerves

- Expect to be nervous, but also expect to do well.
- Visualize the classroom experience going well. Be confident in yourself!
- Remember, students generally mistake nervousness for enthusiasm.
- Review and learn the material before class to reduce nerves, but also remember that you learn much faster than your undergraduates (you’ve had more practice!), so you’ll be able to stay ahead of them even if the material is new to you.
Before the First Class: Preparation is the Key to Success

- Use the UC Davis campus website to locate buildings electronically and visit the room before you begin teaching. How will you set up the room so that you and the students will be able to see each other? If you have images or video to show, do you know how? If you are running a lab, do you know where all the supplies are?

- Make a thorough plan for your first day. Prepare more material than you expect to need (do not rely on students to fill time by asking questions).

- Practice your first class by speaking it aloud to a friend, a wall, or your dog. Best of all, practice in the room you will teach in and have someone check that you are audible from the back of the room.

- Check the bookstore, library reserves and on-line retailers to see if required texts are available.

- Even if it is not required by the instructor of record, you may also want to create a section syllabus that addresses course objectives, policies, assignments and exams, study tips, etc. It demonstrates to your students that you are prepared.

- If the class has a SmartSite (http://smartsite.ucdavis.edu), be sure to familiarize yourself with the website. Take the time to add materials that your students may need.

- If you are required to hold office hours decide when and where you will host them. If possible, make sure you do not overlap with the professor or other TAs from the course. You may need to reserve a conference room.

Starting the First Class

- Arrive early. Allow plenty of time to set up before students arrive, then establish a comfortable atmosphere by chatting with students as they trickle in. Possible topics: their major, their summer, their previous experience with the subject of the course.

- Write the course and section numbers on the board so students can confirm that they are in the right place. Also write your name.

- Bring lots of syllabi and other handouts to class. Bring your attendance sheet!

- Bring index cards and ask students to write their names, email addresses, why they are taking the class, and anything else you would like to know. Collect these as a tool for getting to know your students within the first few weeks.

“The little things can make a big difference. On my first day in a new classroom, I discovered that there was no chalk! None of the nearby classrooms had extra. Fortunately, I was able to use the room’s document projector, but I now pack a little box of chalk if I’m going to a new classroom.”

--Erin Hendel
TA, English and Native American Studies
TAC 2011-2012
• Introduce yourself with a quick biographical sketch. Tell them how you got excited about the field or what you find most compelling about the subject. You will seem more accessible and friendly if the students know something about you.

• Speak slowly, clearly, and loudly! Act confident.

• Present yourself as approachable non-verbally by smiling and making eye contact with all students, not just the students in front.

• Have students introduce themselves in small groups. This will help students feel comfortable with each other. By building a trusting environment, they will be more likely to speak up in class as the quarter progresses. You can find ideas for icebreaker activities in that section, below.

• Stay a few minutes after class to answer students’ questions about the course or the material you covered that day or other logistical concerns they may have.

**Setting High Expectations**

• Discuss course objectives and expectations (using your section syllabus as a guide if you created one). Describe the course content, grading and attendance policies, the format of exams and other assignments, due dates, and expectations of student behavior. Tell students how the assignments will help them with course material.

• In addition to telling students what you expect of them, tell them what they can expect from you. Will you read drafts of papers? Hold review sessions? How will you evaluate their work? Let students know that you are receptive to their suggestions.

• Tell students what they need to bring to each class period and to exams (e.g., textbooks, notes, safety equipment).

• Describe how you propose to spend class time (e.g., discussion, problem-solving, group work, review).

• Dive into the course material to give students a sense of what to expect when they attend your sections. Get them started on an activity. If your section will be discussion-based, set the precedent now that you expect them to participate, raise their hands before speaking, etc.

• Do not set yourself up to be an expert – if you don’t know an answer, say so! Then, try to find the answer and report back to the class later. Similarly, don’t expect your students to be brilliant, at least at first. Expect diverse levels of preparation and interest in your course material.

“A little personal enthusiasm for the subject matter goes a long way. For example, I spent time showing how my research related to the course material. I was afraid students might be bored with it, but instead they were more engaged and asked a lot of questions.”

--Heather Dwyer
TA, Ecology
TAC 2011-present
As the Quarter progresses

- Make a concerted effort to learn your students' names. Repeatedly encourage students to ask questions. If you respond enthusiastically and warmly to questions and comments, more students are likely to begin participating.

- Get new ideas for your teaching by sitting in on discussion or lab sections run by other TAs and discussing their goals and techniques with them afterwards.

- Talk to undergraduates majoring in your department about their expectations of and experiences with TAs. They can give you ideas about successful approaches and common mistakes.

- A key to becoming a successful teacher is getting feedback early and often. Consider having a TA Consultant (http://cetl.ucdavis.edu/consultations/) visit your classroom to do a mid-quarter interview with your students. This interview will provide you with information about what is going well or needs improvement from the students' perspectives, and the students' suggestions for change.

Dealing with Difficult Students

- Don't let disruptive students take over the class. Students will look to you to ensure that the atmosphere in the classroom is one in which they can concentrate and learn without being distracted by neighbors. If a disruptive student is impeding others' ability to pay attention, you have a few options:
  
  o Remind the entire class, without calling on anyone specifically, that everyone needs to pay attention/stop texting/begin the quiz, etc.
  o Stop talking and look directly at the disruptive student until the behavior stops.
  o During a break or at the end of class, ask to speak to the student in private and tell them gently but firmly that his/her behavior must stop.
  o If your first requests/warnings aren't heeded and a disruptive student continues to distract others, call the disruptive student by name and ask them to stop the distracting behavior. If the behavior persists, ask (and insist) that he/she leave the classroom.

- If faced with a persistently disruptive student or a student who makes you uncomfortable, consult with the course instructor or Student Judicial Affairs (3200 Dutton Hall, http://sja.ucdavis.edu, sja@ucdavis.edu, 752-1128).

- Students (and instructors) are expected to follow the UC Davis Academic Code of Conduct. When improper conduct disrupts the class or threatens the safety of others, there are approved courses of action to take. For more information, contact Student Judicial Affairs.

Other Things You Need to Know

- **What should my students call me?** Generally, the instructional setting at UC Davis is informal, and TAs often ask their students to call them by their first names. However, what your students call you ultimately is up to you. Some TAs, especially new TAs who are only slightly older than their students, feel that using surnames helps establish the appropriate professional distance between them and their students. Some people also suggest that female teachers tend to have
fewer disciplinary problems when their students address them more formally. Another consideration is that although you may feel comfortable when your students use your first name, some students are uncomfortable in this situation. Their culture may require that they show respect to teachers by addressing them as Mr., Ms., or Doctor. Alternatively, they may need an authority figure, and using their instructor's surname may reinforce the student-teacher relationship.

- **What should I wear?** Your wardrobe is up to you. While your dress can subtly influence your students' attitudes towards you and the course, your competence and personality are much more important. Some TAs dress more formally early in the quarter to establish their authority, then dress more casually later in the quarter. Most would describe TA dress at UC Davis as casual, and many TAs do not dress differently on days that they teach versus days that they attend classes themselves. Look around campus to see what other TAs are wearing. Finally, dress to feel comfortable and to be able to move easily.

- **Where should I sit or stand?** Use of physical space in the classroom is an important instructional tool. Generally, standing makes you the center of attention, whereas sitting focuses more attention back to the group. As a rule, don't stand behind the podium or sit behind a desk for long periods; move around the room. When students speak during whole group discussions, move away from them slightly so that they project their voices across the room. This helps the other students hear the response.

- **How should I hold the chalk so it doesn't squeak?** Hold the chalk at a 45-degree angle to the board surface. If it still squeaks, break the chalk in half. Inevitably, at some point the chalk will squeak anyway. Use this disruption as an opportunity for humor. You can respond by covering your ears with your hands and, with a pained look on your face, yelling "Wow, I hate it when that happens!" Alternatively, you can pause noticeably, then turn to face the class and say, with only a hint of levity, "...and if you don't pay attention I'll do that again."

- **How do I answer questions effectively?** First, listen carefully without interrupting and then ask clarifying questions if needed so you can be sure to understand the content of the question. Then, validate the question. For example, you can thank the student for bringing it up, nod encouragingly, state that the question is a good one. Then repeat the question for the class. If appropriate, turn the question back on the class to encourage dialogue between students, which will increase students' engagement and learning. If you can, relate the content in your response to something the students can relate with. Finally, when you have finished giving your answer, ask if further explanation is needed.

- **What if I don't know the answer?** You cannot be expected to know everything! If you don't know an answer, you can handle it several ways:
  - Pose the question back to the class; see if anyone else knows the answer.
  - Ask the students to look up the answer for homework (you may need to direct them to the appropriate resources).
  - Admit without hesitation or apology that you don't know the answer. It's okay to say you don't know! But do tell students you will find out. Once you have looked it up, email the class or address it in the following class session.

“TAs need not be experts on the subject matter as students generally cannot discern expertise from confidence.”

--Patrick Grof-Tisza

TA, Ecology
The important thing is to not make up answers; you may give students the wrong information, and students might “see through” your response and not trust you or your knowledge. Students don’t expect you to know everything, and admitting you don’t know the answer actually makes you appear more human and helps the students to trust you.

- **Am I going to have to lecture?** In general, TAs are not supposed to “lecture” (that is, deliver a monologue) in their sections. You will probably be expected to present 5 to 15 minutes of material, and then spend the rest of the class time facilitating student work. You will find that you enjoy those 5 to 15 minutes of “lecture” more if you learn to reach your students through strong presentation techniques. You should make sure the information you present is well organized, has clear main messages, and is perhaps supported by visuals that aid student understanding. See Chapter 2 of this Guide and [http://cetl.ucdavis.edu](http://cetl.ucdavis.edu) for much more information on effective presentation techniques.

- **How many office hours should I have?** Technically, TAs must hold one office hour per three hours taught in the classroom, but many TAs schedule more. Many TAs also allow their students to set up consultations with them outside of the scheduled office hours on an as-needed basis.

- **What if a student complains to the faculty member?** Each faculty member handles these situations differently since a great deal depends on the context and content of the complaint. It is likely that the faculty member will let the student know that s/he has been heard and that the incident will be investigated. Expect the faculty member to ask you for your version of the situation. In most cases, the complaint is caused by miscommunication. Work out the situation collaboratively with the faculty member.

- **What if a student disputes a grade?** Since many TAs are not the instructor of record for the course, students have a right to have your grading of their work reviewed by the faculty instructor. That review process will be at the discretion of the faculty member, and you should ask your faculty member how to handle such requests.

