Head TA Handbook

The general job description of a Head TA is to assist the lecture instructors with the discussion aspects of the large Biology core courses.

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Likely Responsibilities of the Head TA

1. Set up discussion sections
   a. Meet with faculty to decide points, attendance, requirements for discussion
   b. Schedule grad TAs among course discussion sections
   c. Order discussion supplies like flip chart paper, dry erase markers, textbooks, etc.

2. Attend pre-quarter and weekly training meetings with your discussion leaders
   a. Practice and discuss active learning techniques for discussion
   b. Prepare discussion leaders for upcoming lecture topics and likely student confusions
   c. Encourage interaction and teamwork among discussion leaders

3. Discussion section leadership
   a. Make sure all discussion leaders are providing useful learning opportunities to students
   b. Make sure that points awarded across discussion sections are comparable
   c. Help discussion leaders with teaching issues (unruly students, low participation, FERPA privacy issues) as they come up.
   d. Provide feedback to faculty about how discussion leaders are dealing with lecture material, exams, exam grading, etc.
   e. Visit the discussion of each discussion leader at least once during the first half of the quarter, and provide written and oral feedback.
   f. Obtain final grades from discussion leaders and exams, and provide a complete gradebook to students

4. Attend each lecture (only one section per day)
   a. Take notes as a record of content and administrative information given to students
   b. Assist faculty with technology or other teaching needs during lecture
   c. Understand the lecture material well enough that you could teach discussions if needed

You job should not include:
- Setup or administration of online needs of the course
- Managing student administrative needs (emails, clickers, general questions)
- Assisting faculty with exams and grades
Responsibility Checklist

By the end of the first week of September:
1. Contact faculty to be sure of your hours and duties (see Faculty Meeting Worksheet)
2. Create Head TA timesheet and log in your hours and duties as they begin
3. Obtain discussion schedule from WebSOC, and make sure no discussions overlap with each other or with lecture.
4. Obtain the names and email addresses of the graduate students from the faculty as soon as they become available.
5. Email graduate students to set discussion schedule (see Instructions for Scheduling Discussion Sections)
6. Ask faculty to email textbook publisher for a desk copy book and image cd for each discussion leader.
7. Send discussion leaders the dates for first training/information meetings

Before the start of Week 0:
1. Send discussion leaders the discussion section assignments as soon as it is ready
2. Contact department liaison to make changes to ESOC to reflect correct discussion leaders (See ESOC Instructions)
3. Order teaching supplies for discussion leaders and faculty (see Ordering Teaching Supplies)
4. Meet with TA Training leader Adrienne Williams to discuss pre-quarter training
5. Create information packet for discussion leaders
   a. Your syllabus as an example, with correct points and quiz information
   b. Important dates for exams and other responsibilities

Week 0:
1. Attend pre-quarter training for TAs. Pass out information packets and teaching supplies, critique microteaching, lead discussions, etc.
2. Contact bookstore to be sure there are sufficient textbooks / clickers for students
3. Check that all discussion leaders have web pages and syllabi up by Wednesday night.

4. Make sure discussion leaders have teaching supplies

5. Make sure discussion leaders are ready for discussions during Week 1 (and Fri Week 0).

6. Fill in Head TA timesheet

Week 1:
1. Send an email to each TA the night before their first discussion:
   a. Encouragement that the first day will go well
   b. Reminder about enrollment rules
   c. Reminder to take time to build community using icebreaker

2. Help lead first weekly TA training meeting:
   a. I will have a 30-minute activity on common mistakes discussion leader TAs make. You will have 20 minutes to discuss upcoming lecture material and suggest a good active-learning activity.
   b. bring last year’s notes and make a SHORT list of topics students will have trouble with during Week 1 lectures.
   c. Be prepared to record questions TAs might have so you can get answers and reply back

3. Fill in Head TA timesheet

By End of Week 3:
1. Continue to help lead weekly TA Trainings
2. make sure all TAs have entered all their activities into Gradebook
3. Have all students turn on the Mid-term Evaluation option in EEE, and encourage student participation (offering 0.5 or 1 point is good)
4. All TAs should have visited one other discussion section, and return the given evaluation form to you and the TA Training Leader.
5. Ask TAs to email you a sample of their Week 3 discussion outline and activity sheet. Make sure:
   a. The activity is not too long
   b. TA isn’t assigning a bunch of homework
   c. TA isn’t providing lecture summaries or “study guides”
6. Fill in Head TA timesheet
7. If time permits, visit each discussion section for at least the first half of the period.

By End of Week 5:
1. Continue to help lead weekly TA Trainings
2. Ask TAs for their quiz averages and discussion section averages. Make sure all averages are roughly similar. TAs are more often too hard rather than too easy – these need to develop easier quiz questions to bring their means back in line.
3. Fill in Head TA timesheet, and turn in to all course faculty. Meet if necessary to discuss time overages.

