

MSLC GUIDELINES FOR WORKING WITH PEER LEARNING ASSISTANTS (PLAs)

We are excited for Peer Learning Assistants (PLAs) to assist in supporting student learning in your course. Here are a few guidelines and tips for working with PLAs:

- **Blackboard Access** – Please provide PLAs access to your course Blackboard site as Students or Course Builders if possible. We suggest Course Builder access if you prefer they view course material and also engage with any features on the site (*ex: post information, assist with Discussion Boards*) without having access to the gradebook. ***Please do not provide PLAs access to your gradebook at any time.***
- **General Communication** – Please let the PLAs know how you prefer they communicate with you throughout the semester (*email, messaging, in-person during drop-in hours/class, etc.*).
- **Introductions** – Please let the PLAs know how they may introduce themselves to the students (*ex: share a slide, say hello at the start of a class or discussion, post a brief bio on Blackboard*) and how they may assist in advertising the MSLC as a resource for all students (*ex: share a flyer, post something on Blackboard*). Please share PLA drop-in hour schedules with your students through Blackboard.
- **Course Support Preferences** – Please let the PLAs know what forms of course support you prefer they offer for your students (*in-person/online drop-in hours, weekly/exam reviews, in-class assistance, etc.*) and establish specific expectations for their role in your course as they begin their positions. Please also share any challenges you anticipate PLAs may face in supporting your course.
- **Teamwork** – Please invite the PLAs to any meetings amongst your course teams that you feel may be appropriate and/or helpful to them at any time (*ex: content meetings with TAs*). We recommend you meet / communicate with your PLAs weekly to establish expectations, ensure they are providing sufficient support to students, and provide opportunities for everyone to share concerns and feedback. This helps build community and sense of belonging for your course team of PLAs.
- **Student Perspectives** – Please keep in mind that PLAs are current undergraduate students. Their experiences are incredibly valuable in gaining insight regarding student perspectives in your course, and they are excited to be part of your course team. PLAs are eager to learn and contribute, so please share your teaching insights and talents with them. Please also be mindful of their student status when communicating with and about them to your course.
- **Content Training** - All new PLAs are required to complete training (NATS 200/workshops) during the first semester of work to gain some general knowledge of teaching strategies, learning styles, and tips for engaging students in learning. Any course-specific content preparation should be provided by the Instructors working with the student team.
- **Concerns** – Please email, call, or stop by anytime if you have any concerns about the PLA team or if there is anything the MSLC can do assist in facilitating support for your course. We will be periodically visiting PLA sessions (*online and in-person*), and we welcome and encourage your feedback at any time.

PLAs also receive weekly email updates from their MSLC staff coordinators, participate in periodic PLA team meetings, and are invited to all-MSLC student team social gatherings throughout the semester to continue to build a sense of community amongst all MSLC student employees.

MSLC TIPS FOR PLA MEETINGS

Please meet regularly with your PLA team to review content, ensure they are following your guidelines for their course-specific role, gain feedback on student experiences in your course, and answer questions they may have.

Here are a few prompts to help facilitate discussion during your meetings with PLAs:

General conversation starters

- When doing introductions, adding an ice-breaker style question can help students feel more comfortable chatting and connecting with the team! (Ex: share preferred name, major, future goal, favorite snack / season / activity / thing about Chicago, etc.).
- How has your day been?
- How are your classes this semester?
- What are you hoping to do once you graduate from UIC? (i.e., What are your future / professional goals?)
- What are you hoping to learn from this experience working as a PLA?

General Role Questions

- What is working well during your sessions?
- What has been challenging during your sessions?
- Are students actively engaging in their learning during your sessions?
- How are the participation levels during your drop-in hours?
- I look forward to learning from your experiences! I am excited to hear about your teaching approaches that have helped students engage during your sessions!
- Are there any additional tools or approaches you would like to use (or that students may prefer) that we haven't used yet (in class / drop-in sessions)?

Instructor Guidance / Leadership / Feedback

- How has communication with TAs / Instructors been going so far?
- What can the Instructors do to provide additional support to PLAs? to TAs? to students in class?
- Are there any topics you have noticed students struggling with so far?
- Are course policies / expectations clear to students so far?
- Are there any general challenges students have shared?
- What can we do to build stronger connections with students in class so they may participate more?

We also have a variety of student scenario questions available to use for further discussion or professional development. We discuss these during PLA and TA training, and you are welcome to use any of these if they are helpful. Please email the MSLC Director for access to the *Student Scenarios* document.

CONTINUED LEARNING

The **Center for the Advancement of Teaching Excellence (CATE)** offers fantastic resources including [Toolkits](#), [Workshops](#), and [Certificate Programs](#) that support efforts to integrate inclusive teaching approaches, including active learning. Some relevant workshops include: *Facilitating Collaborative Learning using Peer Instruction & Polling Tools*, *Implementing Effective Group Work*, *Cultivating Equitable Discussions with Active Learning*.

LAS has a wonderful [Teaching Excellence](#) page with many **Inclusive Teaching and Learning Resources** plus other best practices for Instructors.

Professional societies also offer resources, workshops and additional information about these types of programs including the [Learning Assistant Alliance](#) and [Peer-Led Team Learning International Society](#).