

TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND PEER LEADERS: WHAT IS THEIR ONLINE ROLE?

A Quick-Start Guide for Teaching and Learning

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If you would prefer a video tutorial on adding Users to Bb, such as your TA/PL,
please click here:

<https://utep.yuja.com/V/Video?v=1050927&node=4027165&a=1342108628&autoplay=1>

Teaching Assistants (TA) and **Peer Leaders (PL)** have become more and more prominent and needed in the online classroom, especially as enrollment caps increase for faculty who teach online. The main role of a TA/PL is to support faculty, however, it is not as straight forward as it first sounds; this could involve anything from covering a class, to teaching small groups or individuals with specific needs. They are key link between faculty and students.

The **Teaching Assistant** and/or **Peer Leader** for an online course can be invaluable to allow an instructor to give more time to teaching, help with communicating with students, participate in (and learning about) assessment, and contribute to over course management.

Teaching and Learning Considerations

There are several areas of guidance that faculty and TA/PL's should discuss, with clear roles and expectations agreed upon. Prior to the launch of the course, both faculty and TA/PL should walk through the syllabus, class schedule, and assignment instructions, and review learning objectives and grading rubrics. Meetings, in person or virtual, are great, but this kind of coordination can also take place via email to make sure resources are available and questions are answered.

You should discuss and establish clarity in the areas of:

1. Blackboard Skills

Blackboard Training: Do you want the TA/PL to have completed Blackboard training and to be familiar with Blackboard training resources for students? Resources: Blackboard Institute and/or Technology Support workshops. See [Campus Edge](#) for upcoming professional development.

Blackboard Problems: Do you want the TA/P to contact [Technology Support Help Desk](#) to resolve Blackboard technology problems, or to contact you? Or both?

2. Course Policies

Review of Policies: What should the TA/PL know about important course policies and procedures? If the TA/PL notices a lack of compliance with these, what do you want the TA/PL to do?

Settings for Course Areas: Do you want the TA/PL to check or create “settings” in areas such as discussions, blogs, quizzes, tests, or assignments? (such as Adaptive Release, etc.)

Confidentiality: What is important to explain to the TA/PL about confidentiality of student records and information?

3. Course Content

Course Organization: Do you want the TA/PL to become familiar with content and how it is organized? Familiar enough to be able to explain it to a student?

Access to Course Materials: Do you want the TA/PL to find out about and advise students on how to get their books or how to access other content?

Working Ahead: Do you want the TA/PL to study and work ahead of students on all course materials? And to check active links in advance of each week’s materials?

Schedule Review: Do you want the TA/PL to check the schedule of all due dates?

Notification of Errors: Do you want the TA/PL to notify you of any errors found in course materials?

Adding Content: Is it important to advise the TA/PL to never add any course content or quizzes without your approval and guidance? Or, is it alright for the TA/PL to add certain content?

4. Communication

Tone: What tone do you want the TA to express in communication with the students? Expressions of genuine, real caring and encouragement? Or do you prefer a coaching or professional tone in encouraging students to get and stay on track? Compared to face-to-face classroom education, distance education requires students to be more focused, become better time managers, and to have the ability to work alone and with others.

TA/PL Challenges: How do you want the TA/PL to respond if students challenge the TA’s role or approach in the course?

Discussion Threads: Are there discussion forum threads that you want the TA/PL to add to the course? Do you want the TA/PL to coach students in each forum and thread, or just certain ones?

Reminders: What reminders do you want the TA/PL to send to students? Do you want your TA/PL to send messages reminding the class of due dates and assignment

requirements at certain times before they are due?

Tracking and Reporting: Do you want the TA/PL to track participation and grading? Do you want periodic reports from the TA/PL?

Academic Integrity: How vigilant do you want the TA/PL to be in looking for signs of possible cheating? How would the TA/PL be able to notice such signs? When and how should the TA/PL report them to you?

Messages: Do you have any planned messages or materials that you want the TA/PL to send out or post as announcements to students at different times during the course? Or to send out periodic messages of tips that might help students excel in the class?

Checking Class Pulse: Do you want the TA/PL to take the initiative in getting in touch with students? Do you want the TA/PL to become aware of what individual students are coping with? Do you want the TA/PL to advise you on the “pulse” of the class?

5. Grading

To Grade or Not to Grade? Do you want the TA/PL to grade student work? What do you want the TA to grade?

Scoring Guides: What guidelines or rules for marking, commenting, and recording grades do you want the TA/PL to follow? Rubrics can be especially helpful!

Turnaround Time: How soon do you want grading to be completed after a discussion? After submission of an assignment?

Posting: Do you want to check the grading before it’s posted in the Gradebook?

Best Practices:

An agreement with the TA/PL can be very helpful in getting started and knowing what to do, and what NOT to do, in their role as a TA/PL in the course.

Here is an example—feel free to modify:

Roles and Responsibilities

- As the TA/PL, you are very important in making the students feel welcome, in adding that “touch of warmth” to the learning, in checking on how they are doing, in reporting issues that come up, and in keeping track of progress.
- Content is critical and as the instructor, and due to the complex content, I need to explain things in my own way regarding the content in the course. So, make sure that

you check with me about any of the content questions that may arise.

