CS398T: Supervised Teaching in Computer Science

Dr. Anna Gal (panni@cs)
Dr. Alison N. Norman (me) (ans@cs)
Department of Computer Science
The University of Texas at Austin
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Today’s Agenda

• Introductions
• Course Overview
  – What is 398T?
  – How to succeed
  – Tentative Schedule
• Guide to Being a Good TA
  – Expectations
  – Tools
• How to Present and Represent
Introductions

• Us
  – Role at UTCS
  – How we got here
  – What we do when we are not here

• You
  – Tentative research area (Systems? Theory? AI? ...?)
  – Background
  – Personal interests (Cooking? Reading? Cycling? ...?)
What is 398T?

• A course where you will learn about:
  – Research opportunities
  – Teaching

• Part 1: Research professors presenting about their research
  – Helps you know the possibilities as you begin exploring research areas and choosing advisors
  – Led by Anna Gal
What is 398T?

• Part 2: How to Teach
  – Helps you be a good TA and then a great teacher
  – Led by Alison Norman
  – This part has assignments
What is 398T?

• Part 3: Working with an Advisor
  – Begins simultaneously with Part 2 (or maybe even during Part 1!)
  – You will identify a research advisor to work with for the rest of the semester (and maybe for your whole PhD!)
    • You’ll need to identify this person and have her/him agree to work with you and sign the form we’ll give you by 10/15
  – Once you have identified that advisor and your choice has been confirmed, you will meet with that advisor weekly for the rest of the semester
Course Information

- Credit/No Credit Class
  - All you need is to earn credit, and you are finished!
- To earn credit for this course:
  - Attend class
    - Sign in on the Sign-In Sheet
    - Do NOT sign in for anyone else
  - Participate in class
    - Pay attention
    - Ask questions and/or contribute to the discussion
  - Complete assignments
    - Must show good effort
  - Identify an advisor by mid-semester
    - Soon after the research talks end
  - Begin meeting regularly with your advisor
Course Tools

• Piazza
  – Main place for communication, including information about course schedule, forms, and assignments
  – Should have received an invitation

• Website
  – Include contact information for course staff, course schedule, and assignment information

• Canvas
  – Automatic registration

• CLIPS
  – Inside UT Direct

• Email
Communication

• Course communication will take place through:
  – Piazza announcements
  – CS email (login@cs.utexas.edu)
  – email officially registered with the university
  – Canvas announcements

• Both Piazza and Canvas announcements will by default go to the email address registered with the university
Schedule (So Far)

Research talks for the first part of the semester, and then... teaching!

• How to be a Good TA
• Teaching and Learning Theory
• Being Prepared
• In the Classroom
• Human Messiness
• Assessment
• Micro-teaching Presentations
Quick and Dirty Guide to Being a Good TA
Why should you care?

Being a Teaching Assistant is a valuable part of your graduate education

– Academic employment
  • Ease transition to teaching
  • Considered for hiring at many schools (and particularly at liberal arts colleges)

– All employment
  • Improves communication skills
  • Deepens your understanding of the material
Expectations

• Uphold your appointment from the first day of class until the course final is given AND graded

• Perform duties as assigned to you by your supervising instructor
  – Lead discussion sections, grade and provide feedback, proctor exams, etc.
  – Confirm your assigned duties with your supervising instructor
  – Be certain you fully understand your responsibilities
Expectations

• Meet deadlines and attend meetings, office hours, and class sessions in a timely and consistent manner
  – Feedback through fair and accurate grading is an essential part of education
  – When grading is delayed, the feedback becomes meaningless to the student

• Work 20 hours per week *on average*
  – Some weeks will require more time than others
    • Usually around exam dates and assignment due dates
    • Need to practice time management
Expectations

• Be professional at all times
  – Fair and equal treatment for all students
    • And *no dating your students!*
  – Maintain all student data in the strictest confidence in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
  – If you will miss a deadline or scheduled activity due to bad time management, illness, or another reason, inform your supervising instructor immediately.
Expectations

• Adhere to the TA policies as set out in the UT Handbook of Operating Procedures:
  
  http://www.policies.utexas.edu/policies/teaching-assistants

• Commit to the TA position when you accept it
  ─ No backing out!
Possible Responsibilities

• Leading discussion sections
  – Be on time
  – Be prepared
    • Know lecture topics, work homework and assignments
    • You don’t have to know everything! Follow up later if you don’t have the answer then
  – Speak slowly
  – Speak to the students, not the board!
    • Jokes are welcome
  – Lead a discussion---don’t lecture
    • Ask leading questions
    • Pause until a student tries to answer
  – Get a copy code for any handouts: http://apps.cs.utexas.edu/copier_codes/
    (site can be reached from UTCS direct)
Possible Responsibilities

• Holding office hours
  – Attend your office hours!
  – Instructor will guide you as to how many and where
  – There are TA stations in the basement
    • Reserve them here: https://apps.cs.utexas.edu/ta_stations/index.scgi
    • Site can be reached from UTCS direct page
  – Do NOT hold them in your grad office (then the students can find you!)
  – Do not schedule them during class
  – Try not to overlap with other course staff
  – You may do your own work when you don’t have students, but don’t assume you won’t have students!
Possible Responsibilities

