

# Teaching Together: A Handbook for Faculty and TAs

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## Introduction: About this Handbook

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Undergraduate lecture courses in the School of Social Sciences at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) often enroll several hundred students. These large classes rely on graduate student teaching assistants (TAs), who work closely with instructors and are typically responsible for leading discussion sections, grading assignments, and providing targeted feedback to undergraduates.

However, common challenges in the working relationship between instructors and TAs frustrate faculty, graduate, and undergraduate students alike. This resource guide emerged from a three-year long project designed to improve large undergraduate classes by strengthening collaboration between faculty and graduate TAs. It offers specific tools for improving faculty-TA communication, engaging in a collaborative course design process, addressing teaching challenges, and supporting graduate student pedagogical and professional development.

As universities around the world contend with the challenges of remote teaching during the COVID-19 crisis, leveraging the skills and knowledge of faculty and graduate student teachers has become more important than ever. Strong faculty-TA working relationships can help universities address new course design challenges, respond with agility to interruptions in our teaching, and prepare graduate students for future careers in an uncertain educational landscape.

### *Background*

Universities throughout the United States increasingly rely on graduate student teaching assistants (Park 2004). Though research emphasizes the importance of pedagogical training and support for TAs (Chadha 2013; Gardner and Jones 2011; Pentecost et al. 2012), less is known about the issue of faculty-TA collaboration. Existing scholarship suggests that challenges in the faculty-TA working relationship are common and that the relationship is often fraught.

Many of these challenges result from role ambiguity. This ambiguity leads to uncertainty and confusion that is sharpened by the unequal power between faculty (some of whom are themselves in more precarious situations than others) and graduate students (Dotger 2011; Gardner and Jones 2011). TAs often interface more directly with undergraduate students and may feel uncertain about the degree to which they can set their own expectations and objectives for the class, or how to anticipate, communicate, and enforce those set by the professor (Madden 2014; Park 2004). At times, TAs' professional and pedagogical commitments may be at odds with the commitments or teaching philosophies of the faculty with whom they work (Madden 2014), and TAs may feel caught between the roles of teacher, researcher, and student (Vaughn 1998). Faculty, similarly, often find it challenging to juggle

multiple roles as mentors for TAs' professional development, as managers and supervisors of their academic labor, and as their colleagues and collaborators in educating undergraduates (Breslow 1998; Nyquist and Wulff 1996).

In addition, the broader pedagogical purpose of TA-led discussion sections is often unclear. Concerns about the discussion section model are long-standing: nearly 60 years ago, anthropologists Bruner and Spindler identified discussion sections as a “most difficult problem.” If a majority of instructors question the value of TA-led discussion sections and regard them as unsuccessful, Bruner and Spindler ask, “why then is the system maintained?” (1963, 150-151).

“Discussion sections are apparently a **most difficult problem** in many of the large audience courses, as indicated by the fact that a majority of instructors in such courses **regard the discussion sections as unsuccessful**.

...[M]any question the value of **free-ranging discussion** between **inexperienced teaching assistants** and sophomores who know no anthropology.

If discussion sections are not highly regarded in some institutions,  
**why then is the system maintained?”**

-- *Edward M. Bruner and George D. Spindler, 1963*

The discussion section system has persisted in order to meet several institutional goals. Discussion sections aim to 1) address the problems raised by growing class sizes, allowing for more personal contact between students and instructors and smaller group conversations among undergraduate students; 2) distribute teaching workload and labor in a less expensive way than hiring additional full-time faculty; and 3) provide both financial support and opportunities for pedagogical training to graduate students (Bruner and Spindler 1963; Park 2004). However, while discussion sections aim to achieve all of these institutional and pedagogical goals at the same time, they frequently fail at one or more of them.

The disruption of on-campus teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted more instructors than ever to question and redesign the traditional lecture/discussion section format. At the same time, the objectives that discussion sections were designed to address have never been more important: allowing for personal contact among instructors and students, managing teachers' huge workloads, and ensuring financial support for graduate students. We hope the tools and lessons described in this handbook can support instructors in developing creative ways to meet these needs alongside their pedagogical goals under these unprecedented teaching and working conditions.

In preliminary investigations conducted in the UCI School of Social Sciences in Fall 2017, the authors identified several concerns related to faculty-TA collaboration in large lecture classes with TA-led discussion sections:

- There is often little coordination between lecture and discussion section planning, and lectures and sections tend to run as parallel rather than closely integrated classes;
- Faculty often rely on TA-led discussion sections to address the highest-order learning goals of a course (especially reading, writing, research, and critical thinking skills), though these are often the most challenging aspects of a course to teach;
- There is a lack of clarity among both faculty and TAs about how to share teaching roles and responsibilities;
- There are few structured opportunities for feedback in either direction (from faculty to TAs or TAs to faculty).

To investigate these challenges more extensively and identify strategies for addressing them, the authors developed a series of two Teaching Together workshops in 2018 and built on them to design and coordinate a year-long *Teaching Together Learning Community* in 2019.

### *About the Teaching Together Learning Community*

The *Teaching Together Learning Community* was a pilot project designed to promote collaborative teaching between faculty and graduate TAs. It targeted instructors and TAs of social science courses with large (100-300-student) lectures and TA-led discussion sections.



Timeline of the Teaching Together Project

In the initial stage, faculty and graduate students from across the School of Social Sciences jointly participated in workshop sessions focused on active learning, inclusive teaching, and assessment/grading. In the second stage, interested faculty and TAs were grouped into teaching teams for four upcoming anthropology courses. These teaching teams engaged in a structured course design process to clarify the ways that lectures, discussions, and outside

activities align with course learning outcomes. Finally, the teaching teams implemented their course design as they taught the class, and they met regularly with the authors/learning community coordinators to address teaching challenges that came up during their term.

The goals of the learning community were to strengthen collaboration between faculty and TAs, better integrate discussion sections into course design, improve undergraduate learning in large lecture classes, and foster graduate student professional development.

### *Handbook Organization*

This handbook shares insights and materials developed through the *Teaching Together Learning Community*. While the final activities of the learning community focused on classes in Anthropology, initial workshops included participants from a variety of disciplines, and these materials are designed to be used by both faculty and TAs across the School of Social Sciences and in related disciplines across and beyond the UCI campus.

Each section of this handbook begins with a fictionalized scenario that identifies common issues faced by faculty and TAs. The challenges involved in these scenarios and strategies for addressing them are enumerated, and detailed sheets and templates for implementing these strategies are offered. Resources and templates are presented in such a way that they can be extracted from the handbook and used or re-distributed on their own.

During our preliminary research, pedagogical training workshops, teaching team meetings, and other learning community activities, we identified four priority issues of widespread concern to faculty and TAs:

- Improving role clarity and communication among faculty & TAs;
- Designing discussion sections or alternative teaching strategies to support undergraduate learning;
- Navigating grading challenges as a teaching team; and
- Supporting graduate students' professional and pedagogical development.