**Logistical Considerations**

- **What will be in my classroom?** First, don’t trust what is said here – visit the room before you begin teaching to see for yourself. Regular assignment classrooms should have a teacher’s desk or lab bench, a chalkboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers, an eraser, and a media cabinet (with video connections for a laptop, a network connection, and a DVD player). You can find out what equipment is standard to your classroom by visiting the registrar’s website: [http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/schedule](http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/schedule) and clicking on “Room Lookup.” For on-call support for using the classroom media equipment, call the Classroom Hotline at 752-3333.

- **What should I bring to class each day?** As a good role model for your students, each day you should bring your texts, the syllabus and basic course materials, some paper and pens, and a roll book if appropriate.

- **Do I need keys?** Regular assignment classrooms normally will be unlocked; however, you may need keys to access supplies or special equipment. Ask your faculty supervisor or the department staff, or call the Classroom Hotline at 752-3333.
• **Where is my office?** You may hold office hours in your home lab or office, or the department you are TAing for may assign an office for your use. Ask the department about office assignments.

• **Where can my students leave things for me?** Discourage students from leaving things taped to your door. The best way to collect things is in person, so try to arrange a time when you or a colleague will be in the office to collect materials. Also, ask whether departmental staff is willing to place items from students in a mailbox for you. If the department has a communal TA mailbox rather than a private mailbox for you, this may not be a good idea.

• **Where can I leave things for my students?** If possible, meet the student in person. Return papers during discussion or lab, or before or after lecture. If the item is important, do not leave it pinned to your door. This procedure may be inconvenient, but it is necessary to avoid the problems of lost or plagiarized papers. Student work is confidential, so leaving it in a public space for other students to see is not allowed.

• **How can I make copies of assignments and handouts?** Departments provide their TAs with access to photocopy equipment or the campus copy service. Check with department staff regarding the process and the number of copies you can make.

• **What do I do with grades?** Although most record keeping is now done on computer spreadsheets, it is important to keep paper back-up copies of all your records to protect against computer crashes or stolen laptops. Careful and thorough record keeping also protects both you and the student, and makes it easier to handle grade disputes. For example, if a student goes to your supervising faculty member claiming her D grade was the result of your dislike for her, all your supervisor has to do is review her grades in the grade book. Ask your faculty member if s/he has a specific protocol for recording grades. The faculty member may ask you to keep your records on-line through SmartSite so that students can access their grades at any time. For help with SmartSite, call IT Help at 754-HELP (754-4357).

**Icebreaker Activities**

**Creating a Positive Atmosphere from the Beginning**

Icebreakers are brief introductory activities that help your students become comfortable with each other. When your students are relaxed and familiar with each other, they are more likely to participate in discussions or to operate as a team. The days of one-liner jokes as icebreakers are gone; today, icebreakers are fun, humorous, thoughtful, surprising, or just plain silly. Games that ask participants to reveal something personal about themselves or that encourage participants to get to know each other are especially popular because they create group cohesion based on trust and understanding. Below are some icebreakers you might try in your classes, or modify to suit your needs. If possible, personalize the icebreaker to include references to the course you are teaching. This conveys your excitement about the topic.
The cornerstone of a successful icebreaker activity is its duration. The activity must be short enough to allow time for the serious work of the day. However, it must not be so short that participants feel it was a perfunctory exercise. The duration also should depend on the size of the group, the overall length of the class, and the purpose of the class. A one-hour discussion, for example, may only call for a four-minute icebreaker, whereas a long-term collaborative project may merit a longer icebreaker.

**Icebreakers to Try**

- **Introduction plus**: One by one, students introduce themselves and share an interesting fact about themselves. You might even ask them to identify their favorite toothpaste, cartoon, animal, or childhood toy; what they want to be when they ‘grow up’; why they are taking your class, etc.

- **Introduce your partner**: Pair students up and give them two minutes to interview each other for information. At the end of the interview, students take turns introducing their partners to the class.

- **Items in common**: Randomly place students in groups of three to five (with people they don’t know). Each group has five to ten minutes to discover the most unique thing that all the participants have in common. Each group then shares its finding with the rest of the class; a prize may be given to the most unique shared trait.

- **Two truths and a lie**: Each student writes down two truths and a lie about themselves in random order. Form groups of four to seven students. Each person shares his or her three ‘facts’ and the group must decide which one is the lie.

- **Name history**: Have students introduce themselves and say why their parents gave them their first name (it was a great uncle’s name, it means something in a different language, it’s a character from a book, etc.), or the history behind their surname. This icebreaker will help you learn your students’ names.

- **Roots**: Bring a world map to class and have students mark where they were born.

- **Agree or disagree**: Label sides of the room with signs delineating different opinions or preferences (e.g., agree or disagree; prefer to visit all 50 states or all 7 continents; you may wish to include more than two options). Make a statement, perhaps related to class material, and ask students to move to the side of the room that matches their opinion or preference. Ask several participants from each group to explain their choices to the class.

- **Connections**: Cut magazine pictures into two or three parts. As students enter the classroom, tape a

---

“In my first class in the United States, I prepared PowerPoint, video, and visual materials that required a laptop and projector. When I entered the classroom, I realized that there was no projector in the classroom. I looked at students and they looked back at me. Then, I decided to begin my first class without a projector. In the end of the class, I asked them if they had any questions. They looked at me and asked, ‘What’s your name?’ Now, I still prepare visual materials and ensure I will have a projector but I introduce myself before showing the visual materials.”

--Hsiao-Chi (Angel) Chang

TA, Education
TAC, 2011-2012
portion of a picture to each person’s back. After every student has a picture, they must walk around and ask yes or no questions about their pictures to determine what they are. The goal is to eventually find the student(s) with the other part(s) of the same picture. Variations of this game include taping words (names of people, concepts, etc.) on students’ backs and asking them to match up with students with complementary words.

- **M&M mixer:** Buy a one-pound bag of M&Ms and pass it around; instruct students to take a few, but not to eat yet. Now ask students to share one piece of personal information for each M&M taken. Consider assigning a subject category to each color of M&M (e.g., red is personal information like name, major, school, age; yellow is family information; green is hobbies, etc.).

- **Bingo:** Draw a 5 x 5 square grid on a sheet of paper. In the center space, write ‘free,’ and in each of the other spaces write an experience that some students in your class are likely to have had (e.g., transfer student, went to a different continent over the summer, have a birthday in January, been to Mexico, speak another language at home, etc.). Give students copies of the bingo cards and instruct them to find another student who has had one of the experiences listed on the card. When they find a student with a matching experience, they should ask that person to sign the box. The first student with five different names signed across, down, or diagonally wins a prize (only four signatures are necessary if the ‘free’ space is included in the row).

## Tips for International TAs

Welcome to UC Davis! Many of the UC Davis undergraduate students you will teach are California residents between the ages of 18 and 21, and many of them have very little travel experience outside of California. Therefore, their exposure to people from cultures different from their own may be limited. As a member of the international community, and now a teaching assistant (TA), you have a wonderful opportunity to help educate California’s residents about both academic and multi-cultural topics, and you will simultaneously learn more about American culture, as well. UC Davis strives to provide its undergraduate students with a rich education, and encourages its students to think critically about the world. Your unique life experiences and personal perspectives will be a valuable contribution to your students’ education.

All teaching assistants face new challenges every time they teach. TAs from countries other than the USA share these same challenges but also experience dilemmas unique to being an international TA: *How formal must I be with the professors? My tuition is expensive; can I afford to take time away from research to teach? My students have trouble understanding my accent; how should I handle that?* Below are tips to help international TAs transition to teaching at UC Davis. Some of these tips may apply more directly to you than others, but all will provide you with insight about what your students and international colleagues experience in and out of the classroom. The presence of international graduate students on campus and your participation in the UC Davis teaching and learning communities enriches the lives of your colleagues.

### The Role of TAs

Many American institutions, including UC Davis, hire their graduate students to work as Teaching Assistants (TAs) or Associate Instructors (AIs). In these positions graduate students gain teaching experience, and also play an important role in their undergraduate students’ education. Even though TAs work closely with an instructor of record, the TA is in charge of their own classrooms
and their students. Specific details about the role of a TA can be found in “What is a UC Davis Teaching Assistant, Anyway?”

The Value and Contributions of International TAs

International students are a significant part of the community in part because they contribute notably to the campus’ diversity not only regarding research and teaching, but also the social and cultural aspects of the university. UC Davis recognizes the contribution of this diversity, in part due to international make-up of TAs and proudly states being fifth among U.S. universities hosting the most international scholars (according to a 2009-2010 report) and 17th for most racially and ethnically diverse large national research university (U.S. News & World Report 2009).

Personal Priorities: Teaching vs. Research

A challenge all graduate students face, regardless of their background, is balancing life and work priorities. Yet, international graduate students may feel this challenge with particular intensity due to the high cost of tuition. It common for international students to feel external pressure to complete their research and earn their degrees quickly and efficiently. International graduate students might work as TAs, but the combined pressure of teaching and conducting research will feel overwhelming at times. The intensity of these feelings is compounded if you especially enjoy teaching and find yourself spending less time on your research. Alternatively, spending lots of time on research may detract from having a full and rich experience as a TA.

Anticipating the challenges you will face as a graduate student is an excellent first step to achieving a balanced graduate school experience. Take a moment to think about your priorities in graduate school and write down your responses to the following questions:

• Why are you at UC Davis for graduate school? What do you hope to gain from your experiences?

• What are your responsibilities as a graduate student? How do you plan to manage your time to ensure that you meet your various responsibilities?

• Who can you talk to when you feel confused or overwhelmed? Identify important people in your life and campus resources who will help you.

• How will you reward yourself for a job well done?

• After each year of graduate school revisit and revise this list. You will be surprised by how your priorities will change with your experiences!

Graduate school is an opportunity to learn in unexpected ways. As a graduate student you want to conduct top-tier research in your field and acquire a degree that will launch your career. Working as a TA may feel unfamiliar and daunting, but your experiences in the classroom will help you hone your leadership, communication and interpersonal skills. Remember, you do not have to face every challenge alone!

Professional Relationships with Instructors of Record

Instructors of record play a very important role in any class: they are responsible for the course content, grades and general management. You may TA for your graduate advisor (also known as your major professor or your principle investigator, or PI) or you may TA for another professor,
inside or outside of your department. Defining your professional relationship with the professor for whom you TA can be tricky. Are they your boss, your colleague or your mentor? The best answer is: all of the above. To have a healthy and productive TA experience, it is important to be aware of what you need to succeed in the classroom. Graduate students sometimes find themselves teaching classes on short notice, or instructing students on material that new to them as well. These circumstances can be stressful, so knowing when, who and how to ask for help will make for a more enjoyable quarter. What follows are some answers to common questions:

• “How do I know what a professor expects from a TA?” Oftentimes professors will meet with their TAs before the quarter begins. In this introductory meeting professors will discuss their expectations for the discussion or lab sections, proctoring and grading exams, etc. This conversation may also occur over email, rather than in person. Either way, if the professor doesn’t initiate this conversation, it is acceptable and often expected that you will. If you have never been a TA before these early conversations are a great opportunity to ask all of your questions. Don’t be shy!

