

Conflicts, Challenges, and Hot Moments in the Classroom

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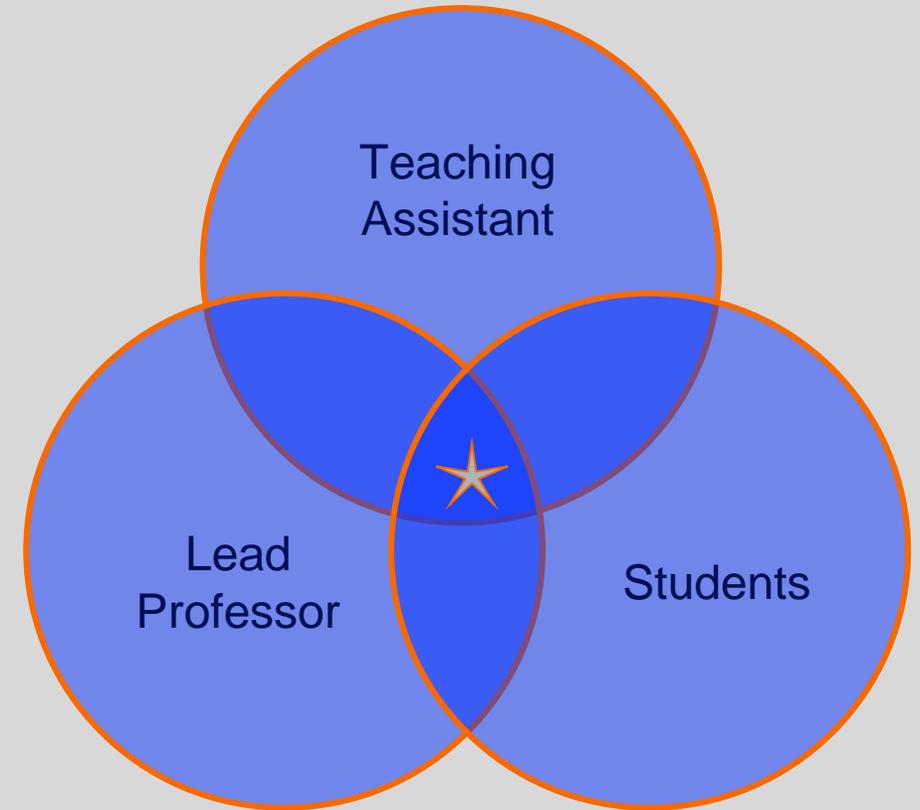


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 - Psychology of Childhood, Psychology of Adolescence
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Introduction

- Various challenges you might experience as Teaching Assistants
 - Provide some strategies to work through them



The TA x Professor Relationship

1. Power Dynamics
2. Work expectations
3. Overstepping boundaries/
expectations
4. Receiving feedback
5. Giving feedback

Power Dynamics

- Power: a person's ability to exert influence and control
- Power Dynamics: how power affects a relationship between two or more people
- What might this look like in this context?
 - Dr. P is the professor for a class that you are taking and is also the lead professor for the class in which you are a TA. You are aware that Dr. P is responsible for your grades in class, which may have great importance in your future success. You have an exam in two days which you need to study for, and Dr. P asks you to grade 150 exams by the end of the week. You cannot possibly study for your exam and complete the grading assignment.
 - How do we feel about this situation?
 - How might power play a role in how you're feeling?

Power Dynamics

- How do we handle power dynamics in the classroom with our lead professor
 - Have a conversation about your expectations as a TA
 - Be honest about the situation
 - provide appropriate context and necessary support
 - Reach out to trusted colleagues

Work Expectations

Consider:

Your professor asks you to complete grading of 75 essay exams in two days.
What would you do?

Overstepping boundaries and expectations

What are the TA expectations?

What role does power play in course expectations and boundaries?

Receiving feedback

What is constructive criticism?

- **Feedback provided in a manner that acknowledges both the positives and room for improvement instead of solely focusing on the negatives.**
- **Intended to give the recipient context around their areas of improvement, which is crucial for understanding why the feedback is being offered.**

How can we go about them?

- Try to not personalize remarks
 - See [Ted Talk by Frederik](#)
- Be self-aware
 - Sometimes taking constructive criticism can be hard! Try your best to think about the intention of the person providing the feedback and your subsequent reaction
- Humans make mistakes

Giving feedback

- Only speak from your expertise
 - E.g., “What I’ve seen from my interactions in recitation...”
 - E.g., “Would you mind helping me understand X decision...”
- Don’t rely on assumptions
 - Give recommendations only when you know the facts on that specific topic or person.
- Try offering “feedback Sandwich”
 - “placing a relevant corrective feedback between positive statements”
- Is your feedback solicited? Is it appropriate to provide? If so, is now the right time?



