

# TA decision guide

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## 

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This document assists all TAs with supporting students who may be in the following situations. For each situation, required or recommended actions are specified. Where indicated, some reporting is mandatory as designated employees. If there are questions regarding the required and/or recommended action steps, please contact the support service referenced. Support services for HSC whose contact information differs from UPC are indicated, otherwise the contact information is the same for both campuses. Online faculty and students might never physically visit USC and may be in different time zones; they will access support resources by phone or email options unless otherwise indicated.

### Emergency Contacts

* Department of Public Safety, University Park Campus (UPC), phone 213-740-4321
* Department of Public Safety, Health Sciences Campus (HSC), phone 323-442-1000

### Support and information at a glance

* [Campus Support and Intervention](https://campussupport.usc.edu/), phone 213-740-0411, email [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu)
* [Office of the Ombuds](https://ombuds.usc.edu/), phone UPC: 213-821-9556, phone HSC: 323-442-0382; UPC email: upcombuds@usc.edu; HSC email: hscombuds@usc.edu
* [Office of Professionalism and Ethics](https://report.usc.edu/), phone USC Help & Hotline 213-740-2500 or 800-348-7454, email ope@usc.edu
* [Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX](https://eeotix.usc.edu/) (EEO-TIX), phone 213-740-5086, email eeotix@usc.edu.
* [Office of Student Accessibility Services](https://osas.usc.edu/), phone 213-740-0776, email sasfrntd@usc.edu.
* [Cardinal Folder](https://issuu.com/uscedu/docs/cardinal-folder_for_issuu_feb_12__2020?fr=sYzc5NDI4MDYyNQ), includes information about emergency response and reporting
* [Gold Folder](https://issuu.com/uscedu/docs/gold-folder_for_issuu_feb_12__2020?fr=sM2ZmNjI4MDYyNQ), includes information supporting student well-being

* [USC Faculty Handbook](https://policy.usc.edu/faculty-handbook/)
* [USC Curriculum Handbook](https://arr.usc.edu/faculty-staff/curriculum/resources/)
* [USC Grading and Correction of Grades](https://arr.usc.edu/faculty-staff/grades/grading-correction-of-grades/#:~:text=Correction%20of%20Grade%20Process,to%20discuss%20the%20assigned%20grade.)
* [Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](https://policy.usc.edu/studenthandbook/)

### Emergencies

You witness, or student reports, an emergency.

* Call USC Department of Public Safety at (213) 740-4321 (UPC emergency) and/or report the emergency through the LiveSafe app.
* In addition to medical emergencies, other emergencies include active shooter, natural disasters, accidents, gas leaks, suspicious packages, suspicious, disruptive and threatening behavior, etc.
* Online students witnessing an emergency should call local authorities.

### Disruptive or threatening behavior scenario and action steps

Student is repeatedly disruptive in class, harasses TA or classmates, uses verbal or physical threats, or exhibits other inappropriate behavior.

* If the situation is life-threatening or an immediate physical threat, call DPS at (213) 740-4321 (UPC emergency) or report via the LiveSafe app. Doing so may also result in the matter being forwarded to the [Office of Community Expectations (OCE)](https://communityexpectations.usc.edu/).
* Otherwise, use informal resolution first to remind students of course guidelines/policies, in private rather than in front of other students. Refer to the [USC Integrity and Accountability Code](https://policy.usc.edu/code-of-ethics/) for additional support and information about USC’s Unifying Values. If the situation escalates, contact Campus Support and Intervention at [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu) or (213) 740-0411 or in RTCC 421. Document all incidents with dates, times, descriptions, and possible witnesses.
* For more detailed steps, refer to the [Cardinal and Gold Folders](https://employees.usc.edu/cardinal-folder-gold-folder/) or the Chief Threat Assessment Officer in the Office of Campus Wellness and Crisis Intervention at (213) 740-0243.
* And consult with the Office of Community Expectations (213) 821-7373 / [communityexpectations@usc.edu](mailto:communityexpectations@usc.edu) for additional support.

### Accommodation request scenarios and action steps

#### Disability-related accommodation requests

Student would like to negotiate an accommodation based on a self-reported need (Example: requests extra time on test due to self-reported learning disabilities).

