

**Best Practices for Instructors (Professors, Lecturers, Associate Instructors),  
Teaching Assistants, Readers**

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## Courses with TAs

### *TA Contract*

- Everyone involved needs to be familiar with the union contract:
- [http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/employees/policies\\_employee\\_labor\\_relations/collective\\_bargaining\\_units/academicstudentemployees\\_bx/contract\\_articles/bx0211article\\_2appointment\\_notification.pdf](http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/employees/policies_employee_labor_relations/collective_bargaining_units/academicstudentemployees_bx/contract_articles/bx0211article_2appointment_notification.pdf)
- It is the instructor's responsibility to fill in the details of the contract—do not ask TAs to assign themselves hours for their tasks, as this violates their bargaining agreement
- The TA contract should specify all tasks, the range of tasks, and number of hours spent on different tasks. Plan your TAs/readers' work load, particularly the grading, so that they do not exceed 220 hours in a quarter, 40 hours in a given week, or 8 hours in any one day, as specified in the union contract. Indicate the number of hours which will be spent in each activity including "administrative assistance" for the class (e.g., administering gradebook, scanning and posting course materials on Smartsite, proctoring exams for students who need extra time (Staff should not be asked to do this), photocopying course materials, managing chat rooms, processing scantron exams, giving feedback to the instructor on exams and assignments, etc.). Sample TA contracts are available electronically on the department web site: <http://sociology.ucdavis.edu/graduate-program/graduate-student-forms>
- Time in the TA contract must be provided for first-time TAs who are required to do the CETL training (usually in the fall and winter) if the training takes place after the quarter has started
- When TAs receive the TA contract from instructors, TAs should check the hours listed for tasks and make suggestions for adjustments, including any additional tasks not yet included. TAs should review the types of tasks they are being asked to perform and the length of time assigned to that task, whether it is a weekly task, a quarterly task, etc.
- TAs also should review the syllabus prior to signing the TA contract to ensure that the number of assignments are proportional to the number of students and number of sections (i.e., if class sizes increase and/or number of sections increase, instructors must limit assignments to the number that can be graded within the allotted 8/40/220 hours; conversely, other duties may be added if the number of students is below expected enrollment).
- Prior to signing the TA contract, instructors should verify with the TAs that the contract appears realistic. If disagreement about the contract cannot be resolved, the instructor and TA(s) can consult with the Vice-Chair or Chair (instructor representative), the Union representative (TA representative) and/or the ombudsperson.

- If instructors designate a Lead or Head TA and give extra responsibilities to one individual to coordinate a group of TAs, the instructor must adjust downward this TA's other work tasks.
- If instructors choose to enroll additional students above the number specified in the TA contract, they must either adjust the TA's hours and assignments accordingly or take on the grading and administrative duties for these extra students themselves.
- TAs are eligible for 12 days maternity/paternity leave. Please see the Graduate Program Advisor for details on how to accommodate this benefit.
- Graduate students do not technically receive any sick leave, but there are exceptions. The Graduate Program Advisor can provide guidance on this issue.

### ***TA and Instructor Communication***

- TAs cannot be required to meet or discuss course material by email/phone before the week in which the quarter starts (typically a few days before the first day of instruction; see <http://advising.ucdavis.edu/deadlines.aspx>), **but** they may volunteer to meet or review material in preparation for their employment. If TAs are available and willing, instructors are encouraged to meet with TAs in person before the first class to review class syllabus, gather information about the TAs' experiences and to complete the TA contract (the union contract states thirty days before the class starts, which is not typically feasible).
- In the first week, instructors and TAs should establish agreements about reasonable time expectations for responses to emails. Neither TAs nor instructors are required to give each other their personal telephone numbers. They may choose to do so but should discuss expectations about communicating by phone or text (e.g., M-F, 9 to 5, except in emergencies).