This handbook is organized into four sections—"Working Together," "Planning Together," "Grading Together," and "Learning Together"—each of which includes strategies and resources designed to address these four concerns, respectively.



## Working Together: Improving Role Clarity and Communication

**Scenario:** You are one of three TAs for a large class taught by a new professor. One of your students has missed the first exam and asks to make it up, saying they stayed home sick with a cold. You say no, citing the policy in the syllabus, which states that make-up exams are only permitted in “extreme and well-documented situations.” You later hear that another TA allowed a student in a similar situation to retake the exam in office hours. You go to the professor, who defers and asks TAs to use their own judgement on a case-by-case basis. You appreciate the professor supporting your decision, but you are concerned this isn’t fair to students. How do you handle this situation?

### Common Challenges

Members of a teaching team often do not know each other and have little experience working together. TAs receive new course assignments each quarter and faculty work with different TAs each time they teach a course. Expected TA duties vary from one assignment to another and are not always made clear to TAs. The result is a lack of clarity around course policies and protocols, faculty expectations, and TAs’ responsibilities. As many classes move online, teaching teams may contend with additional challenges anticipating and assigning online course management tasks.

To address these challenges, clarify course policies, expectations, and TA responsibilities before the class begins. Anticipate challenges and plan for regular communication among the teaching team.

### Tips

- **Together:** Hold regular team meetings to clarify expectations, address concerns, and anticipate common challenges. At a minimum, meet at the beginning, middle, and end of the quarter.
- **Together:** Check in briefly each week. This could be done electronically or in a brief conversation immediately before or after class sessions.
- **Faculty:** Share your completed TA request form listing expected duties with TAs before classes begin.
- **TAs:** Monitor the time you spend on various TA tasks to better communicate with faculty about expected duties, build teaching time into your own schedule, and ensure compliance with labor contracts.

### Resources:

- **Faculty-TA Communication Checklists & Meeting Agendas**
- **TA Timesheet for Remote/Online Teaching** to assign and track TA tasks
- **Discussion Section Syllabus Template** to clarify discussion section objectives and expectations

# Faculty-TA Communication Checklists

Frequent, efficient communication between instructors and teaching assistants (TAs) is essential to our teaching and working lives. We recommend that teaching teams meet at least three times per term in order to facilitate teaching and course management, support TAs' professional development, and enable open communication. Below are three checklists to help make the most of these meetings at the start, middle, and end of the term.

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## I. Initial Meeting Checklist

It's important for instructors and TAs to meet at the start of the term—ideally before classes begin, and certainly before the first discussion sections take place. The first meeting is an opportunity to set expectations for course goals, communication, and division of labor for the term and to anticipate problems that may come up.

### A. Introductions

- + What are your research interests and/or career goals? How does teaching and TAing fit in with those?
- + What prior teaching experience do the TAs have? What skills do they bring? How familiar are they with the course management system or other programs used in the course?
- + What else are you each working on this quarter?

### B. The Course

- + What are the goals of the course? What are the desired learning outcomes for students?
- + Does the course have a guiding methodology or structure that the TA and students should be familiar with (e.g., problem-based learning, flipped classes, etc.)?
- + What role do discussion sections have in the organization of the course? Is student attendance required? What should take place in discussion sections?
- + What are the major assignments in the class (exams, term papers, etc.)?
- + Where can students and TAs find course information? How are the syllabus and course website organized?

### C. TA Roles and Responsibilities

- + What are the TAs' responsibilities in the course (planning and leading discussion sections, proctoring exams, grading assignments, taking attendance, holding office hours, etc.)?
- + Will the TA be expected to attend lectures?
- + Should TAs prepare syllabi or information sheets for their own discussion sections? What should these include?



- + If there is more than one TA, how will these responsibilities be divided (especially grading and lesson planning)? How will discussion section assignments be scheduled among TAs? Will there be one TA in charge of coordinating the work of other TAs?
- + How much leeway does the TA have in designing and executing these tasks?
- + How should TAs prioritize these tasks?
- + If TAs find they have too much work (e.g., the workload regularly exceeds established maximums or is unfairly distributed across TAs), how will the instructor address the problem?

#### **D. Course Management Protocols**

- + Where and how can TAs access photocopiers, Scantron machines, and other equipment? Do they know how to use it?
- + In what situations should students contact TAs, and when should they contact the instructor? What contact information will be listed in the syllabus?
- + Exactly how will grades be determined? What kind of rubrics will be used? How will grading parity be ensured across different graders and sections?
- + What system (Canvas, Excel, etc.) will you use to keep track of grades and attendance? How will grades be stored and shared?
- + When will TAs be expected to turn in grades for major assignments?
- + What are the procedures for handling student complaints, cheating, or plagiarism?
- + What are the procedures for handling classroom emergencies?
- + If TAs notice students failing or otherwise struggling in the course, how should they address it?
- + How will the instructor handle TA absences, expected or unexpected?

#### **E. TA Professional Development**

- + Is the instructor available to sit in on TA-led sections and offer teaching feedback? Is the TA open to this teaching observation and feedback?
- + Is the instructor open to feedback from TAs on what is and isn't working well in the course? How can this be addressed throughout the term?
- + Are there any additional texts, programs, or materials that would help the TA be better prepared for this course?
- + For advanced graduate students, are there opportunities to give a guest lecture or create other pedagogical activities relevant to their research?

#### **F. Communication Plan**

- + What are the preferred media to contact each other, for urgent and non-urgent matters (email, phone, text)? What kind of response time should you each expect?
- + How often will you plan on meeting during the quarter? Will you have a standing weekly meeting, or meet before and after exams or major assignments?
- + How often will you plan to check in about grading, lesson plans, and other matters? Who is expected to initiate check-ins?
- + When can you schedule to meet next?

## II. Midterm Meeting Checklist

While ideally faculty and TAs are able to meet regularly throughout the term, sometimes it's not possible or expedient. Nonetheless, we recommend scheduling at least one longer meeting mid-term to check in about how the course is progressing, triage any problems, review students' midterm feedback, plan for grading major assignments, and revise course protocols as needed. We recommend circulating midterm course evaluations to students as well.

### A. Self-Evaluation (for Instructor and TAs)

- + What, specifically, is going well? What has been challenging? Consider:
  - o Lecture format
  - o Discussion section format
  - o Readings and assignments
  - o Grading procedures
  - o Communication between instructor and TAs
  - o Communication with students
  - o Online course management systems
  - o Overall student engagement
  - o Specific student challenges
  - o Overall workload
  - o Other
- + What can we change? What can't we change?
- + Is there anything else the instructor can do to make the TA's job easier? Is there anything the TA can do to make the instructor's job easier?