* Refer the student to the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) in GFS 120 at (213) 740-0776 or [sasfrntd@usc.edu](mailto:sasfrntd@usc.edu). In order for disability-related accommodations to be provided in classes, OSAS must formally approve them, and students must present a letter of accommodation to provide to their instructors in a timely manner. Self-report of conditions and requests for accommodations directly to instructors/TAs may not align with the University’s documentation procedures related to accommodation requests.
* If the student is an athlete, also have them contact their advisor in Student-Athlete Academic Services at saas.usc.edu, (213) 740-3801 or go to the John McKay Center (JMC) 102.

Student provides you with an official accommodation letter from OSAS.

* Accept letter. Ask student if they have also provided a letter to the instructor. Encourage them to do so if they have not. Accommodation letters should be viewed as private and shared on a need-to-know basis with TAs who are directly providing accommodations for the specified class. Otherwise, do not share information. Implement the required accommodation from the time of receipt of the letter. Contact OSAS for assistance at (213) 740-0776 or [sasfrntd@usc.edu](mailto:sasfrntd@usc.edu)

#### Personal emergency accommodation request

Student requests a one-time accommodation due to an emergency (Example: submit late work due to illness or death in the family).

* Refer to course policy in the syllabus to confirm professor’s instructions on such matters. Comply with student request if course policy allows. Inform instructor by email of the request and your decision to accommodate it per course policy. If course policy is unclear, refer student directly to the instructor and follow instructor’s decision on the matter. Encourage student to contact Campus Support and Intervention [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu) or (213) 740-0411 or in RTCC 421 for crisis and medical absence support.

#### Harassment, assault, or violence accommodation request

Student requests an accommodation and reveals it is needed due to sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, stalking, dating or domestic violence.

* Do not promise confidentiality and do not investigate. Be supportive and calm. Remind student of your desire to support them as well as your obligation to report any information they shared with you involving sexual misconduct to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX Office, EEO-TIX, at (213) 740-5086 or [eeotix@usc.edu](mailto:eeotix@usc.edu) as it is required for TA’s as Designated Employees under the University’s [Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation](https://eeotix.usc.edu/policy/). Let students know this is to ensure they are aware of their rights and resources so that they can make informed decisions, as well as to ensure their and other community members’ safety. Keep information shared as private as possible. The EEO-TIX Office will send the student an outreach email outlining the student’s reporting options and available services, invite them to a meeting, and coordinate any needed accommodations for the student. Do not investigate further. Share information about [Confidential and Private Resources](https://eeotix.usc.edu/report/confidential-and-private-resources/).
* If a student does not want to continue the conversation because it is your obligation to report it, refer them to confidential options such as RSVP (see below). You still must, however, contact EEO-TIX to share any information you know, even if you do not know the name of the alleged perpetrator.
* Encourage student to contact/visit Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP). Offer to call RSVP with the student at (213) 740-4900 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including on University Holidays). Offer to escort student to RSVP at the Engemann Student Health Center (ESH 356). RSVP is a confidential resource for the student disclosure, but RSVP will remind TA of duty to inform EEO-TIX.
* For online students that are not available to physically access RSVP, they may request a phone consultation at (213) 740-4900 to learn about resources, accommodations, and reporting. RSVP can provide assistance in finding advocacy and support services near their home.

#### Athletic accommodation request

Student athlete provides a Travel Excuse Letter and requests accommodations based only on it (Example: make up missed test or quiz).

* Decisions for this type of accommodation are at the instructor’s discretion. Assist the students with contacting the instructor directly with the request. Contact the instructor directly to stay informed of the instructor’s decision if it affects student work overseen by the TA. For more information, contact Student-Athlete Academic Services (213) 740-3801 at the John McKay Center (JMC) 102.  The Student-Athlete’s specific advisor is also listed on the travel letter with contact information.  More information could also be found at [saas.usc.edu](http://saas.usc.edu/).
* It is the student athlete’s responsibility to provide a Travel Request Letter at least one week prior to a competition, unless qualifying for certain competitions doesn’t occur within that time frame. The student is responsible to reach out to the professor and TA at least a week before to have the conversation about a possible competition resulting in missed class time if an official travel letter cannot be generated at that time. Once eligibility for the competition has been determined, they will follow up with the official letter asap.

