



# Yale College Guidelines for Teaching with Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs)

In Fall 2015, with the endorsement of the Yale College faculty, the Computer Science department hired Yale's first group of Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs). Many universities nationwide, including peer institutions, have employed ULAs. With appropriate training and guidance, ULAs can serve as a considerable instructional resource, since students who struggle with the curriculum often find their peers more approachable than faculty or graduate students. By helping their peers, ULAs themselves deepen their own understanding of the course content and enrich their college experience.

The following guidelines are intended to help instructors provide a well-supported learning experience for undergraduates who work as ULAs. Because appointing undergraduates to an instructional role raises concerns and poses potential risks, these guidelines are necessarily more extensive and stringent than those for other instructional roles. Hiring departments and supervising faculty should understand their responsibilities in providing extensive guidance and supervision of the ULAs.

## Expectations of ULA Stakeholders

### Institutional Responsibilities

The University funds ULAs through the Teaching Fellow Program. Working in partnership with the sponsoring department, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provides resources to train ULAs. The CTL offers foundational training that covers basic pedagogy and addresses topics such as confidentiality, academic integrity, and Title IX issues. This training is every semester and is required for all students appointed as ULAs for the first and second times. The CTL will provide recommendations to the department about effective mechanisms for ongoing guidance for the ULAs. These recommendations may include formats for weekly ULA meetings with the instructor, such as discussing problems sets and reviewing challenging concepts.

### Departmental Responsibilities

Working with course instructors, departments will select and hire their own ULAs through Student Employment. Under no circumstances may departments hire first year students as ULAs.

## Departmental Responsibilities (continued)

Departments must secure the approval of the Yale College Faculty before hiring. Departments holding this approval may request ULA use by consulting with the Yale College Dean's Office and the Teaching Fellow Program. Departments may use ULAs only if no graduate student teaching fellows are available.

The DUS will facilitate the partnership between the CTL and faculty. The DUS will thus be the primary departmental contact and should meet with the ULAs at the beginning of each term to discuss the responsibilities, expectations, and limitations of the assignment. Each DUS, in consultation with the DGS, should establish the qualifications for their own department's ULAs (e.g., whether ULAs must have taken the course to which they will be assigned, whether ULAs must be juniors or seniors, etc.).

Departments will designate one or more faculty members to partner with the CTL to train ULAs. Departments will coordinate communication between the CTL and the ULAs to facilitate training and assessment.

All departments using ULAs will be reviewed after an initial three-year trial period. The review will be based on student responses to the Online Course Evaluation (OCE) as well as responses provided by the ULAs to the CTL questionnaire (see "Evaluation of ULA Use").

## Faculty Responsibilities

The instructor of record must closely supervise the ULA throughout the course and participate in ULA training.

Course instructors will inform ULAs whether they are required to attend class sessions.

Course instructors will hold weekly staff meetings with the ULAs to review topics on which their peers may request help, advise ULAs on assigned grading duties, and help ULAs prepare for sections.

Course instructors will provide grading rubrics to ensure consistent grading by ULAs. Course instructors will facilitate blind grading mechanisms (see examples in Appendix 2; consult the CTL for further assistance).

Course instructors will review ULA grading and must be responsible for calculation and assignment of final grades. ***Under no circumstances may ULAs grade essays or perform any type of qualitative assessment.***

Course instructors will observe each ULA at least once per term, either by visiting during the ULA's office hours, or by observing the ULA's discussion section, and offer feedback and suggestions. This is a core responsibility of faculty toward students, both graduate and undergraduate, who assist in the teaching of their courses.

Other faculty responsibilities include:

- preparing their own course materials, including syllabi, papers, essays, lectures, homework assignments, problem sets and examinations, and scoring keys;
- reserving and printing course materials;
- obtaining audiovisual equipment;
- maintaining course websites;

## Faculty Responsibilities (continued)

- managing the distribution of students in sections at the start of the term;
- recording grades and reporting them at the end of term;
- administering their own examinations;
- grading graduate students' examinations and graduate students' coursework that requires qualitative evaluation

## ULA Responsibilities

ULAs are expected to hold office hours, lead review sessions, and work one-on-one with students. They are permitted to grade student work, although the expectation is for “blind” grading—where students' names are hidden from the ULA during grading—and that they grade only quantitative assignments. ULAs may grade graduate student work when the course instructor member provides them with an answer key.