### B. Student Evaluations

- + What are the main points of positive feedback in students' midterm course evaluations? What are the main points of negative feedback?
- + How do these align with or differ from our self-evaluations (above)?
- + What can we change? What can't we change?
- + What is the plan for communicating these changes to students?
- + Are there any students in danger of failing the course? How will this be addressed?

### C. Upcoming End-of-Term Assignments

- + What major assignments or exams are coming up at the end of the term?
- + What scaffolding will students need to successfully complete these? What role will the instructor and TAs have in preparing students for these tasks?
- + What can you do now to anticipate and prepare for the end-of-term grading rush?
- + When can you schedule an end-of-term meeting?

### D. TA Professional Development

*If a TA gave a guest lecture, or the instructor gave a teaching observation for a discussion section, consider scheduling a separate meeting to provide feedback. Institutional centers for teaching and learning often have resources and templates for teaching observation and feedback.*

### III. End-of-Term Meeting Checklist

Although the end of the term is always hectic, making time for a final meeting can be very valuable for both the instructor and the TA(s). This end-of-term meeting is a good opportunity to plan ahead for the grading rush, address last-minute problems, and reflect on lessons learned throughout the course.

#### A. Self-Evaluation (for Instructor and TAs)

- + What aspects of the course were most successful? Least successful? Consider:
  - o Lecture format
  - o Discussion section format
  - o Readings and assignments
  - o Grading procedures
  - o Communication between instructor and TAs
  - o Communication with students
  - o Online course management systems
  - o Overall student engagement
  - o Specific student challenges
  - o Overall workload
  - o Other
- + What would you change if you were teaching or TAing for this class again?
- + What warnings or suggestions do you have for someone teaching or TAing for this class in the future?
- + What skills or prior knowledge do graduate students need to be effective TAs for this course? What could be done to modify the course or better prepare TAs in the future?

#### B. Final Grades

- + Exactly how will grades be determined? What rubrics will be used?
- + How will the grading workload be divided among TAs and the instructor?
- + How will grading parity be ensured across different graders and sections?
- + By what deadline must TAs submit grades to the instructor?
- + How will the final exam and grading workload fit in with the TAs' own end-of-term deadlines?
- + How will you handle disputed grades, cheating, or plagiarism?
- + What is the plan for returning, retaining, and/or disposing of student papers, bluebooks, and other student materials in accordance with FERPA standards?

# Teaching Assistant Timesheet for Remote/Online Teaching

**How to use this timesheet:** With the University of California's move to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teaching assistants (TAs) and other Academic Student Employees (ASEs) will be contending with changing responsibilities and working conditions associated with online teaching and course management. This document is a tool for TAs (1) to monitor their weekly workload and responsibilities, (2) to help communicate and plan with their course instructors/supervisors about their work, and (3) to track compliance with the UAW 2865 labor contract\* for ASEs at the UC. Log your work time by tasks completed (rows) for each week (columns). Access this document as a spreadsheet at <http://bit.ly/TATimesheet>.

Tasks	Hours Worked per Week**										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Finals
<b>Reviewing Course Content</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Viewing lectures or modules</li> <li>Completing assigned readings</li> <li>Completing required supplementary readings</li> </ul>											
<b>Creating &amp; Maintaining Course Site</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating/formatting modules and pages in Canvas or another platform</li> <li>Uploading readings, lectures, assignments, or other course content</li> <li>Other site maintenance</li> </ul>											
<b>Grading &amp; Assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grading using Canvas/SpeedGrader</li> <li>Grading in other platforms</li> <li>Creating assignment rubrics</li> <li>Adding rubrics to Canvas</li> <li>Providing feedback on students' work</li> <li>Inputting grades from other platforms</li> <li>Tracking student extensions, absences, etc.</li> </ul>											
<b>Discussion Moderation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Developing lesson plans for online discussion sections</li> <li>Holding synchronous discussion sections</li> <li>Recording attendance for synchronous lectures or discussions</li> <li>Moderating asynchronous discussion boards or chats</li> </ul>											

Tasks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Finals
<b>Preparing Course Content***</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preparing audio or video lectures</li> <li>Editing audio or video lectures</li> <li>Transcribing audio or video lectures</li> <li>Preparing assignments and learning activities</li> <li>Writing exam or quiz questions</li> <li>Preparing study guides</li> </ul>											
<b>Technical Support****</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Helping students with Canvas, Zoom, or other software</li> <li>Assisting instructor or other TAs with Canvas, Zoom, or other software</li> <li>Developing instructions/guides for navigating the online course</li> <li>Obtaining technical support for online instruction</li> </ul>											
<b>Required Skills Training*****</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-guided learning on online/remote teaching</li> <li>Attending workshops or training on online/remote teaching</li> </ul>											
<b>Other Tasks (note below):</b>											
<b>TOTAL HOURS PER WEEK**:</b>											

## Notes and Resources:

\*Visit <https://uaw2865.org/> to view the contract, learn about your rights as an ASE at UC, and find additional resources on the COVID-19 crisis.

\*\*In most cases, TA appointments begin on the date instruction begins and extend through Finals Week, for a maximum total of 220 hours during the 11 week quarter (or 110 hours for those employed at 25% time). If your weekly workload regularly exceeds 20 hours, or you expect to exceed 220 hours in a quarter, let your instructor/supervisor know or contact your union for additional support.

\*\*\*TAs may be asked to develop some lesson plans and content for discussion sections, but they are not contractually obligated to develop content for lecture. If you have concerns about the content preparation required of you for remote teaching, contact your union representative (<https://uaw2865.org/>).

\*\*\*\*There are numerous resources available for technical support for remote teaching at UCI. TAs are not required to provide technical support. Instructors can visit <https://sites.uci.edu/teachanywhere/> for guidance, or contact [dtei.uci.edu](mailto:dtei@uci.edu) or [oit.uci.edu](mailto:oit@uci.edu) for additional support.

\*\*\*\*\*Note that any skills training required to carry out your work responsibilities count as paid work and cannot be required before the first day of instruction for the quarter.

# Discussion Section Syllabus Template

A discussion section syllabus is separate from the main syllabus for the course and details discussion activities, assessment and grading criteria, and classroom policies that may differ from the main lecture. A joint syllabus created by all of the course TAs creates consistency across sections, and clear discussion section policies allow faculty to better support TA decisions.

