Inaugural Caltech Teaching Conference & TA Orientation: 9/26/2013
Report from the Center for Teaching, Learning, & Outreach (CTLO)

Overview:
With input from the Graduate Studies Committee, the CTLO worked with the Graduate Dean's Office to redesign the teaching component of graduate orientation week. The new model included an opening session with a faculty speaker and TA panel followed by three concurrent session blocks. Sessions addressed common forms of teaching and new TA questions, as well as topics of possible interest to experienced TAs. With CTLO mentorship, feedback, and support, team of graduate students planned the sessions, recruited co-facilitators, and produced a booklet of materials. A follow-up survey documented attendees' participation and provided feedback.

Overall Participation:
218 of the 232 G1s (94%) confirmed their participation in the Teaching Conference (TC). Attendance distribution by Division is shown in **Table 1.** Additional participants in the TC, including G2+ and Undergraduate students, are not included in this summary.

TABLE 1

Division	G1 Attendees	% of Division's G1s
EAS	91	94%
CCE	53	96%
PMA	42	91%
GPS	21	95%
BBE	8	89%
HSS	3	100%
TOTAL	218	

Session Participation:
Nine different concurrent sessions were offered at the TC; the five topics identified by the Graduate Studies Committee as most important were repeated in multiple time blocks. 92% of the G1 attendees reported participating in the maximum number of concurrent sessions, three. **Table 2** shows total attendance by session (attendance combined for repeated sessions).[*]

TABLE 2

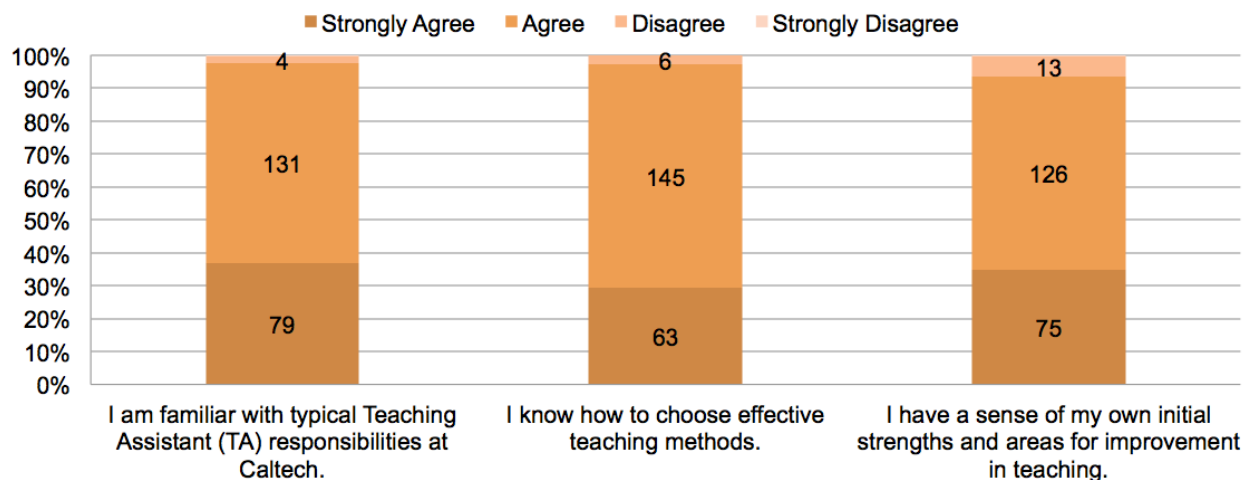| Session	G1s	% of TC Attendees
Grading & Feedback	181	83.0%
Successful Office Hours	142	65.1%
Effective Recitations	141	64.7%
Practice Teaching	71	32.6%
Life as a Lab TA	53	24.3%
Authoring Problems	13	6.0%
Research Mentoring	10	4.6%
Educational Outreach	7	3.2%
Responding to Student Writing	3	1.4%

Outcomes:
In addition to tracking participation, the follow-up survey asked for participants' self-evaluation of the intended outcomes of the Teaching Conference. **Chart 1,** below, displays outcome self-evaluations: Over 90% of responses indicate that they agree or or strongly agree with outcomes statements. Only two "strongly disagree" responses were recorded (one each to the first and third questions).

