

Best Practices for Department of Visual Arts

Teaching Assistants (TAs)

I. Role Overview

The role of the Teaching Assistant (TA) is very important in delivering our academic mission. Our undergraduate students rely on their TAs to achieve their academic goals, and to generate a community of learners. All work that is necessary to fulfill the duties of the TA, including office hours (which may be used for emailing the IOR and students), and class prep (such as research and required reading), are part of the TA's employment. The material contained in this handbook is intended to provide TAs with guidance on how to maximize the learning experience for all who work collectively to deliver academics at UC San Diego. This is an informational document created within the Department of Visual Arts, may not be all inclusive and does not take the place or override the ASE Contract.

II. Distribution of Tasks between IOR and TAs

TASK	IOR	TA
Oversee the quality, consistency and content of the course	✓	
Design the syllabus, exams, projects and assignments	✓	
Compose and deliver the lectures	✓	
Supervise and guide the TAs	✓	
Ensure the consistency of course content and grading criteria across all sections	✓	
Attend weekly meetings (IORs with all course TAs)	✓	✓
Hold office hours for students	✓	✓
Teach sections, lead review sessions		✓
Grade course assignments, class participation and attendance		✓
Proctor exams	✓	✓

Perform individual and/or group tutoring		✓
Final grade review and submittal	✓	

III. TA Terms of Employment

1. **Contract:** TAs are part of the Academic Student Employees (ASE) bargaining unit. The terms of employment are defined in the [Collective Bargaining Agreement](#) between UC and your union.
2. **Work Hours:** TAs are employed for a set number of hours each term. These hours are calculated across the quarter so it is possible to have hours vary week by week based on the assignment and grading needs of the class. It is the responsibility of the TA to understand the work hours required in their contract and to manage their time appropriately. It is a good practice to keep a written log of worked hours, which you can share with the IOR during your regularly scheduled check-in meetings. This should include prep time such as learning a new tool or equipment, reviewing course content or responding to emails.
3. **Timesheets:** This requirement is an expectation from the ASE contract and takes place outside of our department. When submitting your timesheet, only report the hours you were absent, not the hours worked. Timesheets must be submitted each month, even if there is no absent time to report.
 Check the [UCSD HR website](#) for timesheet submittal deadlines.
 Submit your monthly timesheet on Ecotime [here](#).
4. **Overtime:** TAs must notify IOR immediately if they work more than the expected weekly hours for any week. If the expected number of hours is exceeded for two weeks in a row, a plan should be made to adjust the hours and expectations to meet the term's contracted hours.
5. **Grievances:** Any grievances or concerns you may have as a TA, including workload issues, should be discussed with the IOR, if appropriate, or brought to the immediate attention of the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Coordinator. This is an important initial step to ensure that the department and instructor are aware and have an opportunity to address your concerns with you. The ASE contract has instructions for addressing grievances through the union.
6. **Planned Absences:** It is the TA's responsibility to notify the IOR and the Graduate Program Coordinator in writing about any planned absence from an assigned duty upon receipt of the TA offer letter. This notification may affect the employment offer and does not take the place of the written request for an absence during the quarter.
7. **Requests for Leave:** Absence from an assigned section, TA meeting or lecture for any reason other than personal or family emergency must be requested in writing and approved at least three weeks in advance. It is unlikely that more than one week of absence during the term will

be approved. Your request must contain information about the nature of the leave and probable duration. It should be sent to the IOR with copies to the Graduate Program Director and the Graduate Program Coordinator. Upon request, the TAs will be required to provide appropriate documentation. Review [your contract](#) as an Academic Student Employee (ASE) before submitting a leave request to know all particulars, as those are often updated by your union.

8. **Covering Absences / Substitute Teachers:** While it is the University's responsibility to make arrangements for coverage, the TAs will assist as reasonably as possible. The preferred method for coverage is for the IOR to provide a plan for a qualified TA or faculty member to cover the absent TA's sections and other duties.