#### Religious accommodation request

Student requests an accommodation due to religious reasons (Example: making up a test due to missing a class for religious observation).

* Decisions for this type of accommodation are made by the instructor in accordance with the [University policy on absences](https://orsl.usc.edu/life/calendar/absences/) related to observance of [religious holy days.](https://orsl.usc.edu/life/calendar/) . Assist the students with contacting the instructor directly with the request. Contact the instructor directly to stay informed of the instructor’s decision if it affects student work overseen by the TA.
* A student should contact the instructor 2 weeks in advance to request such an excused absence.

### Academic request scenarios and action steps

#### Coursework

Student confides difficulties with academic load, keeping up with coursework, or questions about declaring or changing major.

* Encourage students to contact [Undergraduate Support Services](https://undergrad.usc.edu/). Services include academic counseling, free tutoring, and organizational and time management.
* Online students are encouraged to contact their academic advisor or student support advisor and visit online resources from the [Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity](https://kortschakcenter.usc.edu/).
* If the student is an athlete, refer them to their academic advisor at Student-Athlete Academic Services, saas.usc.edu, (213) 740-3801 or to the John McKay Center (JMC) 102.
* If a disability is disclosed, refer the student to the Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) in GFS 120 at (213) 740-0776 or [sasfrntd@usc.edu](mailto:sasfrntd@usc.edu) to discuss potential needs.

#### Academic integrity violation

Student violates academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating, collaboration, fabrication, etc.).

* Do not promise confidentiality as it is required to notify the instructor of the student’s violation.
* All reports of academic misconduct should be reported to the [Office of Academic Integrity (OAI)](mailto:academicintegrity@usc.edu) in a timely manner.
* If the observed behavior is during a quiz or exam, document the observations and allow the student to complete the assignment. If possible, seek additional witnesses to confirm the TAs observations. Submit all documentation to the instructor of record.
* Refer the student to the instructor and provide the instructor with supporting evidence of the student’s violation.
* The instructor will determine the appropriate next steps, often per departmental policy, but sometimes also based on TA input/recommendations. The instructor may also ask the TA for assistance in meeting with the student and/or reporting students to the [Office of Academic Integrity](https://academicintegrity.usc.edu/).
* The Office of Academic Integrity manages reports for graduate and undergraduate students at the university.

### Personal matters and crisis request scenarios and action steps

#### Health

Student confides personal matter related to mental health status, family or relationship troubles, substance abuse, food insecurity, homelessness, natural disaster, etc.

* If the student is an immediate threat to self or others, or exhibits high levels of distress, call Department of Public Safety DPS (213) 740-4321 (UPC emergency) or via the LiveSafe app, and then Counseling and Mental Health Services at (213) 740-9355. Document all concerning behaviors, interactions, and steps taken. Do not guarantee confidentiality, as it is mandatory for TAs to report as indicated above when students are threats to themselves or others. If the student poses a threat to others, notification should also be made to Threat Assessment and Management (213) 740-0243.
* Otherwise, encourage student to contact/visit Counseling and Mental Health (CMH) Services. Offer to call CMH with the student (213) 740- 9355 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including University Holidays) or call the National Suicide Prevention hotline (800) 273-8255. Offer to escort the student to CMH at the Engemann Student Health Center (ESH 3rd floor). Encourage [online students to make an appointment](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/making-an-appointment/online-students/) (California residents may also be eligible for Telehealth services).
* Or encourage the student to contact/escort student to Campus Support and Intervention at [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu) or (213) 740-0411 or in RTCC 421.
* If the student confides by email (Example: can’t attend class because they are depressed), reply to the student with contact information for Counseling and Mental Health (213) 740- 9355 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including University Holidays) in ESH 3rd floor, and Campus Support and Intervention at [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu) or (213) 740-0411 821-4710 or in RTCC 421. You may also refer the student to Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) to see if they qualify for academic accommodations at (213) 740-0776 or [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).
* TAs are encouraged to call Counseling and Mental Health (213) 740-9355 for support and consultation on how to speak with the student or manage a situation.

Student confides personal matter related to physical health status.

