CHAPTER ONE:

PREPARING TO TEACH

In the Beginning

Meet with your faculty supervisor to learn what is expected of you.

Are you expected to:

- Grade or evaluate papers, quizzes, exams?
- Write final evaluations or assign final grades?
- Meet and confer with individual students?
- Hold regular office hours? How many hours a week?
- Meet and confer with the faculty instructor?
- Make up or help the instructor make up exams, quizzes, paper topics, or research topics?
- Give a lecture or lectures?
- Keep attendance? Is section attendance mandatory? Optional?

Find out what assistance the faculty member is prepared to offer you.

Request the following:

- Weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the instructor and with other TAs for the class.
- "Desk copies" of assigned reading for class instructions and discussion. (You should never have to spend your salary buying the books for a course you are TAing. The faculty instructor needs to order these when he/she orders books for the course.)
- Copies of all handouts and syllabi. Be sure to get extras for students who have missed classes or lost their copy.

Discuss the following:

- Your access to photocopiers and to office space, if you don't already have it.
- Section size/work load.
- Instructor visits.

The First Day of Class

Even established instructors get nervous when meeting a class for the first time. For a beginning TA, a sea of new faces, combined with the newness of teaching itself, can be truly daunting. Be assured that, while the first day of class is undeniably important, it won't make or break your quarter. The impression left by a less-than-perfect first day will be forgotten as you gain increasing confidence in your teaching.

The key to surviving the first day is preparation. Here are some things you can do ahead of time to get ready:

- Make sure you understand your faculty supervisor's expectations, and how your section fits into the course as a whole.
- Think through your objectives for the quarter: what do you want students to learn, and how might you facilitate that learning?
- Visit your classroom ahead of time, so you know where it is and how it is physically arranged.
- Plan your first day carefully. Have an outline on paper that you can refer to. Practicing what you plan to say can make you feel less nervous.

Think of the first day as an opportunity to establish the tone for the quarter, and to communicate your attitudes and expectations. Keep in mind that many students may be "shopping." They will want to know what the course will cover, what the requirements will be, and what the instructor is like. Listed below are five things you will want to cover the first day, along with some tips for accomplishing each.

Introduce yourself

- Make sure students know how they may address you.
- Tell them your office hours and location, email address, and phone number if appropriate. Also have this information on a handout.
- Let them know your background, and why you are interested in the subject.

Introduce the subject

- Help students understand the context for the course: Why is the subject interesting? How might it relate to their lives or future studies?
- Consider bringing in a specific real-world connection, such as a relevant news story, to pique their interest.
- Give students an overview of the course objectives.

Communicate course or section requirements

- What work will be required?
- What will class meetings be like?
- How will students be evaluated?
- What are your policies on attendance, late papers, etc?

Get to know your students

- When calling roll, ask for correct pronunciations and nicknames.
- Index cards, folded lengthwise, can serve as name tags to be placed on desks for the first few class meetings.
- Consider playing a "name game" to help you and students learn one another's names.
- Ask students to pair up and interview one another, then introduce their partner to the class.
- Ask students to write on a card or paper their name, class, major, previous experiences with the subject, and their expectations for the course.
- Discuss their expectations and preconceptions about the subject.

Set the tone for the quarter

- Establish an approachable persona by encouraging questions.
- Communicate your own interest in the subject.
- If possible, incorporate into the first class meeting the kinds of activities you plan to use during the quarter, such as discussion, group activities, problem-solving, writing.
- Give a substantive assignment for the next class meeting to signal that you intend to get down to business. This might be a short reading, introductory writing exercise, or asking students to bring in a relevant article from the press.

Over- and Under-Preparation

[adapted from the UC Davis TA Manual]

Regarding over- and under-preparation, a TA at UC Davis says: I learned that it is far better to be overprepared than underprepared. A most difficult and recurring problem I face, especially teaching a given course or section for the first time, is gauging the amount of material to be covered in any particular class meeting. Clearly, teaching involves a lot of preparation. But how much? I have spent days preparing for a one-hour class in which only one-fifth of what I had prepared was covered. I have also (I guiltily admit) been underprepared because of lack of time—rather, I didn't make time for preparation. I have listed what I feel are the consequences of each of these.

Being overprepared:

- Anger at myself for not sleeping, skipping lunch before class for further preparation—in short, feeling I was over-compulsive.
- Disappointment at not covering the prepared material in class.
- Running the danger of trying to squeeze in too much, because, after all, I have my notes in front of me. This confuses the students.
- Steering class time away from questions or free-flowing conversation because of trying to squeeze in too much.
- A strange feeling of dedication to my work and students, feeling that I care. Why should I be so masochistic?
- A sense of accomplishment.
- I might learn something from the material.
- I will have material for my next meeting, if it involves a continuation of the current class meeting. Thus the first two thoughts may be irrational.
- No time to make significant progress on my own work or dissertation.

Being underprepared:

- An intense, overwhelming, omnipresent, terrifying feeling of FEAR before and during class, "My God! What if they ask me questions which I should be prepared to answer?"
- Heart-piercing guilt for having let my students down and partially wasted their time.
- Intense self-criticism for being underprepared.
- A firmly cemented vow, never, never, never, NEVER to let this happen again.

Equally as important as preparing for individual class sessions is the larger preparation for the course. Many TAs are in a position to exercise a good deal of control over the content and progression of their courses; for these TAs particularly, it is vital to determine course goals as explicitly as possible and to make these goals clear to the students.

A straightforward and well-thought-out syllabus or lesson plan can go far toward establishing a relationship of trust between TAs and their students. Whenever possible, try to stick with the syllabus, since students depend on it—and if it was well planned in the first place, it can prevent you from dwelling too long on one issue to the neglect of others. A good syllabus can provide you and your students with a positive sense of where the course is going, where it has been, and what its governing principles and goals are.

Be honest with your students about your goals and the methods of communicating these goals. A number of studies have shown that students who understand a course's objectives learn more quickly—possibly because they spend less time trying to figure them out on their own all term. There's no advantage in making a mystery of what you expect from students. The better prepared you are in your overall conception of the course, the more clearly you can communicate these goals to your students. If you have not TAed the course before, have the instructor clue you in.

A last word of advice

Finally, don't panic if your first discussion doesn't cover everything, or if the students' level of analysis doesn't meet or exceed your expectations. Your primary goal is to set up an atmosphere in which you and the students are comfortable exchanging ideas among yourselves. If one-third of the section contributes to the discussion, you've done fine. If two-thirds contributes, you've done an excellent job.

Office Hours

Why have office hours?

Office hours can be an important part of the learning process or a completely wasted opportunity. The difference depends on your ability to encourage students to come to your office to clarify material presented in class, ask questions about assignments, or get suggestions for further readings. Early in the quarter you can encourage the habit of using office hours by scheduling a short interview with each student in your section. In this interview you can find out the reasons they are taking the course, and learn about any particular problems they anticipate, and generally develop a good rapport with them.

If you are a graduate student at Santa Cruz and have your own office, you should consider yourself extremely lucky. For many of us, office space has been and continues to be a problem.

Whom to call and whom to ask for office space:

1. See your department assistant for space that is controlled by your department
2. Call your divisional business office for information regarding the latest graduate student office space on campus.

Other alternatives

You may want to consider holding your office hours in one of the college coffee shops, at a picnic table, or another "alternative" place—including a coffee shop off-campus, dorm lounge, etc.

During the first week of the quarter, you should tell your students the location of your office and the times during which you will be available for consultation. Post these hours on your office door. If you don't have an office, ask if you can post your hours by the course instructor's door. (You can pick up one of those "official" office hour cards your professor uses from the department office to do this.) It is advisable to announce any changes in your office hours or any emergency cancellations. Most TAs spend an average of two hours a week holding office hours, although this may vary from department to department.

Not all of your students will be able to make it to your posted office hours, so you may want to keep the option open to make individual appointments as needed. Do remember, though, that your time is limited. If you are making several special appointments, it may be wise to schedule several of them for the same day, back-to-back, right after class, etc.

Actually getting students to come to your office hours

How do you get students to come in? Let them know frequently that they are welcome. Invite them individually. A comment on a paper (e.g., "Please see me about this") brings about a 75% response. Stress the importance and value of office visits both to you and to them. (Note: You can also invite students to come in and talk about any positive responses you have had to their work. Undergraduates need not automatically associate office hours with serious problems). Most TAs deal with freshpersons and sophomores who are new at the university. If those first few who come in have positive experiences, the word will spread. Some TAs find that posting the answers to quiz or homework problems on their door is an effective means of attracting students to office hours. Circulate a sign-up sheet in section to schedule appointments.

You may also wish to schedule two mandatory office meetings with individual students (once at the beginning of the term and once at the end). If you can get students to show up at least once and if they find the experience pleasant and useful (rather than painful), chances are that you'll be seeing students regularly during your office hours. Realistically, visits are likely to be cyclical. You can expect anxious faces at your door right before exams and just before paper deadlines.

Try to be as approachable as possible. The best thing to do when a student comes in to your office hours is to make him or her feel welcome. It is very easy to make students feel that they are intruding; it takes only a little bit of care to create a relaxed, pleasant atmosphere in which communication is natural and easy. Arranging for them to have a chair to sit on helps.

Rely on the student to tell you what he or she has come to see you about. You may suspect some hidden problem, but you should not press the student to disclose it. You can help the students if they actively request your help, but your responsibility need not extend further than responding to their requests.

Listen to your students when they come to your office hours. Give them your undivided attention. This is all part of making students feel welcome and encouraging better communication. If you share an office, try to set your office hours so both TAs do not need the space at the same time. (It is distracting to have two consultations going on at once).

The best way to show that you are listening is to ask questions—it also shows students that you find their concerns important. Students often fear that they are wasting your time; by listening attentively and responding thoughtfully, you can help allay their anxiety. Finally, you should realize that you won't always be able to provide the information that is needed.

Addressing individual problems

As the quarter progresses and you become more familiar with your students, office hours can be used with increasing effectiveness to address individual problems. For instance, almost every quarter you will teach a few shy students who consistently do well on written assignments, but who are initially reticent in class discussions. In office hours you can meet individually with these students and encourage them to speak more in class by expressing your enthusiasm for their work and urging them to share their good ideas with the rest of the section.

In addition to advising and answering questions from individual students, office hours can also be used in a number of ways to supplement lectures and discussion sections. For example, special office hours can be scheduled to deal with particularly difficult material. Group office hours can also be held for review sessions at the end of the quarter.

Office hours can also be used to grade papers—or do work of your own—if no one shows up.

Fairness and respect

In meeting with students during the quarter, aim at creating the sense that you will treat them fairly and without favoritism. If you are approached by a student with serious personal problems, refer the student to the appropriate person or facility. (Note: In a situation in which a student is asking for more personal counseling, remember that you are not always the best qualified person for the student to be talking to.) If you think the student needs more specific advice, you may be able to suggest someone who can provide it. Or you may refer the student to the Counseling and Psychological Services. [See "Resources for TAs."] These various resources may not be able to help you solve all of the problems you are confronted with, but it will give you a place to start. Despite your desire to help students, don't allow yourself to be put in the position of surrogate parent or psychotherapist. The creation of a dependency relationship could be harmful to you and to the student.

Students may be critical of a course or a faculty member but feel uncomfortable about voicing their criticism directly to the professor involved. You may want to convey the criticism yourself, particularly if the criticism is constructive and can be used to improve the course. If you do decide to convey any critical comments, make sure you protect the student's anonymity. As a TA, you are in an especially difficult and sensitive position and should respect the confidences of both faculty and students.

CHAPTER TWO:

DISCUSSION AND REVIEW SECTIONS

Entering undergraduates often don't know how to behave in class discussions, and moreover come to the University with an image of student and teacher that doesn't include discussion. The image of the University professor as a teller of great truths from a formal podium is part of the fantasy many students have about University life. They come to be told, to be taught. In their limited secondary school experience, "discussion" often was really an oral examination on the previous night's homework assignment. It is safe to assume that when you face the students in your discussion section for the first time they have, at best, only a vague idea of their responsibility in a discussion and, at worst, the idea that you are only the source of answers to their questions on or about tests. A key to having a good discussion section is for both you and the students to have a clear idea of the goals of a discussion and the behavior expected of the leader and participants. (Douglas L. Minnis, former Assoc. Dean of the Graduate Division, UC Davis)

Generally smaller than the lecture portion of a class, discussion sections are places where students get an opportunity to test ideas, work through problems, clarify confusions, and build learning communities.

Discussion Strategies for Increasing Class Participation

[compiled from the UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis TA Manuals, and "An Interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching in the Context of War" in Sub/Versions, a working-paper series of the Feminist Studies FRA]

A variety of strategies can improve learning in a discussion setting. When selecting a strategy, keep in mind the needs and abilities of the students, the appropriateness of the strategy for the material you are covering, and the kinds of strategies you feel comfortable and competent using. Here are a number of possibilities:

1) ***Provide study questions*** about the lecture or reading material that can form the basis of the next class discussion and will alert students to the most important ideas to be derived from that week's assignment.

2) ***Require students to hand in one-page summaries*** of that week's readings or class assignment. This will help ensure that they do the reading before they come to class. You might also encourage them to hand in a question or problem at the end of section that can be taken up at the next meeting. (Five minutes may be set aside for this purpose.) This allows quieter students a means of contributing to discussion with less risk. This also makes students' areas of difficulty known to you. It allows you to diagnose major areas of difficulty when similar problems are raised by a number of students.

3) ***Assign groups of students the responsibility*** for planning and leading some discussions. This works best when students are responsible for a limited topic, problem, or research area.

4) ***Ask students to use the blackboard to solve problems***, do translations or write prose compositions, or to list ideas or possible answers to a question. [See Chapter 5 for more information about use of the blackboard].

5) ***Play "devil's advocate"*** if necessary to prompt students to get involved in or animated about class discussion. Even if you agree with students' arguments about a certain topic, challenge them with the most cogent argument against their position. This often makes for good debate in class. Try to resolve disputes by appeal to objective evidence and not authority of position. If the dispute is over values, have these clarified and respected even if resolution is not possible. Disputes can often form the basis for library or writing assignments. Listing evidence pro and con on the blackboard during disputes is another way to encourage participation.

6) ***Begin a discussion by asking a question about a common experience of the group*** and then relate it to the reading, asking comparison/contrast questions or presenting an alternative view.

7) ***Have students nominate topics for discussion*** at the beginning of a section. These can include problems, interesting points, or basic ideas in the text. List the

nominations; then have the group pick the ones they want to cover and set the others aside, perhaps for office hours or paper topics.

8) If the material for the section lends itself to open-ended questions where a variety of ideas can aid understanding, ***have a brainstorming session.*** During the first part of the session pose a question and list every idea that students come up with in response. During the second part of the session, synthesize, relate, and critically judge the ideas as you approach a solution.

9) ***Clustering*** is an alternative to brainstorming. To do this, begin with a word, name, or concept written in the middle of the board. Have students brainstorm with this word as a focus, and expand connections out from the source. The base idea leads to more ideas, releases creative thought, clarifies conceptual connections, and provides source links for written assignments.

10) ***Divide students into smaller units,*** if the group is too large, and have each unit deal with the same or separate problems. Have one student in each group take responsibility for keeping time and another take responsibility for recording the content of the discussion. Float from group to group, giving guidance and answering questions when needed. When all students in each group have contributed, reassemble the entire section and have someone from each group present to the larger collective.

11) ***Think-and-listen groups*** combine the attributes of two-way time and small group activities, and are a great exercise to do when students should be thinking about paper topics or preparing for an exam. Have students break into fours or fives and have each participant speak for five minutes about "Everything they know about "X" topic." After all have spoken once, the group can give each person individual feedback.

12) ***Question cards*** are the source of another two/three person exercise that requires students to work with the course material. Make up cards before the section that deal with the course material (they can be descriptive or analytic questions, include quotations from the readings, charts or illustrations, etc.) You will need 10 cards for a group of twenty students. Pass the cards out and instruct each pair to work together for fifteen minutes to provide the best response for their question. Encourage the students to use any course material they have on hand to answer the questions. (This is an exercise that encourages students to do really close readings.) After the fifteen minutes are up, go around the room and have each group "teach" the rest of the class. Your role should become one of prodding or playing "devil's advocate" occasionally. Have the "experts" handle questions unless they get into really deep water.

13) ***Pose an either/or question and debate,*** e.g., "Is the frontier or the Industrial Revolution more important for an understanding of American character?" Have the class divide physically into those who favor each side and those who are undecided. Have a debate, with the undecided free to contribute at any time. When students change their view, ask them to move to the group with which they now agree. This kind of device can help students clarify their values, appreciate varying levels of argument, and see the implications of the positions that they choose. On occasion it is also useful to assign students to specific sides of a debate and then switch the sides in the middle. This ensures that all students are associated with "less desirable or correct" positions and that they can make both arguments.

14) ***Taking positions*** is another exercise that can be used to help students clarify concepts or where they stand in relation to course material. Before class, make a list of statements about a current course topic that the students can affirm or dispute. When students have assembled, label one side of the room "agree" and the other "disagree." Read the questions aloud and have the students physically move after each question to show their response. When there is time, have the students on each side of the room discuss among themselves why they are there and then present their reasons to the others. Students find it very interesting to see their alliances shift from question to question. Undecided locations can be included and the corners of the room can be used to provide greater variation: label them "agree strongly," "agree somewhat," "disagree somewhat," and "disagree strongly."

15) ***Pose a comparison-and-contrast question about two or more concepts from class readings.*** Have the students free-write all the various possibilities of connection and disparity they can think of. Then, synthesize the lists on the board and use them to analyze the concepts or theories, or to introduce and evaluate the readings.