IV. TA Specific Duties

Teaching Assistants are assigned to assist the IOR in three main areas: delivering course content, assisting students, and grading. This involves activities both inside and outside of the classroom. The specific duties for each of these areas are:

1. Delivering Course Content

- **Classroom access:** Enter your PID# in the code box to enter your assigned classrooms when employed within a Department of Visual Arts space.
- **Lead sections and exams** in accordance with the syllabus provided by IOR. Leading sections include discussing course material and guiding students in the successful completion of their assignments.
- **Attend lectures** to stay current on course content.
- **Attend weekly meetings with IOR** to discuss hours worked, expectations and progress, develop lesson plans for sections and review grading criteria.
- **TAs are NOT expected to:**
 - *Deliver lectures.*
 - *Devise the syllabus, projects, assignments or exams.*
 - *Cover a class or lecture for IORs. In no cases, may a TA or Apprentice Teacher substitute for a faculty who is traveling, on leave, or for some other reason misses a lecture or class. Only a Visual Arts Faculty member may substitute for IOR during an absence. On rare occasions under special circumstances, a TA or Apprentice Teacher may be asked or allowed to make a brief presentation to the class in lecture, but only if the presentation is developed under the direct supervision and with the participation of the IOR. The time spent preparing the presentation is part of the workload and the faculty must attend the presentation.*

- *Participate in meetings or other work prior to the start of the quarter or after the quarter has ended. Beginning and ending dates for each quarter can be found here:*

<https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/resources/academic/calendars/>

2. Assisting Students

- **Classroom Environment:** the first day of class can dictate the tone for the rest of the term. Set a positive classroom atmosphere from the first day of class following the guidance from your IOR. Ensure that you and your students are aware of any facilities related policies for your class or classroom.
- **Teach problem-solving skills:** stress critical thinking and decision-making skills when working on assignments.
- **Question Strategies:** effective question strategies capture students' attention, foster student involvement, and facilitate an active learning environment.
- **Office Hours:** TA's are required to hold one hour of weekly office hours for students. The time and place is determined by each TA, and may include solving student questions about assignments, clarifying course content, and more tailored study sessions.
- **Email and Canvas Communications:** It is recommended that each TA set aside designated time for responding to student emails or Canvas messages/discussions each week so it is easier to keep track of hours worked. This practice also sets appropriate response expectations for students, and supports TAs in managing their workload fairly.
- **Perform individual or group tutoring sessions:** it is possible that a student or group of students may need additional support during the quarter or prior to the submission of key assignments or exams. TA's should assess the needs of the students and discuss with the IOR if specific tutoring sessions may be beneficial to schedule and what content would be most appropriate to cover.
- **OSD Exams:** Students with accommodations for disabilities often request their exams be administered on a date, time and location different to the one scheduled for the whole class. In such cases, TAs are required to proctor OSD exams and participate in outside prep. If the IOR chooses to utilize the Triton Testing Center, this is not required.

3. Grading

- **TAs review and grade** student projects and papers, as well as take attendance and record student's participation in class as outlined by the IOR.
- **Grading criteria and attendance standards:** should be reviewed and discussed with IOR at the beginning of the term. Request as much clarity from the IOR in order to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. Check-in with your IOR throughout the quarter to ensure

that they are aware of grades and attendance within your sections and ask clarifying questions as needed.

- **University-wide Grading System:**

<https://blink.ucsd.edu/instructors/academic-info/grades/system.html>

- **Attendance:** follow the IORs direction on their preferred method and policies. In general, it is recommended that TAs use the attendance module on Canvas, which is very user-friendly and reliable. Keeping your attendance records in order will help you avoid and tackle any issues that can arise with students.
- **Grading Timeline:** Aim to grade assignments in a timely manner. Posting grades on Canvas no later than a week after each assignment is due is a good practice. For final exam or project grades, it is recommended to post grades on Canvas at least a week before the IOR has to submit e-Grades, in case students have any issues with their grades that need to be reviewed.
- **Grading Records:** TAs must provide all of their student records (grades and attendance) to the IOR at the end of the quarter so that any re-grade requests or questions that come after the quarter has ended can be addressed by the IOR. The TA contract for the class has been fulfilled at the end of the quarter and there should be no additional work or communications that take place after this point with students enrolled in the course.
- **Grade Appeals / Requests to Re-grade:** if a student is in disagreement about a grade they received, set up a brief meeting to go over their grade, either during a classroom break, or your office hours. Remind students that this means a full reevaluation of their grade, and could result in the grade being increased, decreased or no change. The best way to avoid grade appeals is to post grade updates during the quarter so students are aware of their progress and specifically reach out to students via email who have low/non-passing grades. These questions and concerns should be addressed with the IOR as well so they are informed in case the student escalates their concerns to them.
- **Adjusting a Grade:** TAs can adjust a grade if necessary or deemed appropriate, but if unsure on how to proceed, consult with the IOR. If the student still has issues with a re-grade, direct the student to the IOR. For final grades (once IOR have submitted e-Grades), IORs are the only ones that can alter a grade. Inform students of this protocol at the beginning of the term, to avoid issues.

