### Introduction

**Background:**
ITA, short for International Teaching Assistant, is an essential body of graduate students on UCD campus. Within the framework of 2020 initiative, more and more international graduate students are joining our UC Davis community, bringing in their international educational experiences as well as adding many dimensions of student diversity to Davis. At the same time, international teaching assistants are in need of support in many issues:

1. English as a second language;
2. Cultural unfamiliarity and misunderstanding;
3. Anxiety over difficult questions;
4. Controversial topics;
5. A sense of mutual support among ITAs.

In addition to domestic graduate students’ potential anxieties and excitement over teaching an undergraduate course for the first time, international graduate students usually experience many more and intense anxieties when teaching in a less-familiar US classroom setting. Just to name a few moments that an international TA might feel challenging: a total different dynamics of the US classroom compared to the one of his/her own country, inherent fear of making English grammar mistakes when explaining complex ideas to native English speakers and lack of confidence in dealing with unexpected situations in a classroom. And all these issues would only be infinitely amplified if he/she were not previously informed about them and if he/she could not find anyone to talk to. My project aims to answer the questions that ITAs might have before the actual teaching practice and help them ultimately overcome these anxieties when the challenges do come.

**Projects:**
- I will organize a seminar on the topic of ITAs positioning before entering a classroom. Rather than addressing the common issues of being a first-time TA, this seminar puts emphasis on the ITA’s identity. For example, whether or not one should disclose one’s international identity to the students so that they would “forget” you more; how to eliminate the anxiety that generates from your English accent; how to bridge the “knowledge gap” between the students and the ITAs because of different systems and expectations of education. The seminar will be conducted in the format of free interactions between the former/experienced international TAs and new ITAs after a short problem-raising speech by each participant.
- I will organize another seminar on how to adjust oneself to fit into the role of being a student and a TA at the same time. The seminar is conducted with no deliberate bifurcations of domestic and international TAs. I will invite some faculty members and postdocs, who had gone through the graduate school and found themselves comfortable in being an ITA. These faculty members will share their experience on how they learned a tremendous amount.

**Objectives:**
I intend to achieve the following outcomes by the end of the workshops/discussions:
1. Community building: MTAs build connections with colleagues across disciplines/boundaries.
2. ReSource sharing: MTAs know more about resources available on campus that would facilitate the teaching.
3. Pedagogy input: MTAs get useful tips, strategies and experiences from other more experienced TAs.
4. English test details: ITAs know more about the English requirement teaching at UC Davis and tips to help them to learn more familiar with the potential problems that may happen in a classroom and have more confidence dealing with these issues. Also, one conclusion coming out of the discussion is that ITAs have advantages in that they do not assume anything and will be more catering to the student diversity.

### Workshop I:
**How to Present Myself: Concerns of ITAs (International Teaching Assistant)**

**Discussants**
Dan Villarreal, Teaching assistant Consultant, PhD Candidate
Watunesa Tan, Teaching assistant Consultant, PhD Candidate
Jae Wook Jung, Teaching assistant Consultant, PhD Candidate

**Participants**
First-year teaching assistants across disciplines

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<th>Issues discussed</th>
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<td>1). Common concerns of being an international teaching assistant (ITA)</td>
<td>TAs shared their experiences, anxieties or challenges when working as a first-time TA.</td>
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<td>2). Types of cultural misunderstanding</td>
<td>TA consultants shared the common issues that ITAs encounter in their teaching practices. Some suggestions and tips.</td>
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<td>3). Potential solutions from Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE)</td>
<td>The issue of identity. Where should ITAs situate himself/herself, how should an ITA present himself/herself? To what extent should one reveal one’s international cultural backgrounds? For example, on lecture, notes, memorization versus more critical debates, and interaction with the students.</td>
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### Workshop II:
**Teaching as An International TA at UC Davis: Requirement, Tips and Community**

**Speakers**
Dawn Takaoglu, International and Academic English Director
Jordan Carroll, PhD Candidate, Department of English, PFTF Fellow
Adam Liebman, PhD Candidate, Department of Anthropology

