



**University
of Victoria**

Department of History

TEACHING ASSISTANT HANDBOOK

2013 – 2014

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¹ This handbook is adapted from the University of Victoria TA Handbook. It has been redesigned to suit the needs of graduate student Teaching Assistants in the Department of History. It will always be a work in progress and as a TA, your input is important. If you have comments or questions about the content and format of this handbook, please direct them to the Graduate Director and/or the Teaching Assistant Consultant (see page 4 for contact info).

WELCOME!

Welcome to your role as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in the Department of History at the University of Victoria! You are now part of a team of faculty, staff, and graduate students whose experience and dedication to excellence in education makes for an amazing learning and working environment. As a TA, you are an integral part of the structure of higher education. You will play a hands-on role in the education of students at UVic. The aim of this handbook is to offer some advice to help you along the path to a successful experience in this endeavour.

It has been said that one does not really understand a concept until one has to teach it, and by doing so, one has the chance to learn it a second time. Perhaps this maxim is why those who are pursuing post-graduate studies are often employed as apprentices to the professoriate. A higher degree is often thought of as a qualification to teach at the post-secondary level. Although it is typically necessary, it is fast becoming only one of several qualifications required when considering a career in a college or university setting. Previous teaching experience and training is definitely an asset in the job market. A graduate student's life as a TA can be the start of that experience. Make the most of it!

As a TA in History, your duties will most likely include grading essays or exams, and/or leading discussion groups, tutorials, or seminars. This handbook will provide you with important tips, advice, and guidelines on how to fulfill these important roles.

What are My Responsibilities?

In accepting a job as a TA, you also become an employee. The memorandum you received informing you of your TA assignment outlines the central rights and responsibilities of your new position. In addition, the History Department organizes a TA orientation, which will introduce you to some of the key aspects of your role. The 2-hour orientation session is mandatory for all new TAs. You are also encouraged to attend additional workshops offered by the Teaching Assistant Consultant (TAC) and the Learning and Teaching Centre (LTC). If you attend eight hours of workshops offered by the TAC you will receive a Teaching Assistant Fundamentals Certificate, a valuable recognition of your professional development.

TA as a Teacher

As a teacher you have the moral and legal responsibility to treat all your students fairly, without favouritism or prejudice. Ensure that your language and examples are free of prejudice towards or against gender, race, religion, or ethnic group. All students should have equal opportunity to speak in seminars or to ask questions and to be heard respectfully.

Your most important responsibility is to create the right environment for your students to learn the required skills and knowledge of the course. It is important that you care about your students as learners. Relax and make your classes an enjoyable place to be, and the rest will take care of itself.

Record Keeping

It is important to keep accurate and complete records of any data that are relevant to your role: attendance, participation in seminars, quiz, mid-term, essay and final marks. Whether you keep your grades in digital or hard copy, make sure a duplicate exists in a safe place. Records of any email correspondence between you and your students or between you and the instructor should be kept for the duration of the term. It is important to document all conversations and discussions if you become involved in a grading dispute. This can take the form of notes to yourself including: who was present, date, time, topic of conversation, and what was resolved. Do this as soon as possible to avoid forgetting any details. Only discuss a student's grades in private. Be prepared to explain your grades by showing the student your grading criteria.

- If a student wishes to appeal their grade, ask the student to return the paper/exam in question so that you can review it.
- If the student convinces you that an answer marked wrong is acceptable, acknowledge that you had not thought of that possibility and alter the marks accordingly.
- If the student has not convinced you that a grade change is in order and is not satisfied with your explanation, she/he should be referred to the instructor.
- In the event of an appeal to the instructor, you should first meet (or email) with the instructor without the student present. Explain what happened and provide a written list of events. Thereafter, the responsibility for the outcome lies with the instructor.
- In cases where you suspect academic dishonesty (plagiarism) on assignments, essays or exams, retain the material in question and contact the instructor immediately. The History Department's policy on academic integrity can be found attached to the course syllabus.

TA as an Employee

TAs acquire new rights and professional responsibilities. Take your role as a university teacher and employee seriously: you are a professional, a representative of your university and department, and even your discipline! As an employee, you are a member of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 4163, and your rights are defined in the Collective Agreement. Please review this agreement thoroughly. Before the start of the course, you will need to negotiate the particulars of your appointment with the instructor and sign a contract.

