To: Dr. Erika Paterson

From: Curtis Fox

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Subject: Proposal for More Efficient Use of TA’s to Improve the Learning Experience of Students at UBC

**Introduction**

Throughout students’ years at UBC, they will often need assistance with their schoolwork, or need their exams and assignments graded in a timely manner. These are important factors for students to have a smooth and enjoyable experience while going to school.

Without an abundance of teaching assistants (TA’s), students will not have access to as many office hours, and grading would be left solely to the instructor of the course. However, in larger classes (which is most common in first and second year), there is just too much grading for a single instructor and a small number of TA’s to complete in a reasonable amount of time. The same idea applies to office hours, which could become very crowded, and therefore inefficient, if not enough TA’s are hosting them.

**The Problem**

Students are paying a lot of money to take courses at UBC, and should therefore have as many resources to help them learn as possible. In some courses, students are not getting work back in a timely manner, or do not have access to enough resources for help (maybe not enough office hours for example). These factors could be detrimental to the learning of students taking these courses.

**Possible Solution**

Presently, undergraduate TA’s are limited to working 12 hours per week on average. I propose we increase the number of hours they are allowed to work each week. Some TA’s may have the time to work additional hours, so we should allow them to do so. Not only could it take pressure off of TAs who can’t work as much, but it would also allow students to get more help when needed. Exams and assignments could also be marked in even faster, so students could get feedback on their work more quickly. This change could really help students learn the material more quickly as well as more thoroughly. These changes could also help the university, as this could help when there is a shortage of available TA’s for courses.

**Research Methods**

To explore this issue I’ve proposed, I intend to conduct a survey for students to take, which will include them providing their opinions on access to TA’s, as well as on the timeliness of assignment and exam grades being returned. I will focus on evaluating the opinions of students studying computer science, since I’m most familiar with this department, as both a student and as a TA.

**Scope**

These are questions I will try to address when writing my formal proposal:

1. What proportion of students feel work is not handed back in a timely manner?
2. Do students feel as though more office hours could be provided?
3. Who exactly would need to be consulted in order to make changes?
4. How would this benefit instructors of the affected courses?
5. Will I need to do more research beyond surveying of students?

**My Qualifications**

I have worked as a TA for both the UBC computer science and the UBC statistics department. I am also a student in both computer science and statistics, where many of the TA’s are undergraduate students like myself. Therefore, I have perspective as both a TA and as a student, which I believe gives me the background to study this issue.

**Conclusion**

Overall, students are going to university to learn and prepare themselves for their future careers. It is important they have all the resources possible to allow them to get the most out of their studies while at UBC. I hope that you agree this is a very important issue that needs immediate attention. Thank you for taking the time to read this proposal.

**Background Information for Instructor**

In many undergraduate courses in Computer Science, many of the TA’s are undergraduate students. They perform tasks such as grading of assignments and exams, holding office hours, and assisting in the invigilation of exams. However, presently there is a weekly average limit of 12 hours that TA’s are allowed to work. I believe this could possibly be a factor hindering TA’s from providing more assistance in their respective courses. I would like to address my formal report to the CUPE union, since they dictate the rules regarding TA’s. However, I mainly write this proposal for the university, as they are the ones who could both benefit from the changes and push for change.

**Intended Audience**

I write this proposal for the university, who has the power to push for change when it comes to TA usage. They could possibly implement changes, but also encourage the CUPE union, who handles things such as TA salaries and weekly hour limits, to make changes.