

Best Practices and Guidelines for Teaching Assistants and Supervising Faculty

For the Supervising Faculty

Best Practices and Guidelines¹

- Fill out the **Description of Duties Form** and then go over it with each TA/Associate and sign. Ideally, this should be done before the quarter begins but must be taken care of before the first day of the course's instruction. Please return a completed/signed form for each TA/Associate to Carly Yartz (cyartz@ucsb.edu). It is crucial that the TA/Associate not go over their workload (50% TA/Associate = 20 hours per week; 220 hours per quarter) to avoid breaking any labor laws. Be sure to include at least 1 ½ hours in the TA training/workshop column to account for the workshop they are required to attend.
- Have a first meeting with your TA(s) at the beginning of the quarter before the first day of instruction for your course. In your first meeting with your TA(s), make sure to discuss the **Description of Duties Form** and expectations. After discussing this form, you should both sign it. In addition, make sure to establish: the overview of the course for the quarter, each person's role, the value of approaching your work as a team, a general understanding of specific skills and motivation each TA brings to the table. See the recommended **First Meeting Agenda**. Copying and distributing a **Getting to Know You** worksheet in this first meeting could also be helpful.
- Meet weekly with TA(s) to check in and provide supervision, support, and instruction. Establish a recurring day and time to meet during your first meeting with your TA(s).
- Observe each TA teaching an entire section/class at least once per quarter. The supervising faculty will write-up their observation and E-mail it to the TA, the graduate advisor, and the director of graduate studies (DGS). (*See below for more information*)
- Help TAs prepare for their section/class by communicating lecture/course goals and themes.
- Provide guidance with grading (and help to create a uniform standard of grading among the TAs, as necessary). Often this involves reviewing (or spot-checking) TA-graded papers, homework assignments, exams, etc. Faculty members are responsible for setting grading standards for exams, papers, homework assignments, etc. and making sure that the TA(s) understand them.
- Establish clear and uniform policies for make-ups, incompletes, late papers, absences, grade appeals, and add/drops before the start of the course.

¹ Adapted from UCSB's History Department TA Handbook, Northwestern University's The Graduate School Best Practices and Guidelines for Graduate and Teaching Assistantships, The University of Texas at Austin Graduate School Best Practices: Teaching Assistant-Instructor Agreements, Vanderbilt University Supervisors of Teaching Assistants, Pitt University Center for Teaching and Learning "Working with Your TA"

- Establish a policy regarding contested grades. Cooperate and consult with the TA involved when handling a contested grade or a difficult or disruptive student. TAs should inform the instructor of problems.
- Recognize that you are a mentor for your graduate student(s). Keeping in mind that many TAs have no prior teaching experience, it is your responsibility to: answer questions about specific practices of the discipline with regard to teaching, provide support for teaching and information about sources of support for teaching at the university, prepare TAs for unexpected hurdles, provide advice about balancing the various demands of performing, resource, coursework, and teaching responsibilities, and assist in problem solving.
- Recognize, when developing the course requirements, that being a TA is a half-time job. The TAs' primary responsibility is to make progress in their coursework and their training. Be realistic about the number of quizzes, homework assignments, exams, etc. the TAs are expected to handle. Make sure expectations are set to comply with the UAW contract requirements for maximum hours per week (20 hours) and for the entire course.

TA Observation and Write-Up

All supervising faculty should evaluate each TA's performance before the end of the quarter. Evaluation should be based on a prearranged visitation of one entire section/course meeting for each TA. Supervising faculty should observe TAs teach a section/class at least once during the quarter. While you are observing, make notes on the **Music Department TA Observation Worksheet**. Within a week of observing your TA, provide feedback in a write-up of their observation and E-mail it to the TA, the graduate advisor, and the DGS. See below for best practices for observing teaching and what to include in your observation write-up.

If a supervising faculty member has 4 or more TAs for that quarter, then they can ask another faculty member in their area (or area adjacent) for help conducting these observations and write-ups. Similarly, if a supervising faculty member will be in and out of town during a quarter, they may ask another faculty member in their area (or area adjacent) for help conducting these observations and write-ups. It is the responsibility of the supervising faculty member (and not the TA(s)) to reach out to other faculty in their area to arrange for help with TA observations.

If another faculty member has agreed to help with TA observations, it is the responsibility of that faculty member to: (1) arrange the date and time of the observation with the TA(s), and (2) ask for a syllabus and a description of course goals/objectives from the supervising faculty member or the TA(s) in order to best facilitate the observation.

Best practices for observing teaching:

- Be unobtrusive (not in direct line of vision of teacher or class, but able to see both)
- Be discreet and diplomatic (e.g. do not correct errors by instructor or students)
- Focus not only on content, but also on teaching and learning processes
- Observe interaction between instructor and students

- Take notes (it can be helpful to split notes by recording time and activity next to observations)
- You may use the **Music Department TA Observation Worksheet** for taking notes while observing
- Points to consider include:
 - Are objectives for class given verbally, written, or not at all?
 - Is teaching method appropriate and/or effective?
 - Is significance of topic clear?
 - Are key points emphasized?
 - Are explanations clear to students?
 - Is information well organized?
 - Are activities well-timed to maintain student interest?
 - Does TA encourage participation?
 - Does TA practice inclusive teaching?
 - Does TA seemed prepared for class?
 - Does TA respond to questions?
 - Is the TA sensitive to diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom?
 - Were examples and/or modeling used appropriately?
 - Is technology, audiovisual materials, handouts, performances, etc. appropriate, clear, and used effectively to engage students?

In the write-up, the observer should succinctly summarize key points and use constructive language. (TA should NOT receive initial notes of the observation). Try to keep the final write-up to no more than one page, with points that reflect the course observation notes. The write-up should open with the date of the observation and the course/section that was observed. The bulk of the write-up should include both what the TA did well as well as constructive suggestions for improvement. In the suggestions for improvement, provide specific, actionable suggestions for improvement based on the observed strengths and areas for growth. Offer practical strategies, resources, and suggestions that TA can implement in future courses. The intention of the observation write-up is to give formative feedback to help them improve their teaching. Faculty members may choose to write-up their observation in a number of forms (see examples of an **Example Prose Write-Up** and an **Example Bullet Point Write-Up**).

Within a week of observing the class/section, the faculty supervisor (or faculty substitute) should E-mail a copy of this observation write-up to the student, the graduate advisor, and the DGS.

To ensure that these observations occur, the DGS is responsible for keeping track of which TAs have been observed for that quarter and which have not (based on E-mails received with the observation write-up). If it is week 7 and the DGS has not received observation write-ups for some TAs, then the DGS is encouraged to E-mail the supervising faculty of those TAs to remind them to complete their observations.