Chart 1 — Stacked bar chart (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree):
- I am familiar with typical Teaching Assistant (TA) responsibilities at Caltech: Strongly Agree 79, Agree 131, Disagree 4.
- I know how to choose effective teaching methods: Strongly Agree 63, Agree 145, Disagree 6.
- I have a sense of my own initial strengths and areas for improvement in teaching: Strongly Agree 75, Agree 126, Disagree 13.

---

[*] See Appendix 1 for breakdown of sessions by Division, Option, and Citizenship.

Comments:
55 attendees responded to the open-ended question, "Do you have any comments that would help us plan future Teaching Conferences and TA Orientations?" **Chart 2**, below, summarizes themes:
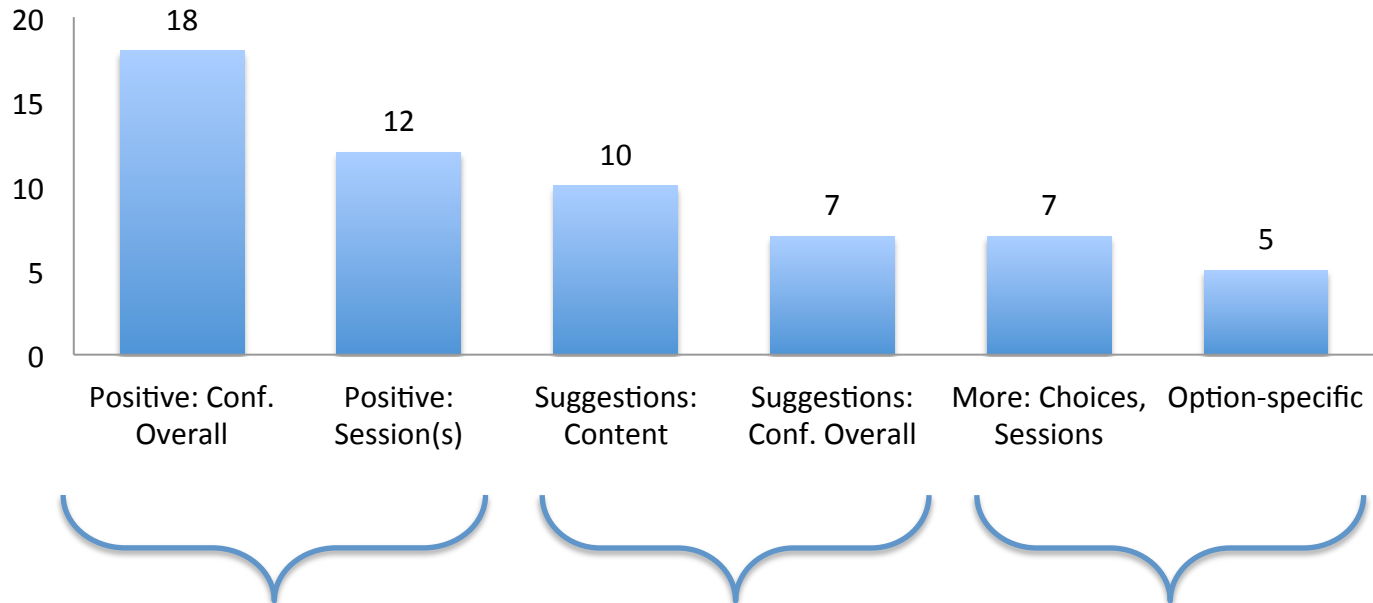
Positive Comments, e.g.:

"The sessions were very well run, engaging, and interesting."

"This year's TA training was great!! I really appreciate having the TA training booklet because there were some sessions that I could not attend…All the speakers were incredibly helpful, and I appreciate the time all the staff and volunteers put into the training. Fabulous!"

