TA Handbook

Department of Statistics and Applied Probability at UCSB

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1 Introduction

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

This handbook seeks to clarify and codify the general expectations of Teaching Assistants (TAs) in the department, but also contains useful and important information for Graders, ULAs (Undergraduate Learning Assistants), and Instructors. As such, we encourage all members of the department (whether they are TAs or not) to read this handbook, to ensure everyone is aware of the policies outlined therein.

Part I

Teaching in the Department of Statistics and Applied Probability

2 Teaching Mission Statement

The Mission of the Department of Statistics and Applied Probability is, in part, to provide education and training to UCSB students in the areas of statistics, data science, actuarial science, financial mathematics, and applied probability. We seek to educate and prepare the future workforce of data scientists and quantitative thinkers.

Our graduate students are given the opportunity to work as Teaching Assistants, Graders/Readers, and Teaching Associates in order to help further these educational goals. Our TAs work together with faculty, instructors, and colleagues to provide a broader reach to our teaching, to give additional perspective and context to classroom material, and to interact more closely with students. A Teaching Assistant position is also a key part of graduate student training in that it brings greater understanding of the key material in statistics and applied probability as well as preparing the next generation of teachers.

Our graduate students come from diverse backgrounds that strengthen our department as a whole. As stated in the PSTAT Department Mission Statement,

> Increasing diversity across our field is essential in creating more productive, representative, and enriching outcomes as well as innovative solutions to critical problems. We recognize that, historically, the job markets and academic communities in statistical theory and methods, financial mathematics, and actuarial science have been weighted toward racial, gender, and socioeconomically privileged communities. We are dedicated to correcting this imbalance in our own community.

To this end, Teaching Assistants are encouraged to bring their own unique personal history and perspective to their role in ways that contribute to educating our students. They should also reach out across categories and intersectionalities to support every student who comes to our classes.

3 Staff and Faculty Leadership

Staff

- **Student Affairs Manager (SAM)** and **Graduate Program Advisor (GPA)**: 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)
  - Coordinate classroom scheduling for departmental courses
  - Assist with exam accommodations through the Disabled Students Program (DSP)
- **Academic Coordinator:** Jessie Priestley [she/her] (academic-coordinator@pstat.ucsb.edu)
  - Hires and onboards Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs)

Academic Leadership

- **Director of Graduate Studies (DGS):** Drew Carter [he/him] (carter@pstat.ucsb.edu)
  - Assigns TAs to courses
  - Makes hiring decisions regarding Teaching Assistants and Readers
  - Interprets policies for academic employees
- **Lead TA:** Ethan Marzban [he/him] (epmarzban@pstat.ucsb.edu)
  - Leads the TA Training program (PSTAT 501)
  - Acts as a liaison between graduate students and departmental leadership

- **Teaching Assistant Training Coordinators:** Jack Miller [they/them] (jbmiller@ucsb.edu), Julie Swenson (she/her)(swenson@pstat.ucsb.edu), Julie Swenson
  - Support TAs in matters related to classroom instruction
  - Available for TA consultations
  - Support the DGS with matters related to TAs

Part II

Expectations for Graders and ULAs

4 Expectations for Graders

Graders (or "Readers" which is their official job title) are hired to grade student work. Typically, graders are given weekly homework papers to grade. Most often the course instructor will provide solutions to the assigned questions as well as a rubric describing how points are to be assigned in the grading. It is your responsibility to make sure that you understand the intentions of your instructor both as to what answers are considered acceptable and also how points should be distributed for partially correct answers. (See Grading)

Time Cards Unlike Teaching Assistant positions, Grader (Reader) positions are hired as hourly employees. This means that you are responsible for keeping track of the number of hours you spend each week grading papers. These hours should include any time that you spend working on solutions or understanding the material in preparation for grading.

At the end of each pay period, Graders will need to submit a time card via the university system. Readers will be required to report their worked hours into the Kronos Timekeeping system. Graders are on a biweekly pay period, and should receive reminders from the Kronos system to log hours and approve each timecard.

Graders work with their course Instructor to be sure that they are grading the appropriate number of hours. It is crucial that the total number of hours worked matches the amount budgeted at the end of the quarter. It is also important to note that Graders are eligible to receive tuition remission if they have at least 100 hours reported in Kronos by the end of the quarter.

For example, If you were told that you were assigned two courses for grading 65 hours for one and 35 hours for the other, at the end of the quarter it is okay if you have worked 55 hours and 45 hours, but the total number of hours needs to be 100. You should also coordinate with the instructors of both of those courses so that they understand how you are using your time.