• “The professor wants me to call them by their first name; what do I do?” International TAs get to explore how their own cultural identity interacts with their colleague’s identities. The level of cultural immersion that an international TA experiences is a personal decision that is informed by identifying and addressing cultural differences openly. TAs – both domestic and international – have a variety of personal expectations for professional behavior. For some this may mean always calling a professor “Dr. Smith” or “Professor Smith” even if the professor insists they be called Susan. A very valuable and insightful conversation will occur if you take a moment to explain why it is uncomfortable to call Dr. Smith by her first name. Her intentions may be to put you at ease, and she may not realize you are uncomfortable!

• “Many other TAs and professors wear jeans to class. Is there a dress code?” As international scholars, international TAs have the opportunity to practice American cultural norms, but this should not come at the expense of losing personal cultural identity. Teaching is hard work and your job should not be made more difficult by wearing something that makes you self-conscious. It is always best to err on the side of professional attire that is reflective of who you are. It is also a good idea to dress formally at the beginning of the quarter as you get to know the professor of record and your students, and then relax as the quarter goes on.

• “The professor gave a wrong answer in lecture yesterday. Can I correct him/her?” Teaching is a team effort! It is certainly appropriate to speak with the professor about the content and material of the course. Correcting a professor in the middle of a lecture may not be the most appropriate strategy, but you should feel confident to speak with the professor after class. You could approach and say, “It’s my understanding that X does not always equal Y, but you said today that it does. Can you explain that in more detail to me? I’d like to communicate it correctly to my students.” By addressing the professor in this manner you give him or her an opportunity to re-evaluate his or her reasoning and discuss their answer. All of us – TAs, professors and students – learn by discussing our ideas and evaluating our own understanding of course material.

• “The students complain to me about the professor. What should I do?” TAs often find themselves in the middle, between the professor and their students. As a TA you do not want to undermine the professor’s authority, nor do you want to ignore your students. Therefore, when a student comes to you with a complaint, have them explain the nature of the complaint. If you can help the student learn by reframing the professor’s lecture you should do so. If the student
has a complaint about a grade, or a class policy or a personal issue it would be best to include the professor in such a conversation (either in person or via email).

**Expectations: UC Davis vs. International Universities**

In your home country you may have experienced a different educational system than the one experienced by UC Davis students, including different expectations of student academic preparation, different policies governing grading, and different relationships between students and teachers. For example, in the U.S. it is not necessarily disrespectful for student to address their teacher as “Andrew” rather than as “Mr. Wong.” Your fellow TAs can provide a wealth of information like this that will help you become familiar with your new academic environment. The following are some tips to help you adjust to a possibly new educational system:

- Create a support group for yourself of other international TAs. Sometimes it is so helpful just to have someone to talk to who is as surprised as you are by American educational customs.

- Communicate with other TAs in your department about their experiences working with students and professors. Ask questions! For example: What specific problems have they encountered, and how have they solved these problems?

- Communicate with the professor you will be working with. For instance, you might ask the professor: What are your expectations of me and of the students in lecture and in the discussion section or lab? What is your grading policy? What are the average grades from past quarters?

- Attend teaching workshops organized by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and/or your home department. This is an excellent way to learn specific strategies for teaching UC Davis students.

Also be aware of some common differences between American institutions and international ones:

- In the U.S., teachers and students generally are informal with each other. You may encounter students eating in class, wearing casual clothes, or calling their instructor by his or her first name. This kind of informality usually does not mean that the students are any less serious about learning or that they lack respect for their instructor. Other examples of generally acceptable behavior by students include:
  - asking questions during class. The American educational system encourages students to participate actively in class, and asking questions is a part of this participation.
  - challenging instructors’ grading procedures on exams and other graded assignments. Again, the American educational system encourages students to check if they think a mistake has been made. Be prepared to explain your grading procedures and to make your expectations clear.

- Students will enter your class with very different levels of training. In core skills such as mathematics and writing, they will not be equally prepared to do the work you ask of them.

- Many students have part-time jobs that will hinder their ability to study as much as they need to in order to earn an A, yet most of them still will expect to be given high grades.
Connecting with Students

- Create a comfortable environment on your first day of class by talking about your own interests and expertise in the subject. Also ask students to share with you and their classmates what they already know about the topic of the course, or why they were interested in taking the class. (See the Icebreaker section for ideas you might use in your class.)

- Encourage students to ask questions, and urge them to ask for clarifications or pronunciations if they do not understand the concept you are trying to explain.

- Remind your students regularly that they should come to your office hours when they need help. You are in your office every week waiting to help them!

Connecting with Community and Helpful Resources

For many graduate students, graduate studies can be very isolating, especially for international TA’s. To create a more balanced lifestyle it is important to stay connected with communities and reach out to helpful resources. The following is only a small number of such resources available to international TAs:

- **Cross-Cultural Center (CCC):** The mission of the CCC is to foster a multicultural community through education and advocacy regarding systematic group oppressions, ethnic and cultural diversity, and establishing an environment of cross-cultural learning and exchange for the entire campus. ([http://ccc.ucdavis.edu/index.html](http://ccc.ucdavis.edu/index.html))

- **International House Davis (I-House):** The I-House is a non-profit, community-based organization. The mission of I-House is to promote respect and appreciation for all people and cultures. They encourage a global community by providing many opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and exchange. ([http://www.internationalhousedavis.org/](http://www.internationalhousedavis.org/))

- **Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCF):** As an international student you are in a unique position to encounter new and intense stressors as you transition to UC Davis. Common concerns for international students include anxiety about academic performance, self-identity, self-esteem, long-distance relationships, and conflicts in intimate, social or professional relationships. Visit the SHCF website for valuable resources and personalized support. ([http://shcs.ucdavis.edu/](http://shcs.ucdavis.edu/))

- **Women’s Resources and Research Center (WRRC):** The WRRC provides the space and resources for women (but the services are open to everyone) to explore the intersections of their identities and develop themselves as allies. The WRRC also helps people learn to network for academic and social advancement individually and within our diverse communities. WRRC spaces, programs, and services are open to all. ([http://wrrc.ucdavis.edu/](http://wrrc.ucdavis.edu/))

- **WorkLife and Wellness:** WorkLife provides programs, policies, referrals and education that enable employees and students to be effective at work, school and home. WorkLife encompasses dependent care and family services, health and wellness, financial support, career flexibility and community involvement. ([http://www.hr.ucdavis.edu/worklife-wellness](http://www.hr.ucdavis.edu/worklife-wellness))
**Language: Identity and Accents**

Some UC Davis students lack prior experience with people from other countries, and those who have not been exposed to non-American accents may automatically think that they cannot understand international TAs. Some students also may use your accent as an excuse for their own poor performance in the class, even though their poor performance is really due to other factors (e.g., poor study skills). Here are some other linguistically based facts that are important to understand when facing issues of language, accents, and identity.

An “accent” that is, sounding “foreign,” is an essential part of a speaker’s identity. Through our use of language we aim to present ourselves as we identify ourselves in a society. For these reasons, just because someone may have an “accent,” does not mean that this person does not know English well, but rather, this person may be identifying with a different variety of English and not wish to fully assimilate to American English (in cases where the latter is possible). For example, a French speaker may speak English with an accent; however, this person may be completely fluent but still wants to sound French for identity reasons!

- Students adapt to their learning environments and the more they are exposed to various accents, the easier they will understand with clarity these accents.

- Being exposed to different accents will add to the students’ own diversity and perspective.

- Studies show that the more students get used to working with international TAs, the less they mention difficulties due to language differences.

- Communicate with your students about issues of language/accent and identity so that they can better understand these issues, who we are as international TAs, and how we wish to portray ourselves in a diverse society such as that one found at UCD.

**For English Language Learners**

Beyond accents and issues of language identity, as an international TA you may still be at an early developmental phase in learning English. We suggest the following strategies to help overcome language difficulties:

- Address the language issue directly with your students as early as possible. Acknowledge that your English may be difficult for them to understand. You could say, for example, “English is not my native language. I’ll do my best to make sure you understand me, but I’ll need your help. Let me know when you don’t understand something I say.”

- Encourage students to ask you to repeat if necessary and to see you after class or during office hours for further clarification.

- Speak slowly. This is one of the most important factors in making yourself more easily understood.

- Project your voice. Speakers from other cultures sometimes speak more softly (or more loudly) than Americans do. Try to speak loudly enough that you can easily be heard in all parts of the room, even over the sound of noisy lab equipment. Say, “If you can hear me at the back...”
of the room, please raise your hand.” If students aren’t raising their hands, you know you need to speak up!

- Write an outline of the day’s activities on the board or provide information on a handout. If you mispronounce a word or have difficulty explaining a concept, your students still will know what you are talking about.

- Write difficult terms and concepts on the board, and use PowerPoint, overheads, and diagrams on the board to supplement your oral presentations.

- Make sure that you are correctly pronouncing key words and other vocabulary that you use frequently. These words may be field-specific, lecture- or lab-specific, or just words commonly used in the classroom.
  - Field-specific examples: economics, statistics, helium, flow-rate, market-value.
  - Common classroom examples: midterm, homework, Scantron form, open-book exam.

- If you don’t know how to say a word that you expect to use, ask a colleague to help you learn the correct pronunciation. Become your English dictionary’s best friend!

- Practice what you will say before going to class by speaking it aloud to a friend, your dog, or the wall. Don’t feel shy! The payoff in your speaking performance is well worth the awkward practice.

- Be especially aware of your audience and check frequently to determine whether they are following you. You can do the following:
  - Check for non-verbal behavior (confused facial expressions, looking at each other, lack of head nodding) that may indicate that your students are not following you.
  - Ask whether your students are following you. You can use phrases such as “Are you following me?” “Okay?” “Is that clear?” (Do this after the main points or main sections of your explanation. Also, make sure you wait long enough – about 10 full seconds – for students to ask a question if they want to.)

- Ask questions that require students to show you that they have understood your point (e.g., “Let’s review what we’ve just done.” “How would you find...?”). If no one volunteers to answer, they may have missed your point.

- Learn how to ask for clarification when you are not sure what a student has said or asked.

