Undergraduate Teaching Assistants: Promises and Pitfalls

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8th Biennial Conference on University Education in Natural Resources
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

• 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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