



SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED
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Date: November 29, 2018
To: Teaching Assistant and Teaching Fellows
From: Director of Graduate Student Programs
Subject: Teaching Assistant and Teaching Fellow Supplemental Memo

Introduction

Instruction provided by Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Teaching Fellows (TFs) is an important component of our undergraduate programs. Service by graduate students as TAs/TFs is also a valuable part of graduate education. As a TA or TF in our School, you will be carrying out critical work that is greatly appreciated. TAs and TFs serve two general roles. The first, and most important, is to help the students learn the material presented in the course. The second is to assist the instructor of record (IOR) in evaluating student performance and keeping records. We look forward to working with you to create a strong partnership in educating our students.

General considerations

Treat your students pleasantly and professionally. You are their instructor, not their buddy. Be friendly and approachable, but remember that your job is to help them learn the course material and, if relevant, carry out the laboratory experiments in a safe and effective manner. Do not spend large amounts of time in class or office hours digressing into topics not related to the course.

It is important that all students in a course be treated equally. As a TA, be careful not to play favorites among your own students. If there are multiple sections of a course with different TAs, it is important to follow closely the course policies and grading rubrics set by the IOR such that students in different sections are treated equally.

Treat your students with respect, but be firm about course policies and grading. It is fine to make factual statements about a student's performance in one-on-one communications with that student, but be careful never to say anything to a student that he/she might interpret as a personal affront. Do not discuss a student's performance in the presence of other students or TAs. Always try to be as positive and encouraging as possible while being honest about the student's performance.

In general, your own course work has priority over your TA work, and your TA work has priority over everything else. Do not accept a TA assignment that conflicts in time with a course you are taking for credit. The Graduate Programs Office can help identify an assignment that fits your

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class schedule. IORs should not require TAs to participate in activities such as exam proctoring or grading during times when they are scheduled to be in class. However, TAs should not expect to be excused from TA duties to work in their research labs, travel to conferences, attend research group meetings, *etc.* Release from TA duties for these reasons is at the discretion of the IOR and must be arranged ahead of time with the IOR.

TA/TF Employment Eligibility

TA/TF must be a UC Merced graduate student in good standing, and must meet all the following basic requirements:

Enrollment: TAs or TFs must be a full-time UCM graduate student enrolled in at least 12 units during the semester of the appointment. Graduate students do not need to be registered in courses during summer session; however, they must be an active UC Merced graduate student.

Academic Standing: All students must be in good academic standing as defined in the Graduate Policies and Procedures Handbook.

Appointment: During any academic year, a graduate student may not be appointed in any capacity by the University of California beyond a maximum of 49.9% time. Between academic year sessions (semesters) and during the Spring and Summer recesses, appointments may not exceed 100% time.

Application: Any graduate student seeking employment as a TA/TF must apply for a position through the UC Merced employment web site, <https://aprecruit.ucmerced.edu/apply>.

Oral English Proficiency: International and U.S. Permanent Resident graduate students who are not citizens of countries where English is either the primary or dominant language as approved by the UCM Graduate and Research Council, who wishes to be considered for appointment as a TA or TF, must pass an approved oral English proficiency examination. There is no exception to this requirement. Additional requirements for international students seeking employment can be found in the Graduate Policies & Procedures.

Conditions of Employment

Teaching Assistant

A TA is not responsible for the instructional content of a course, for selection of student assignments, for planning of examinations, or for determining the term grade for students. Neither is the TA to be assigned responsibility for instructing the entire enrollment of a course or for providing the entire instruction of a group of students enrolled in a course. The TA is responsible only for the conduct of recitation, laboratory, or quiz sections under the active direction and supervision of a regular member of the faculty to whom responsibility for the course's entire instruction, including the performance of TAs, has been assigned.

Teaching Fellow

Subject to the general supervision of a faculty member designated in catalogues and published schedules as "in charge" of the course, a TF should be competent to provide the entire instruction

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of a lower division course to a group of students, and normally should be given such assignments. Assignment to conduct instruction in an upper division or graduate course or course section may not be made except with the approval of the Committee on Courses of Instruction (Regulations of the Academic Senate, 750)

All TA/TF appointments are made in accordance with the University of California's Academic Personnel Manual (APM) 410, UAW labor agreement and the UC Merced Graduate Policies and Procedures. You can find the manual at: [APM 410.pdf](#) .

As an Academic Student Employee, the terms and conditions of your appointment are described in the Agreement between the University of California and the International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America (UAW), AFL-CIO and its Local Union 2865. You can find the complete text of the agreement at: <http://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/labor/bargaining-units/bx/contract.html>.

Training and Orientation

All required training and orientation shall be considered part of the workload for the term, with the exception of pedagogy courses in which an ASE is required to be enrolled. Said pedagogy courses and training requirements shall not be used to reduce the number of ASE appointments.

