

Steps to Get Started

LA Program from Faculty Perspective

The following information is for faculty interested in leveraging LAs for the first time.

What to consider as you think about adding Learning Assistants to your course(s):

1. Is Active Learning a significant component of your course structure?

- a. Learning assistants are only effective in courses that provide numerous Active Learning opportunities.
- b. Lectures: 25-50% Active Learning
 - Professors occasionally will pause lectures to introduce short Active Learning activities.
- c. Discussions and Labs: Minimum 80% Active Learning
 - Sessions usually start with a brief introduction/lecture review
 - Students then work in their groups for most of the session
 - Have a clear vision of how LAs will interact with students during Active Learning
 - What will the LAs be doing during “down-time”?
 - If desired (and highly recommended), the end of the sessions can be excellent opportunities for groups to “share out” what they learned and accomplished
- d. Think about where your LAs will be situated when they are not actively working with students.
 - Are there enough seats for LAs in the classroom?
 - Do you want them waiting in the wings or on stage with you?
 - Do you want them sitting together, or spread out among your students?
 - The frequency of your Active Learning activities will dictate what’s best; if you’re conducting a lot of short, discussion-based activities, then sitting among the students may be the best approach. Students/LAs just have to turn and talk.
 - If activities are longer or more involved, then LA locations may not be as important.

2. Can you commit to a weekly preparatory meeting with the instructional team?

- a. Meeting weekly to discuss upcoming lessons and reflection on previous lessons is crucial to a successful LA experience (LAs, professors, and TAs)!
- b. Cohorts that do not meet weekly almost always fail. LAs feel unprepared, and professors/TAs feel that LAs aren’t effective.
- c. Ideally, the whole instructional team attends (professor, TAs, and LAs)
 - Full team meetings are generally the most effective approach in most situations. Fewer things go wrong when the entire team is on the same page
 - Situations vary. For example, some lab courses don’t have lectures, so the LAs only work with TAs. Unless all the TAs are coordinating and instruction is

Adapted from the UCI LA Program, courtesy of Josh Arimond, Program Coordinator.

consistent across all sessions, it may make more sense for LAs to meet weekly with their TAs for planning purposes.

- d. Weekly meetings can be held in person or via Zoom.
- e. Electronic communications (no matter how frequent) are not adequate substitutes for actual meetings.

3. Do you have enough tasks for the LA to keep busy?

- a. LAs are paid based on their weekly scheduled hours (including their weekly preparatory meeting)
 - 3-4 hours/week, 5-7 hours/week, or 8-12 hours/week (usually courses w/3-4-hour labs)
 - The majority of the LAs' responsibilities should be interacting with students.
 - Courses with discussion or lab sections tend to provide enough weekly hours for 5-7 hours/week. Lecture-only courses usually require additional weekly responsibilities (3-4 hours/week)
- b. **LA Learning Sessions:** Like office hours, except LAs can only see students who need help with course content. Questions about grading or other administrative concerns should be directed to the instructor and TAs
- c. **Formative Assessments:** While LAs cannot grade assignments/exams, LAs can help with formative assessment. Formative Assessment can be a valuable tool for instructors and LAs to discuss student progress and future pedagogy planning.
- d. **Facilitating Discussion Boards:** LAs can be scheduled (every week) to monitor and respond to student discussion boards,
- e. **Feedback and Advice:** LAs can be assigned to provide weekly (ungraded) input on assignments, projects, and group work. While some of these things may end up in the gradebook, the LAs are not assigning the grade.
- f. We can discuss more examples and options for additional responsibilities, if needed.

