UTCS’s First Ever Graduate/Undergraduate Joint TA Training

September 5, 2018
Why are we here?

To provide guidance and set expectations for all of our TAs

– Role responsibilities
  • What they are and what they are NOT

– Tools of the trade
  • Intro to Piazza, Canvas, CLIPS, etc

– Welcoming environments
  • What does it mean to be “welcoming”? What does that look like?

– How to get paid (undergrads only)
But first...

• One of your most powerful tools is knowing people who are also doing the same thing

• So... sorry about this, but we’re doing an icebreaker
Role and Responsibilities
TA == Teacher

• A TA is a teacher
• You are part of a team
• Your job is to help *all* the students learn the material
Role 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
Role 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
Role Expectations

• Be professional at all times
  – Fair and equal treatment for all students
    • And no dating your students!

• When you say you are going to do something, do it!
  – Not doing so hurts your reputation, the reputation of the instructor, and the department
  – If you will miss a deadline or scheduled activity due to bad time management, illness, or another reason, inform your supervising instructor immediately.

• Maintain all student data in the strictest confidence in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)
FERPA

• What is this FERPA?
  – Federal Educational Rights and Privacy Act

• What does it mean to you?
  – In brief, you may not share student information, including grades or other performance measures, with anyone other than the student or the course staff
  – This includes which students are registered for your class
  – In practice, don’t post rosters, don’t grade in public, don’t discuss grades over email, don’t discuss students with their parents or anyone else
  – You should receive an online training in FERPA when you first accept the TA position
Role Expectations

• Grad students:
  – 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

• Undergrads:
  – Work up to the number of hours you are appointed and then report those hours honestly
  – You do not need to work for free
Role 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
• Office Hours
• Grading
• Interacting with Instructors and Students
• Answering Questions
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!
• Lead a discussion---don’t lecture
  – Ask leading questions
  – Pause until a student tries to answer
Office Hours

• Instructor will guide you as to how many and where
  – Do NOT hold them in your grad office, if you have one (then the students can *always* 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!
Office Hours

• Attend your office hours!
• Teach without providing answers
  – Explain concepts
  – Ask leading questions designed to take them to the answer
  – Teach debugging techniques
    • What would your first steps be?
    • They should type!
• Do not let them leave feeling just as frustrated/confused as they were when they came
Grading

• Be prompt
  – When grading is delayed, the feedback becomes meaningless to the student

• Be fair
  – Consistency is key
    • Often easiest to grade one question at a time
  – Develop a fair and accurate rubric
    • Supervising instructor often provides rubric or will provide feedback on one you develop
  – Apply rubric equally to all students
  – If the rubric seems wrong after a few papers, stop and adjust (and regrade those papers!)

• Be firm
  – 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
Interacting with the Instructor

• Overarching goal: polite honesty
• Often, as TAs, 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
Building Rapport

• Your goal is to provide a safe space for students to learn
• Learn their names
  – Photo roster!
• Be accessible
  – Chat with them (Bad/Good TV, books, games...)
• Make them feel as if you are paying attention
  – If they come to office hours after sending you email, you can say, “I saw your email” or “Did you send me an email on that?”
  – If you notice someone misses something on the homework or exam and they see you, mention it and ask about it.
• Take their concerns seriously
• Laugh at yourself. Laugh *with* them.
Your Students are GOOD Students

• UTCS students are typically bright and willing to learn

• If they don’t understand something, it may have been communicated ineffectively
  – Their assumptions may not be the same as yours
  – They are critical of the “givens” in the field (this is a good thing)

• Give them the benefit of the doubt

• Do not treat them as though they are miscreants/a waste of your time
Answering Questions

• Listen carefully to questions
  – Questions stem from confusion
  – Sometimes the question itself reveals a misunderstanding that must be addressed
  – Identify the confusion, then address both the confusion and the question as stated
• 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
• Do not belittle the students, even in jest
  – No question is a bad/dumb/etc. question
  – Do not say, “oh, that is easy!”
Answering Questions Online

• Many UTCS courses use Piazza for course discussion
• Check the site for questions at least twice a day
• Answer 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
• But do not answer too quickly!
Other Possible Responsibilities

• Meeting with the supervising instructor and other course staff
• Attending lectures
• Assisting with the creation of exams, quizzes, and other assignments
• Supervising other TAs
NOT Your Job

• Running personal errands
  – You don’t need to grocery shop/buy gifts/whatever

• Working extra hours
  – Remember, grad students, your appointment is on average but is limited to 20 hours per week
  – Undergraduates should not be asked to work for free

• Babysitting their children

• Dating your faculty supervisor
Logistics

• Get a copy code for any handouts: http://apps.cs.utexas.edu/copier_codes/

• There are TA stations in the basement
  – Grad students, reserve them here: https://apps.cs.utexas.edu/ta_stations/index.scgi
  – Undergrads, your faculty member must request access for you first (through helpreq@cs)
A Tour of the Tools

• Piazza

• Canvas
  – Canvas has online tutorials and they will make appointments with you to help

• CLIPS
Welcoming Environment
What is a “Welcoming Environment”? 

