

## UTA REFLECTION

-Chirag Rathi

This semester, I had the opportunity to collaborate with Dr. May Yeap in the discipline of multivariable calculus. As a teaching assistant, my duties were to attend one lecture per day and help the students during the lecture, hold review sessions for the class and help the students at the tutoring lab in the Mathematics department. All of these duties not only helped the students but also were stepping stones to improve my teaching skills.

It is said that the hardest part about teaching is constructing the bridge between ignorance and knowledge. This is the most important quality of a teacher and the teacher's ability to do that makes this profession respectable. During my time as a teaching assistant, I collaborated with various students struggling in different aspects of vector calculus and the intriguing aspect was each one of them thought differently. Thus, I had to construct a unique bridge for almost every one of them. This not only made me appreciate the value of teaching but also enhanced my creativity in thought and speech.

Formerly, as a student of vector calculus I was able to understand all the concepts in class. However, I never got the chance to explain it to someone. This teaching assistantship gave me the opportunity to apply my knowledge and to work on my soft skills.

Through the UTA program I have learnt that every student is different and has to be approached differently. For instance, some students want to know the motivations behind the answers while some students don't want to go beyond the limits of that particular question. Though there is nothing wrong with either mentality, I had to judge whether the student was there to gain insights into the theory or was just there for some homework help.

By making these judgement calls, I learnt the importance of time management. Since I was not a personal tutor, I had to budget my time according to the crowd in the tutoring lab and in the review sessions. I could not spend my entire time on one student.

Budgeting my time led to the conclusion that I had to choose my words wisely and speak in such a way that would clear up the students' doubts as soon as possible. Practicing this skill over the semester made my speech more precise and now I am able to present a complex idea in clear and concise ways.

Also, the UTA seminars every Tuesday helped me to adopt new style of teaching during the practice sessions. I would ask the students to form groups and work on the board on the problems that I had prepared beforehand. This was an entertaining experience not only for the students, but also for me. I was able to hear their thought processes as they discussed the problems in their groups and I was able to isolate a general area where most of them were struggling.

Throughout these sixteen weeks, I picked up many other minor skills. But making judgement calls, budgeting my time and speaking accordingly are the three big ones. By the end of the semester I feel more confident about my abilities to explain a topic in concrete and non-confusing ways.

Undoubtedly, the UTA program does give an opportunity to use their math knowledge. But more importantly, it gives a chance to work on one's soft skills like speaking, reading body language, negotiating etc. These soft skills are extremely critical to thrive in the society. So, anyone looking to develop their soft skills must enroll in the UTA program with the mathematics department.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with Drs. Lidia Mrad and Rachel Neville during this semester and I hope that this UTA program prospers even more in the future!