**TA Training Orientation lesson plan**

Notes

* This orientation is planned to be delivered as a one-time, three-hour session prior to the first day of classes in the semester. It does not address everything that a TA will need during their TA experience, but attempts to cover the essential topics that must be addressed *before* the first day of class. Other topics will be addressed in the full TA Training course curriculum.
* Providing visual support, such as simple PowerPoint slides, is recommended to help TAs follow the structure and main points of the orientation.
* Suggested essential content is provided for each part of the training, in the form of lists. Local (school or department) content for each part can be added as needed.
* Scenarios can be small-group activities. Suggested: provide TAs with scenario descriptions and ask them to discuss their specific responses/solutions. Assign a faculty member and/or experienced TA to each group to facilitate discussion. After a period of small-group discussion, have some groups share their group’s conclusions and briefly summarize the main points. Select scenarios from the appendix, or compose original scenarios.
* Times for each part are estimated.

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| **Pre-course preparation** |
| The facilitator should finalize the following action items before the start of the TA Training Orientation:   * Decide how to provide the handout materials. One option is to collate the materials in a folder and hand each TA a folder as they check in for the training. CET documents are available through the Blackboard CET TA Training Curriculum org or as downloads from the USC CET website <http://cet.usc.edu>. * Revise the provided lesson plan if your training does not follow the model of a single, 3-hour session. * Arrange for speakers and group facilitators, if needed. * Edit the provided PowerPoint presentation, if desired. |

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| **Module 0: Orientation** | |
| Facilitator preparation | |
| * Review lesson plan * Review handouts * Plan lectures for sections labeled “Deliver content” in the lesson plan * Review scenarios and make notes on points that should be addressed * Review PowerPoint presentation * Secure needed materials (see list below) | |
| Hand-out materials to provide TAs when they arrive | |
| * Sexual Harassment policies (printed from <http://policy.usc.edu/discrimination>/) * CET document FERPA for TAs * CET document TA student support decision chart * CET document TA resources * CET document First day of class checklist for TAs * CET document Writing course-specific policies * CET document A menu of discussion norms * Scenario descriptions (see appendix) * Instructions for accessing the online resources in the upcoming TA Training course (developed by individual academic units delivering the TA Training course) * Graduate assistant handbook (accessed at <http://graduateschool.usc.edu/assets/doc/GA_Handbook.pdf> | |
| Materials needed for orientation session | |
| * Room with projector and computer, if projecting material * Check-in list of TAs * Handout materials for TAs * Food and drink for TAs, if desired | |
| Welcome | 0:30 |
| Greet participants, introduce any speakers/facilitators who will welcome the TAs. Short welcome speeches, if desired. Give basic introduction to the value of TAs and their importance to the student experience. |  |
| Agenda | 0:30 |
| Display the general outline for the training session; explain structure, timing of breaks, locations of restrooms, etc. |  |
| Part I: TA/faculty relationship | 20:00 |
| 1. Deliver content    1. Responsibilities of the faculty member to the TA    2. TA can initiate first meeting with faculty    3. TA should defer to faculty; it’s the faculty member’s course    4. When to ask questions of faculty, when to make decisions as TA    5. Handling disagreements with faculty 2. Facilitate faculty/TA scenario discussions (instruct TAs to use the referred documents in addressing the scenarios) 3. Address any related questions, if time allows | 10:00  10:00 |
| Part II: Essential policies | 40:00 |
| 1. Deliver content    1. The general USC educational system, semester structure, grading procedures, etc.    2. Professionalism       1. TA-student boundaries; friendly but not friends       2. Sexual harassment policies (refer to handout)    3. Accommodations and Disability Services and Programs    4. USC resources (refer to CET document TA student support decision chart and CET document TA resources) 2. Facilitate policy scenario discussions (instruct TAs to use the TA student support decision chart in addressing the scenarios) 3. Deliver content    1. FERPA (and HIPAA if necessary) (refer to CET document FERPA for TAs) 4. Facilitate FERPA scenario discussions (instruct TAs to use the referred documents in addressing the scenarios) 5. Address any related questions, if time allows | 15:00  8:00  7:00  10:00 |
| Break | 10:00 |
| Part III: The first day of class | 45:00 |
| 1. Deliver content    1. The importance of first impressions    2. The importance of planning well for the first class    3. The importance of attitude: excited, confident, helpful 2. First day activity    1. Have TAs take out the CET document First day of class checklist for TAs    2. In groups, TAs review the document and select the five items they feel are most important. One goal of this activity is simply to have the students review the document, but with an active mind. 3. Deliver content    1. The importance of establishing respectful authority with students    2. Recommendations of methods for establishing and affirming TA authority with students    3. Introduce discussion/classroom norms. Reference CET document A menu of discussion norms. 4. Facilitate authority scenario discussions 5. Address any related questions, if time allows | 10:00  10:00  15:00  10:00 |
| Break | 10:00 |
| Part IV: Syllabi | 25:00 |
| This section may be omitted if the TAs being oriented will not have an opportunity to create syllabi for their own courses or course sections.   1. Deliver content    1. The importance of syllabi       1. A “contract” between student and instructor       2. Establishes section policies    2. Local policies on the use and contents of syllabi produced by TAs 2. Syllabus activity    1. Have TAs take out the CET document Writing course-specific policies    2. Groups of TAs are assigned one of the three types of policies discussed in the document.    3. TAs independently compose a policy (as assigned) for their specific course/section, using the document as a resource and in discussion with their groupmates.    4. Volunteers read their policies and/or ask related questions that can be answered by the facilitator or other participants. 3. Address any related questions, if time allows | 10:00  15:00 |
| Closing | 19:00 |
| Discuss the TA Training course, including   * Class locations and times * Attendance requirements/expectations * Introduction to the flipped educational model * Introduction of how to access the TA Training course materials; refer to the how-to sheet created by the school/department * Important first-day information, such as how to get the classroom door open if locked, how to get assistance with classroom technology, and whom to contact in the school/department with questions * Pressing questions from the TAs   Thank participants, and release | 16:00  3:00 |
| Total session time | 170 min |

