UCSC 2021 Graduate Student Survey: Teaching Preparation

Based on Doctoral Students' Responses
Report by IRAPS, March 2022

This report from the 2021 UCSC Graduate Student Survey contains results for doctoral students' responses about teaching preparation. Students answered questions about satisfaction with the teaching assistant (TA) experience, and needs for TA training. Graduate students provided suggestions for additional resources for TA training. For previous years' results, please see a similar report in 2019 on TA training posted on the IRAPS website.

The 2021 UCSC Graduate Student Survey covered a comprehensive range of topics about the graduate student experience. The Graduate Student Survey has been held regularly at UCSC since 2007, and is conducted every other year in the Spring quarter. Since Spring 2021 this survey has become a UC-wide survey.

The survey was open from April 15, 2021 to July 1, 2021. All graduate students enrolled in Winter and/or Spring quarter 2021 were invited to participate. Students received an initial invitation and nine reminder emails.

Among Doctoral students, 1440 were invited and 585 participated in the survey, with an overall participation rate of 41%. A total of 494 students responded to questions about teaching preparation, which was located toward the end of the survey.

Results are disaggregated by division, as well as other background characteristics where appropriate. Students' responses are representative of the academic division and gender composition (weights were applied to correct for some differences in response rates).

For results about student experiences with faculty teaching, program quality, advising, program climate, professional development, career plans, and campus services, or about financial situation, housing, basic needs, and support for families, please see the 2021 Graduate Student Survey reports posted on the UCSC IRAPS webpage. If you have questions, please write to IRAPS at surveys@ucsc.edu.

Executive Summary

Experiences as Teaching Assistants

- Campus-wide, about half of doctoral students (51%) have worked as a Teaching Assistant for 4 or more quarters.

- Only 1 in 10 (10%) doctoral students indicated not having received any formal instruction in teaching prior to a first TA assignment.

- 9 in 10 (89%) Teaching Assistants indicated needing more training and resources in dealing with academic dishonesty and cheating.

- Only 1 in 6 (16%) Teaching Assistants reported that their experience helped them establish a good work relationship with faculty members.

Suggestions for improving training for Teaching Assistants

- Students provided many suggestions for improving training for Teaching Assistants. Arts Division students most frequently requested having an obligatory formal training for TAs, holding training before the start of a TAship, and having guidelines or instruction for faculty on how to work with TAs.

- Humanities students most frequently requested having more training before TA assignments start, improving a training seminars, taking more care in which courses are assigned to new TAs, and giving guidance to professors on how to treat TAs with respect.

- Social Sciences students most frequently requested offering more formal in-depth trainings, having TA trainings before TA assignments, covering costs for equipment needed to TA remotely, providing higher salaries, giving TAs the ability to provide feedback to course instructors, and formalizing the requirements about how faculty should supervise TAs.

- PBSci students most frequently requested having guidance on teaching before working as a TA, preparation before teaching a first lab class, assistance about how to teach sections online, a course for new TAs before the Fall, and more suggestions on how to teach in a remote environment.

- BSOE students most frequently requested training for TAs before starting TA work, support on how to engage students in online learning, more pedagogical training including on classroom management, improved department courses on teaching, and clearer expectations of the TA role before starting.

Findings

Tables show combined responses, depending on a question. Most tables show total results and are disaggregated by division.

The vast majority (87%) of doctoral students have worked at least one quarter as a Teaching Assistant, and about half (51%) have worked as a Teaching Assistant for 4 or more quarters. See Table 1.

Table 1. Number of quarters worked as a Teaching Assistant

	Arts	Humanities	PBSci	BSOE	Social Sciences	Total
	N = 34	N = 63	N = 167	N = 126	N = 105	N = 494
0	9%	8%	12%	25%	5%	13%
1-3	20%	15%	46%	44%	24%	35%
4-6	15%	28%	23%	11%	25%	20%
7 or more	57%	50%	19%	19%	47%	31%

Question text: Since starting your graduate studies at UCSC, how many quarters have you worked as a Teaching Assistant (including this quarter)?