16) ***For closure exercises*** that especially encourage those students who have not spoken during discussion, try the following:

a. Go around the room and give the floor to students who have not said anything and let them pose a question, make an observation or comment, or simply "check in" with the section regarding what they thought of class or the week's readings.
b. Try closing by quickly going around the room and asking each student to say "una palabra" (one word) that reflects the section meeting itself, the discussion, or the readings.

These exercises open a space for all the students in your section to then contribute something to the discussion. All of the strategies discussed so far involve some forethought, although they leave considerable room for flexibility as the class progresses. Showing respect for students in both your demeanor and language, and encouraging the group to engage in a common learning enterprise can help make the students feel more comfortable and ready to share ideas.

Skillful Questioning

[adapted from UC Santa Cruz Earth Sciences and UC Berkeley TA Manuals]

Skillful questioning is one of the most useful skills for the beginning instructor to master. Proper questioning both checks the level at which your students are operating and leads them to rise above it. It is important to pay attention to the kinds of questions you ask and how you present them. Students will answer questions at the level you pitch them. What follows are some general pointers to lead you into questioning skillfully and a review of several common questioning problems.

Pointers

Decide whether you are more interested in eliciting certain answers or in stimulating general intellectual inquiry. This decision, largely dependent on your particular discipline, will greatly affect the content of your discussions and your own flexibility in letting them take their own shape.

Even if you decide you want a general intellectual inquiry, it is usually best to ***begin by discussing basic questions.*** Initial questions should be simple, designed to test students' understanding of the lecture or the readings. Probing for specific areas of understanding or misunderstanding is a necessary first step in most discussion sections. Once this basic understanding is achieved, you can move on to ask questions about larger units of material, about relationships among the different parts of the material and their relationship to the whole, about applications and expansion of the material into new areas.

Be supportive of students. If an answer is completely incorrect, encourage the same student to rephrase or to attempt it again. Try to provide an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable offering tentative or partial answers, and encourage them in their attempts to elaborate or qualify.

Encourage your students to ask questions of one another. If one student needs assistance in completing an answer, look to another student to provide it, rather than providing it yourself.

Phrase questions so students can show off their grasp of the material. Avoid questions that have right or wrong answers. Avoid anything with the implicit message "I know something you don't know and you'll look stupid if you don't guess right."

Discussion questions need to be phrased as problems that are meaningful to student and instructor alike. Phrase questions at a level appropriate for the class. Remember, you may have to shift gears if you come from your great graduate seminar to TA your introductory level section.

Wait long enough to give students a chance to think. The issue of "wait-time" is an often ignored component of questioning techniques. Try counting to 10 s-l-o-w-l-y after asking a provocative question to which you are just dying to respond yourself. Students don't like a silent classroom either. Once they have confidence that you will give them time to think their responses through, they will participate more freely.

Defensive questioning

How eager would you be to respond to questions such as these?

- Since I have explained this several times already, you all should know what is the effect of an increased demand upon this supply curve.
- Obviously, when you use this formula you'll get...?
- (After listening to several answers) The real answer is this, etc.
- Does everybody understand the explanation I just gave? It should be clear by now.
- O.K. Now rephrase your answer the way you think I would say it.

Students need to feel that it is psychologically "safe" to participate, to try out ideas, to be wrong as well as right. The teacher's behavior is a most important determinant in the establishment of a safe or comfortable climate. Learning, an active process, requires that the student interact with ideas and materials. Student participation frequently increases when instructors do not conceal their ignorance, but sometimes hesitate about certain questions of information. Instructors' responses should be guided more by an honest desire to assist students than to demonstrate the extent of their own knowledge. Constant "teacher-talk," feeling compelled to comment on each student idea, deciding to be the final arbiter in decision-making processes, interrupting, controlling, intimidating either through expertise or the threat of grades—these are but some of the behaviors that prevent students from engaging in the active processes needed for significant (as distinguished from "rote") learning to take place.

Try to:

- Remember and refer to students' ideas, by name if possible.
- Yield to class members during discussion.
- Acknowledge your own fallibility.
- Accept that your students will not always have the "right" answer. This doesn't mean that either they or you have failed.

Student Responsibilities: The Bottom Line

Although you may need to encourage your students to come to class prepared, remind them that they owe it to each other to do so. This responsibility is ultimately theirs; you are not their parent.

CHAPTER THREE:

TEACHING AND RESPONDING TO WRITING

Teaching Students to Write

The ability to write clearly and well is one of the most important skills students should learn in college. Nevertheless, writing is one of the most difficult things to teach. We realize that there is no one simple formula or outline for the teaching of writing. However, what all of the essays in this section repeatedly stress is that if you are committed to helping your students to become better writers, then it is the writing process and not the writing product that they need to develop, with your careful attention.

You don't have to be an English teacher to help students improve their writing. TAs in almost every discipline are in some way concerned with writing, and they can expect to confront various levels of skill—or lack thereof—in their students. TAs should also be prepared to deal with different degrees of anxiety about writing, proficiency in English, and resistance to the whole idea.

We empower our students by helping them develop the skills and the voice with which to write. And if we equate writing with power, then the teaching of writing can be equally empowering for TAs.

On Teaching Writing

by Miriam Wallace [a TA's perspective]

The amount and kind of writing our students are asked to do is often not in our control. Nevertheless, as primary respondents we have quite a bit of power in shaping what kind of writing we have to read. A badly written assignment often produces bad writing in response. Working on students' writing in sections or office hours ahead of the due date can make a big difference. Here are some general notes on teaching writing at UCSC which can help you avoid trying to respond to truly awful written work.

Avoiding the five-paragraph essay

Many, if not most, students come to the university expecting to write what they were taught was the proper essay formula in high school: the five-paragraph essay. Most of you know this creature under one name or another. The format goes like this: first comes your introduction that states your thesis clearly, then you have three points that prove this, each of which gets a paragraph, and the fifth paragraph is your conclusion that basically restates the introduction claiming the thesis is proved by the intervening three paragraphs. This formula is precisely that, a formula. It yields dull, repetitive and narrow-minded papers. It is unchallenging and leaves little room for the writing process to lead anywhere, since the conclusion is already written in the introduction. If students show you rough drafts or even final drafts that look like this, you need to do something lest you die of boredom and frustration reading twenty, thirty, forty papers of this kind. Here are some suggestions:

Explain the five-paragraph format and why it limits the writer's ability to say what he/she wants to say.

Ask students what they really are interested in, and how they would explain it to someone back home. (This will sometimes get the student to think outside of the academic mode and loosen the ability to verbalize and then to write.)

Ask students to write their first papers without either introduction or conclusion. Work on these after the body is constructed.

Ask students to use their conclusion to expound on what they learned in the process of writing the paper.

Topics and thesis statements: Helping students say it their way

Students often have the most trouble condensing their ideas into manageable paper length. This problem is common when the paper topic is open, but poorly written assigned topics elicit unmanageable and unfocused papers as well. Conscientious students try to cover all the issues raised by a topic, and wind up with thesis-sized papers that you don't have the time to read.

Start by asking students what they are really interested in. What does the student really want to tell you? Sometimes students can tell you in ordinary conversation what their real point is when the kind of dense, formal language they think college papers should be written in keeps blocking their ability to express themselves.

Once a student has verbalized an idea, you can ask questions to help him/her narrow it down, decide what information he/she will need to actually write on it, and help him/her to walk out with a firmer idea where to begin. Sometimes I keep notes of our discussion, and hand these to students before they walk out. This can serve two purposes. It shows that I was interested and attentive enough to write down what the student said. It can also serve as a model for the student in later writing meetings. This can be tricky, since the temptation is to take notes on the paper you would write yourself. Try to honestly write down what you hear the student saying he/she wants to write about.

If the student has a rough draft, or even notes, sometimes you can find the beginnings of a thesis statement buried in there. Showing a student that he/she has already produced something which could be the seed of the essay often encourages the student hugely.

Outlines—pros and cons

Outlines are useful when writers have too many good ideas, and need to figure out how ideas are related and subordinated. However, forcing students to write outlines before all papers can prevent the writing process from being a learning and discovery process. Use your judgement about when an outline might help a student to focus and organize interesting but rambling ideas, or when an outline will limit writing. You can have students make outlines after they finish a paper, especially if the structure is bad. This can help to clarify why a reader has trouble following an argument. It is possible that an outline may shut down writing before it really gets going, so if students have interesting ideas but stilted writing, discuss the problem with them. The major point is to be sensitive to frustration due to the limitations of outlines, and recognize that this doesn't mean the student can't write well. Writing an outline is potentially useful, but it is not a panacea.

Overcoming writer's block

Writer's block is one of all of our worst nightmares. Try some of these strategies to get students who are blocked jump-started.

Tell the student to start from somewhere other than the beginning. Many writing blocks come from trying to start with a good introduction when the student is all ready to write the central argument. Starting in the middle of the argument allows the paper to develop so that the introduction and conclusion become clearer.

Use in-class or in-section free-writes. Give out a topic, or even a few words or section of class readings and ask students to write for a timed period. Anything they write is OK, even, for example, why they don't feel like writing about the class material, etc. If you do these frequently and ask students to save them, or hand them in to you (not for reading, but to hand back later) many students will have the beginnings of a paper or at least a starting point.

Another way to do this is to have students try free-writing on the topic at home, and then if they like, bring their free-writes in as if they were rough drafts. Ask the student what he/she wanted to say, thought was really interesting, found out by writing.

Grammar and spelling: How much do they count?

The key here is to decide if the mistakes you are seeing are a product of carelessness, or a sign of a deeper problem with written language. Or, alternately, are they not mistakes, but an effort at unconventional writing for a purpose? Some "grammatical" errors are indeed purposeful, and require a thoughtful response, such as use of the pronoun "they" when a singular is required by context. This is fast becoming acceptable in colloquial American English, as a way to avoid the gendered singular "he" or "she" by substituting a neutral "they," ignoring the problem of number.

Carelessness is often indicated by errors that are inconsistent. The most effective way I have found to convince students to avoid careless errors is to suggest two things to them: 1) Many readers will not take a writer seriously who makes simple grammatical and spelling mistakes. Even unsophisticated readers can identify these "high visibility" errors, and will ignore the content by reading only the errors. Such readers will assume any information written in such a way must be suspect. 2) Such errors also suggest disrespect for your reader, including your TA and professor. If you really have trouble spotting these mistakes, ask a friend to read over your paper for you, looking for just such slips.

If the mistakes are consistent, or if there are great number of them, you can suggest that the student try working with a writing tutor. Students whose first language is not English may have difficulty with such peculiar things as prepositions (those little words that make no sense at all, but which native English speakers seem to know instinctively). Sometimes a quick lesson in section will do the trick, ("its" and "it's" are two of my quickie favorites). Sometimes you may even want to suggest that a student take a writing course.

Using writing groups: Peer critique

Writing groups are a way of using the energy and fresh eyes of your students to help each other. In addition, students are likely to become better writers by thinking seriously about others' writing. Poor writers can learn from better writers, and better writers can often offer useful and less frightening models for their peers than any TA or professor.

When you ask students to read and respond to each other's papers, you do need to set some guidelines so that students don't either pick on every word, or generously say "I liked it" without offering any useful insights. I always start by saying that I expect all of us to honor each other and try to hear the point the writer is trying to make. I usually ask students to pair up, or split them into small groups, depending on how much time we have. You can ask students to read each other's papers silently, trading off when they finish, or you can ask students to turn in xeroxed copies at the beginning of class for everyone if you are really organized. Then I have them answer the questions below.

You can also ask the writer to read his/her paper aloud. With five-page papers, you can expect each paper to take ten minutes read aloud, or about eight read silently. The others are to listen silently to the whole paper, noting their response to these three questions:

1) What is the paper about?
2) What did you as a reader/listener want more of?
3) Where did you as reader/listener get confused?

Using office hours

Having students come to your office hours with their rough ideas and notes is often an excellent way to head off trouble, give students the encouragement to continue with good and original ideas, as well as create a good working relationship. I also sometimes have students sign up for a meeting after their first paper to give them a chance to ask me about any puzzling comments, or cryptic markings, to argue that I missed their point and so prepare for a rewrite, and for me to learn faces. I've also discovered that if you've overzealously promised papers back on Monday, but you won't really be able to get them done then, making students sign up to come get their paper gives you some extra time to grade. It also makes them feel special because you took the time to talk with each individually. With the sign-up sheet in front of you, you don't have to be embarrassed by getting their name wrong, and you have a better chance of remembering each student as an individual.

Responding to Students' Writing

by Virginia Draper, coordinator, Writing in the Disciplines

Decide whether the assignment is meant to examine what the student knows or to encourage learning. Keep this in mind when making comments.

Set yourself a time limit for each paper, and try to stick to it (use an alarm clock if necessary). Read through five or six papers quickly at the outset, to get a sense of the range of quality and typical problems that students appear to have with the assignment. Once you have a sense of the range, read each paper twice, once quickly, once more carefully for the purposes of responding or commenting.

Avoid using red ink; nothing short-circuits a student's careful reading of your comments more quickly. You may want to write in pencil, which gives you no less authority and allows you to edit yourself without messing up the paper.

Distinguish between editing and responding. Simply noting the errors forces the students to think through the process of revision themselves. Resist the temptation to rewrite sentences, replace words, and correct spelling. Note errors, but do not fix them for students. If a sentence is poorly worded, bracket the part that bothers you, but do not rewrite it.

Make your marginal comments spare and legible. Resist the urge to debate with the student in the margins. If you think a point of analysis is incorrect, note it briefly and then expand on your objection in the end comment.

Direct critical comments toward the paper rather than toward the student, e.g., "This paper suffers from lack of organization," rather than "You've done a poor job of organizing this paper."

In the end comment resist the urge to note everything you found objectionable. As a general rule, address one major weakness and then briefly list other weaknesses. The purpose of the end comment is to summarize your reaction to the essay and justify your evaluation. The student can assimilate only few suggestions at a time. More elaborate discussions can take place during office hours. A one-third to one-half page comment is usually sufficient. Request a conference with students who have severe problems.

It helps if you begin your end comment with a statement of what you take the purpose of the paper to be, followed by a (brief) description of how the student fulfilled that purpose (positive comments). Your acknowledgment of what the student was trying to do lets the student know what you have understood. More important, it establishes the ground or basis for your evaluation. Knowing that he or she has been read for meaning—and not mere correction—and that he or she has communicated something, the student will be more receptive to your criticisms. Then you can go on to explain or describe how the paper fell short of fulfilling its purposes.

If you have asked students to do a self-evaluation or summary of the paper's purpose in a cover sheet or end comment, address your comments to the student's. I highly recommend cover sheets or end comments because they effectively initiate your and the student's conversation about the paper.

Above all, focus the end comment. A sentence about purpose, followed by one or two noting strengths of the paper and a couple of sentences about the weaknesses constitute a good comment as long as you feel you have communicated your reaction.

You might want to develop or borrow a consistent and comprehensive set of correction symbols. Discuss these symbols with your students before you respond to the papers, perhaps when you review common writing problems in class. If time and resources permit, give students a copy of your grading symbols, so the symbols will be before them when they read the paper closely.

Consider developing a checklist that covers the major aspects of writing expected in the assignment. Discuss the checklist with students while they are in the process of writing the assignment, and use it for self-evaluation and for students to evaluate each other's papers. I do not recommend using only checklists because they can give the impression that you are reading only to see if certain features are in the paper and not for meaning or communication.

Cover Sheets

I have students answer the following questions and attach their answers to their essays when they turn them in. These "Cover Sheets" encourage students to reflect upon their own work. They let me know their assessments of their papers and their sense of their own needs. And they provide valuable insights for my responses, their revisions, and their individual development as writers.

Answering these questions also gets them "thinking like writers," as these questions are ones most writers ask and respond to sometime during the composing process. It helps them to gain some distance from their writings and begins a dialogue about their papers.

I do not read the Cover Sheet until I have read the paper once. During my first reading, I do not make any marks or comments. I just read it to get a sense of the whole piece and its purposes. Then I read and respond to the Cover Sheet remarks, noting where and why I agree and disagree. Then I read the paper again putting mostly questions in the margins, but also noting strengths and errors of conventions.

In my comments—either in response to the student's Cover Sheet remarks or written on the back of the Cover Sheet—I make sure I let the student know what I take the purpose of the paper to be and how well the paper fulfills that purpose—where it goes astray, succeeds, etc. I also note strengths and make a couple of suggestions about what the writer might work on in the next paper.

The Cover Sheets with your comments provide a record of each student's progress that can easily be used for summary evaluations. Students turn in all previous papers with Cover Sheets each time they submit a new essay. I use past Cover Sheets to guide my responses and assume they review them when they work on new papers.

Cover S heet questions

Purpose: What do you want your readers to do, think, feel, believe, or understand as a result of reading your paper? You may have multiple purposes. It helps if you begin this answer with this statement: "I want my readers to . . . ." Students need help distinguishing between two

kinds of purposes: 1) why they wrote the paper and 2) what they want readers to get out of the paper. These often relate, but are different in important ways.

Strengths: What are you pleased with? What works in this paper?

Help Needed: What are you unsure about? How can I help you?

Acknowledgments: All writers use friends and colleagues, sometimes professional editors, to make their work better. Who assisted you and in what ways?

Values: What did you get out of writing this paper?

What you got out of writing a paper often has a relationship to what you want readers to get out of the paper. So often the answer to this question provides a key to Purpose #2 and can suggest how an unfocused or underdeveloped essay may be revised.