"I believe this was a short, but effective training day for our teaching assignments."

"I think it was a good formula, stick with it!"

"Liked this idea! It was nice to engage with the graduate students and others who are involved with teaching and discuss strategies."

"This is the best part for me for the whole orientation week!"

"I thought the small group practice sessions were helpful to start thinking about how to teach…"

Content:
- More advanced content (3)
- More ethics examples (2)
- Less overlap between sessions (3)
- Other specific topics: Non-native speakers; US classroom procedures; grading systems; mentoring methods; print content.

Conference Overall:
- Shorter (2)
- Logistics: Order of sessions, room sizes, locations.
- Ask options to make TA assignments before conference.

Interactivity (not counted above, <5 comments):
- Be more interactive (2)
- Be less interactive (2)

More Choices/Sessions, e.g.:

"One more session would've been great."

"I would have enjoyed being able to attend more of the sessions or being able to choose more sessions."

"It would be helpful to hold a second, follow-up orientation after we've had the chance to try TA'ing."

"Span the teaching conference over two days."

Options-specificity, e.g.:
"Make more use of the participants' options"

"Somehow integrating option specificity would be great if possible."

Inaugural Caltech Teaching Conference & TA Orientation: 9/26/2013
Report from the Center for Teaching, Learning, & Outreach (CTLO)

APPENDIX 1:
Session Participation, as percentage of G1 Attendees, by Division, Option (largest 10 G1 options), and Citizenship.

Division	Office Hours	Grading & Feedback	Practice Teaching	Lab TA	Recitation	Authoring Problems	Student Writing	Outreach	Mentoring
BBE (8)	25.0%	87.5%	37.5%	12.5%	62.5%			12.5%	12.5%
CCE (53)	22.6%	64.2%	67.9%	71.7%	62.3%	1.9%		1.9%	3.8%
EAS (91)	87.9%	91.2%	15.4%	7.7%	65.9%	6.6%	1.1%	1.1%	4.4%
GPS (21)	57.1%	81.0%	47.6%		42.9%	19.0%	4.8%	9.5%	14.3%
HSS (3)	100.0%	100.0%	33.3%		33.3%	33.3%			
PMA (42)	78.6%	88.1%	16.7%	16.7%	78.6%	2.4%	2.4%	4.8%	

Option	Office Hours	Grading & Feedback	Practice Teaching	Lab TA	Recitation	Authoring Problems	Student Writing	Outreach	Mentoring
Chem (33)	15.2%	54.5%	93.9%	69.7%	60.6%			3.0%	3.0%
Phys (32)	78.1%	84.4%	18.8%	21.9%	75.0%	3.1%	3.1%	3.1%	
EE (26)	76.9%	88.5%	23.1%	19.2%	61.5%				7.7%
Mat Sci (17)	94.1%	88.2%	5.9%		88.2%				
Aero (12)	100.0%	100.0%	25.0%	16.7%	25.0%	33.3%			
BMB (11)	63.6%	72.7%	36.4%	54.5%	45.5%	9.1%			9.1%
Space E (10)	100.0%	100.0%	10.0%		70.0%	20.0%			
Chem E (9)		88.9%	11.1%	100.0%	88.9%				
Biology (8)	25.0%	87.5%	37.5%		62.5%				
Appl Phy (7)	100.0%	100.0%	14.3%	0.0%	71.4%			0.0%	0.0%

Citizenship	Office Hours	Grading & Feedback	Practice Teaching	Lab TA	Recitation	Authoring Problems	Student Writing	Outreach	Mentoring
U. S. Citizen/ Nat. (107)	57.9%	78.5%	36.4%	30.8%	62.6%	8.4%	2.8%	4.7%	4.7%
International (101)	73.3%	86.1%	29.7%	16.8%	66.3%	4.0%		2.0%	4.0%
Eligible non-citizen (10)	60.0%	100.0%	20.0%	30.0%	70.0%				10.0%