### ***Course Syllabus***

- Instructors should post syllabus and readings (if applicable) on SmartSite by the start of the class.
- Instructors should post office hours and the TAs office hours on their syllabus with the appropriate room number.
- Syllabi should include expectations for undergraduate student email use, including reasonable response times, periods of access, etiquette, etc.
- Instructors should err on the side of providing too much information rather than too little in their syllabi.

- The syllabi should state consequences for students who add late, miss class due to illness/family issues, turn in late papers, etc.
- Instructors should describe their policy for grade change in their syllabus and specify the chain of accountability (i.e., who do students talk to first when seeking a grade change).
- The instructor must obtain 100% of a class' agreement to change the weighting for the entire class for various course assignments after the class has started and the original syllabus distributed

## ***Section***

- Sections should reflect course material, course concepts, and further course learning objectives that the instructor has outlined in the course syllabus and in lecture. While TAs may want to bring in outside material and current events, these need to be relevant and related to the course material. TAs can also use section to help students prepare for exams and assignments. Sections should also encourage student discussion and peer engagement.
- The union contract contains no language limiting section size to a particular number of students or limiting the number of sections per week; instead, the workload, defined as hours per day/week/quarter. We typically assign two sections of 25 students each for first year courses and sections of 35 for social statistics courses. Instructors should be aware that adding students or sections will require significant changes to assignments.
- Instructors can schedule extra TA-led sections in classes regardless of whether or not regular sections are held (e.g., to run review sessions in preparation for exams and papers), but this must be included in the TA contract.
- Before the start of the quarter, instructors and TAs should communicate about whether sections that meet early in the week (i.e., prior to the first lecture) should be held. As these are usually cancelled because the course has not yet been introduced, it is also important for *instructors* to notify enrolled students whether these sections will be held.

## ***SmartSite and Gradebook***

- Instructors should create a gradebook by the first week of class on SmartSite.
- TAs should be assigned as “Lead TA” when adding them on SmartSite. This designation allows TAs to access their section rosters, get grade distribution data, and make adjustments as needed.

- Instructors and TAs should discuss ahead of time whether students will use electronic submission for papers or assignments (via SmartSite's Assignments) or turn in hard copies. Because TAs are grading, they should be asked their preference.

## *Grading*

- Instructors and TAs should discuss and agree on the timelines for grading each assignment/exam at the beginning of the course (and as needed). TAs should make sure to meet these grading deadlines.
- If TAs find they are having trouble meeting a grading deadline, they should contact the instructor immediately to inform them and discuss solutions with the instructor.
- If TAs realize that grading is going to require more time than was allocated in the TA contract, they should communicate this with the instructor to make adjustments to make sure they do not go over their quarterly hours.
- If TAs are diligent about recording hours and realize that they will likely work more hours than scheduled, they should communicate this to the instructor so that they can try and remedy the situation before additional hours accrue. They can also contact the Union representative for guidance.
- Instructors should provide detailed answer keys for all work to be graded by TAs; do not ask TAs to make answer keys or to grade without them.
- Instructors should meet with TAs to discuss answer keys or rubrics, jointly grade a sample of assignments/exams/papers to ensure that grading practices meet the instructors' expectations and when there are multiple TAs to ensure that grades are consistent across TAs. Instructors should be clear about the level of feedback expected on assignments.
- Instructors and TAs should discuss the department expectations for grading distributions before the TAs begins grading. Instructors should make clear to TAs their distribution expectations for each graded work. TAs should be prepared to justify any grading exceptions and to re-grade if necessary (grade in pencil first).
- After final grades have been submitted it is the instructor's responsibility to manage students who are unhappy with their course grade. TAs must provide any information and material they have to allow the instructor to answer students' questions and make any needed changes. TAs' responsibilities for the class begin their first week and end their last week of employment.
- Instructors do typically not reevaluate a students' work (or additional work) after final grades have been filed with the registrar (unless a student received an Incomplete in the course). UC Davis policy states: *"Academic Senate Regulations (systemwide and individual campus) provide that grades are final when filed with the Registrar by an instructor. A grade can be*

changed only if a “clerical” or “procedural” error can be documented.” <http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/records/grades/changes.cfm>

