

Andre Foard

### UTA Program Reflection Report

This semester, I worked with Samantha Kao as a UTA for Vector Calculus. This was my first semester in the program, and my first experience being a teaching assistant at the university. The program overall acts as a small-knit community that supported each other; I feel one of my biggest downfalls in the program was not utilizing this. Both Dr. John Peca-Medlin and Dr. Aparna Upadhyay actively offered support and advice at the end of seminars hosted weekly; additionally, they would be willing to correspond through emails during the week if you had any questions.

I initially felt confident in my ability as a math student; while I had to put in a fair bit of effort, I found that I was able to succeed in my previous math courses at the university. I thought a chance at revisiting the material would allow me to understand the fundamentals of why the concepts work. As a student, I feel my grasp of the material is more solidified; however, I failed to make these deeper connections. As I progressed throughout the semester, I began to understand that wasn't the purpose of this position.

Being a UTA is not a matter of simply being confident in your abilities as a student, but also your ability to act as a mentor to your peers. Your peers are in the position you were in when you originally took this course; they aren't interested in fully understanding the why of the concept because they are still in the process of learning it. This meant that most of my time was spent assisting students through concepts I was already comfortable with. My extra time wasn't put towards my own original goal, but towards trying to expand the number of ways I could explain a concept since everyone learns in their own way.

The program has made me slightly more comfortable with Vector Calculus; however, the primary benefit is towards being able to explain mathematics comfortably since no other course has required me to do so previously. Samantha Kao, the instructor I worked with, helped me improve my ability to explain concepts; stressing the importance of facilitating the growth of students and their own ideas and methods rather than having them mimic my work.

The workload of the position was manageable throughout the entire semester; however, the initial learning curve of several tasks such as grading homework assignments took several attempts to become familiar and comfortably acquainted with. Samantha Kao gave me a lot of freedom in what I was able to do for the course and she was understanding of my limitations if I expressed them. Aside from grading, I was also responsible for creating and hosting reviews, hosting office hours, and tutoring. The primary area of the program where I interacted with students was through the tutoring center. Additionally, most of the students I tutored were for Calculus 2, this required me to brush up on a bit of extra material every so often. As most people in the UTA program will say, my favorite part of the program was interacting with students, even the ones not in my course directly.

I failed to grasp what made a TA good until it was too late. From my experience a TA acts as a medium between the teacher and the student; someone that students can feel more comfortable asking questions to. However, I feel as though I failed to establish that bond early in the semester. My primary focus was so intent on being able to answer any question given to me I failed to act like a proper mentor. I feel as though this limited the number of students who felt comfortable approaching me with questions

as I took too passive of a role. As the semester progressed, I felt like I couldn't assist those in need and that is my biggest regret in the program.

I appreciated the opportunity to be a part of the UTA program. I enjoyed working with Samantha Kao throughout the semester; additionally, I appreciated having both Dr. Peca-Medlin and Dr. Upadhyay leading the UTA program. While I feel as though my original expectations for the program weren't met, I would still recommend this program to other undergraduates. The caveat to that is again the UTA program is about more than being a great math student; it requires the ability to want to be a good mentor too. While I might not be returning to the program next semester, and I might not have spoken highly of my experience; I still plan on joining a similar program next semester. I hope those interested in the program can learn from my mistakes and truly succeed in their position.