

## **Department of Anthropology**

### **Undergraduate TA Guidelines**

**Revised September, 2021**

#### **Role of the UTA**

Undergraduate TAs play an important role in university teaching. They contribute to students' education by assisting instructors in preparing course materials, labs, and marking student assignments and tests. Your job as a UTA is both demanding and rewarding.

#### **Assisting with Teaching**

Your primary role will consist of assisting the course instructor with teaching. At the start of the term you should meet with your instructor to confirm exactly what will be expected of you. You may be asked to help prepare materials (e.g. finding appropriate open access photos for a Power Point, finding appropriate YouTube videos to supplement the lesson), mark objective quizzes or tests, mark simple assignments using scaled grading (e.g. completed/ not completed), or organize other teaching-related activities. UTAs generally do not hold office hours or lecture. While most instructors understand that school work comes first, you also have a responsibility to fulfil the requirements of the job. You will have to plan your UTA work around your own assignments and deadlines over the course of the term, learning to balance a variety of demands.

#### **Representing the University**

In your role as a UTA, you are representing the university. You are expected to uphold university standards and adhere to all university guidelines and regulations. If you disagree with these policies, it should be done privately in a conversation with the course instructor, the Senior TA, or your union representative – not in front of students, or by refusing to follow regulations.

#### **Representing the Department**

UTAs work as members of the Department of Anthropology. You are obligated to follow department policies and regulations, and uphold departmental standards. Make sure you are aware of and understand departmental requirements. As in the case of university standards and requirements, if you disagree with them, speak to your instructor privately; do not take it upon yourself to reinterpret them.

As a discipline, anthropology's history mirrors that of other social sciences over the course of the last 150 years, including the ugly aspects of colonialism and racism. There is much to criticize in that history, but that is generally the province of upper-level and graduate courses and discussions among professionals. Remember that 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students are encountering anthropology for the first time. Encourage their enthusiasm and emphasize the positive aspects of our discipline. Save your critiques for private conversations with the instructor and other TAs, or discussions in your upper-level classes.

#### **You and Your Supervisor**

The professor for whom you are TAing is your supervisor. You will be working under their direction. They determine course assignments and activities, and set standards for the course; they are ultimately

responsible for the course. Make sure you understand their expectations. If you disagree with the instructor's methods, theories, choice of course materials, or assignments, express your concerns in a private conversation. Do not undermine the instructor with students. If you feel you cannot work with an instructor, bring the matter to the Department Head.

### **You and the Students**

Although you are hired by the department and university, and work under the supervision of the course instructor, your ultimate responsibility is to the students. You must strive to be fair, honest, and respectful towards all students. You need to treat all students equally, and not exploit your position of power over them. You should put aside your own bias when dealing with students, and never use disrespectful, derogatory language or remarks.

You might find yourself in a position of having to mark or review the work of a peer whom you know well. In such a case, speak to the course instructor, who will reassign the work to another TA who does not know the student. *You should not be grading the work of your friends or classmates.*

If you become aware of any problematic issues with students or their work – for example, plagiarism, cheating, selling course materials to an outside entity, buying test answers or papers online – bring it to the attention of the instructor immediately. Do not try to interfere on your own. The same goes for students who may be struggling with academic, medical, or mental health issues; refer all such concerns to the instructor right away.

### **Expectations**

Make sure you understand your responsibilities and the course instructor's expectations regarding course attendance, turnaround time on marking assignments, absence policy, and other course-related issues. Some responsibilities you may be asked to take on include:

- Helping the instructor assemble or prepare class materials
- Helping the instructor organize class activities
- Keeping records related to the class
- Helping the instructor with technology related to the class
- Setting up a lab, classroom, or online classroom
- Cleaning up a lab or classroom after an activity
- Helping to hold a review session
- Marking objective quizzes/ tests
- Marking simple assignments using scaled grading (complete/ incomplete/ not turned in).

You should *not* be asked to teach the class or to prepare lectures from scratch. If you have any concerns about the work you are being asked to do as a UTA, speak to the Senior TA, Department Head or your union representative.

### **Hours**

UTAs generally work a limited number of hours per course. It is your responsibility to know the number of hours you are authorized to work, and to keep careful track of them. If it looks like you will run out of hours before the end of the course, let the instructor know well ahead of time. Don't wait until a big

assignment needs to be marked, then announce that you are out of time and quit. Likewise, if an assignment or activity seems to be taking up a great many of your work hours, speak to the instructor as soon as possible. It may be necessary to reorganize how the work is distributed.

### **Maintaining Clear Communication**

Maintain clear, open lines of communication with the course instructor and the other TAs. Bring up any issues, questions, or problems early; don't wait until the situation has reached a critical point. Be proactive; let the instructor know about any issues that may be coming up (for example, delays in completing your work, conflicting responsibilities or schedules, conflicts of interest in marking). Remember that the instructor is not a mind reader. You may be aware of things, especially regarding the students in the course, of which the instructor is unaware. Bring them to the instructor's attention early. Ask the instructor for feedback on your work. Do not hesitate to ask questions about material or instructions you don't understand.

Remember that the graduate student TAs are also resources and role models for you. Communicate actively with them; act as a unit vis-à-vis both students and the instructor. You can also seek advice from the Senior TA, a graduate student who is appointed to support all TAs in the Department.

### **Confidentiality**

Student performance on assignments, their marks and final grades in a class, and their disability status are confidential information protected by Canadian law. As a UTA, you must maintain that confidentiality. Do not for any reason reveal a student's grades or confidential information to other students or persons other than the course instructor and TAs. If a person outside the course (e.g. a student's parent or friend) approaches you asking for that information, refer them to the instructor.

### **Additional Resources**

For additional resources and guidelines, consult the Instructional Resource Guide for Teaching Assistants prepared by the University Teaching and Learning Centre, which can be found here:

<https://ctl.ubc.ca/files/2011/05/Ta-handbook.pdf>