TA as Student Advisor

In the first few years of an undergraduate's life on campus, TAs play a very important role. This may be the only personalized instructor-student contact that a student experiences and the TA's actions can be very influential. One of the advantages TAs have as student advisors is that they are often close to the students in age and experience. With a bit of care, attention, and some friendly questions you can set the tone for a productive interaction.

Remember to treat your students as adults. Do not talk down to students, make fun of them in the lounge (or on Facebook), or complain to them (or others) about how little they know about

history. Students come from a range of academic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. It is your job to set out expectations, work with gaps and limitations in knowledge and show empathy to struggling students. All of the above notwithstanding, you must maintain clear professional boundaries. Do not give out your phone number or dedicate more than your allotted hours to a student, and do not become romantically-involved. You are in a position of power and therefore have a responsibility to take the initiative to avoid conflicts of interest.

TA as Instructor – Student Liaison

The TA is an intermediary between instructor and students and can assist the learning process and flow of information both ways. In most cases, questions about course requirements should be deferred to the instructor. This is to ensure consistency when there may be more than one TA for a given course. TAs can assist instructors by passing on general comments about difficulties students might have in understanding the lectures (too fast, outline unclear etc...).

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GETTING STARTED: A CHECKLIST OF THINGS TO DO

- [] Carefully read TA assignment memorandum and CUPE Agreement.
- [] Attend TA Conference workshops at the Learning and Teaching Centre.
- [] Attend departmental TA orientation and TA workshops offered by the TAC.
- [] Arrange a meeting with instructor.
- [] Meet with instructor to determine specific duties.
- [] Determine basic agreement regarding assignments to be marked, seminars to be led, etc., and the projected amount of time allotted to each task.
- [] Sign the form outlining expectations with the instructor.
- [] Arrange a mid-term check-in meeting.
- [] Ask the instructor to consider providing written feedback on your performance (this can be a useful starting point in building a teaching dossier).
- [] Begin using a day planner to organize and manage schedule.
- [] Arrange peer observations.



TIME MANAGEMENT

Like any employee, you are entitled to limit your work to the hours assigned and paid by the university. Take seriously the contract that you arranged with the instructor and make sure you are allowed enough time to complete the duties you are assigned, including prep work and time in class. Write down the dates and times that you will be in the classroom, take note of the due dates of any assignments that you will be grading, and confirm these with the instructor. If you find that you require more time than there are hours allotted, or if there are conflicts in your schedule, discuss the problem with the instructor. If this does not work, speak to the department chair and, if all else fails, you can follow the university grievance procedure.

Many TAs report that time management is a source of problems and frustration, and it is easy to see why: you are faced with a wide diversity of complex tasks, switching frequently among them; and, there is often a noticeable lack of imposed structure in the daily life of a graduate student. This openness and freedom is one of the great things about graduate school, but it makes time management especially critical to your success. Your TAC will likely provide a time management workshop early in the first term, but below are a few tips to get you started.

Setting Priorities and Goals

One way to plan, and achieve your goals, is to establish your priorities ahead of time. What is really important to you? That way, you'll know where you will want to invest your time and effort. Develop goals for specific activities (e.g. teaching, research, volunteering, etc.) Where do you expect to be in terms of your goals a year from now? A month from now? A day from now?

Planning

It may be useful to make these goals as explicit as possible; write them in terms of specific tasks to be done and estimates of the time it will take to do each task. Composing and seeing written goals (e.g. "To Do List") helps one to give proper consideration to all goals, and to be more realistic. Often, the best plans go awry, and failure to follow through on plans may foster frustration, guilt, and a tendency to procrastinate. Acknowledge that this may happen and re-evaluate your goals to see where you can improve on your planning for the future.

Keeping Track

Time management requires record keeping and reflection on attainment of personal goals. Some people find it helpful to keep a simple list of their accomplishments, and then to review the list at the end of the day to assess progress and to fine tune strategies for the next day. In particular, watch out for less important but straightforward tasks taking priority over more important, complex or difficult tasks. Some graduate students keep track of the minutes spent reading or the number of words written which provides them with objective feedback to gauge their progress. Find a setting that will be free from distractions and interruptions. One hour of uninterrupted work time can be more productive than several hours of interrupted work time.