### ***Instructor Responsibilities and Conduct with Students***

- Ask students for feedback on course (throughout and at the end of the course). Address student concerns through action or by communicating reasons for course structures.
- Post office hours on the department website and outside of your door, by first week of classes.
- Be punctual for office hours.
- Instructors are responsible for managing students with disabilities, not TAs. TAs will grade their work and assist them during office hours/section. All documentation from the Student Disability Center is sent to the instructor of record and the instructor should arrange alternate scheduling for exams, course note takers, and so forth. If TAs are needed to help proctor extra-time exams, their hours on other tasks should be adjusted accordingly.
- Instructors should provide their TAs or Office staff with a copy of their final exam no later than the day before their final in case they are unable to make the exam because of an emergency

### ***Instructor Responsibilities and Conduct with TAs***

- Do not ask TAs to prepare course syllabi, exams, assignments, power-point slides, or study guides; it is reasonable to ask them to review and comment on instructor prepared exams, assignments, grading rubrics, etc., assuming time for such tasks has been built into the TA contract.
- TAs cannot be required to teach a class or give "guest lectures." This is strictly voluntary; a TA might appreciate the opportunity to give a guest lecture on a topic related to his or her research, but you need to attend and provide feedback. TAs can lead a discussion, show a film, or do other related tasks without direct supervision.
- TAs do not buy their own books. Instructors must arrange with department front desk staff to order desk copies from the publisher (or alternative arrangements). If TAs require hard copies of readings posted on SmartSite (for example, if TAs need hard copies for section/office hours when discussing with students and referencing on a laptop is cumbersome/impossible), instructors will either loan the TAs the course copy card so TAs can make reading copies or the instructor will make hard copies for the TAs.
- Do not ask TAs to run errands or do tasks unrelated to the course (e.g., check your mail, photocopy non course-related materials).

- Do not ask TAs to manage any student cases that involve Student Judicial Affairs. The instructor should handle those cases.
- Discuss with the TAs in private any concerns that you have with their teaching/grading/conduct. If an issue cannot be resolved, consult with the department ombudsperson or Vice-Chair. Do not discuss the issue with students in the class.
- Do not rely on TAs to proctor exams. Instructors should be present to provide aid when students have questions and to handle situations in which cheating is suspected.

### ***TA Responsibilities and Conduct***

- At the first TAs/instructor meeting, TAs should give a brief introduction of their relevant work experience to help instructors identify how best to structure guidance, facilitate work relationships, and communicate expectations. This is intended, in part, to help foster mentorship relationships among the TAs (caveat: Lead TAs' other responsibilities would be adjusted down, as previously noted).
- Students who wish to TA should complete department TA ranking sheets with careful attention to make sure they do not conflict with their own graduate courses. Students' top five rankings should ONLY include classes in which they are available for ALL sections. If a graduate course time changes, the instructor should notify all students ASAP, as well as facilitate the connection between TA and administrative staff if time conflicts result from the change.
- Post office hours on the department website and outside of your door, by first week of classes.
- Be punctual for office hours.
- Attend lectures if required by the TA contract. Aim to be a good role model for student behavior in lecture. TAs should not be disruptive or distracting (e.g., showing up late, engaging in side conversations, multitasking during lecture, texting, browsing the internet, reading, etc.); take appropriate lecture notes.
- Read all of the material requested by the instructor. Adequate time for reading course materials should be built into the TA contract.
- Consult with the instructor about material you want to post on a course Smartsite
- Post your discussion section syllabus on Smartsite by first meeting of the section (sample syllabi are available in the Teaching Sociology Smartsite).

