Postdoc Time Commitment and Impacts

**Time Commitment**
- Pre and post-workshop meetings: 4-6 hours per quarter
- Workshop itself: 3 hrs per quarter
- Preparation for workshop: 0-6 hrs per quarter, depending on level of facilitation
- Workshop assessment: 2-4 hours per quarter (may change with evolution of assessment methodologies/collaborations)

**Impacts**
- Opportunity to meet other post-docs with an interest in teaching and STEM education and diversity
- Greater understanding of inclusive practices in teaching and mentoring
- Gain leadership and organizational skills for a grassroots effort
- Develop skills in student assessment
- Experience in working with and implementing a project with a committee of diverse colleagues
- Opportunity to network with more senior members of the administration involved in student learning
- Opportunity to make positive changes in biology education at UCSD

**From Contributing Post-docs Past and Present**

*From Pavan Kadandale (Post-doc in Amy Kiger’s group):*

“Being involved in the TA training workshop has been incredibly helpful in my job search. Thanks to what I have learnt in preparing for, conducting, and assessing the success of the TA training workshop, I have been able to strengthen my Statement of Teaching Philosophy and my Statement on Diversity. During my subsequent interviews for academic tenure track positions, interviewing faculty remarked that they were very impressed with the depth of both. I think that my experiences with the TA training workshop, my discussions with the other postdoctoral fellows, and the associated mentoring I got from Gabriele Wienhausen were instrumental in my success at getting interviews for academic positions. During the interview process itself, being able to talk intelligently and confidently about diversity in the classroom, its attendant challenges, and ways to create a better learning environment helped me make a strong impression on the selection committee. I was also able to address the role of assessments in becoming a more effective educator, and to talk about the different approaches to assessments. Although time will tell if I interviewed successfully, I cannot understate the part that everyone involved in the TA training workshop played in my at least having a really good shot at landing a great academic position.

On a personal note, it was incredibly motivating to be able to talk to other postdocs who shared the same passion for balancing teaching and research. Having a "support" group to bounce ideas was great, and having many minds contributing to sifting through the education research literature was invaluable in uncovering the latest developments and philosophies on teaching.
This is an absolutely terrific experience on all levels, and is highly recommended for any postdoc thinking about a career in academia."

From Dan Pollard (Post-doc in Scott Rifkin’s group):
“Participation in the TA training workshop has been extremely rewarding. Prior to this experience I found it difficult to find career development opportunities that were not strictly focused on research. The workshop has been very easy for me to incorporate into my busy schedule. I was able to start off slowly, just sitting in on a few meetings and workshops to see how it works. After I became acquainted with the workshop’s methods and goals I volunteered to help teach a short module. It had been several years since I had taught a class so it was challenging and extremely useful to get in front of a class again to continue developing my pedagogical skills. Having a group of postdoc colleagues in the room while you teach and then working together to discuss what is working and not working with specific teaching methods is a very unique opportunity. Regardless of what career I end up in, I believe my experiences with this workshop will have a profound impact on how I think about and engage in communication."

From Laura Ewell (Post-doc in Jill Leutgeb’s group):
“Participating in the TA training workshop has provided me with the opportunity to balance my two academic priorities, teaching and research. As I progress along the academic track, I find such opportunities extremely important (and rare). I hope to become a professor, and so I value the chance to learn how to balance several time commitments that I think are equally important – a skill that will definitely come in handy later! Furthermore, my initial involvement in this program has been personally insightful, spurring self-reflection on my own teaching practices and biases. I hope to become more involved over the coming quarters."

From Stefanie Otto (now Assistant Professor of Biology, Carroll College):
“I have to say that our workshop and preparation activities for the workshop really helped me for my first year of teaching... I just wish I still had all of our ‘crew’ around to discuss some of the problems and difficulties I face every day.

For one, I learned a lot about the importance of assessment. For all of the classes I teach, I make sure to include a beginning of the semester evaluation and my own personalized end of the semester evaluation. I also write a response to evaluations so that my students know I take their feedback very seriously and to let them know where I stand on particular issues. Honestly, I would have never thought of doing this seeing as I never experienced it during all my years of schooling!

Also, I was exposed to many different teaching styles and methodologies through our workshops, personal experiences, and [the STEM Teaching and Diversity] journal club. I am trying to implement as many of the styles as I can in my own classrooms (clickers, peer discussion groups, journal clubs) to help enhance the student learning environment. Again, coming from big universities, I would have never thought to implement any of these items and wouldn’t have known where to begin if it wasn’t for our group’s effort designing and implementing the training program and journal club.

I honestly can say that the brief time I had with the TA training workshop group has proved extremely beneficial to me and I am so grateful that I had the opportunity to be a
From Kerstin Kirchsteiger (Post-doc in Mark Estelle's group):

"I had heard about the workshop last year already, but wasn’t able to find the time to commit to participating. This year I finally got the chance of getting involved and am really happy I did so. I have only very little teaching experience and have learned a lot about how to tackle problems in the classroom attending the workshop. I think the students as well as us (the facilitators) learn new things constantly in these workshops. It’s a very dynamic process.

I had a very good impression from the first workshop, the students really seemed to have enjoyed actively thinking about diversity in the classroom and so did I.

Honestly, in the teaching situations I have been so far, I was the most diverse person, coming from a different cultural background [outside the US], whereas the student group was more homogenous, a situation you can’t find that often here in the US. Therefore it seems to me a very important issue to be aware of and to have tools to prevent any conflicts/negative experiences students may experience in a diverse classroom. Stressing the importance and richness of diversity and its impact on all of us is pivotal.