LEADING DISCUSSION GROUPS, SEMINARS AND TUTORIALS

Pre-class Jitters

It is not uncommon to be nervous prior to leading your first class; even seasoned lecturers can feel the jitters! Remember that even if you don't know everything, you still know more about your subject than the students, so do not doubt your abilities. Nervousness may result in accelerated speech and disorganization, so make a conscious effort to speak at a moderate pace and maintain your focus. You can deal with nervousness by being prepared: know your material and have a strong introduction ready, use visual aids to focus attention away from you, have some water on hand, and think of your anxiety as positive energy. You'll be fine!

First Impressions

Students do a lot of intense processing of the TA in the first class. They are paying more attention to you at this time than at any other time in the course. Their attention is focused at least as much on the manner in which you present the material as it is on the material itself. The first meeting of a class is an important vehicle for getting students on the right track and for establishing your role as a TA beyond merely transmitting information.

Preparation and Goals

A good discussion needs planning - don't try to 'wing it.' Before class, review the material to be discussed and the goals of the seminar and the course. Remind yourself of the points and questions you want to discuss to better keep the discussion on track. Be knowledgeable about the material and expect to answer factual questions. Feel free to ask the instructor for some guidance in preparing for the class.

Keeping the goals of the group in mind is essential to maintaining the direction and focus of the discussion. Seminars are typically organized to discuss assigned readings, to review the material covered in lectures, or to extend or enhance the lecture material. In each case, it is important that students do most of the talking. As TA, you should facilitate the discussion so that everyone has an equal chance to be heard and the discussion stays on track.

Structure

The structure of the seminar will vary according to the needs of the group and the material to be covered. In the case of a session that covers a lot of material, or the members of the group need to develop the necessary skills, it would probably be an advantage to provide a defined structure at the beginning. On the other hand, operating a seminar with a loose and less visible structure encourages the group to select the important ideas and develop more complex thoughts. Even a highly structured plan should leave room for feedback. Remember that the least visible and most powerful structure may be by direction through questions.

Here are some other points to consider:

- You may want to offer some structure options to the group and let them choose the most comfortable format.
- Keep in mind that the needs of the group may change as the course progresses and the skills and confidence of the students increase.
- Consider the needs and interests of the students and the goals of the seminar.
- Tell the students you are not a teacher but a facilitator and that when the seminar is going well, you are redundant.

Arrangement of Furniture

An important and often forgotten aspect of successful seminars is the arrangement of furniture in the classroom. Allow the possibility of breaking up into smaller groups. Arranging chairs in a circle will encourage everyone to participate and to direct the discussion to each other rather than to through you. Avoid having students sitting in rows that face you. This will automatically channel all communication through the TA. Great distances between the participants will also make it difficult to communicate and easier to avoid contributing. Avoid the ‘head-of-the-table’ implication. If the TA sits at one end of a long, rectangular table, the attention tends to focus on that end; often the other end of the table starts their own discussion.

Your Grand Entrance!

It is important that you have a well-kept appearance so as to project the attitude of care for yourself and respect for your students. Introduce yourself and the course you are teaching. Tell them how you wish to be addressed. Most TAs are only a few years older than students in their class and prefer to be called by their first name while others prefer to be addressed more formally (i.e. Mr., Ms.). Your students may not have met a TA before so you may want to explain your role and what parts of the course, and for which grades, you are responsible. You may want to mention why you are teaching the course and/or why you are interested in that particular field of study to break the ice and convey your enthusiasm for the subject.

Establishing a Positive Learning Environment

Undergraduates, particularly in large classes, want reassurance that they are human beings and not simply ID numbers. There is a strong correlation between positive evaluation of the TA and student perceptions that the TA cares about them as individuals. This perception also motivates students to work harder and achieve more. Show students from the very beginning that you view them as individuals and care about them as people. The first and one of the easiest ways to accomplish this is to learn their names as quickly as possible.

Aside from these benefits, there are other reasons to learn students' names. Calling on them by name helps create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere in the classroom and enables you to stimulate class discussion by asking students personally to express their points of view. Also, it

may transform a group of isolated and anonymous individuals into a community of people who cooperatively engage in the exploration of ideas and knowledge. Moreover, it tells students that attendance is important and that you will know if they are not there.

It is important for the TA to assist in the building of a “safe” learning atmosphere. One way to do this is to help the students get to know one another. Warm-up activities are one way to do this. One technique is to have students pair-up and have one introduce the other to the class. There are many other possibilities. Try googling “icebreakers” and see what you can find!

