



*Shane N. White*  
*Telephone: (510) 987-9303*  
*Fax: (510) 763-0309*  
*Email: shane.white@ucop.edu*

*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate*  
*Faculty Representative to the Regents*  
*University of California*  
*1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor*  
*Oakland, California 94607-5200*

August 3, 2018

**MICHAEL T. BROWN**  
**PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
**UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA**

**Re: Training for Teaching Assistants and Graduate Student Instructors**

Dear Michael:

At its July 25, 2018 meeting, the Academic Council unanimously endorsed the attached recommendations from the University Committee on Educational Policy (UCEP) regarding training for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs).

UCEP's investigation of GSI and TA training found substantial variation in the availability and use of training across campuses. UCEP recommends that each campus administration work with their Academic Senate and their Center for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) or Office of Instructional Development (OIDs) to (1) develop minimum standards for required campus-level training; (2) ensure that adequate resources for training are provided; and (3) offer additional training in pedagogy for graduate students interested in pursuing teaching careers. UCEP also recommends that campus departments consider offering additional, discipline-specific GSI training programs, including faculty-led apprenticeships and "augmented TA" positions; incentives to promote faculty involvement in TA and GSI training; and incentives to encourage graduate students to teach in summer.

UCEP and Council emphasize that these are not mandates to campuses, but rather best practice recommendations for improving the quality of undergraduate education by ensuring that individuals delivering or helping to deliver instruction are prepared to be effective teachers.

We respectfully request that you share this letter with the campus CTLs, OIDs, and others as appropriate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shane N. White".

Shane N. White, Chair  
Academic Council

Encl

Cc: Institution Research and Academic Planning Vice President Brown  
Academic Council  
Senate Director Baxter  
Senate Executive Directors



UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATIONAL POLICY (UCEP)  
Ed Caswell-Chen, Chair  
epcaswell@ucdavis.edu

Assembly of the Academic Senate  
1111 Franklin Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, CA 94607-5200  
Phone: (510) 987-9466  
Fax: (510) 763-0309

July 6, 2018

**SHANE WHITE, CHAIR  
ACADEMIC COUNCIL**

**RE: TRAINING FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS/GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS**

Dear Shane,

Over the course of the year, UCEP reviewed information from the campuses on training for Teaching Assistants (TAs) and Graduate Student Instructors (GSIs), and was also provided with feedback from the May meeting of the directors of the Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs)/Offices of Instructional Development (OIDs) on each campus. Although all campuses provide some sort of training for TAs and GSIs, there is substantial variability across campuses in terms of the training that is available and how well it is utilized. Even required training may not be offered consistently due to resource limitations. Given the important role of TAs and GSIs in undergraduate instruction, we believe that it would be advisable for each campus administration, together with the appropriate committees of the divisional Senate and CTLs/OIDs, to review and determine appropriate best practices and standards for the minimum required campus-level training, and ensure that adequate resources are provided to implement the training. While strict uniformity is not essential, there should be coherence in the minimum requirements across the campuses.

Beyond these minimum requirements, it should be recognized that teaching may be a significant part of the careers of our graduate students. Formal training, in addition to what is offered by the schools and colleges may be desirable (e.g., some departments require that TAs take a pedagogy course before teaching as sole instructors) and could be provided.

In addition to the campus-level training, we expect that discipline-specific training at the departmental level is necessary. There is a question of who will provide this training; ladder rank faculty may not be best suited for this. Some departments are asking, or thinking about asking, lecturers with security of employment (LSOEs) to provide this training. Regardless of who provides the training, we believe that proper incentives such as teaching credit are important for ensuring faculty involvement and the quality of the training.

There are several possible approaches to help ensure high-quality GSI training. For example, informal apprenticeships, with faculty assuming responsibility for mentoring any TA that would like to teach a course independently, by having a TA sit in on the class in advance. Another option would be to create an 'augmented TA'<sup>1</sup> position where a graduate student would be enabled as an apprentice instructor: teaching a few classes with the faculty instructor being present and providing feedback afterwards, creating some of the assignments, etc. (The compensation provided to the graduate student could be higher than that for a TA.) This would ensure that a graduate student hired as a GSI to teach a course would have experience teaching the course. We do not propose that apprenticeships should be required before a GSI is appointed; sufficient teaching experience (e.g. a graduate student who has been an instructor at other institutions) is an alternative, and we recognize that compromises may be needed in unexpected situations. Such training programs are helpful in improving instruction, and should be reinvigorated in ways that are appropriate for programs and campuses.

UCEP was also informed that, at least on some campuses, TAs and GSIs are paid less for teaching during summer session. UCEP has not looked into this further, but if this is the case and such a disincentive could be removed, it might encourage more graduate students to teach during summer, thereby increasing the number of courses that departments can offer. Increasing the enrollment in summer session would be beneficial to UC.

The committee asks that Council forward this memo to Provost Brown and IRAP Vice President Brown with a request to share it with the CTL/OID directors. UCEP appreciates the opportunity to bring this matter to the attention of Council and we will provide you with updates as we investigate this issue further. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ed Caswell-Chen, Chair  
UCEP

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<sup>1</sup> Since the titling for TAs and GSIs varies across the campuses, we will not suggest a title for this position, but we note that the Associate title that is mentioned in passing in APM 410-17.c without being defined anywhere in the APM might be appropriate.