Guiding Principles for Fall 2020 Course Adaptations

Area of Focus - Guidelines for the role of Teaching Assistants in the COVID-19 context

Co-contributors: Christina Hendricks, Theresa Rogers, Nicolas Romualdi

Teaching assistants are invaluable contributors to education at the University of British Columbia, and their roles change in the context of online teaching and learning. The purpose of this document is to identify areas of potential concern, and to provide recommendations to consider for Teaching Assistant appointments in the context of COVID-19.

There are several teaching assistant roles covered by the [Collective Agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278](): Senior TA (STA), Grad TA I (GTA I), Grad TAII (GTA II), Undergrad TA I (UTA I), Undergrad TA II (UTA II), and Markers. See also ["Hiring a Student" on the HR website](), and a [summary of changes to the collective agreement that will begin Sept. 1, 2020]().[5]

Most of the principles below will hold for all UTA and GTA roles; where there are differences they are noted in what follows. Because Markers are only assigned to mark tests or exams of an objective nature, many principles will not be applicable to them (e.g., principles having to do with doing synchronous class meetings).

The vast majority of TAs are graduate students; for GTAs the teaching assistant role needs to be compatible with research and learning commitments that these students may have, which are widely variable depending on the Faculty and stage in graduate school (between early Masters and PhD Candidacy).

The principles are grouped by three topics: general guidelines, training in online course design and preparation, and course delivery conditions and invigilation. A number of these guidelines hold in all contexts, but they reflect issues that have been raised in the current context where many courses will be delivered in an online format for the near future.

General Guidelines in the COVID-19 context

- Units must hire students into the correct role for the duties assigned. For example:
    - Graduate Academic Assistants may be hired to support course and curriculum design, and may work on several courses within a unit. GAAs should not be hired

---

[5] There are references throughout this document to the Collective Agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278, and links to an agreement that held from 2014-2019. A new agreement has been ratified but a full text is not yet available; there is only [a summary of key changes](). We indicate in the document where information can be found in that summary, and where it cannot we refer to the old agreement, lacking any other document to refer to. Please contact UBC HR if you have specific questions about what is or is not changed in the new agreement.

July 3, 2020

to engage in duties that fall under the roles of a UTA or GTA, such as teaching activities within courses, interactions with students, or marking (See "Hiring a Student Worker" for a list of TA duties).

- ○ Recent changes to the collective agreement between the university and CUPE 2278 have expanded the Senior TA role (effective Sept. 1, 2020). If a unit is hiring students after Sept. 1 with duties that fall under the new STA role, they should be hired as STAs. STAs may work on design and development of new curricular materials along with other TA duties, but generally do so in connection with a course for which they are hired as a TA.

- TAs may be paid before the official start date of their contracts (September 1 for Winter term 1), such as compensation for hours they spend in training related to online courses. However, those hours may not be considered as part of the TAs' contract during the term that follows; i.e., TAs must be paid for the extra hours on top of their work during the term, at a pro-rated amount (see the Collective Agreement section 14.01).

- Ensure that TAs can be paid for work assigned to them in a timely manner, keeping in mind that students need to satisfy visa, SIN, and Canadian bank account criteria in order to be employed as TAs by UBC, and current WorkSafe BC and taxation rules do not allow for TAs to perform their work outside Canada. Please contact UBC HR for further details.

- TAs may need to take extra time for new tasks in an online environment that need to be taken into account in allocation of hours, such as facilitating chats in video meetings, running breakout rooms, preparing to invigilate online exams, and more. They may also receive an increased amount of online queries from students (e.g., through discussion boards and emails).
  - ○ Plan as well as possible the expected workload and duties for TA positions and advertise accordingly. Remember that a list of duties, including expected hours connected to each duty, must be provided to TAs in writing (see the Collective Agreement section 12.02).
  - ○ Adhere to the advertised, expected and contracted total workload for TA positions, or compensate for necessary extra hours, while being mindful of students' need to manage other aspects of their programs.

- Consider various priorities when assigning TA positions (e.g. need for completion of program, loss of other opportunities, seniority, etc.), while also following appointment and reappointment provisions in the collective agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278, Article 13.01.