Overall, 1 in 10 (10%) doctoral students indicated not having received any formal instruction in teaching prior to a first TA assignment, including 1 in 5 (21%) students in BSOE. See Table 2.

Table 2. Satisfaction with preparation, supervision, and guidance in Teaching Assistant positions

		Arts	Humanities	PBSci	BSOE	Social Sciences	Total
		N = 31	N = 57	N = 147	N = 92	N = 100	N = 427
Formal instruction in teaching you received prior to your first TA assignment	Did not receive any	14%	3%	6%	21%	7%	10%
	Very satisfied/Satisfied	26%	45%	47%	36%	28%	38%
	Other responses	60%	52%	47%	42%	64%	52%
Formal supervision and evaluation of your work as a TA	Did not receive any	2%	2%	9%	7%	5%	6%
	Very satisfied/Satisfied	44%	47%	43%	54%	43%	46%
	Other responses	53%	51%	49%	39%	52%	48%
Informal support and guidance from faculty members for whom you worked as a TA	Did not receive any	2%	0%	5%	3%	0%	3%
	Very satisfied/Satisfied	65%	71%	56%	66%	60%	62%
	Other responses	32%	29%	39%	31%	40%	36%

Question text: Referring to the preparation for your TA role at UCSC, please indicate how satisfied you are with the quality of:

About 9 in 10 (89%) Teaching Assistants indicated needing more training and resources in dealing with academic dishonesty and cheating. More students indicated needing this in 2021 than in previous years, likely due to the remote learning environment.

Also of note, over half (54%) indicated needing more training in assisting faculty in teaching undergraduate students discipline-specific knowledge, ranging from 39% in BSOE to 75% in the Arts Division. See Table 3.

Table 3. Needs for more training and resources for teaching preparation

(Sorted by percentage of total)	Arts	Humanities	PBSci	BSOE	Social Sciences	Total
	N = 26	N = 50	N = 130	N = 74	N = 89	N = 369
Dealing with academic dishonesty/cheating	91%	89%	89%	88%	89%	89%
Having information about resources and campus services	65%	71%	73%	58%	69%	68%
Assisting faculty in teaching students discipline-specific knowledge	75%	67%	45%	39%	67%	54%
Responding to insensitive or offensive remarks/questions	53%	39%	52%	43%	56%	49%
Engaging students in the remote environment	51%	50%	48%	32%	59%	48%
Knowing who to contact if TAs have a conflict with a faculty member	54%	37%	48%	36%	53%	46%
Planning your own course as an instructor of record	52%	52%	40%	27%	45%	41%
Designing and leading section activities using active learning approaches	53%	52%	30%	27%	45%	37%
Assessing student learning and giving useful feedback	42%	50%	29%	24%	36%	34%
Dealing with students who challenge TA's authority	31%	30%	30%	24%	36%	30%
Creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment	35%	26%	26%	28%	38%	30%

Question text: Thinking about both the formal and informal training and guidance you received as a TA, select the areas where you need more substantial training/resources.

Teaching Assistants rated several aspects of their experiences. Only about 1 in 6 (16%) Teaching Assistants reported that their experience helped to establish a good work relationship with faculty members, ranging from only 12% in PBSci to 27% in Humanities. See Table 4.

Table 4. Ratings of experiences as a Teaching Assistant while a graduate student at UCSC

(Percent agree/strongly agree)	Arts	Humanities	PBSci	BSOE	Social Sciences	Total
	N = 31	N = 56	N = 146	N = 92	N = 97	N = 422
Provided you with valuable teaching experience	18%	37%	23%	24%	32%	27%
Helped you establish a good work relationship with a faculty member(s)	13%	27%	12%	15%	19%	16%
Supported you to develop skills relevant to your career goals	19%	28%	21%	13%	23%	21%
Took up a lot of your time slowing down your progress towards degree	31%	42%	23%	21%	35%	28%

Question text: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the classes you worked for as a TA...