By end of Week 8
1. Continue to help lead weekly TA Trainings
2. Check the EEE gradebooks again to make sure TAs are keeping them up-to-date.
3. Make sure TAs who were running too easy or hard have adjusted the level of difficulty of their quizzes.
4. Fill in Head TA timesheet

By end of Week 10
1. Continue to help lead weekly TA Trainings
2. Collect gradebook scores from TAs, and give them to the admin TA or faculty members for calculating final grades.
3. Contact TAs with any exam info they need for the Final.
4. Remind TAs to encourage students to fill out the final evaluations
5. Fill in Head TA timesheet and send to faculty and TA Trainer
Faculty Meeting Worksheet

Use this worksheet when discussing the organization of the course and discussions with the faculty for the course. The right margin has space for answers.

1. Course information:
   a. Name of the course: ________________
   b. What Biology department administers this course?
   c. What lecture sections am I responsible for?
   d. What are the days and times of lecture?

2. Faculty instructors:
   a. Who are the faculty associated with the course?
   b. What parts of the quarter are each teaching?
   c. Who will make me an assistant through EEE?
   d. Who will be handling all student administrative issues?

3. Here are the likely responsibilities of a Head TA, in addition to attending lecture and teaching discussion sections. Do we agree on these responsibilities? (you may want to bring the checklist to show what you will be doing)
   a. Set up discussion sections
   b. Lead training meetings for discussion leaders
   c. Discussion section leadership

4. Course syllabus:
   a. May I have a copy of the syllabus?
   b. How many exams are there? When are they?
   c. What is the textbook?
   d. Do you have enough desk copies and media disks for me and for all the discussion leaders? Can you email the publisher and order them?
   e. Will you be testing on material in the book but not in lecture? What proportion of exam material will be book only?
5. Discussion Organization:
   a. How many discussions are there?
   b. How many grad student discussion leaders are there? May I have their names and email addresses now?
   c. Do you want me to be in charge of scheduling who teaches which discussion?
   d. How many points are associated with discussion?
   e. Do we need to give quizzes in discussion?
   f. How much “homework” or out-of-class work should discussions generate, if any? How many hours per week?
   g. The discussion leaders will create activities based on lecture material. Did you have any suggestions for concepts you know the students need extra help with?
   h. What is your philosophy about enforcing discussion attendance?

6. Lecture attendance:
   a. Is there a lecture time you would prefer I attend?
   b. Will you need help with technology during the lecture?
   c. Is there particular behavior you would like from the TAs during lecture?

7. Exam prep and Grading (if applicable):
   a. Which of the following exam responsibilities do you want from the discussion leaders?
      - Write exam questions
      - Review and edit exam written by faculty
   b. Will there be short-answer questions on the exams?
   c. Will any of the TAs be grading the exams?
   d. How many hours do you plan on each exam taking the graders?

8. Discussion Leadership:
   a. Do I have the authority to enforce the discussion requirements about points, difficulty of assignments, etc?
b. Do I have the authority to sit in on a discussion and give feedback to the discussion leader about their teaching?

c. Do I have the authority to discuss problems with the discussion leader regarding the quality of their work?

d. Have you had problems with discussion leaders in the past? What issues would you like me to be most alert to?
Instructions for Scheduling Discussion Sections

1. Print up a list of all discussions associated with your lectures from WebSOC (http://websoc.reg.uci.edu/perl/WebSoc).
   a. I like to create a visual grid to see what discussions are when, as below. This figure shows two lectures (A,B), times of each lecture, and times of each discussion (1-15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hour</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>10</td>
<td></td>
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<td>B1</td>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>B1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>B1</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>A11</td>
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<td>B6</td>
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<td>B6</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>B6</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Organize how the graduate student discussion “clumps” will be distributed.
   a. Graduate discussion leaders need to teach three discussions. All three need to be on one day, and the one day should be either Monday, Wednesday, or Friday to minimize disruption to their research.
   b. Make a list of these 3-discussion clumps.

3. Email the list of graduate student TAs with the following information:
   a. A short welcome to the course
   b. Your name and role as coordinator
   c. A short summary of their responsibilities, including teaching 3 discussions and attending the lecture associated with the discussions
   d. The list of discussion “clumps” to choose among
   e. A request to list their first, second and third choice, plus noting if any clumps are impossible because of their own coursework
   f. A deadline for response (5 days is reasonable)

4. Record the graduate student responses

5. Choose which graduate students will teach which discussions
   a. If there are discussions that are desired by more than one graduate student, I generally give the preference to the one that replied first.
   b. It is generally fairer to give many students their second choice rather than some their first choice and some their third choice.

