

**DOCTORAL STUDENTS' FEEDBACK ON TA TRAINING**  
**Results from the 2019 UCSC Graduate Student Survey**  
**Report by IRAPS, July 2021**

In the 2019 UCSC Graduate Student Survey, students answered questions about satisfaction with the teaching assistant (TA) experience, and needs for TA training. Graduate students provided suggestions for additional resources for TA training. This report covers feedback on TA training among doctoral students. Please also see a separate IRAPS report on CITL programs.

In 2019, 52% of doctoral students participated in the Graduate Student Survey.

### **Executive Summary**

- The majority (84%) of doctoral students have worked as a TA for at least one quarter.
- Half of doctoral students in Arts (50%) and Humanities (56%) worked as a TA for at least 6 quarters, compared with 21% in BSOE and 25% in PBSci.
- Students reported low satisfaction with the formal TA training prior to having a first TA assignment, ranging from 22% being *satisfied* or *very satisfied* in Social Sciences, to 37%-41% in BSOE, PBSci, and Humanities.
- TAs indicated that training and guidance was most needed for how to plan a course as the instructor of record: about 2 in 3 (across divisions, between 57% and 76%) identified this topic as an area for either *substantial* or *some additional* training or guidance.
- About 2 in 3 TAs (between 64% and 72%, across divisions) received valuable teaching experience as a result of TA work, about 3 in 5 (between 56% and 64%, across divisions) developed skills relevant to career goals, and at least 3 in 5 (between 60% and 72%, across divisions) established a good working relationship with a faculty member.
- Between half (52%, Arts) and two-thirds (67%, PBSci) of TAs felt that TA work took up a lot of time slowing down the progress toward a degree.
- Doctoral students' suggestions for improving TA training included expanding training and guidance activities including offering university-wide TA training on how to design one's own course, providing student feedback, setting boundaries with students, and time management; providing standard checklists for TA-professor communication; having TA training be earlier in the graduate career, increasing salaries, providing guidance on communication with professors, and offering division-specific TA training content.

## Results

The majority (84%) of doctoral students indicated having worked as a TA for at least one quarter, with over half (55%) having worked as a TA for 3 quarters or more. The proportion of doctoral students having worked as a TA for 6 or more quarters varied by division, from one-quarter or less in BSOE (21%) and PBSci (25%), to half or more in Arts (50%) and Humanities (56%).

**Table 1. Number of quarters with a TA position, by division**

	Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	PBSci	BSOE	Total
	N = 28	N = 72	N = 149	N = 225	N = 135	N = 609
0 quarters	7%	10%	10%	14%	30%	16%
1 quarter	11%	7%	7%	18%	18%	14%
2 quarters	7%	4%	15%	18%	16%	15%
3 to 5 quarters	25%	24%	23%	25%	16%	22%
6 to 9 quarters	36%	28%	26%	13%	12%	19%
10 quarters or more	14%	28%	18%	12%	10%	15%
<b>Subtotal 6 or more:</b>	<b>50%</b>	<b>56%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>34%</b>

## Satisfaction with Preparation for TA Assignments

Students reported low satisfaction with the formal TA training prior to having a first TA assignment, with 22% being *satisfied* or *very satisfied* in Social Sciences, to 37%-41% in PBSci, BSOE, and Humanities. Satisfaction with formal supervision and evaluation of TA work varied, with at least 2 in 5 (between 41% and 53%, across divisions) being *satisfied* or *very satisfied*. Table 2 shows satisfaction ratings for all divisions.