Suggestions About Improving Training for Teaching Assistants

Students were asked to provide any suggestions for improving training for Teaching Assistants in the program, or for supporting Teaching Assistants in remote or hybrid teaching environments. Suggestions are presented by division, and within each division the responses are generally listed with the more frequently mentioned items listed first.

Arts students suggested: Having an obligatory formal training for TAs, holding training before the start of a TAship, having guidelines or instruction to faculty on how best to work with and implement help from a TA, more frequently assigning TAs to classes in which they have some speciality, providing more opportunities to teach in classes of their own, creating a forum for current TAs to share tips on engaging students in an online environment, making CITL trainings more available, offering sections for Music TAs to give TAs more experience, providing training on how TAs can support professors during a remote teaching environment, improving existing pedagogy classes, expanding online training modules, providing mentoring between experienced TAs and new TAs, having professors provide grading rubrics for TAs to standardize grading, having more standardization of workload across TAships, and improving mentorship from professors.

Humanities students suggested: Having more training before before TA assignments start, improving training seminars, taking more care in which courses are assigned to new TAs, giving guidance to professors on how to treat TAs with respect, making the Canvas training video optional, providing funding/tuition remission for one term to be able to step away from TAing, continuing the resources from CITL, providing more chances for History of Consciousness students to TA in relevant fields, having more standardization across professors on workload and transparency about expectations of TA responsibilities, providing higher salaries or more fellowships, continuing to allow remote work, and avoiding hybrid courses.

Social Sciences students suggested: Offering more formal in-depth trainings on how to teach, having TA trainings before TA assignments, covering costs for equipment needed to TA remotely, providing higher salaries for TA positions, giving TAs the ability to provide feedback to the course instructors for whom they are TAing, formalizing the requirements about how faculty should supervise TAs such as holding regular faculty-TA meetings, improving training on how to use online platforms, providing training on how to run online sections, providing more funding to increase CITL programs, having a paid bootcamp before starting graduate school about teaching techniques, having faculty share the grading workload on long written assignments, having less variation in grading workloads across courses, having faculty work with CITL to develop material, having CITL programs be open to faculty, providing more support on how to deal with challenging situations, allowing TAs a role in developing course content, and not scheduling remote learning sections on Friday afternoons.

PBSci students suggested: Guidance on teaching before working as a TA, preparation about what to do in class specifically before teaching a first lab class, instruction or technical assistance about how to teach sections online, a course for new TAs about teaching practices especially before the Fall, more suggestions of how to teach in a remote environment, storing or keeping materials used in previous quarters for classes that are taught frequently so that future TAs can use them, more examples provided to TAs about ways to make remote teaching interactive, proactivity from professors in how to deal with TAs, equity across funding between TAs and GSRs in terms of stipends and coverage of fees, reducing grading or workload for lab TAs given that creating lab course materials take more time in a remote environment, mentoring by experienced TAs of new TAs, guidance about how to increase student engagement, better mentoring opportunities, improved technology for teaching such as laptops and tablets, recognition that distance learning lab courses are not that useful, and formal evaluations at the end of every TAship to see how to improve.

BSOE students suggested: Training for TAs before starting TA work, support on how to engage students in online learning, more pedagogical training and professional development including on classroom management, improved department courses on teaching, understanding of expectations of the TA role before starting, more funding for CITL trainings and outreach, more GSR positions instead of TA positions especially for advanced students, more funding opportunities for grad students, better communication with advisors to graduate students about aspects of TAing, higher salaries or reimbursements for extra utility costs and relocating to Santa Cruz, better training and resources on detecting plagiarism, and recognizing that many undergraduate students may not be actively participating in group activities within sections.