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## Course Title Discussion Sections

TA name  
Email  
Office hours

TA name  
Email  
Office hours

TA name  
Email  
Office hours

### Section Objectives

*What are the goals of the discussion section? What kinds of activities and interactions will discussion sections include (e.g., mini-lectures, small-group activities, review quizzes or games, etc.)?*

### Preparation

*What should students do before they come to the discussion section? Is there anything they should bring with them (e.g., readings, lecture notes, electronic devices, etc.)?*

### Participation Grades

*Consider addressing the following issues:*

- *How will discussion section attendance and participation be included in the students' overall grade in the class? How many sections are students required to attend? (Note: This information should also be included in the full course syllabus.)*
- *How will participation in discussion be determined? Will there be in-class assignments that must be turned in? Will attendance be taken?*
- *What happens if students arrive late? At what point will they be counted as absent?*
- *What should students do if they are unable to attend the discussion section one week?*

### Classroom Policies

*Consider addressing the following issues:*

- *What do you expect from students during discussion? What constitutes respectful listening and ethical and engaged participation? [Note: You could also have students create their own list of class expectations and agreements on the first day.]*
- *Is the use of electronic devices (laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.) encouraged or discouraged during the discussion section? Are there any guidelines for electronic use?*

*[Note: Electronic devices are essential for ensuring access and inclusion for all students. They should not be banned completely.]*

- *Is the recording of discussion sections (audio or visual) allowed? How should students request permission to record and what kinds of privacy considerations are required?*

### **Communication**

*What are the best ways for students to get in touch with you (e.g., office hours, email, Canvas messaging, etc.)? What guidelines are there for communication? [Note: This is a good place to encourage students to come to office hours or to request that emails include course titles in the subject, etc.]*

### **How to get the most out of discussion sections**

*Do you have any additional advice to help students get the most out of the discussion section and succeed in the class?*





## Planning Together: Designing Discussion Sections to Support Undergraduate Learning

**Scenario:** You're a TA for a large class in your discipline, and you've just received your students' midterm evaluation forms. You've been putting a lot of work into planning interesting and active lessons, and their feedback on your teaching is mostly positive. However, while many students say the discussions are "fun" and "interesting," they also describe them as "pointless" or a "waste of time" given the course's heavy workload. You don't want to simply "teach to the test," but you also don't want to make the section an unnecessary burden on your busy students. How do you handle this situation?

### Common Challenges

Lecture and discussion sections often run as separate, parallel courses. TAs may be unsure how discussion sections fit with the broader learning goals of the course, and faculty may not know what has actually been happening in discussion sections. As a result, TAs find it difficult to plan discussion sections each week, and to undergraduates, discussion sections can seem to be disconnected from course assessments and inconsistent from one TA to another.

To address these challenges, integrate discussion sections into the overall design of the course, clarifying the role discussions play in preparing students for assessments (exams, papers, etc.) and in helping them achieve learning goals. Support frequent communication and resource sharing to ensure that all teaching team members are working toward the same goals.

### Tips:

- **Together:** Use a backward course design process to incorporate discussion sections in the overall course plan. Whenever possible, include TAs in conversations about the design of a course.
- **TAs:** Use collective lesson planning to increase consistency across sections and reduce individual planning time. If a course has several TAs, each might plan 2-3 sessions and share their plans and materials with the others.
- **Faculty:** Establish clear learning outcomes and goals on the syllabus to guide both undergraduates and TAs. If possible, share previous course materials (exams, lecture notes, etc.) with TAs. Request permission to archive discussion materials from one term to share with future TAs.

### Resources

- **Integrated Backward Course Design Template**
- **Backward Course Design Template for Online/Remote Courses**
- **Discussion Section Lesson Planning Template**
- **Menu of Active Teaching and Learning Strategies**

# Integrated Backward Course Design Template

**How to use this template:** Backward course design begins by identifying the central goals or learning outcomes of a course. Next, instructors define the assessments they will use to determine whether students have achieved those outcomes and identify specific learning activities that will help students develop the knowledge and skills they need to complete this assessment. This template updates the backward design process by asking instructors to distribute those learning activities across various course modalities—which activities will happen in lecture, in discussion sections, or independently? Incorporating discussion sections into the course design helps ensure that faculty and TAs are working toward the same goals. For a primer on Backward Course Design, see Bowen, Ryan S., (2017). Understanding by Design. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved June 20, 2020 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/understanding-by-design/>.

<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b> <i>“By the end of this course, students will be able to...” OR “In this course, students will...”</i>	<b>Assessments</b> <i>How will you know if students have achieved the SLOs? (e.g., quizzes, graded assignments, projects, surveys?)</i>	<b>Learning Activities</b> <i>What will students do to develop the skills needed to complete the assessments (e.g., lectures, readings, videos, practice quizzes, problem sets)?</i>	<b>Where &amp; When Learning Activities Happen</b> <i>Lecture, discussion section, homework? (Specify weeks if known)</i>
1.			
2.			
3.			

# Backward Course Design Template for Remote/Online Courses

**How to use this template:** The principles of backward course design also apply to remote/online course development, but the decisions about where and when learning activities happen may be different, and it is important to consider how students will know what activities are expected of them. This template can be used to align these components and to structure your course.

<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b>  <i>“By the end of this course, students will be able to...”  OR “In this course, students will...”</i>	<b>Assessments</b>  <i>How will you know if students have achieved the SLO (e.g., quizzes, graded assignments, projects, surveys)?</i>	<b>Learning Activities</b>  <i>What will students do to develop the skills needed to complete the assessments (e.g., lectures, readings, videos, practice quizzes, problem sets)?</i>	<b>Where &amp; When Learning Activities Happen</b>  <i>Before, during, or after lecture? In what module, and in what order? Synchronously or asynchronously? Individually or in groups?</i>	<b>How Students Will Know What Is Expected of Them</b>  <i>Module headings, announcements, Canvas due dates &amp; to-do lists</i>
1.				
2.				
3.				

# Discussion Section Lesson Planning Template

<b>Week:</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Review
<b>Student Learning Outcomes:</b>				<b>Priority Topics/ Readings:</b>							
<b>Administrative Tasks:</b> <i>(Announcements, reminders, upcoming assignments, general feedback, etc.)</i>											
<b>Time</b>	<b>Topics/ Activities</b>						<b>Materials Needed</b>				
<b>Hip Pocket Plans:</b> <i>(What you'll do if you're over or under time, or if something goes awry)</i>											
<b>Reflection/To Do Next Time:</b>											

# Menu of Active Teaching & Learning Strategies

**How to use this chart:** This chart presents flexible activities that draw on evidence-based strategies to support meaningful learning. The chart follows the principles of backward design: first, identify the primary goal of the lesson, then select the learning strategies and teaching activities that best fit with the course material and student group. See also [Active Learning while Physical Distancing](#), curated by Jennifer Baumgartner at Louisiana State University, for additional activity suggestions for remote teaching & learning.

