

UC San Diego
Department of Economics

**Teaching Assistant (TA)
& Reader Handbook**

2018-2019

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I. Departmental Contacts

Area of concern	Contact	Title	Office	Email
Provides training and advice on best practices to new TAs, Readers & UIAs	Daniel Leff Yaffe <i>Ph.D. Student</i>	Senior TA	Econ 127	dleffyaf@ucsd.edu
Provides training and advice on best practices to new TAs, Readers, and UIAs	Giacomo Rondina <i>Faculty Member</i>	Director of Instruction	Econ 226	grondina@ucsd.edu
Oversight of TA and Reader assignments; Advises faculty & TA/Readers on workload; oversees the TA/Reader evaluation process.	Diana Platero-Lopez <i>Senior Staff</i>	Director of Student Affairs & Instructional Programs	SH 247	dplatero@ucsd.edu
Faculty Advisor to Graduate Student TA/Readers.	Prashant Bharadwaj <i>Faculty Member</i>	Vice Chair of Graduate Studies	Econ 318	
Submitting hours via online timekeeping.	Amanda Brainerd <i>Senior Staff Member</i>	Admin/Fiscal Coordinator	SH 255	abrainerd@ucsd.edu
Manage TA/Reader assignments; assists with reserving a Dept. space (up to 30 seats). Will unlock the Grad Lounge (SH 213) for Tutors.	Jackie Tam, Cathy Pugh <i>Staff Members</i>	Ph.D. Program Coordinators	SH 253 & SH 251	econphdadvising@ucsd.edu
Assists with room requests (>30 seats) Distributes Desk Copies.	Danny Romero or Amanda Brainerd <i>Staff Members</i>		SH 245	econrooms@ucsd.edu
Undergraduate Student Services including walk-in Advising.	Jennifer Beauchamp, Kelly Escobedo, Tania Herrera, Danny Romero & Brittany Thompson* <i>Staff Members</i>	Undergraduate Advisors *Ms. Thompson is the Dept. Undergrad TA Coordinator & Liaison for the Office of Students with Disabilities (OSD).	SH 245	econugadvisor@ucsd.edu
Schedule Office Hours, Dept. & campus.	Various Dept. Staff		n/a	econrooms@ucsd.edu

II. University Contacts

Area of Concern	Contact	Website
General Graduate Student Financial Support	Graduate Division	http://grad.ucsd.edu/financial/index.html
Teaching resources including consultation and observation.	Teaching + Learning Commons	http://ctd.ucsd.edu/
Assistance to students, faculty, and staff regarding reports of bias, harassment, and discrimination.	Office for the Prevention of Harassment & Discrimination (OPHD)	http://blink.ucsd.edu/HR/policies/sexual/OPHD.html
Assistance with students with documented disabilities.	Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) University Center 202	http://disabilities.ucsd.edu/students/index.html

III. Working as a TA or Reader in the Department of Economics

50% TAs and Readers should work approximately 20 hours per week, 25% TAs and Readers should work approximately 10 hours per week, etc. If you feel that you are consistently being asked to work more than the appropriate amount of time, please talk to the instructor-of-record first. If you are uncomfortable doing this, please talk to the **Senior TA, Daniel Leff Yaffe** dleffyaf@ucsd.edu or to **Diana Platero-Lopez** (dplatero@ucsd.edu, SH 247) **either will work with you and the Instructor to find a reasonable agreement.** All such conversations are confidential.

A. TA and Reader Responsibilities and Tips

Description of Duties:

A teaching assistant (TA) assists in the instruction of an upper or lower division course at the University under the supervision of a faculty member. The TA primarily assists the faculty member in charge of the course by conducting discussion or laboratory sections that supplement faculty lectures and by grading assignments and examinations.

A TA may also assist with the development of assignments or exams, hold office hours and proctor examinations. In the case of basic language, reading and composition, some other skills-building courses, and a few other courses, a teaching assistant may lead the class meetings, but as with all other TAs, the general instructional content of the course, as well as the official assignment of student grades and decisions on grade appeals, are the responsibility of the faculty member in charge of the course. In no instance shall a teaching assistant be assigned responsibility for the entire instruction of a course.

A Reader assists a course instructor by grading homework, papers, or exams and may also hold office hours to answer students' questions about such assignments.