The TA x Student Relationship

1. Student Respect
2. Power dynamics
3. Student support
4. Student feedback
5. Students not following expectations

Student Respect

- Sometimes, students may not provide TAs the respect that is deserved
 - TAs can easily become scapegoats in the classroom
- How might we deal with a lack of respect in the classroom?
 - “During a session, you notice that a student is distracted on their phone while others are working on group activity. You then approach the student so as to redirect their attention to class and in response the student accuses you of invading their privacy, you are just a TA and you have no role in dictating how they spend their class time”

Power dynamics

- Power dynamics play a role in your relationship with your students
- What power do you have as a TA that may affect your relationship with your students?

- Always be mindful of your role and the power that you may have
 - Acknowledge your power (and possibly privilege) in the classroom to reinforce student awareness
- Maintain an appropriate TA x Student relationship and environment
 - Do not form relationships with students which require a shift from your identity as their TA

Student Support

Suppose you are teaching a recitation, how do you balance what students need your support with and what the professor assigned you to do?

Consider Jack's case;

Jack is a TA in math department leading 2/5 recitation sections. He's assignment today is to support students with Statdisk, computer software for data analysis. Some students insist that they would prefer help with homework that is due soon, after all that is what other TAs did this week. How would you go about this situation?

- Be flexible
- Is there a way to compromise?
 - Can I provide my students the support they need while also fulfilling my other obligation?
- What supports are other TAs providing?
 - Have any of my colleagues faced similar challenges?

Student feedback

- Student feedback is one of the most powerful, important tools that a TA can use
 - Our response to that feedback is just as important

- When receiving feedback from students we must consider the context
 - A student approaches you after class and shares that they and the other students think your daily quizzes are too difficult
 - What is our immediate response?
 - Always provide the student an actionable response
 - What context might inform our reaction?

- What do you do when you receive inappropriate or even hurtful “feedback”?
 - “You should learn how to speak English better. Then I’d understand what you’re teaching”
 - What is our immediate response?
 - How might we follow up with this “feedback”?

Students not following expectations

- Sometimes a student may not follow class expectations
 - responses could differ based on teaching style
- This may sometimes become a moral dilemma
 - “I’m on scholarship and I need a B in this class or else I need to drop out”
 - “If I don’t pass this class I can’t graduate this year”
 - “I’m on a sports team and they’ll kick me out if I don’t pass”
 - “I know I didn’t hand in my homework, but I’ve attended every class this semester”
 - “I know it says no make-up assignments in the syllabus, but my dog was sick and I couldn’t focus”
 - How should we handle these situations?

The Student x Student Relationship

1. Unequal participation in group work
2. Social Disagreements in the classroom
3. Inappropriate comments in the classroom

Unequal participation in group work

- How do you consider (weigh?) grades when students are supposed to be graded equally but do not equally contribute?

Consider student -student rating below

b. Group member name: ~~_____~~

1 2 3 4 5

~~_____~~ was not on the Zoom, was at the cite of measuring but didn't help, and didn't help write the report. ~~_____~~ only helped with our initial planning.

Here is what I did to address the situation

- Acknowledge the feedback
- Seek audience with the “named individual”

Social Disagreements in the classroom

- A student shares an opinion in class that others disagree with
 - Conflict diffusion
 - Take inventory of your own feelings and assess the situation
 - Validate opinions
 - Engage in discourse if appropriate
 - SET FUTURE BOUNDARIES
 - You don't need to resolve their conflict - in most cases you shouldn't
 - It is ok to agree to disagree! Civil discourse is important in the college classroom
 - You should mitigate their need to address this conflict in the classroom
 - You can leverage your respect
 - If you feel an opinion shared is objectively wrong, be sure to acknowledge which of your comments come from fact vs opinion
 - There is nothing wrong with sharing personal feelings, but be sure to make aware that is what you're sharing

Inappropriate comments in the classroom

- Sometimes students may say something inappropriate in the classroom
 - Their comments can be hurtful and may have a lasting impact on themselves or others
 - Our response is very important
- Some things to think about...
 - What is their intent? Was their comment purposefully hurtful?
 - Is this a teaching moment for the student? For the class?
 - Will engaging in discussion regarding this comment be productive for this student?
 - ALWAYS respond!
 - Silence is a form of communication
 - Even if the response is at minimum acknowledging that what was said might be hurtful and moving on
 - If you feel as though ignoring is the best response, still address with the student and class at a later time
 - These situations can be uncomfortable for you. How do you feel about what was said and how might those feelings affect your response.

Thank you!



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