**Participants**
First-year and seasoned teaching assistants across disciplines, including both ITAs and domestic TAs

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<td>1). Test of Oral English Proficiency and strategies for preparation</td>
<td>In the workshop, speakers talk about three main issues: 1) English language test for ITAs; 2) How to deal with controversial topics; 3) Tips to answer students’ difficult questions. ITAs are more comfortable to handle awkward situations, avoid conflict in class, and to lead a new class. This is a comfortable place where you can learn from experienced TAs and build connections with TAs from other disciplines.</td>
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<td>2). Challenges of being an international student</td>
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<td>3). Tips for teaching for the first time</td>
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**Outcomes:**
In the workshop, speakers talk about three main issues: 1) English language test for ITAs; 2) How to deal with controversial topics; 3) Tips to answer students’ difficult questions. ITAs are more comfortable to handle awkward situations, avoid conflict in class, and lead a new class. This is a comfortable place where you can learn from experienced TAs and build connections with TAs from other disciplines.

### Post-workshop Resources

**CEE (Center for Educational Effectiveness):** [http://ces.ucdavis.edu/](http://ces.ucdavis.edu/)
1. Make an appointment with TA consultants;
2. Video taping one’s class performance;
3. Mid-term evaluation;

**SHCS (Student Health and Counseling Services):** [https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/counseling-services](https://shcs.ucdavis.edu/counseling-services)
1. Academic problems;
2. Personal issues;

1. International Teaching Assistant warning;
2. Resources for taking the exam;

**Acknowledgements**
Thanks for the support of PFTF (Professor for the Future) program without which I cannot reach out to the wider Davis community and workshops would not be successful. Also, thanks PFTF directors Dr. Teresa Dillinger and Dr. JP Delplanque for organizing the year-long program. The multidimensional program is not only valuable, useful, practical, informative, eye-opening but more importantly, it is deeply memorable. Thanks Dr. Cara Harwood Theisen and Dr. Julia Menard-Warwick for your effort in putting together wonderful seminars on pedagogy and ethics respectively, and equal thanks to colleagues-spunkins in the same program from who I learned a tremendous amount.
Professors for the Future, 2015-2016

PFTF Fellow: Zhen Zhang
Program: Comparative Literature
Major Professor: Sheldon Lu

Project Title: "Overcoming the Anxiety of Teaching in the US Classroom: Positioning, Readjustment and Self-appropriation of International Teaching Assistants."

Project Summary:
ITAs, short for International Teaching Assistants, are an essential body of graduate students on the UC Davis campus. Within the framework of 2020 initiative, more and more international graduate students are joining our UC Davis community, bringing in their international educational experiences as well as adding many dimensions of student diversity to Davis. At the same time, international teaching assistants are in need of support in many venues: English as a second language; cultural unfamiliarity and misunderstanding; anxiety over difficult questions; teaching controversial topics; and creating a sense of mutual support among ITAs. In addition to domestic graduate students’ potential anxieties and excitement over teaching an undergraduate course for the first time, international graduate students usually experience many more intense anxieties when teaching in a less-than-familiar US classroom setting. Just to name a few moments that an international TA might find challenging: a total different dynamics of the US classroom compared to the one of his/her own country, inherent fear of making English grammar mistakes when explicating complex ideas to native English speakers and lack of confidence in dealing with unexpected situations in a classroom. All these issues are infinitely amplified if he/she were not previously informed about them and if he/she could not find anyone to talk to.

To address these concerns, I organized two workshops. The first focused on the topic of the ITA’s positioning before entering a classroom. Rather than addressing the common issues of being a first-time TA, this seminar placed emphasis on the ITA’s identity. For example, whether or not one should disclose one’s international identity to the students so that they would “forgive” you more; how to eliminate the anxiety that generates from your English accent; how to bridge the “knowledge gap” between the students and the ITAs because of different systems and expectations of education. The second workshop focused on how to adjust oneself to fit into the role of being a student and a TA at the same time. The seminar was conducted with no deliberate bifurcations of domestic and international TAs. I invited some faculty members and postdocs, who had gone through the graduate school successfully, to share their experience with other TAs. In addition, ITAs and domestic TAs conversed with each other so that ITAs become aware that they are not alone in terms of the anxieties.

My project aimed to answer the questions that ITAs might have before the actual teaching practice and to help them ultimately overcome these anxieties when the challenges do come.

University of California, Davis