Learning Goal	Strategy	Learning Activities
<b>Remember</b>  Define, describe, label, list, name, etc.	<b>Retrieval Practice</b>	<b>Quizzing</b> with polling/classroom response systems (iClickers, <a href="#">PollEverywhere</a> , Zoom polling, etc.)
		<b>Review games</b> (Jeopardy, <a href="#">Kahoot</a> , <a href="#">Quizlet</a> , <a href="#">Heads Up</a> ) work well for learning facts and vocabulary.
		Ask students to recall information from a previous class session, reading, etc., WITHOUT using notes. Variations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Opening question:</b> “What did we talk about in class on Tuesday?” “What are the two major theories we’ve discussed so far?”</li> <li>• <b>Minute paper:</b> “Make a list of everything you remember from Wednesday’s lecture. You have 1 minute.”</li> <li>• <b>3-2-1:</b> “Write 3 things you learned in [lecture/reading/film], 2 things you found particularly interesting, and 1 question you still have.” [Note: Try having students do this in small groups then share their questions with the class.]</li> </ul>
		<b>Focused listing:</b> Look over a reading or notes from a recent lecture. (2 minutes) Put your notes away and make a list of everything you remember. (2 minutes) Now talk to a partner and compare lists. What can you add to yours? (2 minutes) As a class, discuss what was easy or difficult to remember and why.
		<b>Write the exam:</b> Students write their own exam questions (alone or in groups), then trade to answer the questions. Students can trade a third time to grade/evaluate the responses.

Learning Goal	Strategy	Learning Activities
<b>Understand</b> a concept or argument; Clarify an abstract idea	Elaboration	Ask students to describe how two concepts are <b>similar or different</b> .
		<b>“Unpack” a concept.</b> Once students can define X, ask them to explain why X? How X? When X?
		Ask students to <b>write a poem</b> about a concept or term (Haiku, Limerick, or Acrostic styles can work well)
	Concrete examples	Ask students to come up with a <b>new example</b> to explain a concept (alone or in groups).
		Ask students to use an example to <b>illustrate a concept for novel audiences</b> (e.g., for new students, a child, someone who hasn’t taken an anthropology course before, etc.).
		Ask students to begin with specific examples and use them to <b>identify patterns and themes</b> or make broader arguments.
	Dual coding	Ask students to <b>draw a picture</b> or illustrate a concept or term with a sketch. Consider an adaptation of <a href="#">Lynda Barry’s 6-minute diary</a> .
		Give each student a sticky note and ask them to write an event that was discussed in class or a reading. Have students put the notes on the board to <b>construct a timeline</b> . Use a similar method to have students construct a map of global connections.
		Ask students to reflect on and/or <b>discuss an image, meme, or video clip</b> . (Good techniques for reflection: think-pair-share, minute paper)

Learning Goal	Strategy	Learning Activities
<b>Make connections</b>	<b>Form associations</b>	Give students up to 10 terms. Ask them to <b>create a “mini-map”</b> grouping the terms and showing relationships among them with arrows.
		Ask students to each identify a concrete image/moment/scene from a reading that stands out. List these on a board or in a public document, then ask students to <b>identify themes</b> that emerge. What connects these? What’s missing?
		Ask students to <b>annotate a reading selection</b> . Distribute part of a reading. Ask students to annotate it in groups--define key words, identify how those words connect to other parts of the text or to anything outside of the reading. Draw on annotations for full-class discussion.
	<b>Link concepts to personal experience or previous knowledge</b>	Ask students how a concept or case <b>connects to something they learned in another course</b> or something from a book/film/TV show.
		Ask students to <b>describe a time they’ve observed or experienced an issue in their own lives/communities</b> . This can be done privately in a minute paper or more publicly in a think-pair-share or group discussion.
		Ask students to <b>explain how they would apply the information</b> in their own lives--what decisions would they make based on the material?

## References and Resources

Bean, John C. 2011. *Engaging Ideas: The Professor’s Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lang, James. 2016. *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Nilson, Linda. 2010. *Teaching At Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

The Learning Scientists Blog: <https://www.learningscientists.org/>



## Grading Together: Navigating Challenges as a Teaching Team

**Scenario:** You are an adjunct lecturer teaching a large class with a single TA. You and the TA split the grading of weekly writing assignments, for which you use a rubric. Midway through the quarter, a panicked student comes to your office hours with questions about her last assignment. Upon reading the TA's comments on the student's paper, you think their feedback is very harsh, but not totally unfounded. The grade is only slightly lower than what you would have assigned. You don't want to undermine your TA, but you want to reassure the student. How do you handle this situation?

### Common Challenges

Grading is often the most labor-intensive TA duty and one that is especially fraught. Assessment and grading expectations are often unclear to both students and graders, and grading criteria may be (or may appear to be) applied inconsistently, limiting undergraduate learning and creating inequities.

To address these challenges, grading strategies should support student learning, consider grader labor, and be fair and equitable to students. Well-developed rubrics can support all of these goals. Consider collective rubric development, where faculty & TAs construct the rubric together and it is shared with students before an assignment is due. When rubrics are added to an assignment in Canvas, multiple graders can apply the same frequently-used comments and feedback.

### Tips:

- Use detailed rubrics to grade assignments.
- Use grade norming procedures to calibrate rubrics across the teaching team and make adjustments if necessary.
- Grade anonymously to ensure fairness and minimize grader bias. Have students write ID numbers instead of names on paper assessments or hide names when grading in Canvas.
- Grade by question. Have each grader evaluate one question on an exam or a multi-part assignment. Gradescope facilitates this process for physical exams.
- Consider alternatives to traditional grading! See the “Additional Resources” section of this Handbook for more information about “ungrading” strategies.

### Resources

- [Getting Started with Grade Norming](#)
- [Analytic Rubric Template](#)



# Getting Started with Grade Norming

Grading brings some of the greatest teaching challenges for instructors and TAs in large undergraduate courses: managing dozens or hundreds of assignments; providing students with meaningful feedback; ensuring fairness and consistency across graders and sections; and communicating effectively as a teaching team, all while juggling end-of-term deadlines. **Grade norming** is a strategy teaching teams can use to help accomplish all of these objectives, especially for major projects and written assignments. Here's one way to do it.

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**Step 1: Plan ahead.** Once you have scheduled due dates for major assignments, plan a teaching team meeting with the instructor and all other graders shortly after these deadlines.

**Step 2: Use a rubric!** If you haven't yet created a rubric for the assignment, draft one before you meet. Analytic rubrics that describe specific grading criteria as well as examples of high, medium, and lower-scoring student work may be especially useful when working with multiple graders (see the template in this handbook). Not only does a detailed rubric help communicate grading criteria to students, it can help graders evaluate students' work more consistently and efficiently.

**Step 3: Road-test your rubric.** As a teaching team, choose three to five students' assignments to pilot-test your rubric. You might choose these at random, or you might try to choose examples that are likely to earn a range of different grades. Set a timer and have each grader use copies of the rubric to assign provisional scores to each assignment (this means each of the 3-5 assignments will have multiple provisional scores). Wait to compare your scores until all graders have finished scoring each of the selected assignments.

