Guidelines For Teaching Assistant Consultants

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Center for Teaching Development
University of California, San Diego - 0030

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by

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TA CONSULTANT GUIDELINES

Introduction

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 teaching assistants (TAs) offering training and thematic workshops, as well as 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 the TAs achieve instructional competency and to help UCSD students by enhancing the effectiveness of undergraduate education.

Teaching assistant consultants (TACs) are hired and trained by CTD to assist the professional staff. You have been selected to serve as a TAC and you will work with clients (TAs) in a variety of disciplines for whose training you will be responsible.

Your background as a TA 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 consultant will be the factors that will make the difference in CTD's efforts to provide a quality TA training program.

Following are TA consultant guidelines for CTD's activities and procedures. They have been refined following consultations with and suggestions from previous TACs. Many thanks to those who contributed to this effort.

When in doubt about any of the written procedures, please contact me.

We're pleased to welcome you to our staff and we wish you good luck in what we trust will be an extremely rewarding experience for you, the new TAs, and their students.

Rosalind Streichler
Director, CTD

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CTD Registration / Assignments

- All new TAs are required to register both online and with CTD's registration card. They are instructed to provide information about their TA assignments: class-day-time-location.

- Online information will be available on the web-based system, **TrainTrak.**

- Consultants will then be given an opportunity to select clients based on TAC background, TA's discipline, logistics, and scheduling considerations. Please follow the instructions for client selection in the **On-Line Procedures for TA Consultants** (attached).

    - Graduate TACs initially select graduate students only.

    - Runners will distribute **questionnaires** to undergraduate TAs beginning in week 3. CTD staff will prepare summaries of undergraduate questionnaires and put in the Director's box. The Director will review the questionnnaire-only summaries and put them in Box 1.

    - On occasion, we will need to observe an undergrad TA. This will be noted in **TrainTrak** and you can pick up the TA's folder from the Director or Program Representative and schedule an observation.

Initial Client Contact

- E-mail a short introduction to your clients to set up an observation (sample attached). Also request information about the approximate number of students who generally attend class. Although it would be ideal if we could schedule a pre-observation meeting with each of our clients, time and budget constraints preclude this; however you can try to establish rapport and set up a mentoring relationship with your client through e-mail or phone conversations prior to the observation. You can ask if they have any specific questions or concerns about the class and if they have any issues to bring up. You can suggest to the TA that a brief outline or lesson plan of the day's session would be helpful to provide a guide for your observation (although they are not required to provide it).

- Enter initial client contact information into **TrainTrak** within 24 hours.

- The **TrainTrak** system automatically sends an e-mail reminder to both the TA and the TAC if there is an observation or consultation set for the next school day.

- If you reschedule an appointment, make sure to update **TrainTrak**.

- When you contact the TA, inform him/her that you will need approximately seven-ten minutes of class time to distribute the **Questionnaires** (attached). Please wait until the end of the class* to distribute questionnaires, but make sure to discuss it with the TA so that it is understood that you will get up from your seat approximately 7-10 minutes before the end of the class in order to distribute questionnaires to the students in the class.

- We try to complete all scheduled observations no later than the sixth week of the quarter. **If there is a problem with completing your observations in a timely fashion, please inform the Director during the fifth week.** (We can make efforts to reassign clients to other TACs with more flexible schedules or we can send runners to distribute questionnaires, but we <u>cannot</u> do this without your information.)

  **** For a variety of reasons, in laboratory sections it is necessary to distribute questionnaires at the beginning of class.***

<u>Observation Guidelines</u>

<u>Preparation</u>

- Select a file folder for each TA from our prepared folders according to type of section. In addition to questionnaires, these should include: **Mentor/mentee form**, **TAC checklist card**, **Conference notes**, **Evaluation of CTD services**, **Consultation reminder**. Note that questionnaires vary according to type of section -- discussion, lab, problem-solving, performance/studio (theatre, visual arts, music). These questionnaires are color-coded and it is essential that you select the appropriate type. There are two versions of questionnaires for discussion, problem solving, and lab sections and you may select either version.

  - * During training, clients have an opportunity to view the two versions of questionnaires and they may inform you of their preference.

- If you are not familiar with the course, **check the UCSD General Catalog**. Copy the course description and put it in your folder. While this is useful for all observations, it is particularly important if you conduct a consultation-only conference.

