Welcome!

Welcome to the Spring 2012 issue of the TA/GS newsletter from the Learning and Teaching Centre. The newsletter was developed specifically for teaching assistants and graduate students at UVic. Inside you will find words of wisdom from your fellow graduate students at UVic, who have kindly shared their stories about the Teaching Assistant Consultant (TAC) program at UVic. As well, our In Focus section features the Department of French and how TAs are supported in that department.

We encourage your participation in what we have to offer, but please let us know at any time if there is a topic that you want addressed and we will do our best to accommodate your request.

Enjoy!

Cynthia Korpan
TA Training Program Manager
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The TA Consultant program at UVic positions TA mentors (known as “TA Consultants” or “TACs”) in most departments throughout campus. The TACs develop discipline-specific seminars designed for TAs in the departments they are responsible for, taught in the fall or over the academic year that cover a range of practical topics, tips, approaches and issues most pertinent to TAs at UVic and complemented by supporting materials.

TA Consultants (TACs) are typically senior graduate students with teaching experience and demonstrated teaching excellence who are therefore likely to garner the respect of other TAs and be capable of serving in a mentoring capacity. The TAC reports to the TA Training Program Manager, Cynthia Korpan, and is responsible for liaising with the Graduate Advisor (or designate) in his/her home department to ensure the smooth running of services for TAs there.

The TAC’s primary role is to facilitate the professional development of TAs in his/her department(s), assisting them to be effective teachers, primarily by offering a discipline-specific TA seminar, helping with one-on-one questions/consultations and providing advice and referral to appropriate campus resources. The TA Training Program Manager at the LTC provides all TACs with the necessary training, support, and resources in order to be able to fulfill this crucial role.

Participating in this innovative professional development program is not necessarily part of a TA’s regular responsibilities since such duties are assigned by units. Rather this is an opportunity that UVic is providing institutionally to support our graduate students in being successful in the classroom and as competitive as possible in their future careers.

The TACs for 2011-12 (pictured above) are:

- **Economics**
  - Ron Gibson
- **English**
  - Alison Hedley
- **Engineering**
  - Electrical, Computer, Mechanical
  - Sohad Kadhum
- **Geography**
  - Jill Harvey
- **History**
  - Derek Murray
- **History in Art**
  - Ryan Harper-Brown
- **Music**
  - Libby Concord
- **Pacific and Asian Studies and Greek and Roman Studies**
  - Natasha Fox
- **Physics and Astronomy**
  - Lisa Glass
- **Political Science**
  - Joelle Alice Michaud-Ouellet
- **Psychology**
  - Megan Yim
- **Sociology**
  - Edward White
Below, some of the TACs for 2011-12 share successes and upcoming events in 2012.

Alison Hedley, Department of English:
The following are a few highlights of the creative and varied tutorial activities developed by English TAs. I’ve started keeping a list of these tutorial ideas for future reference, and I’ve put some of them to use already. These simple but useful gems demonstrate the value of working with a TA community.

Content Quiz
Developed by Michael Stevens and Arthur Hain (English MA students and TAs for Engl147)
On the first day that your tutorial covers a new text, open class with a quiz. You may choose to warn students ahead of time, thereby motivating them to read; however, if you surprise them with the quiz you can gauge student engagement and motivate future class preparation.
Give your students a few questions designed to generate class discussion. After the students have a few minutes to respond, have them share and discuss their answers. The idea is not to shame those who have not read the text, but to prepare a space for student engagement. As a TA, you may not be able to give students the incentive of participation marks for quiz completion. Nonetheless, sharing answers as a class can be incentive enough. If you aren’t convinced, you can choose to bribe them with candy . . . However, it’s worth noting that the TAs who gave this quiz didn’t need to resort to sugar to generate productive class discussion.