Abstract: For lengthy papers (seven or more pages) drawing upon research, I ask students to write an abstract. I define an abstract as a three-to-five sentence summary written in the third person, answering these questions:

- What is this paper about?
- Who might be interested in this paper and why?
- What is the central idea, major assertion, thesis, or point of this paper?
- How does the author make this idea reasonable, believable, understandable? (In other words, summarize how the author reached the thesis, idea, and conclusion).
- So what? What are the implications of this idea? In other words, if this idea is reasonable, then what follows?

Further Thoughts on Evaluating Written Work

I usually read three batches of forty papers a quarter. I find that I soon go brain dead if I try to read and respond to more than five or six papers at a time. So one of my survival strategies has been to know my personal limits and give myself a break. I always divide the pile up into groups of five and make sure I take a break between each round of reading. Otherwise, I feel as if I'm cheating those students whose papers happen to be on the bottom when I feel fried and everything I read sounds incoherent. [a Core Course instructor]

Before you even get out your pen or pencil, decide what was the purpose and goal of the assignment. Are you interested in grammar, style, analytical content, organizational structure, evidence that the student has learned something specific? How would you prioritize all the different things you are looking for in the assignment? Also take into consideration how much time the student had to complete the task and what else you expected him/her to perform at the same time. Will the work be re-worked or rewritten, or is this the last chance the student will ever have to do this particular piece of work?

Grading papers is a process distinct from grading essay exams. Generally more weight is placed on style or expression in the grading of papers. You cannot expect students working hastily during an hour-long examination to write stylistic masterpieces. Given adequate time to write a paper, however, students should be able to express themselves in well-conceived prose.

Ideally, comments should provide suggestions for future improvement. Always discuss weaknesses in terms of how they could be successfully remedied.

Always find something to praise. You know that you need a certain amount of positive feedback yourself in order to feel motivated; your students are no different. Even if the only good thing about the assignment is a creative title, or neat handwriting, point it out. Your criticism is more likely to be taken well. Check marks, or comments like "good idea," "interesting," or "I never thought of this before," are also helpful.

If you have too much to critique, or severe problems with the student's execution of the assignment, keep your comments brief and ask the student to meet with you. Harsh criticism on written work is especially devastating since it is impersonal and immutable. You stand a better chance of not hopelessly alienating your student by meeting with him/her to discuss how he/she might improve to meet class standards.

To develop a sense of grading standards, some TAs begin by writing tentative evaluations in pencil or on a separate sheet of paper on the first five or six papers. This allows them to get a sense of the range in the quality of students' responses before making irrevocable final comments. To ensure that your first few comments were not excessively harsh because you had unreasonably inflated expectations, (or overly lenient because of low expectations) take a last look through the first papers

you graded to see whether you have been reasonably consistent.

Some Suggestions for Comparable Letter Grades

[from Roger Garrison's How a Writer Works (New York: Harper and Row, 1985)]

The following is a general guideline for how you might make distinctions in your students' papers between what constitutes excellent, good, fair and poor work. This letter-grade breakdown should function as a general framework rather than as a precise formula. [For further discussion of how students are evaluated at UCSC, see Chapter 6.]

An "A" paper

An "A" paper conveys immediately a sense of the person behind the words; an individual voice that speaks firmly and clearly from the page.

The title and lead sentences work smoothly to indicate the direction, scope, and tone of the whole piece. The reader feels the writer's assurance and is in no doubt about what is being communicated.

The writing is packed with information. Examples or comparisons are carefully chosen and have a "just right" feel to them. Occasionally, there is a vivid image or deft comparison.

Organization of material is logical, clearly developed. The reader does not stumble or hesitate over the sequence of facts and ideas. Transitions from one point to another are smooth, almost imperceptible.

Sentences are varied, with rhythms and emphasis suited to the meaning. Phrasing is often fluent and graceful. Sentences read well aloud.

Word choices, especially verbs, are accurate, sensitive to connotations. There is an absence of "clutter"—heavy or hackneyed expressions used instead of a short word that means the same thing.

Punctuation is appropriate, giving the reader helpful or necessary signposts for pauses and stops.

There are no mechanical errors (grammar and spelling).

An "A" paper is not flawless; there is no such thing in writing. But it reflects a writer who is in full control of both material and language. Control is the key word here: The reader feels expert guidance.

A "B" paper

A "B" paper has the characteristics of an "A" paper, with the following flaws:

Information may be thin. The reader wants and needs more. Examples or illustrations may feel slightly forced or exaggerated.

Organization is clear; the reader does not confuse the sequence of information or ideas. However, transitions (especially between paragraphs) may be awkward or abrupt.

Sentences tend to be of similar structure and are occasionally awkward or wordy. Relative clauses may be poorly placed.

Word choices are workable and clear, though verbs may lack bite or strength.

Punctuation is occasionally confusing.

A "C" paper

A "C" paper is characterized by awkwardness throughout. It does not read smoothly aloud.

Information tends to be adequate, but barely sufficient for clarity.

Organization is occasionally confused, especially between sentences. The reader sometimes has to stop and reread material to be sure of its meaning.

Sentences have little or no structural variety. Phrases are often awkwardly placed. (Modifiers, especially adverbs, are sometimes too far from the word they modify.)

Diction is usually characterized by wordiness and cliches. Unnecessary words and phrases make the writing loose.

There are several grammar, spelling, and punctuation errors.

A "C" paper will do: It's adequate, but it gives the reader an impression of fuzziness and lack of assurance on the part of the writer. The reader has to work to understand what he or she is reading.

A "D" paper

The main impression is one of haste, carelessness, lack of attention, or simply an inability to draft even direct or simple statements.

The paper may make some sense, but only if the reader struggles to find it. The writer obviously has scanty control of the material.

There are numerous structural and spelling errors, and the visual presentation is sloppy.

Examples of "Obvious" Plagiarism, "Ambiguous" Plagiarism, and Clearly Correct Referenced Citations

[taken from "Tips for Teaching" in the UC Berkeley TA Manual]

It is necessary to clarify the distinctions between plagiarism, paraphrasing, and direct citation. Provide students with instances of correct and incorrect ways to use others' ideas and words. You might want to share the following example with your class (from *The Random House Handbook*, by Frederick Crews, (New York: Random House, 1984, 405-406):

Consider the following source and three ways that a student might make use of it:

Source: "The joker in the European pack was Italy. For a time hopes were entertained of her as a force against Germany, but these disappeared under Mussolini. In 1935 Italy made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. It was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations for one of its members to attack another. France and Great Britain, as great powers, Mediterranean powers, and African colonial powers, were bound to take the lead against Italy at the league. But they did so feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany. The result was the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all."

—J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.

Version A: Italy, one might say, was the joker in the European deck. When she invaded Ethiopia, it was clearly a breach of the covenant of the League of Nations; yet the efforts of England and France to take the lead against her were feeble and half-hearted. It appears that those great powers had no wish to alienate a possible ally against Hitler's rearmed Germany.

Comment: Clearly plagiarism. Though the facts cited are public knowledge, the stolen phrases aren't. Note that the writer's interweaving of his own words with the source's do not render him innocent of plagiarism.

Version B: Italy was the joker in the European deck. Under Mussolini in 1935, she made a belated attempt to participate in the scramble for Africa by invading Ethiopia. As J. M. Roberts points out, this violated the covena nt of the League of Nations.[1] But France and Britain, not wanting to alienate a possible ally against Germany, put up only feeble and half-hearted opposition to the Ethiopian adventure. The outcome, as Roberts observes, was "the worst possible: the league failed to check aggression, Ethiopia lost her independence, and Italy was alienated after all."[2]

1 J. M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.

2 Roberts, p. 845.

Comment: Still plagiarism. The two correct citations of Roberts serve as a kind of alibi for the appropriating of other, unacknowledged phrases, but the alibi has no force because some of Roberts' words are again being presented as the writer's.

Version C: Much has been written about German rearmament and militarism in the period 1933-1939. But Germany's dominance in Europe was by no means a foregone conclusion. The fact is that the balance of power might have been tipped against Hitler if one or two things had turned out differently. Take Italy's gravitation toward an alliance with Germany, for example. That alliance seemed so very far from inevitable that Britain and France actually muted their criticism of the Ethiopian invasion in the hope of remaining friends with Italy. They opposed the Italians in the League of Nations, as J. M. Roberts observes, "feebly and half-heartedly because they did not want to alienate a possible ally against Germany."[1] Suppose Italy, France, and Britain had retained a certain common interest. Would Hitler have been able to get away with his remarkable bluffing and bullying in the later thirties?

1 J.M. Roberts, *History of the World* (New York: Knopf, 1976), p. 845.

Comment: No plagiarism. The writer has been

influenced by the public facts mentioned by Roberts, but he hasn't tried to pass off Roberts' conclusions as his own. The one clear borrowing is properly acknowledged.

We hope that you will use this as a guide to help explain to your students the difference between acceptable and clearly unacceptable forms of using reference materials and citations in their written work.

CHAPTER FOUR:

TEACHING IN THE SCIENCES

General Tips for Conducting Science Labs

[adapted from the UC Santa Barbara TA Handbook by Genie McNaughton]

This section provides some tips that can help you lead any type of science lab, despite the unique demands of each of the various disciplines. Whatever the discipline, you will be a more effective TA if you:

1) Plan what you're going to do.
2) Implement what you've planned.
3) Evaluate what you've done.

1) Plan what you're going to do.

The most important thing you can do to ensure that your lab sections run smoothly is to be well prepared. Your preparation prior to the start of the quarter should include becoming acquainted with the lab storeroom so that time won't be lost during section looking for necessary equipment or materials. If applicable, know the location of the first aid kit, basic first aid rules, and procedures for getting emergency assistance.

Basic weekly planning might include the following:

Know exactly what the students are supposed to learn. Obtain a copy of the lab exercise and read through it. Make sure you have enough copies for all of the students in your section(s). Remind students well in advance of the first lab to purchase or obtain whatever manuals or supplies are necessary. Let students know what they will need to bring with them to lab, e.g., calculator, ruler, compass, graph paper, tracing paper, textbook, etc.

Perform the entire experiment in advance. By going through the lab yourself, including any computations required, you'll be familiar with some of the stumbling blocks that your students may confront and you'll know the subtler points of the coming lab.

Read and study the theory on which the experiment is based. Your thorough understanding of the theoretical aspect of the lab, along with the applicable procedures, should be useful to you in handling most questions.

Research the relevance of the experiment, both the techniques being taught and the applications of the theory being demonstrated. Think about actual applications of the material and provide examples of the relevance of the information to the "real" world. Be prepared for the oft-asked question, "What's it good for?"

Decide how to introduce the lab most effectively. Before students get underway with the day's lab, they may need you to demonstrate the procedures that they will be following. Is a handout with written instructions in order? Do you want one or two students to demonstrate the experiment to the rest of the class? Will a fifteen-minute lecture about the theory and intent of the lab suffice? Your initial introduction can set the tone and motivation for the remainder of the lab period.

Prepare handouts which enhance the lab or facilitate any difficult calculations.

2) Implement what you've planned.

Below are some suggestions for effectively doing what you've planned for your lab:

Tell your students the purpose of each lab and specifically what you expect them to be doing. Provide any necessary instructions for completing the lab. Don't become overly dependent on a single presentation mode. Use a judicious mix of oral presentations, blackboard demonstrations, handouts, overhead, slides, props, whatever works.

Help your students focus on the lab work before they start. Ask a few pointed questions, or have students break into small groups for ten minutes at the beginning of the lab while you circulate, asking for questions that students may have about their preparations. You can use this informal assessment to clear up areas of confusion before the lab gets underway.

Show students how to handle and care for equipment.

Provide students with any necessary instructions for completing the lab. This can be done with a handout, by oral presentation, on a blackboard, or by referring students to the appropriate page of a lab manual.

Demonstrate any part of the procedure which may be problematic. Again, taking the time to anticipate difficulties before everyone starts working may save you from countless repetitions of a minor procedure.

Enforce laboratory rules, especially if safety is an issue. You should also adhere to the rules because students view you as a model for lab behavior. Making safety concerns known is a necessary first step in avoiding serious problems. Emphasize lab courtesy and be sure to have students clean their area before they leave. Report breakages as soon as possible and set broken apparatus aside, clearly marked for other students and TAs who will be using the lab after you.

Inform your students of the approximate amount of time different tasks will take so that they can pace themselves accordingly. Let them know when they can use the lab if they need more than the allotted time to complete the exercise.

Provide students with laboratory hints and helpful information such as sample data, the derivation and use of any typical formulas, and calculations of sample lab problems. Such information can smooth out the process of completing a lab.

Inform students of the procedures and rules for writing up and submitting lab reports or results of experiments. If you are as explicit as possible about what you expect in the way of written work, you can save yourself from the post-grading complaints and hassles.

Point out interesting aspects of the experiment whenever possible (e.g., "Galileo did this whole thing using a cathedral lantern for a pendulum and his pulse for a watch!"). Historical anecdotes can increase student motivation for the lab by adding a new perspective to their tasks (instead of being motivated solely by course credit) as well as breaking up the routine of the section.

Circulate among your students while the lab is in progress and be available to give assistance and answer questions. You can observe your students at work and give them help where it's needed. Don't wait for students to ask you questions; they may be a little hesitant (especially early in the quarter). Ask a few strategic questions of your own in order to figure out what students do and do not understand (e.g., "Once you plot those points on your graph, how are you going to find the best straight line through them?," or "Why do they tell you to make measurements with the current going both ways through the coil?"). Be aware that there is a difference between hovering around students, intimidating them, and circulating around, being friendly and letting them know that you want to interact and help with the lab.

3) Evaluate what you've done.

As the lab section draws to a close, you'll want to assess your success as well as that of your students. Evaluations can be conducted both formally and informally.

Formally, you can:

Read and evaluate student lab write-ups to assess individual or group success in a) completing the lab, b) gathering the appropriate data, c) drawing reasonable conclusions from the data, and d) following designated procedures for the lab report.

Administer frequent quizzes to inform you and your students of their understanding of the facts, concepts, principles, procedures, etc. that you expect them to be acquiring in the lab.

Ask for written feedback about your performance as a TA. You can gather midquarter feedback by distributing a short questionnaire to your students around midterms. Elicit student opinion about specific aspects of your section, e.g., clarity of presentation, relevance of material, willingness to respond to questions. These brief surveys can also provide some global reactions to the course in general. By reviewing these questionnaires right away, you may be able to effect changes that will help many of the students.

More informally, you can:

Respond to the questions that are asked and problems that arise during the lab. If an individual asks a critical question or experiences an important problem, you can draw this to the attention of the entire class. Student questions help to pinpoint difficulties in coping with the lab.

Ask questions that will let you know if students understand what's going on. Be sure to check for comprehension, as well as for facts or details. Also, frequently ask if students are understanding what you are presenting or asking them to do. Student responses may serve as an informal barometer about the perceived pace and clarity of your presentations and instructions.

How to Be a More Effective TA In Math Sections

[adapted from a selection of TA Handbook, *2nd edition, by Adolfo Rumbos]*

In trying to answer the question of how to be an effective Math TA, it is useful to distinguish between courses that generally serve students who are interested in mathematics and who have relative good mathematics backgrounds (upper-division courses, numbered 100 and above), and the lower-division courses that serve a wide variety of students with different interests and backgrounds. I will first focus on lower division courses, because new Math TAs are most likely to be assigned to these courses.

TA duties in lower-division math courses. The TA duties for lower-division courses consist mostly of leading discussion sections, giving and grading weekly quizzes, holding office hours, grading exams, and coordinating the grading of the homework (if readers have been assigned to the course). The TA must always try to work closely with the instructor, and to coordinate with the other TAs for that particular course. This involves meeting frequently with the instructor and other TAs to inquire about the status of the lectures, quizzes, exams and assignments. This will ensure a complete knowledge of the mechanics of the course that is essential, particularly during the first weeks of the course.

Preparation. The importance of preparation cannot be overemphasized. A TA's first duty is to be thoroughly informed on the course matter; additionally, a TA should be knowledgeable about the mechanical details of the course as well: grading policy of the instructor, impo rtant exam dates, material to be covered in the course, etc. An excellent way to keep informed is to attend as many lectures as possible. It is a good idea to attend the lectures even if it is not required of you, especially the first time you TA for a particular course. Check with the faculty member in charge to make sure you understand what is expected.

The TA must make sure that he/she goes through all the assigned problems. Adequate preparation should minimize the chances of getting stuck while presenting a solution. If you do get stuck you should admit it and turn the situation into a learning experience for the whole class. Ask for suggestions from the students, tackle the problem from a couple of different angles, and mention problem-solving strategies in general. If the problem is still intractable, the best thing to do is to stop and promise a student a solution for the next meeting or during office hours.

Holding office hours. Students vary widely in their preparation, making it very difficult to meet everybody's expectations during discussion sections. Office hours offer an excellent opportunity to assess students' mathematical background individually. During office hours a TA can pinpoint students' weaknesses and offer suggestions and help for improvement, or may present more challenging ideas to those students who are more advanced.

A TA's availability to the students is a vital part of his or her performance. The Math Department requires a minimum of three hours a week allotted to office hours. It is important for a TA to make himself or herself accessible to all the students. A way of doing this is to present the students with several choices for office hours. [See Chapter 1: "Preparing to Teach" for more information on office hours.]

Personalizing interaction with students. A TA should get to know the students' names as quickly as possible. Different TAs have different strategies for doing this. Some ask students to write their names and other pertinent information on index cards during the first section meeting. Others prefer a more active approach, such as having students participate in the discussion and asking their names whenever they do so. It also helps to hand back graded homework assignments and quizzes in sections, calling students' names as their work is returned.

Grading. The course instructor is in charge of writing narrative evaluations [see Chapter 6], but most instructors will ask the TAs for comments on the performance of the students. Here is where a TA's assistance becomes indispensable because the TA gets to know most of the students well through section meetings.