4. How many LAs do you need?

- a. The size of your LA team will depend on your Active Learning activities
- b. Hiring LAs based on total enrollment
 - Works well with Active Learning activities in large lecture halls
 - Most of your activities are going to be short, 10 minutes or fewer
 - While students may occasionally work in groups, this type of Active Learning activity generally requires working individually or in pairs (neighboring students)
 - New professors typically start with one LA per 20-25 students. As instructors gain experience, they will figure out their ideal LA/student ratio
- c. Hiring LAs based on the number of groups
 - Works well when students are required to work in groups often, or when activities take up a large percentage of the class time
 - Discussion and Labs are often scheduled this way
 - Most professors start with 1 LA per 3-5 groups

- This ratio is best for group work that doesn't usually require LAs to spend more than a couple of minutes at each group.
- LAs are mostly checking in with each group, which may result in brief conversations.
- Common for labs
- If you anticipate LAs will need to stay with groups for extended periods (5 minutes or longer), consider recruiting 1 LA per 2-3 groups

5. Contact your school program chair if you are interested in using LAs

- a. Email your program chair to let them know you are interested in using LAs
- b. Use the rest of this document to help yourself prepare for using LAs in your classroom
- c. If you have questions, contact Adriana Signorini <asignorini@ucmerced.edu> or Tammy Rossi <trossi@ucmerced.edu>

6. Recruit your LA team.

- a. Faculty are responsible for recruiting their LA teams
- b. You should be ready to start recruiting your LA team
- c. Decide how you want to collect interest from potential LA candidate
- d. Ideally, LAs have taken and done well in the course (or professor-approved alternative courses). Choose a minimum grade requirement; we recommend students who have earned a B+ or better
- e. If you've taught the course before, your former students are excellent LA candidates
 - Before opening recruiting efforts to students who took the course with other professors, many professors try recruiting their former students
 - Former students know you and your teaching style. They know how to navigate your course successfully
 - Canvas can help you collect their contact information
 - If you're currently teaching the course, recruiting announcements at the end of the semester, in-class or Canvas, can be very effective
- f. If you're opening the recruiting process to all students, you will need a course grade report

7. Compose and email your recruiting letter

- a. Templates are available on the [LA Program website](#)
- b. Consider including deadlines
 - Many students wait until the last minute to apply
 - It's easier to extend deadlines than it is to add them later

8. Select your LA Team

- a. While interviewing is a great way to choose the "right" LA, it is very time-consuming. Consider including free-response questions in your application to help you make decisions.

- b. Don't be surprised if your early LA teams are selected based on being available. For courses that need LAs to support discussion or lab sections, decisions are often based on student availability.
- c. Account for attrition
 - Student availability can be problematic as the semester draws near
 - You are likely to have a few LAs that must change their LA schedule or even withdraw from their LA positions
 - Back-up candidates are highly recommended

9. What happens after you have your LA team?

- a. Faculty should contact their LA team with a welcome email
 - The welcome email has information for new LAs about the Pedagogy course.
- b. Time to start prepping your instructional team
 - Professors should add LAs to the Catcourse sections in the role of **Observer**. With this role they can see all course content and participate in discussion boards (if you want). They cannot see students' grades.
 - Your first instructional team meeting should be scheduled before week 0
 - The primary purpose of this meeting is for everyone to get to know each other, share their philosophy behind teaching the course, and set expectations
 - Determine how the team is going to communicate with each other
 - There should always be an open line of communication
 - Some questions, concerns, and advice can't wait until the next meeting or instruction day
 - It should be quick and easy for the team to ask and respond to questions or concerns
 - Emails are fine, but many successful LA teams are using apps like Slack, Teams, or Discord. Talk to the LA team and determine what the best app to use is.
 - Finalize/confirm LA schedules
 - LA schedules should be finalized by Week 0
 - Schedule the day/time for your weekly planning meetings during the semester
 - Try to schedule planning meetings as close to the next instruction day as possible. For example, courses with MWF lecture schedule should try to meet Fridays after lecture or Mondays before lecture (assuming you don't want to meet over the weekend)
- c. Week 1: Introduce your LAs to the students in class
 - Explain their role(s) and what students can expect from them
 - If there's time, give them a couple of minutes to talk about themselves
 - Structure Day 1 so that LAs and students can interact early (and often)
 - The sooner students get comfortable with LAs, the better
 - Consider extra Active Learning activities on Day 1 (or even better, all of Week 1)

- Again, the sooner students become accustomed to working with LAs (and Active Learning), the better the rest of the semester will be.

