



EOS-SEI-sponsored pizza lunch for TA's, March 7th 2011

Training opportunities for TAs – pros, cons, needs, opportunities and recommendations

Last month a hand out was requested. Is the following too long?

1. Five TAS, + Josh, Erin, Francis & Carey. FJ re-iterated last gathering's outcomes and today's intentions
 - a. Today: TA training: desires and opportunities on campus.
 - b. Subsequent two gatherings (suggested – open for adjustment if TA's have other preferences)
 - i. Logistics: discuss (a) briefing sessions; (b) DE-briefing sessions; (c) tracking and managing time; (d) mentoring; (e) balancing dep't, instructor, TA undergrad expectations? (f) others?
 - ii. Applying "What the Best Tutors Do" in the various TA settings you all encounter, INCLUDING marking, and giving feedback to students on marked work. <http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/resources/INSPIRE-Guidelines.pdf>
 - iii. Additional option: consider "Teaching what you don't know" (Search that title on Amazon.ca)

2. Training opportunities for TAs – pros and cons (please adjust correct or augment as you see fit)

opportunity	pros	cons
eosc516	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - http://www.eos.ubc.ca/courses/eosc516/eosc516.htm and see Learning Goals and principle "textbook". - Provides practice and peer feedback on lessons. - Increases comfort level for guiding lessons. - Exposure to some Teach/Learn literature - Meet people in the dep't with similar interests. - credits towards degree 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the ISW model is time-intensive. - significant commitment - 4hrs time slot needed for the present format. - too few can take it. - does it provide directly applicable help for the most likely jobs TAs will be doing, especially marking?
ISW wrkshp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - all at once coverage of many aspects - meeting others - free! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3days
ISW facilitator workshp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - for "advanced" folks keen on gaining facilitator qualifications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 days
CTLT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - wide range of workshop style opportunities, ranging from 3hrs to several days. - Early Sept and February reading week workshop series - see http://ctl.t.ubc.ca/programs/graduate-student-ta-programs/ - free! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - program varies year to year but there's always interesting stuff - need to commit time (but worth it!)
FoGs?	I could not find anything in a quick scan, but it might be worth exploring further. See http://www.grad.ubc.ca/ or http://www.grad.ubc.ca/current-students/scholarships-awards-funding/research-teaching-assistantships	

3. Training resources recommended by participants (we could solicit suggestions later from others who did not attend). Ask about Books? Websites? Programs, ...
 - a. Resources list for 516 (link above), especially the Resource Guide for TAs ("textbook" referenced above)
 - b. On the Cutting Edge: Professional Development for Geoscience Faculty from NAGT, NSF and SERC, at <http://serc.carleton.edu/NAGTWorkshops/index.html>
 - c. The Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology at UBC – CTLT. Home is <http://ctl.t.ubc.ca> and there's a "resources for teaching assistants" link right there front and centre. In particular:



- i. Programs for TAS: <http://ctlit.ubc.ca/programs/graduate-student-ta-programs/>
 - ii. Resources at <http://ctlit.ubc.ca/resources/teaching/teaching-assistants/>
 - d. Others please???
4. Recommendations from this discussion: Who implements any of these is certainly up for discussion. However, if grad council could generate a short list of preferred actions, they could (a) discuss their ideas with the Graduate Advisor, and (b) involve STLFs to support development or do some of the grunt work. Let us know!
 - a. Collect opportunities to gain TA skills into a handout for new grad students. Include examples of workshops available during CTLT's reading week or September sessions.
 - b. Consider a handout of "tips and tricks", perhaps added to the "new grad student's checklist". This could include recommendations for "managing your manager" – i.e. convincing the instructor to work with you as part of the teaching team.
 - c. Add an TA expectations or "boot camp" session to the normal new EOS grad student orientation day.
 - d. Start a reading club?
 - e. Start a teaching-oriented EOS web page? For TAs? Wiki, blog, or other social network? Who should maintain, or should it be open access? Consider <http://blogs.ubc.ca/> or http://wiki.ubc.ca/Main_Page. One option might be that EOS-SEI could get this started, then turn it over to Grad Council to "maintain" – ie. check, correct, update once or twice a year. Just an idea...
 - f. Geography TA Training model:
 - i. Geography has a mandatory, half-day (4-hour) orientation that all incoming graduate students are required to take regardless of whether or not they will be TAing during their first year. It is done as part of normal orientation into the Department, and lunch is provided. The orientation occurs during the first week of classes when there are no labs or sections being taught so almost all TAs will be in attendance. CTLT facilitators assisted two of us ("Senior" Geography TAs) to develop the workshops which we subsequently led on behalf of the department. There are no followup professional development events related to teaching for TAs sponsored by geography – students are encouraged to attend CTLT events.
 - ii. Structure: The session was broken into two parts with the first two-hours focusing on general teaching skills (classroom etiquette, teaching techniques like student engagement and marking, TA-professor interactions, and special circumstances) and the second two hours being "discipline-specific" discussions where the human and physical geography TAs split up and had discussions on running labs (physical) or leading discussions (human). There are on the order of 25 participants.
 - iii. Currently the program persists under management of keen graduate students. We are not sure if there is a Department Level commitment. This would need checking, but is probably important both for long term persistence and to ensure it is taken seriously.
 - g. Mandatory TA training was discussed to some extent. There are significant pros and cons, and the notion of forced TA training comes up periodically. In the end, we do have a very diverse department with a wide range of graduate students, so mandating anything is difficult, unless it is part of a "normal" event that is already in place, like the geography model described above.
 - h. The notion of paying TAs for their training time was discussed. This should be possible if one week's worth of TA time is spent in a graduate student's first week at EOS. Again, paying may be less important if the session is part of a normal orientation event.
 - i. The need for alternate pathways to gaining necessary skills was recognized, especially if there are mandated or semi-mandated requirements in place.



- j. Mentoring was recognized as important and it usually happens naturally. But if it doesn't, new TAs need advice on how to get useful mentoring so they can grow into their new jobs without negative impacts on undergraduate students. This too could be part of a handout and/or orientation session.
5. One bottom line issue that I think keeps coming up is a clear need for a "marking boot-camp" workshop. Something to cover the range of what to expect, how to apply rubrics if they are given, how to build one if there isn't one, how to establish expectations so the rubric can be used, efficient ways of generating useful feedback ... The dep't, grad council, and EOS-SEI needs to discuss how to set up a useful workshop and consider ways of delivering it.
 6. Finally, it was noted that people showing up today are the already committed types. How to make it possible for others is another topic needing discussion among Dep't, Grad Council and EOS-SEI. Not an open forum, but perhaps a few brainstorming sessions – for this and the previous issue. As always it needs someone to take the ball and run with it.

That's how I saw the meeting. Please send corrections, additions, questions asap. We can make this available to everyone via on the web. I can post it to a current (or new) location as part of the EOS-SEI site (<http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/>) or it could become the first post on something new – something mentioned at item 4.e. above.

Finally – next time? My current thought is that a more focused session might attract more people – IF it addresses real needs. I really think that TAs represent the front line in teaching, whether it's face to face time in labs, office hours, online discussions, or feedback from marking of labs, assignments, quizzes and midterms. Therefore, all TA's are in fact tutors. Knowing what the "best" tutors do would be helpful to everyone.

How about a session called something like:

- "What do marking, running labs and tutoring have in common?" OR;
 - "Best practices for all TAs; the 10 minute refresher." OR;
 - "Tips for efficiently and effectively doing your job as a Teaching Assistant."
- OR – something like that. It needs a good name.

The point would be to discuss how any or all aspects on the 2-page outline at <http://www.eos.ubc.ca/research/cwsei/resources/INSPIRE-Guidelines.pdf> can help all TAs do their jobs better. Since the pre-reading is only two pages, it might inspire folks to want to hear how others do their jobs, and how to make their own experiences more efficient and effective.

Any comments or suggestions are welcome – I'll be looking forward to seeing as many folks as possible March 28th.

Thanks for your interest everyone, FJ.