

### UTA Reflection

From being a student to being a Teacher's Assistant for students to being both. I discovered a bizarre passion for teaching in my senior year of high school, when I spent the first two trimesters TA-ing for half of the Calculus classes and the latter trimester TA-ing for every single Pre-Calculus, Calculus AB, and Calculus BC class at my school (don't worry, it was a pretty small charter school), as well working as a private tutor for two separate families. I thought back then, "there must be a better use for adeptness in math than just getting A's."

Fast forward two years, give or take, and I was accepted into the University of Arizona Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program in the Department of Mathematics. This was my first ever semester as a Math UTA, under the supervisorship of Professor Bayly, Math 313, which was actually the first ever Math course I'd taken at the UofA. I had been slowly forgetting Calculus II and Vector, which I took the summer prior to senior year of high school. High school was a pitiful lake compared to college's ocean of mathematics. I had to remember countless concepts spanning multiple different classes. My undergraduate career in mathematics was no longer simply "take one class, get a good grade, forget about it, rinse and repeat." My engagement with mathematics was strengthened via re-acquisition of knowledge, propelled by the need to help students in Math 129 & 223 in the Calculus Tutoring rooms.

Outside of a math perspective, being a UTA finally showed me the struggles of being a student, only this time, from the viewpoint of the helper and not the helped. Though I held myself as an equal to my students, I received lots of practice in refining my technique in helping students succeed in Math. My students helped me too, by being people I would

regularly talk to, keeping my sanity in check in times of isolation, as well as keeping my productivity from dropping too low.

I found that the most critical takeaway from my pilot semester of UTA duties was that I did not need to be perfect. As the semester progressed, the material students brought to my attention became steadily more challenging and steadily farther from the boundary of my memory. Luckily, I had my trusty *Single and Multivariable Calculus, Third Edition* to refresh my understanding of prior topics. The position provided a substantial boost in confidence, even when I was unsure how to approach a problem. There were times when I would unintentionally step into my students' shoes and pass judgment on my abilities as a TA. That was not productive. No matter how inadequate I felt about a topic, what inadvertently helped the most was reminding myself that I know how to do these problems, the knowledge might just be temporarily dormant, and that the students came to me for a reason.

As someone who struggled with mental health (it has gotten much better now), and as someone who was once very nihilistic, I found a purpose with which to live by: I may not have much self-esteem or self-importance, but if I can spend some of my life helping the lives of others, then it is a life well lived. That is my maxim. The UTA program provided an outlet for me to help others, and I will continue to grow under its employment. I will do my best to continue working as a UTA for subsequent semesters, and I do highly recommend the position to undergraduates of all years and standings, with high regards to its contributions to academic as well as personal prosperity.