• An environment that is, well, welcoming. (Ha.) 

• It is an environment that is welcoming to all groups (majority, underrepresented, and in the middle). 

How do we get this magical thing?
Welcoming Environments: Creating One

We are all responsible!

• Create a feeling of community
• Understand and promote the Growth Mindset
  – Do not confuse preparation with ability!
• Reduce barriers to entry
• Stick to the rules
• Insist on decency
• Stop bias
Create a feeling of community

• Know your students’ names
  – Photo rosters
  – Pictures with their names
  – Note facts

• Help students get to know each other and build community: the more people you know, the more connected you feel
Promote a Growth Mindset
Adapted from NCWIT resources

• Clearly express your confidence that all your students can meet your standards

• Explain:
  – Mental effort changes the brain and increases capacity
  – Tests and assignments are testing skills at a point in time, not ability or potential
  – Feedback should provide information on how to improve

*Preparation and ability are not the same thing*
Reduce Barriers to Entry

• Watch for assumptions about prior knowledge
  – Terminology
  – Acronyms
Stick to the Rules

- The underrepresented groups are less likely to ask for exceptions or assume that the rules can be bent, so allowing exceptions can create an unfair learning environment for the underrepresented group.

- If you want to change a rule/allow an exception/whatever, allow it for the whole class.
Insist on Decency

• Do not allow condescension/flaming/hazing to stand

• Speak up and stop it!
  – In class
  – On Piazza
  – In the lab
  – In the hallways
  – At work
  – ...
A Big Part of Decency: Eliminating Microaggressions

• Those are those little comments that:
  – May seem to be compliments but are not
  – Make someone feel like they are not part of a group
  – Intentionally put someone down
  – Make fun of someone for an innate trait
  – Pigeonhole a person’s characteristics based on the stereotype of the group

• Yes, intent and context may matter.

• For instance, the question, “Where are you from?” could be:
  – Friendly conversation
  – An attempt at background information to understand someone better
  – Meant to make someone feel different from others

• But realize that what the listener hears is what matters.
Why do these microaggressions matter?

• Behavior is cumulative: one comment may not matter, but many of the students in our underrepresented groups face many of these comments.

• Not welcoming
• Ostracizing
• Affects the recipient’s confidence
Other examples...

• “Weeelll.... Microsoft hires a lot of women.”
• “Girls are good at design”
• “Men are just not good communicators.”
• “Are you in the right building?”
Step 1: Recognition

This is hard. Here are some thoughts:

• Try to hear it through the recipients ears and in other contexts [text message vs. voice]

• Listen for key words: “actually” “you people” “like them”

• Ask yourself:
  – Does it marginalize the person’s experience/feelings/actions?
  – If the statement were made to an underrepresented group as a whole, would it be appalling?

• Practice: Read a bunch of them along with explanations about what they means, and you’ll be able to recognize new ones on the fly
Step 2: Assessment

- Is it important to address?
- Should I interrupt now?
- Should I take the person aside later or address this issue at a later time?
- What is stopping me from intervening?

- Later: What could you, anyone in the scenario, or the organization do to prevent future instances?
Step 3: Response

• Confusion. Avoid accusations and instead invite clarification “What do you mean by that?”
  – “Could you explain, please?”
  – “Which women? Which men?”
  – “How do you know that?”

• Arouse dissonance: people don’t like to be inconsistent.
  – I’m surprised you would say something like that, considering how supportive you are of women in computing
Step 3: Response

• Pivot: this is a way of not confronting directly, but letting people know they made a mistake in a socially graceful way.
  – If someone thinks that a colleague is a clerical worker, walk up and say, “Hi, have you met our new assistant professor?”

• Declare irrelevance.
  – “Why does that matter here?”

• Use humor (when appropriate for the situation or your relationship with a colleague)
Stopping Bias

• Learn about bias
  – How it sounds
  – How it looks
  – Be particularly concerned with implicit bias

• Interrupt it!
What is Implicit Bias?