- Please try to arrive a few minutes before the section begins so that you will have an opportunity to personally introduce yourself to the TA. Indicate that you will be observing, **not** evaluating the session and that you will be taking notes of everything that goes on. The notes are to help remind you of what was covered during class so that you can use them to guide your feedback session. Later when you consult with the TA, both of you will compare what you observed with the TA's perceptions about how the class went, particularly in terms of the TA's objectives and plans for the session.

- Give a copy of the **Mentor/Mentee** handout (attached) to the TA. It may be completed while the students are responding to the questionnaires. If it cannot be completed during that time, request that the TA mail it to CTD-0030 (intra-campus mail) or drop it off at CTD (307-309 Center Hall) or bring it to the feedback conference.

- If you have any questions related to observations of international TAs, please consult with the English Language Program for International Instructors (ELP-II) Coordinator.

Observation

- Start thinking about developing your own system of observation note taking. (You could divide the notepad into 1/3 - 2/3 columns and take down everything that goes on in the class in the 2/3 section and put your observations and questions or comments in the 1/3 section opposite the related running commentary or you can use the ***Classroom Visit*** **form** as your guide).

- Taking complete notes during the observation will help you plan your feedback conference and will be useful when you write up the summary. Taking sketchy notes and relying on memory is not appropriate for this type of professional observation. Because of inadequate reporting in the past, we now require that you turn in your observation notes with the files **(no exceptions).**

- As the class begins, note if the TA provides an introduction that gives students an overview of the structure of the class or information on what will be covered. Is an outline of the session activities listed on the board?

- During observation, look for evidence of:

  - adequate preparation and organization
  - statement of goals and objectives
  - active *learning* as well as teaching
  - efforts to promote complex thinking rather than a reliance on rote learning
  - appropriate interpersonal communication skills
  - adequate content knowledge (see attached **microteaching checklist**, **lab checklist**, and section **questionnaires** for further guidance)
  - effective time management
  - flexibility when required

- Are the activities appropriate for the type of section and discipline; i.e., humanities, social science or science discussion sections;

studio art, theatre or music sections; math, sciences, or engineering problem-solving sections; and science laboratory sections?

- If you observe classroom management problems that you are uncomfortable handling (gender equity, academic diversity, cheating, etc.), or problems with attitude and behavior of TAs, please alert the Director as soon as possible.

- For concerns such as preparation of international TAs, TAs with difficulty in public speaking, or sexual harassment issues, check with the ELP-II coordinator.

- We have a handout of courses, which, for one reason or another, are deemed challenging or non-observable. In those cases, we do not assign TACs. However, this list requires constant updating. If you find in your pre-observation contact with the TA or even after you are in the classroom that a class is <u>non-observable</u>, please let us know.

- A major concern in lab sections relates to safety. All lab consultants should wear safety glasses (available on the materials shelves on the north wall). If you observe disregard for safety guidelines in biology labs, please inform the Undergraduate Lab Safety Coordinator, Joe Stagg, (858) 534-2195, as soon as possible. Follow up ASAP with a report to the Director. Please acquaint yourself with emergency protocols for any lab you observe (see Biology and Chemistry/Biochemistry departmental handbooks).

- As soon as practicable after observation (within 24 hours), update **TrainTrak** following instructions in the **On-Line Procedures for TA Consultants** manual.

- Use the **TAC Checklist** (attached) as a guide to insure that you have completed all activities.

<u>Time Commitment</u>

- We allot 3.5 hours for each TA client—averaging one hour for observation, one hour for administrative activities (e-mailing, tallying, and analyzing questionnaires), and one hour for consultations, plus an additional half-hour to be used as needed.. We leave it to your professional judgment to determine how you allot the 3.5 hours. For some clients with small classes, you might spend less time on the questionnaires; whereas for larger classes the questionnaires might take longer. You might spend less than 3.5 hours with some clients and others might require more time, but generally the average time spent per client will approximate 3.5 hours. Unless ***pre-approved by*** **the Director, you** ***cannot*** be credited for more than the standard number of hours per client. We allot one hour for consultation-only. If there are other partial activities, consult with the Director or Program Representative regarding remuneration. Occasionally, situations arise where clients do not show up for a conference or class is cancelled and you had not been informed. You are not expected to spend an inordinate amount of time scheduling and rescheduling. Please inform the office staff immediately of these situations, and we will follow up with the client. You have been selected as a TAC because of your professional skills and that is where we expect you to concentrate your efforts. **Also, make a note of what happened in the blue area of the yellowcard section on *TrainTrak*. These notes are particularly useful as a communication device among TACs, the Director, and Program Representative and should indicate problems as well as supportive statements.**

Videotaping

- Occasionally a TA will request videotaping. If you have questions about our videotaping policy, consult with the Program Representative.