Work together with your Instructor to schedule when you have grading to do. It is often the case that there is more grading to be done in later weeks of the quarter than at the beginning. This is to be expected. You can mitigate the effects on your schedule by finishing your grading work in a timely manner. You do not want your unfinished work to build up as more homework comes in each week. Let your instructor know if there are weeks when you will be particularly busy so that they can try to schedule the grading appropriately. Especially during finals week, you will want to plan ahead and know how much work you will be expected to do. Leave enough space in your schedule to complete the grading on time. In the rare case

that something comes up such that you do not think you will be able to complete your grading in time, make sure to communicate with the Instructor as far in advance as possible.

5 Expectations for ULAs

Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs) play a valuable role within the teaching team, offering additional support to enhance students' academic success in the course. ULAs are equipped to provide numerous forms of assistance, including but not limited to, assisting in discussions or lab activities, conducting tutoring sessions for small groups, holding office hours, hosting review sessions, and facilitating study groups. The PSTAT Department offers dedicated tutoring space that can be conveniently scheduled by ULAs.

It is important to note that while ULAs are well-qualified to provide various forms of support, certain responsibilities are restricted to other instructional staff members, such as faculty, Teaching Associates, or Teaching Assistants. ULAs are not authorized to lead discussion or lab sections, assign grades to student work, or independently handle activities designated for the aforementioned personnel.

ULAs are hired as hourly employees and assigned a fixed number of weekly hours. They are not required to work during finals week. If there is a need for any modifications to their allocated hours, ULAs must promptly communicate such requests in advance to both the department and the instructor. Moreover, ULAs are responsible for tracking their worked hours, as this information will be required for their time card.

Part III

Expectations for Teaching Assistants

6 TA-Instructor Communication

6.1 Description of TA Duties from Instructor

A key component of ensuring that courses run smoothly is communication, especially between TAs and Instructors. Before the start of the quarter, the Instructor will reach out to you and convey additional information about the course as well as their expectations of you as a TA. This often takes the form of an introductory meeting between the Instructor and all TAs of the course (as well as the Head TA, if applicable), though certain instructors prefer to communicate this initial set of expectations through email instead of a meeting. Regardless of the mode of communication, the Instructor will make sure you are aware of your duties in the course.

6.2 Communication between TA and Instructor

Most communication between TAs and Instructors takes place over email; as such, you should ensure that you are checking your email regularly and making sure that emails are not being left unanswered for extended periods of time. In particular, you should make every effort to respond to Instructor emails within one or two business days of when they are sent. Similarly, Instructors will make every effort to respond to your emails within the same time period (one-to-two business days).

Please note that, in certain extraordinary circumstances, you may be asked to respond to emails over the weekend (e.g., if the final exam for the course for which you are a TA falls on a Saturday). This will not, however, be a regular expectation of you.

In certain cases, it may be necessary/beneficial to adopt a second mode of communication between TAs and Instructors. This can take the form of a Nectir Chat, Slack Channel, Discord Server, Google Chat Room, etc. If your Instructor chooses to establish such a resource, you should also ensure that you are checking it regularly and that, again, communications are not being left unanswered for extended periods of time.

7 Workload Expectations

Teaching Assistants are generally hired at either 50% or 25% time. A 50% TA is responsible for two discussion sections, and a 25% TA is responsible for one discussion section. The expectation is that the workload is about 10 hours per week for each discussion section that you are responsible for. However, not every week is the same, and some weeks will be busier than others.

There are Union Rules (see Glossary) which stipulate that TAs hired at 50% time may not be assigned work exceeding 220 hours per quarter (110 for 25% positions). Furthermore, no one can be asked to work for more than 40 hours in any given week or more than 8 hours in a given day. Additional rules and specific details are provided in Section 32 of the amended UAW 2865 contract.

What this typically means is that you will not be asked to work in excess of 20 hours per week on a regular basis for your TA duties (10 hours if you are a 25% TA). These 20 (10) hours include time spent:

- Preparing for Sections
- Leading Sections
- Hosting Office Hours
- Attending lectures (if you are asked to do so)
- Answering student and/or Instructor emails
- Grading
- Taking attendance
- Reviewing course material and/or assessments (if applicable)

If you feel that the workload being asked of you is in danger of approaching or exceeding the above-stated limits, you are encouraged to reach out to the Instructor to discuss adjusting your workload. Should discussions with the Instructor prove to be unsuccessful, you are encouraged to reach out to either the Teaching Assistant Training Coordinators or the Lead TA.

Please note: you are expected to prepare for each of the sections and Office Hours (OH) you lead. Above all, this entails working through any provided material (e.g., worksheets, homework, etc.) **fully** before coming into your section/OH, and ensuring that you are able to answer questions about the material without having to reference the solutions. That is, you should not prepare by just skimming over the solutions provided to you–make sure you can solve all problems on your own, and that you are able to answer student questions adequately.

It is unfair to your students if you come to Sections or Office Hours underprepared, especially if you are simply "reading from the solutions" and not providing any additional insight.

