Learning Assistants Information

Learning Assistants Program

What are Learning Assistants?
Learning Assistants (LAs) are undergraduate peer educators who work with students in the classroom setting to support and facilitate active learning in courses that are traditionally difficult or have high enrollment. LAs are unique because they are required to take the LA Program pedagogy-focused seminar training course concurrently with their first semester as an LA. In most situations, LAs have taken the course (or a professor-approved, equivalent course) and performed well in it. LAs are an essential part of the instructional team. In the classroom, LAs support professors and graduate teaching assistants (TAs) with active learning- typically in the form of group activities or discussions. Outside the classroom, LAs meet, reflect, and plan course curriculum and student progress with professors and TAs on a weekly basis. LAs are not permitted to lead instruction (unsupervised), meet with students about grades or course policy, or perform any course-related administrative tasks, such as grading.

Why do Learning Assistants Participate?
There are many positive benefits associated with being an LA:

- Builds more dynamic relationships and networks with faculty, grad students, and peers, both personal and professional.
- Gain instructional experience by leveraging evidence-based pedagogy strategies.
- Explain the concepts of Active Learning and small-group, collaborative instruction, and how they differ from remediation-based instruction (passive learning; lecture-based)
- Apply basic theories and principles concerning how learners experience information.
- Evaluate learning outcomes for effective, small-group facilitation.
- Facilitate effective, small-group instruction with collaborative activities.
- Motivate students to pursue both independent and collaborative learning successfully.
- Provide a written analysis of the methods you've implemented and evaluate your performance.
- Improve as a peer facilitator/educator/mentor through instructor and peer feedback.
- Develop self-reflective, critical thinking, and leadership skills you can use in your academic/professional life.
- Connect with faculty and grad students for mentorship, academic, research, and/or career advice
- Possible Letters of Rec.

What do Learning Assistants do?
The primary responsibility of an LA is to support their professor and TAs by assisting students as they engage in active learning. LAs are expected to interact with students to facilitate collaborative activities and discussions. LAs are not expected to be content experts. LAs are trained to become learning experts. Undoubtedly, students will have many questions. LAs do not immediately respond to student questions or misconceptions with answers. Instead, LAs learn to guide students to their own conclusions at a metacognitive level. From an observer's standpoint, LAs circulate the classroom, assist students who ask for help, and check for understanding with all students.

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What are the Learning Assistants' weekly commitments?
The following list is typical for most courses. Actual commitments will vary by course and/or professor. Since course schedules and availability vary from quarter to quarter, LA positions are reassigned on a semester basis.

Learning Assistants are (typically) expected to commit to the following weekly commitments for the entire quarter:

LAs attend weekly planning meetings with their professor and TAs

- 1 hour/week

LAs attend/support all lectures in their assigned section

- 3 hours/week

LAs are assigned to attend/support 2-4 discussion sections or 1-3 lab sections

- 2-4 hours/week

Some LAs might…

- Lead supplemental practice or review sessions
- Monitor/facilitate discussion boards
- Mentor/support student groups outside of class
- Content-related Learning Sessions (similar to Office Hours, but cannot discuss grades or course policies)

What is the Learning Assistant pedagogy/training course?

All LAs, new to the program, must attend the *LA Pedagogy-focused seminar* during their first semester as an LA. Once completed, LAs do not need to retake the course. This training equips LAs with the skills to facilitate effective Active Learning and collaborative group work. This training course is mandatory for all new LAs, and there are no alternatives or exceptions. While pedagogical theory is a focus of the course, its aim is to apply that theory to immediate practical use.

How are LAs compensated?

LAs are monetarily compensated based on the number of hours/week they are assigned to support their course. In most cases, LAs are paid per 3-4 hours/week.

Who recruits Learning Assistants?

Schools, departments, and professors are responsible for recruiting their own LAs. However, the LA program assists with recruiting when needed. Students interested in becoming an LA, should contact the department and/or professor for more information about their recruiting process.

Do you still have questions about the Learning Assistants Program?

Learning Assistants Information

Contact Adriana Signorini, Lead Coordinator, at <asignorini@ucmerced.edu>

Document adapted from the UCI LA Program, courtesy of Josh Arimond, Program Coordinator