- If you are proficient in this area and would like to do the videotaping, CTD will provide a videocam using the client's videotape.

Questionnaires

- Occasionally a client might request that we not distribute questionnaires during the scheduled observation time. If this is the case, observe the section as scheduled and we will schedule a runner to distribute the questionnaires at a later time. You must inform the Program Representative that a runner should be scheduled. You will then schedule the consultation after the questionnaires have been analyzed, unless you have reason to make earlier contact.

- If you distribute questionnaires, make sure all questionnaires are returned to you. If you do not distribute questionnaires (only one student, not enough time), do **not** leave questionnaires with the TA. Mention that either you or a runner will return to distribute questionnaires. (If there are at least 2 or more students you **must** distribute questionnaires; however, the TA can request an additional distribution by a runner for another time.)

- Occasionally a TA will request an individually designed questionnaire. If you receive such a request please consult with the Director. All questionnaires used in CTD must be approved by the Director.

Directions to Students Regarding Questionnaires

- Inform students that you are from CTD and that we are the campus-wide agency responsible for training TAs. Introduce the questionnaires by discussing the questions and emphasize that student comments are important.

- Indicate that the questionnaires do *not* go to the department. They are anonymous and confidential (see attached **Policy for Section Questionnaires**).

- Tell students we want their help in giving us some information about how the class is going so that when we meet with the TA, we can discuss the things that are important to those in the class.

- Suggested comments to the students (this is the basic information – individual comments may vary):

    - "This is your opportunity to have input into the instructional set-up at UCSD. The university cares; this is a university-wide requirement."

    - "This is not like the CAPE questionnaire at the end of the quarter which is strictly for evaluation. This is a questionnaire to help guide us as we talk with the TA about what the good things are that s/he is doing and also some areas that you wish could be changed or that you feel you want to express an opinion about."

    - Reiterate – "That is why we give you space for comments in each of the questions. These comments are very helpful, so please take the time to note your thoughts in each of the areas if you can."

    - "We're only here for one 50-minute session, but students are our points of contact with the class."

    - "Thanks for your cooperation."

- Collect all questionnaires. - Note the number of students in the class and number of questionnaires – This is important because you are required to note that information on the summary that you prepare.

Arrange for Consultation

- While the students are completing the questionnaires, ask the TA to fill out the **Mentor/Mentee** form, then talk about a mutually convenient time for consultation and at that time, you might respond to any questions about our services. If the TA does not complete the **Mentor/Mentee** form, provide an office envelope pre-addressed with CTD-0030 and ask them to put it into a campus mailbox (not the U.S. mail boxes).

- Try to arrange a feedback meeting as soon as possible (allowing yourself time to analyze the questionnaires and complete the summary); preferably within a week (also see information on group consultations). If you have difficulty arranging that, please check with the Director. Give the TA a **Consultation Reminder Card** (attached).

- Enter the appointment time and place in **TrainTrak** within 24 hours.

- If you cannot arrange for a mutually convenient time within a week, tell the client (TA) there will be some e-mail communication until you can meet.

- Consultations should be held at the Center, although we can make exceptions. There is a **sign-up sheet** for the consultation rooms. If you cannot stop in, please call the office or e-mail to reserve a consultation room. We provide a service to the campus and a professional suite of offices has been designated by the University to house this Center. Clients should become familiar with our facilities, handouts, and other services, and we have found that clients are more likely to complete the **TA Training Evaluation** form (attached) when they are in the Center.

  There may be exceptions to this policy for logistical reasons. These exceptions **<u>must</u>** be approved (via phone or e-mail) by the Director of CTD.

- For reasons of privacy, consultations **should not** be held at various campus cafes or other open areas.

<u>Analyzing Questionnaires</u>

- Tally quantitative information and enter into computer summary. Note number of students and number of questionnaires received. Enter all information in **TrainTrak** using the **On-Line Procedures for TA Consultants.**

- Include both positive and negative student comments (unless professionally inappropriate), and, when possible, separate them. Put student comments in a list format with each comment preceded by a dash (--). For repetitive comments, include the number of times repeated (ex: 3x). Do not abbreviate words, or use symbols. Always reread the summary and correct any grammar, spelling or typing errors. Occasionally the last line in a cell is either not printed or printed twice. Please check this.