As a TA, the notion of "business hours" can become a bit complicated, especially if you are leading a section late in the evening (be aware that some sections for courses meet from 7 - 7:50pm). It is important for your own mental health to set boundaries with regards to the times of day during which you will be working on your TA duties, and the times during which you will not. As always, the amount of work you spend on your TA duties should not exceed the maxima outlined above.

You will typically not be asked to work on weekends or holidays (though, depending on your own schedule, you may find it prudent to plan/prepare for sections over the weekend, especially if you are holding a section on Monday). Course staff meetings should also not be scheduled on weekends or holidays except in extreme or emergency circumstances. One exception is the initial meeting Instructors hold with their TAs–these meetings almost always occur either during break or during the weekend right before the start of the quarter. You should make every effort to be available for this meeting, just as the Instructor will make every effort to be respectful of your time and keep the meeting from running too long.

> **Tip**
>
> Communication is key!

8 Recurring Duties

8.1 Discussion Sections

TAs hired at 50% time will be responsible for leading 2 sections per week, and TAs hired at 25% will be responsible for leading 1 section per week. Please note that for lower division courses (i.e., PSTAT 5A, PSTAT 5LS, and PSTAT 10) each section meets twice a week (so, a 50% TA in PSTAT 5A will be holding 4 x 50 = 200 minutes of section per week).

The specific duties you will be expected to carry out while leading sections often vary significantly across courses and instructors. A typical section will consist of a review portion (in which you review lecture material for your students) along with some time for students to work through a worksheet or lab activity. Certain sections, however, are led like an Office Hour and are more flexible in structure. If you are unclear about how you are expected to lead sections, please reach out to the Instructor.

Note: Please refrain from going through questions on the homework assignments prior to the due dates unless the Instructor has indicated that this is okay.

8.2 Office Hours

Typically, TAs are expected to hold one hour of weekly Office Hours per Section led. This means that TAs appointed at 25% time usually host one (1) hour of Office Hours per week, and TAs appointed at 50% time usually host two (2) Office Hours per week.

The Office Hour is a time when students in your discussion section can come and ask you questions about the class. This typically involves questions about the assignments. Though you are allowed to hold office hours in your cubicle/office space, you also have the option of using the following portal) to reserve one of the following classrooms:

- South Hall 5421 (commonly referred to as the "StatLab")
- Building 434 Room 113
- Building 434 Room 126

Please note that some courses may deviate from these norms. For example, an Instructor who provides all Section materials and homework solutions for a particular course might ask you to hold 1.5 office hours per Section instead of 1 office hour per section.

8.3 Grading

Certain Instructors expect TAs to aid in the grading of assignments and assessments. It is typical for TAs to grade assessments that take place during Sections they lead (e.g., quizzes, worksheets, labs, etc.). As a TA, you may also be asked to grade homework assignments should the Instructor deem it necessary. It is also typical for TAs to grade exams (midterms and finals) under the guidance of the Instructor.

Some Instructors grade using online tools (e.g., Gradescope, Canvas), whereas others prefer to grade on paper and in person. If your Instructor decides on in-person/synchronous grading, they (or the Head TA) will likely coordinate blocks of time for grading sessions during which you will be asked to come to campus and grade exams. Again, though, the workload asked of you should never exceed the maxima outlined in the section on Workload Expectations above. Please communicate with the Instructor and/or Head TA if you feel your grading obligations will extend your workload beyond a reasonable amount.

It is your responsibility as a TA to ensure you complete the grading of assignments and assessments by the deadlines set by the Instructor (deadlines that will often be discussed with and agreed upon by all members of the Course Staff). It is not fair to students to have to wait extended periods of time before receiving feedback on their work. Additionally, please let the Instructor know if you have any major assessments for your own classes or qualifying exams coming up that may interfere with the typical timing of grading assessments.

8.4 Proctoring Exams

As part of your TA duties, you may be expected to proctor exams during the quarter. Please note that even as a TA employed at 25% time you may still be asked to proctor all exams for the course; the expectation is that the Instructor will modify your workload in other capacities correspondingly to ensure your workload is consistent with your official appointment.

It is the responsibility of the Instructor to provide additional information if needed regarding what specific duties are entailed in the proctoring of an exam. For in-person exams, most instructors expect proctors to maintain a vigilant eye on the students in the room, and to report any suspicious behavior to the Instructor or Head TA (if applicable) as soon as possible. Additional proctoring duties may include: distribution and collection of exams, answering of student questions during the duration of the exam, providing a headcount of students present in the exam room, etc.

Vigilance during exam proctoring is key. While proctoring, you should not be continually on your phone, working on your own projects, or talking with other proctors. Not only is this sort of behavior counterproductive, it can also disrupt students while they are taking their exams. Rather, keep an active eye on students and follow any instructions given to you by your Instructor and/or Head TA carefully.

If timed assessments/quizzes take place during Section times, you will likely be responsible for the proctoring of these assessments. You may also be expected to aid in the creation of Section-specific assessments, as outlined in the following section of this Handbook (Creation of Course Materials).