V. Challenges, Concerns and Emergencies

- **Life-threatening or significant emergencies:** Call 911.
- **Non life-threatening medical assistance:** If a student is sick or mildly injured during class, direct them to Urgent Care at Student Health Services, located on Library Walk > [MAP](#)

- **Students with academic, behavioral or psychological issues:** Both IORs and TAs are understood as “mandatory reporters.” If a student has been showing extremely low engagement, has behavioral issues, or is in psychological distress/crisis, the TA should intervene to address the issue, which should follow these steps:

1. **Speak to the student:** it is recommended that this is done privately during a class break, or after class is finished. Show empathy and listen - knowing the cause of the issue is key in evaluating the best route to help the student.

Does the student pose a danger to themselves or others, or need immediate assistance for any reason?		
YES	UNSURE	NO
↓	↓	↓
The student's conduct is clearly and imminently reckless, disorderly, dangerous, or threatening and is suggestive of harm to self or others.	The student shows signs of distress, but I am not sure how serious it is. My interaction has left me feeling uneasy and/or concerned.	I am not concerned for the student's immediate safety, but the student is having significant academic and/or personal issues and could use some support.
↓	↓	↓
Call 911 (emergency) or 858-534-HELP (urgent, non emergency)	Submit a Triton Concern Form	Bring in additional support from the list below, or submit a Triton Concern Form

2. **Bring in additional support:** Once you've analyzed the situation and causes, call immediately or share campus resources with the student (depending on the urgency of the situation):
 - **Triton CORE: (858) 534 - HELP [4357]** a mobile response team at UC San Diego that provides compassionate intervention and support to students experiencing a behavioral health crisis. *Mon-Fri from 10am–10pm*
 - **CAPS 24/7 Crisis Line: (858) 534 - 3755** to speak with a crisis counselor anytime. *Mon-Fri from 8:00am–4:30pm (Select option #2 after business hours).*

- **CAPS** Counseling and Psychological Services: <https://caps.ucsd.edu/>
 - **OSD** Office for Students with Disabilities: <https://osd.ucsd.edu/>
 - **Academic Options:** for Students with Extenuating Circumstances
<https://advising.ucsd.edu/students/resources-support/extenuating-circumstances.html>
 - **Additional Resources for Students:**
<https://vcsa.ucsd.edu/case-management/index.html#student-resources>
3. **Inform the appropriate parties in the Department:** email a detailed report about the situation, and proposed action plan to both the IOR and the Undergraduate Advising Office (vis-ug@ucsd.edu). IORs are responsible for the follow-through regarding the student's grade-status, enrollment, or OSD accommodations that may arise.
 4. **No-Shows:** When a student does not show up to class regularly, message the student to check in and request a response by a designated date. If there is no reply and the student continues to be no-show, email the student and include the IOR in the message. Request a response within 24 hours. If there is no response again, report via the Triton Concern Form and notify the IOR and vis-ug@ucsd.edu

VI. Guidelines for Capturing Educational Sessions

- **Recording lectures, sections, or individual meetings with students** via Zoom, phone, or any other mechanism (including regular audio recording) is permitted only by instructors (both IORs and TAs), and those students with a previously approved disability accommodation. Instructors may allow all students to capture classes with permission. If they do, everyone must have prior notice that a class will be recorded/captured and have the opportunity to turn off their audio/video (if online) or not to be captured at all (if in person). Without prior permission and notification, students may not record classes.
- **Recording of private conversations:** California law requires consent from everyone who is being recorded. It is illegal to record a confidential conversation (or a conversation where there is a reasonable expectation or privacy) without consent. Doing so can subject the individual to fines up to \$2500 per violation or imprisonment up to a year (see Cal. Penal Code § 632).

VII. TA Performance and Evaluation

1. Instructor Feedback

Instructors are encouraged to clearly articulate their expectations, provide oversight and give timely feedback. The intention is to let you know what actions and teaching practices are effective and where there are areas for improvement. If you do not feel you are receiving feedback, check in with

your instructor of record and ask that they provide feedback prior to midterms so that you know how you are doing.

2. Student Feedback

At the end of every quarter, students receive prompts to evaluate their instructors and teaching assistants. This process is overseen by the Associated Students and is anonymous. It is recommended that you set aside 10 minutes of class time during the last meeting of Week 10 and ask that students evaluate the course using their laptop or phone at that time. Getting more responses provides you with accurate recording of your performance. Without this, we see very few students complete evaluations and they typically really loved or had issues with their TA, and these results may not be a fair reflection of your teaching. You should retain these evaluations at the end of each quarter for future job applications as student feedback is a common application expectation.