**Step 4: Debrief.** Before comparing scores, discuss the grading experience as a team. Are any parts of the rubric unclear? Are any of the criteria difficult to assess using the given descriptions? Do graders notice important components of the assignment that are *not* reflected in the rubric as written? (Note that where there is confusion among graders, there is likely to be confusion among students!)

**Step 5: Compare your scores.** Beginning with the first assignment, compare each grader's overall scores, as well as the sub-scores for each component of the rubric. Are your scores relatively similar or widely spread out? Where there are differences, have each grader discuss their reasoning. Do the same for each of the other assignments.

**Step 6: Get graders on the same page.** Decide as a team how you plan to address any questions or inconsistencies you identified in Steps 4 and 5. For example, you might choose to modify the rubric's descriptions of grading criteria for clarity or reallocate point values based on reading actual student work. You may not revise the rubric at all, but instead decide whether or how to address mechanical errors or other common mistakes in your scoring. If needed, test your revised rubrics by repeating Steps 3 through 6.

## Analytic Rubric Template

<b>Grading Criteria</b>	<b>Excellent</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Needs Work</b>	<b>Points Given</b>
<b>Thesis Statement</b> 10 points <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>9-10 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Evidence &amp; Analysis</b> 10 points <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>9-10 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Organization</b> 10 points <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>9-10 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>7-8 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-6 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Grammar &amp; Mechanics</b> 5 points <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>5 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>4 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-3 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Bibliography</b> 5 points <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>5 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>4 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	<b>0-3 points</b> <i>[Description of work scored in this range for this category]</i>	
<b>Comments:</b>				<b>Total:</b>  <div>/40 pts</div>



# Learning Together: Fostering Graduate Students' Professional and Pedagogical Development

**Scenario:** You are a faculty member and have been supervising a strong graduate student who is now preparing for the academic job market. The student has been successful at earning research grants and is submitting articles based on their dissertation chapters, but they are struggling to write the teaching statement and sample syllabi needed for their job applications. The student was a TA in your class and has asked you for a letter of recommendation for teaching-focused positions, but you never actually observed their interactions with students. How do you handle this situation?

## Common Challenges

Instructor-TA relationships may or may not overlap with research advising relationships, and they are often short term. At a research university, while TAing occupies a significant percentage of graduate student time, it is generally considered secondary to research-related pursuits. Professional development activities may not be prioritized over other immediate responsibilities, but graduate students' skills and professional development needs change over time.

By recognizing pedagogical training as a core part of graduate education, faculty can better integrate pedagogical development into their teaching and mentorship of grad students. In turn, graduate students can learn to hone their own teaching skills while practicing collaboration with faculty instructors.

## Tips:

- **TAs:** Think of TAing as professional development and approach it as an opportunity to develop your teaching philosophy and cultivate your teaching approach. Identify possible ways to integrate your teaching and research interests.
- **TAs:** Find teaching mentors and make use of teaching resources in the department, school, and university early and often.
- **Faculty:** Offer to observe TAs' teaching and provide constructive feedback. Be prepared to write letters of recommendation that focus on teaching.
- **Faculty:** Nominate graduate students for teaching awards and support applications for teaching-focused fellowships and jobs.

## Resources:

- **Seven Ways to Support Graduate Students' Pedagogical and Professional Development**
- **Seven Strategies for Working with Faculty during COVID-19**

# Seven Ways to Support Graduate Students' Pedagogical and Professional Development

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## 1) Clearly communicate professional norms and expectations

- Talk about teaching with graduate students frequently and frankly
- Anticipate graduate students' concerns about navigating academic power dynamics and the challenges of juggling competing demands of teaching, coursework, and research
- Meet with your TAs throughout the quarter to ensure mutual understanding of course policies and course goals
- Articulate clear expectations about TAs' roles and responsibilities
- Assign tasks that are commensurate with TAs' experience
- Check in about TAs' workload and make adjustments as needed

## 2) Open up the black box of course design and lesson planning

- Discuss your syllabus with your TAs: Why did you organize it as you did? What are your goals for the course? What did and didn't work well the last time you taught the course?
- Meet in advance of major assignments to construct rubrics together (this can also help with grade norming)
- Suggest supplemental or background references for TAs unfamiliar with (or highly interested in) your course topics
- Suggest supplemental videos or online media TAs might use for discussion sections
- Meet with TAs, especially first-year grad students, to come up with lesson plans and activities for discussion sections

## 3) Foreground TAs' roles as undergraduate educators

- Enlist your TAs' input on course design and student learning before, during, and after your course
- Encourage graduate students to develop their own teaching philosophies and pedagogical commitments
- Engage graduate students as active members of the department, for instance in developing undergraduate curricula
- Consider opportunities for co-teaching with advanced graduate students

#### **4) Invite and provide feedback on teaching**

- Solicit TAs' informal input on how the course is going throughout the quarter
- Ask undergraduate students for a joint midterm evaluation that addresses both the lecture and discussion sections
  - Meet with TAs before and after midterm evaluations to manage expectations and decide together how to address student feedback
  - Example midterm feedback question: *"To improve your learning in the second half of the class, what can you as a STUDENT a) start doing; b) keep doing; c) stop doing. To improve your learning, what can your INSTRUCTOR OR TA a) start doing; b) keep doing; c) stop doing."*
- Offer to observe TAs' teaching at some point during the quarter, if they would like
  - Remind undergraduates in advance and during the observation that you are there to observe the TA, not the students
  - Include positive and constructive feedback
  - Set aside time to meet after the teaching observation to discuss your feedback

#### **5) Recognize the potential of the "research/teaching nexus"**

- When possible, invite graduate students to give a guest lecture on topics related to their research
- Encourage TAs to incorporate their own research into the curriculum in other ways (through case studies, readings, or discussions)
- Consider collaborating with graduate students to conduct research on your teaching

#### **6) Help TAs build teaching skills throughout graduate school**

- Tailor your supervisory or mentoring approach to TAs' level of experience. For example, first-year graduate students might benefit from coaching on course management and professional norms, while senior students might benefit from opportunities to guest lecture for your class
- Create or share workshops and other opportunities for professional development in teaching
- Share your favorite teaching tips, tools, and resources, and explain why you find them useful

#### **7) Support graduate students preparing for teaching careers**

- Ask graduate students about their teaching-related career goals
- Be honest about the challenges graduate students will face on the academic job market and in early-career teaching positions
- Write letters of recommendation speaking to graduate students' teaching skills, and let your TAs know you are willing to do this

# Seven Strategies for Working with Faculty

## Moving to Remote/Online Teaching

Graduate students' knowledge and experience as teachers has been critical to the university's rapid transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collaboration among faculty and graduate students can enhance undergraduate learning, graduate student professional development, and pedagogical creativity and efficacy. In practice, however, such collaboration is often complicated by challenging power dynamics, institutional cultures that tend to undervalue teaching skills and graduate student expertise, and a lack of clarity about our respective roles, goals, and expectations. The following strategies offer a starting point for graduate students preparing to work with faculty to support online course development.