9 Creation of Course Materials

The overall creation of course materials is something that the Instructor is expected to carry out, and is not generally something you (as a TA) will be expected to do. However, as a TA, you may be asked to aid in the creation or modification of certain course materials.

More specifically, you may be asked to oversee the creation of materials for assessments that take place during your Section Time (e.g., weekly quizzes). The creation of such material, however, is designed to be more akin to "versioning", and will likely entail simply adapting pre-existing course materials (e.g., homework problems, textbook exercises, etc.) by changing a few words and numbers. You may, additionally, be expected to create the solutions to these assessments. The rationale behind this expectation is that you will likely be responsible for the administration and proctoring – and possibly even the grading of – these assessments; as such, your involvement in every stage of their development is paramount.

So, as a general rule of thumb: you may be asked to contribute to or create assessments (and their solutions) that will take place during Section. All other course material should be created by the Instructor. As always, if you foresee any difficulties in or concerns with carrying out these duties, please communicate with the Instructor, Head TA, or department (by way of either the Lead TA, the Teaching Assistant Training Coordinators, or the Graduate Program Advisor).

10 Responsibilities of a Head TA

The primary function of a Head TA is to facilitate communication between TAs and the Instructor of the course. Head TAs are typically only assigned to very large classes such as 5A, 5LS, 10, or 120A.

If you are a TA for a course with a Head TA, it is possible that your primary means of communication with the Instructor will be through the Head TA. Questions regarding specific student circumstances or general course logistics should in many cases be directed to the Head TA, who may decide to include the Instructor on future communications. Furthermore, weekly/regular TA meetings may be led exclusively by the Head TA in certain circumstances, though the Instructor is still expected to maintain a heavy presence in the administration of the course.

A Head TA position comes with extra responsibility, and so it is generally offered only to more senior, experienced Teaching Assistants who are familiar with the workings and logistics of that particular course. Head TAs are selected from recommendations by the instructors and the TA training team. The compensation for taking on this leadership role is a reduction in the number of sections that you will be asked to lead. If you are interested in becoming a Head TA in a future quarter, please talk to your Instructor or the DGS.

Part IV

Hiring Procedures

11 Hiring Procedures

11.1 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 (who is also the Graduate Program Advisor).

11.2 Section Assignments

Once course assignments are completed, the Student Affairs Manager (SAM) 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.

11.2.1 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 checking with all other TAs for the course (and the Head TA for the course, if applicable) then the next step would be to communicate with the DGS to be switched into a different course.

11.2.2 Confirming Section Assignments

If ther3e are no conflicts with your assigned section, please confirm with the SAM that your assign9ment is finalized. This will trigger the SAM and Undergraduate Program Advisors (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 teaching evaluations will be assigned based on what is listed in eGrades.

Part V

Evaluation of Teaching Assistant Performance

12 Student Evaluations

At the end of each quarter, the students will give feedback about your section via Explorance Blue (known as "Blue"). Blue is new to UCSB for Fall 2023, so more information will come out during the quarter. These are online surveys where students answer questions about the course and about you as an instructor on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree). The University and the Department will have a set series of questions that the students are asked, and you may be able to add custom questions. Students are also asked to provide comments about the quality of instruction in the course. Blue will be available in the last weeks of each 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 teaching evaluations.

After the quarter has ended, you will receive the results of your teaching evaluations. 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 comments and quantitative 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 Blue responses with your Instructor, the Teaching Assistant Training Coordinators, or Head TA if you are not sure what the feedback means.

13 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. There is a Departmental Teaching Assistant Evaluation form which Instructors complete for each TA at the end of the quarter. Some of this feedback should also be sent on to the TAs.

Instructors are unlikely to have direct knowledge regarding the performance of a TA in the classroom. However, they are able to give feedback on grading and the other aspects of working together to run a course. Instructors will also often get feedback directly from students regarding sections. It can be useful for the TAs to listen to this feedback whether it is praise of a compelling teacher or concerns about the classroom.

Evaluation forms submitted by the Instructors are kept by the department. They are primarily used to find the best candidates for Head or Lead TA positions as well as Summer Teaching Associates. The evaluations also provide information to help find the best fit for a TA into a course in a future quarter.

In the assignment of TAs to sections at the start of quarter, Instructor recommendations are given a high priority. A good team of TAs and instructors can lead to the best outcomes for our students.

Part VI

Getting Help with Teaching

14 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 both the Instructor's and your 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. You can find some ideas for icebreakers here. As you go throughout the quarter, connect the course material to real-world applications when suitable, 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.

Please find below additional resources that can help:

- https://id.ucsb.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/engaging-students/overview
- https://id.ucsb.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/ta-programs/pillars-of-teaching-assistantship
- https://id.ucsb.edu/teaching/ta-training/video-consultation

15 Managing Your Time and Dealing with Stress

Effective time management and stress management are crucial skills for TAs to navigate their roles successfully. As a TA you will juggle multiple responsibilities as a TA – including leading sections, grading assignments, collaborating with instructors, and answering emails – in addition to taking your own classes. Adopting strategies to manage your time efficiently is therefore essential.