3. Poor performance as a TA

If you fail to fulfill your work duties, or concerns are noted by your IOR and/or students, a performance review will take place to properly evaluate the situation. This process is non-punitive, but rather aimed at closing any gaps so that you excel at your role as a TA. Depending on the severity of the situation, a performance review will result in preventive disciplinary actions such as a detailed performance report, suggested additional resources, arbitration meetings or supplemental training. Only under egregious circumstances, an immediate punitive action will take place. This would be addressed following the process and instructions outlined within the ASE contract for disciplinary action.

VIII. University-wide TA Support

Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FSAP)

<https://blink.ucsd.edu/sponsor/hr/divisions-units/programs-rewards/fsap/index.htm>

The Faculty and Staff Assistance Program (FSAP) is a confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which helps campus faculty and staff resolve concerns affecting personal well-being and/or job performance. Support for campus leaders, managers and supervisors; connections to local resources; and collaboration with HR units and other campus partners are also services provided by their team of licensed, professional counselors.

The Teaching and Learning Commons (The Commons)

<https://commons.ucsd.edu/educators/index.htm>

While the Commons cannot focus on TA development based on the unique qualities of the Visual Arts Department, some aspects of the Commons can help TAs in general. We recommend that TAs take advantage of this resource. The Commons works closely with academic departments to enhance instructional effectiveness and provides ongoing thematic workshops including course and syllabus design, classroom management, public speaking, instructional technology, cognitive learning strategies, preparing teaching portfolios, and long-term professional development. Other services include observations, classroom videotaping, language assessment, and consultation.

Resource Guide for TAs	> Frequently Asked Questions and responses
Advancing Teaching	> Teaching resources, training and consultations
CDIIP Support	> Guidance through the entire course design process
Digital Learning	> Enhancing teaching and learning through innovative technology
Education Innovations	> Proposal Development and Program Design Support
Keep Teaching	> Strategies and resources for adaptable teaching, designing for inclusion, and promoting student learning after the pandemic.
Research + Assessment	> Systematic analysis of learning environments and outcomes.

VIII. Professional Development

Teaching Portfolios:

A teaching portfolio documents your teaching philosophy, experience, and evaluation, serving as a means to reflect on your teaching objectives and improvements. Creating a teaching portfolio early in your career is advisable to ease the documentation process. Most teaching portfolios are created for job applications in academia. They should be tailored to the specific institution, considering its teaching objectives and mission. Contacting faculty and students can provide insights into the priorities of a university, especially regarding the importance of teaching in hiring decisions. Quality is more important than quantity; while a complete portfolio is beneficial, applicants should select relevant materials for each position.

Types of Teaching Portfolios:

- **Reflection:** A teaching portfolio can be a systematic means for instructors to reflect on and improve their teaching. The process of articulating teaching goals and then documenting how these goals are met is central to creating a portfolio, and it offers insight into your teaching approach. Creating a portfolio reveals both those areas in which you excel as a teacher and those in which you might wish to improve.

- **Evaluation:** In some universities, teaching portfolios are used as the basis for evaluating teaching assistants' progress or as part of a tenure review (or post-tenure review). Generally,

portfolios designed to highlight teaching accomplishments are prepared by individual instructors and are then reviewed by a committee of colleagues or supervisors.

- **Curriculum Development:** Some departments and/or universities have begun using teaching portfolios as the basis for curriculum development. In this case, instructors prepare and exchange portfolios as a basis for discussion about the department's overall goals for instruction. The portfolio can demonstrate how an individual instructor's teaching style and course content fit into the department's goals.

Organization:

Your teaching portfolio should be organized in such a way that a potential employer can carefully peruse the document or quickly scan it. If the college or university to which you are applying does not provide specific guidelines, you should follow a standard format. Typically, this will include five sections:

- 1. Teaching philosophy statement**

- 2. Courses taught**

- 3. Sample course materials**

- 4. Student evaluations**

- 5. Other documentary support** (such as classes or workshops that you have attended, teaching awards that you have received, letters from a supervising instructor or department chair documenting your progress, or documentation that you have served as a mentor for new instructors in your department).

UCSD Resources for preparing a Teaching Portfolio:

<https://holisticteaching.ucsd.edu/teaching-and-mentoring-portfolio/index.html>