

November 21, 2011

Synopsis: Teaching

1. What is teaching?
 - a. Communicating information
 - b. Showing students how to think about that information
 - c. Learning from the students
2. Duties of a TA
 - a. Know the class material—you will be asked questions about it, and may have to lecture about it
 - b. Lead discussion, laboratory, or quiz sections
 - c. Evaluate and grade assignments, projects, and exam questions
 - d. Talk to the instructor about any problems or concerns you hear about from the students—or that you have on your own
3. In the classroom
 - a. Clear up any confusion that the students have
 - b. Ask questions of the class to ensure they understand the material
 - c. Encourage them to ask questions
 - i. *Never* call a question “stupid” — just answer it, or (if you have time) lead the students to answer it
 - ii. Be willing to follow a tangent, if you can relate it back to the material you want to cover
 - iii. It’s okay not to know the answer—but be honest if you don’t
 - d. Try to see the material from *their* point of view
 - e. Pictures and diagrams help
 - f. Think carefully about lecturing by putting slides up
 - i. It may enhance readability, especially if you’re being filmed
 - ii. It may detract from spontaneity, because it’s harder to write on the slide than on the board
 - iii. If the room is dark, it’s harder to take notes, too
 - g. *Never berate or denigrate a student—ever!!!!*
4. During office hours (individually)
 - a. If you don’t know the student’s name, ask—it shows interest in them
 - b. If a student has a question about homework, ask them what they have tried
 - c. If a student has a general question, try to walk them through to the answer
 - d. Whether you talk about non-class related things is up to you, but if you choose to do so:
 - i. Steer clear of anything controversial—you are in a position of power!
 - ii. If asked your opinion, you may give it but you don’t have to
 - iii. Avoid *anything* that could be interpreted as suggesting people who don’t think like you are daft—it inhibits the free flow of conversation, and as you have the power, can be intimidating (see below)
 - e. Ask if they have any concerns or issues with the material or the class that you can help with or should know about
5. Grading
 - a. Grade according to the guidelines your instructor sets (and if told to use your judgement, do so!)
 - b. Comments, we love comments! The more, the better
 - c. Be clear—if you deduct points, be sure to document *why* they are being deducted and *how many* are being deducted
 - d. Be consistent—don’t take 5 points off one student’s score and 10 points off another student’s score for the same error
 - e. Be prompt—getting the grading for Homework 1 done by the 8th week is a good way to get *everyone*—instructor as well as students—seriously upset with you
 - i. If you will be late in completing grading, let the instructor know *as soon as you do* so he or she can make contingency plans
 - ii. If there’s a problem in grading, again ask for help

- f. Compliments never hurt anyone—if a student has a particularly clever or creative answer, say so!
6. Administration and other important matters
- a. Have a good sense of humor!
 - b. Be clear to the students about what you can, *and cannot*, do
 - c. Know the rules about cheating
 - i. See the Student Judicial Affairs web page (<http://sja.ucdavis.edu>)
 - ii. Basically: be honest, be ethical, and don't steal (plagiarize) other people's work
 - d. Know the rules about harassment
 - i. Treat others as you would want to be treated
 - ii. *Do not physically touch a student*
 - iii. Do not make jokes at a student's expense!
 - iv. Do not tell "dirty" (vulgar or profane) jokes unless you know they will be well received—it is *much* better to avoid this entirely
 - v. Do not get romantically involved with a student over whom you have academic control (this means grading)
 - vi. Never pressure a student to spend time with you outside the academic setting (especially in a romantic or sexual setting)