Attitude and Trust

One of the most important elements in running a successful seminar is the personal approach of the TA. Your attitude will affect the dynamics of the group and both the level and quality of participation. A good facilitator’s attitude includes excitement, enthusiasm, confidence, respect and efficiency. To make a seminar work you must create an atmosphere of trust between you and the students and among the students themselves. Bringing some paper and markers so students can make name cards to place in front of them will help everyone learn names. A good facilitator must be open to students' ideas, listen carefully and actively, be sensitive to students' feelings, and encourage and direct students' input.

Participation

In every group there are individuals who are willing to speak out and others who are quiet. It is easy to overlook the silence of some students when there is an abundance of contributions by others. Below are some tips for handling both quiet and domineering students.

- Getting a quiet student to speak out takes patience and understanding.
- Do not attempt to force a shy student to speak by putting him or her on the spot.
- Instead try to encourage a contribution as part of a group activity.
- Look for non-verbal clues that the shy student is willing to answer.
- Breaking the class up into smaller groups will provide a more comfortable situation for her or him to speak in front of fewer people.
- Chat with the student after class and ask how you can help them get more involved.

The opposite of the quiet student is the one who likes to dominate the discussion.

- Without being rude, you can still ask for those students who have already contributed to hold back until others have had a chance.
- Try and chat with the dominating student after class and let them know that you value their input but alert them to the need to allow space for other students to speak.
- One strategy that helps with both problems is to go around the group and give everyone a chance to speak in their turn. With each new topic/question start in a different part of the circle.

- An effective strategy is to establish “ground rules” in the first class. You can ask your students to contribute rules to a list. This gets them invested in the process. You will be surprised how great a list they come up with!

When the flow of discussion stops

There will be lulls in the discussion. Wait a minute or more and allow the students to process the information. Do not be afraid of silence! If the material is covered before the class-time ends, ask the students if there is anything they want to discuss. Have some additional questions of your own to explore other aspects of the material.

Some students come to the seminars having not read the material to be discussed. If several students are unprepared, the discussion is severely hampered. This may be an appropriate point to note the consequences of how being unprepared diminishes the learning experience. One suggestion to ensure preparation is to provide questions on the materials in advance of the seminar and let the group know you will be asking members to answer the questions in class.

If you find that students are always speaking to you instead of each other, they are probably seeking the authority to speak. Whenever someone asks for your opinion or asks a question of you, turn it back to the group and ask for their opinions or comments. Use eye-contact to include others when a student is speaking to you. If the discussion is so far off to make that technique difficult, make a break in the discussion, summarize the relevant comments to that point and ask a question that will bring discussion back to the topic.

Evaluating Student Performance

Frequently you will be called upon to give a grade for students' participation in discussions. If you are basing the mark entirely on the oral contribution in the seminars you should consider the points that contribute to that mark. Avoid giving too much credit to the student who speaks a great deal but contributes little of substance to the discussion. Giving high marks for merely making a quantitative, as opposed to a qualitative contribution, punishes those students who are less talkative or shy. A possible scale for grading participation might be to give 1 point for showing up and allow the students to earn the other 4 points in participation contributions. If the 5-point scale is too restrictive, expand it to 10. Record grades immediately after class when your memory is fresh. You might make subtle notes during class to help your memory but nothing kills a discussion like a TA writing grades while or after a student speaks. Keep any notes in case you are asked to justify your marking at a much later date.

Summary

It is important to summarize the ideas raised throughout the discussion at the end of the class. This helps students organize the issues raised and to create their own perspective. Remember the goal of the seminar. The nature of a good seminar discussion is interaction between the members of the group. Make sure everyone understands the goals of the class, what is

expected of students, and what students can expect of you. If communication exists and students understand expectations and are confident they can meet those expectations, the sessions will be far more relaxed and will invite discussion of interesting ideas.

The Role of Questions

Questions can be seen as tools in the hands of the TA. Questions can be used to generate contributions, breathe new life into a flagging discussion, or increase the intensity by focusing on specific issues. Questions can be used to encourage students who are less aggressive in responding and thus spread the level of participation amongst the group. Used by a skilled TA, they can exploit the full potential of the learning experience and make seminars enjoyable.