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### 1) Recognize what you can teach and what you can learn

- Your **professional skill set and experience** as a student, teacher, and teaching assistant are assets to your students, your faculty colleagues, and to the university. The combination of knowledge, skills, and experiences you bring to this work are unique to you.
- Recognizing your own strengths and limitations (what you have to teach, and what you have to learn) can help **define the goals and scope of your work with faculty**.
- When reflecting on what you bring to this work, **consider a wide range of skills and knowledge**: using Canvas and Yuja, managing workflow in large courses as a TA, creating active learning activities, improving accessibility for all learners, developing inclusive course policies, communicating effectively with students and co-workers, etc.
- Consider your own limitations, both **what you have yet to learn** and **what you might delegate to others**. Knowing what you *can't* do will help you know when to set boundaries for your work, when to defer to others on your team, and when to ask for help.

### 2) Clarify expectations

- Teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic presents unprecedented challenges. **None of us knows quite what to expect** as faculty and TAs collaborate to build online courses.
- Even under typical working conditions, **a lack of clarity about respective roles and expectations** is one of the most frequently cited sources of difficulty for the faculty-TA working relationship.
- Wherever possible in your communication with faculty, **try to make clear what expectations you each have** for your work together. What kind of guidance or direction do you expect from them? How many hours will you be working and how will they be distributed? Will your work be focused on building a pre-designed online course in Canvas, or will you be collaborating to design or redesign an online class for the first time?

- The **Faculty-TA Communication Checklists** (pgs. 8-11 in this handbook) are designed to elicit an open discussion of expectations between faculty and TAs during a typical term. Many of the questions may be relevant to you in defining expectations for online course development.
- It's important to note that the shift to remote teaching and learning can entail **substantial changes to the types of labor and responsibilities** demanded of graduate student TAs and fellows. The list of teaching and course management responsibilities in the **TA Timesheet for Remote/Online Teaching** (pgs. 12-14 in this handbook) can be used as a starting point to define the scope of your work.

### 3) Define course goals & priorities

- If you and your faculty colleague are not sure where to begin with collaborative course design, it can help to start by **defining their course goals and priorities**.
- Course goals might be specific **Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**, such as “Students will be able to describe a data set including both categorical and quantitative variables to support or refute a statement.” Other goals might include things like “I want course policies to **accommodate students’ need for flexibility** during this time” or “I want TAs to focus more on providing written feedback rather than managing technical issues in Canvas.”
- Understanding faculty’s goals and priorities can help you figure out **where to focus your course development efforts**, such as what elements of a face-to-face class can be redesigned, kept as-is, or taken out altogether.
- These priorities can also help you **communicate about competing objectives**. For example, multiple choice quizzes may be less effective than essays for assessing some types of student learning, but essays require much more grading labor. Referring back to course priorities can help you figure out how to balance these trade-offs.
- You may use the **Backward Course Design Template for Remote/Online Classes** (pg. 19 in this handbook) to help you (re)design a course around defined student learning outcomes. ([See this resource](#) for a primer on Backward Course Design.)

### 4) Offer alternative options

- Collaborating on teaching and course design may be a very different way of working with faculty than either you or they are accustomed to. In a traditionally hierarchical institution like a university, **it can be tricky to navigate how to provide feedback “up the ladder,”** especially when you may have skills and experience faculty do not have. Every working relationship is unique, and **there is no one right way** to navigate these challenges. When in doubt, consider offering alternative options and explaining your reasoning.
- **Offering alternative options** can help you strike a balance between pointing out the problems with a particular approach while still deferring to faculty’s judgement. When you can, describe different ways to address an issue, citing pros and cons of each. For example, you might say “Live Zoom lectures have the benefit of simulating in-person class, but we may not be able to expect consistent synchronous attendance. On the

other hand, recorded lectures allow you to organize lectures by topic rather than time limits, but don't allow for live Q&A or discussion."

## 5) Explain your reasoning

- Explaining your reasoning can include **referring to your own experience** or referencing the **goals and priorities** discussed in Strategy 2: "Based on my experience TAing, moderating daily discussion boards will involve X hours of TA grading per week, which might make it hard for TAs to focus on grading the assignments you mentioned were priorities in our last meeting."
- In other situations, you might **refer to research**: "Some research shows that *less* direct instructor involvement in online discussion boards can actually encourage student expression and engagement. Can these discussion boards be more hands-off?"

## 6) Pick your battles

- **There is no single right way to teach**, and ultimately, most course design decisions are the instructor's to make.
- Bearing this in mind, **consider your own values, priorities, and boundaries** when deciding whether and how to provide feedback, especially when you expect it might be met with resistance. It's okay to decide something is "above your pay grade."
- Whenever you can, center your discussion around students' needs and learning.
- Ask for help. If you're uncertain about whether or how to address an issue with faculty, you can reach out to your mentors or DTEI advisors to help you think it through.

## 7) Leverage teaching as a team

- Collaborative teaching and course design can be challenging, but it also offers distinctive opportunities for creativity, efficiency, mutual learning, and honing our practice as teachers.
- Keep an eye out for ways to leverage your collaboration with faculty to improve your pedagogy, whether through brainstorming novel active learning assignments or pilot-testing a rubric (see **Getting Started with Grade Norming** on pg. 25 of this handbook) to make it more fair and effective.
- Think of your fellow TAs and graduate student colleagues as collaborators in exploring team-teaching—learn from each other, ask for support, and share your ideas freely.





## Institutional Support for Faculty, TAs, & Students

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A key lesson from the *Teaching Together Learning Community* is that teachers' individual ability to change their teaching, mentoring, and collaboration is greatly dependent on broader structural issues in the university and beyond. A main goal of this project is to help faculty and graduate students improve their working relationships and pedagogical practice *within* current institutional constraints, but we recognize that the interventions that have the greatest impact on our work, teaching, and learning require much broader institutional transformation.

Faculty and TAs are often drawn to careers in higher education because of a passion for teaching and learning. In practice, our ability to teach and learn effectively are constrained by structural concerns like growing undergraduate class sizes, mounting pressures on research and publication, and deeply entrenched racism, sexism, and ableism in our institutions. For graduate students and adjunct faculty, these pressures are often compounded by the competitive academic job market, the precarity of teaching labor, and the growing gap between academic workers' funding and their cost of living.

