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UTA Reflection

This semester, I was a UTA for Real Analysis (Math 425B) with Professor Conroy. As this was my third (and final) semester being a TA, I felt comfortable with my responsibilities this time around. It was easy for me to get into a good rhythm with holding office hours and grading as compared to previous semesters. All in all, this semester was less intensive than the previous semester. Firstly, I had fewer regular attendees at my office hours. Whereas last semester I had about two or three of the same students at every session. This time I had about seven different students that would stop by semi-regularly. Secondly, there were far fewer students that attended my weekly calculus tutoring sessions compared to last time. Then, I had about 10 students per week, but this time I believe I averaged about 3 students per week. As it turns out, not too many students are keen on going to tutoring on a Friday afternoon.

Like last semester, I felt that being a UTA is not only helpful for students, but also for my own math knowledge. When you are a student, you tend to only study the material only as far as your final exam is concerned; there isn't any practical need to go further. However, acting as the role of teacher forces you to think critically about how and why the material is true. There have been a lot of "eureka" moments that I've had over the past few semesters being a TA over something that confused me and it didn't really make sense until I tried explaining it to someone else.

I would also say that being a UTA is also great for public speaking skills. Before being a part of this program, I was not very confident in any one-on-one teaching, let alone being able to stand up in front of a class and communicate the material. Being a TA and giving office hours or tutoring is, at least in my opinion, a low stakes and non stressful environment that is good for boosting confidence and gaining communication skills.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned from being a teaching assistant was the importance of empathy. Real analysis (and calculus) is a difficult subject, and I had to be patient and understanding with the students as they struggled to grasp the material. I also had to be aware of their different learning styles and adapt my teaching approach accordingly. This helped me to develop my own interpersonal skills, and to become a more effective communicator and teacher. In my three semesters being a TA, I have had the pleasure of helping out several great students. They challenged me to think deeply about the material, and they helped me to see things from new perspectives. Overall, I would absolutely recommend this program to anyone who is interested in studying math more deeply or simply wants to help students.