The responsibilities of a TA, Reader or Tutor in the Department of Economics includes the following:

1. Communicate with the Instructor-of-Record
2. Communicate with Students (**TAs Only**)
3. Attend Lecture
4. Teach (**TAs Only**)
 - a. Discussion Sections
 - b. Exam Review Sessions
5. Prepare Questions and Answer Keys (**TAs Only**)
6. Hold Office Hours (**TAs Only**)
7. Proctor Exams
8. Grade
 - a. Exams
 - b. Homework
9. Course Website Management (typically UCSD's TritonEd)

1. Communicate with the Instructor-of-Record

Communication with the Instructor typically begins before the first day of classes because the Instructor needs to finalize the syllabus before classes start. It is very important that you are in email contact for at least two weeks prior to the start of the quarter so that you can respond to emails asking for your preferred office hours, office location, etc. During the quarter, it is important that you answer the instructor's emails promptly because important, time-sensitive issues may develop.

The Instructor may schedule meetings with all of the course's TAs/Readers weekly, occasionally, or not at all. Even if no meetings are scheduled, it is important that you communicate with the Instructor regularly so that you have current information about the course and to ensure that you are meeting the instructor's expectations and to provide feedback about the non-lecture components of the course. After an exam review session, for example, it is useful if you send a few sentences on how many students attended, what you covered and how it was received by the students.

2. Communicate with the students (TAs Only)

Respond to student e-mails within 24 hours. If the student's questions are too hard to answer via e-mail it is okay to say the question is best addressed in office hours and to give the students your office and hours. E-mails regarding missing exams, special accommodations, etc. should be forwarded to the Instructor to answer.

If you must miss office hours or discussion sections, consider using TED to send an e-mail to the students. Be sure to apologize for the inconvenience and include when the make-up session will be (added office hours before exams is usually much appreciated.)

3. Attend Lecture

TA's and readers are compensated to attend lectures and most Instructors require first time TA and readers (for either the Instructor or the course) attend all lectures. Even if an Instructor may not require your attendance in lecture, attending lecture is the easiest way to keep up with the material and be able to answer students' questions as well as be helpful to the Instructor and students should there be an emergency. If you don't attend lectures, it is your responsibility to keep up with the course material. This is particularly important if you are leading discussion sections for the class as TAs

cannot present new material to the students. Some ways to keep up with the course include checking the course website regularly (if there is one), asking for updates from TA(s) that are attending the lectures and asking the Instructor if they are sticking to the schedule on the syllabus.

4. *Teach (TAs Only)*

a. Discussion Sections

It is *very* important to be prepared for sections. Do the reading required of the students and make sure you know what is being covered in lecture. If you are confused about any course material, first ask the other TAs if they can help you to understand it—it's your job to be able to explain things to undergraduates, so don't be embarrassed to admit that you're confused. If all of the TAs are stumped, ask the Instructor.

In discussion sections you will most likely field students' questions on homework, practice problems, or review material already presented by the Instructor in lectures. Usually, Instructors will have problem sets or practice exams for you to go over during section. Even if you have an answer key, it is important to **solve the problems** on your own so you can best explain them and check for mistakes. It is more important that students understand how you reached the solution than the answer itself. You should help the students think about what concept the problem is attempting to test and ways the problem could be modified (and show up on an exam!). Before each section begins, be sure to post an outline of what you will be covering that day on whichever board or screen you will be using to present material during section.

If the Instructor does not specify what you are to cover in section, it is up to you to create a lesson plan. Creating your own practice problems based on lecture topics is one idea—many students find it helpful to go through each step of a problem that may have been covered quickly in lecture. Students appreciate being asked about what *they* want covered; oftentimes there is one topic/problem with which they are all struggling.

Whatever you cover in section, remember that if students are quiet, it is more likely that they are lost or shy, and not bored. Go slowly—do **not** skip steps in solving problems or explaining – and try to write every step on the board so that students can go back to their notes from section when they are doing problems on their own. Take your time to draw graphs clearly and label everything! Students whose first language is not English will find it particularly helpful if you write key terms and definitions on the board. It is also helpful to ask for feedback while you are teaching section. Not only does this allow you clarify material the undergraduates may not understand but also it encourages active discussion in your section. This should be a less formal environment than the Instructor's lecture.