**APPENDIX: Scenarios**

Faculty/TA scenarios

Scenario 1: In discussion section one day, a student asks you to show her how to answer a particular question. You work through the question with the student, and the student says that she agrees with your answer. The student then pulls out an exam that had been graded by the course instructor. The student came up with the same answer you showed her, but only received a grade of 7 points out of 10. You look over the student’s answer, and it seems mostly correct to you. A detail was omitted that the student considered obvious. But there was nothing tricky or difficult about the omitted detail, so you probably would have given that answer 9 points out of 10. The student tells you she has already talked with the professor and explained her reasoning, but the professor refused to change the grade.

What do you tell the student?

Scenario 2: While you are leading your session, several students start to complain that they do not understand the instructor’s explanations during lecture. One of the students asks you if you could devote your sessions to explaining the material again, so that they can understand it all better.

How do you respond to the students?

Policy scenarios [Note: These scenarios have required responses that can be found in the CET document TA decision chart for supporting students]

Scenario 3: A student approaches you at the end of class and says that he has a learning disability, so he will need to be allowed extra time to complete a course assignment. How should you proceed, and what would you say to the student?

Scenario 4: A student comes to your office hours to talk about how they are doing in class and ends up disclosing that they are having trouble in class because they are having a personal crisis and have been depressed recently.

What are the recommended action steps for supporting this student, and what would you say to the student?

Scenario 5: You received the following email from a student.

*Dear \_\_\_ (TA),*

*My name is Sam, and I’m a sophomore on a scholarship that requires me to maintain at least a 3.0 GPA. But right now I have a “C” in your class, and I stand a chance of not continuing next semester.*

*Is there a chance at all for me to schedule an appointment with you today to see if there is any possible way that my grade can be reconsidered? Is there any extra credit I can do to improve my grade and save my scholarship? I don’t know what else to do. If I don’t maintain a 3.0 for my scholarship, I will have to drop out of SC! My parents can’t afford the tuition, and I already have a part-time job.*

*Thank you for your consideration. And may God bless you for any help you can give me!*

*Sincerely, Sam Someone*

How will you respond to Sam?

FERPA scenarios

Scenario 6: A student’s mother calls you on the phone, explaining that you are their son’s TA and they wish to discuss a poor grade that their son received from you recently.

What do you say to the parent?

Scenario 7: One of your fellow TAs decides that the most efficient way to hand back graded papers is to leave them at the end of class on a table in the back of the room and allow students to find and pick up their own paper. This way, time is not lost during class in handing back the papers individually. The TA recommends that you follow this same strategy.

How do you respond to your fellow TA?

Authority scenarios

Scenario 8: In your first semester as a TA you are assigned to a course related to your field but not one in which you consider yourself a specialist. Your discussion section has generally been going well, but the behavior of a particular student begins to be a problem. She seems unhappy with you as a TA and starts to challenge your authority right in the classroom. On one occasion, she openly rejects your explanation of a particular phenomenon and tells you in front of the class that your explanation is “simply wrong”! And she even presents an alternative explanation to the class. Because you do not know enough about the subject area, you are not sure whether her explanation is correct. During the past few weeks, she has become more and more combative in her attitude, and you worry it is making other students lose their confidence in you.

How do you address this behavior in a manner respectful of the student that also preserves your authority in the classroom?

Scenario 9: During a classroom discussion, one student uses a term that many people find offensive. Although it does not appear that the student intended to offend anyone, you see many shocked faces and a few gasps from other students in the room.

How can you address this issue without shaming the student who spoke or minimizing the offense taken by other students?