

Collaboration and High Impact Practices: Utilizing Undergraduate Learning Assistants (ULAs)

Undergraduate Learning Assistants have been used in a variety of classrooms and disciplines across the country and at UNC for many years. They facilitate collaboration inside the classroom and may support continued learning outside the classroom. ULAs assist learners, and thus are distinct from teaching assistants who assist instructors. The ULA experience is transformational for a student when the experience is structured well, can be a [high impact practice](#) for these undergraduates.

As a 2017 [College report](#) about ULAs noted, across departments, there are different names given to ULAs, the tasks and requirements vary, and compensation varies. The practices below are meant to help guide the use of ULAs in a classroom, but it is recommended that individual faculty correspond with departmental administrators about specifics related to departmental use and credit awarded if a ULA is using this as a high impact practice experience to meet a general education requirement.

Four best practices, based on the 2017 College Report:

- 1. Be intentional and transparent about how ULAs are selected.** Be intentional about a process that selects a diverse team of students, being sure to provide role models of students underrepresented in a particular discipline. Defining a transparent process for participation as a ULA provides fair access to students interested in these roles. The criteria for consideration, timelines, and paths to participation (e.g. course enrollment, prerequisite experience, GPA, application and/or interview process) need to be made available to students on a website or other readily accessible location.
- 2. Ensure that ULAs receive training and continual support.** Students need formal, structured guidance in University policies and safety, effective pedagogy in their setting (classroom, small group, one-one one) learning theory, a diversity and inclusion lens, and other elements central to educational roles. Students also need opportunities to practice offering learning assistance to fellow students with support from more experienced faculty and staff. Expertise with disciplinary content is not sufficient on its own. ULAs can provide effective support with training and ongoing guidance. ULAs are chosen to fulfill an important role in promoting academic success, and it is important that they understand how.
- 3. Supervision and Accountability.** ULA roles within a course/discipline vest students with responsibilities and tasks as defined during selection and training processes. Once they are in place, it is important that ULAs have a supervision structure and clear forms of accountability to support their success. This supervision and accountability may take the form of participation in a course, maintaining and reporting records of interactions with students, and/or regular, formal check-ins with the instructor or professional staff. This supervision helps students problem solve in timely ways and ensures that ULAs and students they interact with are receiving the support they need--to the benefit of all.
- 4. Assessment and evaluation.** Individual ULAs need feedback loops in order to grow and develop. Regular evaluation from students they serve and supervisors is critical in this process. Likewise, defining

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and enacting learning outcomes and assessment measures provides critical data to understand the impact of the ULAs on student learning. This larger, formal ULA program assessment drives improvement of and provides direction for future efforts.

More Resources:

<https://www.aacu.org/leap/hips>

<https://www.learningassistantalliance.org/>

<https://curricula.unc.edu/faculty/undergraduate-learning-assistants/>

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