- You may want to let students know that as a TA/PL:
"I won't be giving the content information but will assist in clarifying as much as I can. If I am in doubt about an answer, I'll check in with Prof. _____. But do let me know anything you might think of as a 'muddy point,' anything that you can't figure out or that is confusing to you. I'll do my best to find a way to help in consultation with Prof. _____."
- Do not post any new quizzes or answers to quizzes unless you get them from me.
- Do not change any content unless I provide it or give directions for you to do so.

TA/PL Discussion Room

- Your role is important in giving a "personal touch" to the learning experiences in this class.
- "TA/PL Office Hours" on Discussion Board. Post turnaround to expect for the questions that they post in your area. You should plan to check and respond to student questions and emails within 24-48 hours. If uncertain about how or when to respond to something, please check with me.

Checking Progress on Student Participation

- Use Bb Retention Center to communicate with encouragement to students who are struggling, but also to acknowledge students who are doing well!
- Give me a weekly summary for each week's progress. This will help with grading.
- Check in on students through Bb Retention Center to find out about reasons for delays. This kind of message would be good: "I noticed you haven't yet submitted your assignment. Since the week is fast moving along, I hope you can submit them soon. And, I hope everything is alright. Let me know if you are having difficulties or if there's anything that I can do to help."
- If you notice students are having particular problems, let me know so that I can follow up as appropriate.

Reminders to Students

- Periodically, post reminder in your discussion room of upcoming deadlines (like for the end of the discussion week, and just before the quizzes and tests); and post an announcement "Please check the new message posted in my discussion area."

Gathering Feedback from Students

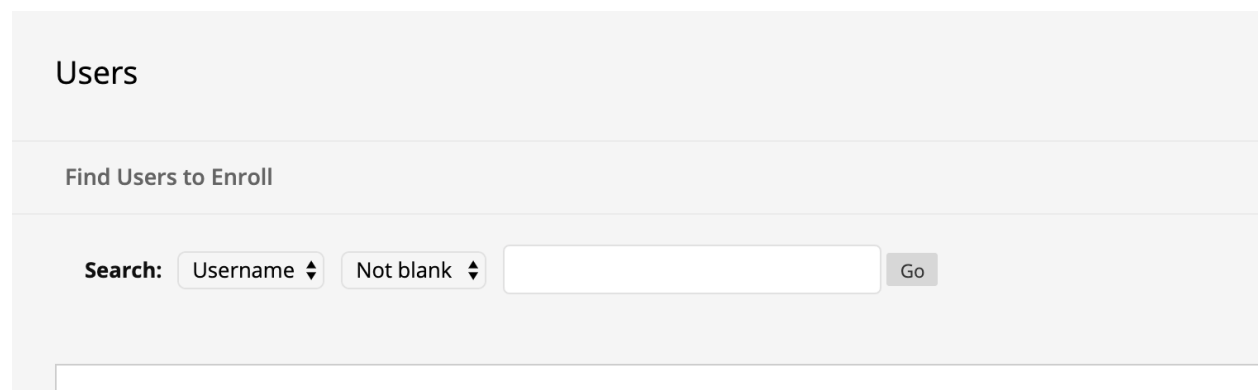
- About the third week, post a new thread on Discussion Board called: “Feedback from You.” Ask students: “How’s it going? What parts of this course are your favorite? What do you like least or what would you change?” Summarize the information from students; send to me. This will help us in making improvements in the course.

Adding Your TA/PL to the Bb Course

*Please note that it is not possible for someone to be both a student and a TA/PL within the same course. This is due to the fact that federal law [FERPA] and University policy both specifically prohibit students enrolled in a class from being able to modify their own grades or to view or modify the grades of other students enrolled in that same class.

To manually enroll someone as a TA/PL in your Blackboard course:

1. Go to your **Course Management** section
2. Click **Users & Groups**
3. Click **Users**
4. Go to **Find Users to Enroll**
(**Note:** This step confuses some. Do NOT click or use the search box. This would only allow you to search your class for a student who is already in the shell!)



The screenshot shows the 'Users' section of a Blackboard course. Below the 'Users' header is a section titled 'Find Users to Enroll'. This section contains a search form with the following elements: a 'Search:' label, a dropdown menu set to 'Username', another dropdown menu set to 'Not blank', a text input field, and a 'Go' button.

5. Enter the TA/PL’s username (the first part of their UTEP email).

6. Select the **role of Teaching Assistant**

7. Click on **Submit**.

* Indicates a required field.

ENROLL USERS

Enter one or more Usernames. Separate multiple Usernames with commas. Click **Browse** to search.

* Username

Role

Enrollment Availability
 Yes No

Availability Override Date
You can allow students to access an unavailable course or term until the date you choose. This action will override previous course or term date settings.

Enter dates as mm/dd/yyyy

Click **Submit** to proceed.

(Note: If you do not know your TA/PL's username, you can search for it by clicking on "Browse."

Users

Search Options:

<input type="checkbox"/>	STATUS	FIRST NAME	LAST NAME	USERNAME	EMAIL
<input type="checkbox"/>		Steven (Test Student)	Varela	stvarela_ds	stvarela@utep.edu
<input type="checkbox"/>		Steven	Varela_PreviewUser	stvarela_previewuser	stvarela@utep.edu

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