If you are unsure of the answer to a student's question, let the student know that you are not sure and you will follow-up with the correct answer (via e-mail, by posting the answer on TritonEd, etc.). Giving the wrong answer, particularly in an exam review, is far worse than giving a correct, albeit delayed answer!

b. Review Sessions

Not all Instructors require review sessions. If you are responsible for holding one, a useful teaching method is to present an outline of the material covered up to that point. Highlighting key concepts and working through important problems (if applicable) is helpful to the students and may elicit questions from them. Try to allow time at the end for additional student questions on particular homework problems, practice test problems, or lecture items.

A significant portion of the students may not be aware of what is required of them on the exam. It is useful to schedule these sessions several days before the exam so they can adjust their study habits.

5. *Office Hours (TAs Only)*

It is *essential* that you are present during your office hours. If you need to miss your office hours for a certain week, notify your students at least 24 hours in advance of the cancelled office hours and the new time by sending an email announcement. If you have to miss or be late to your office hours due to illness or emergency, send an email ASAP to econphdadvising@ucsd.edu. Staff will post a note on your office door. You should also inform the Instructor that you are missing office hours and when you plan to make them up. If possible, contact your fellow TAs from the class to see if one of them can cover for you. If so make sure that a sign is posted on your door directing students to the alternate location & person.

During office hours, individual students tend to ask questions related to reading assignments and lectures (though homework and old exams are also fair game). Office hours can be more challenging than sections because it is more likely you will get a question for which you did not explicitly prepare. Don't be embarrassed to look up answers in the text book, lecture notes, or answer keys – students just want to have their questions answered. If possible, it may be good for the students to hear you thinking out loud as you find the precise notes and/or place on the textbook to reference; this will avoid students presuming you do not know the course material. If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to email the student(s) later (but ASAP); they will appreciate your honesty and consideration for not wasting their time!

6. *Prepare Questions and Answer Keys (TAs Only)*

The Instructor may ask you to prepare homework or exam questions, proofread homework assignments or exams, or write answer keys to homework assignments or exams. When preparing homework questions, keep in mind that answering them should help students do well on exams. When preparing exam questions, make sure that they assess how well the student knows the material, but also try to ask questions whose answers are unambiguous and therefore easy to grade accurately.

7. *Proctor Exams*

It is important that you get to lecture at least ten minutes early on exam days. Given the possibility of multiple exam versions, passing out exams in large classes can take a surprising amount of time. Instructors may need help carrying exams to the classrooms, especially in large classes, so be sure to offer to help. Proctoring exams means that you help answer questions during the exam and are on the alert for any evidence of academic dishonesty. Try to minimize contact with your phone or laptop during this time. If you suspect academic dishonesty, be sure to point this out to the Instructor; she/he will instruct you what to do next.

8. *Gradescope Scanning:*

Gradescope is an online grading platform that has several advantages over grading paper copies of exams:

- It is hard to give individual feedback to students on their exams. Gradescope facilitates detailed explanations because the TA only needs to write the feedback once and then every student that made that same mistake will get the feedback.
- Graders sometimes make mistakes and correcting the mistake can be quite time consuming, particularly when exams have already been returned. If the grading error is one where the TA marked an answer wrong when the answer was correct or if the TA was too harsh/lenient when deducting points, then it is trivial to make the correction in Gradescope.
- Grading is faster with Gradescope because all TAs can grade at the same time.
- With regrades, TAs sometimes suspect the student has changed an answer to an already-graded exam. Gradescope completely solves this problem because we have the original exam scanned in.
- We have no place in the department to store final exams. So, we have an open-access shelf on the first floor where students can pick up their final exams with Buckley waivers. Students toss the exams around and sometimes take the exams of top-performing students. We will no longer need to keep paper copies of final exams.

a) Gradescope Exam Retention Guidelines:

Instructions for Final Exams:

- Even though the final exam has been scanned into Gradescope, we recommend keeping a paper copy of the exam for 10 days after grades have been posted
- We do not want to store final exams in the Grad lounge, so we have dedicated SH 108 for scanned final exams
- After 10 days, staff will place all final exams (in SH 108) in secure shred bins for proper disposal
- The paper copy of the final will not be returned to the student as students can view their exam and print from Gradescope

Instructions for other graded work:

- We recommend retaining midterms, quizzes or other graded items a few days after grades are released to students and then placing the exams in secure shred bins for proper disposal

TA and Readers responsibilities:

- TAs and/or Readers are responsible for scanning exams into Gradescope and confirming exams were scanned properly
- Exams should be stored in the faculty's office or in the storage cabinet in SH 108, and NOT in the Grad Lounge

Secure shred bins are the large locked bins with slots for documents/papers in the Department and are located on the second floor in SH and the Economics Building. Please ask, if you are uncertain about the secure shred bins, or their locations.

