

Undergraduate Teaching Assistants: Promises and Pitfalls



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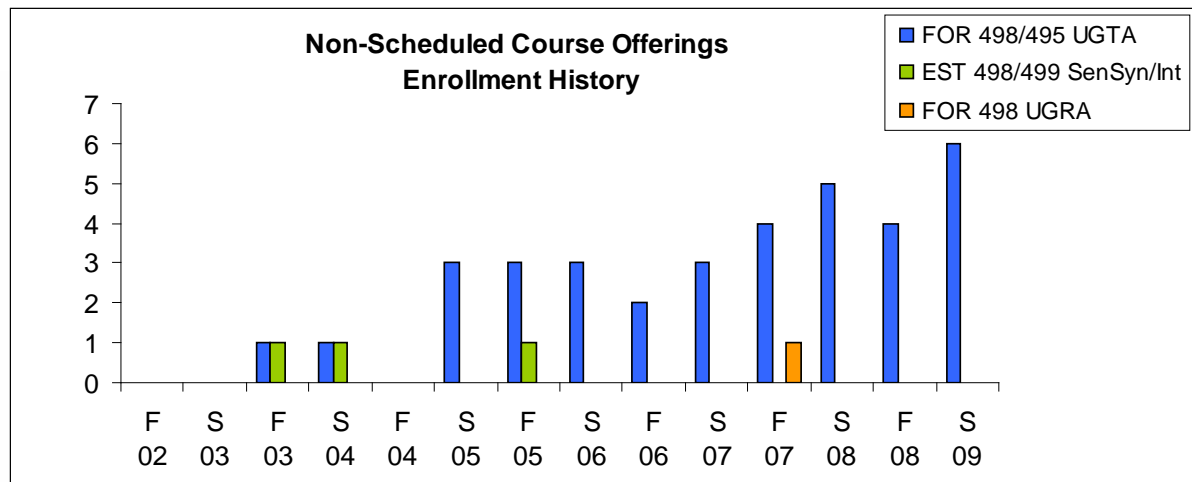
Why an *Undergraduate* TA?

- Declining GA allocations
- Change in teaching load
 - Large classes, core courses
 - 200 students per semester
- Teaching Assistants versus Graders



Evolution of the program

- Began as independent study
- Formal course proposed in 2008
- 41 students in 6 years



What do Undergraduate TAs do?

- Responsibilities
 - Attend class
 - Hold library hours
 - Present sample projects
 - Assist in exam grading
- Grading
 - Attendance & library hours - 25%
 - Individual project - 50%
 - Reflection paper - 25%



TA Projects



Western Civ in the Movies Project

What not to do...



- Please don't wait to the last minute to start your project
- Don't try to do the presentation without team practicing
- Don't read off your slides (make short bullets)
- Don't talk to the screen
- Don't forget your movie summary or comparison
- Don't forget a conclusion slide
- NO animation in powerpoint - it looks unprofessional
- Don't talk to other members while presenting

Tips...



- Meet the deadlines for teams and films, and have your thesis approved
- Pick a topic you find interesting, engage it, and have fun with it!
- Give everyone on the team a job so everyone does a share of the work
- Schedule regular meetings and start working on the project now
- Take the research and analysis seriously – don't present drab stuff we can read in an encyclopedia
- Don't have more than 2 learning objectives
- Cover all the necessary parts of the project but don't have too many slides...your presentation should be exactly 15 minutes no more or less!
- Make sure you explain why you chose the clip and clearly explain show how it is related to your research and analysis
- Dress professionally. That means NO hats!!
- It's all about the presentation, that means speak clearly and loudly, look at the audience not at your cards!!
- Practice, practice, practice....
- Don't forget to turn in your slides (2 copies) and bibliography! Take the time to make the bibliography neat and complete.

- Survey studies
- Sample assignments
- Course Improvements
- Presentations
- Research papers
- Journals and synthesis papers





Benefits of Undergraduate TAs

- Instructor
 - Course improvement / innovation
 - Additional assistance for students
 - Improved understanding of the student perspective
 - Increased efficiency / decreased work load
- Teaching Assistants
 - Development of leadership skills
 - Excellent experience if planning on graduate school



Potential Pitfalls with Undergraduates



- Excessive management and oversight
- Lack of Dependability
- Unsatisfactory communication
- Disappointment and energy expenditure





Conclusions

- Promises outweigh the pitfalls
- Teamwork and mentoring skills
- Motivation and enthusiasm
- Grading parties !
- Lasting relationships



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