How to be a Good TA

CS398T: Supervised Teaching in Computer Science
October 17, 2017
Last Time

- Research Talks!
- Guide to Being a Good TA (last time I was here)
  - Expectations
  - Responsibilities
Today’s Agenda

• Roadmap

• Being a Good TA
  – How is it going?
  – Expectations and Responsibilities
  – The X Factor
Roadmap

• Today:
  – Being a Good TA (Recap)
• Before and During Class
  – Being Prepared
  – Class observation discussion
  – Facilitating effective discussions discussion
• Human Messiness
• Experienced TA/Al panel
• Assessment
• Micro-teaching presentations
• Wrap-Up
TA == Teacher

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

• 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)
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

• 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
  – Often easiest to grade one question at a time
  – Consistency is key
  – Supervising instructor often provides rubric or will provide feedback
  – 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
Online Discussions

• Check for posted questions at least twice a day
• Answer to the best of your ability
• No question is a dumb question
  – Questions stem from confusion
  – Identify the confusion, then address both the confusion and the question as stated
• Do not belittle the students
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 are not the same as yours
  – They are more 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
The X Factor

• What makes a teacher:
  – Good?
  – Interesting?

• What makes a class:
  – Useful?
  – Entertaining?

• What motivates YOU?
Strategies for Motivating Students

• Challenge them
  – But provide help
FLOW

(Csikszentmihalyi, 2003)
Strategies for Motivating Students

• Challenge them
  – But provide help

• Provide feedback
  – Timely, constructive, emphasize the Growth Mindset
Fixed Mind-set
Intelligence is static

- Leads to a desire to look smart and therefore a tendency to...
  - Avoid challenges
  - Give up easily
  - See effort as fruitless or worse
  - Ignore useful negative feedback
  - Feel threatened by the success of others

As a result, they may plateau early and achieve less than their full potential.

All this confirms a deterministic view of the world.

Growth Mind-set
Intelligence can be developed

- Leads to a desire to learn and therefore a tendency to...
  - Embrace challenges
  - Persist in the face of setbacks
  - See effort as the path to mastery
  - Learn from criticism
  - Find lessons and inspiration in the success of others

As a result, they reach ever-higher levels of achievement.

All this gives them a greater sense of free will.
Strategies for Motivating Students

• Challenge them
  – But provide help

• Provide feedback
  – Timely, constructive, emphasize the Growth Mindset

• Connect material to larger goals
  – Career, larger understanding
MOTIVATION THEORY

C - COMPETENCE
R - RELATEDNESS
A - AUTONOMY
V - VALUE
E - EFFORT ATTRIBUTIONS
S - SELF-BELIEFS
Strategies for Motivating Students

• Challenge them
  – But provide help

• Provide feedback
  – Timely, constructive, emphasize the Growth Mindset

• Connect material to larger goals
  – Career, larger understanding

• Build rapport and community
  – Icebreakers, discussions, group work
How to Present and Represent

Katie Dahm
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

**What to wear?**

**BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL**
- Pressed suit
- Natural looking makeup
- Appropriate length skirt
- Polished, closed-toe shoes
- No bulky jewelry
- Portfolio

**BUSINESS CASUAL**
- Pressed suit
- Nice blouse
- Polished shoes

**BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL**
- Fresh haircut
- Clean shave
- Appropriate tie
- Matching tie and shoes
- Portfolio

**BUSINESS CASUAL**
- Button-up shirt
- 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

• Class observations are due Thursday
  – Bring your observation sheets with you to class!

• A Canvas Module on leading effective discussions is posted and is also due by Thursday
  – Bring your rules for discussion section to class

• Many thanks to Carlton Fong, who created the motivation slides used in this presentation (carlton.fong@austin.utexas.edu)