

Incorporating sustained community building in graduate TA experience

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Introduction

We will follow the path a graduate TA can take:

- On Arrival
- Early In-Service
- Late In-Service



What we will highlight along the way:

- Sustainability and reproducibility
- These remarks are **bolded**

Some things that you might look for:

- Multiple entry points for TAs
- Explicit positions and compensation

On Arrival

New grad student summer panel

- Optional Zoom panel during the summer before arrival
- Panelists (4) chosen to be nice grad students
 - The group is as diverse as possible along as many axes as feasible
 - The group is chosen to correct misconceptions about math culture (eg. work/life balance)
- Preset questions chosen to provide a sense of the community
- **It is part of a TA job to organize this event**
- **The panelists are given gift cards**

On Arrival

TA Training

- Advertised as TA training, but goals are bigger
- Technical skills are practiced in online pre-work
- Two day in person training focuses on developing:
 - soft skills (eg. communication, inclusive teaching, etc)
 - cohort community (eg. community guidelines, group outings, etc)
- Consulted with UBC E&I Office to redesign around EDI
- **TA Training is permanent, mandatory and valued by the department**
- **Lesson plans are well established, so energy can be put towards community building**

Early in-service

Mentoring for first year graduate students

- Check-ins:
 - What it looks like: a walk and chat
 - Questions: How are you doing? Do you like your TA? How are your classes going? Do you need anything?
 - Under the surface: give students an opportunity to ask for help, develop a sense of student wellbeing, catch any TA issues, provide access to resources & people, identify students who seem interested in teaching/facilitation
 - Provides a more informal one-on-one experience
 - **This is someone's TA job (me!)**
- Training for the tutoring centre
 - Facilitated reflection during a tutoring centre shift
 - **This is someone's TA job (me!)**

Early in-service

Workshops

- One-off workshops (facilitative teaching, marking, talking to supervisors, etc)
 - 1-2 hours (with lunch or dinner or snacks)
- Math department specific Instructional Skills Workshop
 - 3 day workshop
- **Pay facilitators**
- **Collect and share resources & lesson plans**
- **Program planning at beginning of each year**

Reading groups

- Includes faculty, graduate students, and undergrads
- **Reproducibility: :)**

Late in-service

Senior grad students engage flexibly with the community

- Take high responsibility jobs (eg. instructor, head TA)
 - Structures for community with other instructors (eg. meetings, slack)
 - Now working with undergraduate TAs
 - Can provide implicit or explicit mentorship
 - **These jobs exist as part of running courses, but coordinators must foster community**
- Engage with training across the university
 - UBC's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology has advanced workshops and courses
 - **Uses existing resources for PD and taps into existing communities**
 - **Funding provided for registration fees**

Late in-service

Some graduate students build the community


- Facilitate small events
 - One-off PD workshops, group outings in TA training, panelist/moderator at Q&A
 - **Provides a low commitment way for senior students to start getting involved**
- Facilitate TA training and/or Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW)
 - We use an apprenticeship model to onboard new TA Training facilitators
 - Facilitating the ISW requires a 5 day workshop (centrally run)
 - Facilitators can be hired by the learning centre in addition to math
 - **We maintain a folder of previously used lesson plans**
 - **Early in-service workshops ensure we can continually build the team of facilitators**

Summary of themes

- **Reproducibility**
 - Use existing, stable structures
 - Make it someone's job
 - Collect resources and manage them explicitly
- **Multiple entry points**
 - Different levels of time commitment/engagement
 - Both formal and informal activities
- **Shaping community**
 - Constant recruitment of people to get involved
 - Attention to the human aspects: all events must have snacks
 - Actively develop a healthy community culture, rather than merely building opportunities for community to form

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*Do any of your points
resonate with ours?
Anything we've missed?*

Questions

Appendix

Q&A Questions for intro panel

0. What did your first year of grad school look like? What did you do during the term vs during the summer?
 1. What would you want to tell yourself when you were first starting grad school?
 2. How do you split your time between courses/TA/research? How do you involve your supervisor in that decision?
 3. How did you decide which courses to take in your first year?
 4. Are your friends mostly other math grad students or other people? How did you meet your friends?
 5. What do you do to cope when things are tough?
 6. What does research look like during the summer? Do you work with your supervisor or someone else? Do you work remotely?
 7. What do you like and dislike about where you live? (and how did you find it?)

TA Training Schedule

DAY 1

Breakfast

Icebreaker

Welcome

Expectations & Communication

Marking

Expectations & Diversity

Lunch

Meet the Department VIPs

Break & Feedback

Campus Tour & Small Group Snack Trips

DAY 2

Breakfast

Icebreaker

Welcome

E&D continued

Break

Facilitative Teaching

Lunch

Small group facilitation practice

Snack Break

Small group facilitation practice

Wrap-up & Feedback