Peer Review: Thesis Statements
Developed by Katie Young (English MA student and TA for Engl147)
When explaining activity procedure at the beginning of class, emphasize that students will be sharing their work with everyone after pair peer review: this will encourage small group productivity.
1. Work in pairs for 15 to 20 minutes; give students specific guidelines for critiquing one another’s papers—perhaps write the key questions on board, or hand out a peer review thesis checklist.
2. Regroup. Have each person share his or her thesis sentence (if it’s longer than a sentence or two, you may choose to write the thesis on the board or display it on an overhead projector).
As each student presents his or her thesis:
- have his or her partner share a point of feedback given, and/or
- invite someone else to give feedback, and/or
- respond yourself
(paricularly if the students are struggling to articulate their points, or you see a major error go unaddressed)
This simple peer review exercise has many benefits! It gives you, the TA, an opportunity to get involved with every student’s work at the planning stage; it also allows you to develop a sense of how everyone is progressing. The exercise gives students the opportunity to gauge their peers’ critical abilities and to gauge your level of expectation.

Through the examples shared in class, students can better understand what kind of elements go into a successful thesis and what kind of things to watch out for in completing their assignments.

“Ask Anything” Segment
Developed by Tiffany Parks (English PhD student and TA for Engl147)
If you find yourself with extra time (or perhaps you decide to set some aside), give your students ten or fifteen minutes to ask you anything! From Tiffany’s experience, you might initially be met with blank silence. Give your students a minute to think. You can encourage them to ask anything, ranging from the most silly or inane topic to the biggest question of the semester; to get the ball rolling, you can let them know that if they are thinking about it, chances are someone else is too—so they may as well ask about it aloud! You may also want to facilitate question formulation by listing off the various areas and topics they may have questions about (for example: the class average, copies of the syllabus, citation formatting, grammar, the final exam, lecture and tutorial content, etc.). You might be surprised by the range of questions your students generate. This activity is an excellent way to gauge student progress and to address any major student concerns that you might otherwise overlook in your tutorial.

Derek Murray, Department of History: The Department of History is a great place to be a graduate student and teaching assistant! This is one of the most collegial history departments in the country, and strives to provide a welcoming environment for all of its members.
As TAC, part of my mandate is to help enhance that environment. In addition to offering opportunities for professional development, I also try to build community. The school year began with a bang, or thwack, as grad students and faculty got together for the second annual History Department Golf Tournament. In the winter term, I will be hosting a series of informal “coffee talks” where grad students and TAs get together to discuss topics and issues related to the teaching of history.
Joelle Alice Michaud-Ouellet, Department of Political Science

Since the fall of 2009, the Department of Political Science has developed an innovative approach to introducing first-year undergraduate students to a new course titled, The World of Politics. A team of instructors, Dr. Warren Magnusson, Dr. Amy Verdun, Dr. Michael Webb, and Dr. Janni Aragon team-teach this course. Each instructor is responsible for covering material, which is in line with his or her expertise. For example, Dr. Aragon teaches about debates in political science framed in the sub-fields of political theory, comparative politics and international relations.

Team-taught courses are increasingly popular in higher education as they hold several pedagogical and intellectual advantages. In these courses, students’ benefit from a dynamic learning environment that offers multiple perspectives as well as points of access for understanding key concepts. Team-teaching also promotes dialogue between different approaches, enhancing students’ understanding of the debates pertaining to the discipline of political science. Having said that, team-taught courses also represent a new set of challenges for both instructors and students. Among other things, the literature points to the importance and challenge of integrating all the course’s components into a cohesive unit. Continuity is something that is crucial to the students’ learning experience and this is where the role of the teaching assistants (TAs) becomes even more invaluable.

This year, The World of Politics has six TAs: Simon Labrecque, Anastasia Chebakova, Gary Heshmat, Michael Smith, Cody Willett and Steffen Neuman, working under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Janni Aragon. The TAs lead weekly tutorials, assist with the marking of exams and assignments as well as offer one-on-one consultations with students. TAs occupy a pivotal position between the teaching-team and the students, making clear to the students what is expected of them while conveying students’ concerns and questions to the instructors. The TA role is especially important, in the context of a first year course such as The World of Politics, in which students are familiarizing themselves with the various teaching styles.

Team-taught courses also provide TAs a great opportunity to facilitate discussions in conjunction with the diverse group of instructors, thus contributing to their professional development as future university teachers should they decide to pursue a career in academia. As other departments are considering implementing team-taught courses, the Department of Political Science can be a model of success for both this approach to teaching as well as the crucial role TAs play in maintaining continuity and enhancing the quality of students’ learning experience in such courses.