It is NOT explicit bias

These are the biases built into society.
   – These are shortcuts to help you make sense of the world
   – Sometimes those shortcuts have negative effects

We receive the implicit message about what is good and what is bad from the day we are born.

*We must take conscious steps to overcome our implicit biases.*
Why Does It Matter?

Implicit bias can cause:

– Those microaggressions
– Stereotype threat
  • Occurs when a person is concerned that his or her actions will reflect negatively on a group
– Failure to recognize greatness
– People to not meet their full potential
What do we do?

• First, we learn to recognize and understand implicit bias.
  – We can’t stop something we don’t understand

Harvard has created implicit bias tests:

[https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/]
Types of Bias

Bias takes many forms, some common ones:

- Performance Bias
- Performance Attribution Bias
- Competency vs. likeability
- Maternal Bias
- Conformity Bias
- Affirmative Action Bias
- Self-Serving Bias
What do we do?

• First, we learn to recognize and understand implicit bias.
  – We can’t stop something we don’t understand

• Then, we speak up and stop it.
Oh no!

• *You* have said or done something that was misinterpreted/not well considered/not good.

• First: Don’t be this guy:
I DON'T ALWAYS SAY SOMETHING STUPID

BUT WHEN I DO, I KEEP TALKING TO MAKE IT WORSE
Oh no!

• *You* have said something that was misinterpreted/not well considered/not good.

• First: Don’t be this guy:

• Second: Stop talking, and just apologize. We all make mistakes.
  – “Whoops! I didn’t mean that. Of course we want your opinion/want you here/your skills are amazing.”

• It *is* important to correct your mistake---*the impact is more important than the intent*:
  – Performance and creativity are impacted
  – Thinking is impaired
  – Individuals may miss information right in front of them
Let’s practice!

From Colleen Lewis’s talk at NCWIT Summit Spring 2017: How Instructors Can Improve Inclusiveness in Classrooms and Programs
Preparing for Next Time

• Class observations are due at next training Wednesday, 9/19
  – More information will be posted to Canvas
    • Once I learn how to do that
  – Bring your observation sheets with you to class!

• A Canvas Module on leading effective discussions is posted and is also due by Wednesday, 9/19
  – Bring your rules for discussion section to class
Timesheets

- Go to UTDirect
- Click on “timesheet”
- Fill in hours
- Either “save for later” or “save and send to signer”
- [https://utdirect.utexas.edu/utdirect/index.WBX](https://utdirect.utexas.edu/utdirect/index.WBX)
Email your timesheet to professor

- Take a screen shot of your timesheets
- Email the professor you work for as well as Liz Whittenton (liz@cs.utexas.edu)
- Volunteer?
**Timesheet Example**

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**Total Hours Worked:** 0.00

I certify this is an accurate record of hours worked and absent. I understand the intentional falsification of time records violates university policy and will result in disciplinary action, which may include termination.

- Save for later
- Save and send to Signer
- Delete
- Submit Request

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Zero Hours – don’t forget!!

- You must account for each day you are APPOINTED to work in a given semester.

- Pay periods are 1st – 15th and 16th- 31st
  - Sometimes you will stop working for a holiday but there are still days left in the pay period.

- SPRING BREAK! (is an example of this)

- Looking at your “timesheet summary” will help you avoid forgetting these.
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- Pay electric...
Timesheets Due:

- On the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 16\textsuperscript{th} by 9:00 AM
- EVERY PAY PERIOD
Email Format Preferred

- Subject line:

Timesheets for approval, January 16-31
What Counts Toward Hours Worked?

- ANYTHING you do that is related to the class you are proctoring
  - Attending the lecture
  - Holding office hours
  - Answering questions via email, text, Piazza, Canvas, etc.
  - Grading
  - Attending class-related meetings
  - Attending/monitoring exams

- Please DO NOT go over the number of hours assigned per week
FERPA
Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act

Please take the FERPA Module in UTDirect → Compliance Training

Some things to remember

- Please do not leave graded stacks of homework, exams, etc., out in public view, or in a stack for rifling through
- Do not send grades/personal information to anyone via email
Acceptable Use Policy

- You may have to electronically “sign” this
- It will ask for a supervisor EID: flynnea1
Switching to WorkDay on 10/31

- All timesheets must be turned in by 5:00 pm on 10/30/18.
- Anyone working on 10/31 will need to estimate their hours and turn them in.
Thank you for coming!