Certified Learning Assistants Program

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CLAP Learning Assistants (LAs) are undergraduate, peer-educators that are receiving pedagogical training and receive practical training in courses under the supervision of professors where they gain experience in supporting and facilitating Active Learning during instruction in Lectures, Labs, and Discussions. As an additional benefit, LAs enhance student learning in challenging courses by making them more collaborative, student-centered, and interactive by reducing instructor/student ratios. All CLAP LAs are required to enroll in a pedagogy training course, UNI STU 176, concurrent to their first quarter working as an LA. After completing UNI STU 176, LAs are CLAP-certified LAs and can continue their pedagogical training with additional mentored in-class experience through independent study.

The LA Experience

Although the LA experience is somewhat different for each course, the experience for all LAs involves three related activities and has similar goals of collecting data about student performance and perception, demonstrating the efficacy of reduced instructor/student ratio, student peer collaboration, and objective driven discussion.

1) PEDAGOGY TRAINING

New Learning Assistants attend weekly a Uni Studies pedagogy course in evidence based instruction and Active Learning facilitation skills. Returning LAs continue to earn course credit for further development in pedagogical practice in experiential classroom instruction.

2) PLANNING

Instructional Training Meetings: Learning Assistants attend weekly planning meetings with course instructors and TAs to discuss content and discipline specific pedagogy. The training meetings provide additional learning opportunities for the LAs by including experience planning and discussing Active Learning activities/strategies that the LAs facilitate.

3) PRACTICE

Learning Assistants practice their pedagogy skills (UNI STU 176 & Instructional Team meetings) by facilitating Active Learning with students in lecture, discussion, and lab sections.
Faculty Best Practices

There is no dictated course design of what a course transformation should look like. Instead, faculty members who employ CLAP-certified LAs must agree to:

1. One-time LA Consultation meeting w/ CLAP or LAFA
   - Mandatory for all faculty partnering with CLAP- especially those new to LAs
2. Meet in weekly planning sessions with the TAs & LAs who support their courses
3. Include Active Learning is a major component within their course design
   - Promote and encourage interaction/collaboration among TAs, LAs, and students in the course
4. Meet, as needed, with CLAP or LAFA regarding progress of the LA program and course design
5. Reflect and evaluate course design and assess learning in their courses.

Weekly Content Planning Session

Meet weekly in content planning sessions with the LAs and TAs that support your course. Below is the recommended structure of these meetings...

- Reflect on previous week’s lessons/activities (What worked? What could be improved?)

- Review learning objectives and content-specific pedagogy for upcoming lessons/activities. Confirm that LAs have everything they need to prep for their sessions (content and materials for review, lesson plans, worksheets/answer keys, etc.).

- Collaborate & review the activities or worksheets with LAs for upcoming sessions
  - Work with your LAs and discover what ideas/activities they have that would incorporate into future lessons.

- Meeting wrap up

How Faculty Can Maximize LA Training and Experience

To maximize the LA training and experience, it is important for LAs to fully engage with the students in the course. The side benefit is that these practices also maximize the benefit and experience for students in the course. Introduce the LAs at the beginning of the course and let the students know they are there to help facilitate discussion. Encourage students to ask questions and seek help from LAs in the course. Promote the value of collaboration and discussion amongst peers and actively remind students to utilize LAs during their sessions. LAs can also assist with formative assessment, lead voluntary review sessions, and proctor exams.
Course Design:
There is no dictated course design of what course transformation should look like in order to best utilize LAs. Help with course design is available through CLAP, LAFAs, or DTEI. The following are recommendations...

Lecture Sessions
Instructors should pause direct instruction (lecturing) for Active Learning activities by posing questions, prompting discussions, or leading short group activities. During Active Learning, LAs circulate the lecture hall (as does the instructor and TAs), making sure all students are engaged in discussion, promoting useful dialog, responding to student questions, and providing feedback to the instructor on student understanding. Frequency and length of Active Learning activities are varied. The LA’s role is not to confirm answers but to help students articulate their ideas and justify their reasoning to themselves and other students.

What Instructors See From Students
After the instructor poses a question, students discuss with neighboring students before responding. Typical discussions for challenging conceptual questions last 2-3 minutes.
Discussion/Lab Sessions

During a discussion/lab section students work in small groups on activities, such as worksheets or lab assignments, that emphasize the main concepts in the course. TAs generally do not lecture but ask questions designed to help students find their own answers. Students are expected to construct answers for themselves through discussions with classmates, TAs, and LAs.

With TA guidance, LAs circulate among groups of students, listening and observing groups as they work through context-rich problems and challenging analysis of relevant course material. When appropriate, LAs engage students in Socratic dialog, asking probing questions about each group’s current thinking. LAs also try to get students into discussions about the problem, concept, or exercise with one another. LAs do not give answers; instead they ask probing questions that can help lead students into productive discussions.

Occasionally, TAs or LAs may interrupt to address the whole class with a brief review to reveal common issues among groups. Since discussions require active participation, a small portion of the final grade for the course is (can be) based on students' participation in the discussion sessions. There are many ways this can be accomplished. Faculty and TAs are encouraged to explore the resources available from DTEI.

What Instructors See From Students

Students work together in groups on challenging activities or carefully sequenced questions that can help them build conceptual understanding or problem solving sophistication, critical thinking and analytical skills. Students are expected to defend their reasoning and negotiate meaning with their peers.
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UNI STU 176: LA Pedagogy
Concurrent with their first quarter working as an LA, new Learning Assistants participate in a pedagogy/training course that develops general pedagogical knowledge. This course is mandatory for all Learning Assistants and is taught by the Certified Learning Assistants Program, in coordination with DTEI.

By the end of the pedagogy course, LAs will be able to:

• Apply basic theories and principles concerning how learners experience information
• Design and implement their own plans for effective small group facilitation
• Provide written analysis of the methods they have implemented and evaluate their own performance
• Improve as a peer facilitator through instructor and peer feedback
• Develop awareness of the ways in which intellectual & cultural diversity impact learning
• Develop critical thinking & leadership skills they can use in their professional life

UNI STU 176 Seminar Topics

1. Planning for Interactive Groups
2. Motivation & Collaborative Learning
3. Communication & Question Strategies
4. Bloom’s Taxonomy
5. Metacognition
6. Non-Verbal Communication/Wait Time
7. Assessing Student Understanding
8. Addressing Student Difficulties