**Table 2. Satisfaction with TA training, supervision, and guidance, by division**

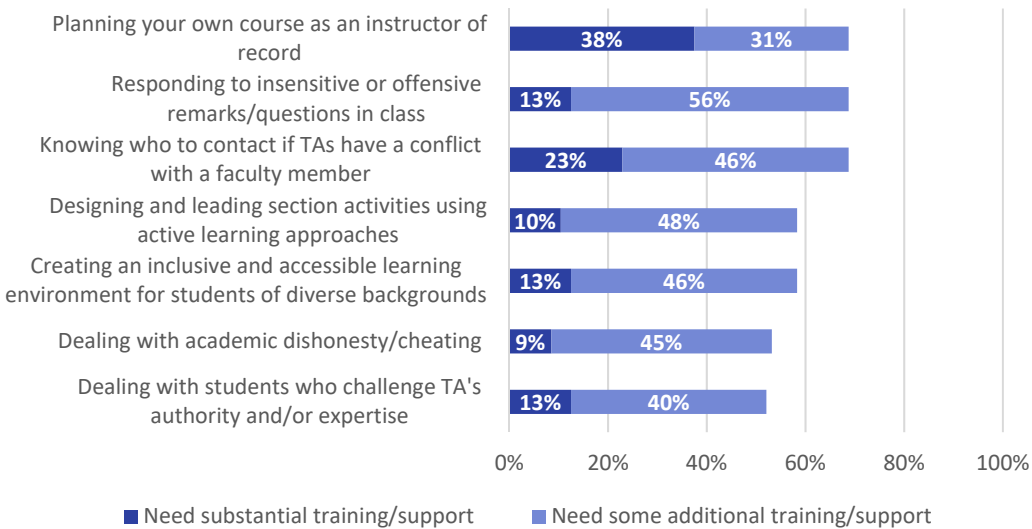
		Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	PBSci	BSOE
		N = 25	N = 64	N = 133	N = 191	N = 94
Formal instruction in teaching you received prior to your first TA assignment	Satisfied/Very satisfied	28%	41%	22%	38%	37%
	Other ratings	56%	50%	71%	54%	52%
	Did not receive any	16%	9%	7%	7%	11%
Formal supervision and evaluation of your work as a TA	Satisfied/Very satisfied	44%	53%	41%	45%	45%
	Other ratings	48%	36%	52%	48%	52%
	Did not receive any	8%	11%	8%	6%	3%
Informal support and guidance from faculty members for whom you worked as a TA	Satisfied/Very satisfied	60%	66%	60%	58%	58%
	Other ratings	40%	34%	39%	40%	41%
	Did not receive any	0%	0%	2%	2%	1%

*Question text: Referring to your TA experience at UCSC, please indicate how satisfied you are with the quality of ...*

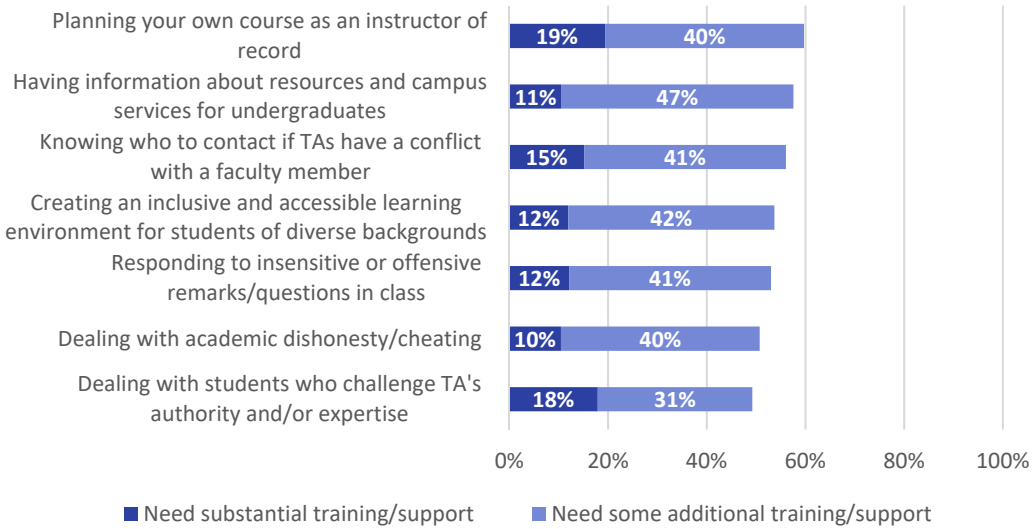
## Top Needs for Instructional Training

Doctoral students were asked about the variety of teaching-related tasks and challenges. Training and guidance was most needed for how to plan a course as the instructor of record: about 2 in 3 (across divisions, between 57% and 76%) identified this topic as an area for either *substantial* or *some additional* training or guidance. Other areas of high need included knowing whom to contact in case of conflict between a TA and a faculty member, and assessing student learning and giving feedback to students. Moreover, TAs indicated needing more training related to classroom management: dealing with students who challenge the authority and expertise of TAs, responding to insensitive remarks in class, and creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment. Figures 1-5 show the areas for instructional training, ordered from the most needed to the least. For a summary of results by division, see Table 5 in the Appendix.