Our pre- and post-workshop discussions are really enriching and moving towards continuous improvement of the content and the methodology of how to best transmit it to the students. It’s extremely interesting to analyze the reactions of the TAs to the different situations we expose them in the workshop. The diversity within the organizing post-docs feeds positively into this process."

From Evan Merkhofer (post-doc in Tracy Johnson’s group):

“Participating in the TA-training workshop has allowed me to increase my experience and knowledge of how inclusivity and diversity play such a critical role in undergraduate education. Before getting involved in the workshop, I had heard these buzzwords thrown around, but didn’t really know what they mean. Helping to develop and implement this workshop helped me to really understand the importance of these in education. It has been both a teaching and learning experience for me; every time I am involved in the workshop, I learn more and more from the participants and they open my eyes to aspects of education. One of the most rewarding parts of the workshop is realizing that the students truly want to learn how to make UCSD a better place to learn through fostering an inclusive learning environment for the students that look up to them as teaching assistants.

My involvement in this workshop has had many practical benefits that will be useful as I continue my career in academia towards becoming a professor. Creating a rapport with postdoc colleagues has led to a spawning of many new ideas, including starting to integrate this workshop in the field of education research, which is an area of great interest to me. It has also allowed me to discuss how to develop and implement new pedagogical methods as I increase my teaching experience. This workshop offers a unique opportunity for postdocs to increase their exposure to important aspects of pedagogy, and I am excited to continue to be involved in it, and am certain that it will be very useful in my career development.”

From Sharon Sann (Post-doc in Yishi Jin’s group):
“Participating in facilitation of the diversity workshop has allowed me to think more clearly about diversity issues in my own teaching while encouraging better teaching practices among TAs. I plan to implement some of the teaching methods we introduced to TAs in my own classroom in the future.”

From Suzanne Lee (Post-doc in Jens Lykke-Andersen’s group):

“As a scientist with a strong interest in STEM education, I have found helping to create and continuing to develop the TA Training Workshop to be extraordinarily rewarding – with an impact that has gone far beyond simply acquiring more teaching experience.

Perhaps the most valuable aspects to me of participating in this project have been the opportunities I’ve had to interact with and learn from other post-docs and educators. The post-doc team involved in this workshop is ever evolving, with individuals from diverse educational and cultural backgrounds – each of whom bring their own perspectives and experiences in STEM classrooms as teachers and students. From these colleagues and our discussions, as well as discussions of existing literature through the associated STEM Teaching and Diversity journal club, my understanding of “best practices” in teaching and mentoring has been greatly expanded.

In addition to learning from my post-doc collaborators on this project, I’ve also greatly appreciated the ongoing mentoring of Associate Dean Gabriele Wienhausen, her colleagues and other scientist-educators I’ve met through discussing this work at on-campus and off-campus conferences. Through these interactions, I’m gaining a deeper understanding of how to better assess student learning, and on a personal side, I’ve become more inspired to pursue a career that allows me to balance my research with activities in teaching and improving the educational experiences of students.

In addition, my involvement in the TA Training Workshop has also given me the practice of actively working with a team of diverse colleagues, balancing research responsibilities with teaching-related activities, and clarifying and articulating my own thoughts on critical issues in education and diversity in the sciences – all skills I believe will be important to whatever career path I ultimately take.”

From Sandi Clement (now Assistant Professor, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo):

“During my first year on the job market I had a campus interview during which I met with the Vice Provost for Diversity for that campus. It was during that meeting I discovered, rather awkwardly, that I was unprepared to discuss diversity in STEM in a meaningful way. I decided I needed to educate myself if I wanted to get a job. More importantly, I needed to educate myself if I was serious about teaching well not just to a subset of students, but to all of my students. Helping to organize and develop the postdoc led TA training on inclusive teaching helped me to put some of what I had learned into practice. I am confident that this experience played a large role in receiving so many job offers during my second year on the job market.

It is much more difficult for a postdoc to become part of the academic community than it is for a graduate student or new faculty member. Being involved in regular meetings through the STEM education journal/discussion group allowed me not only to learn about topics in inclusive teaching, but also to connect with other postdocs and with grad students in the Division of Biological Sciences. Importantly, the TA training workshop
also gave me an opportunity to connect with people outside of STEM as well through venues such as the Teaching Diversity Conference. If it is hard for a biology postdoc to meet other biologists at UCSD, it is nearly impossible to meet people from other disciplines.

One of the lessons that stuck with me from our readings in preparing for the TA training workshop is the importance of contextualizing science and integrating science with society. This is something I have put into practice during my first year teaching. I am learning from my students in their own words how they make connections between the course material and topics of importance to them. I’ve learned some surprising and interesting things!

While I learned that it is important to create a meaningful and contextualized experience for my students, I am still uncertain how to do this well. So, when I arrived at my new institution I reached out to professors in the Philosophy department and in the Gender and Ethnic Studies department for advice. Not only did I receive many helpful suggestions, now I am part of a Professional Learning Community centered on inclusive teaching for equity and social justice in K-PhD STEM education. If not for my experience with the TA training workshop and the STEM [Teaching and Diversity] discussion group at UCSD, I would have not thought to reach out to my colleagues from other departments, an my first year as a tenure-track professor at a new institution would have been a much lonelier experience.”