* Encourage student to contact/visit USC Health Center at (213) 740-9355 or by making a non-emergency appointment via their My Student Health Record Portal (MySHR). For sudden and severe symptoms, assist the student to reach the after-hours advice nurse at (213) 740-9355, option 1. If the matter is an emergency, call DPS (213) 740-4321 or via the LiveSafe App.
* Online students should be encouraged to contact their primary care provider for a non-emergency or, if the matter is an emergency, to go to a local emergency room. Provide online students [information about their access and coverage options through USC](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/).

#### Harassment, assault, or violence

Student confides personal matter related to being a victim of a crime (but not involving sexual assault, stalking, dating or domestic violence, or any other protected characteristic, such as race, religion, etc.).

* Encourage student to contact/visit the Department of Public Safety (DPS). Offer to call DPS at (213) 740-4321 (UPC emergency) or (213) 740-6000 (UPC non-emergency) with the student or use the LiveSafe app for reporting. Offer to escort student to DPS in the Downey Way Parking Structure (formerly Parking Structure A) on UPC. Encourage online students to report the crime to their local authorities.
* Encourage student to contact/visit Counseling and Mental Health (CMH) Services. Offer to call CMH with the student (213) 740- 9355 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including University Holidays).

Student confides personal matter related to sexual or gender-based harassment, sexual assault, stalking, or dating or domestic violence.

* **Do not promise confidentiality and do not investigate**. Be supportive and calm. Remind student of your desire to support them as well as your obligation to report any information they shared with you involving sexual misconduct to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX Office, EEO-TIX, at (213) 740-5086 or [eeotix@usc.edu](mailto:eeotix@usc.edu) as it is required for TAs as Designated Employees under the University’s [Policy on Prohibited Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation](https://eeotix.usc.edu/policy/). Let students know this is to ensure they are aware of their rights and resources so that they can make informed decisions, as well as to ensure their and other community members’ safety. Keep information shared as private as possible. The EEO-TIX Office will send the student an outreach email outlining the student’s reporting options and available services, invite them to a meeting, and coordinate any needed accommodations for the student. Do not investigate further. Share information about [Confidential and Private Resources](https://eeotix.usc.edu/report/confidential-and-private-resources/).
* If a student does not want to continue the conversation because it is your obligation to report it, refer them to confidential options such as RSVP (see below). You still must, however, contact EEO-TIX to share any information you know, even if you do not know the name of the alleged perpetrator.
* Encourage student to contact/visit Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP). Offer to call RSVP with the student at (213) 740-4900 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including on University Holidays). Offer to escort student to RSVP at the Engemann Student Health Center (ESH 356). RSVP is a confidential resource for the student disclosure, but RSVP will remind TA of duty to inform EEO-TIX.
* For online students that are not available to physically access RSVP, they may request a phone consultation at (213) 740-4900 to learn about resources, accommodations, and reporting. RSVP can provide assistance in finding advocacy and support services near their home.

Student confides about a bias or hate incident, discrimination, or harassment related to a protected characteristic (e.g., race, religion, disability).

* In the event of imminent threat or endangerment, report to DPS (213) 740-4321 (UPC emergency) or via the LiveSafe app only.
* Otherwise, do not promise confidentiality and do not investigate. Remind student you support them and of your obligation to document and forward the information shared with the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX Office, EEO-TIX, at (213) 740-5086 or [eeotix@usc.edu](mailto:eeotix@usc.edu) as it is required for TAs as designated employees, even if the student states they already have reported the incident. Keep information shared as private as possible. The EEO-TIX Office will send the student an outreach email with available services, invite them to a meeting, and coordinate any needed accommodations for the student.
* If a student does not want to continue the conversation because it is your duty to report it, then refer them to confidential options, such as the Counseling Center (213) 740-7711 or the Office of the Ombuds, phone UPC: 213-821-9556, phone HSC: 323-442-0382; UPC email: [upcombuds@usc.edu](mailto:upcombuds@usc.edu); HSC email: [hscombuds@usc.edu](mailto:hscombuds@usc.edu)

#### Concern for a USC community member

A student confides concern about a USC community member (faculty, staff, or student), or you are concerned about a student’s personal problems, but the student with the potential problem has not requested help.

