

## **II. WORKING WITH PRIMARY INSTRUCTORS AND PEERS**

The following sections of Rishel's book should also be read at this point:

- Get Along with Colleagues
- What is a Professional?
- ... And Not So Silly Stuff
- Becoming a Faculty Member [*good for seeing the faculty perspective*]
- University and College Governance
- Case Studies: Case VI

You should also read the sections in the UCR TA handbook (*The Next Step*) on the TA–professor relationship (pp. 27–28), relations with other teaching assistants (p. 100) and questions to ask (pp. 38–39).

### **Relating to the instructor**

If you are teaching a discussion section for a course, it is important and absolutely necessary to have regular communication with the primary instructor. This is a shared responsibility. Since the instructor is responsible for most of the day to day decisions involving the course, you should feel free to bring questions of this nature to the instructor whenever it is necessary. If you have difficulty contacting the instructor or the instructor's responses are not helpful you should inform appropriate Department personnel before minor problems turn into major ones. Setting up a weekly or biweekly appointment with the primary instructor is an option well worth considering.

### **Differences of opinion**

The job of a discussion section leader is to carry out assignments from the course's primary instructor, and therefore if you are a discussion section leader it is your responsibility not to contradict the instructor or to criticize his choices in front of the students. The unit "Relating to Students" discusses some ways of dealing with such differences when communicating with the students

### **Obligations of primary instructors**

*Updating the coverage of material in the lectures.* This is particularly important in classes with two or more discussion sections. Teaching assistants need to know what was covered and assigned in class in order to know what questions to expect from the students. At least once a week there should be information from the primary instructor about what has been covered and what is expected to be covered in the next week. This is particularly important if the coverage of material diverges significantly from the text. If teaching assistants have not heard from a faculty member in one week's time and are not sure about where things stand in the lectures, they should contact the primary instructor for information.

*Preparing and grading quizzes and examinations.* Teaching assistants are expected to do substantial amounts of work in connection with preparing and grading quizzes and grading examinations. However, ***it is the instructor's responsibility to ensure that the grading across different sections is uniform, and the instructor also carries a share of the responsibility for grading examinations.*** Instructors are expected to supply teaching assistants with adequate guidelines to ensure uniformity in quizzes. One possibility is prescribing lists of textbook problems from which quizzes are to be taken. Regarding examinations, in addition to supplying answer keys and reasonable guidelines for assigning partial credit, primary instructors are expected to do a fair share of the grading in calculus and higher level courses, and this is required for primary instructors who are not regular or emeritus faculty members. If each teaching assistant is assigned to two discussion sections, the instructor should do roughly the same amount of work as each teaching assistant. More generally, if there are  $n$  discussion sections, the instructor's share would normally be about  $2/5$  if  $n \leq 2$  and there is only one discussion section leader, and the lesser of  $1/4$  and  $2/(n + 2)$  otherwise.

If primary instructors prepare practice examinations for students, ***it is the instructors' responsibility to provide teaching assistants with adequate information on the solutions to the problems that are presented.***

*Regulating the numbers of quizzes and examinations.* The relatively large numbers of students in many discussion sections make it necessary for primary instructors to take into account the workload of teaching assistants in connection with quiz preparation and grading. A quiz every week will probably consume too much of teaching assistants' time if the latter have 35 or more students in each discussion section. In keeping with the philosophy that less is sometimes more, primary instructors have been strongly urged to limit the number of quizzes to 4 per quarter, especially if the number of students exceeds 30 per section.

Once again, if there are problems involving these points, they should be brought to the attention of appropriate Department personnel. At the end of each quarter questionnaires will be sent to TAs for feedback on primary instructors.

For teaching assistants who are assigned lecture sections of the remedial course Mathematics 003, the situation is a bit different, and course coordination is handled by the Learning Center. If there are questions about the rights and responsibilities of TAs in such courses, they should be directed to supervisory faculty members in the Department (e.g., the Graduate Advisor and the Department Chair) and possibly also to the Learning Center. In a very limited number of cases experienced graduate students may be assigned to be primary instructors of lower level courses; the Department Chair and Undergraduate Advisor are the persons to contact with questions regarding such assignments.

### **Cooperating with coworkers**

Everyone has a right to expect that his or her coworkers will behave responsibly. The items above deal mainly with the rights of a teaching assistant and the responsibilities of

a primary instructor. There are corresponding rights and responsibilities going the other direction, and likewise there are patterns of rights and responsibilities regarding other teaching assistants and lecturers who are assigned to the same type of jobs as you are. These responsibilities include attending meetings, doing a fair share of the routine tasks that require everyone's participation, helping out in an appropriate fashion whenever unanticipated problems arise, constructively supporting the efforts of others and keeping personal issues from interfering from professional interactions as much as possible.

### **Work rules and the union contract**

In the spring of 2000 the University signed a three year union contract with the United Auto Workers Union covering all teaching assistants and certain other student employees such as readers (= paper graders). A copy of the contract may be viewed online at the following site:

[www.ucop.edu/humres/contracts/ase/asecontract.html](http://www.ucop.edu/humres/contracts/ase/asecontract.html)

This contract clarifies and formalizes the working relationship between faculty and academic student employees while preserving and protecting the academic judgment of the faculty. Faculty members who supervise teaching assistants have a responsibility to be systematic and specific in their instructions to teaching assistants, and there are strict limits on the amount of work that can be assigned. Over the quarter the maximum is 220 hours of work, within a given week the maximum is 40 hours, and the total number of overtime hours beyond 20 each week cannot exceed 50 in a quarter. The workload is not measured by actual hours worked but rather by the number of hours the University could reasonably expect that a teaching assistant would need to complete the work assigned; departmental input is used in determining reasonable expectations. The site

<http://www.ucop.edu/senate/contract.html>

contains a list of questions and answers about the contract that should provide information on many points. Primary instructors who are in charge of teaching assistants or readers are responsible for knowing the contents of the union contract in sufficient detail to work within its provisions and to complying with its terms, and they have been told that violations could have extremely serious consequences.

### **Inappropriate conduct**

There is a discussion of sexual harassment on pages 29–34 of *The Next Step*. Although the discussion deals with TA – student relationships it applies equally well to TA – professor relationships or relationships among TAs in which some are in a position of authority over the others (for example, an experienced TA who may be teaching a lecture section of a nonremedial first year course). More generally, ***everyone has a responsibility to act professionally, to anticipate the sensitivities of others and particularly those who differ from us in some important respects, and to avoid doing things that can easily be regarded as coercive or offensive by others.***