One key aspect of effective time management is setting clear priorities. This is accomplished by identifying the most critical tasks and allocating time accordingly. Prioritizing tasks based on deadlines, urgency, and importance allows you to stay organized and focused. Utilizing tools like to-do lists or time management apps can aid in keeping track of tasks and deadlines.

Another effective time management strategy is creating a structured schedule. You can designate specific time blocks for various responsibilities, such as preparing for sections, grading, and emails. This structured approach helps minimize distractions and ensures that each task receives adequate attention. Finally, you can enhance time management by learning to coordinate with your instructional team when possible. Collaborating with other TAs or seeking guidance from instructors can help distribute the workload, fostering a more balanced and efficient environment.

At times during the quarter, you may experience stress. To effectively deal with stress, be sure to practice self-care and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Engaging in activities that you enjoy, whether it is hobbies, exercise, or spending time with friends, can provide a much-needed respite from work-related pressures. Additionally, mindfulness practices, such as meditation or deep breathing exercises, can help you manage stress in the moment. Taking short breaks during intense periods can also prevent burnout and allow you to return to your tasks with renewed focus.

Seeking support from colleagues and supervisors is vital when facing stress or challenges. Having a support network to share experiences and seek advice can provide valuable insights and encouragement. Most importantly, it's essential for you to be realistic about your capabilities and to know when to ask for help. Acknowledging limitations and seeking assistance when needed can prevent you from becoming overwhelmed and ensure that you can perform your duties effectively.

> **Tip**
>
> Make sure to manage your time, set clear priorities and boundaries, create a structured schedule, and practice self-care and maintain a healthy work-life balance. Also make sure to reach out to your colleagues and supervisors whenever necessary!

15.1 University Resources

- Instructional Development's material for New TAs: https://id.ucsb.edu/teaching/ta-training/new-tas
- UCSB Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): https://caps.sa.ucsb.edu/
- Student health
- Current agreement between the UC (University of California) and UAW 2865 (the union to which TAs belong): https://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/labor/bargaining-units/bx/contract.html

Part VII

Managing Issues as a Teaching Assistant

16 Classroom Issues and Distressed Students

16.1 Classroom Issues

The classroom is meant to be a place where student learning and understanding is fostered and promoted. On rare occasions, you may have a student who disrupts the learning environment with their behavior or comments. If a student exhibits disruptive behavior in the classroom, try to remain calm and ask the student to refrain from the disruptive behavior or commenting. According to the UCSB Office of Student Conduct, after notifying the student of questionable, offending, disruptive conduct and giving them the opportunity to respond and/or the opportunity to correct the behavior, an instructor may exclude from class, either temporarily or permanently, any student whose conduct is disruptive toward the instructor or other members of the class. If you need to dismiss a student from the classroom, let the Instructor know as soon as possible so that appropriate actions (e.g., formal reporting) can be taken.

16.2 Distressed Students

UCSB is committed to providing a quality learning environment. As a TA, you may be the first to encounter a student who is in distress. Encouragement and helping the student to seek assistance with the appropriate campus and community resources are key. UCSB has multiple professionals poised to respond to distressed students. These staff members include social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and coordinators of student mental health services.

The University provides a number of different resources including Distressed Student Response Protocols. **It is important to review this material at the start of the quarter so that you know what is available if a difficult situation arises.**

> **!** Important
>
> Go through the Distressed Student Protocol (linked above) before the start of the quarter to ensure you are well-versed in its content and its structure.

17 Managing Conflicts between TAs and Students

Teaching Assistants play a key role in the structure of our courses in that you have the closest contact with individual students. Students will usually look to you first when they need help navigating a course, and they may also turn to you when they feel that something isn't right.

17.1 Syllabus

Many questions or complaints about a course can be addressed by pointing the student back to the syllabus for the course. A well-crafted syllabus acts as a contract between the student and the instructor which details expectations and policies. Having this agreement ensures that everyone in the course is treated fairly. The syllabus also ensures consistency across Sections in a course. Be sure to follow the policies in the syllabus for the course, bringing any questions to the Instructor. Please note that policies exist for fairness across all students in the course and that you should not make changes without consultation with the Instructor.

17.2 Grading on Individual Assignments

The majority of issues that students raise will be regarding the way that their assignments are graded. TAs will typically be the first contact forthat a student who goes to first when they sees something amiss in the way their work was graded. Your job is to react respectfully and carefully. It may be as straightforward as helping the student see how their work was not correct or did not meet expectations.