- Eliminate entire questionnaires with any comments that are totally off the wall or out of line --"What a dude!" or "She looks great in short skirts" or types of comments that are unrelated to the TA's actual content competency and teaching ability. These are professional summaries that may be sent to professors, supervisors, or other institutions (upon TA request) and will be reviewed by the CTD office for accuracy and content. (Check with the Director if you are uncertain about some of the questionnaires).

- Include your observations related to specific questions in the column for observer comments. Some of your observations might not fit a specific question or category, so please use the space at the bottom of the page for additional general comments. Your comments are extremely helpful when we prepare recommendations for TAs and also as a general measure of the quality of TAs and the TA training system. Your comments alert us to problems and it is essential that they be complete and thorough.

- After you have entered your summaries in **TrainTrak,** CTD will print a formatted version of your summaries and put them in your mailbox on the morning after you submit them**. (Note that a "Yes" in the "Done?" field at the end of the summary enables the printing.)**

- A copy of the summary will be forwarded to the director who will review it (purpose: to note possible problems and to provide advance assistance if necessary).

- We will give the original questionnaires and a copy of the summary upon request to the TA at the end of the quarter. The summaries will be maintained in a file at CTD and will be used to support TAs' applications for consultant positions and to prepare recommendations (upon TA request) or to provide research or base-line information on TAs at UCSD.

- Before holding your first consultation as a new TAC, schedule an appointment with the Director prior to the feedback conference. Bring the client files and be prepared to discuss your observation and analysis and to answer questions about your plan for the conference.

Feedback Consultation*

Before

- The consultation is a very important part of the TADP. It is the only one-on-one chance TAs have to talk to a trained consultant about their concerns.

- After you have reviewed, analyzed, and summarized the questionnaires, and reviewed the **Mentor/Mentee** handout and your own observation notes, you will have a better idea of the direction the consultation will take.

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* *Also see attached handout on consultation by John Andrews*

- **IMPORTANT**: Make sure you complete the summary sheet *before* the consultation. (**NO EXCEPTIONS** unless there is equipment failure).

- If you need guidance on dealing with cross-cultural issues, consult with the ELP-II coordinator.
- If you need guidance on other classroom management issues or pedagogy, consult the Director.

- Use the **Mentor/Mentee** form as a guide to the goals you will try to attain in the feedback session. Request that the TA complete the form before you begin the consultation. This will help you understand the TA's background and provide preparation for conducting the conference. This is particularly important with a consultation-only client.

- It is possible to discuss with the TA the competencies on **Mentor/Mentee** form. Because it might be difficult to cover everything, you and the TA could choose several objectives to work on during the session. If you find you can't cover everything during the conference, you may provide additional handouts. If the TA requests an additional consultation, consult with the Director.

<u>During</u>

- Each consultation will be different because of the variation in situations, but it is helpful to start by asking your TAs how they think the lesson went. Ask how the course has gone so far.

- Use a questioning technique, such as "Why do you think this student said this?" "Is there something you could do about that?" "What worked, why, do you have any concerns, questions?" "What do you think was problematic?" "What do you think could be done differently next time?"

- Affirm what your client says or add some suggestions at that point, rather than begin with something like, "I noticed this comment about *x* and I think you might want to..."

- As the TAs verbalize their own thoughts and reactions, actual changes in thinking and later in practice will occur. Using a guided, focused approach will enhance your role as facilitator and will encourage positive results which should be the aim of every feedback conference.

- When you give your impressions, start with something positive that can come out of the person's attitude and behavior during the meeting--taking notes, listening attentively, responding appropriately, as well as positive behaviors noted during the class session. Always emphasize what worked well even as you offer suggestions for improvement.

- All TAs should be encouraged to start each section by putting identification and contact information (**name, email, office hours, etc.**) and an agenda on the board. We have encountered too many sections during mid-quarter where students did not know their TA's name. If the TA did not supply this information during class time, make sure to cover this.

- There are situations when there can be an inconsistency of expectations among departmental directives, student demands, and CTD's guidelines (particularly regarding our promotion of ***active*** **vs.** ***passive*** learning or our emphasis on promoting complex thinking). It will be your task to help the TA sort out these conflicting expectations. The TA should be encouraged to consult with the course instructor as well as CTD to achieve a needed balance among these expectations. Here it is very important to ***LISTEN*****--not just** ***TELL***.

