IAFA-Instructional Assistant Faculty Advisors

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In response to recommendations of the UC President’s advisory committee on undergraduate education, the UC San Diego Graduate Division implemented the requirement that all UC San Diego Instructional Assistants (IAs) receive appropriate training and evaluation. This task is carried out by the academic departments working in cooperation with the Teaching + Learning Commons (The Commons).1

Role & Responsibilities
To ensure implementation of the IA training requirement and to achieve effective communication among all involved units, the Graduate Division asks academic departments to identify a faculty member responsible for IA training oversight. These faculty members are called IA Faculty Advisors (IAFA).

The IA Faculty Advisor is expected to conduct an annual review of departmental statements that delineate the responsibilities of IAs and faculty instructors and to ensure that IAs are receiving meaningful evaluation and feedback regarding their performance.

Faculty advisors are asked to work with their departmental colleagues and The Commons to create an IA training and evaluation program appropriate for the specific needs of their graduate teaching and instructional assistants, the department, and its faculty, and to ensure that all IAs are provided with a current department specific IA handbook.2 IA Faculty Advisors may also be called upon to resolve conflicts between supervising faculty and IAs as needed.

IA Faculty Advisors should establish practices (e.g., setting aside time to meet with IAs as a group mid-quarter) to bring to light and address any problems and conflicts (e.g., support for IAs grappling with academic integrity issues in a course). While IA Faculty Advisors may be able to solve only a subset of problems without assistance, they can call upon colleagues, The Commons, and the Graduate Division for consultation and support.

IA Faculty Advisors are expected to participate in two UC San Diego IA Faculty Advisor meetings per year conducted jointly by The Commons and the Graduate Division. These meetings provide an important venue for sharing concerns, problems and unmet needs and for identifying viable steps to solve or ameliorate these problems.

Instructional Assistant (IA) Training Components & Role of The Teaching + Learning Commons
To implement the IA training and evaluation requirements, faculty and departments are encouraged to draw on the resources available at the Teaching + Learning Commons. The Commons is poised to assist academic departments in the mentoring and teaching preparation of IAs via support for custom-designed departmental training, Teaching Skills for IAs courses within The Commons, orientations, observation, consultation, and workshops. The Commons is committed to collaborating with departments to help achieve the mission of enhancing undergraduate education at UC San Diego.

Elements of a comprehensive training program within a department include:

- An introduction before classes begin for IAs to learn about their instructional role, basic teaching skills and concepts, policies affecting IAs, and resources available to instructors in their department;
- Individual mentoring and feedback by faculty, senior IAs, and instructional improvement professionals, based on observation, student evaluations, and/or videotaping;
- Ongoing seminars and workshops on teaching, as well as access to materials from which IAs can learn independently; and
- Formative and summative evaluation of IAs, based on procedures developed by departments in consultation with IAs.

Departmental IA Training Evaluation
Evaluation of IA training programs may be included in the regularly scheduled graduate program reviews conducted by the Academic Senate and the Graduate Division.

Document prepared by the UC San Diego Graduate Division in collaboration with the Teaching + Learning Commons.

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1 The campus requirement, established in 1978 by the TA Development Advisory Committee, states that all new IAs must participate in introductory workshops on teaching and in a follow-up program that includes observation by and consultation with an experienced teacher (a faculty member, a departmental senior TA, or a Commons’ staff member). This requirement also includes mid-quarter feedback from students, which is incorporated into the consultation process. (Watson, J. (1989) Enhancing Undergraduate Education in the University of California: The Next Steps: A Report from the President’s Advisory Committee on Undergraduate Education. University of California.)

2 The Teaching + Learning Commons’ role includes preparing graduate students for teaching undergraduates at UC San Diego and for the teaching they will do in future academic and nonacademic careers.

3 The Commons has developed a template for an IA Handbook that can be edited to include department specific information. Link to template IA handbook may be found here.