3 Ibid.


Lisa Glass, Department of Physics and Astronomy:

I facilitated four workshops sessions for graduate students and TAs in the month of September. Participants were introduced to the ins and outs of TAing in our department, including tips for teaching labs, running tutorials, and marking. Activities included giving everyone the opportunity to practice giving a lab demonstration, with real equipment, and practice marking assignments and quizzes based on material real students have submitted. There was also a panel discussion with experienced TAs and lab coordinators. UVic Corporate Relations and the department were generous enough to provide us with food during each workshop, including pizza for lunch during the final workshop. Both new and experienced TAs participated and everyone agreed they learned something new and valuable. Hopefully, this series of workshops will translate to a better experience for everyone, from TAs to undergrads to TA supervisors.

January 2012
Megan Yim, Department of Psychology

I appreciate win-win situations...the kind where everyone ends up satisfied and happy with the outcome. This past term, working as a TAC in the Psychology Department, I believe, has been a win-win all around. My role as a TAC has given me experience and professional development opportunities as well as assisting TAs with grading, lecturing and organizational skills. The purpose of the Psychology TAC Program is to nurture the teaching capacity of graduate students. After meeting at the beginning of the semester, to talk about the rules and regulations associated with the TA positions in the department, many people expressed interest in attending workshops on the topic of lecture skills. TAs in the Psychology Department are often given the opportunity to present as guest lecturers, with no formal instruction on how to do so. In November, I offered a workshop on lecture skills including topics such as: structuring the lecture, engaging students, and answering tough questions in the classroom. This workshop was attended by ten new TAs as well as two-experienced TAs. The feedback was very positive and subsequent presentations were requested. During TAC training, I learned that the best way for people to become skilled is by first-hand experience; so, I formatted the workshops as a collaborative experience whereby several students gave short presentations and their peers offered useful evaluation and reflections. As graduate level students we have a lot of experience with both good and bad lectures. Within the safety of our group discussion, we also shared our own experiences of listening to lectures. We then collaboratively built what we felt would be the perfect lecture. From there we were able to develop an outline we could all work from when preparing future lectures. I believe that the TAC program is a great opportunity to advance the skills of graduate students to include good teaching practice along with research skills. It is also an opportunity to develop and grow in leadership, management and interpersonal communication. Win–win situations involve both parties successfully achieving desired goals. The TAC program definitely fits the bill!

Sohad Kadhum, Department of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering

Our TAs have had many professional development opportunities. I look forward to continuing the momentum next term. Early in September, our department invited graduate students and TAs, new and experienced, to an information session followed by a social gathering and luncheon. The information session opened with a review of goal and objectives for the Teaching Assistants Consultant Program in the Faculty of Engineering. Faculty and graduate students then offered a number of short presentations and time was allotted for a questions. Faculty members and staff in Engineering are quite willing to share their knowledge and experience with graduate students and TAs. During the event, participants, both faculty and student, generated a list of topics they deemed important to address in upcoming TA Seminars. I designed the TA seminar series accordingly. TA seminars were facilitated twice per week for 10 weeks presenting topics such as: primary TA responsibilities, first day of class, grading and invigilating, learning styles, confidence building; how to fit into the Canadian classroom, and the TA Fundamentals Certificate. Over this past term, I also arranged for peer review sessions for some of my colleagues during tutorials and lab sessions. And, I engaged in twenty-seven sessions with TAs covering different issues related to graduate studies and teaching assistant consultation. My plan for the spring term is to facilitate: microteaching workshops, the presentation skills workshops and peer observation opportunities for TAs. Engineering TAs, who complete the designated criteria, will be awarded their TA Fundamentals Certification at the end of term.