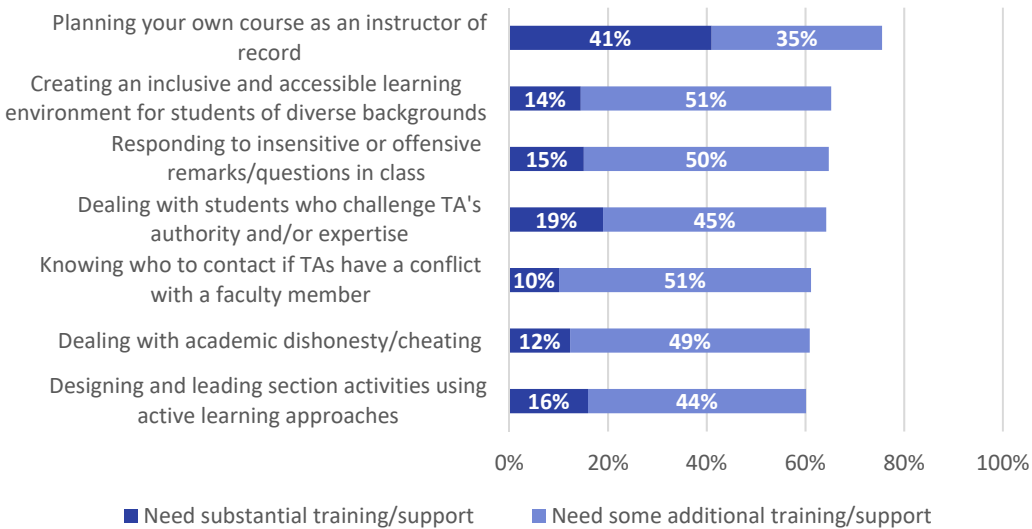
**Figure 1. Arts doctoral students' top needs for instructional training**



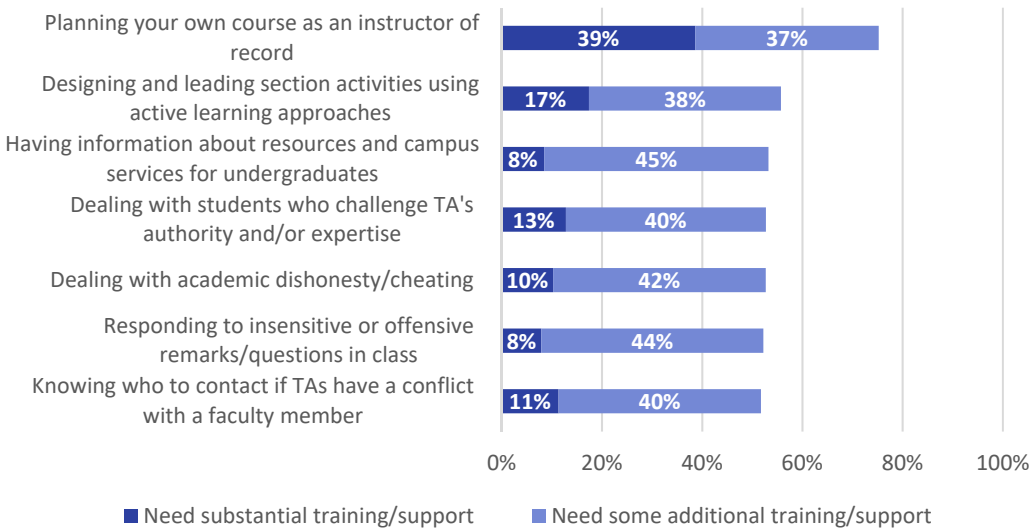
**Figure 2. Humanities doctoral students' top needs for instructional training**



