

## TA Training Program Year 1 Report (2020-21)

\*Please do not exceed 2-3 pages and do not change the font size or margins.\*

Date: May \_\_31\_\_, 2021

<b>Department / Unit:</b> Physics and Astronomy	<b>Name of TA Training Coordinator:</b> Stepan Fomichev, Cassandra Miller, Yukiya Saito, Emilie Carpentier, Aaron Kraft, and Joss Ives
<b>Expected # of TAs to be trained in 2020-21:</b> 90 graduate, 80 undergraduate	<b>Actual # of TAs trained in 2020-21:</b> 62 graduate, 101 undergraduate
<b>1. What program/session components did you originally plan in year 1? What objectives were met?</b>	
<p>Our program (later the TAPD) planned five components over the year 2020-2021: a <u>core workshop</u> for new TAs; a <u>Head TA program</u> for large classes; a one-on-one <u>Mentor TA program</u> for new TAs; <u>communication</u> with TAs through our new website and newsletters; and a <u>needs assessment</u> focused on online teaching practices. All components were planned and carried out by an all-student team of 5 TAPD coordinators.</p> <p>The <b>core workshops</b> are focused on communicating TA expectations and developing key TA competencies through interactive activities and discussions. We planned a two day workshop (4 + 4 hrs) for all new <u>graduate</u> TAs in September 2020 (28 TAs attended); and a one day version (5 hrs) for new <u>undergraduate</u> TAs in September 2020 (29 TAs) and January 2021 (36 TAs). In addition to our existing workshop modules, we planned to implement three new modules this year: <i>Theory of Learning</i>, <i>Online Teaching</i>, and <i>Marking Fairly</i>. All workshops were conducted via Zoom. Core objectives of TA preparedness for classroom teaching, especially online teaching, were met through these workshops.</p> <p>The <b>Head TA program</b>, targeted at large courses with big TA numbers, involves senior TAs (13 in 2020-2021) assisting course coordinators with TA training and management. Head TAs develop and deliver <b>course-specific training</b>, lead weekly preparatory and training meetings and liaison with course instructors. Often Head TAs will engage in course content creation and/or curation and maintenance. This program ran entirely online, and met the objectives of preparing TAs for their specific courses and ensuring a smooth transition to online teaching.</p> <p>Our <b>Mentor TA program</b> pairs new TAs in the department with experienced senior TAs. The Mentor TAs (9 mentors) observe their mentees (25 this year) teach, and meet one-on-one with them to provide constructive feedback and answer any questions the mentee may have. This met the mentorship and one-on-one guidance objectives outlined in our grant proposal. Addressing the objective of providing on-demand access to <b>comprehensive online resources</b>, we planned and created a brand-new website, complete with recordings of online core workshop sessions, a fully digitized and modernized TA Handbook, and Quick Start guides for new TAs.</p> <p>This year we planned and implemented an <b>online-focused Needs Assessment</b>. This involved focus groups with TAs, Head TAs, Mentor TAs, and faculty: from this we developed a general survey. The assessment was extremely helpful for understanding what our TAs needed to be more successful online. The process led us to create a best practices document praised and endorsed by the PHAS teaching faculty: it also informed our workshop modules.</p>	
<b>2. Did any aspects of program or sessions change from your original plan? If so, which and why?</b>	
<p>The pandemic has forced several changes to the program. With all the workshops conducted via Zoom, to avoid Zoom fatigue, the workshop duration was cut. This involved cuts to all module content, as well as some discussion and engagement time. However, very good engagement was achieved by employing novel online techniques (annotation boards,</p>	

breakout rooms, polling, check-ins). The community building aspect of the core workshop proved difficult to recreate online: but attendees still found this a welcome opportunity to meet and interact with fellow TAs.

Also due to time constraints, the Marking module was run separately from the workshop, roughly timed with midterm season. This resulted in reduced attendance, but feedback for the newly developed training was positive.

With the transition to online teaching, there was a strong need to focus the Assessment specifically on online student engagement, in-class and asynchronous teaching strategies and online preparedness of the TAs. A more broad Needs Assessment is slated for 2021-2022.

**3. Briefly indicate what was done in each session to meet all of the TA training needs identified for your TAs. This should include what was done to prepare TAs to support underrepresented and marginalized students. If TAs in your program teach curriculum directly addressing Indigenous topics, what was done to support TAs to approach this with adequate knowledge, responsibility, and care?**

Our **core workshop** is designed to provide guidance for all new TAs in the department. Our most popular module, *Troubleshooting your TAing*, focused on explicitly addressing the most commonly raised concerns from TAs, including grading, academic dishonesty, and inter-TA conflict in an interactive session involving role play and advice on research-based best practices -- with new areas to address online-specific issues. Theoretical modules like *Theory of Learning* introduced TAs to active learning and its constructivist foundation, while *Online Teaching* provided guidance on increasing student engagement and collaboration, and strategies for improving teaching online. We also held two *Marking Fairly* mini-workshops which focused on best grading practices, rubrics, grading under time constraints, and hands-on grading practice. All modules were recorded and are now hosted on our website.