Ron Gibson, Department of Economics

The end of the fall term in the Economics Department brings a memorable and recurring sigh of relief. We made it! The dust is clearing, the core courses are finished, and we can now look back on the achievements of the term...there are many. A record number of TA’s are taking part in the TA Fundamentals Certification; they have completed peer reviews and received excellent feedback. Three of our graduate students presented at the Economics Café Speaker Series at Camosun College; they had a great impact on the students and their opinions of economics, especially the differing roles economics can play in the world. So, what’s next? The winter term will be equally as industrious. Spawning from the Economics Café Speaker Series, the UVic Economics Department will begin to host graduate student guest lectures in plain English. I hope to see you there! This will be an excellent opportunity to show what the future of economics is all about. There will be ample opportunity for questions and dialogue on graduate research topics. A list of guest lecturers and locations will be provided shortly on the UVic website, so check back frequently. And, for those departments interested in starting their own guest lecture series, be sure to attend my Guest Speaker Workshop at the LTC TA Conference on January 12 at 1:00 pm in HHB128.
IN FOCUS

Igniting a love for language teaching: TA support in the Department of French

By Annye Castonguay (with some help from Catherine Caws)

The Department of French at U Vic has a long tradition of offering specific training to its Teaching Assistants (TAs). It was launched several years ago by Dr. John Greene in collaboration with TA Lucie Daigle; together they developed a manual for Teaching Assistants in French. This program and the manual was revised and augmented by Dr. Catherine Caws who worked closely with several sessional instructors who teach French. In 2008, Dr. Caws was appointed Chair of the French Department. At that juncture, Annye Castonguay, sessional instructor, accepted the position of program coordinator and has been carrying the torch since then.

The French Department’s TAs are selected from our Master’s program as well as francophone graduate students from other departments. We employ individuals who are well equipped with the French language to support students at the undergraduate level. French TAs are supported and trained to facilitate small group sessions that offer students the opportunity to practice their oral skills in authentic and meaningful ways. This paid training develops our TA’s instructional skill set and also ensures a cohesive relationship with instructors in the department. Each term, the department facilitates a minimum of eight hours of mandatory TA training and at the end of each term, our TAs receive a certificate for completing the TA Training Program.

Learning the French language in an English language culture can be challenging for students. Immersion programs obligate learners to speak the language in every day interactions as part of the culture. Since our students do not have that opportunity, we have incorporated, in the design of the French program, small group laboratory sessions in which students can practice speaking in French. Most of our first year French courses have a one-hour laboratory session with less than twelve students each week for ten weeks. Although we encourage students to speak French in class and participate as much as possible, large class sizes and a lot of material to cover make it impossible for everyone to have time to speak.

Some students are uncomfortable speaking in front of large groups and prefer smaller group sessions to test their French language skills, therefore, more intimate environments can be less threatening and more conducive to active language learning.

Each course has a particular curriculum to cover; and therefore, in order for lab exercises to be effective, the content must be in line with the curriculum delivered in lecture. We have put forth a great deal of effort to ensure that the focus and activities in the labs are in line with the curriculum. That way, students can improve specific language-learning areas such as vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation, and communication necessary for success in a particular course. The laboratory instructors (TAs) engage students in activities aimed at developing their spontaneous oral expression and guided interventions.
Although TAs come to their role with an excellent knowledge of the French language, teaching skills do not always come naturally. It is important to consider the varied levels of competency that students bring to class. A good lab requires a precise objective, a clear structure and tools to reinforce the material introduced by the instructor in class. The French Department feels it is important to provide our TAs with a good, solid foundation of teaching tools to bring to our classrooms and laboratory sessions. Proficient training is essential in supporting our TAs to be effective assistant educators. TA Training workshops encompass: class management skills, activity design and workload organization. We encourage peer work and peer review in classrooms and labs. And, further to that we foster strong communicative relationships between our TAs and our instructors paving the way for TAs to access the feedback and support they need.

Good teaching practices are important because they benefit all students, both undergraduate and graduate. The French Department’s TA Training Program serves all members of our academic community.

Pictured below: TA Nichelle

"Although TAs come to their role with an excellent knowledge of French language, teaching skills do not always come naturally." — Annye Castonguay

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TAs - Jordan, Katrina, and Marcelle
As an MA Candidate in the Applied Theatre program, I have had the honour of working as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for a number of courses. For all TAs there are countless rewards along with interesting challenges that, in most cases, serve as experiences to make us better educators. The extensive support as well as professional development workshops offered at the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC) drew me in and ultimately led me to pursue my MA Project at the centre.