9. Grades

a. Exams

Most professors use a curve, so consistency in grading is *extremely important*. In order to be consistent, it helps to come up with a grading rubric for the questions you're responsible for, noting how many points you give for each element of a correct answer (or how many points you take away for each error)—and stick to it for every student! You will probably have to grade

several exams before deciding on an appropriate grading rubric. Once you do, make sure all exams are graded according to the same criteria—if you decide to change your rubric, go back and correct any previously graded exams.

If multiple people are grading an exam, each question should be graded by a single individual to ensure consistency. It's also helpful to coordinate on whether you write down the number of points students *receive* on a given question or the number of points students *miss* on a given question.

Exam turnaround should be no longer than one week for midterms and some instructors require less; for finals, the turnaround depends on when the final is scheduled during finals week. Final grades are usually due early the week after finals, so the professor will need the exams graded 1-2 days prior to that. **You should not make travel plans at the end of the quarter until you discuss with the Instructor when the final exam will be graded.** Even after exams are graded, be sure to be available by e-mail in case questions come up.

Maintaining the security of exams is essential. To the extent possible, grade exams at the Department of Economics—there have been cases of exams lost in between couch cushions when TAs have taken them home!

When exchanging partially graded exams with other TAs, a face-to-face handoff is best. If that is impossible, leave the tests in the graduate student lounge, SH 213. If you are an Undergraduate Tutor and need to drop off or pick up tests in SH 213, please ask **Cathy Pugh** (cpugh@ucsd.edu, SH 251) or **Jackie Tam** (jytam@ucsd.edu, SH 253) for access first; should Cathy or Jackie be out of the office, ask **Diana Platero-Lopez** (dplatero@ucsd.edu, SH 247) for access.

Exams are to be stored in the blue storage boxes located in SH 213. Do not leave bags of exams on the lounge floor; use the storage bins and label with the course number and quarter/year. Exams are retained thru the end of the following quarter. The senior TA is responsible for the shredding of the exams.

After exams are returned, most Instructors allow students to request their exam be regraded. Make sure to follow any guidelines that the Instructor sets, e.g. all requests must be made within a one-week time period or no regrades for questions written in pencil. Adhere closely to the rubric you set, and let students know that their exam is being graded the same way as everyone else's. If you find it hard to tell students face-to-face that they will not receive any additional points after reviewing their exam, tell them that you will look it over and then send them an email.

We do adhere to the university's policy of retaining final exams for *one academic quarter*. Methods include:

1. Buckley Waiver – downstairs in the exam cubbies (All faculty/instructors except those who deploy the other two practices, below).
2. No Buckley Waiver – in SH 245 - students must pick-up by showing a photo ID.
3. Exams held by faculty – only reviewed in their offices.

NOTE: Midterm exams are not held in SH 245, but rather with the faculty or TAs.

b. *Homework*

Some instructors assign graded homework. Graded homework is to be returned to students typically one week after due date, but some instructors may ask for a quicker turnaround.

If you discover an error or a typo in a homework or problem set, bring it to the Instructor's attention privately ASAP—the Instructor will be glad that you caught the error!

Often homework is graded on a 0-1-2 (0 if it is not turned in, 1 if it is incomplete, and 2 if it is complete) or similar basis.

Be sure you are aware of the class rules for collaboration on homework. Some instructors allow students to work in teams, so identical homework assignments may not constitute cheating. If you suspect an integrity violation, bring any evidence of cheating to the Instructor's attention ASAP.

10. Course Website Management

Many instructors use TritonEd to post course materials, send student e-mails, make course announcements, post student grades, etc. Uploading student grades from an Excel spreadsheet can be challenging! For help, see <http://acms.ucsd.edu/students/ted/>. For any TED questions, email IWDC at servicedesk@ucsd.edu or call 858.534.2267.