The transformation of the university into a more inclusive and just institution for all students and workers is a massive undertaking far beyond the scope of this project. Nonetheless, the *Teaching Together Learning Community* identified several immediate opportunities to strengthen institutional support for faculty-TA collaboration, graduate students' pedagogical development, and undergraduate learning in large classes in UCI's School of Social Sciences. These recommendations are summarized below.

### **1) Administer TA assignments within each department, rather than at the School level.**

This is the recommendation we heard most often—from faculty and graduate students alike—in our survey, workshops, and interviews. Allowing each department or graduate program to manage course assignments for their own students would have multiple benefits. First, graduate students would benefit greatly from teaching experience and mentorship within their discipline or field of study, allowing them to develop skills relevant to their careers and job prospects (Withrow 2012). Research has shown that graduate TAs who experience their work as disconnected from their own learning and career objectives feel “disposable,” “disenchanted,” and “exploited” (Madden 2014). Additionally, a fear of appearing misinformed can create anxiety and fear of faculty (Gardner and Jones 2011).

Second, allowing departments to make TA assignments in advance would create more opportunities for joint course development that leverages faculty-TA collaboration to enhance undergraduate learning. Graduate students could be better matched with faculty and courses that could benefit from their knowledge as well as promote their professional development. Third, departments could help identify course assignments commensurate with each TA's experience. For example, an introductory course with well-established TA roles and experienced instructors would be better suited to first-time TAs than an assignment as the sole TA for a course in an unfamiliar discipline.

## **2) Create positions for experienced “lead TAs” in courses with multiple TAs.**

Nyquist and Wulff (1996) suggest that there are multiple developmental stages in TA professional development, ranging from “senior learners” to “junior colleagues,” and they suggest that faculty can tailor their supervisorial or mentoring approach according to the needs, knowledge, and experience of each graduate student. One way to do so is to create positions for experienced teaching assistants to lead teams of TAs in large classes, coordinating TAs' work and even mentoring less experienced TAs. This model is more common in large-enrollment classes in STEM disciplines. A lead TA role could simultaneously address several of the priority concerns of the *Teaching Together Learning Community*: improving role clarity and communication, navigating course management challenges as a teaching team, and enhancing opportunities for professional development for the lead TA.

## **3) Develop mechanisms for TAs to provide feedback for faculty.**

Both faculty and graduate students in the *Teaching Together Learning Community* noted that TAs often have unique insights on how a course runs, including on issues of course management, teaching effectiveness, and student experience. However, there are no formal mechanisms at present for TAs to provide feedback on teaching and learning in their assigned courses. There is also little support and oversight for how faculty manage and work with their TAs. Peer review of teaching models offer important opportunities for feedback and formative assessment (Dotger 2011). Creating opportunities for TAs to share feedback on a course at the end of the term would provide valuable information for instructors' future teaching and work with TAs, as well as additional professional development for current TAs.

## **4) Involve graduate students in undergraduate pedagogy and curriculum development.**

Involving graduate TAs as active members of a department can maximize the potential of “the research-teaching nexus” by incorporating their own research projects into the curriculum, prioritizing the development of TAs' professional identities, and encouraging their sense of ownership of undergraduate learning objectives (Fairbrother 2011). Graduate programs can support these objectives by creating new opportunities for graduate students in undergraduate pedagogy and curriculum development, foregrounding TAs' roles as undergraduate educators, not merely faculty-in-training (Madden 2014). For example, a graduate student representative could serve on a department's undergraduate committee,

bringing a TA's perspective to the curriculum development and learning about academic service in the process. Additionally, departments could create opportunities for advanced TAs to co-teach with faculty, such as for seminars related to their research. In addition to providing graduate students with valuable academic training, co-teaching can enhance both undergraduates' learning experience and faculty's teaching experience (Walters and Misra 2013).

## **5) Provide ongoing, discipline-specific pedagogical training beyond the TA Professional Development Program and orientation.**

Intentional pedagogical training for graduate students improves undergraduate learning and prepares graduate students for careers in and out of academia. Currently, incoming graduate students in the School of Social Sciences are required to complete the TA Professional Development Program (TAPDP) before their first TA assignment, but they may receive no additional pedagogical training while at UCI. Ongoing training responds to the multiple developmental stages of TA professional development (Nyquist and Wulff 1996), enhances experiential learning about teaching challenges TAs may encounter in practice (Dotger 2011), and supports graduate students in developing their own teaching philosophies and professional identities (Fairbrother 2011; Madden 2014).

Discipline-specific training is especially valuable (Chadha 2013; Gardner and Jones 2011; Pentecost et al. 2012). For example, the Preparing Future Faculty program from the Council of Graduate Schools has sponsored a variety of activities at institutions of higher education and in disciplinary professional associations to support pedagogical development (Gaff et al. 2003; Winter et al. 2018). Courses for credit are most common, and over the last several years, these have shifted from centralized courses housed in teaching centers to quarter- or semester-long, discipline-focused courses housed in academic departments (Robinson et al. 2019). Other successful training activities noted by the Preparing Future Faculty program include certificate programs, cohort-based learning communities, institutional partnerships, seminars, and workshops (Gaff et al. 2003; Winter et al. 2018). Mentoring activities also hold promise, and Dotger (2011) proposes a method where faculty mentors facilitate focused strategies for improving TA pedagogical practice. This close mentorship enables faculty and TAs alike to study and reflect upon their teaching practice.

\* \* \*

These recommendations are not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to provide examples of some ways UCI and the School of Social Sciences can support ongoing pedagogical collaboration among faculty and graduate students, enhance undergraduate learning, and develop robust professional development opportunities for future university educators. We hope the tools and strategies laid out in this handbook, in conjunction with broader institutional support, will inspire faculty and TAs to continue to develop new and better ways of working, learning, and teaching together.

## About the Authors

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**Katie Cox** is a PhD Candidate in UCI's Department of Anthropology. As a Senior Pedagogical Fellow with UCI's Division of Teaching Excellence and Instruction (DTEI), Katie has designed and led numerous pedagogical trainings for UCI graduate students, faculty, and post-doctoral scholars on topics including active learning, inclusive teaching, and online course design. In Summer 2020, Katie helped to coordinate the DTEI Graduate Fellowship, through which graduate students across UCI worked collaboratively with faculty to redesign courses for remote instruction. Katie received the 2019 Most Promising Future Faculty Award in recognition of her teaching, service, and research at UCI.

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# Additional Resources

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## Backward Course Design

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## Designing Discussion Sections for Student Learning

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- Walvoord, Barbara E. and Virginia Johnson Anderson. "Effective Grading: A Tool for Learning and Assessment." Review by David Adams.
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## Graduate Students' Professional and Pedagogical Development

- [UCI Division of Teaching Excellence and Innovation \(DTEI\) Workshops and Pedagogical Fellows program](#)
- [UCI Teaching Anthropology graduate seminar](#)
- [UCI Inclusive Instruction Working Group](#)

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