However, if you recognize that you have made a mistake in your grading of some work, then you can honestly acknowledge the mistake and make whatever correction to the grading record is necessary. Even when we are being very careful, mistakes and misunderstandings do happen. We can try to not be defensive and react like we would hope your instructors would react with you in a similar situation. If it is a mistake that you think was made consistently across many students' work, then you should talk with your instructor about how to remediate the error.

If it appears that there was an error made in the grading done by one of your colleagues or the instructor, then you should bring this to the attention of the instructor. It is important that the grading corrections be addressed in a coordinated and consistent fashion.

Additionally, make sure to follow any grading rubric that is provided to you by the instructor so that all students' assignments are graded consistently. Should you have questions (e.g., partial credit), be sure to ask the instructor so that a decision can be made for the course as a whole. This is especially important when grading in Gradescope–any changes that you make to the rubric for your students propagates to all students in the course, including students with other TAs. No changes should be made to a grading rubric prior to consultation with the instructor.

For exam grading, instructors may have specific policies about the timing and decisions about grading questions. Often, students will be required to bring up grading issues on exams right away so that there isn't any question about alterations made to papers. Talk to your Head TA or instructor so that you know what the class policy is. Do not make any changes to a student's exam grade without having clear permission from the course instructor.

17.3 Overall Course Letter Grade

You may find that students who are not satisfied with their course grade come to you at the end of the quarter. They may hope to find a few more points somewhere which could push them up to the next letter, or maybe they just want to voice their frustration with the way they were evaluated.

In all cases, Teaching Assistants are not responsible for the assignment of the final letter grade in the course. This is the responsibility of the instructor. While you should still be supportive of your students, you should also let them know that the instructor is the final arbiter. Any issues with grades should be brought directly to the instructor.

17.4 Work as a Team with your Instructor

Over the course of the quarter, you will work closely with many of the students in your sections, and you will undoubtedly be hoping that they do well in the course. It is entirely appropriate for you to advocate on behalf of your students. However, at the end of the day, the instructor is depending on you to be a part of a team. The instructor needs to be able to make decisions for the whole class and have those policies carried out consistently across sections.

Even if you do not agree with a course policy (see Conflicts with Instructors), it is imperative that you do not criticize the course or instructor to the students. This is very harmful to the educational objectives of the course, and it will not, in the end, serve the course or your

students. If you find you are not able to defend a course policy, then you need to communicate that with the instructor. They will be able to address the issues with students.

17.5 Referring Students to the Instructor

There are many situations that students will bring to you which you will need to direct them to communicate directly with the course instructor. The instructor will want to make the decisions regarding a complex or troublesome issue from a student. It is often helpful if you let the student know the best way to bring up the issue with the instructor (e.g., email, office hours, Canvas).

If a student is angry or hostile, then directing them to the instructor can de-escalate the situation. Acknowledge the student's concerns and redirect them to the authority of the instructor. If you are feeling unsafe, removing yourself from that situation is your first priority. You have no obligation to confront the student. You can call 911 on campus to reach campus police.

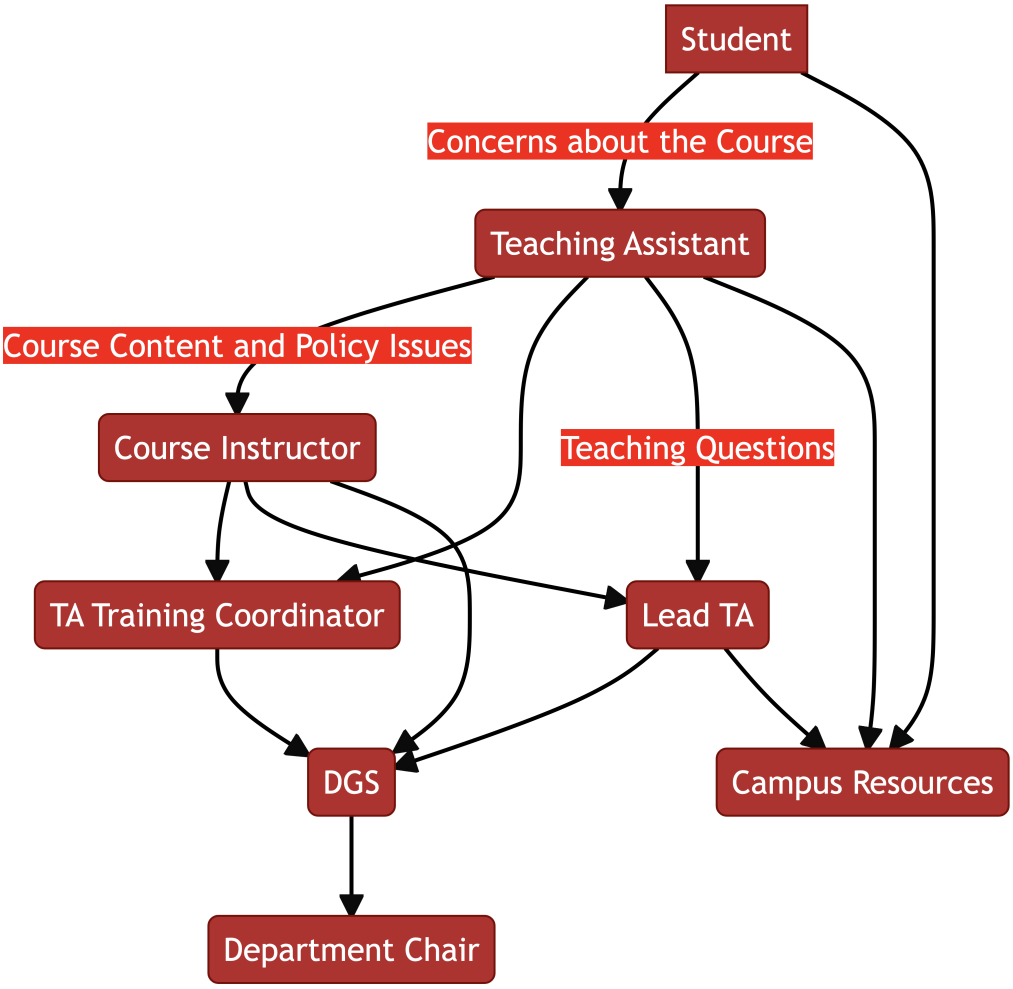
18 Managing Conflicts between TAs and Instructors