B. Sr. TA Responsibilities

- New Grad Reader Orientation (1st years in Fall Quarter only), New Grad TA Orientation (2nd years in Fall Quarter only), and new Undergrad (UG) TA Orientations each quarter (coordinated by Undergraduate Advisor Brittany Thompson)
- On-call to help in the absence of any other TA (i.e., grad is out sick)
- On-call to help with OSD accommodations
- On-call to help problem solve any TA workload issues
- Help with international student English Language Exams
- Work with other TA's and Readers to keep exams organized in grad lounge, and put exams into shred bins per exam retention time limits
- Meet regularly with first-time Readers and first-time TAs to answer questions
- May offer workshops of interest to the TA's and Readers
- Revise and update the Dept. Grad TA & Reader Handbook and Undergrad TA Handbook
- Available throughout the year to meet with Grad and UG TA's, Grad Readers and Grad and UG Vice-Chairs
- Additional course instruction projects as needed

C. Instructor Responsibilities

The responsibilities of the Instructors-of-Record (Professors, Lecturers, and Associate-ins) for the Department of Economics are:

1. General instructional content introducing the course material
2. Official assignment of grades and decisions on grade appeals
3. Attending exams

1. General instructional content

The Instructor-of-Record is responsible for the general instructional content of the course. TAs are not supposed to teach new material in lecture or section. There is, however, some ambiguity to the meaning of "new." Presenting a concept as an extension of something taught in lecture (for example,

going over a practice problem on *ad valorem* taxes in section when excise taxes were taught in class) probably does not constitute teaching new material.

If the Instructor asks you to teach new material, they may not be aware of this rule. If you do not feel comfortable telling the Instructor that you are not supposed to teach new material, please let the **Senior TA**, dleffiyaf@ucsd.edu (or **Diana Platero-Lopez** dplatero@ucsd.edu, SH 247) know, and one of them will handle the matter. All such conversations are confidential.

2. Official assignment of grades and decisions on grade appeals

The determination of final grades and decisions on grade appeals are the responsibility of the Instructor. You may be designated an “authorized grader” on e-grades, UC San Diego’s electronic grade system by the instructor. If you are an authorized grader, you will upload final exam grades e-grades. You may be asked to regrade a question you graded in the case of a grading dispute.

3. Attending exams

The Instructor-of-Record is expected to attend all course exams. If a situation arises in which the Instructor-of-Record is unable to attend an exam and you are unsure of how to proceed or are uncomfortable with the proposed way to proceed, contact the Senior TA, dleffiyaf@ucsd.edu or Diana Platero-Lopez, dplatero@ucsd.edu. All such conversations are confidential.

D. The Importance of Teaching Evaluations

TA evaluations are important to your progress within the Department of Economics as well as your career outside the Department. Two parties evaluate TAs: students and Instructors (generally, Professors and Lecturers). Appendix A is the Student Evaluation form, which is done electronically. Starting in the second week, encourage students in discussion sections and office hours to complete the evaluation. Appendix B is the Faculty Evaluation form also administered electronically. TA evaluations are used in the allocation of future TAs assignments, in departmental and university-wide teaching excellence awards, and in securing teaching positions in general.

Grad Student group standing determines the minimum level of funding you will receive via a Readership or TAs. If, after assigning all eligible students to serve as TAs and Readers there is still need for additional instructional support, TAs with the best student evaluations are given priority in filling the positions.

Both student and Instructor evaluations are used to determine the recipients of the Department’s TA Excellence Award (grad and undergrad students are eligible annually) and the campus-wide Barbara J. and Paul D. Saltman Excellence in Teaching Award. Both come with a monetary reward and are great additions to your CV.

If you wish to teach your own course as a graduate student or become a Summer Graduate Teaching Scholar, Instructor evaluations are of paramount importance. Even one bad comment can jeopardize your assignment, especially to an upper-division course.

Finally, Student and Faculty TA evaluations are reviewed by the Vice Chair of Graduate Studies each quarter. Evaluations that are found to be problematic will lead to a meeting with both the Vice Chair of Graduate Studies and the Vice Chair of Undergraduate Studies to discuss and address the problem.