* Encourage the student to privately and anonymously submit an online CARE report about the USC community member through Trojans Care for Trojans (TC4T) or inform Campus Support and Intervention at [uscsupport@usc.edu](mailto:uscsupport@usc.edu) or (213) 740-0411 or in RTCC 421. Do not approach the student with a speculated diagnosis.
* If concerned about possible trauma or abuse, contact Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) (213) 740-9355 (24hr access to a licensed mental health professional, including on University Holidays) or at the Engemann Student Health Center (ESH 356) for consultation or a reach out. Bias, hate, discrimination, or harassment incident

### Family educational rights and privacy act (FERPA) related request scenarios and action steps

Student’s classmate/friend or relative would like information on the student, or a student would like information about a classmate/friend.

* Explain to the person requesting information that, per FERPA, information related to a student’s grades, GPA, etc. is private information (part of their educational record) and may not be released to a third party without the student’s consent. Refer them back to the student to seek a signed, written release. More information can be found by visiting [General Information - FERPA - Office of Academic Records and Registrar](http://arr.usc.edu/records/ferpa/).

Another TA would like to publicly announce or post students’ grades on an assignment/assessment or leave graded assignments in a public area (such as an envelope on an office door) for student pickup.

* Remind the TA that these practices would be in violation of FERPA because such actions would breach student data privacy. This includes the posting of such data to possibly unsecure, non-USC password protected sites.
* Refer back to the [online FERPA tutorial](https://ferpa.usc.edu/default?ReturnUrl=%2f) that all those working with student data should complete.

### Grade appeal request scenarios and action steps

Student asks for a grade change on an assignment grade given by the instructor or TA.

* Consider student request. If TA-assigned grade was in error, correct the grade for the student and all other affected students. If the grade was not in error, explain why the request is denied, but inform student they may appeal to the instructor (see next scenario).

Student contests an assignment grade given by the TA and requests instructor change it when the TA won’t.

* Document student’s appeal and inform instructor by email. Provide instructor evidence/explanation for your grading decision and refusal to change grade. Offer to meet with the student again with the instructor if the instructor deems in necessary.

Student contests final course grade.

* Report student’s appeal to instructor by email. If contestation is based on TA-graded assignments as well, provide evidence/explanation for your grading decision to instructor. Refer student to instructor. Only the instructor or the departmental Change of Grade coordinator, if authorized by the instructor, may request a Change of Grade form. For more information, visit the [Office of Academic Records and Registrar](https://arr.usc.edu/services/grades/gradinghandbook/gradecorrection.html).

Student requests extra credit or assignments to raise grade.

* Follow the instructor policy on extra credit stated in the course syllabus. If the policy isn’t states, or is unclear, refer student to instructor. Follow up with instructor if decision affects student work overseen by TA.

### Request from someone in a position of authority

Someone in a position of authority asks you to respond to one of the listed situations in a manner deviating from the stated, recommended/required action steps, and you question/feel uncomfortable about whether you should (Examples: supervisor asks you to negotiate an accommodation, or further investigate a report of assault, etc.).

* Contact the 24/7 help and hotline of the Office of Professionalism and Ethics (213) 740-5755 [ope@usc.edu](mailto:ope@usc.edu) and/or consult with the respective office(s) related to the situation.

### USC Office of the Ombuds

The USC Office of the Ombuds serves as a confidential and safe place for all members of the USC community, including faculty, students, and staff, to share any University-related issues or conflicts. The Ombuds will carefully listen to concerns and assist by exploring and strategizing options and identifying relevant resources. Some of the services the Ombuds provide include individual meetings, group consultations, mediations and facilitated conversations, conflict and communication coaching, conflict management presentations, and upward feedback of patterns and trends. Types of concerns that are commonly brought to the Ombuds include interpersonal conflicts, issues of fairness, power dynamics, ethical dilemmas, evaluation issues, and policy concerns. To make an appointment with the University Park Campus Ombuds, please call (213) 821-9556 or email upcombuds@usc.edu. To make an appointment with the Health Sciences Campus Ombuds, please call (323) 442-0382 or email hscombuds@usc.edu. For more information visit [Ombuds.usc.edu](https://ombuds.usc.edu/).