Keep the skill and intellectual level of the group in mind when asking questions. The quality of the questions determines the level of discussion and you should try to raise that standard as far as you can to challenge students. It is helpful to vary the types of questions to match the variety of personalities within the group. You may want to deal with students by asking them basic factual questions until they become more comfortable participating in the discussion.

Wait for answers. Periods of silence can be the most difficult aspect of seminars for some facilitators. Some TAs and students alike become very uncomfortable with them. At the same time, students need the time to think before they answer and you should allow them to do so. Waiting a minute or so also provides time for some of the more reticent students to get up the courage to contribute. Below are some useful questioning strategies.

- Ask no more than one question at a time.
- When student questions are desired, request them explicitly, wait, then acknowledge student contributions.
- Change up your questioning style. Instead of always asking if there are any questions, rephrase it as “If I were to ask you to summarize the main points, what would they be?”
- Use a variety of probing and explaining questions:
 - Factual questions (specific information, who, when, where, what?)
 - Divergent questions (no right or wrong answers necessarily)
 - Probing questions (build on student's response)
 - Higher order questions (more analysis from the student).
- Ask a provocative question – perhaps based on a short description of a theory.
- Pose a question that is based on a common experience of the group.
- Brainstorm an issue, ask the students for ideas to be discussed, write these on the board.
- Divide the group into subgroups and organize a debate over the issues.

As the session progresses, narrow the general questions to more specific ones. Encourage all answers and remain open-minded, but try to keep the discussion within the context of your goals. You do not want the students to look to your authority to speak, so keep out of the discussion as much as possible; invite and allow the students to interact with each other.

Problem Questions

Dr. Maryellen Weimer, editor of *The Teaching Professor*, suggests the following techniques for fielding problem questions from students:

- The question you can't understand – Ask the student to repeat or rephrase the question. Don't imply that you think it's a silly or stupid question. If you continue not to comprehend, enlist the aid of the class, or apologize to the student and suggest you need to tackle the question after class.
- The question that is irrelevant – Recognize the intrinsic value of the question when responding to the student, but don't get the class off track by answering it now. If you can legitimately consider it later in the course, tell the student when to expect an answer. You get even more points on that day if you can look at the student and say, "Remember that question you asked about heat transfer in cast iron?"
- The question you can't answer – It's tempting to fake it to satisfy the student with fine-sounding terms and vocal authority. You set an example when you return to class with reference materials that contain the answer.
- The question that is obvious – Take, for example, the student who asks a question you spent fifteen minutes answering in class yesterday and the student was in class. Is it right to take valuable class time to answer for one person in class what 86% of everybody else present already knows? Consider alternative ways in which you might address this but recognizing that it is still a valid question. Ridicule only discourages others from asking more relevant questions.
- Questions that challenge your authority – Stay calm! Give the student as honest and reasoned an answer to the question as you can. Frequently such questions reflect a much deeper opinion of the way things happen in the academic world. You may politely decline the opportunity to debate or reschedule the discussion outside of class time. Playing out teacher-student altercations in public should be avoided. Assert your authority in a calm and respectful way. Restate your position and the policy or rationale that supports it. Tell the student that there are alternative avenues to explore (e.g., professor or chair) but you will not be using class time to discuss it further.

GRADING ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

Grading is a very important communication tool between student and instructor. To students, grades communicate how one is doing in accordance with the standards expected in the course. To the instructor, grades provide the reference for improving the teaching method for assisting students' understanding. In addition, they communicate similar information to others who need to make an evaluation of the student.

High grades are expected of students trying to get into honours or graduate programs or in competition for scholarships. On the other hand, low grades can be grounds for dismissing a student from an academic program. Although the marking of papers and exam questions share a great deal, there are some differences. This section focuses mainly on the marking of papers, but much of the information can be applied to exam questions.

Setting Standards

Because grades are so important, you should make every effort to be fair and consistent. You can begin by talking with the instructor because it is she/he who is ultimately responsible for setting the marking standards in the course. Ask if there is a particular grading rubric you are required or advised to use. After you are aware of the guidelines you should communicate with other TAs in the course (if there is more than one) on a regular basis to ensure your marking is consistent.

If you have doubts about the standard with which you are working, ask the instructor to review the first few you marked. The instructor should also let you know the form of the grades. Some will ask for a percentage mark, some will ask for a letter grade. Many professors will mark some assignments with you so you can establish a common standard. Don't be afraid to ask!

