

## 2016 Political Science Fall TA Training Agenda

**Location:** Buchanan Penthouse (5<sup>th</sup> Floor Buchanan B, 1866 Main Mall, UBC)

**Date and Time:** Saturday, September 10, 9:30am - 3:30pm

**Facilitators:** Justin Alger, Robert Crawford, Alison James

9:30	Registration and Breakfast
9:45	Introductions
10:00	Department expectations
10:15	Professionalism, duties, and your role as a TA
10:45	<i>Break</i>
11:00	Preparing for your tutorials
11:30	Open forum troubleshooting: how to start discussions and deal with difficult situations in the classroom
12:15	<i>Lunch</i>
1:00	Diversity in the classroom
2:00	<i>Break</i>
2:15	Grading and assessment
3:15	Closing remarks and final questions

# Department Expectations: What the Graduate Advisor says

The exact role and responsibilities of each teaching assistant will be clarified by the course instructor. However, a TA's responsibilities normally include preparation for and teaching of weekly discussion sections, occasional meetings with the course instructor, marking of papers and exams, holding regular office hours to meet with the students, invigilating examinations, reading course materials, and, depending on the instructor's preferences, attending lectures. You should check to see if the course can be accommodated with your schedule, including checking with the Professor regarding times for tutorial sections if applicable.

# Professionalism, Duties, Role as TA

- \* TAship is more than just a job
- \* there are important contractual considerations and these should be respected by both parties
- \* But as TAs you are also professionals—in many cases you are training for an academic career
- \* this is an opportunity for teaching development and integration into the learning environment
- \* TAs and Instructors are partners in education
- \* as such they must share, respect, & support the same learning objectives

- \* the duties of the job can vary but professional expectations remain the same
- \* do what you can to foster an environment of mutual respect & trust between Instructor & yourself (and yourself & students)
- \* remember that you are in a position of responsibility and power
- \* ensure a professional distance (e.g. meet only in office and not over coffee or beer; don't accept Facebook or similar requests while you are their TA)
- \* be courteous, respectful, and respond to emails within a reasonable timeframe (e.g. 48 hours)
- \* keep office hours as posted and be on time (and prepared) for such hours & tutorials where relevant
- \* be attentive to your body language
- \* some students are stronger and more committed than other BUT treat them ALL with respect and avoid communicating with others about alleged "problem students"

- \* be careful of how you allow students to address you (and in how you address them)
- \* be friendly without being friends
- \* students appreciate informality and approachability but be careful to avoid discussion not focused directly on the business at hand (do not become a confidante)
- \* be professional/careful with written communication
- \* e.g. use their proper names in emails; emails lack context and short, to the point emails can signal contempt or impatience; but do not be too informal; "hey" is not the same as hi
- \* avoid gratuitous use of swearing (universities are adult institutions but swearing is unprofessional)

# Preparing for Tutorial

- \* always have a plan (and always have a back-up plan)
- \* do not talk at students or give them mini-lectures (even, or especially, if they want you too!)
- \* if you plan to use technology, come early and be sure it works
- \* if you like to write on the board, don't turn your back on students for extended periods
- \* if you use small groups do so with a purpose in mind (e.g. pose questions and have someone report back; make sure this function is shared among students)

# Diversity in the classroom

Be aware that you will invariably discuss issues that touch on individuals in a personal way – e.g. religion, zones of conflict, gay/lesbian rights, race politics, gender equality

your role is to create an optimal learning environment: a space in which everybody feels welcome, free, and safe to express their opinion

How to achieve this?

1. **RESPECT:** create a culture/environment of mutual respect & trust; discourse is an essential part of peer-to-peer learning and so is vigorous but respectful disagreement; don't avoid "hot button" issues but recognize that the "lived experiences" of a diverse student body needs to be observed
2. **DECORUM:** Do not allow students to interrupt or talk over others; have them speak in order; they don't necessarily need to raise hands but don't allow interruptions to persist
3. **SOCIAL LUBRICATION:** Create a sense of community (ice breakers & small group work)

## When to step in

- \* intervene if necessary and stop the discussion to deal with stereotypes, supposedly “humorous” comments, and sexist/racist/homophobic remarks

# General strategies for inclusion and equity

- \* rein in dominant students
- \* use small group work, rounds, or written questions to ensure participation of quiet students
- \* treat students as individuals
- \* with the examples you use, the scholarship you cite, be inclusive of various points of view, authorship, scholarship, case studies

# Be Aware of Early Alert



Faculty and staff notice a student is facing difficulties and identify their concerns using a secure online form



Early Alert advisors review concerns and identify the most appropriate resources for students in need of support.



Academic advisors reach out to students and offer to connect them with resources and support to help them get back on track.

# Bottom Line: Notify Instructor and let the professionals deal with nonacademic difficulties

## TRAINING FOR FACULTY, TAS, AND STAFF

Do you teach at UBC or interact with students as part of your job? Have you heard about Early Alert and want to start using it? Attend an online or in-person Early Alert training session.

Choose online or in-person training to learn:

- how Early Alert simplifies the process for faculty, TAs, and staff to connect students of concern with campus resources and supports
- the kinds of concerns that are appropriate to submit within Early Alert
- how Early Alert protects student privacy and confidentiality

## Online training for faculty, TAs, and staff

Complete the [online Early Alert program tutorial](#)

# Grading and Assessment

- \* consult with and (best practice) do some marking activities with the instructor (e.g. a couple of samples)
- \* be clear about what you are looking for to your students and yourself
- \* ask instructor if they have a rubric (or make one of your own)
- \* but don't be overly rigid
- \* don't talk about "deducting" grades (even if students do)
- \* don't agonize over grading (nobody's life is at stake)
- \* make sure feedback is positive and future directed (formative vs. summative)
- \* do not use yourself as a benchmark!
- \* don't tell students how the instructor feels about rewrites unless you actually know!
- \* stand behind your work but don't take requests for further feedback or complaints personally, become defensive, or get dragged into arguments (even if the student is unpleasant: when in doubt refer to instructor)
- \* do not use the P word! when in doubt refer to instructor