The University may require, at its sole discretion, an ASE to satisfactorily complete required training to continue appointment as an ASE. The University may, at its sole discretion, require that an ASE who has not satisfactorily completed required training repeat training without the repeated training counting in workload. New TAs are required to participate in Graduate Orientation Week (GROW).

Unpaid activities for which academic credit is given, or that are academic program requirements for all students in the program, or are training required to meet minimum eligibility requirements (e.g., English language tests), are not considered employment activities.

Workload

A TA/TF appointed to 50% time should expect to spend an average of about 20 hours per week on assigned duties. However, the time commitment may vary considerably from week to week, particularly in courses with a fieldwork component. The total workload should not exceed 340 hours per semester or 40 hours in any given week. TAs/TFs who believe that assigned duties require a greater time commitment should discuss the matter with the primary course instructor. If that does not produce a satisfactory resolution, please see the department chair.

Responsibilities

Before Classes Start

1. **All TAs and TFs must accept or decline their appointment within one week of the transmittal of the Duty Form (Appendix C). Failure to accept an appointment in writing within a week will invalidate the appointment.**
2. TAs and TFs must be prepared to attend meetings and perform other duties as assigned at least one week prior to the scheduled start of classes.
3. Meet with the instructor in charge of your course to discuss his/her goals for the course and your duties. If the instructor has not contacted you one week prior to the start of classes, please contact the instructor to arrange for an initial meeting.
4. Familiarize yourself with the syllabi for the courses you are instructing (available at <http://naturalsciences.ucmerced.edu/academics/courses>)
5. If your course has an assigned textbook you can retain a copy by contacting the School's Curriculum Support staff.
6. Attend all required TA and laboratory training as instructed by faculty and staff.
7. Teaching assistants play a central role in insuring that UC Merced's standards of academic honesty are upheld. Familiarize yourself with UC Merced's academic honesty policies, <http://studentlife.ucmerced.edu/content/uc-conduct-standards>.

During the Semester

1. Attend lectures as required by primary course instructor (contact the instructor). Be sure that you understand the material the students are being asked to learn. Go through the assigned reading and/or lectures and if you do not understand something, ask the IOR. Work homework problems or lab report questions ahead of time so that you can help your students.
2. Attend all TA meetings and/or instructional laboratory meetings as required by primary course instructor or laboratory staff.
3. Depending on the course, you may be required to proctor midterm or final exams. The IOR should inform the TAs at the start of the course of the tentative dates and times when proctoring will be required, as well as their proctoring expectations (e.g. should the TAs answer student questions).
4. Hold at least two hours of office hours per week (for a 50% appointment). Be sure the students in your section(s) and your primary course instructor know your office hours and location. For 25% appointment other than 50%, adjust the number of office hours

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proportionately.) Office hours should be held in a readily accessible location. Do not redirect students to your research lab just because no one is there at the start of your office hours. Be sure to inform the IOR of any changes in your office hours or location. Unless advised otherwise by the IOR, TAs are expected to help any student taking the course including those from other sections.

5. Depending on the course, you may be assigned to grade lab reports, quizzes, homework, term papers, or other activities. Follow the instructions and grading rubrics provided by the IOR as closely as possible. If you believe that there is an error in a grading rubric, bring it to the IOR's attention right away. All grades for which you are responsible should be reported to the IOR and/or entered into CatCourses promptly as directed by the IOR. IORs should set clearly defined deadlines for grading to be completed and grades to be reported.
6. Return graded materials to students as directed by your primary course instructor. Note that privacy laws require graded materials be returned to students individually, not placed in a pile to be picked up. In addition to returning graded papers directly to your discussion and/or lab students, to the IOR and/or entering grades into CatCourses, you should keep your own record (*e.g.* on an Excel spreadsheet) of all grades for which you are responsible. Delete your records once grades have been assigned and the grade appeals process completed.

For additional information about student privacy, see registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/family-educational-rights-and-privacy-act-ferpa.

After Instruction Is Over

Please note that course obligations are not complete until the final exam is graded and returned to the course instructor and all course grades are entered in accordance instructor's method of course score recording. Depending on the date of the final exam, the grading process may extend into the week after the instructional end of the semester. Meet with the primary course instructor to be sure you have completed all grading and provided all input needed for grades to be assigned. Provide any other input on the course requested by the primary instructor.

Conflicts of Interest

Graduate teaching assistants must refrain from any activity or conduct that creates an apparent or actual conflict of interest. A TA must not assign grades for, or evaluate the work of, anyone he or she is closely related to or has a financial or close personal relationship with. If you think that your TA assignment might involve an actual or perceived conflict of interest, please discuss the matter with your primary course instructor and/or one of the Graduate Program Staff.

A TA may not request or accept any form of additional compensation from any student in the course to which he/she is assigned.