- Consider partial TA appointments if the number of TA slots are significantly reduced.

Guiding Principles for Fall 2020 Course Adaptations

- In circumstances where there may be a shortage of available TAs, a Teaching Assistant may be appointed to multiple assignments as long as the total hours they are required to work per week do not exceed twenty-four.

  - Be sure to adhere to the maximum total hours that TAs may be required to work per academic year, as explained in Article 14.01(a) of the [Collective Agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278](#): "A full Teaching Assistantship involves an average of twelve (12) hours per week for the Winter Session (September 1 to April 30), for a total of 384 hours. The average applies to exclusive quadruples of adjacent months, commencing in September (September - October - November - December, January - February - March - April)." Note that 12 hours is an average, and workload my differ on a week to week basis.

  - When assigning workloads for particular weeks, be mindful of TAs' other duties and responsibilities as students in their programs, as well as the extra workload that may come with doing their TA roles in online courses (as noted above).

- The hiring unit (Department, School, or Faculty) should ensure that TAs have access to necessary equipment and technologies to complete their duties in online courses.

- Where possible, TAs should have access to a quiet space for instruction, particularly for synchronous instruction (given many TAs live in shared housing, many have children, and generally live in smaller apartments without separate individual rooms). When public health authorities, transit and space considerations allow, departments should consider allocating designated spaces on campus for TAs to carry out their teaching duties, where necessary and feasible.

Training in Online Course Design and Preparation

Teaching assistants should have access to training (or retraining), as needed, to do their work in an online setting. This training could be through Department or Faculty TA Training programs, through CTLT workshops, or other professional development offerings. Further, where possible, ongoing mentorship from lead instructors or senior TAs is recommended.

If units require TAs to participate in training as part of their work, this time must be compensated by including the hours spent on training in the total number of hours TAs are contracted to work. As noted above, if TAs are required to undergo training before their official start date of Sept. 1, this work must be paid for separately rather than counting the hours as part of their Fall term contract.

Topics such as the following would be useful, depending on what TAs will be doing in the courses they support.

- Understanding and applying principles and best practices of online teaching

Guiding Principles for Fall 2020 Course Adaptations

- Effectively using a variety of appropriate tools/media to enhance online teaching and learning

- Leading online class meetings as relevant to their role, such as tutorials or virtual labs

- Organizing and directing group activities in an online setting

- Designing online activities consistent with desired learning outcomes (note that this would fall under the Sr. TA role as of Sept. 1, as per [the summary of changes to the Collective Agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278](#))

- Engaging in online assessment effectively, including using evaluation tools to grade student work

Online Course Delivery and Invigilation

- Regular TA hours as specified by [the collective agreement between UBC and CUPE 2278](#) need to be considered when TA duties and teaching times are assigned, particularly since units can choose to schedule class meetings in an augmented evening schedule for the fall term. TAs may be assigned to courses that are scheduled to run in the evening as per Section 14.01(g) of the Collective Agreement, but if they are required to participate in activities that take place outside of the regularly scheduled hours for the course, they need to be informed and have to have agreed in advance.

    - Section 14.01(g): "Any scheduled teaching duties, online or in person, outside of the hours of 7:30 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. are contingent upon the advance consent of the employee. In the event that a Teaching Assistant is assigned to a course that includes evening classes that end at 8:00 p.m. or later, the employee may be scheduled for teaching duties up to sixty (60) minutes after the end of the scheduled class."

- Provide students with clear information about TA availability, as many courses do for faculty. Students in different time zones may have unrealistic expectations about TA availability and turnaround time for queries.

- Invigilation procedures and requirements should be provided by the instructor and not be left to individual TAs to decide and communicate to students. TAs should be provided guidelines on how to address students' connectivity issues during exams, since students may ask those questions. For example, they should know where students could go for help with troubleshooting, and what to do if connectivity problems mean students have trouble completing exams on time.

- It is recommended that back up plans are in place in case a TA experiences connectivity issues at the time of invigilation.

July 3, 2020