

GUIDELINES FOR
DEPARTMENTAL SENIOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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CENTER FOR TEACHING DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your appointment. We are pleased to welcome you to UCSD's Senior Teaching Assistant (STA) cadre. You are an important link between your department and its TAs as you embark on this new and rewarding part of your career on your way to becoming a member of the new professorate. The mission of the Center for Teaching Development is to enhance undergraduate education. You play an important role in that mission and we look forward to collaborating with you in this effort.

The Center for Teaching Development (CTD) is a service program devoted to the improvement of all aspects of teaching on this campus. In this endeavor, the Center's Teaching Assistant Development Program (TADP) works closely with academic departments and their STAs to provide a training program for all new TAs. This training includes introductory campus-wide workshops, thematic workshops, and an observation/consultation program. The observation/consultation process is designed to provide a confidential assessment of new TAs in their sections in order to help them achieve instructional competency and to facilitate the educational development of UCSD undergraduate students.

The Center appoints graduate teaching assistant consultants (TACs) to assist the professional staff. The Center also provides funding to departments to provide stipends for their STAs who work closely with departmental faculty advisors, graduate coordinators, and CTD to provide an optimum training experience for all new TAs and to provide support and encouragement for returning TAs.

In your role as a STA, your prior TA experience and your knowledge of pedagogy will be called upon; however, your **attitude** about teaching, your own **enthusiasm** for teaching, your **perceptiveness** about what goes on in a classroom, and your **ability** to be a caring, committed STA will be the factors that will make the difference in UCSD's efforts to provide a quality TA training program.

Following are UCSD's guidelines for departmental STAs. They have been refined following consultations with and suggestions from previous STAs. Many thanks to those who contributed to this effort. We encourage your comments as well.

Rosalind Streichler
Director, CTD

GUIDELINES

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide information useful in defining the role of the STA and to help departments more effectively utilize the skills of their STAs. Senior teaching assistants are an important component of the teaching assistant training provided by academic departments and CTD.

The information presented here suggests qualities possessed by effective STAs, offer suggestions about the range of activities STAs can use in helping new and experienced teaching assistants, and describes the resources that are available from CTD. If there are other ways in which any of the CTD programs can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

THE QUALITIES OF SENIOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

First and foremost, the STA should be an **excellent teacher**, preferably with experience in a variety of courses and classroom settings, and should genuinely **enjoy teaching**. Senior teaching assistants should also be able to articulate the goals they are concerned with and the "how and why" of what they do. There are many people who are excellent intuitive teachers, but who have difficulty communicating the essence of good teaching in a way that is helpful to others. This latter quality is an important asset in an effective STA.

The STA should also be a **good listener** and be able to see other teachers' difficulties in their own terms. This enables the STA to understand and help solve problems posed by others. A related quality is the willingness to **experiment with new teaching ideas**. A teacher who is skilled in using one approach can **be a good model** in that instance, but a good STA can contribute more fully by suggesting a variety of methods and techniques.

Finally, STAs should be familiar with how their departments operate and be acquainted with and be able to work cooperatively with members of the faculty and staff, so that they can provide guidance regarding the organizational aspects involved in the teaching assistantship.

THE ROLE OF SENIOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Providing Direct Support & Assistance to TAs

(generally, it is not expected that every STA will perform all of these duties)

1. Be a model for new TAs concerning teaching skills, job satisfaction, and professionalism.
 - Accept this role with enthusiasm and a sense of responsibility.
 - Indicate the importance of the TA's role and its relationship to the undergraduate learning experience.
 - Share teaching experiences of your own that have yielded particular satisfaction.

- Discuss how to handle the transition from student to teacher, and the problems of being an authority figure for people who might also be peers.
 - Place particular emphasis on issues of confidentiality, ethics, equity, sexual harassment, responsibility, handling disputes, and chronic teaching problems.
2. Provide in-course help by observing TAs in the classroom and meeting with them to consult about teaching problems.
 - Schedule office hours so that TAs can meet with you to discuss teaching problems.
 - Plan for classroom observation and feedback consultation. If you prefer, this can be done in conjunction with a CTD staff consultant. Our consultants are available to provide guidance regarding how to observe a class productively and how to provide feedback constructively. These procedures can include classroom observation guidelines and strategies for collecting mid-quarter feedback from students, such as questionnaires and class interviews.
 3. Help new TAs with organizational tips about time management and how to effectively handle their own course work as well as their TA assignments.
 - Offer tips regarding such concerns as grading, office hours, planning lessons for maximum efficiency, and effective use of preparation time.
 - Make suggestions to the TA concerning the choice of courses. This can maximize the use of prior knowledge in teaching a class or provide the opportunity to enhance one's expertise in the subject matter.
 4. Serve as a resource regarding campus and departmental guidelines, such as special course needs and expectations, how to get things done, and the role of the departmental support staff.
 - Be aware of campus resources for students and TAs, departmental grading policies and appeals.
 - Provide information about working effectively with course instructors and dealing with various conflicts.
 - Suggest referrals to other graduate students who are especially knowledgeable in specific areas.
 - Share both good and bad experiences so that TAs can learn from your experience while helping TAs avoid the “reinventing the wheel” syndrome.
 5. Be an active participant in departmental training activities by acting as a speaker or panel member in workshop sessions for new TAs.
 - Be prepared to discuss the issues noted in these guidelines.
 - Use a variety of sources to collect as much information as possible to share with new departmental TAs.