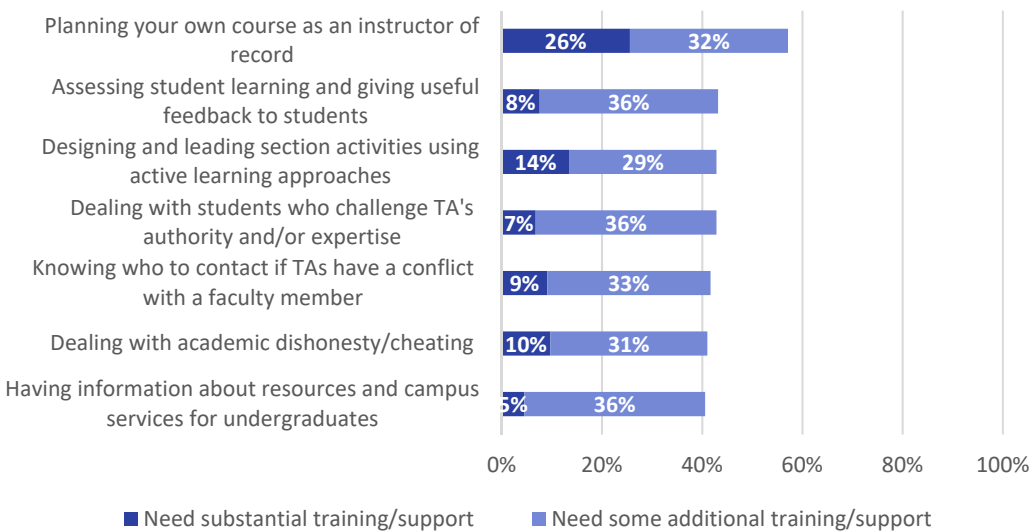
**Figure 3. Social Science doctoral students' top needs for instructional training**



**Figure 4. PBSci doctoral students' top needs for instructional training**



**Figure 5. BSOE doctoral students' top needs for instructional training**



## Teaching, Academic, and Time Impacts of TA Work

TAs evaluated the teaching and academic-related impacts of TA work. Across divisions, TAs reported similar experiences. About 2 in 3 TAs (between 64% and 72%, across divisions) received valuable teaching experience, about 3 in 5 (between 56% and 64%, across divisions) developed skills relevant to career goals, and at least 3 in 5 (between 60% and 72%, across divisions) established a good working relationship with a faculty member. Table 3 shows the results for each division.

**Table 3. Teaching and academic skills impacts of TA experiences, by division**

		Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	PBSci	BSOE
		N = 25	N = 64	N = 132	N = 190	N = 93
TAing provided me with valuable teaching experience	Agree/Strongly agree	64%	64%	72%	73%	70%
	Other responses	36%	36%	28%	27%	30%
TAing supported me to develop skills relevant to my career goals	Agree/Strongly agree	56%	63%	64%	62%	59%
	Other responses	44%	38%	36%	38%	41%
TAing helped me establish a good working relationship with a faculty member(s)	Agree/Strongly agree	72%	63%	60%	65%	63%
	Other responses	28%	37%	40%	35%	37%

*Question text: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the classes you worked for as a TA...*

Time impacts of TA experiences included between half (52%, Arts) and two-thirds (67%, PBSci) of TAs feeling that TA work took up a lot of time slowing down the progress toward a degree. Table 4 shows division-specific ratings of the time impacts of TA work.

**Table 4. Negative impacts of TAing on progress toward degree, by division**

		Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	PBSci	BSOE
		N = 25	N = 64	N = 132	N = 190	N = 93
TAing took up a lot of my time slowing down my progress towards degree	Agree/Strongly agree	52%	66%	53%	67%	43%
	Other responses	48%	34%	47%	33%	57%

*Question text: Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that the classes you worked for as a TA ...*

## Overall Suggestions for TA Training

Doctoral students provided many suggestions for improving TA training, in response to the question, "Do you have any suggestions for how to improve TA training in your program?". Across divisions, many responses were similar. Responses are grouped by theme, but within each grouping are not necessarily ordered in any particular way.

### Expanding TA Training and Guidance Activities

- Make TA training longer than the few hours or a day or two that some departments have had, to become a full quarter instead
- Make TA training a mandatory requirement in programs and a standard part of the curriculum
- Offer a formal program where new TAs shadow more experienced TAs
- Create a panel of current TAs in different types of TA assignments for different types of courses and levels of responsibility
- Hold check-ins among first-quarter TAs throughout the first quarter to get advice and support from other TAs
- Offer further training beyond the first or second year, regularly throughout the graduate career
- Offer continuous support programs for TAs throughout the year
- Continue CITL programs, or provide CITL materials to give to all incoming graduate students
- Require an end of year check-in about TAing

### Content for TA Training and Support

- Offer university-wide TA training on how to design one's own course
- Make curriculum a balance of instruction about institutional policies, general pedagogical methods, and specific situations that TAs are likely to face on a daily basis
- Create and distribute a standard checklist of items that students and faculty should discuss each quarter (regular meeting time throughout the quarter, where to sit during lecture, how to take roll, section in-class assignment or homework expectations, how to calibrate grading across TAs, turnaround expectations for graded assignments, and what skills faculty are supposed to share with TAs)
- Offer more support on how to provide feedback to students and how to lead sections
- Teach how to set boundaries with students about expectations and behavior
- Offer time efficiency and time management training

