TA Handbook

Department of Statistics and Applied Probability at UCSB

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1 Preface

Welcome to the TA Handbook, prepared for Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the Department of Statistics and Applied Probability (PSTAT) at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB).

Part I

Preliminaries

2 Teaching Mission Statement

Text will go here. This is a test of editing the text of the website, and checking that the changes are reflected on github.

3 Staff and Faculty Leadership

- **Student Affairs Manager:** Myranda Flores [she/her] (studentaffairs@pstat.ucsb.edu)

  - Oversees hiring and payroll for academic employees in the department.

  - Coordinates the assignment of Teaching Assistants to sections
  - Has copies of textbooks that TAs can borrow for use in their course during the quarter

- **Undergraduate Advisors:** Ellery Wilkie [she/her] and Yan Laschev [he/him] (undergradadvisor@pstat.ucsb.edu)

  - Coordinates classroom scheduling for departmental courses
  - Assists with DSP exam accommodations

- **Academic Coordinator:** Jessie Priestley [she/her] (academic-coordinator@pstat.ucsb.edu)

  - Hires and onboards ULAs

- **Department Chair:** Tomoyuki Ichiba [he/him] (ichiba@pstat.ucsb.edu)

  - Oversees planning and budgeting for the department,
  - Hires instructors including Graduate Student Teaching Associates.

- **Director of Graduate Studies:** Drew Carter [he/him] (carter@pstat.ucsb.edu)

  - The DGS is responsible for assigning TAs to courses,
  - Makes hiring decision regarding Teaching Assistants and Reader,
  - Interprets policies for academic employees.

- **Teaching Assistant Training Coordinator:** It would be really nice if we had someone with a title like this.

- **Lead TA:** Ethan Marzban [he/him] (epmarzban@pstat.ucsb.edu)

- Leads the TA Training program
- Acts as a liaison between graduate students and departmental leadership

Part II

Expectations for Teaching Assistants

4 Description of TA Duties from Instructor

Text will go here.

5 Communication between TAs and Instructors

Text will go here.

6 Workload Expectations

Text will go here.

7 Discussion Sections

Text will go here.

8 Office Hours

Text will go here.

9 Grading

Text will go here.

10 Creation of Course Materials

Text will go here.

Part III

Hiring Procedures

11 Teaching Assistant Applications

During the Summer before the new academic year begins, the department will send the annual Teaching Assistant Application. Graduate students who would like to be considered for a teaching assistant position must complete this form.

Please be as detailed as possible, especially for the following sections.

- *Workload Expectations* It is common for graduate students to work at 50% full time employment (FTE) which equates to 20 hours per week as well as two sections of a course. It is important for the Department to know your availability per quarter as section assignments are made. For example, if you anticipate having a Graduate Student Research position and would like to split your time between that appointment and the teaching assistant position, the department can make adjustments to your TA course assignments.

- *Prior TA Experience* If you have been a teaching assistant for the PSTAT department in the past, you may list your experience here. You can list which courses in the department you have previously taught.

- *TA/Reader Assignment Preferences* This section will allow you to pick which courses you would like to be assigned to teach. While first choice classes may not be guaranteed, the department tries to accommodate as many preferences as possible.

- *Other skills and qualifications* Students may list other qualifications that may be helpful when assigning TAs to courses. Additional information such as proficiency in software packages, previous graduate degrees, passed actuarial exams would be important to note here.

The information from the teaching assistant application will be used by the Director of Graduate Studies to assign graduate students to courses for the entire academic year. You should receive information about the courses that you will be assigned at the beginning of the year. Assignments to the specific sections of their courses and finalization of the schedule will occur at the start of each quarter. You should receive this information from the Student Affairs Manager.

12 Section Assignments

Once course assignments are completed, the Student Affairs Manager (SAM see Chapter 3) will assign TAs to sections of their course. Instructors and all teaching assistants will have the schedules communicated to them by the SAM via email before the quarter starts.

12.1 Schedule Conflicts

If TAs have a time conflict with their assigned section, it is recommended to try to switch sections with another TA in that same course, if possible. After exhausting all options (another way to say this?) then the next step would be to communicate with the DGS to be switched into a different course.

12.2 Confirming Section Assignments

If there are no conflicts with your assigned section, please confirm with the SAM that your assignment is finalized. This will trigger the SAM and UPA to assign you to the section in GOLD and eGrades, which will grant you access to the course website in Canvas. In addition, your end-of-the-quarter ESCI evaluations will be assigned based on what is listed in eGrades.