- You can ask the student to repeat. Some useful phrases include:
  - Sorry. What was that?
  - Sorry. I didn’t quite get what you said.
  - Sorry. Could you say that again?
  - Could you run that by me again?
  - Could I get you to repeat that?
  - You can repeat or rephrase what you think the student has said (e.g., “Did you say ______?”).

- Have confidence in yourself. Appearing confident will positively influence the students’ image of you. It is always easier for students to listen to a confident rather than a nervous speaker.
Keep in mind that your expertise in your field got you your TAship.
Know the class materials well. UC Davis undergraduate students reported in a recent survey that knowledge of the material is one of the most important characteristics of an effective TA.

- Become confident in classroom management by consulting people such as your supervising professor, TA coordinator, or experienced TAs in your department.
- If problems of misunderstanding persist, get assistance to improve your English (see below).

More Tips for English Language Learners

- Be a good listener. Listen for the rhythm of English, patterns of word stress, new vocabulary, and new phrases.
- Watch television news broadcasts and informational / educational programs. Listen for emphasis and intonation patterns.
- Keep lists of words you use and hear commonly that you need to practice pronouncing or that you need to ask a native speaker about (e.g., “How do you pronounce this word?” or “What does this expression mean?”).
- Spend as much time as you can in an English-speaking environment (as opposed to always speaking your native language) so that you have many opportunities to interact in English.
- Be aware of your speaking strengths and weaknesses. Be alert for the problems you tend to encounter (e.g., sounds, word emphasis, verb tenses), and monitor for them as you speak. If you do not know what your speaking strengths and weaknesses are, you might want to check with an English-as-a-second-language specialist (see the section on Campus Resources below).
- Read in English as much as possible (any type of reading material, including magazines, newspapers, and blogs). Doing so will help with vocabulary development and correct grammatical forms. Research shows that reading is one of the best ways to improve overall language proficiency.
- Practice on your own using an ESL pronunciation guide, preferably one with audio or video components.

“A fast way to absorb American culture is watch TV. And if you do watch television, watch it critically. Don't just sit there and absorb everything that comes through. Pick up language cues and see how people communicate in daily life. Those things will be really helpful to you and also a good source of icebreaker while interacting with your students.

--Hang-Wei (Henry) Hao
TA, Economics
TAC, 2013-present
UC Davis Campus Resources for International TAs

- **Individual tutoring:** Individual tutoring on spoken English is available for international TAs through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (752-6050, cetl@ucdavis.edu) from a linguistics-coaching expert. It's free!

- **Classes:** Contact the Graduate ESL Coordinator (752-9933) for more information on the courses below. Also, visit the ESL Program’s website (http://esl.ucdavis.edu).
  - *Linguistics 25:* A 4-unit academic English course designed to help new international/ESL graduate students with writing, speaking, listening comprehension, and vocabulary development as needed for academic work.
  - *Linguistics 26:* A 3-unit course in academic writing for international/ESL graduate students. Focuses on writing such as grant proposals, resumes, critiques, abstracts, and progress reports on research.
  - *Linguistics 391:* A 3-unit course in speaking skills for international/ESL graduate students with priority enrollment to international TAs. Focuses on pronunciation as needed for clear communication both in the classroom and when giving oral presentations, techniques for responding effectively to questions, comprehension of idioms commonly used in the classroom and language needed to explain class material and interact confidently with students and professors in the university environment.

- **Workshops:** The Student Academic Success Center (752-2013, 2205 Dutton Hall, http://lsc.ucdavis.edu) offers drop-in workshops every quarter for non-native English speakers. Topics include paragraph writing, conversation, and English grammar review. A list of workshops is available at the beginning of each quarter.

- **PAL Conversation Partner Program:** The Partners in Acquiring Language (PAL) Conversation Program pairs up international students with American students for informal conversation practice one hour per week. This program is available every quarter. Contact the Graduate ESL Program (752-9933, 175 Kerr Hall) if you would like to participate.

- **Language Learning Center:** The language lab in the basement of Olson Hall (Room 53 Olson Hall) has a number of advanced pronunciation and listening materials that you can use on your own. These materials must be used in the Language Learning Center, which is open Monday through Thursday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 pm.

- If you need further information on strategies for improving your English language skills, please contact Janet Lane, Coordinator, ESL for Graduate Students; 283 Kerr Hall; 754-6357; jrlane@ucdavis.edu.
Chapter 2: Developing Classroom Skills

Leading a Discussion

Teaching assistants commonly are assigned to teach discussion sections, but these sections may take a number of different forms. The hour may be used to clarify and enhance concepts introduced in the lecture, to cover supporting or supplementary material, to work on solving problems, or to provide a forum for student opinion and debate of issues. Whatever the particular function of your section, you want students to be actively engaged and to participate. Below are some suggestions to help you accomplish this goal.

Fundamentals for Leading a Discussion

Typically, when students hesitate to answer questions or participate in a discussion, the TA responds by turning the discussion section into a mini-lecture series. Soon, attendance declines, the TA becomes discouraged, and the learning value of the session is greatly diminished. To keep this from happening, consider these ground rules to maintain attendance and, most importantly, to engage your students in their own learning. Setting the tone from the very beginning will help you and your students stay engaged and productive.

- At the start, make the goal of the discussion clear both to yourself and your students. Writing a bulleted list of goals on the board can help to keep everyone focused.

- Create a comfortable atmosphere by learning students’ names and encouraging them to get acquainted with each other (see section on Icebreakers for ideas). Try making name cards out of 5x7 index cards or asking students to state their names before speaking.

- At the beginning of each class, remind students where you are in the course and give a short summary (one or two sentences) of last week's discussion to provide a sense of continuity.

- Make sure the participants have the information necessary for the discussion. If many students have come to class unprepared, it may be more profitable to have them complete the preparatory assignment in class than to hold a poor discussion or give a lecture. Consider requiring students to turn in a short written response to their reading assignment each week to encourage them to prepare for discussion section. Ask the course professor if you can award a small number of points for completing these preparatory activities.

- Plan a series of questions – don’t wing it!

“My first discussion was completely unsuccessful! I began guiding discussion based on the assigned reading but had NO response from students. Even though most had done the reading assignment, they were not prepared to fully comprehend it. Now before reading assignments, I make sure students are prepared with background information about the reading (for example, by talking about the themes ahead of time, the genre, the context, the author, showing illustrations, videos, etc.) to help them approach, understand, critique and discuss the texts assigned.”

--Dalia Magaña

TA, Spanish
TAC 2011-2012
Open and closed questions: Start your discussion with easy-to-answer questions to get your students started talking. Closed questions have only one answer to be correct. Simple closed questions, such as, “How many chromosomes does the normal human body cell contain?” can be a great way to break the initial student silence. By comparison, open-ended questions have many correct answers. Open questions can also provide a great opportunity for students to participate early and successfully in the discussion. For example, ask, “What things have you heard about genetically engineered foods?” or “What are some requirements of a healthy diet?” As students warm to the discussion, continue to ask meaningful open questions, and avoid closed questions like “What is the brand name of the most commonly grown genetically modified corn?” that take memorization but little or no contemplative thinking.

Questions that elicit different levels of thinking: Begin with questions that require students to recognize or recall information, then using data elicited by your initial questions, progress to asking questions that require more complex thinking to answer. Ask questions that require students to rearrange information or describe it in their own words. Even more complex are questions, which require application or problem solving to answer. Questions that require the student to find similarities and differences, to construct an explanation, to draw an inference, make a prediction, or evaluate options all elicit higher-level thinking. For example, “How is a healthy diet for children different from a healthy diet for adults?” or “What do you think will be the impact of this rapid switch to genetically engineered corn?” or “Who will benefit and who will suffer? Farmers? Consumers? Biotechnology companies? How?”

Well guided discussion: Discussion at this level is creative and fun for both you and the students, but you must guide the discussion carefully so that it does not turn into a bull session. You should have a well-established format for your discussions, and the predictions, theories, or generalizations that emerge from the discussion must be based on the data and concepts developed through discussion of the information provided through lecture, readings, and, of course, your initial questions.

- If discussions begin slowly, use small group work or brainstorming activities to jump-start the class.
- Encourage your students. Listen and take their ideas seriously. Allow them to feel safe voicing their thoughts even when the ideas are not yet fully formed.
- Whenever possible, attribute specific comments to the students who originally made them. This strategy demonstrates that you’ve been paying attention to the discussion and value each student’s contribution.
- Use the blackboard to outline where the discussion has gone, and where it might go. Structure your board work by using headings and boxing or underlining the conclusions or main points. Consider photographing the resulting notes and posting them on SmartSite for your students to review.

Summing Up the Discussion

- Verbally summarize the main points of the discussion whenever you shift topics, and certainly at the end of the class period.
• Alternatively, ask students to write a minute paper (i.e., a one-minute summary of the discussion or lesson) and have one or more students share their thoughts with the class. What do students think the main point of the discussion was? What was unclear?

• Set up the next class: What questions or issues should students keep in mind? What do they need to do to prepare for the discussion?

**What Do You Do if...?**

• **You can never get the discussion started.** If the topic is broad and interesting, and you have good questions, maybe you need to do something different simply to break the pattern. Some examples:
  
  o Ask the students to write silently in their notes on a question before opening the question up to group discussion.
  
  o Try writing the first few questions on the board, and then have different students lead the discussion of each question.
  
  o Appoint several students to play the role of one historical person or viewpoint, answering as that person or from that perspective rather than contributing their own opinion. Do the same for one or more other viewpoints.
  
  o Divide the class into two teams. Appoint several students to be judges. When a comment or contribution is made, the judges determine if it is new or significant, and if so, add it to a growing list on the board, attributing it to one team or the other. The winning team gets some simple prize.

• **There is a lull in the discussion.** Resist the temptation to fill silence with your own voice. Students need time to process what they have heard and to formulate new thoughts. Wait at least 10 seconds after asking a question (count in your head!); rephrase the question if you still are met with silence.

• **Only a few students talk.** Ask other students to comment on their points, essentially eliminating them from those who may answer. “So how about someone else? What do you think of that?”

• **Only students in the front talk.** Try “changing the front” by moving around the classroom.

• **One or more students consistently monopolize the discussion.** Even conscientious students can have a disruptive effect if they monopolize class time. Do not make eye contact with that student immediately after asking a question. Also, consider ways to limit individual students from dominating the conversation and structure your lessons and discussions to engage multiple if not all students in class (i.e. “Can I hear from someone who hasn’t spoken yet?” or “Can someone from this row/side of the room/section share their answer?”). If necessary, ask for raised hands, and then call on others. If you have a student who is holding up class by asking

*“No matter what the question is, the answer is small groups.”*

---Sharada Balachandran-Orihuela

TA, English

TAC 2007-2009
questions or speaking up incessantly, first try to determine whether this is the only student who doesn’t understand the material. One way to do this is to ask the entire class to help answer the one student’s questions or ask students to explain the problem/concept to each other as a quick, small-group activity. If many students are having difficulty, then you may want to slow down or spend time reviewing material. If you suspect that everyone in class is ready to move on but the one with all the questions, tell him/her that he/she has some great questions and they would be best answered if he/she could meet with you at the end of class or during office hours. One thing to avoid is making the student feel like he/she is the only one with questions or that his/her questions are low-level.