- Run extra sections required by instructor (e.g., review sessions in preparation for exams and papers) in classes regardless of whether or not regular sections are held if this has been agreed to ahead of time and written into your TA contract (i.e., calculated into your hours).
- Discuss with the instructor in private any concerns that you have with the class; if an issue cannot be resolved, consult with the department ombudsperson or Vice-Chair. Do not discuss the issue with students in the class.
- Meet regularly with other TAs when you work in a course that has multiple TAs. Do not discuss the practices of other TAs with students in the class; discourage your students from making invidious comparisons between TAs.
- Check the Soc Grad Resource Hub and Teaching Sociology SmartSites for most up to date information and resources

## Courses with Readers

### *Reader and Instructor Communication*

- Readers cannot be required to meet or discuss course material by email/phone before the quarter starts (typically a few days before the first day of instruction; see <http://advising.ucdavis.edu/deadlines.aspx>), **but** may volunteer to meet or review material in preparation for their employment. If Readers are available and willing, instructors can meet with Readers in person before the first class to review class syllabus, gather information about the Readers' experiences and to complete the Reader contract.
- In the first week, instructors and readers should establish agreements about reasonable time expectations for responses to emails. Neither readers nor instructors are required to give each other their personal telephone numbers. They may choose to do so but should discuss expectations about communicating by phone or text (e.g., M-F, 9 to 5, except in emergencies).
- Instructors and Readers should agree at the start of the quarter whether or not Readers will respond to student emails; instructors should make that decision clear to students.

### *Course Syllabus*

- Instructors should post syllabus and readings (if applicable) on Smartsite by the start of the class.
- Instructors should post office hours on the syllabus with the appropriate room number.
- Instructors should include expectations for undergraduate student email use including reasonable response times, periods of access, etiquette, etc.

- Instructors should err on the side of providing too much information rather than too little in their syllabi.
- The syllabi should state consequences for students who add late, miss class due to illness/family issues, turn in late papers, etc.
- Describe policy for grade change in the syllabus and specify the chain of accountability (i.e., who do students talk to first when seeking a grade change).

### ***SmartSite and Gradebook***

- Instructors should create a gradebook by the first week of class on Smartsite.
- Readers should be assigned as “Lead TA” when adding them as participants on SmartSite. This designation allows Readers to get grade distribution data and make adjustments as needed.
- Instructors and Readers should discuss ahead of time whether students will turn in hard copies or use electronic submission for papers and/or assignments (via SmartSites Assignments). Because Readers are grading, they are usually asked for their preference.

### ***Grading***

- Instructors and Readers should discuss and agree on the timelines for grading each assignment/exam at the beginning of the course (and as needed). Readers should make sure to meet these grading deadlines.
- If Readers find they are having trouble meeting a grading deadline they should contact the instructor immediately to inform them and discuss solutions with the instructor.
- If Readers realize that grading is going to require more time than was allocated in the Reader contract, they should communicate this with the instructor to make adjustments to grading expectations, Reader tasks, have instructor take on some grading, etc., to make sure they do not go over their quarterly hours.
- *If* Readers are diligent about recording hours and do record more hours than pay, Readers should contact the Union representative, who will provide instruction as to how to seek reimbursement for those additional hours. It is important that Readers communicate with instructors *first* to try and remedy the situation before additional hours accrue.
- Instructors should provide detailed answer keys for all work to be graded by Readers; do not ask Readers to make answer keys or to grade without them.
- Instructors should meet with Readers to discuss answer keys or rubrics, jointly grade a sample of assignments/exams/ papers to ensure that grading practices meet the instructors’ expectations and that grades are consistent across Readers. Instructors should be clear about the level of feedback expected on assignments.