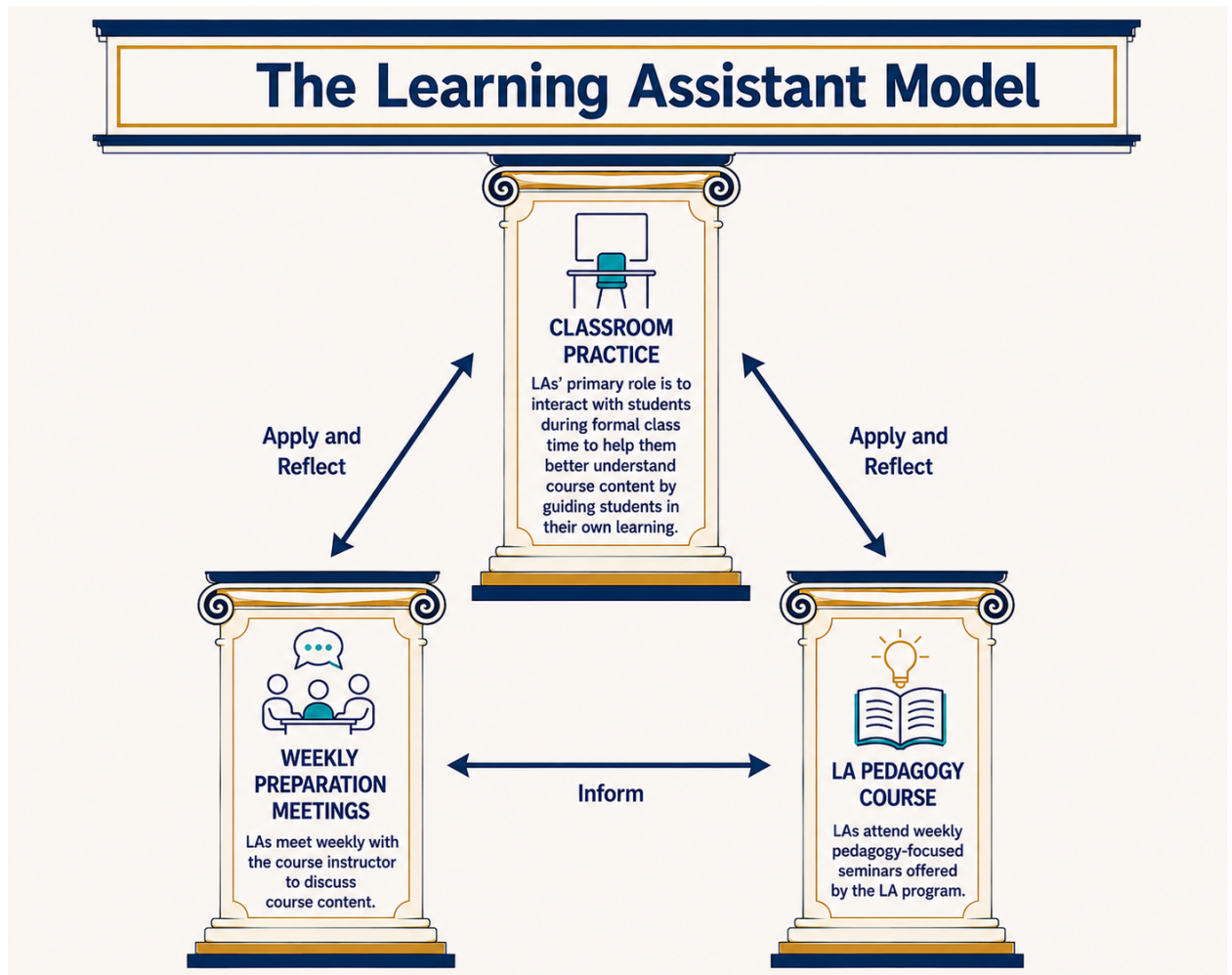


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