How to Begin

Begin by previewing the papers, that is, read a few quickly without marking – just to become familiar with the standard you can expect of them. Be prepared to adjust your marking guide at this stage, in case you have made a mistake. As you begin to mark be prepared to take frequent breaks. It is likely that you will become tired or bored as you progress and your standards will change as a result. Taking breaks provides some protection against differing standards.

Rather than burdening yourself with extra work and filling the pages of the papers with redundant remarks, it is advisable to pick one or two pages in which you mark everything in detail and write a note that you have done so. Most repeated spelling and grammatical errors will be caught and the point will be made about the need for proper style. It saves you work and the student the ego-deflating experience of looking at a paper filled with criticisms. You should put the grade on the last page of the paper or add a separate page of comments. A student's grade is not for public consumption.

The Holistic Approach

When using even the most holistic approach to marking, you need to have something particular to which you can attend and you may ask, what am I looking for? Of course, you should begin by checking with the instructor; he or she may have particular points of interest to be noted. Essentially, one should examine style (how it is said) and content (what is said).

Points in style include basic grammar and spelling. Although most graduate students are good writers, it is also true that many cannot remember why they write as they do, thus it cannot hurt to review a writing manual to refresh oneself of the rules. The *History Department Style Guide* is based on the *Chicago Manual of Style* and is the standard manual for History courses at UVic. Style also includes sentence and paragraph structure, vocabulary, and organization. Organization includes a strong thesis, the introduction, conclusion, and a logical organization of the points to be argued.

Points in content include a familiarity with the material, incorporation of examples to illustrate or support the argument, and identification and analysis of the issues. A good paper will be strong in all points, but exam questions are often marked with a degree of leniency in the style. The instructor is required to clarify any confusion about the standards expected of students.

Feedback Comments

Comments provide the necessary feedback for learning. The comments should be as plentiful as time allows, but not repetitive. They should address the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and offer suggestions for improvement. The criticism should be constructive and accompanied by positive feedback. Avoid at all costs the use of sarcasm or humor. The humor will likely be misunderstood in the context and, like the sarcasm, be taken as hurtful and the result will be alienation, not a learning experience. Do not use red pen. Instead, use pencil so you can also correct your own mistakes.

Many standard problems can be identified with short appropriate phrases referring to the *Style Guide*, e.g.: "run-on sentence." Many others can be common abbreviations such as "sp" for a spelling error. Allow the student to seek out the proper form of the identified problems of style. Many new markers have a tendency to edit everything in the paper. Make extensive comments on the best and worst aspects of the paper and use shorter remarks for less notable aspects.

Assigning Grades

After you have assigned a mark, you may want to pile the papers according to the A's, B's, etc. and quickly review each pile. This will help with consistency. What does each grade mean? Keep in mind that what is considered 'mastery' or 'acceptable' in a first year course is different from a second, third or fourth year class. One pattern among first time markers is that they tend to mark too harshly. This may be the result of using their own expectations of themselves as their standards. In a large class it would be unusual if there were not some A students, even the occasional A+, just as it would be unusual not to have any Ds.

Returning Papers

Normally, all written work is to be returned to students with the exception of final exams. It should be returned in such a fashion that does not allow another student access to the comments or marks. This means that you must not leave a pile unattended for the students to

pick up at random. In most cases, you will return graded work to the instructor, who will then return it to students in the class.

GETTING FEEDBACK AND IMPROVING YOUR TEACHING

Being TA is a learning experience, and learning requires feedback. Look for feedback from as many sources as possible: faculty, peers and students. You may also consider inviting others unrelated to the course to come along and comment on your efforts that day. The LTC publishes a helpful pamphlet, *Formative Feedback for Teaching Assistants (TAs) at UVic*. You can pick this up at the LTC, or ask your TAC for a copy.

Self-Evaluation

You should be doing a regular self-evaluation. Ideally this might be a written log of your teaching times, but it might also just be a period of reflection. Are you achieving the goals set out in the course outline, syllabus or lesson plan? Are you finding that you are running out of time? Do you think that your students understand the main ideas the professor wanted conveyed? Are you more self-assured with the passage of time?