- Instructors and Readers should discuss the department expectations for grading distributions before the Reader begins grading. Instructors should make clear to Readers their distribution expectations for each graded work. Readers should be prepared to justify any grading exceptions and to re-grade if necessary (grade in pencil first).
- Instructors should make clear to students that instructors are responsible for **regrade requests**, as Readers do not hold office hours and handling regrades through email is likely to be labor intensive and unsatisfactory for both students and the Reader.
- If instructors choose to enroll additional students above the number specified in the reader contract, they must either adjust the Reader's hours and assignments accordingly or take on the grading and administrative duties for these extra students themselves.
- After final grades have been submitted it is the instructor's responsibility to manage students who are unhappy with their course grade. Readers must provide any information and material they have to allow the instructor to answer students' questions and make any needed changes. Readers' responsibilities for the class begin their first week and end their last week of employment.
- Instructors do not usually reevaluate a student's work (or additional work) after final grades have been filed with the registrar (unless a student received an Incomplete in the course). UC Davis policy states: "*Academic Senate Regulations (systemwide and individual campus) provide that grades are final when filed with the Registrar by an instructor. A grade can be changed only if a "clerical" or "procedural" error can be documented.*" <http://registrar.ucdavis.edu/records/grades/changes.cfm>

### ***Instructor Responsibilities and Conduct with Students***

- Ask students for feedback on course (throughout and at the end of the course). Address student concerns through action or by communicating reasons for course structures.
- Post office hours on the department website and outside of your door, by first week of classes.
- Be punctual for office hours.
- Instructors should provide their TAs or Office staff with a copy of their final exam no later than the day before their final in case they are unable to make the exam because of an emergency

### ***Instructor Responsibilities and Conduct with Readers***

- Readerships are 25% appointments of 130 hours per quarter; they are not based on enrollments

- Readers grade student work (e.g., papers and examinations). Readers can be required to attend lectures but this must be indicated in their contract and hours must be allocated for this.
- Instructors and readers must discuss the division of student work to be read prior to the first assignment. Instructors will complete the Reader Description of Duties Form, available on the department web site: <http://sociology.ucdavis.edu/graduate-program/graduate-student-forms>
- Readers are not responsible for developing the makeup of exams, holding regular office hours, holding discussion sections, or lecturing in class.
- Readers do not buy their own books. Instructors must arrange with department front desk staff to order desk copies from the publisher (or alternative arrangements). Readers will access additional readings posted on SmartSite electronically.
- Do not ask Readers to prepare course syllabi, exams, assignments, power-point slides, or study guides; it is reasonable to ask them to review and comment on instructor prepared exams, assignments, grading rubrics, etc., assuming time for such tasks has been built into the Reader contract.
- Do not ask Readers to run errands or do tasks unrelated to the course (e.g., check your mail, photocopy non course-related materials).
- Do not ask Readers to manage any cases that involve Student Judicial Affairs. The instructor should handle those cases.
- Discuss with the Readers in private any concerns that you have with their grading/conduct; if an issue cannot be resolved, consult with the department ombudsperson or Vice-Chair. Do not discuss the issue with students in the class.
- Instructors are responsible for managing students with disabilities, not Readers. Readers will grade their work. All documentation from the Student Disability Center is sent to the instructor of record and the instructor should arrange alternate scheduling for exams, course note takers, and so forth.

### ***Reader Responsibilities and Conduct***

- Readers grade student work (e.g., papers and examinations). Readers can be required to attend lectures but this must be indicated in their contract and hours must be allocated for this.
- At the first Reader/instructor meeting, Readers should give a brief introduction to their relevant work experience to help instructors identify how best to structure guidance, facilitate work relationships, and communicate expectations.

- Students interested in being a reader should complete readership ranking sheets with careful attention to make sure they do not conflict with their own graduate courses.
- Read all of the materials requested by the instructor. Adequate time for reading course materials should be built into the contract.
- Discuss with the instructor in private any concerns that you have with the class; if an issue cannot be resolved, consult with the department ombudsperson or Vice-Chair. Do not discuss the issue with students in the class.
- Check Graduate Soc Grad Resource Hub and Teaching Sociology SmartSites for most up to date information and resources.