- We might have a general idea of what constitutes discussion and participation, but it could be totally irrelevant in terms of the course instructor's expectations for section. Perhaps during class the professor encourages participation, discussion, and/or relates anecdotes. Quite possibly, this could result in the students and the professor expecting the TA to fill in details of the big picture presented in class.

- If it is understood that specific sections are to be based on a lecture format, then TAs should be encouraged to use handouts and prepared visual aids (transparencies) to reduce the time spent writing lengthy and complicated formulas and diagrams on the chalkboard.

- Model appropriate teaching strategies and behavior in the feedback conference. Consider active and passive teaching and learning in the consultation session. You should try to draw the person out. Do *not* do all of the talking.

- Discuss sections of the CTD **Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook** (attached). If your clients are biology or chemistry TAs, use their departments' handbooks (on shelves on south wall) as a resource.

- Give TAs appropriate handouts (refer to your **handout binder**) or show them some library resource materials (including videos) that they can review later at their convenience. Give them workshop flyers or newsletters if they have not received them. Encourage attendance at specific workshops for the next quarter if applicable.

- Encourage clients to observe another TA if appropriate; if it appears that your clients would be good models, ask if they would mind being observed by a peer.

- Indicate to your clients that we are not part of the department. We are non-judgmental and the department will not be informed about TA's questions or concerns.
- If the TA would like to work on improvement and/or personally distribute questionnaires to the class at a later time, you can give the TA additional or alternative questionnaires or they can check the CTD website for questionnaires. We can also work with the TAs to help them develop their own targeted questionnaire -- see the Director about this.
- Conclude with a summary or have the TA summarize the meeting. Use the **Conference Notes** (attached) to provide a written summary for the TA. Completing this form should be a cooperative effort between the TA and the consultant. TA discusses things s/he is taking away from the meeting--intention to refine and revise some things as well as to maintain and support things that worked. Give the TA the top copy of the **Conference Notes** and put the yellow copy in the TA's file folder.
- **Note:** If this is a consultation-only session, the summary you write on the **Mentor/Mentee** form or the **Conference Notes Summary** is important for our records and may be completed after the conference, if necessary.
- Consultant concludes with *sandwich* approach:
  - note **positive components**
  - reminder about **negatives** if necessary
  - reiterate **positives**
- Tell clients that questionnaires and the summary will be supplied to them at the end of the quarter (do **<u>not</u>** give out summaries at the feedback conference). It is their responsibility to come to CTD to pick them up or provide a campus address. We will hold them for one academic year. It is to their advantage to retrieve them because it is the first step in gathering data for a teaching portfolio.
- Close the conference with the **TA Training Evaluation** form. Before you hand it to the TA make sure to write your **name, date, and TA's department in the spaces provided.** You may then leave the room so that the TA has a sense of privacy and confidentiality.

  The TA should complete the **TA Training Evaluation** form at that time and put it in the **labeled folder on reception desk** which we have for that purpose. If the conference runs overtime and the TA needs to leave, s/he can complete the **Evaluation Form** later (but encourage ASAP), and then put it in campus mail. In that case, provide an addressed envelope (CTD-0030) so that it can be returned by campus mail. You will be informed if only a limited number of your clients submit evaluations and you will be asked to follow-up with your clients.

- The **Evaluation Form** should **<u>not</u>** be returned to you or put in the client's folder.

<u>After</u>

- Introduce the clients to the professional staff and the student assistants if they are there and tell them to contact our staff if they have any questions or if they would like to be put on CTD's mailing list.

- <u>Within 24 hours</u> of the consultation, update the client record on **TrainTrak**.

  - Make sure all TA information on **TrainTrak** is complete. Enter a "yes" after "complete".

- If the TA requests an additional consultation or if you deem it advisable that the TA have a second observation, note it on the **TrainTrak** record in the **"Notes about this client"** box and e-mail the Director. We cannot credit anyone for more than the standard hours/client unless *pre*-approved by the Director. Depending on schedules and assignments, we might ask you to do the second observation or we might assign someone else.

- Following the consultation, put TA's completed manila folder (**gold registration card, questionnaires, questionnaire summary**, your observation notes, yellow copy of **Conference Notes**, **Mentor/Mentee** handout, and * **TA Checklist Card**) in the appropriate file box. On **TrainTrak**, enter a "yes" after "file turned in".