In your role as a TA, you will be working with the instructor and other TAs towards the shared goal of educating the students in the course in a supportive learning environment. Being a TA might be the first time you have interacted with a faculty member as part of an instructional team. Occasionally, you might find that navigating the relationship between a TA and their Instructor can be a bit delicate. On the one hand, instructors are your colleagues – you will be taking their classes as students, and you may even be conducting research with some of them on a one-on-one basis. On the other hand, the Instructor ultimately is in charge of the course as a whole and has the final word. Occasionally, this can help you out–if a student doesn't agree with a policy, you can "pass the buck" to the instructor!

The number one piece of advice we can give you is to maintain communication – we encourage you to maintain an active dialogue with your Instructor (be that through the course Discussion Board [Nectir, Discord, Slack, etc.] or through regular TA-Instructor check-ins) about your workload, as well as any unexpected issues that may arise.

Another guiding tenet of the TA-Instructor relationship is maintaining a sense of professionalism and cohesion among the course staff. You should not publicly challenge decisions made by Instructors or your fellow TAs in front of your students – doing so degrades students' trust in the course staff as a whole and possibly in the Instructor, which often leads to an overall sense of disarray in the course. It is important to provide the students with a "united front" as an instructional team and handle as many of these disagreements in private with the Instructor and instructional team.

Finally, we would also like to affirm that the department is here to support you. If repeated efforts to resolve conflicts with your Instructor have been unsuccessful, please feel free to reach out to the Graduate Program Advisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, the TA Training Coordinators, or the Lead TA to discuss further.


Student
Concerns about the Course
Teaching Assistant
Course Content and Policy Issues
Course Instructor
Teaching Questions
TA Training Coordinator
Lead TA
DGS
Campus Resources
Department Chair

19 Office of the Ombuds

If you encounter a situation with a student that cannot be resolved, you should first look to the course instructor for guidance. There are also resource people in the department such as the TA Training Coordinators who can help you navigate thorny issues.

It may happen that the Instructor or the TA Training Coordinators will suggest reaching out to the university Office of the Ombuds. This office provides consultation and mediation services for faculty and students. They can be a valuable resource in finding equitable solutions to intractable problems.

Part VIII

Department and University Policies

20 Department and University Policies

20.1 Absence from Section

As outlined above, one of the primary duties of a TA is to lead one or more sections of a course. It is expected that all TAs will be present for **all** Sections they are assigned throughout the quarter, unless explicitly instructed otherwise by the Instructor.

Inform the Instructor of the course as soon as you know that you have a planned absence (i.e., if you know in advance that you will be unable to host sections on a particular set of day(s)) during the quarter. In such a situation, you should start by reaching out to the other TAs in the course for which you are a TA, to see if any of them are able to cover for you. If that proves unsuccessful, you should reach out to the Instructor to discuss. Do **NOT** simply call a friend to substitute for you or cancel section without receiving prior approval from the Instructor.

You should also **not** simply make one of your Sections remote (i.e., over Zoom) without the Instructor's prior approval (unless your course has a PSTAT**W** designation; e.g., PSTATW 120A, PSTATW 160A, etc., as PSTATW-courses are designed for majority-remote instruction). The university has set policies in place limiting the amount of remote instruction that may legally be conducted, and this includes limiting the number of sections that can be conducted remotely.

Please note that if you fail to lead any of your assigned sections, or unexpectedly cancel/make a section remote without prior Instructor approval, your TA appointment may be terminated after review by the department. It is the responsibility of all TAs to ensure students are receiving proper attention and instruction.