- Ask other teaching assistants to contribute suggestions and guidelines so new TAs will have the benefit of a wide variety of experiences.

Gathering and Distributing Information

1. Work with departmental faculty advisers to identify improvements that can be made and/or problems that can be solved with respect to the teaching role, preparation, and evaluation of teaching assistants.
2. Interview other teaching assistants regarding what they have learned about their appointments that may be useful to new generations of TAs.
 - Include tips on efficient grading, challenging courses, information about the nature of certain courses such as the type of students who usually enroll, their expectations, particular pitfalls regarding content, the expectations of the TAs, issues of workload, and course tools such as computerized grading programs and instructional media assistance.
 - Give advice about "what I wish I'd been told when I started."
3. Interview faculty before the quarter begins regarding their expectations concerning teaching assistant duties for each course.
 - Use that information to provide guidelines for TAs as early as possible concerning the responsibilities that are expected of them.
 - Help mediate between faculty and student expectations regarding the role of the TA.
 - Assist faculty in planning for the TA role as early as possible, especially where new TAs are concerned.
4. Consult with STAs in other departments and former STAs in your department regarding their activities and tips they may have developed. This can be done formally at CTD's fall training meeting for new STAs as well as informally throughout the year.
5. Provide information to faculty about the TA experience in different courses, with special reference to the course as a setting in which new TAs can learn how to teach successfully.
 - Make suggestions about structuring the TA activity to improve its effectiveness.
 - Solicit faculty feedback on these issues.

Developing Departmental Structures

1. Compile lists of new TAs, and work with graduate advisers or other faculty members with responsibilities for teaching assistants.
 - Take the initiative with faculty in setting up workshops.

- Plan the workshops with the needs of TAs, students, and the department in mind.
 - Schedule and present ideas and suggestions in the workshops that help inexperienced TAs become effective instructors.
2. Help set up a departmental teaching assistant evaluation system.
 - Consider different systems (check <http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/evaluations/index.htm> for alternate CTD evaluation forms and for additional evaluation items which can be used to design discipline and course specific evaluation forms).
 - Help set up systems for collecting such data.
 - Collect data from faculty, undergraduates, and CAPE.
 - Organize data in a form that is usable by TAs, faculty, and departments.
 - Develop procedures for analyzing and reporting data.
 3. Help set up and/or administer departmental teaching assistant excellence award systems, perhaps in conjunction with the departmental graduate advisers.
 - Set up award procedures or ceremonies.
 4. Assist faculty members in their efforts to supervise TAs in the performance of their duties.
 - Set up a variety of options. (This may include joint classroom observations, joint consultations, or informal discussions concerning the most appropriate methods for delivering supportive feedback.)

Producing and Arranging for Resources

1. Consult with CTD staff to learn about the available resources and use this knowledge to make appropriate recommendations to TAs.
 - Review relevant materials, especially those which are tailored to your specific discipline.
 - Obtain information about ways in which workshops can be structured for different purposes, and the range of activities that can be included.
2. Participate with CTD in producing demonstration videotapes that can be shown in training workshops. These can be tailored to the requirements of specific departments.
 - Serve as a participant or as a consultant (often in conjunction with departmental faculty advisers) on the types of problems and situations that are suitable for your department. (Previously produced teaching tapes are available at the CTD for use with your TAs or as a guide to preparing your own departmental teaching tape, as well as “trigger tapes” noted on p. 7).

3. Create a departmental guidebook or handbook that can be used by new TAs.
 - Consult with faculty advisers and graduate coordinators regarding current handbook. (Helpful materials, including departmental handbooks currently in circulation, are available at CTD. Center staff will work with you to develop a suitable handbook.)
4. Record your own activities in a journal for new STAs so departments can develop continuity concerning the most productive projects.
 - Consider developing a manual that can serve as a common pool of information for STAs, administrative personnel, graduate advisers, graduate coordinators, and MSOs who supervise and/or work with new TAs.

SUMMARY OF RESOURCES FROM THE CTD

- **staff consultants who can provide guidance to STAs**
- **a workshop for all new STAs**, as well as subsequent periodic meetings
- **a selection of written materials** including the *Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook*, the CTD newsletter, a variety of books on teaching, general articles on teaching, and discipline-specific teaching journals.

<http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/libraryholdings.htm>
- **a collection of videotapes** for use during workshops or consultations
- **“trigger tapes”** on CTD website
http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/teaching_tips/index.htm. You can download RealOne Player.
- **Teaching Tips and Techniques**
http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/teaching_tips/index.htm,
http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/teaching_tips/firstday.htm,
http://ctd.ucsd.edu/resources/center_mentor/index.htm.
- **materials to be used directly by STAs** such as forms for recording classroom observations, special purpose student feedback questionnaires, and guidelines for holding class interviews
- **in-class videotaping** on request and microteaching opportunities for new or experienced TAs