  ***Do not turn in folder without completing checklist card.**

- Each file will be reviewed, either by the director or a lead TAC. If changes/corrections are required, it will be returned to your mail slot with comments on the attached **File Review**. After you review the returned file, make any content changes suggested and turn it in to "**Completed Files"** box. If typos are noted, put in box for student assistant corrections.

<u>Group Consultations</u>

- If you observe several TAs who teach for the same class, you might consider conducting a group feedback session. It could be similar to the classroom discussions that accompany the return of quizzes or exams. The observer would note some of the good things that s/he observed and some of the things that need improvement (in a generic way, of course, without naming anyone).

- **Advantages** are that the TAs benefit from hearing about some useful activities that they might not have thought of and also realize that they are not the only ones with problems. They also interact and offer suggestions about how to handle problems that could and do arise before it happens to them. The consultant would act more like a facilitator and the TAs would engage in active learning, problem solving, and peer consultation.
- **Disadvantages** are that critiques of a confidential nature cannot be covered and so an additional slot of time might have to be scheduled for an individual TA if necessary. However, such an individual meeting could take just 10 or 15 minutes and it would probably not be necessary for all of the participants. Another disadvantage is that it might be important to see certain TAs immediately because of obvious problems and scheduling a group in that type of situation could be difficult (however, phone and/or e-mail mentoring/consultations can take place immediately).

Confidentiality

- In addition to the confidentiality we observe regarding TAs and their departments, we also consider confidentiality among ourselves as part of our professional role. While we might discuss TA problems and situations in a general sense in our meetings, we try not to label TAs or in any way openly target them in our discussions.

- **Your access to the TrainTrak system is privileged and will be withdrawn if confidentiality is breached.**

Professionalism

- Other aspects of professionalism include honoring UCSD's sexual harassment prevention and policy guidelines, concerns with academic dishonesty, as well as disability, diversity and gender equity issues. The information provided for TAs in the CTD handbook covers these areas. Please familiarize yourself with the handbook and other applicable handouts.

TADP Meetings/Communication

- Meetings will be scheduled as needed. Following review of your committed schedules, a time will be selected that is convenient to all. If something urgent comes up and you cannot attend a meeting, please let the Program Representative know as soon as possible. In lieu of a meeting, you may receive important e-mail announcements. Please check your e-mail regularly.

Library Resources

- The resource library contains a variety of useful books, journals, handouts, videotapes, and TA handbooks from other universities. These resources are available to faculty, postdocs, graduate students and teaching assistants. You may check out reserve books for one week with possibility of renewal. To check out books, see an office staff member and follow check-out procedures. You may also recommend these resources to your clients who should follow the same check-out procedures.
- Videotapes may not be checked out, but may be viewed at the Center upon request.

Handout File

- You will find a selection of useful handouts in the literature file in the reception area. These may be given to your clients. If you have suggestions for, or requests about topics not covered in the available handouts, please consult the Director. Since we continually update questionnaires and handouts based on your suggestions, please let us know if you have ideas for new handouts or revisions of existing handouts.

Copier

- If you find something in one of our resources that you would like to copy for a TA, please check with the Director. We might already have it or we might have summarized it and included it in another handout. If approved, you may use the copier following our posted guidelines.

Telephone/Mail

- The phone at the student assistant's desk, (858) 534-6767, will be used for voice mail messages for TACs. Messages will be taken and put in your assigned mail slot. Please check your mail slot each time you stop in. You can send and receive FAX messages at (858) 822-0318.

Supplies

- Prepared packets and additional forms are located on the shelves on the north wall. If you note the supply diminishing, please notify office staff. Other supplies can be found in the office file/work room.

Security

- You will be assigned keys to the office. Please follow the **Security Procedures** (attached) at all times. Rest room keys are kept in a drawer at the reception desk.

TA File Pick-Up

- Do **not** return **questionnaires** to the TA at the time of the conference. The **questionnaires** and a copy of the **questionnaire summary** may be picked up when the course is over. Tell TAs to stop in at the end of the quarter and request the questionnaires from any office staff member. If you want to give TAs any supplementary material or respond to their requests for additional/alternate questionnaires, please put material in an envelope addressed to the TA and leave it on the front desk in the Pick-Up Basket. **The completed TA files must be reviewed by the Director or lead TAC before any material is returned to TAs.**

Non-Compliance

- If issues of non-compliance surface, i.e., if a TA is not in the scheduled classroom and you had not been informed of a change or if TA fails to show up for a scheduled conference, please inform the Program Representative or Director as soon as possible (see attached compliance policy).