We continued the practice of incorporating the **Equity and Inclusion group in PHAS group** into our core workshop by having them run the *Creating Inclusive Classrooms* module. This module helps TAs think about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in the classroom and feel empowered to create a safer and more inclusive physics environment. Also, all Head, Mentor TAs and Coordinators attended a training session on equity topics with the Centre for Intercultural Communication (online): they then disseminated the lessons learned, locally and organically, to their mentees and colleagues.

The **Head TA program** supported the practical day-to-day needs of new and returning TAs. This enables new TAs to address common concerns like grading expectations and hours worked by learning from Head TAs, who have more recent and direct experience of these issues and are seen as more approachable than course instructors. Each Head TA held a course-specific training session at the beginning of the term, clearly laying out TA expectations for different roles; organized and assigned TA work and duties; and outlined best practices on teaching in their specific course contexts. They also led weekly meetings to prepare TAs for the course content and common student pitfalls, and facilitated a community of practice. Head TAs are trained by the TAPD coordinators for their leadership roles.

The **Mentor TA program** provided direct guidance and interactive feedback to new TAs. Prior to mentoring, Mentor TAs attended special *Peer Review of Teaching* training at CTLT. The Mentors met with their mentees pre-observation to establish expectations and identify areas the mentee wants feedback on, then observed them in class. Afterwards, the Mentors provided constructive feedback for improving the TA's teaching, as well as reinforced existing good practices -- helping boost the new TAs confidence in their teaching skills. Mentor TAs then facilitate a round of peer mentoring for pairs of new TAs. This year part of the mentoring was a marking exercise, where Mentors imparted useful grading techniques and strategies. Forging relationships with seasoned TAs also allowed new TAs to have a resource to address concerns that may arise even after the conclusion of the mentorship program. This program also helped us identify unmet TA training needs on a one-on-one basis.

**4. Please provide an update on evaluation activities you have completed in the first year of the program. Include a brief description of any feedback you have received**

**to help you to better meet program objectives for the upcoming year, as well as any changes you are making to respond to this feedback.**

We have conducted numerous surveys to collect feedback on the core workshops, Head TA program, and Mentor TA program to evaluate them and identify unmet needs. This year, we also conducted a needs assessment targeting online teaching training and our website.

The feedback on the core workshops continues to be strongly positive, with 91% of respondents saying it was a valuable use of their time. After the core workshops, nearly 90% of participants answered that they are confident in leading tutorial/lab sections online, compared to 44% before the workshop. Some indicated the workshop was too long or ran slightly overtime, which will inform the timing of our future training sessions.

Consistently, more than 90% of the collected feedback indicates strong support for the Head TA program. Head TAs were found to be effective in preparing TAs for course content, communicating useful teaching strategies and advising about student pitfalls, as well as fostering a community of practice among the course TAs.

The Mentor TA program is also consistently highly ranked. Mentees report that “it was helpful to get direct feedback based on real class I taught”: another commonly identified helpful aspect was getting reassured about their current teaching practices. Many also reported forging longer-term relationships with their mentors. As many mentees report wanting more mentoring time and sessions, we are considering expanding this program for 2021-2022 with additional rounds of peer mentoring or other activities.

The online-focused needs assessment showed that, thanks to our modules and resources from September, about 90% of respondents are well prepared for online teaching, while about 30% indicated that they want additional training for online teaching. Depending on the use of online courses by UBC going forward, we are prepared to provide such training, and to improve the content based on the feedback and accumulated experience from 2020-2021.

**5. Budget Summary** We have a budget surplus as Jan workshop online (no catering).

Breakdown of 2020-21 expenditures (include granted and actual costs):

Item	\$ Granted	\$ Spent	\$ Balance on Jun. 30, 2021 (if applicable)
<b>Salaries</b> 5 TAPD coordinators / yr (96/96/96/96/48 hrs) 9 Mentor TAs / 36 hrs/yr 13 Head TAs (in-kind contr. by dept.)	\$27,858.60	\$27,858.60	\$0
Workshop Food Expenses (expected Jan 2021 to be in-person)	\$800	\$0	+\$800
External Training Expenses (CIC and CTLT Peer review of teaching)	\$1,653.40	\$1,653.40	\$0
Funding to support Needs Assessment (raffles, etc.)	\$400	\$100	+\$300

Amount Allocated in 2020-2021: \$30,712  
 Amount Spent in 2020-21: (\$ 29,712)  
 Remaining funding (if any) expected at June 30, 2021: = **+\$1,100**

Please note that if spending exceeds allocation, the deficit must be absorbed by the unit.

Please submit your completed Year 1 Report form to Dr. Christina Hendricks, Academic Director, Centre for Teaching, Learning and Technology and Chair, TA Training Fund Adjudication Committee via [TA.Training.fund@ubc.ca](mailto:TA.Training.fund@ubc.ca) by **3:00pm on May 31, 2021.**