### Require TA Training in the First Year of Doctoral Programs

- Move department TA training from the second year to the beginning of the first year
- Move TA training from winter of the first year to fall of the first year
- Require TA training to be done in the quarter before TA position rather than during that quarter

### Funding Considerations

- Increase salaries for TA positions
- Don't make National Science Foundation graduate fellows work as TAs full-time at half-pay

### **TA-Professor Communication**

- Provide ways within each department for students to report exploitative behavior from faculty
- Require professors to give clearer expectations for TAs
- Reduce disparities in workloads across TA assignments, including where small courses are often given multiple TAs and large courses are given only one
- Provide guidance for how TAs should communicate course expectations to students
- Offer ways for TAs to evaluate professors and for professors to evaluate TAs regularly, including some way for professors to provide concrete suggestions for how TAs can improve
- Provide TAs with training on how to interact with faculty who are uninterested in guiding TAs
- Require regular meetings between TAs and professors

### **TA Assignments**

- Take into account TA preferences for TA positions including prioritizing assigning TAs to courses that are within each TA's field of expertise
- Take into account grad students' professional goals in assigning TA positions

### **Division-Specific Comments**

- A number of comments from Arts, PSci, and BSOE TAs mentioned needing TA training. These comments suggest offering more CITL workshops specifically for students in those divisions.
- Several PSci graduate students wanted to have intensive workshops on TA training, a TA mentor program, or more training on how to teach in an equity-minded way. Since CITL offers many workshops or programs already, these comments suggest a need for raising more awareness among PSci grad students of CITL's program offerings.
- BSOE students suggested having more Engineering-specific CITL workshops.



## Appendix

**Table 5. Needs for more TA training or guidance, by topic and division (also shown in Figures 1-5)**

		Arts	Humanities	Social Sciences	PBSci	BSOE
		N = 25	N = 64	N = 133	N = 188	N = 93
Dealing with academic dishonesty/cheating	Need substantial	9%	10%	12%	10%	10%
	Need some additional	45%	40%	49%	42%	31%
	Not needing	47%	49%	39%	47%	59%
Creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment	Need substantial	13%	12%	14%	14%	3%
	Need some additional	46%	42%	51%	37%	28%
	Not needing	42%	46%	35%	49%	69%
Dealing with students who challenge TA's authority and/or expertise	Need substantial	13%	18%	19%	13%	7%
	Need some additional	40%	31%	45%	40%	36%
	Not needing	48%	51%	36%	47%	57%
Responding to insensitive or offensive remarks/questions in class	Need substantial	13%	12%	15%	8%	5%
	Need some additional	56%	41%	50%	44%	32%
	Not needing	31%	47%	35%	48%	62%
Having information about resources and campus services for undergraduates	Need substantial	8%	11%	9%	8%	5%
	Need some additional	42%	47%	41%	45%	36%
	Not needing	50%	42%	49%	47%	59%
Knowing who to contact if TAs have a conflict with a faculty member	Need substantial	23%	15%	10%	11%	9%
	Need some additional	46%	41%	51%	40%	33%
	Not needing	31%	44%	39%	48%	58%
Assisting faculty in teaching students discipline-specific knowledge and skills	Need substantial	4%	12%	9%	10%	6%
	Need some additional	40%	35%	36%	34%	24%
	Not needing	56%	53%	55%	57%	69%
Designing and leading section activities using active learning approaches	Need substantial	10%	12%	16%	17%	14%
	Need some additional	48%	36%	44%	38%	29%
	Not needing	42%	52%	40%	44%	57%
Assessing student learning and giving useful feedback to students	Need substantial	15%	12%	9%	16%	8%
	Need some additional	29%	27%	44%	34%	36%
	Not needing	56%	61%	46%	50%	57%
Planning your own course as an instructor of record	Need substantial	38%	19%	41%	39%	26%
	Need some additional	31%	40%	35%	37%	32%
	Not needing	31%	40%	24%	25%	43%

*Question text: Thinking about both the formal and informal training and guidance you received as a TA, do you need more training/support in any of the following areas?*