In most lower-division courses the TA is responsible for giving and grading weekly quizzes. In some courses the quiz grades actually count as part of the overall evaluation of the student. The quizzes should be designed to help the students grasp the important points of the course. Even if quizzes are not required, it might be a good idea to give short practice quizzes in sections.

Most instructors give two or three exams during a term. The grading of the exams, especially in large classes, is a

group task accomplished by the instructor, the TAs, and the readers. Each person involved gets a different portion of the grading. It is important to keep consistency throughout the grading both individually and within the group. In most cases the instructor writes up the answer key and sets up a criterion for the assignment of points for each problem, as well as the penalties for faulty reasoning and wrong answers. The TAs should supervise the grading done by the readers so as to minimize errors and inconsistencies in the grading. If difficult cases arise during the grading, the instructor or TA in charge of the grading must be consulted.

About TA training. The Math Department offers a series of workshops for TAs in order to provide further assistance on teaching techniques and other related matters. The Head TA is in charge of supervising all the TAs and providing suggestions and help whenever these are needed. All TAs are encouraged to seek the assistance of the Head TA.

Science TAs as Writing Teachers

by Stephen Marcus, founding director, South Coast Writing Project

Many TAs have expressed concern about the level of writing skills their students display in exams and papers. You may be surprised to hear that you can do something about your students' writing skills—even if you're not a TA in an English Department. You can do this without sacrificing class time to teach something else ("English"), and you may find that the overall quality of your class improves.

Most of the strategies provided below utilize an activity known variously as "free-writing," "non-stops," or "free-flows." The basic technique is simply this: for a given period of time, students write without worrying about spelling words correctly, grammar, punctuation, etc. The working rule is: get it down, don't get it "right." In general, it's best to introduce free-writing, with one-to three-minute time limits. After students have become accustomed to the procedure, the time span can be increased to five minutes or longer.

Suggested activities

Ask students to write three words that they personally thought were of special importance to the day's assignment. Then, ask them to do some free-writing (for about three minutes) based on any one of the words. Next have them spend ten minutes in groups of three, sharing what they've written and generating some questions to ask in class.

A slight modification of the above: Ask students to write down three words that they personally thought were of importance to the day's assignment. Have them form groups of three to share for ten minutes the words they chose and why they chose them. Then have them do a three-minute "free-flow" based on their discussion. The papers can be used for further class discussions or could be handed in for you to read (but not to grade or "mark up").

Have students do three to five minutes of free-writing prior to class discussion. The topic could be as general or as specific as you wish to make it. For example, in a math class a general topic might be: What do graphs do that formulas don't? A more specific topic might be: What prevents an asymptote from reaching an axis? The discussion could continue or expand on what they've written (e.g., "On the basis of what you've written, how would you answer the following question . . . ?").

Have students do five or ten minutes of free-writing on a given topic, then have them choose partners, exchange papers, and read each other's papers. To help them focus their responses, you could ask them first to fill out as many as possible of the following "seed sentences" based on their reactions to what they've read. They can then share their responses. Provide a sheet with spaces for them to complete the sentences:

- Your paper ...
- The way you approached a topic ...
- Something you might have mentioned is ...
- One thing you brought up that I hadn't considered before was ...
- I was surprised ...
- You're good at ...

Provide three seed sentences based on the day's work (examples: "Electrolytic reactions can be..." or "The hardest thing for me to understand in today's assignment was..." or "Supply-demand curves sometimes..."). Ask each student to write an ending for one of the three seed sentences. Then form the class into groups based on the sentence and discuss the topic for ten minutes or so. Afterwards, the whole class can proceed to discuss, ask questions about, or be presented with new material on the topic.

At the beginning of a lab, have students spend three to five minutes writing about any of the following topics:

- What are they supposed to be investigating?
- What's the general procedure they'll be following?
- What mistakes should they be watching out for?
- What don't they understand about the experiment?
- What do they understand most about the experiment?

After you've given your orientation to the lab and perhaps responded to questions generated in the course of their writing, you can read quickly through their papers as they're starting their work in order to spot potential problems.

At the end of a class, have students do five minutes of free-writing based on the preceding class session. Possible topics: "Now, tell me all you can in five minutes about what we covered; quantity, not quality is important" or "Write for five minutes about the class we had today: what you learned or re-learned, what was boring, interesting, confusing, or surprising, what your mind drifted onto when you couldn't pay attention, what questions you still have—write about anything you want, but write about the class." Read through these papers to assess the class in general, your teaching, the students' understanding, etc.

After the students have done some free-writing and are in groups of three to six, have them read their own papers to the group before they discuss the topic.

Ask the students to write five words that are somehow important to the day's work, then have them formulate a question based on each word. Ask them each to pick one of their questions to respond to in writing for five minutes, then:

- discuss what they've written with a partner, or
- ask you the question to see how you'd answer it.

Any of the activities described above can be used to promote and focus group discussions, to assess the state of students' understanding, to encourage (with regular use) the students' coming to class prepared, or to help ensure that students have some grasp of the activities they're about to do (for example, in a lab). The only really difficult aspect of using these kinds of activities is in changing expectations about what's supposed to happen in a math, chemistry, geology, or political science class ("Hey, I thought this was a science class, not an English class!"). The key is to offer them as "experiments" on a regular basis. Then see whether or not, as a class, their writing on exams is different from that in other classes, their discussions are more focused or informed, and whether or not you've enhanced, rather than interfered with, the efficiency of your instruction.

Most of you aren't English teachers. You certainly can't be expected to spend time addressing "writing problems." The particular benefits of the activities described above are that they provide students with opportunities to write—practice sessions—which won't be judged and at the same time provide ways for you to attend to the substance of your course. In addition, reading students' work can enable the TA to identify serious writing problems that should be addressed. Writing tutors are available, and students should be referred well in advance of paper deadlines.

CHAPTER FIVE:

OTHER CLASSROOM SITUATIONS

How to Use Blackboards and Whiteboards in the Labs and Classroom

The role of the board

What you put on the blackboard is probably the only thing that you can be sure your students will have in their notes (unless of course you quote something and repeat it several times). For this reason, how you use the board is of vast importance. Consider that any time you solve a problem on the board, you convey not only the solution to the problem, but also how you organized the information to achieve that end. A step left out or distracting stray lines will almost always create confusion. Remember that when you lecture or lead a discussion, the blackboard is often the "thread of your lesson," which can guide the student who has lost his or her place back into the class activity.

If blackboards are used well, they can be the basis for clear and straightforward classroom communication in any subject or discipline.

Guidelines for board use

1) Students must be able to see and to read what you have written. (Erase the blackboard completely at the beginning.)

2) If you are presenting material that you want students to duplicate in their notes, you need to give them time to copy what you have written.

3) Use the board to highlight and clarify your discussion or lecture.

4) Ask your students if they can read or make sense of what you have written.

5) Use space wisely and efficiently: Fill in one panel at a time, always starting at the top and moving down. If you have a classroom with three moveable boards, use the middle board first. Push it up and use the front board next. This allows information to stay up the longest. Sometimes it is best to reserve one blackboard panel for the main points or outline.

6) Isolate and identify the basic components of what you put on the board.

7) Be selective about what you write. Write down the basic principles. Writing down everything usually confuses rather than clarifies what you are doing.

8) If you find that you have made a mistake, stop. Give students time to revise their notes.

9) For small sections, xerox your overheads and whatever you plan to write on the board so that students can listen and add notes to the handout copy.

10) Put six to eight questions or key concepts up and then guide the discussion from them.

11) Have each person in the room put a discussion question on the board. One thing to remember: deal with all of the questions. There is nothing more frustrating and invalidating to a student than having his or her question put up on the board and then have it ignored.

12) Use visual aids: put key words in bubbles, draw arrows, put circles within circles, etc.

Environment

[Adapted from the UC Santa Barbara and UC Berkeley TA Manuals]

Any setting, including your classroom, exerts many and frequently subtle influences on the people in that environment. (Restaurant reviewers call it "ambience" and rate it along with the quality of the food.) An uncomfortable environment can jeopardize the very climate you are trying to create. Below are some ideas to aid you in creating a classroom environment and structure that facilitates both your teaching and your students' learning.

Room structure and environment

Make sure you visit your assigned room(s) as soon as you know where they are. If you know you will want moveable chairs or video capabilities and find they are not there, or if you find the room is deathly hot or cold at the time of day you will teach, see your department assistant immediately to attempt a change. With a good lead on the upcoming quarter, room changes are often possible. If you wait until the quarter begins, you may just have to tough it out. On the other hand, there are crises: so, if on the first day of section you discover you're teaching a large group in a too small room, see your department assistant for immediate assistance.

Good environments are frequently flexible ones. Feel free to have students move their chairs several times during a class. For example, you might have them move into a circle for discussion, into small groups for in-depth exploration of a topic, and back into rows for your lecture. Experiment with different room arrangements to find those which work best for you.

Your voice in the classroom

How do you know if your speaking voice is right for the room size and for your students? The following suggestions may help you decide if and where you need improvement:

Ask your students if they can hear you, if you are going too fast, etc.

Watch your students. Their occasional lack of attention may be caused by not being able to hear you, by being bored by your voice, or by literally not understanding your words.

Avoid dropping your voice at the end of your sentence or thought. In general, watch your students' responses, ask for feedback, and if you have questions about the sound of your presentation, voice them.

Classroom Dynamics

[Compiled from the UC Berkeley, UC Davis, and UCLA TA Manuals and from "Teaching About Sexual Assault: Problematic Silences and Solutions" by A. Konradi]

Running a discussion section, review or lab section is more than a matter of asking the right questions and setting up the room well. It is a matter of managing a social situation. For some TAs this comes naturally and easily. For others it is initially an effort that lessens with time and experience. The following section identifies important issues with specific suggestions for solving problems.

Within the first couple of sections think seriously about initiating ground rules for participation. The specific purpose of the rules is to set parameters for discussion, to allocate access to the floor equitably, and to create mutual responsibility for the success of the class.

Once ground rules are created you may want to reaffirm class agreement by writing them down and distributing them on the next occasion you meet. At the same time, remind students that they can be amended. The advantage of going to the trouble to duplicate the ground rules is that all students have a copy and can thus become responsible for maintaining compliance. Point this out to the class and be sure to remind them that they can call you on your transgressions as well. Ground rules that are commonly used include the following:

1) Students will behave respectfully toward each other; there will be no deliberate insults or put-downs.
2) Each student will be given room to voice her or his own opinion.
3) No one will be scapegoated by the class.
4) All thoughts are worth hearing in their entirety, so interruptions will be avoided.
5) Everyone will take responsibility for recognizing speakers: the last to speak will identify the next to speak, or facilitators will rotate.

Ground rules are intended to promote group responsibility, but do not lose sight of the fact that they will be a novelty for many students. It is thus incumbent on the instructor who uses them to initiate their application. Generally, you will have to be the one to raise the first issue or call the first time-out. If you do it against yourself you will invariably produce laughter and certainly break the tension. In a brief time students will get the hang of facilitating each other and call attention to lapses, usually their own.

Learn your students' names, preferably by the end of the first class. This may seem like a tall order, but calling your students by name goes a long way towards helping them feel at ease and included in the class. [See Chapter 1, "Preparing to Teach," for ways to learn names.]

Make eye contact with your students when you are speaking to the group as a whole. Instead of speaking to the clock at the back of the room, look directly at different students in different parts of the room. Students then feel that you SEE them.

Be aware of your students' body language. Slumped bodies, rustling papers, private conversations, etc. may all be signs that students are not paying attention, are bored, or don't understand. You can try moving around the room, varying the speed of your speech, asking some questions or whatever else seems appropriate to refocus students back on you. If, on the other hand, you see students leaning forward, waving their hands in the air, looking directly at you, etc., chances are you've got them where you want them. Your body language will also communicate the same messages to them that your students' do to you.

Be sensitive to student note-taking needs. Whenever you can, use phrases like, "There are four applications of this theory ... The first one is ..." Your care in phrasing and pacing what you have to say lets students know you're aware of their presence. Modeling the behavior you wish your students to imitate is also effective. If you take notes during discussions, they are more likely to do so also.

If there is a lull in the discussion, relax. This doesn't mean you've failed. Every conversation needs a chance to catch its breath. It may mean that your topic is exhausted or it may be a pause for people to digest what they've heard. If the lull comes too frequently, though, you may need to give more attention to the types of topics you're picking. You may also be inadvertently shutting down discussion by dominating rather than facilitating.

The private conversation syndrome. Student A asks you a question and you respond to that student, developing a three-minute, interesting (to the two of you) dialogue. The other students in the room may feel left out or bored since the question may not have been theirs. When answering a student's question, respond not only to the asker but to the other students in the room as if they were equally interested in the response. Similarly, if the students are talking only to you instead of to each other, you are probably focusing too intently on the speaker. You can help students talk to each other by leading with your eyes and looking occasionally at others in the room. This will lead the speaker to do likewise.

If a fight breaks out over an issue, then you've got a hot topic on your hands! Facilitate! Your major task here is to keep the argument focused on the issues. Don't let it turn personal unless you are a licensed psychotherapist.

General confusion can be combated by using the blackboard, or even utilizing concrete objects as metaphors or models. [See page 23 for further information about blackboard use.]

Once, while trying to explain geomagnetic dating to a section of Anthro 3 students I realized that I desperately needed a globe or some sphere on which an equator and poles could be located. Unfortunately, I was unable to locate a globe so I used the next best thing, my head. I don't recall now whether the equator ran through the plane of my eyes or between my ears; however, I do recall immediate laughter and then comprehension as the concept was made into something the students could "see." [UCSC Anthropology TA]

Sleepiness and boredom are somewhat less likely to pervade if you are honest in your enthusiasm and extend your repertoire of responses: being struck dumb, outraged, confused or whatever. Sleepiness also can be a sign that the students have simply been sitting too long; this can be fixed easily with a stretch break of 1-2 minutes.

If there are students who seldom or never talk, see if you can't find out whether they are shy, confused, or simply turned off. Watch for clues that indicate they might want to speak up. ("Allen, you seem disturbed by Dan's idea. What do you think?") You may want to make a point of talking to this student before or after class to indicate your interest.

If you run out of material before the end of class, ask your students if there are other topics they might be interested in discussion. If not, let them go early. Don't keep them the whole section time just for form's sake.

The end of the period time-squeeze. There are five minutes left and you realize you will not finish the material so you race through what's left in an effort to get it done. The difficulties here are that a) the material becomes more important to you than the students, b) your increased speed makes it difficult for students to absorb the material, and c) you'll probably do an inadequate job of covering the material in a coherent manner.

For all of these reasons, students may sense your loss of contact with them and may turn you off. Your haste will be wasted. Let your students know that you are running out of time and outline the unfinished material on the board. Refer students to relevant places in their textbook and suggest study topics.

If you divide your class into small groups, consider your purpose before doing so. Different goals can be achieved by asking students to pair or group up with someone they know, someone they don't know, or by splitting the noisiest, most confident students up.

To establish comfort with the practice early in the quarter, ask students to pair or group up with friends to do problem-solving; ask them to find someone they haven't worked with later on.

I've found that some of the quieter students in my sections, who speak English as a second language, go great guns when they pair or group up with each other and work on problems in their first language. [UCSC Sociology TA]

Compulsive talkers

One of the most irritating problems I encountered my first quarter TAing was a small—but powerful!—group of students who were convinced that they alone had interesting and relevant comments to make about the material. They came close to convincing the rest of the class that such was the case too, before I realized that they were only loud, not necessarily right, and were often carrying on shamelessly. Several of my more introspective students thanked me later for calling the monopolizers' bluff, because the rest of the class was interested in the material, not in the classroom performance of the perpetual "talkers." When I finally figured out that simple courtesy and fairness to the rest of the class made it necessary to control these few, it became easy to express my conviction—and the situation quickly righted itself. [a TA at UCLA]

If one or two students consistently monopolize the floor there are many causes at work, but the end result is a great deal of tension. You don't want to reject the one student, but then you don't want to alienate the rest of the class. You may want to take one of three approaches. You can use their comments to throw the discussion back to the class ("You've raised a point. Maybe others would like to comment."), you can acknowledge the comments and offer another outlet ("Those ideas deserve a lot more time. Maybe we can discuss them after class."), or you can stop the discussion, refer to the ground rules and process the dynamic.

Frequently, it is useful to talk to the offending students outside of the class. Students usually respond to your request for less or different participation on their part. Sometimes they lapse back into the old pattern. Don't hesitate to remind them politely if they forget their talk with you.

Wisecracks and smart alecs

One technique which is often effective with wisecracks and insults is to treat them as straightforward, non-evaluative statements. Treat sarcastic remarks as if they were not sarcastic. Some such remarks should, of course, just be ignored. Either treatment takes the sting out of such comments because you are not responding the way the wise-guy/gal wants you to. Just refuse to play the game. You'll be doing the rest of the class, and yourself, a favor. On the other hand, if wisecracking students are making the classroom an unsafe space for other students, or if you personally feel threatened, do not hesitate to confront the student after class, speak to the faculty member, or discuss your concerns with the campus ombudsman.

Loud, but unprepared students

At some time or other you are likely to have students who come to class unprepared but try to bluff their way through section. Such students may get the discussion off track by drawing in irrelevant material. They tend to compensate for being unprepared by being loud. They like to talk about what they are learning in their other classes, which tends to sidetrack your section.

