



SCHOOL OF NATURAL SCIENCES
Graduate Programs

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Date: March 2, 2015
To: Teaching Assistants hired by the School of Natural Sciences
From: Paul Roberts, Interim Graduate Student Programs Director
Subject: TA Supplemental Memo Regarding Orientation, Support, Duties and Evaluation

Introduction

Instruction provided by graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) is an important component of our undergraduate programs. Service by graduate students as teaching assistants is also a valuable part of graduate education. As a Teaching Assistant or Teaching Fellow in our School, you will be carrying out critical work that is greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with you to create a strong partnership in educating our students.

This memo describes your responsibilities as a TA, as well required orientation and training, the support provided to you and the procedure for evaluation of your performance.

Supervision and Support for TAs

Teaching Assistants are supervised on a daily basis by the primary course instructor. That person should clearly outline the goals of the course and your duties, and provide you with the support you need to carry them out. Your work may also be directed by instructional staff who are assigned to support the delivery of instruction.

Should you have any questions regarding your assignment, please contact the primary course instructor. You can also contact one of the Graduate Program Staff in the School of Natural Sciences at snsgrads@ucmerced.edu or the School's general phone number, (209) 228-4309.

Should you feel that your duties are not adequately defined, or that you are not being provided with the necessary direction or support you need to carry them out, you should first discuss the matter with your primary course instructor. If difficulties persist, please inform one of the Graduate Program Staff and we will do our best to address the problems. In addition, 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>.

Orientation

New TAs are required to participate in Graduate and Research Orientation Week (GROW). Specific information, including schedules, is provided to each TA based on their course assignment prior to the start of GROW.

Duties

Most TA appointments are at 50% time. A 50% TA should expect to spend an average of about 20 hours per week on teaching duties. However, the time commitment may vary considerably from week to week, particularly in courses with a fieldwork component. The total workload for a 50% TA is not to exceed 340 hours per semester or 40 hours in any given week. TA's who believe that assigned duties require a greater time commitment should discuss the matter with the primary course instructor. If direct communication with the primary course instructor does not resolve the issue, TA's should contact one of the Graduate Program Staff.

Before Classes Start

1. Please be prepared to attend meetings and perform other duties as assigned at least one week prior to the scheduled start of classes. For more information, see the on-line schedule at registrar.ucmerced.edu/go/schedule.
2. If you are assigned to a course with multiple Teaching Assistants, please work with them to determine who will cover which sections, and report your sections/schedules to your primary course instructor.
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.

A Sample Agreement for Instructor and TA Roles and Responsibilities is available at http://naturalsciencesgrads.ucmerced.edu/sites/naturalsciencesgrads.ucmerced.edu/files/page/documents/sample_instructor-ta_agreement_for_roles_and_responsibilities_2_0.doc.

4. Familiarize yourself with the syllabus and the Student Learning Outcomes for the course, for which you are instructing (available at naturalsciences.ucmerced.edu/academics). Contact your primary course instructor to request these materials if they are not provided to you. If you have questions about how to use student learning outcomes in your teaching, talk to the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence, http://crte.ucmerced.edu/ta_services.
5. If your course has an assigned textbook, contact the School's Curriculum Support staff at the School's general number (209) 228-4309.
6. Attend any required TA training sessions, orientations, and laboratory safety instruction meetings as instructed by faculty or staff.

7. Familiarize yourself with UC Merced's academic regulations regarding such issues as grading policy, dropping and adding courses, *etc.* TAs do not assign course grades and cannot approve dropping or adding courses, but you should be aware of the policies.

Add/Drop/Withdraw policy: <http://registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/adddropwithdraw>

Grades policy: <http://registrar.ucmerced.edu/policies/grades>

8. 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>. You should make reasonable efforts to avoid making it easy or tempting for students to cheat. However, it is your responsibility to be alert to all forms of academic dishonesty and inform the course instructor immediately if you suspect problems.

During the Semester

1. Prepare for class and give clear presentations of the material to your students. Support student learning by linking each class activity, assignment, or quiz to the Student Learning Outcomes that are established for your course. Be sure everything you do in class is related to the goals and student learning outcomes of the course.
2. Maintain a professional and respectful relationship with your students, instructor, and co-TAs (if any).
3. Attend lectures as required by primary course instructor (contact the instructor).
4. Be on time for all assigned meetings of your section(s).
5. Attend all TA meetings and/or instructional laboratory meetings, which may involve performing laboratory experiments ahead of time, as required by primary course instructor or laboratory staff.
6. Hold at least two hours of office hours per week (for a 50% appointment) and be prepared to devote all of that time to meeting with students. Be sure the students in your section(s) and your primary course instructor know your office hours and location. (For appointments other than 50%, adjust the number of office hours proportionately.)
7. Write or provide questions for quizzes and exams as required by primary course instructor.
8. Work exams and quizzes ahead of time as requested and report problems to the primary course instructor in a timely manner. Be careful not to divulge specific information about the content of upcoming exams or quizzes to students.
9. Proctor exams including midterms as scheduled by the primary course instructor and final exams as scheduled by the Registrar. Proctor exams actively to guard against cheating.

Be alert to all forms of academic dishonesty and inform the course instructor immediately if you suspect problems.

10. Grade laboratory reports, homework problems, quizzes, and exams as required by primary course instructor and submit all scores for which you are responsible to the primary course instructor, and/or post scores to UCMCROPS as required, before the designated deadline.
11. 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.

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

12. Convey to your primary course instructor in a timely manner any problems with individual students.
13. Participate in required Professional Development activities as described elsewhere in this memo.

After Instruction Is Over

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.

Depending on the date of the final exam, the grading process may extend into the week after the instructional end of the semester.

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.

Teaching assistants are allowed and encouraged to offer help to their students outside of regular class or office hours. However, such sessions should be conducted in a professional manner within the duties of the teaching assignment. A TA may not request or accept any form of additional compensation from any student in the course to which he/she is assigned.

Request for Leave and Coverage (Absences)

In order to ensure proper coverage for leaves other than long-term leaves, ASEs 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 ASE will be required to provide appropriate documentation. While it is the University's responsibility to make arrangements for coverage, the ASE 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.

Evaluations and Re-appointment

In accordance with UC Academic Personnel Manual Article 410, TA appointments are self-terminating unless the appointee is otherwise notified. Each TA may be evaluated at the end of every semester for adherence to the requirements listed above. If the work has been judged satisfactory, the TA will be eligible to be reappointed for future teaching.

1. Comments may be solicited from other faculty, instructors, or laboratory coordinators with whom the TA interacted.
2. Student teaching evaluations will be considered.

Ongoing Professional Development

SNS TAs are highly encouraged to attend one professional development workshop during each semester in which they work as a TA. We encourage all TAs to participate or utilize the following:

1. Attendance at a workshop offered by the Center for Research on Teaching Excellence (CRTE)
2. Participation in CRTE's *Student Assessment of Teaching and Learning* service (SATAL)
Participation in a one-on-one consultation with CRTE
3. Service as a volunteer for a TA training workshop with CRTE or SNS faculty

For additional information on workshops and services offered by CRTE, see crte.ucmerced.edu.