

ULA Care and Feeding

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Working with ULAs, setting expectations and recommendations for success.

This is designed to serve as a guide for Professors, Teaching Assistants (TA), and Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULA). We have attempted to compile a document to facilitate discussion and understanding between the Educational team. Though this document is accurate to the best of our ability, things will change and the Undergraduate Learning Assistant Course will adapt and change as the needs and challenges faced by each ULA cohort requires.

Week One

Orientation

Uniform messaging from LA's, TA's and Professors are a must. If the Professor encourages group discovery and conversation, but students are pressured to work quickly, or penalized for not getting enough work done, then students will be frustrated and confused.

- Plan an introduction for the LA to the class
 - Explain the role of the LA
 - Do you and the ULA agree on what role they should be playing?
 - Separate the Roles of the LA and TA
- Getting buy in from the students
 - The nature of SCALE-UP means that students drive the learning, if they checkout, there is not much you can do.

WARNING: New LA's have very little experience and may not have even had their first Pedagogy class! Be gentle they do not know what they do.

That being said, LA's will be most hands on with the students and have the most perspective on how the students feel about the course

LA course material¹

9 Talk Moves ("Nine Talk Moves Checklist: Goals for Productive Discussions and Nine Talk Moves" 2011)

¹Based on Dr. Tiffany-Rose Sikorski's Fall 2019 Syllabus

Week Two

- Go over the Syllabus for the course with your LA
 - First time LA's will still not have much pedagogical training at this time. Use them to their strengths: many LA's will have recently taken the course. Use this to find sticking points, misconceptions, and difficult areas of the course.
 - Make special note of common misconceptions students had last semester
 - A Goal for this week is to have >50% of students names available for recall
 - Check in on how the students are adapting to the new coursework

LA course material

9 Talk Moves *Goal 4: Getting Students Comfortable Thinking with Others* (“Nine Talk Moves Checklist: Goals for Productive Discussions and Nine Talk Moves” 2011) *GWU LA podcast episode 1* (H. and C. 2019)

Week Three

- Set office hours for LA's publicly i.e. Blackboard and/or syllabus
 - Use this as an opportunity to reinforce the role you want the LA's to take LA's are not TA's or Professors, nor are they meant to have answers but are a good resource to talk through ideas and concepts.
- Discuss expectations for LA's at office hours i.e. Should they have a lesson plan, or just be available for discussions

ULA course material

(“Nine Talk Moves Checklist: Goals for Productive Discussions and Nine Talk Moves” 2011) (Specifically Goal 4:)

Week Four

Equity in class contributions (Cohen and Lotan 2014)

- Think about how you want your students to contribute in class?
- How can you use your LA's to amplify the voices of the quiet or unheard students.
- Who isn't able to contribute to the conversation because they get talked over or messaged that they are unimportant.
- Work with your LA's to find and encourage everyone to contribute to the best of their abilities.
- Late hires should be completed by now. Get those new LA's introduced to the class and catch them up to speed.

ULA course Material

Cohen and Lotan (2014)

(“Nine Talk Moves Checklist: Goals for Productive Discussions and Nine Talk Moves” 2011)

Week Five

Hearing Student Ideas

By now most ULAs will have achieved ~20 hours of practice with students, and enough knowledge to be dangerous.

- Take a moment to look back on the first 1/3 of the term.
 - What went well?
 - What didn't?
- Do the students in the course understand the dynamics of SCALE-UP?
- Are you challenging the students to tackle complex ideas and giving them enough time and support to really wrestle with the ideas?
- Are you still getting “Is this the right answer?”
 - Of course you are, but are you getting less of it?
- What are you doing to reward students for their efforts to create new ideas?

ULA Course Material

Levin and Richards (2011)

Week Six

Hearing Student Ideas

By now many ULAs will begin to feel more comfortable

- Check in with your ULA
 - Find out which students are still struggling to be heard
 - What have your ULAs done to try to amplify the softest spoken members of your class?
- What problems do your ULAs see that you might not see?
- What problems do you see that your ULAs don't?
- Identifying

ULA Course Material

Schneps and Sadler (1987)

(“Lessons from Thin Air,” n.d.)

Week Seven

At the halfway point in the semester, it might be a good idea to remind students of the role ULAs play. Again take the time to reinforce to the students what role you want the ULAs to play and take inventory, are you and the ULAs sending the same message to students about what role you want them to take?

Week Eight

Asking good conceptual questions.

- How do you construct questions that get students to engage with the material?
- How do you know if students are repeating *magic words* without understanding material?
 - Example redox: reduction is gain of electrons and oxidation is loss of electrons! This pithy answer might on masqarade as knowledge or understanding, but might just be the magic phrase a student as learned to get you to give them credit on homework or an exam. Without good follow up you might not know.
- Identify the magic words that students are parroting

Referances

Cohen, Elizabeth G., and Rachel A. Lotan. 2014. *Designing Groupwork : Strategies for the Heterogeneous Classroom*. Teachers College Press. <https://teachfx.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/elizabeth-cohen-rachel-lotan-designing-groupwork-2014.pdf>.

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Levin, Daniel M., and Jennifer Richards. 2011. “Learning to Attend to the Substance of Students’ Thinking in Science.” *Science Educator*, no. fall. <http://static.nsta.org/connections/highschool/201206Levin.pdf>.

“Nine Talk MovesChecklist: Goals for Productive Discussions and Nine Talk Moves.” 2011. https://inquiryproject.terc.edu/prof_dev/Goals_and_Moves.cfm.html.

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