There are a number of ways of dealing with such students. You might ask them to apply the course material specifically to the point they are making, that is, ask them to give examples from the assigned readings. If they are unable to do so, ask whether they have indeed done the reading. If such students have not done the reading, you might ask them to see you after class. Avoid reprimanding students in class, for it may put a damper on future class discussions. Explain that you want them to participate, but that if they speak off the top of their heads, they will get the class off track; try to persuade them to stick to the class material during section. If the students to whom you have spoken continue to disrupt discussions, then as a last resort you might try to silence them in class: point out that their remarks contradict the assigned readings or that

they are inconsistent with the lectures. This might embarrass students a little, but it will get the point across. Most students in the class will appreciate your efforts to maintain structure in the classroom. They resent it when aggressive-but-uninformed students are allowed to dominate class discussions and especially when someone gets section discussion completely lost. [Greg Schultz, UC Berkeley TA Manual]

Practical Suggestions on Lecturing

by Miriam L. Wallace

For TAs, lecturing is not obligatory. It is more common for TAs to lecture in some disciplines than in others, but occasionally TAs will guest lecture in almost every discipline. There are some reasons why you might decide to ask to give a lecture; it is useful experience and can go on your CV as a "guest lecturer," it gives you a chance to get some of your material and expertise into the classroom, and it gives the professor something special to say in your evaluation, or even in a separate letter for your permanent file. Here are some general pointers to consider as you prepare:

What do you want your lecture to achieve?

Be realistic. Students don't hear everything or absorb everything from a lecture. (Be honest, how much do you get from a lecture—and remember that you've been doing this longer than they have.) Important points must be repeated and demonstrated in order to stick. A funny or unusual example often does the trick. Visual aids, such as blackboards, overheads, slides, or dramatic gestures and voices help. Watch professors whose lecture style you admire, and note what they do and how they do it. Professors who are particularly bad lecturers are also good to study. (I learned never to read a prepared lecture from a professor who always read lectures and about whom the students always complained.)

Talk your lecture rather than reading it.

Write out as much as you need. The act of writing itself will give you greater command of your subject and make you a more fluent speaker. But when you give your lecture, remember that written language and spoken language are very different. Written language is more formal, more oblique and more lengthy in its sentence construction. Spoken language is more succinct. When spoken language is written, it sounds funny. It is also more colloquial, and it takes advantage of the natural inflections of the voice. (See how my written discussion here mirrors the differences between these two forms of language?) Listening to and understanding read lectures is a learned skill, and not one most undergraduates possess or really need.

Decide how interactive your lecture will be.

Let the class know at the beginning whether you will accept questions only at the end, or whether you welcome questions and remarks throughout. Decide whether you will schedule places to pause and ask for reactions, or will ask your audience questions. Open-ended questions elicit discussion; questions that ask about the material covered let you see who is really tuned in and whom you've lost. The scariest thing about lectures is the lack of feedback. Make eye-contact with your audience and look for those students who nod, smile, frown, laugh. They keep you attuned to your audience and prevent the worst of the isolation.

I agreed to do a lecture for a course I was TAing, and tried to remember how my favorite undergraduate professors lectured since I had no idea where to start. My mentor in my undergraduate days used to reformulate her own process of re-reading and re-thinking texts to come up with her own readings. I tried to do the same thing, telling students how I started by asking myself what was confusing and why, how to explain and understand what was confusing, and how I worked through successive levels of explanation until I came up with a more comprehensive reading that took the entire book into consideration and reached some interesting and complex conclusions.

The good thing about this kind of lecture is that it left lots of room open for alternate readings, showed students that I didn't just have the "answers" right there in my head, but only got somewhere through asking lots of questions and re-reading extensively, and served as a model for the kind of papers I was looking for. The lecture ended up being much longer than it was supposed to be, elicited lots of questions and discussion both in the lecture hall and later that week in discussion section, and even later became the first draft of a paper I gave at a conference that same year.

A Few Words about Lecturing

by Kevin Parker

A TA does not have to give lectures, although given certain circumstances lecturing on a voluntary basis can be rewarding for a range of reasons. You may want to have a chance to try out material drawn from your own work if that is appropriate for a specific class, or you may want to gain experience in lecturing to larger groups of students. You may also want to plug your own Summer Session course. If you want to guest lecture, you should let the professor know at the very beginning of the quarter what your areas of competence are, and under what circumstances you are able to guest lecture. (You may not want to have to lecture on a few hours' notice because the professor has the flu, a situation I was once involved in.) Professors sometimes fail to mention the fact of a guest lecture in a TA's evaluation. You should remind the professor to include this important bit of information.

It is difficult to offer suggestions for preparing a guest lecture because the circumstances under which they are offered are so different. It may be that you must stick to the dictates of a tight curriculum and simply give your lecture in the style of the professor. Or, the opportunity may arise that you lecture on some aspect of your own work. If you are lecturing for the first time, you may find some security in having written out your entire lecture. You need not stay with your text, but at least you have got it in front of you should you be struck by stage fright. When writing your lecture, and while giving it (if possible), keep in mind that your audience does not have your text in front of them, and that understanding it is even more difficult, in some respects, than writing it.

CHAPTER SIX:

EVALUATING STUDENTS

Evaluations as well as Grades

[adapted from the UC Santa Cruz General Catalog, with additions by Donna Hunter, Division of Graduate Studies]

UC Santa Cruz has one of the more comprehensive systems for evaluating students' academic performance of any research university in the United States. The evaluation system consists of two major components: the assignment of a final grade in the course and an accompanying evaluation.

In each course for which a student receives a grade of D or better (or Pass), the student receives an evaluation of her or his academic performance. An evaluation usually runs from one to four paragraphs in length and describes (1) the nature and requirements of the course; (2) the student's strengths and weaknesses in the various aspects of the course (e.g., discussion, laboratory work, term papers, and examinations); (3) the student's general understanding of the course content; and (4) any additional or particularly outstanding work.

Evaluations are used at UCSC in academic advising, reviewing scholarship applications, and awarding College Honors and Honors in the major. Evaluations are a permanent part of a student's academic record, appearing as part of the official UCSC transcript.

Instructors bear the responsibility for submitting evaluations in final form but must depend upon TAs to supply them with information if not the evaluations in draft form. Therefore the TA needs to keep a written record of a student's performance throughout the quarter. The instructor should offer guidelines for the format of the evaluations as well as for record-keeping.

At UCSC there is also a Pass/No Pass option. Students in good academic standing may request to take specific courses on a Pass/No Pass basis. Students receive a P (Pass) for work that is performed at C level or better. Work performed at below a C level receives a notation of NP on the student's transcript, and no academic credit is awarded for the course. Like students who receive a letter grade, students who take a course Pass/No Pass receive a written evaluation.

Minimizing Grading Conflicts

[adapted from an article by Beth Haiken and Greg Schultz in the UC Berkeley TA Manual]

The best ways to avoid grading conflicts are to provide students with clear expectations, offer opportunities for feedback, and make sure that your comments on their work are both sensitive to the student and appropriate to the grade assigned. [See Chapter 3, "Teaching and Responding to Writing" for more on responding to and grading student written work.] But should a student dispute your evaluation, make sure to take the complaint seriously.

If students approach you with evaluation complaints but are unwilling to accept your explanation of your criticisms, you should tell them that you will have another TA or the instructor read the work. It never hurts to take any especially problematic piece of student work to the instructor or to other TAs, even if the student has not complained, or you haven't handed it back yet. You might also tell students that it is their prerogative to take the work directly to the instructor for a separate opinion.

It is also helpful if the TAs and the professor establish a definite procedure by which students can appeal their evaluations. Most TAs prefer that this procedure (which should be announced to the class at the beginning of the quarter) specifies that students first appeal to the TA. If the students are still dissatisfied, they can then appeal to the professor. Some students may be especially concerned about the quality of their evaluations

or grades because they are under intense pressure to perform well in order to be admitted to law school, medical school, etc. As a result, debates with students over their evaluations can become unpleasant and awkward. Explain to your students at the very beginning of the quarter that your role is to evaluate their ability to learn and to apply course material. Make it clear to them that you are not judging them as human beings and that the same standards apply to everyone in the class. Students may try to pressure their TAs by telling them they always got "A's" in high school or at community college, or that they need to pass the class in order to avoid academic probation. Firmly explain to such students that their aspirations or previous academic performance in no way affect your grading policy and that it is not your responsibility to see that they get off academic probation. Make it clear to students that you will not be swayed by such pressure. This will help minimize frivolous grade complaints.

Evaluations and grade disputes are generally charged with emotion. In a few cases, students who associate their self-worth with their grades may become distraught and begin to cry when they come to discuss their grades with you. Obviously, it is important first to try to calm them down; then explain to them that the evaluation or grade you gave their work, though perhaps less glowing or lower than they hoped for, should in no way be interpreted as a sign that they are incapable of learning. Convince such students to strive for improvement; reassure them that they are intelligent and capable.

Finally, don't be afraid either to admit that you made an error, or to stick by your own good judgement when evaluating student work. While these seem like conflicting suggestions, both the ability to admit error and the strength to abide by your own convictions are necessary for any teacher, and attributes of great scholars.

Academic Misconduct

[adapted from the UC Berkeley TA Manual, the UCSC policy on academic integrity, and an excerpt from Clarke and Davis, Improving Students' Writing Skills. A Guide to Instructional Resources (UC Berkeley: 1983, pp. 39-41)]

All forms of academic misconduct must be treated seriously. Such misconduct includes but is not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or facilitating academic dishonesty. When misconduct is suspected in a course, it is the responsibility of the instructor to try to establish the facts. If the instructor becomes convinced that cheating has occurred, she or he has the responsibility to impose some consequence within the context of that course. For example, the instructor can treat the work on which the cheating has occurred as not having been submitted. Teaching assistants who suspect academic dishonesty should report it to the instructor with whom they are working.

Academic dishonesty is also a disciplinary issue, as it is a violation of university policy. Every case of suspected cheating is to be referred by the instructor to the provost of the student's college, who has been delegated the responsibility for instituting the disciplinary process. The official University Policy on Academic Integrity can be found in full in Appendix G of the UCSC Rule Book and at http://www.ucsc.edu/academics/academicintegrity/policy.html. The website also features useful guides for both students and faculty.

To quote from the policy, "Instructors [i.e., instructors of record] shall make a reasonable effort to explain to students at the outset of a course the behavior expected of them when taking examinations or preparing and submitting other course work." "Preparing course work" may include collaborative work between or among students, a valuable form of learning, but one on which the instructor may wish to place bounds, bounds that need to be explained to avoid misunderstanding.

CHAPTER SEVEN:

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Introduction

The roles of teaching assistant and graduate student are very demanding. When the person fulfilling both roles has the added burden of speaking a foreign language, learning the ins and outs of a new educational system, and living in a foreign culture, the dual responsibility of being both a teacher and student becomes even more demanding.

Communicating with American students can be a problem due to cultural differences in attitude and different semantics in dialogue. [TA, Korea]

Chinese often tend to be unassertive so that they might be perceived as incompetent or lacking organization, etc. In order to deal with American students, Chinese TAs should be less wishy-washy or even less considerate in the sense that one has to adhere to the policies or principles so as to minimize the chance of being "jumped at" by the students. [TA, China]

I was taken by surprise at the freedom given to a TA and the scope for creativity in leading discussions. Back home the lectures were in a set pattern without audiovisual aids. [TA, India]

To assist you in adapting to your new surroundings, this section provides background information about the American educational system, various perspectives on American undergraduate students, and the perceptions and experiences of international teaching assistants.

Student Diversity and the Educational System

There are two major ways in which the educational system in the United States differs from those in most countries. First, in many countries, students who plan to enter vocational careers go to one type of high school while students who plan to attend college enter a different type of high school. In the United States, most students in a given geographic area go to the same public high school and have the option of taking the same courses, making U.S. high schools less specialized than elsewhere. Students with diverse abilities attend the same schools but with widely varying curricula.

A second way in which the educational system in the United States differs from many others has to do with the level of local control. Each community has a Board of Education whose members are elected by the local community. These individual school boards have administrative responsibility and determine competency standards and curricula for schools within their jurisdictions, guided by requirements established by each state government. Thus, the educational system within each community reflects local standards and conditions more than state or national standards. As a result of this local control of education, the university student population has a diverse academic background.

Although college and university admission is based on a combination of students' high school grade point average, letters of recommendation, and college entrance examination scores, grade point averages may not be comparable between high schools. Due to the variation in local competency standards, a student with a high grade point average in one high school might not have received such high grades had the student attended a high school in a different school district. Often, these differences in grading standards reflect differences in community economic conditions. States have tried to address these variations and inequalities through legislation which attempts to integrate schools, or to alter the funding formula to provide more equitable funding to less wealthy communities.

Thus, the structure of the educational system in the United States adds to the diversity in the academic backgrounds of university students. In addition to their varied academic backgrounds, students also differ in regard to ethnic background, cultural background, international citizenship, age, sex and socio-economic levels.

Research in sociolinguistics on patterns of participation demonstrates the need for instructors to pay particular attention to the cultural and ethnic backgrounds of their students. Many of the research studies report the negative consequences of assuming cultural uniformity of students when in fact most classrooms in the United States are multi-ethnic. Students and teachers operate according to their own cultural, ethnic, and social standards of behavior. When student behavior does not match the instructor's own standards, that behavior may erroneously be labeled by the instructor as non-cooperative or disruptive, and student motivation, self-esteem and learning may suffer as a result.

Because international TAs are entering an unfamiliar culture, it may be relatively easy to see differences in ethnicity in the classroom. On the other hand, a lack of familiarity in working with American students may make the differences even more difficult for the international TA to recognize. International TAs may apply their own experiences in a foreign culture to help understand and appreciate the different ways students may choose to or expect to participate in the classroom. The learning styles and needs of students will vary with their academic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, and individual personalities. [See Chapter 2, "Discussion and Review Sections" and Chapter 8, "Social Awareness and Responsibility."]

Student Attitudes

Understanding student attitudes can be difficult at times. TAs from many different cultures have expressed surprise about the informality of American students. On the whole, American students dress and act more casually than students in most other countries. Such informality may feel disrespectful to many international TAs, and it may take time for the TA to understand and tolerate some of the more casual behavior of Americans.

In some universities it is not uncommon to see students eating and drinking in the classroom. Attendance and promptness may also be lax. One international TA explained that he was very upset when students came to his class late and left early. At first, he thought students left class because of something he was doing or saying. Later he found out that, unlike in his country, many students have full or part-time jobs, are married and have child-rearing responsibilities or have other commitments that make it necessary for them to leave class early or arrive late.

Student attitudes toward faculty and TAs can also be very informal or casual. Students do not usually show formal signs of respect for the teacher, such as standing up when the teacher enters the classroom. At some colleges and universities, students are accustomed to calling TAs and sometimes even faculty by their first names (at UCSC, this is very common). From one perspective, this informality can be viewed as a sign of respect in the American culture. It can imply that the individuals who are respected for their work and position can also be respected for their ability to remain humble in light of their accomplishments. In other words, they are seen as less egotistical than if they insisted on being referred to by title.

A student attitude that can be disconcerting to both American and international TAs is student apathy or lack of interest in course material. Commonly, TAs expect undergraduate students to be highly motivated in their studies and are disappointed when some of their students show apathetic classroom behavior. One way of explaining this is that TAs often teach lower-division, survey courses. Many students must take these courses to fulfill requirements needed for graduation. Such courses are often out of the students' area of emphasis and are also out of their area of interest. As a result, these students may show little motivation for the course other than the motivation to receive a passing grade.

Another factor that may affect student motivation is the degree to which students have clear future goals. The majority of undergraduates enter into higher education directly after high school. Many of them have not yet defined an academic area of interest and may not have declared an academic major. In fact, for some, a liberal arts education or a technical/scientific education may not be a lasting choice.

However, for many other students, the subject area of required courses may become a new found interest. Such students can be strongly influenced by the TA's enthusiasm for an academic subject. Thus, in lower division courses, it is not uncommon to find a wide range of student interest levels.

Students will not all have the same level of interest. So I guess you have to accept the diversity and help the ones that really want to be getting something from the class. But the people who are completely uninterested and just taking the class because they have to, I don't want to put all my effort out for those, although I will certainly help and try to motivate them. [TA, France]

Some of the ways TAs help to increase student interest in course material include providing personal anecdotes, relating course material to the personal lives of the students, and of course, by sharing their own enthusiasm for the subject area. A TA adds another perspective in the following comment:

You've got to earn their attention … I try very hard to communicate. For example, I try to be enthusiastic as much as I can. But I think that is in itself a satisfaction. So it's like an actor on the stage. Sometimes I feel very good after the class. I feel like an actor who … can earn a laugh from the audience. But sometimes I feel like I'm not satisfied with myself—that I'm not enthusiastic enough for some reason… . Most of the time I blame myself, but sometimes I think about it and say, "You don't have to be upset every time you didn't get a reaction, because they have their problems. Sometimes they're passive for some reason." [TA, Thailand]

Even many experienced TAs find that it is easy to blame themselves when students are not interested in a course or do poorly on an exam. Although it is important to continually examine one's teaching methods, it's also important to keep a balanced perspective; teaching and learning are shared responsibilities between teacher and student.

Communicating Effectively

Many international TAs express concern about speaking and communicating effectively. A Korean TA noted that when he first began teaching, students couldn't understand what he was saying. A Chinese TA stated, "I could not clearly express my meanings to students." Trying to clearly express complex ideas in a foreign language is indeed difficult.

A TA can become very tired speaking a new language.

In the beginning I used to get headaches. The first week I didn't really feel it. The second week I had a headache every night from speaking English. Then it went away. If I speak my mother tongue for a few days, I can organize my thoughts properly. My way of thinking is in my own mother tongue, and there is another way of thinking in English. I'm in the process of changing so that I can easily think in each language. [TA, India]

It may be helpful to remember that students may also experience difficulties and become fatigued when they listen to their international TAs. To the international TA, errors in pronunciation and grammar are most obvious; however, a less obvious communication problem, (often commented on by students), is the TA's rate of speech, often referred to as "pace." Frequently, international TAs speak too quickly for American students to understand what has been said. Although some TAs believe that speaking quickly is evidence of their language mastery or fluency, rapid speech interferes with students' understanding.