20.2 Preserving Student Confidentiality

As a TA, you are privy to information about students' grades in the course. This information is protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), a federal law designed to, among other things, protect the privacy of education records. Under FERPA, you may not disclose personally identifiable information about students nor permit anyone else (e.g., parents, other TAs) to have access to student records without written consent from the student.

In addition to information about student grades, you may also have information about mental health, medical status, whether or not a student is documented, whether or not a student

works with DSP, etc. This information is also confidential and should not be shared with or made available to anyone other than the Instructor for the course and yourself.

Here are some ways that you can preserve the confidentiality of your students:

- Ensure that physical documents containing sensitive student information (e.g., grades, Perm #s) are kept secured and not left in public areas (e.g., mailroom, printer, hallway).
- Be sure to password-protect your computer so that others cannot access sensitive student information
- Be sure to communicate with students using their UCSB email address only
- Only share information about students with the Instructor for the course

20.3 Prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Harrassment

The University of California is committed to maintaining a community dedicated to the advancement, application and transmission of knowledge and creative endeavors through academic excellence, where all people who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation.

Sexual violence, sexual harassment, gender-based harassment, and retaliation interfere with those goals. Any reports of such conduct will be responded to promptly and effectively. This includes action to stop, prevent, correct, and when necessary, discipline, behavior that violates this Policy.

You will learn more about this policy through the required training modules you will complete each academic year. The training provided has been customized for graduate students and includes information about your role as a Responsible Employee when you are a TA. In your first academic year, you will complete Campus Clarity's "Think About It: Graduate Students". Graduate students who have completed this training are assigned the "Think About It: Continuing Students" course during each subsequent year.

Should you have any questions about how to handle sexual or gender-based harassment, feel free to contact the TA Training Coordinators.

20.4 Supporting Academic Honesty

Students at UCSB have a Student Conduct Code that exists to support the highest standards of social and academic behavior and ensure an environment conducive to student learning. It is expected that students attending UCSB understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity, and are willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Any submission that

fulfills an academic requirement must represent a student's original work. Any act of academic dishonesty will subject a person to University disciplinary action.

Academic dishonesty can include but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, furnishing false information, unauthorized collaboration, and misuse of course materials. For specific examples of these categories, visit https://studentconduct.sa.ucsb.edu/academic-integrity.

If you suspect a student of violating the UCSB Student Conduct Code in some way, let the Instructor of the course know as soon as possible so that appropriate actions can be taken.

Part IX

FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)

21 TA Resources

21.1 Electronic Resources

21.1.1 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 who 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

21.1.2 Gradescope

Many instructors also utilize Gradescope to aid in the uploading, management, and grading of student assessments. You can log in to 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.

21.2 Teaching Supplies

21.2.1 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.

21.2.2 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). Whiteboard markers need to be checked out from the Undergraduate Advisor. 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.

Part X

Glossary

22 Glossary

22.1 Common Abbreviations

22.1.1 People/Parties in the Department

- **DGS**: Director of Graduate Studies
  - Principal faculty member responsible for overseeing graduate program policies
- **GPA**: Graduate Program Advisor
  - Staff member tasked with advising graduate students and administering graduate policies
- **MSO**: Management Services Officer
  - Chief Administrator in the department responsible for oversight of all aspects of the program
- **SAM**: Student Affairs Manager
  - Supervisor of staff program advisors of both the graduate and undergraduate program

22.1.2 Campus Entities and Terms

- **ASE**: Academic Student Employee
  - The official designation of any graduate students employed by the University (e.g. TAs)
- **CAPS**: Counseling & Psychological Services
  - Provides professional mental health service to the UCSB student body; may be a resource for assisting one of your students in distress, and may also be able to help you deal with the stresses of graduate school. All registered students are eligible for services at CAPS.
- **CITRAL**: Center for Innovative Teaching, Research, and Learning

- **CLAS**: Campus Learning Assistance Services
  - Provides tutoring for many of the lower division classes on campus. For courses like 5A, they have regularly scheduled tutoring sessions to provide additional help for undergraduate students.
- **DSP**: Disabled Students Program
- **ID**: Instructional Development
- **OSC**: Office of Student Conduct
  - Adjudicates violations of the Student Conduct Code. In particular, they collect reports of cheating and academic dishonesty.
- **PSTAT**: Statistics and Applied Probability
- **UAW:** United Auto Workers (see "Union" below)
  - **UAW 2865:** The union to which all TAs, tutors, readers, and associate instructors at UCSB belong
  - The Contract Between UCSB and UAW Regarding ASEs
- **UCSB**: University of California, Santa Barbara

22.2 Definitions of Common Terms

- **Union:** an organized group of individuals, seeking to utilize collective bargaining power to achieve shared interests and rights in the workplace.