

UTA Program Reflection
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I applied for the math UTA program on a whim and (quite literally) at the last minute. I reasoned that the position would provide a good experience, a chance to build my resume, and a convenient source of part-time income. That I would end up enjoying the experience so immensely never crossed my mind.

I spent my first several weeks in the program feeling little more than nervousness. It was overwhelming. I had little previous experience with tutoring, so holding office hours and staffing the calculus tutoring room seemed to be somewhat of a “learn on the fly” endeavor. I was terrified that I might mess up or do something wrong. As for grading, I felt I had exactly no clue what I was doing and was altogether unqualified to make the decisions placed in my hands. But with time, I found my sealegs. This position encourages UTAs to learn by doing. The program coordinators foster an environment where mistakes are welcome and seminar classes are crafted such that participants can learn from each other as well.

With time and practice, my confidence grew. As my apprehension faded, joy took its place. I came to find the position highly rewarding. Every week I looked forward to holding tutoring and office hours. I was excited by every new question students brought in. There were opportunities for me to help students grow in their own mathematical confidence and have a positive impact on others’ academic journeys. It became my goal to strive to help students succeed, and when a student and I were able to reach a moment of clarity and understanding, I was filled with a sense of accomplishment and pride.

I often felt I was learning just as much, if not more, as the students I helped. In each interaction with a student, I strove to communicate more clearly and precisely, expressing mathematics in ways that are both intuitively easy to understand and accurate in vocabulary and nuance of meaning. I challenged myself to find new ways to approach familiar ideas. I have never been a visual learner myself, for example, but I continually sought out intuitive visual approaches to concepts so I could better help students who learn well in a variety of different manners. This, in turn, helped me to come to understand the same concepts more deeply and completely.

I would absolutely recommend that any math student curious about teaching apply for the UTA program. This program is a fantastic opportunity to gain valuable skills and experience. In particular, it is a great way to build confidence with mathematical communication skills while deepening your knowledge of a given subject area. Importantly, the UTA program creates a safe environment where students can try teaching on for size. Some such students, like myself, may find an unexpected fit.