The University of Victoria employs TAs in almost every Faculty on campus. As a community of Assistant Educators, we come with a wide variety of background experiences that we bring to the role of TA. Yet, no matter how much experience we may have, in the classroom or out of the classroom, challenging interpersonal situations do occur that sometimes leave us taken aback and feeling unprepared to respond in a professional and positive manner. This is the point of interest that has generated my Master’s work: An exploration of applied drama methods as a new paradigm in the training of TAs. I devised a series of drama-based training workshops to engage TAs with embodied, visceral experiences that offer a repertoire of responses upon which they can reflect and draw on when difficult situations arise.

Focus groups were brought together in the fall of 2010 to solicit the current and dominant issues that TAs face. TAs, Teaching Assistant Consultants (TACs), and interested faculty members were invited. Participants were asked to speak about their most challenging issues and to give specific examples of incidents that had occurred. They were also asked to speak philosophically about the role of a TA in terms of personal expectations and their perceptions of student, department and university expectations. The focus groups were filmed and the content transcribed and analyzed for dominant themes. Using these themes and anecdotes, I devised, filmed and edited five “critical incident” videos of 3 to 5 minutes each, with actors from the theatre department. Each workshop begins with a video, followed by drama-based activities that offer TAs collective, interactive experiences designed to generate and enable new ways of practice and reflection on issues. In the summer of 2011, I tested the workshops with a group of graduate students and TAs. Based on post-workshop evaluation questionnaires and anecdotal feedback in a follow up focus group session, the LTC invited me to facilitate the series at their September 2011 TA Conference. The series is now part of the TA Training Program at the LTC. One workshop participant reflected, “Yes, practice in a safe environment is very helpful. You can’t practice teaching solutions in the bathroom mirror...it has to be done in a performative setting.”

It has been a wonderful experience working with the LTC staff and the many graduate students and TAs who were a part of the initial focus groups and testing of the workshops as well as the TAs who attended the workshops at the TA Conference. My sincerest thank-you, to one and all, for your willingness to step into the world of drama.

Currently, I have two sets of workshops being offered at the LTC: Applied Drama in the University Classroom: a series designed to assist TAs and instructors in bringing more ‘action’ learning into the classroom. Explore Group Process through Drama: weekly, drop-in workshops that introduce and engage participants in a variety of dramatic forms. These sessions are meant to be a creative change of pace amid our cerebral world of academia. The workshops dates and details will be posted on the LTC website for next term.
Jill Harvey, Department of Geography
Several TA Fundamental Skills Workshops were offered early in the fall term on topics including: lesson planning, plagiarism, and marking. Our Geography TAs gained necessary skills to construct effective lesson plans using the BOPPPS model: bridge, objective, pre-assessment, participatory learning, post-assessment and summary. TAs acquired knowledge on how to detect plagiarism and the most proactive and positive ways of effectively handling such a situation. We also presented information to our TAs on time management and time commitment of marking during midterm and final exams.

Over 25 TAs participated in an informal ‘Midterm Check-up’ in October/November that sought TA opinions on existing lab programs. The outcome of the ‘Midterm Check-up’ highlighted good communication between all levels of the department, and the diversity and breadth of the lab programming offered in Geography. New in the spring term, Geography TAs will be invited to participate in a graduate student pedagogy discussion group, which will meet, over coffee, at the grad lounge on a monthly basis. Informal discussions will center on a chosen academic publication relevant to pedagogy and Geography, or a specific topic of interest to the participants. All Geography TAs and MAs are encouraged to join the discussion group. Stay tuned, as I will send out an email with details for our first meeting in late January.

Natasha Fox, Pacific and Asian Studies and Greek and Roman Studies
Announcing the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies Grad Student Colloquium. Open to all grad students and upper level undergrads with an interest in Asian Studies, this colloquium will meet every other Monday evening to discuss issues relating to our field, thesis projects, and life as graduate students and teaching assistants. This is a completely student-centered, student organized forum for presentation, discussion, exchange of ideas and debate, on topics that relate to our research, interests, and lived realities. Ideally, the colloquium will give each of us the opportunity to evaluate, and be evaluated by one another, and empower us to engage with a range of issues in a way that is meaningful to us. Also, we will be enjoying complimentary food and non-alcoholic beverages, thanks to generous support by the PAAS department, the Centre for Asia Pacific Initiatives, and the GSS. Thank you!!! Please come and join us for lively discussion, stimulating debate, peer-supportive networking, and refreshments! Every other Monday from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm in the GSS room 108. Email any questions to: nfox@uvic.ca

