

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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Suggestions for TA Development

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TAs as Professional Development

TA OPPORTUNITIES

1. Learn actual course content.
2. Explore models for course syllabi.
3. Develop realistic standards for student work.
4. Practice creating assignments and exam questions.
5. Practice setting and maintaining consistent grading standards.
6. Practice one-on-one teaching with students. (If you grade papers, you have an opportunity to teach. Get them to contact you when they have questions.)
7. Practice lecturing and encouraging classroom discussion.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Build collaborative relationships.
2. Seek and learn to use feedback and guidance.
3. Observe the significance of classroom dynamics.
4. Articulate explicit goals and implicit expectations.
5. Develop a reflective teaching practice.

6. Develop flexibility and confidence, or winging it versus faking it.

Suggestions for Faculty wishing to foster TA development

1. Vary TA assignments.
 2. Reward your best TAs. Some possibilities: priority in TA assignment requests; departmental commendations for teaching quality which can be included in a student's portfolio; recommendations for teaching awards at the university level.
 3. Meet with TAs before the course begins to discuss expectations, and hold regular (if brief) meetings with TAs during the semester to discuss teaching issues related to the class and permit TAs to bring up questions.
 4. For new TAs, observe TA-student interactions and make comments afterward.
 5. When offering feedback, be encouraging. Focus on a few improvements with maximum impact. Also be aware that teaching styles do vary; what matters is evidence that students are learning.
 6. Have students present something before their first undergraduate lecture, so they can master most of the mechanics.
7. Encourage students to guest lecture if they are rarely in charge of their own section. A chance to repeat and refine a lecture the following year is also useful.

Suggestions for TAs seeking professional development

1. Request varied assignments: by level, format, and size. As an experienced TA, try to get a class which is being created or revised, and offer contributions to course materials.
 2. Put in a little extra time so you can take small risks.
 3. Volunteer to guest lecture even in classes you are not TA'ing, or to present talks to a general audience. The Engineering department's graduate students have held a summer talk series in the past, and they welcome non-engineering speakers.
 4. Reflect on someone's teaching, and use the Sheridan Center's resources to develop this ability.
 5. Seek feedback from students and professors and exchange ideas with other teachers on teaching.
6. Choose your office hours to be convenient for students, and offer phone or email contact. (Student contact can be managed so that it does not become an imposition on the rest of your life.)