- **Students talk only to you rather than to each other.** Arrange the seating so that students can see each other as well as you. Facilitate class-wide discussions by looking at others in the room as well as at the speaker; doing so will lead the speaker to look at others too.

- **Some students seldom or never talk.** There can be many reasons for this: they may be unprepared, uncertain of the material, or unusually shy; they may have a specific disability; or they may have had little experience with discussion teaching in their academic background. Talk with students individually during a preparation time or when they are in small groups, and listen for a possible contribution. Then at the appropriate time, say “Sara had an excellent idea earlier. Sara, would you share that?” During discussion watch for clues that they may be able to participate, and help them enter the discussion (“Alex, you look like you agree. What do you think?”). However, don’t insist; be careful not to embarrass a student into participating.

- **An argument breaks out over a topic.** You’ve got a hot topic on your hands… facilitate! Ensure that students focus on the topic at hand and discuss it in a respectful, calm manner. Do not let the discussion become personal under any circumstances. Make sure students define their terms. Consider turning the argument into a formal debate, listing pros and cons on the blackboard, asking students to argue against their position, or assigning them to research and present position papers.

## Tips for Encouraging Participation

It’s often hard to convince students to begin participating. A few general principles can help you get them started and keep them participating throughout the quarter.

- **Create a safe environment:** Students take a risk when they speak up in a college class. Students may feel intimidated by the subject, large class size, the teacher, or their classmates. Teachers can create an environment that is safe for student participation by:
  
  o laying out participation ground rules at the beginning of the quarter,
  
  o putting those ground rules in the section syllabus,
  
  o welcoming all comments and questions,

  “I find the first two weeks are really important in setting the tone for the class. Usually if students don’t know each other, they won’t be talking to each other on the first day. I try to encourage my students to talk to each other both in discussion and outside of class so that they have someone else besides me to rely on if they need help in the class.”

  -- Ann Chang
  
  TA, Ecology
  
  TAC 2010-2012
o tactfully fielding wrong answers,
o ensuring that students treat each other with respect, and
o valuing student responses and augmenting (if possible) with more questions.

- **Groups:** Students work best in groups of two to four. This group size allows quieter students to speak up in a more intimate setting, fosters student cooperation, and creates an environment where students learn from each other. Often some of the best participation occurs when the teacher is not part of the discussion.

- **Select interesting materials:** Encourage discussion using outside materials such as handouts (e.g., cartoons, photos, song lyrics, poems, art work, advertisements, newspaper headlines) and audio-visual aids (e.g., video clips, slides, music). These items engage students’ attention and relate the academic subject to the real world.

### In Lectures

- **Brainstorming:** Ask students to brainstorm answers to a question. Write students’ responses on the board.

- **Free write:** Give students a few minutes to think and write their thoughts or answers on paper before asking for volunteers.

- **Pairs:** Have two (or more) students discuss a question for a few minutes before asking for individual responses.

- **Minute Papers:** At the end of a lecture or unit of instruction, give students 60 seconds to write their answers to the following questions: (1) What is an important thing you learned today, and (2) What question(s) remain unanswered? Discuss their answers to these questions if time permits. Alternatively, collect these responses and discuss a few of them briefly at the beginning of the next class.

### In Labs

- **Tasks:** Assign particular tasks to each student in a lab group. Rotate the jobs during the quarter so that everyone has the chance to use equipment, record data, and present to the class.

- **Wrap up:** Have a class-wide discussion at the end of lab that summarizes what students learned from the lab, rather than allowing students to leave as soon as they are finished.

### In Discussion Sections

- **Planning:** A good discussion takes planning. You can avoid blank stares from twenty-five students by:
  o thinking about challenging questions in advance;
  o seating students in a circle;
  o using groups;
Active Learning

Studies suggest that students learn more effectively when they are doing things in the classroom and thinking about what they are doing, rather than passively listening to an instructor. To increase your students’ participation and engagement in the classroom, try implementing an active learning technique in your course. Here are 20 active learning techniques that can be modified to work in just about any class:

At the beginning of class:

- **Matching Goals** – Have students make a list of 2-3 things/concepts they want to learn more about during that class period. Then have them share their list with neighbors.

- **This One Time, in Band Camp...** – Ask students to come up with a personal anecdote relating to the course material for homework and come to next class meeting prepared to share with others. Have students discuss with a partner. Possibly call on a few students to share their anecdotes with the entire class.

- **Mood Music** – When students arrive to class, play a song that draws upon themes represented in a text/movie that students were assigned for homework. As students listen to the song, ask them to write down how the themes of the song are similar to or different from the themes of the text/movie they read/saw. Call on several students to share.

- **Hypothesizing the Lecture** – Before beginning a class, have each student write down 5 questions or points they believe will be related to the upcoming lecture topic. Ask a few students to share their answers.

- **Picasso in the Classroom** – Ask students to think of a concrete visual image that stands out from the last class. Have students draw the image on paper, and then ask for students to share their images on a document camera.

During a mini-lecture:

- **Think-pair-share**: stop in the middle of a lecture and ask students a question. The question should require contemplation, not just memorization. Have them think and jot down ideas on their own for a few minutes. Then students share their answers with neighbors. Ask a few pairs to share their ideas with the entire class.

- **Think-convince-share**: a question with several possible answers is posed to the lecture class. Students vote on what they believe to be the right answer (this can be done with clickers if your students have them), and then turn to their neighbors to not only compare answers
but then persuade others to agree on the correct answer. The class votes again and, hopefully, it becomes visible which answer is the correct one.

- **Just Listen:** Before lecture begins, ask students to put their pens down and just listen. Lecture for 10-15 minutes. Then give students 5 minutes to write down the significant points they remember. Afterward, have them discuss those points with a partner or small groups so students can confirm their memory of the important points.

**At the end of class:**

- **Significant Points** – Ask students to write down 1-3 ideas (not just terms) from that day’s class right before they are dismissed. Have them share with a partner and/or call on students to share.

- **Quick Thesis** – After showing a film, reading a text, or giving a lecture, give students 3 minutes to write a 1-2 sentence thesis that makes an argument interpreting the concepts. Ask some students to share.

- **Applications Card** – On notecards, have students brainstorm on how what they have learned in class can be applied to help alleviate a real-world problem. Collect and share some of the cards at the start of next class.

- **Muddiest point** – Ask students to write you a short note explaining which point from that day's class is most unclear to them. Ask students to explain their confusion in as much detail as possible because this encourages them to think through the ideas they are wrestling with.

**Anytime:**

- **Role-playing** – Ask for 2-5 students to role-play a scenario illustrating a concept from class in front of everyone.

- **Collaborative Exams** – While in pairs or small groups, have students write one or several exam questions. Explain that some well written questions could appear on an exam or quiz. (You may have to work with the professor to make this happen)

- **Joe the Plumber** – Ask students to explain a concept to an everyday person on the street in their own words. Students can explain the concept orally to a neighbor or write it down.

- **“Disassemble/Analyze/Assemble (DAA) activities”** – In engineering industries, this practice is referred to as reverse engineering, product teardown, or product dissection. In small groups, direct students to take apart an object/machine/product, analyze how it is put together, and then reconstruct it.
• **Mad-Lib Fun** – During or at the end of class, ask students to finish the sentence “It is true that...” with something that they have learned “as fact” during that class. Students can write their sentence, and then share it with a partner. This may help students debate what a “fact” truly is.

• **Focused listing** – Have students make a list of 5-7 words or short phrases that describe a concept/problem/case/text they are studying. This may help students categorize and synthesize information.

• **Pro and Con Grid** – Have students list 3 pros and 3 cons regarding a solution to a problem. Have them share with a partner, turn in, or call on a few students to share answers.

• **Concept maps** – Direct students to create a concept map in pairs or small groups. Concept maps represent hierarchical networks of nodes and links. Nodes are labeled boxes representing concepts that are connected by links, which are verbs on the lines connecting nodes. (You can Google “concept maps” to get lots of ideas.) Call on several pairs/groups to share their concept map on a document camera.

### Giving Clear Presentations

As a new TA, it would be unusual for you to give many formal lectures within a course, but you often will prepare and present brief introductory comments or explanations in your own section. You may, however, at times be asked to give a lecture on a specific topic or to fill in for a faculty member who is out of town. Here are some tips for creating and delivering effective presentations.

#### Content Concerns: What to Say and How to Say it

Organization is key when giving a presentation. As you look at this page, font sizes, subheadings, and bulleted give you essential information about the structure of the information. When you give a lecture, you must provide similar information *verbally* (and possibly also on the board). In addition, you must prepare to make the lecture content clear and accessible.

**Introduction**

- Provide an agenda that gives an overview of the material you will present.

- Contextualize your explanation by stating how it relates to past and future lecture material, laboratory exercises, or to upcoming exams, papers, or projects.

- Communicate to students what you expect them to learn from your explanation as well as how you expect them to use the material.

- Make the lecture interesting by sparking students’ attention from the start.
- Raise a question to be answered by the lecture’s end.
- State a historical or current problem related to the lecture content.

**Body**

- Determine the critical components of your explanation that can be developed during the class session.

- Place the critical components of your explanation in a logical order, perhaps using one of the following styles:
  - Cause and effect
  - Time sequential
  - Topical or thematic
  - Problem and solution
  - Pros and cons
  - Ascending or descending

- For each of these components, be able to:
  - articulate it in a simple, clear sentence or group of sentences,
  - provide an example or illustration if possible and appropriate,
  - go on to state any major qualifications or needed elaboration, and
  - restate this component before moving on to the next.

- Provide definitions.
  - Make sure you give clear, concise and consistent definitions of new and unfamiliar terminology, avoiding or explaining specialized disciplinary “jargon.”

- Provide verbal transitions and organizers.
  - Keep your audience aware of the progress of your explanation by emphasizing its structure and development with the use of phrases such as “in summary,” “with that finished, let’s begin…,” “We’ve covered X; now let’s turn our attention to Y.”

**Summary / Conclusion**

- After covering all the components, be sure to bring together the main points in the stated order and come to a conclusion.

- Check for understanding.
  - Ask for questions.
  - Ask students to summarize information.
  - Present a problem or situation, which requires the use of lecture material in order to obtain a solution.