Ryan Harper-Brown, Department of Writing and History in Art
My experience as a TAC and the programs offered by the Learning and Teaching Centre has been nothing short of ground-breaking for me. As someone who’s been thrown into teaching duties, from tutoring, assisting and lecturing over the past 12 years, “wingin’ it” had become par for the course. The LTC’s TA Conference was my first experience with professional development and it’s put me on a path toward becoming a great teacher. As a Teaching Assistant Consultant, I’ve been given the opportunity to help others get the most out of their TA appointments, which is probably just as exciting.
For full descriptions and registration, please see our current calendar at http://ltc.uvic.ca/events/index.php

Spring 2012 TA Conference Workshops

**January**

**Spring TA (Teaching Assistant) Conference**
Thursday, Jan 12 - Friday, Jan 13
9:00 AM - 6:00 PM
Harry Hickman Building
Workshops included:

**Thursday, Jan 12**
“I don’t belong here”: Imposter Syndrome in Academia
HHB 128
9:00 AM - 10:30 AM
Facilitator: Alison Hedley, Department of English

Proactive Living Versus Perpetual ‘Firefighting’: How to Plan Long-term
HHB 128
10:30 am - 12:30 pm
Facilitator: Libby Concord, School of Music

Unmuddling Moodle: Everything You Need to Know to Look Like a Moodle Expert
LIB 034J, McPherson Library
10:30 am ~ 12:30 pm
Facilitator: Mandy Ararat Ospina, Learning Systems

**Guest Lecture: Some Strategies On How to Put One Together**
HHB 128
1:00 PM ~ 2:30 PM
Facilitator: Ron Gibson, Department of Economics

**Exploratory Learning**
HHB 128
2:30 PM ~ 4:30 PM
Facilitator: Catherine Nutting, Department of History of Art

**International Teaching Assistants: Confidence Building**
HHB 128
4:30 PM ~ 6:00 PM
Facilitator: Sohad Kadhum, Department of Mechanical Engineering

**Beyond the Classroom: Using Community-Based Learning to Connect Universities and Communities**
HHB 105
4:30 PM ~ 6:00 PM
Facilitator: Kathleen Bortolin, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

**Movin’ on Up: From TA to Sessional Work**
HHB 116
4:30 PM ~ 6:00 PM
Facilitator: Ryan Harper-Brown, Department of Writing

**Peer-to-Peer Learning: What It Is and How to Make It Work for You**
HHB 120
4:30 PM ~ 6:00 PM
Facilitator: Anna Patten, Island Medical Program

**Problem-Based Learning (PBL)**
HHB 128
9:30 AM ~ 11:30 AM
Facilitator: Jane Gair, Island Medical Program, and the Learning and Teaching Centre

**Unmuddling Moodle: Everything You Need to Know to Look Like a Moodle Expert**
LIB 034J, McPherson Library
9:30 AM ~ 11:30 AM
Facilitator: Mandy Ararat Ospina, Learning Systems

**Friday, Jan 13**

**Teaching as Public Speaking: How to Keep Your Audience**
HHB 128
1:30 PM ~ 3:30 PM
Facilitator: Fran Gebhard, Department of Theatre

**Feedback from Students: How to Get It Fast and Early in the Semester to Help You With Your Role as a TA**
HHB 128
2:30 PM ~ 4:00 PM
Facilitator: Adel Younis, Department of Mechanical Engineering

**Research in Action: Approaches to Sustainable Student-Community Engagement**
HHB 110
2:30 PM ~ 4:00 PM
Facilitator: Mark Willson, Department of Political Science

**Those Last Five Minutes: Strategies for Ending Lessons and Discussion Groups**
HHB 116
2:30 PM ~ 4:00 PM
Facilitator: Tylor Richards, Department of History

**International Teaching Assistants: Editorial Jigsaw**
Friday, January 13, 2012, HHB 105
2:30 PM ~ 4:00 PM
Facilitator: Sohad Kadhum, Department of Mechanical Engineering

**Once More Into the Breach: How to Survive Grading Non-Essay Material**
HHB 120
3:30 PM ~ 5:30 PM
Facilitator: Edward White, Department of Sociology