Official Documentation

- Upon request, CTD will provide an official letter of documentation from OGS and CTD for all TAs who successfully participate in the program. We will use your input to provide the basis for the letter. Therefore it is essential that you follow the procedures outlined in this manual. Situations of non-compliance must be noted on the database and reported to the Director. If a TA is non-responsive or displays a negative attitude during the consultation, please note that as well. The documentation will be an official letter noting that the TA has participated in an training meeting (CTD or department), has either been observed or has had questionnaires completed by his/her students, and has participated in a feedback conference. Additionally, attendance at CTD workshops will be noted.

- If, for reasons beyond our control, we cannot schedule one of these requirements, we must provide the TA with the option to pursue this documentation in a succeeding quarter or permit some alternate means of documenting the TA's participation in training activities.

Recommendations

- If a TA observed by you requests a recommendation and you feel you can positively recommend that TA, you may write a recommendation. You can use the information reported by the students on the class questionnaires and also check some CTD samples (attached). If you do not feel that you can recommend that TA, you are not required to do so and you will have to figure out a way to refuse graciously. If you do write a recommendation, please make a copy for the Center's files and give the copy to the Program Representative. If you wish to use official letterhead stationery, your recommendation must be reviewed by the Director before it can be sent out.

Senior Teaching Assistants

- Many departments, funded by grants from CTD, appoint Senior Teaching Assistants (STAs). Their roles vary according to departments, but generally they provide assistance to new TAs, assist in departmental TA training, and coordinate training efforts between their departments and CTD (see **STA Handbook -** attached). If you encounter a TA problem and would like to consult with the STA representing the TA's department, check with the Director beforehand.

Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook

- Your training packet includes the latest revision of **CTD's Graduate Teaching Assistant Handbook**. Each new TA (with the exception of Biology and Chemistry/Biochemistry TAs who receive discipline-specific handbooks) is given a copy of this handbook. Encourage your clients to bring their handbook to the feedback conference. You might also encourage them to take notes in the handbook during the conferences. If your client has not received a CTD handbook and you feel s/he would find it useful, you may provide a copy or select a specific section in handout form from our files to distribute to your clients.

- The handbook will also serve as a valuable guide throughout your TAC experience and any additional teaching experience you have. It is also available on our website **(http://ctd.ucsd.edu).**

- Many of your questions will be answered in the handbook; however, do not hesitate to consult the CTD staff about any concerns you may have.

Administrative Details

- Check with the Program Representative at (858) 822-1992 or ctd@ucsd.edu, regarding payroll information, keys, security, supplies, scheduling, TA registration cards, database entry, TA contact, questionnaires, summaries, CTD forms, library and video check-out, and other administrative details.

A Final Word

Because we are extremely interested in providing optimum service as we execute our mission at UCSD, we make every effort to refine and revise our program to respond to the many needs we perceive. As consultants who meet on a regular basis with campus TAs, you have an opportunity to provide substantial input into our program.

- <u>Throughout the quarter</u>

Please contact the Director with any ideas for program improvement based on things you glean from your observation and mentoring of TAs.

- End of quarter
  CTD arranges an end of the quarter TAC meeting. You will be asked to respond to a program evaluation. Your input is important and we urge you to complete the form and turn it in.

- End of academic year
  The Director meets individually with each consultant in an end of the year exit interview.

Please use these opportunities to assist us in our continual effort to improve our program. CTD has been richly served by committed TACs over the years. We encourage you to continue in that tradition.

These guidelines should ease the task of adding a new responsibility to the many responsibilities you already have as UCSD graduate students. Again please tell us about things that don't seem to work as anticipated, and feel free to make any suggestions you have for change and improvement. Your feedback is greatly appreciated.

TO TEACH IS TO LEARN TWICE

On Consultations

by
John Andrews*

First, some general thoughts; then a sequential flow of the "typical" consultation. By way of overall orientation it seems to me important to really believe that I am trying to help the TA teach the way s/he feels is right--even if I wouldn't do it that way. This doesn't mean I won't make suggestions, sometimes strong ones, but that respect is there. After all, the same attitude is part of the (relatively) student-centered approach we push in the program, and it would put us in a funny position if we didn't apply it to our work with TAs! My feeling about this is bolstered by experiences in which TAs have convinced me that to deal with the dilemmas they face--such as preparing 100 students for a multiple-choice Chemistry quiz in a half hour--our general prescriptions aren't necessarily appropriate.