Part IV

Evaluation of Teaching Assistant Performance

13 Student Evaluations

At the end of each quarter, the students will give feedback about your section via the Evaluation System for Courses and Instruction (ESCI). These are online surveys where students answer questions about the course on a scale of 1 to 5, and the students also are given the opportunity to make comments. The system is available in the last weeks of the quarter for students to complete the survey. Discuss with your instructor whether they want you to give reminders to your students or set aside time in section for students to complete the ESCI forms.

After the quarter has ended, you will receive the results of the ESCI's. Thinking carefully about the feedback is an important tool for improving your teaching. Try not to worry too much about a single negative comment, but instead try to use all of the results to understand how your students experienced the course and your teaching. Consider changes that you could make to your approach in section to address the concerns of students. It may be useful to discuss the ESCI responses with your instructor or Head TA if you are not sure what the feedback means.

14 Feedback From Instructors

The instructor of each course is able to give feedback both to the Teaching Assistants and to the department regarding performance of the Teaching Assistant duties.

Part V

Getting Help with Teaching

15 Keeping Students Engaged in Section

Fostering active student engagement in section is vital for effective learning. Before the course commences, it is crucial to clarify the instructor's expectations for the sections. Depending on the course, some may follow a highly structured approach, providing a designated timeline and activities for each section, while others may grant more autonomy to the TA. Regardless of the level of flexibility, there are various strategies that can be effectively utilized to enhance student engagement.

While numerous engagement strategies are available, we will focus on a few of our favorites. To begin your first section on a positive note, employ fun and interactive icebreaker activities that foster a welcoming and collaborative learning environment. When suitable, connect the course material to real-world applications, making it more interesting and relevant for the students. Encourage small group discussions to promote active participation and cultivate collaborative learning dynamics. Integrate polls and other interactive activities, such as think-pair-share exercises, to sustain students' involvement and attentiveness throughout the section.

Above all, remember to be approachable and attentive to your students' needs. Regularly assess their understanding of the material by posing thoughtful questions, and if possible, engage in one-on-one check-ins. Demonstrating genuine care for their learning journey and offering support will establish a positive learning atmosphere. Ultimately, these practices will foster a more enriching and rewarding educational experience for everyone involved. By adopting these engagement strategies and maintaining a supportive learning environment, you can empower students to thrive in their academic journey.

Part VI

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

16 Electronic Resources

16.1 Canvas

Currently, UCSB utilizes **Canvas** (canvas.ucsb.edu) as the primary learning management system on which most course sites are built. **LSIT** (Letters and Sciences IT) offers several resources for students and instructors that are new to the Canvas learning system at https://help.lsit.ucsb.edu/hc/en-us/categories/5360081368475-Canvas; additionally, you can submit a "help ticket" for one-on-one (virtual) help using the following link: https://help.lsit.ucsb.edu/hc/en-us/requests/new?ticket_form_id=1260809796629

16.2 Gradescope

Many instructors also utilize **Gradescope** to aid in the uploading, management, and grading of student assessments. You can log into gradescope by navigating to http://gradescope.com/ and logging in with your UCSB credentials- please note that your `@umail.ucsb.edu` address and your `@ucsb.edu` address will have separate Gradescope accounts unless you physically merge them; we encourage you to merge these accounts as soon as possible to avoid any future confusion when logging in to specific Gradescope course sites. You can find information on how to merge your Gradescope accounts at https://help.gradescope.com/article/ipjyg27lg5-student-merge-accounts.

17 Teaching Supplies

17.1 Textbooks

As a TA, you will not be expected to purchase copies of textbooks required for or utilized in courses you are TAing. Rather, the department provides rental copies of textbooks currently utilized in most of the major PSTAT courses, which are to be returned back to the department in good condition at the end of the quarter. You can contact the Student Affairs Manager for further details on the pickup and return of these textbooks.

17.2 Office Supplies

You will not be expected to purchase office supplies that directly relate to your teaching duties; e.g. chalk, whiteboard markers, etc. Rather, the department provides supplies like these to graduate students in the so-called "Supply Drawer", located in the PSTAT Main Office (SH 5607). Please note that the office is always locked outside of business hours and also on days when the Staff are remote, so please plan accordingly.