Benefits for Academic Student Employees)

For graduate students who are appointed as Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows at 25% time (170 hours of assigned workload) or greater within the respective semester's service period, the following benefits apply:

1. Payment of the health insurance (GSHIP) mandated student fee.
2. Partial fee remission (the sum of the Resident Tuition and Student Services Fee) during each semester of employment.
3. Partial fee remission of \$150 per semester to partially cover campus fees. This provision shall be effective with the academic term beginning January 2019.
4. Eligible for Defined Contribution Plan (DCP) coverage and UC retirement plan(s) coverage in accordance with UC plan requirements.
5. Eligible to participate in the campus' child care program, System-wide Child Care Reimbursement Program, and UC Dependent Care Reimbursement Program in accordance with provisions of the collective bargaining agreement. Additional information regarding the Childcare Reimbursement Program is on line at <https://academicpersonnel.ucmerced.edu/node/300>.
6. Eligible for military leave, pregnancy disability leave, bereavement leave, jury duty, short-term and long-term medical leave and family-related leave, and other leaves in accordance with provisions of the collective bargaining agreement.

Request for Leave and Coverage (Absences)

In order to ensure proper coverage for leaves other than long-term leaves, TAs/TFs are expected to contact the supervisor to request leave as soon as the need for the leave becomes known but not less than one (1) working day in advance of the commencement of the leave unless the leave is for an unanticipated personal or family illness or bereavement. Requests for leave shall be made in writing with information about the nature of the leave and probable duration. Upon request, the TA/TF will be required to provide appropriate documentation. While it is the University's responsibility to make arrangements for coverage, the TA/TF will assist as reasonably possible.

TAs are responsible for the education of the students in their sections and should realize that it is very difficult to replace a TA on short notice. If you are unable to meet a scheduled section because of a medical or personal emergency, immediately inform the course instructor, instructional lab staff, and/or one of the Graduate Program Staff so they can find a replacement. Be prepared to provide documentation of the reason for cancellation. For more information refer to the Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article 17 Leaves, https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/labor/bargaining-units/bx/docs/bx_2010-2013_17_leaves_ta.pdf.

Supervision and Review

1. Teaching Assistants are supervised daily by the primary course instructor.
2. The selection, supervision and training of all student teachers is an important responsibility of the teaching department, and in particular of the department chair. All candidates for appointment and reappointment should be subjected to careful review and recommendation, either by the department as a whole or by a responsible committee.

Teaching Resources – Improving Skills

TAs who are teaching in a new format or setting, are unaccustomed to the American classroom, or are simply interested in improving their teaching are encouraged to utilize the following resources.

Teaching Discussion Sections

Discussion sections provide opportunities for collaboration and active learning that do not always take place in a traditional lecture context. The role of a discussion section goes beyond clearing up any confusion remaining after the course material has been presented in lecture. Discussions also provide students with the opportunity to manipulate and apply course content, resulting in deeper learning.

Facilitating Laboratory Sections

Labs should be a process of discovery for students as they uncover the mechanisms behind important scientific principles. Your goal as a TA is to make the most effective use of the lab period in order to give students a beneficial, hands-on experience of doing science. There are aspects to teaching labs that are sometimes difficult. However, a smooth-running lab section and sound teaching techniques will provide your students with a successful and enjoyable learning environment.

TA's interested in improving their teaching skills are encouraged to utilize the following resources.

1. Center for Engaged Teaching and Learning (CETL) offers the following services

- Teaching Workshops
- Individual Consultations
- Instructional Internship Program
- Graduate Student Fellowship

CETL: Please email the center at cetl@ucmerced.edu. Website: cetl.ucmerced.edu.

2. English Language Institute (ELI) provides the following services for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)

- Weekly [Grammar](#) Workshop (fall and spring – for the entire UCM community)
- Weekly [Pronunciation & Fluency](#) Workshop (spring only – for the international UCM community)

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- 6-week Oral Communication Skills for International Scholars non-credit course (fall only – for international graduate students & postdocs)
- [Conversation Partner Program](#) (year-round – for the entire UCM community)
- [One-on-one appointments](#) to support any language-related challenges, including those related to grammar, writing, pronunciation, presentations, vocabulary, and comprehension (year-round – for the entire UCM community)
- In-class English/grammar/writing-related mini workshops in collaboration with faculty who request them
- An [English Resources](#) page to help with academic English

ELI: Please email ELI@ucmerced.edu. Website <https://cetl.ucmerced.edu/ELI>.

3. Students Assessing Teaching and Learning (SATAL) services:

SATAL satal@ucmerced.edu. Website <https://cetl.ucmerced.edu/satal>.

4. Instructional Lab assistance:

- Instructional Lab Coordinator - Physical Sciences: Dr. Donna Jaramillo-Fellin, djaramillo-fellin@ucmerced.edu
- Instructional Lab Coordinator - Life Sciences: Dr. Jim Whalen, jwhalen2@ucmerced.edu

5. Assistance with subject matter:

- Contact the instructor of the course
- View the course syllabi: [NatSci Course Syllabi \(Fall 2016 - Fall 2018\)](#)
- Discussions with fellow Teaching Assistants