TA Training issues brainstorm – April 28, 2008
CWSEI End-of-Year Event afternoon discussion session

- Funding
- Language and cultural issues (International TAs)
- Coordinating with Faculty
- Flexibility
- Filtering (placing TAs in the most appropriate position given their skills and communication abilities)
- Bodies (some departments have to make being a TA for a term mandatory so they have enough people to fill positions)
- Faculty buy-in
- Time
- Follow-up training and support
- Duties (what are the duties for which we are preparing TAs)
- TA motivation

Notes from individual groups

Group 1 - Compliance
- TAs meet once/week (get paid for these meetings)
    - Weekly meeting essential for big courses
    - At first strict – then become more flexible – stress the importance of teaching and their job as a TA that it is very important – this is part of your job as a grad student
- Need some evaluation of TAs from the TA training session – so they can be assigned different duties according to abilities (no English then can't actually stand in front of class)
    - Assign TAs to proper job
- How do we balance the needs of the students with the needs of the grad students to develop (can't spend all term making them better at the cost of the undergrads)
- Give TAs ownership - Valuing input of TAs – was the level appropriate
    - Contributing to product students would see
- At beginning of the term, TAs wrote previous year's exam; all think that they can come unprepared – this lets them know that they can't – show them they need to be prepared
- Ask TAs to keep track of hours, but to be transparent, so that hours can be adjusted throughout the course

Group 2

- Faculty buy-in
  - Con for faculty - time taken out of research
  - Pro for faculty - helping courses, grads go on to other faculty jobs with teaching experience, professional development for grad students, presentations at conferences, help sell TA training to faculty
- Does TA training help develop efficiency and save time?
- Different courses require more from TAs
- TAing in your own area - may improve your research
- Communication between faculty and TAs
  - Need to ensure this happens.
  - How do we require this from faculty?
  - Feedback from faculty into TA training material.
  - Consistency of marking
- Mini projects for TAs done in TA training - e.g. identify problems in labs, TA helps faculty fix them as a special project.

Group 3 - Faculty Participation

- Ensure faculty members are very aware of course expectations set for them in terms of organizing team meetings.
- Choose instructor in charge of multi-section courses carefully as this is an easy path to guaranteed buy-in
- Have regular feedback sessions (electronic or meetings)

Group 4

- TA Compliance - We talk to them about the problems and they say, "Yes, yes, yes, we know, we'll change..." but then they don't.
- Need to ensure that guidelines in the TA Union contract are understood and followed when considering discipline of TAs in terms of departmental "performance clauses".
- Faculty buy-in - One person said his supervisor had nothing to do with his TA duties. They were completely independent.
- Another person said she'd heard this from a student: "I want to TA more, but please don't tell my supervisor!"