***Undergraduates cannot work as ULAs during reading period and exam week***, and so course instructors who administer final exams must provide alternative sources of support during that time, such as holding their own review sessions, offering extra office hours, or providing additional teaching fellows.

ULAs should expect to spend 1-2 hours per week, individually or as a group, with the instructor of record in the course in which they assist.

[See Appendix 1 for descriptions of other student course support roles (Teaching Fellow, Course-Based Peer Tutor, Grader).]

The CTL will provide ULA training, which is mandatory for all ULAs to attend. ULAs must comply with University policies governing confidentiality, academic integrity, and Title IX regulations. ULAs will follow the pedagogical practices for peer instruction presented in ULA training: for instance, how to provide assistance without giving the answer; how to teach inclusively; how to grade consistently and fairly; and so on. ULAs will inform course instructors of any possible conflicts of interest arising from personal relationships with students in the course.

An undergraduate may only serve as a ULA for one course per term. ULA appointments are set at 10 hours per week on average. These hours include the weekly meeting with the instructor and include, where appropriate, attending the class.

Duties assigned to ULAs vary, and they may include the following:

- Grading quantitative assignments, laboratory reports, and examinations. The course instructor must provide detailed guidelines for grading these assignments. To avoid conflicts of interest, ULAs cannot knowingly grade the work of friends.
- Holding office hours in specified campus locations, leading review sessions, and working one-on-one with students in the course.

ULAs with complaints or issues that require the attention of someone other than the faculty member may contact the CTL for assistance. The ULA appointment letter will include contact information for the CTL and reminders about how to report Title IX and academic integrity concerns.

## Evaluation of ULA Use

All stakeholders are expected to facilitate the ongoing evaluation of the ULAs' performance. The Teaching Fellow Program will administer a midcourse survey to all ULAs to ask about their weekly work experience (e.g., number of hours worked; types of duties performed), and to provide ULAs a means to identify any concerns. At the end of the term, the University will assess both the performance of the ULAs and the impact of the teaching experience on the ULAs themselves.

At several points during the term, the CTL will also administer brief questionnaires to all ULAs. These questionnaires will ask ULAs whether the CTL training and weekly faculty meetings provided sufficient guidance for the role, and how these experiences might be improved.

Similarly, students in courses staffed by ULAs will evaluate ULA support by means of a *required* custom question added to the Online Course Evaluation. This additional question will help the CTL get feedback on the preparation and performance of the ULAs from their peers.

The data will be used to review the use of ULAs in three years; it will also help the University and departments to improve these guidelines. Continued use of ULAs is contingent upon following these guidelines.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Types of student course-support: roles defined

**Teaching Fellows** are graduate students assigned to specific courses who may: lead sections or laboratories, which can include designing a lesson plan and providing supplementary instruction; hold office hours and lead review sessions; work one-on-one with students; grade undergraduate work. Graduate students may not substitute for an absent faculty member, nor are they responsible for preparing course materials, any clerical work associated with the course, or administering examinations. No graduate student may teach a lecture course independently or supervise teaching fellows. It is expected that the faculty member in charge of the course will meet weekly with the teaching fellows for that course and observe at least one section of each teaching fellow.

An annually distributed memo from the deans of Yale College, the Graduate School and the FAS details the responsibilities of teaching fellows and faculty at length. Graduate students in their teaching years are expected to teach as part of their academic training, as specified in their letters of admission. Departments and programs are expected to assign teaching fellows wisely and to redistribute assignments as needed based on shifts in projected enrollment during the Course Selection Period.

**Course-Based Peer Tutors** are undergraduates assigned to a specific course who may hold office hours or work one-on-one with students. CBPTs are not authorized to grade assignments or exams. CBPTs are allocated based on requests to the Center for Teaching and Learning.