- Finish by previewing upcoming lectures, laboratories, discussion sections, etc.
Delivery Concerns: What to Do and How to Do it

Carefully preparing all of the physical objects for your presentation will make your presentation more polished and impressive and will make you feel more confident.

Preparation

- Be sure to have all your materials (chalk or whiteboard markers, materials for demonstrations, laptop, etc.).

- Organize your materials in the order you will be using them in your explanation.

- Arrange the room so that all students can see the chalkboard or the screen. If possible, arrange the seating so students can see each other, which will facilitate group work and discussions.

Delivery

- Present the materials via multiple modes of instruction. Include verbal, visual, and kinesthetic modes of instruction. Students appreciate being able to:
  - hear you state important concepts,
  - read important concepts on the board or in a handout,
  - write important concepts, and
  - if appropriate, work with tangible items (such as a plastic model, a zoological specimen, a text passage, etc.) to learn important concepts.

- Use the chalkboard or PowerPoint.
  - Prepare a few PowerPoint slides before class. Do not read them verbatim! Nothing will put your students to sleep faster. Remember, PowerPoint was developed to help businesspeople present information, not to help students learn – use it with caution!
  - Write clearly and in large letters when using the chalkboard, enabling students to read your writing from the back of the room.
  - When using colored markers, chalk, or PowerPoint, choose blue or yellow in consideration of students with red-green color-blindness.
  - Leave note on the chalkboard or PowerPoint screen as long as possible, giving students plenty of time to read, copy, and review during class.
  - Organize your notes so that students can easily trace the development of your explanations.

- Use handouts for extensive or detailed notes. Distribute handouts just prior to their use to help keep students focused on the current discussion topic.

- Consider your body language.
  - Make eye contact to help students stay engaged in conversation.
  - Keep a relaxed, upright posture.
  - Walk around the room to maintain proximity to all students.
Clear Presentation Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Preparation</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Clear agenda</strong></td>
<td><strong>Body language</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Attention getter</td>
<td>○ Handout or on board</td>
<td>○ Eye contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Context</td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Welcoming expressions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Body</strong></td>
<td><strong>Handouts</strong></td>
<td>○ Talk facing class, not chalkboard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Overview</td>
<td>○ Syllabus on first day</td>
<td>○ Avoid a monotone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Define jargon</td>
<td>○ Worksheets</td>
<td>○ Appropriate gestures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Clear transitions</td>
<td></td>
<td>○ Relevancy of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Maintenance of student interest</td>
<td></td>
<td>highlighted explicitly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Examples</td>
<td><strong>Polished talk</strong></td>
<td><strong>Board skills</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Check of student understanding</td>
<td>○ Practiced beforehand</td>
<td>○ Large “font size”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ On topic (no irrelevant tangents)</td>
<td>○ Clear handwriting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Visual aids created</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>○ Visual aids and handouts well organized</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Recap of material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Check of student understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>○ Preview of upcoming material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 3: Grading and Giving Feedback

Grading Student Work

One of a TA's main roles is to grade student work, including exams, quizzes, papers, and problem sets. TAs are faced with a variety of challenges while grading these different types of student work. Below are some general strategies to help you grade fairly, consistently, and in a time-efficient manner.

Grading tips for written exams, essays, and homework assignments

You will be more consistent and efficient when grading student writing if you develop a set of assignment-specific criteria, and designate their relative importance in relation to the overall grade (see “Example Rubrics”). These grading standards should be shared with your students to help focus their efforts and to emphasize that you grade in a manner that minimizes subjectivity.

Below are suggestions for developing standards and for grading fairly and efficiently.

- Be clear on the learning goals of the assignment. The weighting of the various components should reflect those goals; for example, if the primary goal of an essay assignment is to clearly communicate a body of factual material, creativity should likely not be heavily weighted.

- Decide in advance the importance of factors such as grammar and spelling.

- As part of your assignment guidelines and prompt you may want to include your rubric. This way your students will have an idea of what elements you are looking for broadly as they craft their essay. Grading papers is a lengthy process, so having clear expectations from the beginning will be helpful.

- Using your rubric, prepare model answers before you begin grading.

- Grade as anonymously as possible, for example by asking students to write their names on the backside of the page.

- Skim five or more students' papers before you begin grading in earnest. This preliminary reading will give you an idea of the range of answers you will encounter.

- Set a maximum time limit for grading each answer, section, or paper. This way no response gets more consideration or scrutiny than another.

- Grade all students' responses to one question or section before moving on to another.

- Make stacks of papers containing responses that are of similar quality and then review them for consistency before marking points on the paper.

- Grade when you are fresh, taking breaks as necessary. Being sleepy, hungry, or anxious about time does not promote efficiency or fairness.
Commenting on student work

- Make your marginal comments spare and legible.
- Avoid writing “no!” in the margin or marking a mistake with a large red “X.”
- Note errors, but do not fix them for the student. Instead, respond with comments that encourage students to think through the process of revision (e.g., “An early error fouled up subsequent calculations, but the process is correct”).
- Praise students when appropriate so that they know what they did well (e.g., “Good logic” or “Excellent presentation of data”).

Writing final comments

Your end comment serves several purposes: it summarizes your main observations about the paper, provides suggestions for further development, and explains the grade the student earned.

- Begin your end comment by addressing the student by his or her first name.
- Acknowledge the paper’s strengths. You may want to address these comments to the student him/herself. For instance, “Marisol, you do a very nice job connecting the various elements of your argument,” or “Toby, your central ideas are strong and clearly communicated.”
- When offering positive feedback, try to refer to specific examples in the essay. This aspect of the comment demonstrates that you recognize and support what the student has done well.
- If possible, mention any improvements from previous papers.
- Do not link your positive comments to criticisms with “but” or “however.”
- Direct criticism at the paper itself, not at the student. For example, “The thesis statement does not clearly communicate the essay’s focus.”
- Concentrate on one or two global problems to help the student see where s/he can make the most improvement. Use questions to help direct the student to deeper thinking and more sophisticated analysis.
- Offer suggestions for improving the paper. For instance, “More explanation of the connections between the evidence and your assertions would make this essay stronger. For each example, ask yourself, ‘How does this evidence support the point I’m making?’”
- Briefly summarize any other weaknesses in the essay such as grammar, style, or mechanics. If necessary, indicate how a student can seek further help in correcting these problems, for example by contacting the Student Academic Skills Center (2205 Dutton Hall, 752-2013).

Ensuring Consistency among Graders

If you are part of a team of TAs grading an assignment, you should hold a “norming session” to ensure uniform grading standards and marking procedures. Often TAs will divide the grading tasks so that one TA grades all the students’ answers to the same question. Grade five or ten exams or papers together, discussing your evaluations of each question.
Machine Scoring of Exams

You may be asked to go to the CETL to machine score exams. Scantron and Computer Test Scoring Services are available to all instructors for scoring multiple-choice examinations. To ensure that you can score the tests soon after the exam, call 752-6050 well before your exam date to make an appointment. Staff members are available to instruct you on the use of the machines, and on ways to efficiently manage your grading records.
The Ethics of Teaching

Here are some issues you may run into as a TA. It is better to think about some things before you encounter them in the classroom.

• **How do I manage professional and personal boundaries?**

  This can depend on your personality and comfort-level as an instructor; you need to determine the best way to strike a balance between maintaining authority and being friendly. Remember that you can be firm in the beginning of the quarter and establish authority early, and then become more personable as the quarter progresses. It’s easier to become more casual and friendly as the quarter progresses and harder to become more authoritative and firm. What you ask students to call you, what you wear, and how you handle disruptions in class can help you construct the kinds of relationships you want to have with your students.

  "Be clear and firm about classroom and course expectations from day one!"

  --Tracy Quan

  TA, Spanish

  TAC 2013-present

• **What do I do when students aren’t coming to class prepared (e.g., having done the reading)?**

  o Participation - Make it clear to the students that they need to prepare beforehand to participate in class and that their grade hinges on this participation (if it does).

  o Quizzes - Give a short reading quiz every day to encourage preparation (can also result in only students who have prepared attending). Ask the professor of the course if you can tie these quizzes to the course grade.

  o Address it directly - If it seems to be a continuing problem, ask students why aren’t they doing the reading. Have they been finding it too difficult? Too much? You may need to encourage students (especially students new to the university or the university system) to come up with reading strategies, such as how to effectively annotate a text.

  o Cold-call on students especially in the beginning of the quarter to make clear your expectation that they come to class prepared.

• **What do I do if a student misses an important deadline because her/his grandmother died?**

  There’s a saying that teachers are the leading cause of death for grandmothers of college freshman. This excuse is used often, and occasionally it is true. In conjunction with your faculty member, you should have a well-thought out plan for such situations. However, sometimes even the clearest rules require exceptions. You may have to make a judgment based on what you have experienced with the student previously. If you suspect fabrication, ask for an obituary and/or consult with Student Judicial Affairs to see if this student has already buried several dozen grandmothers.

• **Can I accept late papers?**

  This is up to your faculty supervisor, who may in turn say it is up to you. Some teachers have a formal policy that allows each student to turn in one late paper. Others are very strict about not accepting any late papers, or have a pre-established grade penalty for late papers. If your faculty supervisor leaves the late policy up to you, think through
your policy and procedures carefully and communicate them clearly to your students, then administer the policy consistently to all.

**Handling Suspected Cases of Plagiarism and Cheating**

Handling cheating can be awkward, but your role as a TA or AI is to protect the students who aren’t cheating by responding to the students who are (or who you think are). The policy at Student Judicial Affairs (SJA) is to raise students’ academic integrity, so reporting plagiarism or other cheating can also help the student develop more ethical habits for college and beyond.

- As a preemptive measure, explain to students what your (or your department’s) definition of cheating is, remind them that you and UC Davis take cheating seriously, and discuss how you (and your department) handle problems with cheating/plagiarism. Don’t assume that “Don’t cheat!” will suffice as a discussion. Be prepared to have a frank and specific discussion with your students, as definitions/understandings of plagiarism vary across the disciplines and across cultures. Be sure that you include a specific definition of what cheating/plagiarism means in your syllabus or on the first day of class. Students may be less likely to cheat if they know you have policies addressing the problem and the high cost of the consequences for cheating.

- All suspected cases of plagiarism and cheating must be turned over to Student Judicial Affairs (http://sja.ucdavis.edu/reporting-misconduct.html). This is usually, but not always, the responsibility of the instructor of record. Before submitting anything to SJA, you should get in touch with the professor for whom you TA. Once SJA has received documentation regarding the case, they will make a decision regarding culpability and they will recommend a course of action. SJA will recommend to the professor what kind of grade penalty the student should face and will determine if a student should face other penalties such as academic probation or community service. The TA and the professor do not have to speak with the student about the case; SJA handles all communication with the student.

