HOW TO BE A TA

• Practicalities
• Skills & Knowledge
How to be a TA

Practicalities (the official line on TA-ing)

- Ethics and responsibilities as an instructor
- TA checklist
- TA evaluation forms
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Essential Teaching Skills and Knowledge

- Understanding student diversity. Understanding your students.
- Planning lessons/sections
- In-class presentations
- Engaging students, encouraging participation, leading discussions
- Responding to student questions
- Conflict resolution; responding to “difficult moments”
- Grading
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Understanding issues of student diversity.
Understanding your students.

Read “The threat of Stereotype”, and think of the following questions:

- What is the threat of stereotype? Who can it affect? How does it affect student performance? Has it affected you? Why/why not?
- What can an instructor/TA do about it?

What other diversity-related issues can affect a student’s learning?

What other (not necessarily diversity-related) issues can affect a student’s learning?
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Bottom line: always remember this (and don’t do it!).
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Planning a lesson/section.

Read “Backward design”.

Everyone reads to Figure 1.1, then
• half the class reads “Step 1 ... valid and reliable assessments.”
• half the class reads “Step 2 ... different types of assessments.”

Discuss them as a group and report your findings.
Planning a lesson/section.

The design template.
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In-class presentation

- Everything goes (PPT, blackboard, no-support, etc..) BUT
- Preparation is KEY!
- Typical rule: 1 hour class time = 3-4 hours preparation.

- Student trust and respect is something you have
  - a right to expect one day one,
  - but can expect to lose if you don’t prepare your classes well!
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Engaging students, leading discussions

Reflect on the following questions in groups of 3, and share your results:

- What tools have I used in *this* class to engage students and create a comfortable atmosphere?
- What tools have other professors used in your previous classroom experience?
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Responding to student questions

- Patience & respect are key!
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Conflict resolution. How to deal with difficult situations.

- Expect them to happen (rare are classes when they don’t), and prepare for it. Be aware of/control own emotions in dealing with problems.
- Possible problems:
  - Most common: grade issues.
  - Less common: cheating issues, personal issues (distressed student, aggressive student).
- General guidelines:
  - Always be calm, respectful, and listen to what they have to say.
  - Always give the student the benefit of the doubt if there is any doubt but stick to the rules you have been instructed to stick to.
  - If you can, defer the problem to faculty, and/or seek advice/help from faculty.
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Grading.

- Grading takes a lot of concentration, so make sure you are in the right environment to grade (not in coffee shop/watching TV/...)
- NEVER lose student copies. If you are not sure, NEVER take them out of your office.

- Good grading gives feedback to the students on how to improve, and encouragements when they do well 😊

- We all make grading errors.
  - The only way not to make errors is to double-check all graded work
  - Students have a right to ask about their grades, see their answers, and challenge the grade if they think it is poorly graded.
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How to be an awesome TA

• Be interactive, engaging, enthusiastic!

• Be funny and friendly

• Remember your job is not to teach facts (that’s the professor’s job), but to support students in their learning process.
  o Think about the skills they need to learn beyond the facts.
  o Students learning by themselves will learn more than if you tell them the answer.
  o Be more hands-off, but request student participation (collaborative learning)
  o You and the students are a team.
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TA resources:
- ISEE PDP
- TA training guidelines
- Resources provided by graduate division