• Grading assignments, exams, etc.
  – Prompt feedback is essential to the students’ education
  – Develop a fair and accurate rubric and apply equally to all students
    • Consistency is key
    • Supervising instructor often provides this or will provide feedback
    • If the rubric seems wrong after a few papers, stop and adjust (and regrade those papers!)
  – Often easiest to grade one question at a time
  – Handle any complaints
    • Accept written complaints from students, and then promise to review it and respond
    • Only change grades if there was a mistake in the grading!
    • Don’t be trapped into arguing whether the rubric was fair
  – Enter grades as directed by the supervising instructor (probably in Canvas)
Possible Responsibilities

• Answering questions online
  – Many UTCS courses use Piazza for course discussion
  – Check the site for questions at least twice a day, and answer them to the best of your ability
    • On Piazza, the answers can be edited to create more complete answers as necessary... so don’t worry if you think some else may have a “better” answer. Start the answer!
    • Even partial answers can help reduce student frustration
Possible Responsibilities

• Meeting with the supervising instructor and other course staff
• Attending lectures
• Assisting with the creation of exams, quizzes, and other assignments
• Supervising proctors (undergraduate TAs)
Interacting with the Instructor

- Overarching goal: polite honesty
- Often, as grad students, you will be on a first-name basis with the instructor.
  - But if you are unsure, ask!
    - “How would you like me to address you?”
  - You should also be aware that the students are often NOT on a first-name basis (you can ask that, too!)
Interacting with the Instructor

• Notify the instructor of any news regarding the course or students in the course
  – Students that are not attending discussion section
  – Students that have problems, etc
  – A problem you find on the exam, homework, assignment
  – A topic that the students still do not understand
  – Students upset/concerned about grades
Interacting with the Instructor

• Be polite
  – “The students seem to be having trouble with topic X. The confusion seems to be at spot Y.”

NOT
  – “Your teaching sucks, so the students really have no chance of understanding X.”
Interacting with Students

• Be respectful
• Assume sincerity
• Most people are good people, and most students are good students and trying their hardest
Answering Questions

• No question is a bad/dumb/etc. question
  – Listen carefully to questions
  – Sometimes the question itself reveals a misunderstanding that must be addressed
  – When appropriate, lead students to the answer rather than just answering it yourself
    • Can you create a smaller/simpler relevant scenario and lead them through finding that solution?
  – But always give them some help
    • If they are asking a question to you that seems to be a rephrasing of an assigned question, say that! Then say, “Perhaps I am misunderstanding. Would you like to rephrase?”
    • “You should have paid attention in class” is NOT a valid answer
A Tour of the Tools

• Piazza
• Canvas
• CLIPS
Essential Philosophy

Every student is able to learn, and we work until all that want to learn have.

Not:

Survival of the fittest
Summary

• Being a TA is an important and serious job
  – You will be evaluated!
• Be professional
• Treat students how you would like to be treated
  – You were an undergrad once!
• Be confident in your abilities
  – You have the degree, they do not!
• If you run into trouble, talk to your supervising instructor first. If you still need help, contact Tiffany Buckley (tbuckley@cs).
How to Present and Represent

Lydia Griffith
Tiffany Grady
Communication

- Formal vs. Informal
- Frequency
- Method
  - Email, professional email address
  - In person
  - Phone – text or call
- ESL
Personal appearance and Behavior

- Dress for the occasion
- Hygiene
- Behavior
  - RSVP and show up or don’t RSVP
  - Shake hands in formal settings
  - Look the person who addressed you in the eye
  - Polite food consumption
  - Treat everyone with respect
    - Pay attention
    - Ask questions
Professional Attire

**BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL**
- Shirt button-up shirt
- Polished, closed-toe shoes
- Appropriate length skirt
- No bulky jewelry
- Natural looking make-up
- Portfolio

**BUSINESS CASUAL**
- Nice slacks
- Pressed suit

**BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL**
- Fresh haircut
- Clean shaven
- Appropriate tie
- Portfolio
- Polished shoes
- Buttons-up shirt
- White or light colored dress shirt

**BUSINESS CASUAL**
- Matching tie and shoes
- Pressed slacks

This guide demonstrates acceptable Business Professional and Business Casual Attire for your upcoming career events.

**NOTE:** For interviews, always choose Business Professional attire.
Social Media

- Assume nothing is private
- LinkedIn account recommended
- Update all Professional accounts regularly
- Be polite – maybe if you’re having a bad day or someone else is don’t engage
Asking for what you need

- Negotiation
- Setting expectations (managing up)
- Taking responsibility for your success and progress
- Keep them aware of your progress
- Don’t suffer in silence
- Communicate
Announcements

• Next time: Research talks!
• One of your assignments for the teaching portion will be to observe a class and a discussion section and fill out an observation form.
  – You’ll need to sign up for that before I return to this class
  – More information will be posted to Piazza