**Graders** may be graduate or undergraduate students assigned to review and grade problem sets and exams for a course. They do not normally interact directly with the undergraduates enrolled in the course. To date,

## Appendix 1. continued

graders have been more commonly used to evaluate quantitative assignments or other work where grading criteria are more objective (e.g., problem sets, coding assignments, and lab reports rather than essays).

Teaching Fellows, ULAs and graders are allocated to departments and programs by the Teaching Fellow Program. CBPTs are allocated by the Center for Teaching and Learning.

*(See comparison table, a separate page at the end of this document)*

## Appendix 2. Sample blind grading approaches

- Labeling assignments with ID numbers instead of names
- Putting names on the back of the last page of an exam or assignment so it isn't viewed by grader
- Swapping assignments between sections
- Grading by question

Handwritten assignments can be an obstacle to blind grading when graders recognize someone's writing. A detailed scoring key helps maintain consistency.



## Comparison of Student Course Support Roles

Role	Duties	Limits	Faculty responsibilities	Hours	Training
Teaching Fellow	(Graduate students only) May lead sections or laboratories, which can include designing a lesson plan and providing supplementary instruction; hold office hours and lead review sessions; work one-on-one with students; grade undergraduate work	May not substitute for an absent faculty member, nor are they responsible for preparing course materials, any clerical work associated with the course, or administering examinations. No graduate student may teach a lecture course independently or supervise teaching fellows	Meet weekly with the teaching fellows for that course and observe at least one section of each teaching fellow; preparing their own course materials, including syllabi, papers, essays, lectures, homework assignments, problem sets and examinations, and scoring keys; reserving and printing course materials; obtaining audiovisual equipment; maintaining course websites; managing the distribution of students in sections at the start of the term; recording grades and reporting them at the end of term; administering their own examinations; grading graduate students' examinations and graduate students' coursework that requires qualitative evaluation.	TF Level 10 (6--10 hours per week) or TF Level 20 (15--20 hours per week)	GSAS requires training for all first-time TFs; addresses policies such as Title IX, inclusivity, academic integrity, basic teaching strategies (offered by the CTL each semester)
Undergraduate Learning Assistant	(Undergraduate students only) May hold office hours, lead review sessions, and work one-on-one with students. They are permitted to grade student work, although the expectation is for "blind" grading—where students' names are hidden from the ULA during grading—and that they grade quantitative assignments. ULAs may grade graduate student work when the faculty member provides them with an answer key, may be asked to attend class	May elect not to work during reading period and exam week; under no circumstances may ULAs grade essays or perform any type of qualitative assessment; cannot be a ULA for a friend in the course	Same as for TF plus: closely supervise ULA, be involved in ULA training, hold weekly staff meetings, offer guidance for assigned grading duties such as providing a rubric and facilitating blind grading, review ULA grading and must be responsible for calculation and assignment of final grades, observe each ULA at least once per term, either by visiting during the ULA's office hours, or by observing the ULA's discussion section, and offer feedback and suggestions; provide alternative sources of support during reading period and exam week	Up to 12 hours per week	Coordinated in partnership with departments; CTL training required for all first and second time ULAs; covers basic pedagogy and topics such as confidentiality, inclusivity, academic integrity, and Title IX issues
Course-Based Peer Tutor	(Undergraduate students only) May hold office hours and work with students in groups; may work one-on-one with students who need special attention; may be asked to attend class; must keep records and report usage data to the CTL.	Cannot grade work; may elect not to work during reading period	Recruiting students for this role; orienting tutors to course requirements and deadlines; meeting with tutors 2---3 times a term to check in; being available for tutor questions throughout the term; collecting information about students' experience with tutoring.	Up to 10 hours per week	CTL--led training covers basic pedagogy and topics such as confidentiality, inclusivity, academic integrity, and Title IX issues
Grader	(Undergraduate or graduate students) Typically used to evaluate quantitative assignments or other work where grading criteria are more objective (e.g., problem sets, coding assignments, and lab reports)	Typically does not have direct contact with students	Recruiting students for this role	Up to 10 hours per week	None