Student Feedback

You can judge your own performance by gathering "mid-term formative feedback" through a short questionnaire. Make sure the questionnaires are anonymous and cannot affect student grades so that you get honest feedback. State your purpose: to evaluate your own performance so that you may improve in the rest of the semester. What do your students like or dislike about the class? How can you improve? Ask three or four brief questions. You do not have to submit these questionnaires to the instructor, but you might wish to notify him or her you are asking your students for comments on your performance.

Feedback from Peers and the TAC

Often it is less nerve-racking to ask a friend or fellow student rather than the instructor to sit in on your class, and to give you feedback. Ask for comments on your appearance, posture, command of the subject, teaching style and ability to communicate. Your TAC can provide you with forms and guidelines to facilitate the peer review process. In addition, the TAC is available to observe your teaching in a non-evaluative capacity.

Feedback from the Instructor

It is helpful for future employment prospects if the instructor can observe your performance. Two visits are better than one, because improvement can only be noted if the instructor returns to your class later in the term. What they should be observing should be mutually agreed upon ahead of time. The instructor should look at your teaching style, student response and the

overall performance. These observations can be informal and not part of anything kept on file, or, you can ask for a formal evaluation to be kept on file for future reference. If your department keeps records on your teaching performance they will be kept completely separate from your own academic file and strictly confidential.

Using Feedback from Students

If mid-term feedback prompted you to change something, tell the instructor or the students who have helped you make this change. This will communicate that you have listened to their comments and appreciate their help. To have these changes documented might be useful when you construct a teaching dossier. If the observations suggest an aspect of your teaching needs to be improved, but you're not sure how, contact the TAC, Graduate Director, or LTC for advice.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learning Skills Programs <<http://www.coun.uvic.ca/learning/index.html>>

The Learning Skills Program assists students in the development and practice of efficient study techniques, learning methods, and high-level thinking skills that are important for success. They also provide consultation for faculty with regard to issues of learning and student success.

The Writing Centre <<http://ltc.uvic.ca/servicesprograms/twc.php>>

The Writing Centre (TWC) provides one-to-one writing support for students of all levels of writing. Students are encouraged to see a tutor while an assignment is in process and after an assignment is graded in order to review the TA's or instructor's feedback. TWC's goal is to help students improve their writing skills not on any one piece of writing, but in general. Workshops on common writing difficulties are held periodically.

ESL Courses and English Language Centre <<http://www.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/>>

UVic's English Language Centre (ELC) offers a unique opportunity for international students to improve their English for work, travel, or further study. They offer a number of courses and programs for students who want to improve their communication skills.

UVIC Graduate Students' Society (GSS)

The GSS is an autonomous, not-for-profit body that strives to promote the interests, and represent the views of graduate students at the University of Victoria. All of their services and programs are outlined in the annual GSS Handbook & Daily Planner.

Counselling Services <<http://www.coun.uvic.ca/>>

The mission of Counseling Services is to help students, faculty, and staff gain all they can from their experience at UVic. This may involve helping with personal, learning, and career concerns, and promoting success and wellness. They offer confidential, individual counseling. As well as courses, groups, and workshops designed to foster the development and practice of useful skills. A broad range of resources and materials are provided. Except for a nominal charge for some tests and courses, the services are free of charge.

Mental Health Needs/Student Health <<http://health.uvic.ca/>>

This is a drop-in clinic. Appointments are required for specialists only. Patients are seen on a first-come, first-serve basis. Of course, emergencies will take priority. Most of the time patients do not wait longer than 20 minutes but, just in case, bring a book or something to help pass the time. Student medical records are confidential and are not released to anyone without the written consent of the student unless otherwise required by law and in matters of public health. University Health Services invites suggestions for change, growth or improvement from all students. Address: The Jack Petersen Health Centre 3800 Finnerty Rd. Victoria, BC V8P 5C2.

Resource Centre for Students with a Disability <<http://rcsd.uvic.ca/>>

Their web site has been designed to acquaint you with the services and facilities available to students with a disability at the University of Victoria. All students with a disability are encouraged to make themselves familiar with this office at the beginning of their studies.

Learning & Teaching Centre <<http://ltc.uvic.ca/>>

The role of The Learning and Teaching Centre is to support and enhance the professional development efforts of faculty and teaching assistants and to increase awareness of current research and strategies related to teaching and learning in higher education. The goal is to offer resources, consultation, and a forum for discussion to help instructors provide a valuable learning experience to all students. You are welcome and encouraged to make use of the LTC and its facilities.