The biggest problem with this "TA-centered" attitude comes when we really don't agree with the TAs approach, have good reasons for it, and want to influence the TA. Often this leads to the "You *WILL* teach democratically" paradox. How do we offer respect and support, and yet challenge when needed and offer suggestions that differ from what the TA is doing?

I often think of this aspect of consultation as a game involving "support cards" and challenge cards." You start out with a supply of each; every time you confront a TA, you play a challenge card, and when you show understanding or support you play a support card. To caricature it, you can play all your challenge cards at once by starting out, "Well I can see right away that you're a crummy TA but just listen to me and I'll tell you how to fix yourself up." With each challenge card you play there is some risk that the TA will become threatened, close his/her ears, etc.

The object of the "game" is to end the consultation having played most or all of your support cards, and none of your challenge cards, *while at the same time the TA has absorbed all your messages including the difficult or confrontational ones*.

I'll talk about ways to do this in the three-phase sequence below, which consists of rapport-building, diagnosis, and improvement suggestions.

Rapport-building

Here, you play almost nothing but support cards. Useful things to do are:

- be casual and friendly, get to know the person
- talk about the TA's goals, what s/he is trying to accomplish in teaching
- show you're on his/her side by empathizing with problems faced, reflecting understanding of goals
- ask, and be interested in, how the TA experiences the class, how s/he evaluates it
- genuinely celebrate positive events, especially those the TA brings up.

All these approaches also give you information about the TA's outlook and provide many leads into the second phase, *diagnosis*. Often there is a gradual transition into phase 2.

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* *Originally written for CTD by John Andrews, Director, 1975-1988 (edited 8/97 by Rosalind Streichler)*

Diagnosis

This phase involves building up a portrait of what's going on in the class, including the TA's outlook, student input if available, observational data, etc. It is easy to skip too lightly over this and get on to prescriptions, *yet it is absolutely critical* for two reasons: it ensures that your later suggestions to the TA will fit the situation and not be superficial generalities; and it builds a groundwork of goals and problems that helps make the later suggestions credible to the TA in first-hand terms.

It is here that you will probably begin playing some challenge cards. You may want to point out a problem, a contradiction, etc. Yet you can get challenging information into the diagnostic picture while playing a minimum of challenge cards by extending the TA-centered tone of the rapport-building phase. Specifically,

- Point out a problem in an empathic context ("It must have been frustrating to you when..."). Acknowledge the constraints of the TA's particular work setting.

- Get the TA to state the problem first. Then you're in the role of helping to solve it, not the role of bearer of bad news.

- Link the introduction of problems or changes to the TA's previously expressed goals, preferably as questions: "How well did you think participation went today?"

- Spend some time simply being descriptive--talk about the process of the session, what led to what; often problems can be identified informally this way. Also, a concrete process level is vital to really understanding the problem: "When I asked this question, only one person answered and the rest all looked at the ground," not "I can't get participation. What should I do?"

- Get the TA curious about what's going on: "What are some hypotheses about why this happened?"--then you are co-investigators, not accused and prosecutor.

- Don't forget to continue emphasizing positives; they are part of the picture and may help to account for other aspects of the "diagnosis."

Suggestions

Assuming we've come through the second phase with an adequate supply of challenge cards, we gradually blend into the suggestion phase. Actually, I sometimes sprinkle "test" suggestions earlier on, more to see how the TA reacts than to get serious about problem-solving. But for convenience the three-phase division fits fairly well.

Again, you can make suggestions, sometimes involving considerable change, with a minimum expenditure of challenge cards, by continuing to build on the TA's "ownership" of the enterprise.

- Tie suggestions to ways of implementing the TA's own goals; this builds credibility.

- Deal with the TA's expressed problems early on; reduce his/her frustrations.

- Build suggestions out of the concrete context of a closely-examined problem situation. Be specific.

- Present suggestions as alternatives while validating the good parts of what the TA has been doing: "Now you'll have *two* approaches to handling this!

- Use "war stories" of what similar TA's have done; describe concretely the results.

- Acknowledge openly the limitations of any technique or suggestion.

- When you differ sharply with the TA, say so openly and comfortably.