Center for Teaching
and Learning
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
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**Guiding Principles for TA-ing During
Significant Disruptions**

The purpose of this guide is to equip UGA teaching, laboratory, and instructional graduate assistants with relevant resources and recommendations for temporary shifts to remote instruction. During significant disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is likely that there will be a lot of questions, and not enough answers. This is the time to be patient, communicate openly and directly, build on your strengths, prioritize (and protect) your time appropriately, and stay in touch with your available resources and supports.

Key Principles

With a rapid shift to remote instruction, and the various uncertainties or extra barriers some might face, the role of students in instructional roles may also shift. Here are some guiding principles to help you navigate this situation:

- **Reach out to your instructional supervisor**, if you have not already done so (even if they have not yet reached out to you). Ask them what they need from you and be prepared to share information about your own current situation.

- **Be patient** with your instructional supervisor (as well as with your students). Remember that they, too, are navigating an array of challenges associated with current events. Aim to provide information, communicate your own needs, and ask how you can help.

- **Be direct** with your instructional supervisor regarding your current circumstances. For example, if your housing situation has suddenly changed, you may need some flexibility to deal with those circumstances. If you do not have sufficient technology or internet access, let them know. Childcare, illness, and other issues may also come into play.

- **Remember that there is a difference between regular online instruction and remote instruction under current circumstances.** This is a triage situation: no one is expecting perfection, and we will all need to be open to adaptation as the remainder of the semester unfolds.

Communication and Clarifying Expectations

Rapid transition from face-to-face to remote instruction often involves an evaluation of what is possible given the circumstances, and an adjustment of expectations and plans for students. With these changes, your role as a TA will likely change so that you can continue to support the instructor and your students on this path. In order to facilitate a smooth transition, it is important to open communication lines early and directly with your instructional supervisors, and continue checking in to stay abreast of ongoing changes.

As a TA, some proactive things you can do to clarify your new role are as follows:

- **Ask about changes to the course including** how the syllabus has changed, where to find that information for reference, any new or revised course policies, changes to assignments and tests, and adjustments to grade distribution and so on.

- **Ask about how you should spend your assistantship hours.** You might remind your instructional supervisor about the number of weekly hours in your assistantship, and ask about needed changes for how you use those hours, given current circumstances.

- **Share your strengths and interests:** What experience and skills do you already have? What are you willing to learn? While it is not the job of a TA to move an entire course

into eLC, if you have eLC experience from prior TAships, you can let your instructional supervisor know that you are comfortable on that platform.

- **Clarify your new TA roles** and ask questions if you are unclear on specific tasks or duties. Who is doing what? How are you sharing information? What do you do if you get stuck? Keep reading for some examples of possible tasks you might be asked to take on.

- **Discuss live (synchronous, e.g. Zoom) teaching interactions** to determine who will manage and activate tools, troubleshoot with students that are having tech problems, mute students with background noise, monitor the chat for comments/raised hands, type written instructions or prompts into the chat while you are speaking, and so on.

- **Share your contact information** and the best method and times to reach you. Don't assume that your instructional supervisor has this information on hand, but pro-actively share it to make sure they can connect with you as needed and in an appropriate manner.

Tools and Access

As your instructional supervisor shares your new roles and tasks, ensure you have all the tools necessary to complete these TA-related tasks, including the following:

- **Internet.** Do you have wifi access? Are you aware many companies are offering [WiFi hotspot access for free](#)?

- **Hardware.** Do you have the required hardware for the tasks your instructional supervisor has assigned? If not, be clear with your supervisor that you do not have access. Check with your unit to find out if there is equipment that can be lent to TAs who need devices, and only assign work that they have the tools to complete.

- **Software.** As with hardware, be aware of software access needed to complete TA-related tasks (disciplinary specific and general, e.g. Zoom, Adobe Acrobat). If you do not have access or permissions, be clear as soon as possible with your TA supervisor so they can make arrangements to get you access or alter your task list.

- **If you will be helping with eLC related task, ensure you have appropriate access to the course to do what you're asked to do.** See [this guide](#) for more information about the different roles that can be assigned in eLC.

Know Your Available Relevant Resources

- [Teaching and Learning Continuity](#) : UGA's page for all things teaching during the present stretch. This page continues to be updated over time.

- UGA's "Rapid Guide to Online Teaching" course in eLC. This course was created primarily for instructors, but may be of use to some TAs. If needed, you can can request access to the course via https://ctl.uga.edu/contact/.

- The CTL's [guide for instructors](#).

- [CIRTL Website](#), including free workshops for TAs (when logged in with your UGA ID)
  - [Upcoming and Past CIRTL events](#) (including slides)

- [Zoom](#), [Kaltura](#), and [eLC Help](#) links

- [UGA Financial Hardship Resources](#), including [Graduate Student Emergency Fund](#)

Sample Tasks for Teaching & Lab Assistants

The following are <u>examples</u> of the types of tasks that you <u>might</u> be asked to perform. This is not exhaustive nor is it meant to be a comprehensive task list for all TAs, and precise tasks will vary from course to course.

Support Shift to Remote Instruction

- Create [Assignment Submission Folders](#) in eLC and add reminder [Announcements](#) or [Checklists](#). Ensure that you are aware of information students may need such as due dates, assignment expectations, and grading structures.

- Create a (new) [Grade Book](#) (with a new grade distribution) and enter grades for the remainder of the semester. Make sure to confirm if there are new grading rubrics.

- Move quizzes or tests online in eLC,. This might include rewriting some tests questions (e.g., shifting multiple choice to short answer or vice versa) or creating eLC [Quizzes.](#)

- Record short, relevant videos to support student learning, such as single concept videos, an instruction video for an assignment, a demo, a video of them solving math or engineering problems while annotating what they are doing and why, a single lesson, or lesson sequence. You can create videos like these using [Kaltura](#), [Zoom](#), or even [PowerPoint](#).

- Caption videos created by yourself or the instructor of record using a combination of machine captioning and editing in [Kaltura](#).

- Monitor and facilitate online discussions on the [Discussion boards.](#) Work with faculty to determine a participation rubric that could contribute to grades, if necessary.

Support Your Students

- Be aware that some students may face barriers in the current remote instructional context related to technology access, increased anxiety, and limited time. Be empathetic and patient in your interactions and flexible as possible within the boundaries of your TA role. Check out [UGA today's article on Insights on Transitioning to Online Instruction](#). Although this article references the rapid shift to remote instruction that took place in March 2020, the directives it offers are likely still relevant.

- Clarify who is communicating with students (when, how, who) and send out pre-class attendance and due date reminders and post-class recaps. This is the time for extra communication and reminders. Create announcements and help students turn on their eLC [Announcements](#). Make sure that outdated announcements, set prior to the pandemic, have been turned off so not to confuse students.

- Create a resource/tips page for students (in eLC or as a PDF). Resources might include suggestions for how to be successful in the virtual environment and/or resources for times of disruption (e.g. [Student Care and Outreach](#), [Division of Academic Enhancement](#), [Bulldog Basics](#), etc.)