6. Inform all discussion leaders of their discussion times.
Giving Discussion Leaders EEE and WebSOC Access

Discussion leaders are considered the instructor for their discussion. This is maximally effective if WebSOC shows the discussion leader as the instructor as well. Unfortunately, there is often a very small window of time between when you find out who is teaching what discussion, and when classes begin. Because of this limitation, I’ve listed the Ideal Scenario below, followed by the Emergency Scenario.

Ideal Scenario:
1. Create a spreadsheet with a columns for course code, discussion number, Head TA name, (Admin access) discussion leader name (Instructor), and discussion leader employee ID#, as below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Discussion</th>
<th>Admin Access</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
<th>Employee ID#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5161</td>
<td>A1</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Joel M.</td>
<td>M 11:00-11:50</td>
<td>Adrienne W. 22394023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5162</td>
<td>A2</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Joel M.</td>
<td>M 12:00-12:50p</td>
<td>Adrienne W. 22394023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5163</td>
<td>A3</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Joel M.</td>
<td>M 2:00-2:50p</td>
<td>Joel M. 2394023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5164</td>
<td>A4</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Jasmin D.</td>
<td>Tu 9:00-9:50</td>
<td>Jasmin D. 34u9213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5165</td>
<td>A5</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Jasmin D.</td>
<td>Tu 10:00-10:50</td>
<td>Elizabeth R. 4332234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5166</td>
<td>A6</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Jasmin D.</td>
<td>Tu 12:00-12:50p</td>
<td>Maribel A. 3929387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5167</td>
<td>A7</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Elizabeth R.</td>
<td>W 12:00-12:50p</td>
<td>Raul J. 2o3u4p2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5168</td>
<td>A8</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Elizabeth R.</td>
<td>W 11:00-11:50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5169</td>
<td>A9</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Elizabeth R.</td>
<td>W 2:00-2:50p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5170</td>
<td>A10</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Maribel A.</td>
<td>Th 10:00-10:50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5171</td>
<td>A11</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Maribel A.</td>
<td>Th 12:00-12:50p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5172</td>
<td>A12</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Maribel A.</td>
<td>Th 1:30-1:50p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5173</td>
<td>A13</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Raul J.</td>
<td>F 3:30-3:50p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5174</td>
<td>A14</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Raul J.</td>
<td>F 10:00-10:50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5175</td>
<td>A15</td>
<td>Adrienne W.</td>
<td>Raul J.</td>
<td>F 12:00-12:50p</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Fill in the spreadsheet with a row for each discussion section
3. Find out “Who in the department is in charge of entering class information into ESOC” for the department that runs your class.
   a. For Dev and Cell right now, this is Linda Fernandez (4-6681)
   b. For Eco Evo right now, this is Pam McDonald (4-4743)
4. Explain to this instructional support person that you need to change the instructor for a big stack of discussion sections. This is a pain, so be nice. Explain that there is an instructor and an “administrative access” person for each course. Can you email a list of the discussions with the instructor and administrative access marked for each discussion?
5. Follow up after a day, and ask if there is anything else the person needs. Again, be nice.
6. Once the discussion leader is listed as the instructor, they will automatically get access to their class through EEE.

Emergency Scenario:
1. If it doesn’t look like the department person can add individual discussion leaders by the first day of class, you will have to resort to emergency measures:
2. Contact the department person in charge of ESOC, as explained above.
3. Ask them to put you down as instructor for all the discussions. This is faster for them, so you might get lucky. It can also be done weeks before school starts, if the department person is going to be out of town during the critical week before school.

4. Within EEE, you as the instructor will have to add the real instructor as an assistant. For all the discussions. Yes, this is horrible.

5. Additionally, at the end of the quarter the student evaluations will be sent out. Because they do not have the correct instructor in WebSOC, the evaluation will not have the correct name on the evaluation. Again, this can be adjusted, but usually only after great confusion.
Ordering Teaching Supplies

1. Call your department office to find out who does office supply ordering.
2. Write person’s name, extension, email and account and fund numbers below.

3. Order with at least a week’s notice, if possible.
4. Order for each discussion leader:
   - 1 4pack dry-erase markers
   - 1 dry-erase eraser
   - 100 white index cards per discussion
   - 1 file jackets per discussion (like this: http://tinyurl.com/34gr29h)
   - 1 roll masking tape

Enrollment rules at UCI

1. All enrollment needs to be done through WebReg. Do not sign ANY add or drop cards.
2. If a student drops a lecture in order to add a different lecture, they will lose their discussion slot as well. If they drop a discussion, they lose their lecture spot as well. Warn them not to drop without going to BioSci Student Affairs.
3. If a student “needs” a particular discussion or lecture, they can go to BioSci Student Affairs to discuss it with them. The front desk people can generally fix their problem, but tell them to contact you if they were brushed off, and you’ll move them up the chain of command:
   a. Director Carolyn Willman 4-4699
   b. Assistant Director Susana Sandoval 4-4702