

# **HANDBOOK FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS  
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## I. Introduction

The Department of Communication offers teaching assistantships to qualified graduate students. The TA assignment may be for either undergraduate lower or upper division courses. Teaching assistants are generally required to attend lectures, grade student assignments, meet with students in discussion sections (if those are designed for the course), hold office hours, and perform relevant administrative duties such as proctoring exams, running Scantrons, and entering grades as required by the instructor in charge. Generally no more than 12 quarters of teaching assistantships are available for university students.

The following describes departmental policy and offers a very brief selection of pedagogical materials which should be useful in leading section meetings. Students should also consult The Center for Educational Effectiveness and their Handbook (Attachment 1)

## II. Selection Process

Communication doctoral students are offered teaching assistantships as a part of their financial offers. MA students may be offered teaching assistantships if they are deemed eligible and if any are available. (MA students are not guaranteed TAships). A minimum GPA of 3.4 is required. Other considerations weighing in the decision to appoint are past teaching experience, expertise best suited for a particular course, and the availability of funds. The decision concerning TAships is made by the Department of Communication Chair and the Graduate Student Adviser. A TAship carries with it a partial fee remission.

Students may be offered a 25%, 50%, or in some cases, a 75% TAship. A 50% or half-time TA position, usually requires about 20 hours of work per week. Realistically, however, some weeks will require less, others more, for example, during weeks devoted to the grading of exams and essays. In order to work as a TA during a quarter, a student must register for a minimum of twelve units for that quarter, 4 of which may be 396, Teaching Assistant Training Practicum, which includes the pedagogical training under the professor in charge of the course.

## III. Workload

The following responsibilities fall within the workload of the TA:

1. *Lectures.* If at all possible, TAs attend all of the lectures. This makes it easier to deal with students' questions in the section meetings and to give the instructor feedback on things which were not clear or which need elaboration.
2. *Section Meetings.* TAs who hold a 50% position generally lead two or three sections per week. The specific tasks for sections are determined by the requirements of the course and the professor in charge of the course, but they typically involve discussions, activities, and Q & A sessions with students. Homework and exams are typically returned and discussed during section meetings as well. TAs are expected to have gone through all the relevant course readings in advance of the section meetings. They are also expected to have worked through all of the problems and to have clarified unclear lecture points ahead of their section meeting/s.
3. *Office hours.* Two hours per week is the minimum. It is recommended that the times be staggered so that they do not overlap with the usual scheduling of classes (e.g. MWF 9-10). In courses with multiple TAs office hours should not coincide, nor should they coincide with those of the course

instructor.

4. *Grading.* TAs are responsible for keeping records of grades on homework, essays and examinations. Adjudication of disputes about grades and grading practices is the province of the instructor. The instructor alone sets the grading policy for the course, establishing uniform standards and communicating them to the TAs. No grading data should be left on computers where they could be accessible to unauthorized users.
5. *Pedagogical sessions.* TAs meet weekly with the course instructor to plan out the following week's section meetings, to go over problems students are having with the course material and to discuss methods for presenting it.

#### IV. Other Matters

1. *Evaluation.* At the end of the quarter TAs will be evaluated by the students in the sections they lead. They may also be evaluated by the instructor in charge of the course. An instructor's evaluation is based on a visit by the instructor to a section meeting (arranged in advance) and on the TA's general conduct of the section, including the prompt return of homework and attention to the maintenance of quality in instruction and grading practices.
2. *TA-Student Relations.* TAs generally know the students better than the instructor in charge. This gives them the advantage of working more closely with them and informing the instructor in charge of systematic problem areas. It is especially important that TAs not criticize the instructor, the textbook or the course to the students. This serves no useful purpose. Problems with any of these, whether originating from the students or from the TA, should be addressed to the instructor directly.

Since TAs wield a good deal of power, they must be especially careful not to favor some students over others or to intimidate or embarrass their students. Moreover, TAs must be aware of the University's policy on sexual harassment. A sheet outlining examples of sexual harassment is attached.

Bring all cases of suspected cheating directly to the instructor, i.e. do not confront the student with it. The instructor will evaluate the evidence and, if deemed necessary, refer the matter to Judicial Affairs.

#### SOME CAMPUS RESOURCES FOR TAs AND OTHER GRADUATE STUDENTS

**DSS IT Service Center**, In 483 Kerr Hall, 130 and 131 Social Sciences & Humanities Building, 118 Young Hall, 267 Cousteau, Room 137. Phone: (530) 752-8800 [ithelp@dss.ucdavis.edu](mailto:ithelp@dss.ucdavis.edu)

A wide range of computer support is available here including capacity to download many programs on disks for students' personal computers. Computer specialists are on hand daily to answer questions.

**Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE)**, Surge III, Room 1342 Phone: (530) 752-6050  
[cee@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cee@ucdavis.edu)

CEE is a very good unit to know about offering workshops, colloquia series, and conferences throughout the year on many aspects of teaching. A number of these are run by and geared toward teaching assistants. You can also arrange through the Center to have yourself videotaped while you teach and get valuable feedback.

**SASC Student Academic Success Center**, 2205 Dutton Hall, phone: (530) 752-2013  
success.ucdavis.edu

The center has a number of highly skilled tutors in basic areas of study; a place to refer your undergraduates who may need assistance with math, statistics, term-paper writing, how to use a library, etc. Students can get help with writing for ANY course they are taking. It also offers special group tutorials throughout the year.

**Social Science Data Service** (530) 752-4009  
ssds.ucdavis.edu

Consultants are available to help you design and analyze quantitative research projects in the social sciences. This may be of interest to Communication graduate students doing theses requiring the analysis of significant amounts of data

**Graduate Studies**, 250 Mrak Hall, phone: (530) 752-0650  
gradstudies.ucdavis.edu

If you have questions about nearly any aspect of graduate student life – e.g., your general status, privileges, filing deadlines, fellowships available, graduation ceremony dates – this is the place to call. It is in this office that M.A. and Ph.D. theses are filed when completed.

**The Graduate Student Association** (GSA) 253 South Silo, phone: (530) 752-6108  
gsa.ucdavis.edu

GSA is a voluntary association of UCD graduate students from all over campus. Offers monthly meetings, a newsletter, and sometimes sponsors all graduate research conferences.

**Women's Resources & Research Center** (WRRRC), First floor of North Hall, phone: (530) 752-3372  
wrrc.ucdavis.edu

The library hosts one of the country's largest women and gender studies library collections with over 12,000 volumes of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, comics, DVDs, and zines. The library is open to all registered students.