- If you do experience a situation where you suspect a student of cheating, make sure to get all the evidence you can—e-mails, a detailed account of what you saw and/or experienced, another witness, a copy of a plagiarized text or exam, etc.-- and take your case to Student Judicial Affairs (SJA).

- Keep in mind that you shouldn’t verbally accuse a student of cheating in front of their peers or even in private (even if you feel you have overwhelming evidence). You cannot take an exam away from a student in the middle of a test, even if you suspect or witness cheating. You CAN have a student move to a different location in the middle of an exam. Let the student finish the exam and take note of the time of the occurrence or where on their exam you saw the incident occur.
Below are several scenarios that prompt you to make a decision or take action. Consider how you might respond to these, or other, scenarios.

**Negotiating Student-TA relationships**

1. You are chatting after class with one of your students who, while leaving, asks, “Hey, you want to grab a cup of coffee sometime?”

   *What would you say?*

2. Chris displays great enthusiasm, turns in work on time, comes to office hours regularly, and produces quality homework. You enjoy working with this student. Pat displays considerable disinterest, arrives late, never attends office hours, produces sub-par work and offers excuses, which are obviously fabricated. A big project is due, and both students do not hand in the work. An earlier e-mail informed you that Chris was unable to make the deadline because of a graduate school interview. You agreed to an extension until the end of the week with no penalty. One hour before the deadline, Pat calls; the car has broken down and an extension is requested. You decide not to grant one and say the project grade will automatically drop one letter grade as per your late policy. Pat responds, “But you gave Chris three extra days!”

   *Now what? What is fair?*

3. Alex, a student in your discussion section, displays an obvious and serious dislike for you. Disturbing class by arriving late, reading the newspaper while you talk, whispering loudly to neighbors, and audibly voicing snide comments after your remarks are common behaviors. Most significantly, Alex often subtly but occasionally belligerently challenges nearly everything you say in class. As a result, the class has been disrupted, your effectiveness as a teacher has been seriously diminished, and your nerves are frayed. A TA colleague says, “Just ignore it. Without your attention, this behavior will stop soon enough.”

   *Is this good advice? What other strategies might help you deal with this situation?*

4. It is half way through the quarter and as you sit in the back of lecture you notice many students doing everything *but* taking notes—they’re on Facebook, email, YouTube and Hulu. Some are even openly texting in class. The professor ignores the electronic distractions and continues to lecture. The professor made a few brief comments at the beginning of the quarter about turning off cell phones, and you reiterated these comments in your discussion section. In office hours a few students have privately told you that they are distracted by their classmates’ behavior.

   *What strategies can you employ as a TA to get your students to refocus? Who is responsible for classroom etiquette for electronic devises? Can the mid-quarter distractions be avoided?*
Responding to Student Diversity

5. You often make use of small group activities during your discussion section. You have noticed that week after week your students consistently break into small groups along ethnic lines. This time you form the groups. But a vocal student says, "We like working in our own groups. We study together after class. Why are you mixing us now? You're just making it harder for us to learn this."

*Given what the student said, should you be concerned about maintaining diversity within groups?*

6. You’re teaching a controversial subject (e.g., genetic engineering, Middle East policy, affirmative action) to a very diverse group of students. Near the end of the session, a student states, “My dad said this is what you’d say. He said you’d give your views, which is clearly ‘the right answer,’ and then pretend to give the ‘other side’ but make us sound misinformed and closed-minded.”

*How do you juggle the various viewpoints that might inform your students’ understanding of the subject? What do you say about your own viewpoints?*
Professional Development for TAs

These resources will help you successfully fulfill your teaching duties here at UC Davis, and also help you to transition into an academic career as a skillful teacher.

TA Consultants in the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL)

The TA Consultants (TACs) provide peer-consulting services to their TA and AI (associate instructor) colleagues. Whether you need some quick advice or you would like to spend some time talking with an experienced TA, the TACs are here to help you. Each TAC has had a great deal of successful experience in the classroom, enjoys teaching, and is committed to helping her/his TA colleagues get the most from their TA experiences.

TACs strive to find the best combination of information, training, feedback, and support to match the interests and needs of each TA with whom they consult. That combination may include assisting the TA with pre-class preparation and planning, observing practice sessions, visiting the classroom, talking with their students, and referring the TA to campus resources and reference materials such as books, journals, and handouts.

TAs improve their skills more rapidly by seeking and responding to feedback regarding their in-class instruction. The TACs can be one source of that feedback. Some of the specific consultation types provided by the TACs are:

**Classroom visit** - At your request, a TAC will visit your classroom, take detailed notes to share with you confidentially, and then meet with you to discuss the transcript. Simply discussing the class session with a peer colleague often can provide surprising and valuable insights.

**Mid-quarter class interviews (MQI)** – The class interview solicits information from your students about their perceptions of your teaching and the conduct and progress of the section. At your request, a TAC will visit your classroom between the fourth and sixth week of the quarter and ask your students three general questions: “What is working well? What is not working well? What suggestions for improvement do you have?” The TAC then will help you interpret the students’ answers, plan strategies to improve the class and your instruction, and discuss options for responding to the students’ comments. Information gathered is confidential. In other words, students’ responses are kept between you, your students, and the TAC; your supervisor will not know the results of the mid-quarter interview unless you share them.

**Videotaping** – Videotaping is an extremely powerful tool for developing teaching skills. It offers you the opportunity to see yourself as your students see you. At your request, a TAC will videotape instructional presentations, usually during regularly scheduled classes. You and the TAC who videotaped you then watch the playback. The TAC will help you interpret the video and plan strategies that will improve the class and your instruction.

Classroom observations, mid-quarter class interviews and videotaping are popular TAC services that often are requested by the same TA again and again. When possible, schedule early to assure your first choice of time and date. These services are free to all graduate students and post-docs. Contact the TA Consultants at tac@ucdavis.edu.
Opportunities for TAs

This section includes information on four current programs specifically designed to enhance the professional development of graduate students as instructors.

Seminar on College Teaching

This seminar is appropriate for both novice teachers and for those who have considerable teaching experience. Participants focus on the skills and issues involved in college instruction, prepare to teach their first course, or consider how to improve courses they have taught many times. Ten sessions cover elements of learning goals, lesson plans, communication strategies, learning assessment, course management, and student diversity. Participants consider the best instructional practices – things that work for successful teachers and are supported by solid research. Difficult or controversial instructional issues and ethical decisions encountered by college instructors are also considered.

Participants who complete all seminar requirements will receive a certificate of completion that can be included in a portfolio and curriculum vitae. Participants may enroll in EDU 398 Group Study for one unit of credit (CRN provided at first session).

The Seminar on College Teaching is offered in most Fall quarters and occasionally in Winter or Spring. It is sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Professors for the Future

Sponsored by the Office of Graduate Studies, the PFTF program is designed to provide leadership and support to those campus activities that serve the professional development needs of UC Davis graduate students as future members of the professoriate. A select number of graduate students are annually designated as Professors for the Future Fellows. Fellows receive a small stipend, participate in a professional development program designed especially for them, participate in the Seminar on College Teaching (see above), and in turn fill leadership positions for coordinating and communicating the various other activities of the program to the general campus.

Fellows contribute to the various components of the larger process of developing graduate students and postdoctoral scholars to be future members of the professoriate by proposing individual projects to fill recognized needs or by filling supporting positions within existing programs. As fellows they receive public recognition as promising scholars and they also play a leadership role in providing support and services to current and future graduate students and postdocs.

Applications are due in the Office of Graduate Studies in early March. For more information check out their website at http://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu/pftf/index.html.

“Things really changed for me when I realized that teaching is a constant adjustment, both in the sense of micro changes made during class when "the lesson plan meets the students" and macro changes made over time as courses end, new ones begin, and reflection occurs. I used to think that you had training, taught some, and then were "there." It's such a relief and also refreshing to know that we are always moving and evolving as teachers.”

--Miki Mori
TA, Linguistics
TAC 2012-present
Los Rios Faculty Diversity Internship Program

Applications available mid-July through the Los Rios Community College District. The program is one year long and participants are partnered with professors at local community colleges as a way to gain experience teaching at the community college levels.

TA Consultant Program

The TA Consultant Program is a professional development program for experienced graduate student instructors. TA Consultants enhance their own understanding of teaching and learning, and gain valuable academic community service experience by playing an integral part in the overall training and development of TAs at UC Davis. TA consultants receive training and acquire skills in providing instructional support services, which will benefit them in their own development as instructors and contribute in an important way to the training and support of TAs at UC Davis. TA Consultants receive a stipend of $1000 per quarter as recipients of a TA Training Graduate Fellowship.

Specifically, TA Consultants:

- provide workshops and presentations for departmental TA training programs,
- organize and host special seminar programs on teaching,
- provide videotaping and playback services,
- provide mid-quarter interview services,
- participate in the planning and execution of annual TA orientation programs,
- contribute to a variety of teaching related publications, and
- participate in weekly group program planning and training meetings.

The expected commitment is approximately six hours per week; individual schedules throughout the quarter are negotiated. Applicants must be advanced graduate students, have significant experience as a Teaching Assistant, and have a demonstrated interest in instructional improvement.

Application information and materials are available online at the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning’s website (http://cetl.ucdavis.edu) in early Winter Quarter. You may also call 752-6050 or email tac@ucdavis.edu for more information. This fellowship is sponsored by the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.

Building Your Teaching Portfolio

The time to start preparing your teaching portfolio is now. You should begin systematically collecting portfolio materials when you begin assisting in your first course, and revise and update the materials as you gain more experience.

A teaching portfolio is a concise, organized narrative that presents your teaching accomplishments and strengths. Each summary in the portfolio is about one to two pages. The narrative is followed
by a set of appendices that provide documentation in more detail. The summaries and the appendices show how your teaching methods and goals have developed over time. Many colleges require a teaching portfolio for hiring, promotions, and tenure selections.

To be successful, the portfolio should:

- include examples of student and teacher work,
- demonstrate a structure based on professional standards,
- provide a reflective commentary of your work as a teacher,
- feature a selection of examples to illustrate your teaching experience, and
- demonstrate collaboration with colleagues.

Documents you are likely to include in your portfolio are:

- a statement of your teaching philosophy (see below),
- samples of your work; these may include lessons plans, exams, and syllabi,
- samples of work done by your students (e.g., photocopies of projects, journals, papers, and completed assignments),
- summaries that briefly explain the samples you have included, and
- commentaries that reflect your teaching and learning.