International TAs may find that communication is enhanced by giving students time to think about new or difficult information. This is especially necessary after the TA has explained a difficult concept or problem and then asks the students a question about it. The amount of time a TA gives the students to think and respond to a question is referred to as "wait time." At least five-to-ten seconds of wait time should be given after asking students a question. This allows students time to think about the question and formulate a response.

When listening to a non-native speaker, many students need extra time to "translate" mispronounced words or words that are spoken with an unfamiliar accent:

Sometimes I have trouble understanding foreign TAs—especially when they speak fast. If I listen carefully I understand, but usually it takes a few seconds for me to really know what they've said. So it's really helpful when they speak slowly or leave a little time for me to think about what it is they've said. Lots of times I miss a few words here and there, but if I understand most of what they've said I get the message. [an undergraduate]

What happens is when you are explaining something, suddenly your mind becomes full of ideas. You want to just spit out all the ideas on the students and of course there is the problem of casting those ideas in a way easily understandable to students, and there is the additional problem of understanding my accent. First they have to understand the word, then understand its meaning—with a native speaker, they only have to understand the meaning. At the beginning of class I consciously speak slowly but sometimes it happens that I get fast and many students ask exciting questions and I want to fill their minds with the exciting ideas racing through my mind. So I start to speak too fast. I have to remind myself to go slow. [an international TA]

The problem of students not understanding the TA's pronunciation may be complicated by a students' sometimes limited vocabulary: students may be unable to differentiate between a TA mispronouncing a word and a TA using a word unfamiliar to the student. An international TA describes it this way:

Some students claim that they are unable to understand some words which I use, and they are very quick to ascribe it to the pronunciation issue. But I realize that above the pronunciation issue there is another aspect.

Suppose I use the word "explicit." Now, this is a perfectly valid English word, and my pronunciation is good enough. Now suppose a student hasn't heard of this word. Given the state of affairs in the high school system and the fact that many students spend more time watching TV than reading books, quite a few students will not have heard the word "explicit." Then his or her gut reaction will be, "My gosh, this guy doesn't know how to pronounce it." Whereas if an American TA were to use the word "explicit," the student's reaction would be, "Well, probably I don't know the word." My advice is to try and avoid bookish words. Try to use down-to-earth or slang words. [TA, Turkey]

The English Language and the International Teaching Assistant

by Jacqueline Hoeppner-Freitas [from Teaching at Berkeley: A Guide for Foreign Teaching Assistants, UC Berkeley, 1986]

Listening comprehension. If you're a new arrival to the U.S. and have heard very little native-spoken English, you are in for a huge surprise. When you begin your first conversation, you may expect to hear some polite questions such as "How are you?" and "Where are you living?" Instead, you hear "How are ya?" and "Where ya livin?" Is this English? Yes, it's perfectly normal spoken English, but your ear has to have a chance to get used to it. You may think that you can't understand because your vocabulary is not large enough, but you will be surprised to find out that much of the language you are hearing is well known to you in books. You simply have to "tune into" the sounds of American English.

The best remedy for this "language shock" is to immerse yourself in English. DON'T avoid speaking English. DON'T stick exclusively to speakers of your native languages. DO cultivate American friends. DO go to welcome parties. DO ask people in your department for help. DO ask questions of Americans wherever you encounter them: on the street, at the market, at the bank, etc. DO watch TV when you can. DO listen to the radio as much as possible. DO read newspapers.

This contact with English is important for more than just language-learning reasons. If you know what's going on around the area in entertainment, politics, sports, and so forth, you will be able to better understand the references people make. Many incidents of misunderstanding are simply a matter of not knowing the cultural and political information that everyone else takes for granted. Remember, an American moving to Santa Cruz from another part of the U.S. would also be confused by local references. If, on the other hand, you have a chance first to read the local and/or national news and then watch it on TV, this could improve your listening comprehension as well as familiarize you with local issues and events.

Pronunciation. Probably no other area of language difficulties causes you as a TA more concern than your pronunciation. You may feel exposed and vulnerable to criticism from your students. This fear is very real, because some students try to blame their difficulties in a course on their TA's pronunciation. And unfortunately, the American English pronunciation system is a very difficult one to master. Many languages have a perfectly adequate five-vowel system. English has at least thirteen. In addition, the stress and intonation patterns of your native language may differ radically from those of English. So, how should you go about improving your pronunciation?

Pronunciation is best improved with the aid of a knowledgeable English teacher, but the single most important factor in improving pronunciation, experts say, is the motivation of the speaker. It takes time to improve. Through repetition you will train your tongue and lips to the point that the sounds will be produced automatically, without thinking. I suggest to my students to practice speaking English in front of a mirror whenever possible in order to watch the movements of the mouth. In addition, there are many little blocks of time during the day when you can repeat words and sentences for practice. When you are walking to and from class, you can be rehearsing some sentences, either in your mind or out loud. A student of mine from Korea said that everywhere he went, on buses and on the street, he listened to tapes and repeated what he heard. He said he didn't care what people thought. And his English is now of native-speaker quality, an amazing fact given that he did not grow up with any native speakers around him. The factor that most sets people like him apart is that he cared tremendously how his English sounded.

Cross-cultural differences. When a TA and a student experience confusion and possibly even hostility towards each other, a TA might easily jump to the conclusion that his/her language ability is at fault. While this may be the case, often other factors are involved. For one thing, as with native speakers, personality differences can cause misunderstandings between TAs and students. The most important factor, however, and one very easily overlooked, may be cultural differences. These differences can account for much of the failed communication between the foreign-born TA and the American student. Some students, out of their own ethnocentricity, may make little attempt, if any, to understand their TA's personality, attitudes, and culture. It should come as no surprise, then, that this kind of student may be irritated by the TA's foreign accent and "strange ways." If, for example, the TA speaks softly and avoids eye contact while teaching, the student may assume the TA is insecure, unprepared, or even worse, ignorant. The student may not have the sophistication or the desire to look beyond the surface at the cultural differences. Studies have shown that the single most important factor influencing communication success between foreign-born TAs and American students may be the extent of the students' ethnocentricity.

Fortunately, not all American students lack the ability to appreciate and understand other cultures. The foreign-born TA, however, must be aware that such students exist and must take steps to reduce the negative effect that the inevitable cross-cultural misunderstandings will have on the class. It is therefore advisable for the foreign-born TA to learn as much as possible about American culture. Again, one need not turn to books alone for information. By watching people, you can attune yourself to American-style gestures, posture, and eye contact. You might notice that it is common for Americans to listen politely by looking (not staring) at the speaker and nodding and saying "Uh-huh" once in a while to demonstrate interest. On the other hand, speakers look at their listeners briefly, look away, continue talking, and then establish eye contact again. It's as if the speaker must "check in" with the listener every so often to make sure the listener is attentive. These and many other conventions comprise a large body of culturally-bound behavior that needs to be understood to bring about effective communication in the classroom.

A Woman, a Foreigner, a TA

by Jyoti Shanghera [from Teaching at Berkeley: A Guide for Foreign Teaching Assistants]

I paused with my hand on the door knob, ostensibly to quell my thumping heartbeat and to collect myself. In that brief moment all the events of the past ten days hurriedly stumbled over each other in dizzying succession. Only ten days ago, I had landed in this country, this alien land, from New Delhi. And now, here I was on the threshold, ready to make my entrance as a TA assigned to young Berkeley undergraduates. "It is only normal that I am nervous," I tried to console myself. Squaring my shoulders and pushing my chin up, I attempted to draw upon my previous experience as a teacher. I suppose it worked, for I managed to enter the room with an apparent equanimity I was still far from genuinely feeling.

An apprehensive introduction. As I introduced myself and turned to the blackboard to inscribe my strange-sounding name, I saw myself mirrored through the eyes of these students I was supposed to teach. The look I encountered from them was an unmistakable combination of apprehension, curiosity and nervousness. Well, to that extent we were all kindred souls, but added to this, in the case of a few men particularly, were distinct glances of amusement and even suspicion. I suppose I stood out very conspicuously in my distinct Indian attire, as a colored woman from the Third World who spoke English with a strange accent. This was a situation that merited getting used to on both my part and on the part of the students.

The introductory process was somewhat prolonged on the account of being a foreign TA and a woman. I found myself responding to a host of queries ranging from general information on India to fairly incisive autobiographical details. For instance, I delved into India's colonial past and legacy in order to comment on their interrogative statement "How come as an Indian I spoke such fluent English?" I also had to embark on a brief lecture on the status of women in India, to break the stereotypical image of the downtrodden, silent suffering woman created by the media in the West. However, in the long run this rather arduous and protracted introduction went a long way in dispelling the initial doubts and creating an atmosphere of ease, acceptance and

congeniality. My students were eager to brief me on the ways of American life and the problems faced by university students.

Encountering prejudice. This unique process of mutual learning marked my entire experience as a TA. My term as a TA happened to coincide with the occurrence of some political upheavals in India from which I was able to draw meaningful comparisons with the social structure in the West and generalize on the socio-political fiber of developing societies. While most of the students participated eagerly in such discussions, there were a few who were affronted and upset. Unfortunately, these dissenting voices were never aired, and I became aware of their existence only after an informal evaluation when one of the students, presumably a male, ventured to assert that "This woman, this dumbo from a Third World country, from a society less developed than the U.S.A., has the gall to stand up and criticize our country and say that she is going to put things in perspective."

I was frankly taken aback by this caustic criticism, especially because in none of the discussion sections had I gotten wind of such hostility. Even though I am aware that this was a minority opinion, and by no means representative of the general attitude of the students, I would still advocate caution while expounding on the ills and evils afflicting American society. It may be advisable to couch one's criticism in softer language so as not to offend the sensibilities of some students. On the other hand, one must be wary of being intimidated by the presence of obnoxious, racist characters, a sprinkling of which may be found in each section.

Apart from the above reaction, as a woman and as a foreigner, I did not encounter any overt problems. In fact, I found the women and minority students, including blacks, drawing much closer to me. Their sense of ease was decidedly reflected in their interaction with me during my office hours when they would come up to me without any inhibitions and often discuss their personal problems, apart from clarifying doubts about the course material.

While these gestures did create a friendly environment and made me feel good, I sensed the desirability of distancing myself somewhat from my students, especially for the expediency of grading. However, the minority students and women would make it a point to inform me of any protest meetings, conferences or events of public or political interest and solicited my opinion on many of these issues.

It cannot be denied that a foreign woman TA has to be doubly cautious in dealing with the disadvantages she is burdened with by virtue of her status. I often wondered whether I was putting much more effort in preparing my sections than did the other TAs so as to prove myself. And, to this day, I have not been able to ascertain whether I had relatively fewer students in my sections on account of my nationality.

I would conclude by saying that the problems one has to cope with as a foreign woman TA are by no means insurmountable. As in every other field, in order to do well, one has to be open, receptive, human, sensitive and capable.

Advantages of Foreign Teaching Assistants

by John Quansheng Zhao [from Teaching at Berkeley: A Guide for Foreign Teaching Assistants]

It is true that foreign teaching assistants have more difficulties than their American counterparts, such as language barriers, cultural differences, etc. No doubt, every foreign TA must try very hard to overcome these problems. Yet, there are not many people who realize that foreign TAs have their advantages as well, which stem from the same sources of disadvantages, i.e. different cultural and academic backgrounds.

Many academic branches require instructors and TAs to have a broad background knowledge. This is particularly true in the social sciences and humanities. Needless to say, a native speaker would be an ideal TA for a foreign language class: a Japanese TA teaching Japanese, a Mexican TA teaching Spanish. Their advantages are obvious compared with their American counterparts who have studied, perhaps, three or four years of these foreign languages.

On many occasions, foreign TAs have their own advantages in studies that are closely related to their own home countries in such departments as Political Science, History, Sociology, Anthropology, Economics and groups of area studies (Africa, Asia, Central America, and Europe). Here I would like to refer to

my own experiences. In the fall of 1984, I was a TA for a Political Science upper-division class "The American Role in the Far East" taught by Professor Robert A. Scalapino, Director of the Institute of East Asian Studies at Berkeley. This class concentrated on American foreign policy toward China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and the competition with the Soviet Union. In order to understand current American foreign policies, Professor Scalapino provided his class with a tremendous historical background. About half of the students in this class had some knowledge about Asia. The other half were beginners. They had perhaps never heard of, for example, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the 1911 Revolution and the founding father of the Republic of China.

As a graduate student from Beijing University, I had a solid knowledge of Chinese history and I was familiar with Asian culture and history. As a Ph.D. student in Political Science at Berkeley, East Asian Politics was one of my main fields, and I passed the qualifying examination in that field, so I was familiar with American scholars' points of view. Thus I felt confident in being a TA for this class.

Exposing students to foreign perspectives. At discussion sections, on the one hand, I organized discussions around the professor's lecture and assigned readings. On the other hand, I tried to provide different points of view from the perspective of the various Asian countries.

Many students in the class were excited about the fact that they had a TA who was directly from Beijing, China. Since Sino-American relations was one of the most important aspects of American foreign policy in Asia, they were curious about what kinds of comments a Chinese TA would give in many cases. Several times in discussion sections, I was asked for "personal opinions." My own background enabled me to answer virtually any question regarding Chinese politics. All these made the discussions more vivid and full of variety. Furthermore, about one-third of my office hour visitors were those who wanted to have a "chat" with me on various issues that may not have been directly related to the class. For example, the topic may have been birth control policy in China, or the feelings of South Koreans towards China. By the end of the semester, I had made many new friends among the students. Both the students and I were enjoying this type of student-TA relationship, and both of us, I believe, learned a lot from this experience.

Teaching proficiency and confidence. Asian TAs are the largest foreign TA group in the sciences and technological fields. It is true that most of these TAs (except perhaps those who are from India or Singapore) have had troubles with the English language, since they lack a good English-language environment at home. On the other hand, these Asian graduate students have an unusually strong foundation in mathematics and science even before entering this country. Based on this solid foundation and rich experience, they could provide undergraduate students with as much as their American counterparts do, if not more. Therefore, even in these fields foreign TAs can also find advantages.

This short article has emphasized the advantages of foreign TAs, because I want to encourage foreign TAs to be more confident about their capability of being good teachers in an American school. Certainly I am not going to ignore the difficulties that foreign TAs face. The most significant of these difficulties are language barriers and cultural differences. Foreign TAs should all work hard to improve their English proficiency, and try to understand American culture better. But since there have been few people who have addressed the issue of the advantages of foreign TAs, I would like to say a few words to foreign TAs at the end of this article: Try to make full use of your assets; it is not only that you need this TA job (for financial and practical training reasons), but also that you are needed.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

SOCIAL AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

To what extent does our role as TAs carry with it the social responsibility for educating our students in ways that extend beyond the scope of the classroom syllabus? What are these responsibilities and how do they complicate—or enhance—our position as teachers, as role models, and as fellow students also struggling to pursue an education? And, in "educating" the students in our classrooms, to what extent are we involved in educating ourselves? [Pedro Noguera, from the UC Berkeley TA Manual]

Unlearning Racism in a Multicultural Classroom

[adapted from Ricky Sherover-Marcuse's "Unlearning Racism" Workshop]

This article is included to stimulate discussion and self-reflection among TAs about their teaching practices in an atmosphere of multicultural and racial tensions. TAs who are committed to dealing with these tensions in the classroom should first be aware of their own behavior and be willing to enlist the assistance of Anglo students, as well as students of color, in creating an environment where "isms" can be "unlearned."

Faculty behaviors reported by students that may communicate uneasiness and differential expectations:

1) Ignoring students of color by avoiding eye contact, by not acknowledging comments, or by not calling on them directly.
2) Using a voice tone or facial expression that expresses disbelief or surprise when a student of color responds correctly or makes an academic accomplishment.
3) Interrupting students of color more when they do respond and not helping them to probe further with their responses.
4) Making comments that imply that students of color are not as competent as whites or presume that students of color cannot be in charge.
5) Asking a student of color for an opinion on an issue related to race as if the student of color is a spokesperson for all people of color.
6) Offering little guidance and criticism of the work students of color produce.
7) Ignoring the cultural contributions of people of color and using examples in such way as to reinforce a stereotyped and negative views of people of color.
8) Reacting to comments or questions articulated in an ethnic language style as if they are inherently of less value.

The effects of these behaviors:

1) They discourage classroom participation.
2) They discourage students from seeking help outside of class.
3) They make students feel less confident.
4) They inhibit the development of relationships with faculty that can be helpful in learning about a particular discipline and related career paths.

Some recommendations for creating a learning environment more conducive to the participation of students of color:

1) During the first few weeks of class, become aware of how you and students of color and white students interact with one another. Make sure relevant questions, comments, or opinions of students of color are acknowledged by you and other students.
2) Encourage students of color who are reluctant to participate.
3) Try to solicit and listen to the opinions expressed by a student of color as those of an individual rather than those of a group spokesperson.

4) Make sure that students of color are not unnecessarily being interrupted or discredited by you or other students in the class.
5) Make good eye contact with all students.
6) Make sure that students of color are assuming responsibility in group activities and are allowed to take on leadership roles.
7) Be careful not to call a student of color using the name of another student of color in the class or group. Students of color are likely to interpret this action as regarding them as part of a group rather than as an individual.
8) Notice whether the language style of a student of color's comment, question or response affects your own perception of its importance.
9) Meet with students of color to discuss academic and career goals. Offer to write reference letters when appropriate.
10) Include students of color in the informal interactions that can be important in communicating support and acceptance.
11) Become aware of contributions by people of color in your area of study and use examples when appropriate. The implications of certain theoretical perspectives for people of color may also be pertinent in certain disciplines.
12) Provide students of color with informal as well as formal feedback or constructive criticism on the quality of their work. Watch for comments that may imply they are not as competent as white students or that attribute their success to chance and their failure to lack of ability.

TA Discrimination and Hierarchies of Credibility: First Impressions

by Lynet Uttal

I remember the first days of being a TA as very painful. After class each day for the first few weeks, I, a short dark woman, stood at the front of the classroom with the other two TAs, two tall white men, making myself available for questions. As the crowds of students sorted themselves out I would find myself standing alone whereas my colleagues would each be fifty students deep. Each day I felt awkward, invisible, nervous, and I didn't know what to do with myself. Was I supposed to run up to these throngs of students and say, "I'm a TA, too. I can help you. I know when sections will be assigned, where to get a copy of the syllabus, where to get the books…." Instead I would stand there frozen and uncomfortable. I felt the same way when students chose sections and my sections were not as full and the other TAs' sections were overcrowded. [a TA]

You may be given less credibility due to assumptions students will make about your ability as a TA. Many of these misperceptions are due to general social stereotypes people have about particular racial/ethnic groups, particular characteristics, or about men and women. Your students are not exempt from having these racist, classist, sexist, ageist, homophobic and other assumptions. For example, a woman may be assumed to be less credible than a male; a short heavy set man may be assumed to be less credible than a tall blond man; a person with a lisp may be assumed to be less credible than a person who speaks without a lisp; soft-spoken people will be seen as less credible than those who assert themselves in a strong manner; a young person will be assumed to be less credible than an older person, up to a certain point, at which the older person begins to lose credibility based on their age or appearance alone.

These assumptions may also be connected to the type of course you are TAing. For example, an Anglo TA may be assumed to be less credible than a Chicana in a Chicano Studies course; a woman teaching a heavy-duty theory course may be assumed to be less knowledgeable than a man.

Unfortunately, these assumptions tend to follow a predictable hierarchy of credibility—men over women, Anglos over people of color, straights over gays, etc. (It is also possible that they may be reversed—a gay student may give more credibility and on first impressions prefer a gay-appearing TA over a straight-appearing TA . . . again, all assumptions since in reality credibility is not confirmed by first impressions alone.)

One of the major problems with assumptions of first impressions (besides their unjustified prejudice) is that those negatively judged will have to work harder than others to establish their credibility. And in the meantime, like the TA quoted above, they feel the pain of having to cope with the actions that undermine them. Especially in the beginning when you are developing your teaching style for the first time, you can feel very vulnerable. Subtle things, like students seeming uninterested in being in your section, can make it difficult to garner enough confidence to be an effective TA.

There are ways to avoid some of these initial assumptions and minimize students making choices based on appearance alone. First of all, *don't let yourself get put in a position where choices are made without some kind of non-visual information.*

Ask that TAs be given the time to introduce themselves (your interests, past courses TAed, what you hope to focus on in your sections).

Ask the professor to introduce each of you early on so that students know you are one of the TAs. A quiet Japanese American woman will probably be assumed to be one of the students until the professor makes an introduction. Somehow, more experienced and more verbal TAs give cues that distinguish them from students in a class.

The other problem with the assumptions of first impressions is that some of them last even after contact and interaction have happened. For example, some students feel that female TAs will be more understanding and more likely to grant extensions and change grades. These same students will "work harder" to persuade a young TA than an older TA, to whom they have given credibility, to do things differently from what is expected. The result is that the less credible the TA is deemed, the more students will feel safe in challenging the TA and asking (many times demanding) for changes. Again, this means more work for the TA who has been judged by assumptions associated with their gender, age, physical characteristics, etc.

How do you handle these kinds of problems?

Keep in touch with other TAs. Find out what kinds of expectations their students have of them. Use this as a comparison to your experiences.

Decide what your limits are and stick to them. Give the student clear and firm guidelines of what you would need to see done to make any changes (to deadlines, narrative evaluations, grades, etc.).

Set time limits. After ten minutes, if a student is still trying to persuade you to change your decision, repeat what you need to see to make any changes and call time. This should get the message across to even the most insensitive student that you mean what you say.

Discuss issues of stereotypes, credibility, and listening skills on the first day in your sections. The assumptions are not only problems to you as a TA, but they will also affect how other students act and are responded to by other students in sections. You can help your students be consciously aware of the biases they unconsciously carry around. It may break the ice on the first day to share ideas on this issue. It may also enrich the quality and style of discussions that are possible in your sections by establishing that people need to listen to one another.

Unfortunately, you cannot erase racism, sexism, classism, ageism, homophobia and all other "isms," especially on the first day of class. There are things you can actively do to prevent yourself from being a full-blown victim of them. And, if you happen to be one of those tall, blond, male, assumed-to-be-an-authority-at-first-sight types, you can help those who have misjudged by being the one who suggests that decisions not be based on names and faces.

Overcoming Homophobia in the Classroom

[edited by Ellen Louise Hart and adapted in part from the UC Berkeley TA Manual]

Homophobia: the fear and hatred of lesbians and gay men, and the discrimination against them.

Biphobia: the fear and hatred of bisexuals, and the discrimination against them.

Heterosexism: a belief in the superiority of heterosexuality, and its elevation over all other sexual identities and communities.

One of your primary tasks as a TA will be to establish a classroom environment in which your students feel comfortable participating in the educational process. You will be unable to complete this important instructional task if you allow homophobia and biphobia to damage the environment and alienate lesbian, gay, and bisexual students. On the other hand, you are in a position to make a difference for the good.

If you think only a few students will be hurt by heterosexist remarks and prejudices, think again. At least 10% of the population is lesbian or gay. More are bisexual. A significant percent have family members who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

The facts about homophobia at UC

Though lesbian and gay students constitute a significant group on campus, they nonetheless encounter prejudice and discrimination at school. A survey of 247

lesbian and gay students throughout the UC system suggests that homophobia and heterosexism are widespread among faculty, staff, and students. Respondents reported encountering homophobic remarks and jokes from fellow students, faculty, and staff. Anti-lesbian/gay prejudice is by no means confined to casual remarks or thoughtless jokes. Respondents reported that required reading materials for their UC courses contained anti-lesbian/gay biases: "Human sexuality class still has some books describing gays as having no long-term goals and always leading depressing lives. Ditto for some abnormal psych books." "One university extension course grouped homosexuality along with 'crimes and diseases', such as alcoholism and rape."

While survey data revealed that anti-lesbian/gay prejudice is common in UC Berkeley classrooms, no such data is available for UCSC. The 1984 UC Berkeley Classroom Climate survey documented that instructors at the university are failing to establish an educational environment that is not discriminatory, and that they are consequently disrupting the learning process for lesbian and gay students who felt left out of the class because of their sexual preference.

Some students surveyed reported that instructors made homophobic comments on their papers. There were also reports of students being chastised by instructors for expressing a lesbian/gay perspective in class: "The TA called me a 'man-hater' and didn't want 'negative vibes' in the classroom." Anti-lesbian/gay assumptions and prejudice were encountered widely in faculty lectures. One survey respondent reported that in a sociology class the professor's sole comment about gays was that they "have no community. 'A street full of bars did not constitute a community.'"

Bias undermines education

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual students are not the only ones who suffer from homophobia and heterosexism. Intellectual development of heterosexual students is also limited by denying them access to accurate information about lesbians, gays, bisexuals and their contributions to society. For instance, the history professor or TA who is unaware of or negligent about reporting lesbian/gay history may slight important issues, events and figures, leading students to graduate from college with the mistaken assumption that all historical figures are heterosexual. This is the heterosexual bias.

Adding to the problem is the fact that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are not always easily identifiable. Very often heterosexuals erroneously believe that they do not personally know any gay people. However, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals are present on the campus as educators, students and staff. Not only will some of your students be gay, but so will some of your co-workers.

What you can do

As a TA you can reduce homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism in the classes you teach. Your primary responsibility is the discussion section. If the subject arises, it is important to be prepared to deal with the topic in an informed and unprejudiced manner. Below are some guidelines that will help you overcome bias in the classroom.

Guidelines

1) ***Don't assume that everyone in the classroom is heterosexual.*** Remember, at least 10% of the population is lesbian and gay. Appearances are deceiving. Don't believe the myth that all lesbians are masculine and all gay men effeminate. Also, the homosexual community is very diverse with members who are females and males, African-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and Whites.

2) ***Monitor your own use of critical or stereotypical terms to discuss lesbians or gays or homosexuality.*** As a TA, you will quickly learn that students pick up the attitudes and values of those whom they think have authoritative knowledge about a subject. It is important that in your role as educator you do not pass on stereotypical attitudes about any group of people.

3) ***Don't allow biased or stereotypical comments to go unchallenged in the classroom.*** In many cases lesbian and gay students will not be the only ones offended by blatantly homophobic or anti-lesbian/gay remarks. Depending on how you address such remarks, these students may or may not feel free to express their own discomfort with such comments. If you encounter a biased remark you might do one or more of the following: ask other students in the section to respond to the comment; express your own discomfort and explain your position; encourage discussion about stereotypes in general and the ways that

they can be harmful. In any case, it is important to avoid angrily confronting or embarrassing students who make biased comments. Instead, motivate them to rethink their statements.

4) ***Discourage offensive humor directed at lesbians and gays.*** Remember that just as you would not accept offensive humor about women or ethnic minorities, you should also not accept offensive humor about lesbians and gays. Again, be sure that in pointing out the error, you do not humiliate the student. However, students who persist in making offensive and prejudiced remarks may need special attention, which can be given in office hours.

5) ***Encourage the discussion of lesbian and gay topics in your section.*** Part of the mission of the university is to explore diversity and to present new and different ideas to students. Topics pertaining to homosexuality should be raised if relevant, even if they are not in the syllabus. Discussion of lesbian and gay topics can add diversity and depth to discussions.

6) ***Discuss stereotypes in textbooks*** with the students in your discussion sections. Students should be encouraged to note when textbooks contain both biased and erroneous information. This contributes to the development of critical thinking skills. Point out these stereotypes to your fellow TAs and the supervising professor.

7) ***Don't rely on lesbian and gay students to initiate discussion on the topic of homosexuality.*** Often students will not bring up a topic unless they feel it is safe to do so. Don't hesitate to bring it up yourself, for that may be all that students need to begin to contribute to the discussion.

8) ***Encourage students to do research on lesbian/gay topics.*** Prior to the past two decades very little research had been done on lesbian and gay topics, so there are great opportunities for both you and your students to do ground-breaking work.

Ultimately, both heterosexuals and homosexuals benefit when you include lesbians and gays in the educational process. And what is more, you will be conducting your discussion sections according to UC policy, which states: "It is the intent and direction of the Board of Regents that the University's policy against legally impermissible, arbitrary, or unreasonable discriminatory practices shall be understood and applied so as to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. As specified in that policy, all groups operating under The Regents, including administration, faculty, student governments, University-owned residence halls, and programs sponsored by the university are governed by this policy of non-discrimination."

What about Dating Your Students?

[adapted from "In Case of Sexual Harassment: A Guide for Women Students," A Project on the Status of Women, Association of American Colleges, 1986]

Know university policy:

On November 30, 1983, the statewide Assembly of the Academic Senate of the University of California adopted a motion endorsing the position that faculty members should not be romantically or sexually involved with students in their classes or under their supervision. The Assembly asked the Committee on Privilege and Tenure (UCPT) to consider proposing legislation concerning this position. ("Faculty" should be understood to mean ladder faculty as well as lecturers and TAs).

Under this official guideline, "current students" should be understood to mean:

- any student currently enrolled with the particular faculty member in a course offered for credit.
- any student currently engaged in research under the official supervision or direction of the particular faculty member, in pursuit of undergraduate honors, in graduate research/writing projects for credit, in a doctoral dissertation program, in tutorials offered for academic credit, or in field research projects for academic credit.

This statement of position does not refer to:

- relationships existing before the faculty/current-student relationship, or
- relationships that become established after the conclusion of the coursework or the period of supervision or direction of research and writing projects undertaken for academic credit.

The best time to date your students, if at all, is after they have graduated from school. While it is true that some students have been able to date their professors/TAs without any problems, this is the exception rather than the rule.

Some of the problems inherent in dating your students are:

- When you have so much power over his/her grade (and hence his/her future), it is difficult to have a relationship as equals.
- If your relationship is known to other people and your student's grade is excellent, some students and faculty may question the validity of your grade and find it hard to take you seriously as a teacher.
- If your relationship is secret, people could still find out about it and again question the validity of your grades. Because you have a personal relationship which is likely to influence your objectivity, you yourself may be unsure of your true ability to judge academic performance, which can lead to self-doubt.

If the relationship ends badly with a lot of hard feelings on both sides, depending on his/her position:

- he/she could sabotage your future ability to get TA assignments;
- he/she could talk about you to other teachers and students and negatively influence how they perceive you;
- if he/she is taking any courses that you must teach, it will be very awkward being in those classes. It will be difficult to ensure that your personal feelings won't affect your behavior toward him/her in class, or at grading time;
- if he/she is a major in your department, he/she might feel very uncomfortable not only with you but with others in the department as well. Indeed, some women go out of their way to avoid both a professor/TA who is an ex-boyfriend and his/her department in general, and end up feeling alienated by the whole experience. This is not a fair position to put a student in;
- You may be subject to sexual harassment charges;
- Even if the relationship ends amicably, it might still be awkward to teach any of his/her classes in the future.

Sex Discrimination, Sexual Assault, and Sexual Harassment

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community in which all persons who work or study at the University or who participate in University programs and activities can exist together in an atmosphere free of all forms of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation, including sexual. Every member of the University community should be aware that the University is strongly opposed to sexual assault and sexual harassment, and such behavior is prohibited both by law and by University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sex offenses, and will take whatever action may be needed to prevent, correct, and if necessary, discipline behavior that violates this policy.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, when submission to or rejection of this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment or education, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work or educational performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive working or learning environment.

Sexual harassment may include incidents between any member of the University community including faculty, academic appointees, staff, coaches, students, and non-student or non-employee participants in University programs. Sexual harassment may occur in hierarchical relationships or between peers. Sexual harassment may occur between individuals of the same sex as well as between individuals of the opposite sex. The individual reporting the harassment does not have to be the person directly subjected to the harassment but may, in special circumstances, be anyone who witnesses and is affected by the harassing conduct. Sexual harassment in violation of this policy may occur without economic or educational injury to the individual who is harassed.

In determining whether the alleged conduct constitutes sexual harassment, consideration shall be given to the record of the incident as a whole and to the totality of the circumstances, including the context in which the alleged incident(s) occurred.

Harassment that is not sexual in nature but is based on gender or sex-stereotyping also is prohibited by University policy if it is sufficiently serious to deny or limit an individual's ability to participate in or benefit from University educational programs, employment, or services. While gender-based discrimination may be distinguished from sexual harassment, acts of gender-based discrimination may contribute to the creation of a hostile work or academic environment. Thus, a determination of whether a hostile environment due

to sexual harassment exists may take into account acts of gender-based discrimination.

Overview of resolution process

UCSC has established formal and informal procedures for resolving sex discrimination, including sexual assault and sexual harassment, reports and complaints. Resolution will be handled professionally, appropriately, equitably, and with sensitivity. When appropriate, remedies to the complainant may be proposed in either informal or formal resolution processes.

A complainant may also file a grievance pursuant to the appropriate University policy or collective bargaining agreement. In order for the grievance to be considered under those policies/agreements, it must be filed within the timelines set forth in the policy or collective bargaining agreement. If the complainant wishes to use the resolution process of the *Sex Offense Policy and Procedures for Reports of Sexual Assault(s) and Sexual Harassment*, the grievance may be put in abeyance pending the outcome of the resolution process.

Because complaints are most effectively resolved at the earliest possible stage, UCSC encourages early reporting of concerns or complaints regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment. Individuals who think they might at some point be interested in pursuing criminal prosecution are advised to report any physical or sexual assault as soon as possible to the UCSC Police Department. Prior to filing either a formal or informal complaint, individuals may contact any University official for information about the *Sex Offense Policy* and procedures to learn about options for resolution. The procedures for informal and formal resolution are described in the policy booklet.

For copies of the UCSC *Sex Offense Policy and Procedures for Reports of Sexual Assault(s) and Sexual Harassment* or copies of the *Sexual Harassment Annual Report*, please contact the Title IX/Sexual Harassment Office at (831) 459-2462 or email rew@ucsc.edu. The policy is also available at the Title IX office WEB site www2.ucsc.edu/title9-sh.

First Amendment and academic freedom

As participants in a public university, the faculty, staff, and students of the University of California enjoy significant free speech protections found in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution and Article I section I of the California Constitution. The UCSC Sex Offense Policy is intended to protect members of the University community from discrimination, not to regulate protected speech. We recognize the constitutionally protected right to free speech enjoyed by all members of our community and especially uphold the principles of academic freedom for our faculty and students. Consistent with these principles, nothing in this policy shall prohibit conduct that is legitimately related to course content and teaching methods of an individual faculty member. Freedom of speech and academic freedom, however, are not limitless and do not protect speech or expressive conduct that violates federal or state anti-discrimination laws.

The Disability Resource Center

The mission and work of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) is to ensure unrestricted and equal educational access and non-discrimination and to support the retention and graduation of UCSC students with documented physical and cognitive disabilities. As defined under federal law (Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990), the campus is legally required to make all its programs, services, and activities accessible to qualified students and others with disabilities. To meet this mandate, the DRC staff work directly with students, faculty and staff to determine reasonable accommodations and provide effective academic support services, and we serve as a resource for the campus community in complying with disability-related policies and laws.

The DRC offers the following services to qualified students with documented disabilities: disability management advising and services orientation; liaison with faculty, staff and the community; test accommodation authorization and other academic adjustments; note-taking services; authorization for on-campus van transportation; parking permit recommendations; tutoring referrals; adaptive equipment loan and training; academic materials in alternate formats (books on audio tape and CDs, E-texts, Braille, and enlarged print); proofreaders, scribes, typists and transcribers; mobility/orientation assistance; library/lab assistance; sign language interpreting and real-time captioning; priority enrollment; Department of Rehabilitation liaison; assistance with other physical access issues; and referrals to on- and off-campus resources. The DRC also offers diagnostic screening and referral for all UCSC students.

Examples of academic accommodation

Low vision

Seating near front of class

Large print handouts, lab signs, and equipment labels

TV monitor connected to microscope to enlarge images

Class assignments made available in electronic format

Computer equipped to enlarge screen characters and images

Blindness

Audio-taped, Brailled or electronic-formatted lecture notes, handouts, and texts

Verbal descriptions of visual aids

Raised-line drawings and tactile models of graphic materials

Braille lab signs and equipment labels, auditory lab warning signals

Adaptive lab equipment (e.g., talking thermometers and calculators, light probes, and tactile timers)

Computer with optical character reader, voice output, Braille screen display and printer output

Hearing impairment

Interpreter, real-time captioning, FM system, notetaker

Open or closed-captioned films, use of visual aids

Written assignments, lab instructions, demonstration summaries

Visual warning system for lab emergencies

Use of electr onic mail for class and private discussions

Learning disability

Notetakers and/or audio-taped class sessions, captioned films

Extra exam time, alternative testing arrangements

Visual, aural, and tactile instructional demonstrations

Computer with voice output, spellchecker, and grammar checker

Mobility impairment

Notetaker/lab assistant; group lab assignments

Classrooms, labs, and field trips in accessible locations

Adjustable tables; lab equipment located within reach

Class assignments made available in electronic format

Computer equipped with special input device (e.g., voice input, Morse code, alternative keyboard)

Health impairment

Notetaker

Some flexibility in attendance requirements; extra exam time

Assignments made available in electronic format; use of email to facilitate communication

Useful teaching techniques

Some students with disabilities face challenges participating in small group discussions and other interactive activities. Specific needs vary greatly. However, some general teaching strategies that benefit students include:

Classroom

- Select course materials early so that students and the DRC office have enough time to translate them to audiotape, Braille, and large print.
- Make a brief announcement at the beginning of the quarter ("please contact me if you have particular disability-related needs") so that students feel welcome to approach you.
- Make syllabi, short assignment sheets, and reading lists available in electronic format (e.g., disk, electronic mail, WWW).
- Give clear descriptions of visual materials.
- Establish clear ground rules for discussion.
- Face the class when speaking. Repeat discussion questions.
- Write key phrases and lecture outlines on the blackboard or overhead projector.

Laboratory

- Take the student on a tour of the lab he/she will be working in. Discuss safety concerns.
- Assign group lab projects in which all students contribute according to their abilities.
- Arrange lab equipment so that it is easily accessible.
- Give oral and written lab instructions.

Examination and fieldwork

- Assure that exams test the essential skills or knowledge needed for the course or field of study.

- Some students will require extra time to transcribe or process test questions; follow campus policies regarding extra time on examinations.
- Consider allowing students to turn in exams via electronic mail or diskette.
- Ask student how he/she might be able to do specific aspects of field work. Attempt to include student in field work opportunities, rather than automatically suggesting non-field work alternatives.
- Include special needs in requests for field trip vehicle reservations.

Graduate students with disabilities

TAs with disabilities may want to avail themselves of the services listed above and work with the DRC office. Some accommodations necessitate advanced planning (e.g. special room selection), so it is advisable that the TA with a disability not wait until the quarter begins to talk with the instructor or the DRC. If you are in one of the departments that assigns TAs at the last minute, talk to your department assistant about any needs you may have.

Disability Resource Center,
146 Hahn Student Services

Open 9-12 noon, 1-4pm

459-2089 V, 459-4806 TTY
email: <mailto:drc@ucsc.edu>drc@ucsc.edu
For campus van service, call TAPS, 459-2829

Helpful hints for interacting with people with disabilities

In general:

- Don't assume a person with a disability needs your help. Ask before doing.
- Make eye contact and talk directly to the person, not through the person's companion or interpreter.
- Avoid actions and words that suggest the person should be treated differently. It is okay to ask a person in a wheelchair to go for a walk or to ask a blind person if he or she sees what you mean.
- Treat people with disabilities with the same respect and consideration that you have for anyone.

Visual impairments

- Be descriptive. You may have to help orient people with visual impairments and let them know what's coming up. If they are walking, advise them if they have to step up or down; warn them of possible hazards.
- You don't have to talk loud to a person with a visual impairment. Most visually impaired people hear just fine.
- Offer to read written information for the person with the visual impairment when appropriate.

Learning disabilities

- Don't assume the person is not listening just because you are getting no verbal or visual feedback. Ask the person if they understand or agree.
- Don't assume you have to explain everything to people with learning disabilities. They do not necessarily have a problem with general comprehension.

Mobility impairments

- Try sitting or crouching down to the approximate height of people in wheelchairs or scooters when you talk to them.
- Don't lean on a person's wheelchair unless you have the individual's permission—it is their personal space.
- Be aware of what is accessible and not accessible to people in wheelchairs.

Speech impairments

- Listen patiently. Don't complete sentences for a person unless he or she asks for help.
- Don't pretend to understand what a person with a speech impairment says just to be polite.
- Ask the person to spell a word if you're not sure what is being said.

Hearing impairments

- Face people with hearing impairments when you talk to them so they can see your lips.
- Slow down the rate at which you talk when speaking to a person with a hearing impairment.
- Increase the level of your voice, if appropriate, when talking to a person with a hearing impairment.
- Communicate by writing if necessary.

CHAPTER NINE:

GETTING FEEDBACK ON YOUR TEACHING

Ruth Harris-Barnett, Center for Teaching Excellence

Just as it is helpful for students to receive frequent feedback to improve their performance, instructors can use feedback during the quarter to improve their teaching effectiveness. Many sources are available to provide feedback on your teaching: your fellow TAs, your faculty supervisor or another faculty member, and CTE staff (see section on "Formal Feedback") may all be able to assist you. But remember that the two most readily available sources of input, as well as those most familiar with your teaching day in and day out, are your students and you.

When asking for input on your teaching, keep in mind the distinction between *formative feedback* and *summative evaluation*. Summative evaluation happens at the end of a process and describes how you did. An end-of-quarter grade is an example of summative evaluation. Formative feedback, on the other hand, happens while something is still in process and provides information for improving performance. Think of comments on a rough draft as formative feedback. Your department probably provides a mechanism for formal (summative) evaluation of teaching assistants at the end of the quarter. But you can use both informal and formal methods for obtaining formative feedback throughout the quarter.

Informal Self-evaluation

A few suggestions for examining your own teaching practice throughout the quarter:

- At the end of each class period, think about what happened in terms of your learning objectives for that day. Make note of things you might be able to change in order to better accomplish your objectives.
- If you ask students to complete a structured survey, be sure to also complete it yourself, before you read students' inputv. If you find your own views of how the course is going are very different from your students', think about what might account for those different perspectives.
- As the quarter progresses, keep records of things that worked well, and things that didn't. You might want to also keep copies of representative student work. By the end of the quarter this compilation will provide valuable information for reflection and improvement.
- Writing a short reflective essay about your teaching at the end of the quarter can help crystallize issues and bring perspective to the experience.

Informal Feedback from Students

Asking for student input during the quarter not only helps you keep in touch with student attitudes about the course and about your instruction, but more importantly gives you insight into their understanding of course content, allowing you to adjust class activities to imvprove students' learning. It also conveys to students that you value their views.

Fortunately, student input can be obtained regularly during the quarter without sacrificing a lot of valuable class time.

A few recommendations for using informal student feedback:

- Establish openness about feedback early in the quarter, so that students see it as a normal part of the course.
- Ask for feedback more than once during the quarter. Quick feedback options can be used on a regular basis to monitor students' understanding and attitudes.
- If you sense that some aspect of the course isn't going well, asking students for input can help relieve your frustration, while diffusing student dissatisfaction.

- You may focus your request for feedback on particular aspects of the course, or leave it open-ended.
- Think ahead of time about what things you could and couldn't change mid-quarter. (e.g., *I could adjust the relative amount of class time spent on discussion; I could not adjust the amount of reading assigned.)* This way, you will be less likely to be caught off-guard by student suggestions.
- If you ask students for input, make it worth their time. Let them know when you have made mid-course adjustments as a result of student feedback.
- Be aware that if you ask for feedback, you may very likely receive some criticism. Try not to get demoralized if this happens, and above all do not get angry with your students for giving you what you asked for! Try to use student comments constructively to improve your teaching.

Here are a few ways of obtaining informal student input as the quarter progresses:

- Micro-quiz (sometimes called the "minute paper"): Use three-to-five minutes at the end of a class session to find out if students are understanding the material presented. Ask them to jot down answers to two questions:
  - What major idea sticks with you from class today?
  - What one question do you have arising from class today?

  Variation #1: the "muddiest point" approach. Ask students to answer:

  - What is the most confusing thing you heard in class today?

  Variation #2: Ask students to write a short paragraph at end of the class session summarizing what was covered in class that day.

Students should be asked *not* to put their names on the papers, and to drop them off as they leave class.

- Have students take a few minutes to write a short paragraph about how the course is going for them. Alternatively, you could focus their answers by asking two or three specific questions.
- Break students into small groups and ask each group to take 10 minutes to generate one suggestion.
- At the completion of an assignment or lab experiment, have students take a few minutes of class time to reflect on the learning process: What did they learn? What was their biggest difficulty? What do they feel they accomplished best?
- Remember to informally ask how the course is going during small group interactions or individual conferences.

Formal Feedback on Teaching

The Center for Teaching Excellence offers several options for getting student feedback on your teaching during the quarter. The best time for doing this is during weeks 3, 4, and 5, while there is still time to make changes in your teaching. All options are free and completely confidential. For more information about these options, visit CTE Online, (www.ic.ucsc.edu/CTE) or call CTE(see Chapter Ten: "Resources for TAs").

- **Mid-Quarter Class Interviews** At the invitation of the instructor, a facilitator visits a class to interview students about positive aspects of the course as well as ideas for change. CTE prepares a confidential report of the interview.
- **Electronic Mid-Quarter Analysis of Teaching** (EMAT) Accessible from CTE Online, EMAT allows an instructor to create a customized survey to evaluate teaching.
- **Videotaping** allows instructors to see themselves as students see them. Follow-up consultation is available.
- **Teaching Observations** Upon request, a CTE staff member observes a class and makes notes on all aspects of the student/teacher interaction. Instructional behaviors are recorded objectively and without judgment. A confidential discussion of the observation follows.
- **Student survey forms** Several different versions are available at CTE Online, including two forms designed for teaching assistants.

CHAPTER TEN:

RESOURCES FOR TAs

Locating Campus Resources

Listed below are several offices on campus that may assist you in your teaching. In addition, these two web sites contain more extensive links of interest to teaching assistants:

UCSC Teaching Toolbox
http://ic.ucsc.edu/CTE/teaching

- Links to all of the teaching resources listed below
- Teaching tips
- Resources for difficult teaching situations

Graduate Student Association
http://www2.ucsc.edu/gsa/

- Links to numerous resources related to all aspects of graduate student life.

Web pages for the offices listed here may be located quickly by going to the "A-Z Index" from the UCSC home page. Bold type indicates the alphabetical heading under w hich each may be found.

Communication and Technology Services (CATS)

Help desk 9-4357 • info@cats.ucsc.edu

- Email accounts
- Network services

Instructional Computing 9-5651 • ic@cats.ucsc.edu

- Computing labs

Faculty Instructional Technology Center (FITC)

9-5506 • fitc@ucsc.edu

- Course web pages

University Library

9-4000 (McHenry Library)

9-2050 (Science and Engineering Library)

- Course reserves
- Student research assistance

Media Services

9-2117 • media@library.ucsc.edu

- Classroom media

Copy Center

9-4104 • copies@ucsc.edu

- Photocopying
- Course readers
- Purchase *Writing and Learning* handbook

Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE)

9-5091 • cte@ucsc.edu

- Mid-quarter feedback on teaching
- Individual consultation services for instructors
- Resources for teaching development

Academic Resource Center
EOP Learning Center

9-2296

Services for Transfer and Re-entry Students (STARS)

9-2552

- Learning support services
- Academic success workshops
- Tutoring

Counseling and Psychological Services

9-2628

- Individual and group counseling
- On-call (urgent) services
- Workshops
- Resources for working with emotionally distressed students

Disability Resource Center

9-2089 • drc@ucsc.edu

- Assistance and adaptive services for students with disabilities
- Information and tips for instructors

Academic Advising

(See individual college web sites and directory listings.)

- Each college at UCSC has an advising office for its undergraduates.

Office of International Education

9-2858

- International student services
- Education abroad program

Books on Teaching

The following books, available in McHenry Library, are highly recommended for beginning teachers by the Center for Teaching Excellence. CTE staff can recommend additional titles on specific aspects of teaching.

- Anne Curzan and Lisa Damour, *First Day to Final Grade: A Graduate Student's Guide to Teaching* (2000, University of Michigan Press). LB2335.4 .C87 2000
- Barbara Gross Davis, *Tools for Teaching* (1993, Jossey-Bass). LB2331 .D37 1993
  - Portions of this book are available online at http://teaching.berkeley.edu/teaching.html#tools.
- Wilbert J. McKeachie, *Teaching Tips* (1999, Houghton Mifflin). LB1738 .M35 1999
- Linda B. Nilson, *Teaching at its Best* (1998, Anker). LB2331 .N54 1998
- National Research Council, *How People Learn* (1999, National Academy Press). LB1061.H672 1999
- Virginia Draper, *Writing and Learning A Handbook for UCSC Faculty* (1993). PE1405 .U6D73
  - This book may be purchased at the Copy Center (Bay Tree Plaza).

NOTES

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DIVISION OF GRADUATE STUDIES
OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST and DEAN

SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA 95064

August 7, 2003

Dear Graduate Students:

It is a pleasure to present the fourth edition of our *TA Handbook*. For fifteen years, graduate students have benefited from its combination of pieces written by experienced Teaching Assistants and excerpts from various publications on teaching and learning. The handbook is meant to serve not only the novice Teaching Assistant but also the veteran of one or more quarters. In re-reading it, I found myself reminded of teaching techniques that are especially useful and challenges that even a seasoned instructor faces. The sections on social awareness and resources point to the diversity of our student body, the responsibility that all teachers bear towards our students, and the commitment the campus has made to offer assistance of many sorts. The section on international Teaching Assistants caused me to reflect on the diversity of the graduate student body and the rich contributions their presence makes.

You should always be aware how valued your work as Teaching Assistants is to this university. As you progress through your course work and do your own research, you are also learning how to teach what you know and disseminate knowledge to a younger generation of learners. As true as it is that a Teaching Assistantship is a job and you are "academic student employees," it is also true that you are part of a process that is perhaps unique in our society. At the university questions can be asked, and should be asked, that have no simple answers; at the university we are given the time and place to do the sorts of thinking that are rarely sustained in the world at large. The outlook and skills you acquire and hone in the classroom will serve you well in whatever career you pursue.

I hope you will find this handbook to be the useful tool it is intended to be. Please accept my best wishes as you undertake to make your own vital contribution to the educational enterprise of this campus through your service as a Teaching Assistant.

Sincerely,

Frank Talamantes

Frank Talamantes
Vice Provost and Dean

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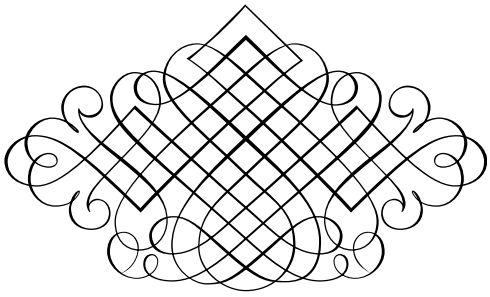
Acknowledgments

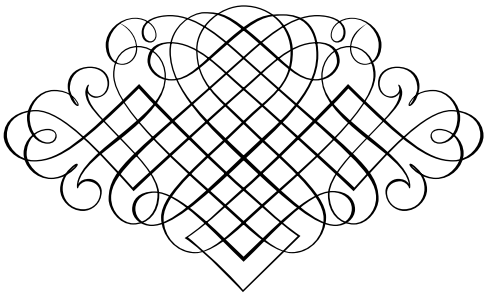
This handbook is a product of many people's efforts. It was first edited by Elena Tajima Creef, Gina Marie Frost, Amanda Konradi, and Miriam L. Wallace in 1988. Their fine work was revised in 1996 by Lynn Fujiwara, Randa Pfeifer, and Sarah Greenleaf Whittier. These editors were all master's or doctoral candidates at UC Santa Cruz with many years combined experience as Teaching Assistants.

In Summer 2003 Ruth Harris-Barnett, Center for Teaching Excellence, and Donna Hunter, Division of Graduate Studies, recast what they had inherited in an effort to bring it up to date and make it more useful. Like their predecessors, the present editors request that readers send comments regarding this text to the Division of Graduate Studies (Kerr Hall) so that any future editions may better serve the graduate teaching community.



TA Handbook

A Practical Reference for Graduate Student Teachers



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