**Writing a statement of teaching philosophy**

If you are planning a career in academia, at some point you will undoubtedly be asked to provide a statement of the goals, methods, and philosophies that guide your teaching. This statement is the most important document in your teaching portfolio. It paints a picture of who you are as a teacher and should reflect your personality and interest in teaching. Think carefully about what you write, and remain true to who you are as a teacher. Expect your teaching philosophy to change over time as your knowledge, experience, and goals change.

*Format* – The statement should be one or two pages long (short and clear is best!), well organized, and written in a narrative format. First person style is standard. Avoid technical terms that may not be understood by a reader outside your field.

*Content* – There is no single formula for writing a successful statement of teaching philosophy. However, most statements include the following information.

- **Your objectives as a teacher** - Your objectives need to be realistic and relevant to your teaching. A primary goal of course is to have your students learn the basics of the subject you are teaching. However, you need to think further than this. What do you hope your students will gain from your teaching? Critical thinking skills? Problem-solving skills? Communication or writing skills?
• *Achieving your objectives* - Once you have established your objectives as a teacher, think about how you will achieve those objectives. Demonstrate to readers that you have a concrete understanding of the teaching techniques, pedagogy, and strategies that you have used and will use in your teaching. Relate these techniques to successfully achieving your goals as a teacher; specific examples are invaluable. For example, if you prepared a reader for your students, how did you select the materials, and why? What do you expect your students to have gained from this selection of readings?

• *Why do you want to teach?* Here you can express yourself and show the reader your personality. Why are you interested in teaching? Why is teaching important? What are the rewards of teaching? How do you inspire your students?

• *Personal growth plan* - Demonstrate to the reader how you have grown as a teacher over time, and what you intend to do to continue growing as an instructor. How has your teaching philosophy changed over time? What have you done to increase your teaching skills? What are your strengths and how will you correct your weaknesses?

The TA Consultants will consult with you for free regarding your statement of teaching philosophy. Email tac@ucdavis.edu to set up an appointment.

**Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning**

**Services and Programs**

*Contact information: 1350 Surge III, (530) 752-6050, [http://cetl.ucdavis.edu](http://cetl.ucdavis.edu)*

Excellence in teaching includes, among other things, the ability to stimulate intellectual curiosity, aesthetic sensitivity, a sense of historical and social context, tolerance for ambiguity, delight in subtlety, appreciation of different perspectives, critical thinking, healthy skepticism, and receptiveness to new ideas. The Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) is dedicated to assisting faculty members and Teaching Assistants in their efforts to develop and maintain excellence in teaching on the Davis campus.

For TAs, the CETL offers peer consulting through the TA Consultant Program and a variety of other programs and services. Teaching Assistants who are interested in improving their teaching abilities are encouraged to meet with a TA Consultant in order to discuss which programs and services may be of help.

Available services, programs and resources include:

**TA Orientation**

The CETL organizes a campus-wide orientation for new Teaching Assistants at the beginning of each academic year. The purpose of this orientation is to welcome new TAs to the campus, provide an overview of teaching at Davis, and offer some advice for getting off to a good start. It is required by the University of California Office of the President and by the University of California, Davis. You probably received this Guide at the TA Orientation!
Workshops and Seminars

Workshops on teaching skills and strategies are offered to all members of the campus community each year. Watch for fliers in your department or check the CETL web page at http://cetl.ucdavis.edu/.

Services for International TAs

Tutoring to increase English proficiency and classroom communication skills is available to International Teaching Assistants by appointment. The SPEAK test is administered several times each quarter to pre-registered students to help them assess their oral English proficiency. Contact Barbara Mills in the CETL for more information, bjmills@ucdavis.edu.

Test Scoring and Analysis

Scantron and Computer Test Scoring Services are available to all instructors for scoring multiple-choice examinations. Individual consultation is provided on: 1) test construction, and 2) using item analysis for exam improvement and for improving teaching. Contact Barbara Mills to set up an appointment, bjmills@ucdavis.edu.

“Even the best instructors get better by talking with others about teaching.”

--Philip Matern
TA, Physiology
TAC 2012-present
Further Resources for TAs

Your very useful resource guide to all things UC Davis
(Campus and Community Resource Guide)

1. **Student Health and Counseling Services (SHCE)**
   a. **Health and Wellness Center**
      
      **Location:** The Student Health and Wellness Center
      
      **Services:** Medical services, including emergency & urgent care, primary care, reproductive and sexual health, psychiatry, optometry, and nutrition services
      
      [Link](http://shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/medical.html)

   b. **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)**
      
      **Location:** North Hall (2nd Floor)
      
      **Services:** Mental health & psychological services, including individual career counseling, mental health assessment, eating disorder services, stress and wellness services
      
      [Link](http://shcs.ucdavis.edu/services/caps.html)

2. **Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) and the Teaching Assistant Consulting Program (TAC)**

   **Location:** 1360 Surge III
   
   **Services:** Mid-Quarter Interviews (MQIs), videotaping consults, observations, workshops on teaching and professional development, scantron and computer test scoring
   
   [Link](http://cetl.ucdavis.edu/)

3. **Student Academic Success Center (SASC)**

   **Location:** Dutton Hall
   
   **Services:** Tutoring for undergraduates for (ESL and mainstream) writing, chemistry, math, biology, statistics, physics, studying strategies and retention help
   
   [Link](http://lsc.ucdavis.edu/)

4. **Student Judicial Affairs (SJA)**

   **Location:** Dutton Hall
   
   **Services:** Regarding ethics, plagiarism, student and teacher rights and responsibilities, academic integrity and civility
   
   [Link](http://sja.ucdavis.edu/)

5. **Information and Education Technology (IEC)- Academic Technology Services**

   **Location:** Surge II
   
   **Services:** Graphic design and web development, audio-visual, computer, and classroom support, video-conferencing, podcasting and webcasting
   
   [Link](http://iet.ucdavis.edu/)
6. **Women's Resource and Research Center (WRRC)**
   - **Location:** North Hall (1st floor)
   - **Services:** Leadership and educational programs, a safe space, a library, additional support, scholarships, and grant funding.

7. **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Resource Center**
   - **Location:** Student Community Center
   - **Services:** Counseling, panel discussions and speakers, peer educator program, HIV testing, grant funding

8. **Cross Cultural Center (CCC)**
   - **Location:** Student Community Center
   - **Services:** Place of advocacy, cultural competency, community building, workshops, performances, seminars, exhibits, cultural student associations

9. **The Student Disability Center**
   - **Location:** Cowell Building
   - **Services:** Resources and determining eligibility, ensuring specialized academic support, information for faculty

10. **Graduate ESL courses and Partners in Acquiring Language (PAL) Program through the Department of Linguistics**
    - **Location:** Kerr Hall
    - **Services:** Pronunciation and advanced academic English courses, writing for ESL students, conversation partners for English and foreign language learners
      [http://linguistics.ucdavis.edu/esl-instruction/graduate-esl](http://linguistics.ucdavis.edu/esl-instruction/graduate-esl)

11. **Activities and Recreation Center (ARC)**
    - **Location:** ARC center & the South Silo
    - **Services:** Gym, sports facilities such as basketball, badminton, squash courts, rock climbing, fitness classes, intramural sports, personal training, weight lifting, craft center, band-uh!

12. **Experimental College**
    - **Location:** South Silo
    - **Services:** Various classes including martial arts, dance, crafts, fine arts, community gardening, music, alternative health, mind and spirit
13. **Office of Graduate Studies**  
**Location:** Mrak Hall  
**Services:** Information on the Graduate Student Association (GSA), scholarships & grants, professional development, forms, informational resources  
[http://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu/students/index.cfm](http://gradstudies.ucdavis.edu/students/index.cfm)

14. **Davis wiki**  
**Services:** A useful resource for all things Davis, including activities for students with families, transportation, finding a good dentist, the best happy hours, etc.  

**Acknowledgements**

The first edition of the Beginning TA's Guide to Instruction at UC Davis was compiled and edited by Alexis Blackmer and Beth Deitchman, co-coordinators of the TA Consultant Program, 2002-2003. The second edition was completed by Mikaela Huntzinger in 2007. The third edition was completed by Mara Evans in 2011 with assistance from the 2010-2012 TACs.

Many authors contributed to the various sections of this Guide including, in alphabetical order: Alexis Blackmer, Jacob Clark Blickenstaff, Jamiella Brooks, Julie Collins, Kelly Comfort, Will Davis, Beth Deitchman, Heather Dwyer, Oswaldo Estrada, Nicholas Hall, Mikaela Huntzinger, Mara Evans, Lisa Hays, Janet Lane, Tim Larrabee, Robert Lynch, Dalia Magaña, Jeff Mason, Philip Matern, Miki Mori, Kelly Neil, Melissa Salazar, Leilani Serafin, Jon Wagner, and Alessia Zanin-Yost.

We also acknowledge several UC Davis units who made contributions to the Guide, including the Department of English, Department of Linguistics, the Graduate English as a Second Language Program, Student Judicial Affairs, and the Office of Graduate Studies.

Many journal articles and TA handbooks from other institutions were consulted for this Guide. Much of the material in this guide has been heavily informed by the work of others. To make things even more complex, many of the ideas expressed herein can be considered "common knowledge" or practice by those familiar with teaching and learning in higher education.

Below is a list of sources that prominently influenced our thinking as we developed this guide. Please consider searching their websites for additional information. If we missed recognizing your contribution, we apologize and take full responsibility for that omission.

- Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University ([ctl.stanford.edu](http://ctl.stanford.edu))
- Instructional Development Services, University of California, Irvine ([www.tltc.uci.edu](http://www.tltc.uci.edu))
- Office of Instructional Consultation, University of California, Santa Barbara ([www.id.ucsb.edu](http://www.id.ucsb.edu))
- Center for Teaching Development at the University of California, San Diego ([www.ogs.ctd.ucsd.edu/index.php](http://www.ogs.ctd.ucsd.edu/index.php))
- Teaching Resources and Continuing Education Office, University of Waterloo ([www.cte.uwaterloo.ca/](http://www.cte.uwaterloo.ca/))
2013-2014 TA Consultants

Patrick Grof-Tisza  
*Ecology*

Henry Hao  
*Economics*

Robert Lynch  
*Physics*

Miki Mori  
*Linguistics*

Kelly Neil  
*English*

Tracy Quan  
*Spanish*

Leilani Serafin  
*English*

Mai Thai  
*Sociology*

Heather Dwyer  
*Ecology, TAC Coordinator*

Philip Matern  
*Physiology, TAC Coordinator*

FREE SERVICES include:

- Videotaping and playback services
- Confidential peer consultation on teaching
- Quick answers and advice via email at tac@ucdavis.edu
- Teaching workshops and presentations
- Class interview and observation services
- Check out their blog: http://ucdtaconsultants.blogspot.com

CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS