Identifying Resources to Succeed as a Teaching Assistant at Cornell

COLLEEN MCLINN: All right, so our agenda for today, after that little, brief interlude for introductions and poll, we're going to talk a little bit about different teaching roles at Cornell. We also are going to do some reflection and planning activities. So we're going to give you a chance to download a downloadable action plan document and work on it individually a little bit. And then we're going to do a collective Google Jamboard document, as well. So we're just, again, demonstrating some of the technologies available to you as a teaching assistant at Cornell. And then, in that Google Jamboard, we'll collect questions, and then we will also-- after you give us some feedback on the session, we'll have at least 10 minutes or so for Q&A and response to questions, as well. All right, so I think I'm going to turn it over to Derina now to talk about the learning outcomes and the next activity. I may have gotten a little out of order, but turning it over to Derina.

DERINA: Not a problem, Colleen. Welcome, everyone. It's wonderful to see so many of you. Good morning. Good evening, wherever you might be. Just wonderful to see so many of you interested in hearing more about the teaching resources that we offer. And Colleen and I are doing this together because we offer services through the graduate school as well as the Center for Teaching Innovation, which is where I belong. And we collaborate a lot on our workshops. So the learning outcomes for this particular workshop is that, at the end of the session, you should be able to discuss your teaching role, explore teaching resources to support your role, and be able to develop an action plan for the coming year, so thinking about what you might want to do right away and keeping that as something to hold onto, having a plan rather than just doing things as it happens, being more mindful about what your professional development is going to be for the coming year and the following years. Next slide. I think we're now going into the Zoom poll.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Great. So our colleague, Zenobia, is going to help us load a Zoom poll. And this is a simple two-question poll, and this will show you another one of the tools you have available to you if you're teaching partially online. Thanks, Zenobia. So it's a two-question poll. First question, have you had any teaching experience so far? And options are yes, a little; yes, a lot; or not yet. And then, second question, will you be teaching this academic year? And options are yes and no. And it's also possible you might be. I don't know. But you can just skip it if not. All right, so we've got about 78% participant. We'll leave it open for a few more seconds, and then we'll display the results. And Zenobia, thank you so much for loading that. So this is another technology that you can use, just the built-in polling and other features like whiteboards within Zoom. The polling is the one feature

we're showing today in your teaching. All right, we've got 90%. So I think that's good enough to share the results. And so if you hopefully see them now, we've got 24% said, yes, they have a lot of teaching experience, 54% said they have a little, and 22% said not yet. And then about half and half teaching this academic year and not. So we had 23 people said, yes, they are teaching this year, and 21 said, no, they're not teaching this first year. Thank you so much for participating. All right, and I am going to hide the Zoom. And then-- great. So the next thing we're going to do is talk a little bit about teaching roles at Cornell and some of what that might look like. And so I'm going to go back to Derina.

DERINA: Hi again. So we know that some of you are not particularly sure. And I noticed that there's about-- it's almost a 50/50 breakdown of people who are going to be teaching this coming year and those who are not going to be teaching. And so you may not know what your role might be coming up, but you may have some sense. But the general roles that we have at Cornell right now, you tend to be a teaching assistant or you could be an instructor. So the difference is the teaching assistant could be part of a team or they work with a faculty member who is instructor of record. But as you get into your senior years, it is possible that you become an instructor of record. And so you are responsible for the course. So that's the difference, and that's why we put them up at the top of the slide. And as a TA, you could have a recitation, which means that you would have a group of students that you meet with once or twice a week. If you're in the science or engineering area, you might have a lab. If you're in architecture or in design, you may have a studio that you manage. Some people have office hours, and that means that you meet with your students and you answer questions that they may have. It could be an auto tutorial, and that's specific for some departments. In particular, physics has auto tutorials where they help the students who are going through their tutorials. You may be responsible for grading, and that might be your only role. And that's also considered a teaching assistant role. That means that you won't have direct contact with your students, but you are definitely supporting your faculty member or the instructor of record. As a co-instructor, you could be teaching a first year writing seminar. And all undergrads have to take a writing seminar in their first year, and so they have a lot of classes and a lot of TAs who support those courses. Or you could be teaching a language course, and that sometimes happens right at the beginning, and you are responsible for that course. So these are the possible teaching roles that you might have. Does anybody-- is there another teaching role that you might have that you've heard about? And if you want to put it in the chat or you could actually talk to us about it, too. We'd love to hear from you, too. Thank you, Sam. Yes. Well, that's not considered part of your TA responsibilities, but it's definitely something that Cornell Prison Education project is a wonderful opportunity to get teaching experience. So thank you for bringing that up, Sam. That's really helpful. So for some students who do not get teaching as part of their graduate student role at Cornell because they're on fellowships or they're an RA, there are some opportunities to be able to teach. And we can talk a little bit about that later, as well. But thank you. So moving forward.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Yeah. Before we go too deep into action planning and resources, we just wanted to start with reflection on your experiences, as well. And so we'd like to do a

little chat waterfall activity, and this is something you could do with students if you were teaching online in Zoom. So how this would work is we're going to give you a question. We're going to ask you to type your response into the chat, but then we're going to ask you to wait to hit Return or Send on that response. And then we're expecting kind of a waterfall where all the responses come in at one time, if that makes sense. So the question is to think of a teacher-- recall a teacher that really inspired you to learn. What characteristics or attributes of their approach to teaching do you recall as being important for your learning? And so we'd like you to type into the chat the various characteristics you identified above, and don't hit Send until we tell you to do so. Does that make sense? So think of-- at heart, it's simple. Think of an inspiring teacher. What characteristics or attributes of their approach to teaching do you recall as being really important to you? And we'll give you a little countdown, and then we'll let you know when to hit Send on your answers. All right. If you've had a little time to type, to think and type, you can go ahead and hit Send on your answers, and we'd love to see. Oh, great. See how this chat waterfall works? It's like magic. Oh my gosh. Thank you. Thank you. All right. One person sent it to me directly as a direct message. And if it's OK, I'm going to re-paste it in the main chat. Perfect. So some of the answers coming in-- positive reinforcement and empathy, engaging, fun examples, anecdotes, lectures were more of a conversation than a lecture, relatability, passionate, honest, courteous, open to discussion, energetic, treating everyone as adults. Let's see. Sorry. There's so many answers that I scroll down a little bit. Enjoy teaching the class, approachable, interactive with students, curious, patient, knowledgeable, encourage critical thinking, willing to share, non-judgmental, creative, hands-on activity. Let you be creative. Let you be human. Didn't expect perfection. let you talk about world events impacting us when you couldn't focus. Check in on us if something was off and didn't just brush it off as not their job. That's really important, especially in the last few years where we've had so many difficult things happening in the world. Thank you so much for sharing. These are great responses. I hope you continue to read through some of the things your peers said that I didn't have time to highlight. All right. So next up, Derina is going to introduce the next activity. All right. And then I forgot we put the slide in there, but feel free to make a few notes if you want, or see if you can save the chat. I think it's set up that you can save the chat. No promises, but I think the three little dots at the top of the chat window allow you to save this, if you want to, for later.

DERINA: Yeah, I hope you can save the chat because these are really great notes.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Looks like it. Yeah.

DERINA: Great ideas. Colleen, are you going to go forward with—

COLLEEN MCLINN: Yeah, so I added a couple of other example resources, just not knowing what we would get. And I think these were from last year's group, but some really similar themes that are coming off here, as well. All right. And so some of types of skills and competencies that Derina and the Center for Teaching Innovation are trying to support in their role with graduate student development programming-- skills like engaging students

in group work, leading discussions, assessing and grading assignments, creating inclusive and welcoming environments. And then for the longer term, as you start to progress in your kind of independence in teaching, thinking about things like designing learning outcomes, designing syllabi for courses you might instruct. And so what she's going to do is prompt you with an assignment about how to identify some of the areas where you would like to develop that might be relevant to what you expect your teaching roles to be in your graduate field or graduate program.

DERINA: Thanks, Colleen. So I just popped in the chat, the Cornell box participant folder, and you should be able to-- if you aren't able to, can you let us know?-- get into that box because we will put other resources in there. So we want to make sure that you have access to this participant folder. This action plan is in there. It's a Word document. Download it. And what we'd like to ask you to do, as Colleen mentioned, is for you to fill it out. And this is something that you can have. If you have a teaching role, what is your teaching role? So what teaching roles are you likely to experience in your graduate program? But think about, if you are going to be a TA this coming semester, make sure you put in what teaching role it is, when it is, just to have some information there. And it's really nice to have that kind of documentation for the future, as well. And as you are putting it in, think about the competencies that you need. And this is where-- maybe if you go back to the previous slide there. So thinking about skills and competencies, what are some skills and competencies you already have, maybe from teaching experience that you've already had in your graduate work or wherever you might be? You may have had as a professional career, but thinking about the competencies you already have, but also thinking about what you want to develop. And so start to put that down. And we're going to give you-- what do we say? Seven minutes, I'd say, approximately. Just-- I think most of you have your cameras turned off, so feel free to just work on that, and then we'll check in again with you.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Fantastic. And so just download this document. Here's a preview of what it looks like. And I got very broad with my example skills and competencies. I was trying to think at the broadest, basic level some roles and skills that TAs and teachers need. But you can get even more specific to your disciplinary area and your field of study, if that's appropriate, too.

DERINA: And all we were trying to do is make sure that you actually put something down and you actually try to identify the skills and competencies that you currently have and what you want to do. And now we'll turn it over to Colleen because we're going to do an activity now to think about what resources might be helpful for you and before we start talking about what we do offer.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Great. So about half of you were going to be teaching this semester, and so this will be really-- or this year. So this will be really relevant for you. For others, some of this will be information for the future, as well. But we wanted to do another interactive called a Google Jamboard. And this Google Jamboard, unfortunately, this is a tool that-- Google sometimes invests effort in developing tools and then doesn't always

maintain them. So this is something that we're still going to be looking for other academic technologies that can support this kind of thing. But it's a collaborative space that people can add questions and comments and things like that to. So we're going to have two frames on this Jamboard, and the first one is going to be a frame that you can add a sticky note to that says, what resources do you think would be helpful for you? And the second frame is going to be a place to add your questions and concerns about teaching at Cornell in a sticky note. And I'm just going to-- this is an overview of it. But up at the top, you can use the arrow to move to frame two. At left, you can add a little sticky note, and I see at least one person that managed to add one, which is great. You could also type directly into the slide, too, with this little text box. Or you could make a pen and make a star by something that someone responded that you really like. Great. And so we're going to give a few minutes to answer this. And just to the interest of getting some answers on both of them-- thank you for that-- Miro board and Conceptboard. I'm a little familiar with Miro, but less so with Conceptboard. So if your last name starts with A through M, start on the first slide. And if your last name starts with N through Z, start on the second slide. And then we'll let you know when it is time to switch. And if you have any technical difficulties, please just let us know. And I see a couple people that manage to move to the second frame. Fantastic. Let us know if you are having any technical difficulties. All right. So we've had a little bit of time to respond. I just want to screen share for a moment some of the responses that have come in today. There are some really great questions and some really great resources. And just to let you know what we're going to do later in the session, the resources, of course, we'll collect all these and share them back with you as we share the slides. The questions, we are going to try and field some of those later in the session, as well. But, also, Derina is going to use those to inform an activity that she's doing next week, as well, which is a new TA welcome event. All right, so resources that would be helpful. Some of the things coming up-- advisor, other faculty members in the field, current students who have already done this role of TAing, senior TAs. You could let them attend your first course and provide some feedback. That's a great idea. The professor whose class you're TAing for, a manual, maybe something like on how to create an effective class discussion about a reading assignment. access to LinkedIn Learning, discussions with other TAs, time management and organizational tools to stay on top of grading, prep, and other office hour responsibilities. Google Chrome bookmarks or internet links that have been helpful for other TAs, TAs who previously taught the same course offering, speaking to former students, labmates, mentalhealth.cornell.edu, guides for making more effective plans from students further along in their program, advisors, faculty. Events offered through CTI, examples of solutions-- examples, solutions of homework, and teaching notes. Got it, three separate things. So now some questions that came up, and we will try and-- or concerns that came up. These are both. And we'll try and respond—

DERINA: So should we—

COLLEEN MCLINN: --to some of these later in the session. Yeah. Sorry. What were you going to say, Derina?

DERINA: No, I was just going to say that maybe we could answer some of those towards the end and so that we—

COLLEEN MCLINN: We absolutely will. Yeah. So you raised some really great questions, from average class size, What if students have an emergency? What if the workload is too much? What if I notice mental health red flags in students? How do I learn about expectations? How do I work with students who are having trouble academically or personally? Fantastic questions. Thank you. All right, so before we field those questions, we're going to talk a little bit about existing resources. And Derina, in particular, is going to introduce you to some of the existing resources of the Center for Teaching Innovation.

DERINA: All right, so we have quite a few resources. So if you haven't had a chance to go into the TA Online Orientation, we'll talk you through that. And I think-- I wonder if it would be helpful to do the live demo at this point.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Sure. One second. Let me just put the Teaching Assistant Online Orientation link in the chat. And then I can stop screen sharing if you want to take over.

DERINA: Yeah, I can do that. OK. All right, so what I thought would be helpful was if I actually went to the Center for Teaching Innovation web page and start off, because a lot of people are not sure where to go. So go into Programs and go to Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Fellows, because all of our programming is for all of them. And this is just exploring our programs. And this is a view of our current programming. But I wanted to highlight the Teaching Assistant Online Orientation to thinking about where you might want to get started. And we wanted you to think about the online orientation in terms of what would be helpful for you for the first few weeks. And this is a asynchronous course that's on Canvas, and it's available. It takes about four to five hours. And it isn't mandatory. It's optional. But we highly recommend it because it gives you a chance to go into a variety of modules. So there are five modules, and you can go through that. And you can come out with an action plan that would be specific to what you want to work on. And if you go back to the current graduate programming, these are some of the workshops that we offer right now, the Essentials of Teaching Institute, the Course Design Institute, and the Inclusive Teaching Institute. So those are coming up starting in September and October. And all of those are detailed here. I think that would be it. So I'll let you share the slides again.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Great. So we're going to go back to the slides for a second and just give a couple of trajectories or models of what your development might look like over time. Just to highlight, again, other resources, of course, within the graduate school where I am, we have programs in partnership with Center for Teaching Innovation around supporting future faculty development for those aspiring towards academic careers. We also have memberships and things like the North American CIRTL Network, Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching, and Learning, which is a national or international future faculty development program. And then there might be college-specific programming and

engineering college in the Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines and other resources that are really available to you and supportive to you as a TA. All right, so this is the Teaching Journey model from the Center for Teaching Innovation for development.

DERINA: So as we thought about what your journey would be, I know that many of you are coming at different stages of your graduate career. Some of you are just getting started. Some of you might be a little bit further in. But the way we thought about it is, if you're getting started at Cornell, the one thing to think about is the TA Online Orientation. It gives you an overview of what is available at Cornell, the resources and the programming. And so that might be something for you to think about. And then as you start to develop in your teaching practice and you evolve in that role, you have to start thinking about the other workshops that are offered. And if you go into Getting Started-- not Getting Started. If you go into the slide that I had shown earlier where it was the current programming, there's the Essentials of Teaching Institute and then the course design and Inclusive Teaching Institute. And in the spring, we will be offering another Essentials of Teaching Institute Part 2, and we have a teaching conference as well as an Early Career Graduate Teaching Cohort. So we have two cohort possibilities. And this is something that you can think about as you prepare for future teaching opportunities. Think about forming a community, and the Early Career Graduate Teaching Cohort is a one-semester opportunity to work with other TAs or people who are interested in teaching. You're very early on, and you're thinking about what you might want to do. It's limited to 20 students, so it's somewhat competitive, but the applications will come out towards the end of the fall, early spring. And highly recommend that you do this. This is the third year that we're going to be offering it. And it has been really helpful to have people involved in that process. The other cohort that we also offer is the CTI Teaching Fellows program, and those are our experienced TAs who actually run all of the workshops. And I coordinate that program. That is a cohort experience. It is a one-year appointment. You have to apply for it, and you become part of that. So if you have any questions, please reach out to me at any point. But this is the trajectory that we think of, and we hope that this is helpful for you to think about. And as you look at your action plan and the skills and competencies that you want to develop, think about how you might be able to add to that based on the resources that are available. And as Colleen mentioned, it's not just at the Center for Teaching Innovation. The graduate school also offers a variety of programming that highly recommend. And then you may have some within your college or your field. So make sure that you ask people within your department. Make sure you find people that-- your graduate field assistant would be able to tell you about these different options within your program or something that they might recommend.

COLLEEN MCLINN: All right. So we might want to go through this a little bit quickly. But these are just some examples of the trajectory of other graduate students who are now alumni. So just breaking it into Derina's three stages. And these are real former graduate students. All of them are people we know and are in a variety of different careers from working as faculty, working at Vice Media, working in industry, all kinds of things. But some of the examples of what they did-- starting with field-specific or university-wide TA training

early on, so like the TA Online Orientation that we mentioned, TAing for introductory-level undergraduate courses. As they evolved, pursuing more teaching development as interested, things like Inclusive Teaching Institute that Derina and I are offering later this fall, along with another colleague, as a one-day intensive, or other shorter workshops, or maybe courses. There are some seven-week courses offered, as well. As they continued on and got closer to the end of their graduate program, thinking about outreach and mentorship opportunities related to their research and their disciplinary area and ways that they could engage their skills as educators through those activities. But then participating in things like the CTI Graduate Teaching Fellows program. Maybe having an opportunity to be an instructor of record for a first-year writing seminar or co-instructing an undergraduate course with a faculty mentor and participating in conferences on teaching in the discipline at Cornell. Or sometimes there's discipline-based conferences, like engineering education and other things like that.

DERINA: So I'm putting something in the chat. It's a video that is actually in the TA Online Orientation. But I think it highlights some of the concerns a lot of new TAs have. So it's titled "What I Wish I Knew Before I Started as a TA." and I hope-- just download it, and hopefully you'll get to watch it at some point. It's a very short video. These are two teaching fellows who were in our program a few years ago, and they talked about what their experiences had been when they came in. As Colleen mentioned, there are a lot of trajectories and lots of things that you may consider. In terms of getting started, as I mentioned it again, the TA Online Orientation is one thing to consider. But we also have the New TA Welcome that we offering August 22 at 10 o'clock. It's right after the graduate school's Welcome for Graduate Students. And so that's from 9:00 to 10:00. And then ours, the New TA Welcome, we encourage you to stay on for the welcome. We have a very brief overview of the resources that we offer through the Center for Teaching Innovation. But we are allowing for a larger group-- small group discussion, so larger time to be able to talk to experienced TAs and go through some scenarios, but also be able to ask them questions about what their experience was. You may not get somebody from your discipline, but it's always nice to network and to hear from people from other disciplines about what their TA experience has been and what are some ideas for developing yourself in terms of professional development for the future. Looking forward, we have the Essentials of Teaching Institute in September again-- I mentioned that earlier-- the Course Design Institute. It's not too early to start thinking about how you might want to structure your class. Next slide.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Great. And then this is where we were originally going to do the live demo, but we brought that a little earlier.

DERINA: Earlier, yeah.

COLLEEN MCLINN: So just some other links to check out, too. At the graduate school, we work a lot on supporting your career exploration and skill development. So that might be within academia. That might be beyond academia. Either way, check out, if you want, any of our programs and resources on things like research communication or mentoring in

research. And then we also do consultations and review things like cover letters and CVs and help you with practice interviews, so ways that go beyond the teaching aspect, as well.

DERINA: So going to the actual website from Center for Teaching Innovation, the Teaching Portfolio Program is part of that. And you don't have to-- we really encourage you to start thinking about this early, not waiting to a month before you actually start to apply for positions. So highly recommend thinking about how you might document your teaching, reflect on your teaching, and start to put together your materials. Colleen and I work very closely to support our graduate students and postdocs as they are on this journey, and you can reach out to either of us at any time. So you could sign up for the program and request a consultation, and it could be with either Colleen or myself. Thank you, Colleen.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Yeah. All right, so we'd like to take a moment to ask you to complete the evaluation. And while you do that, we're just going to look through, a little bit, the questions that you submitted on Jamboard earlier and see if we can group them into different types of categories and maybe answer a few of them today. Others we may answer going forward in the CTI's New TA Welcome next week that we mentioned or in other upcoming programming. So please take a few moments to work on that evaluation. So we all continue to leave the feedback survey open for your responses. And I think Zenobia may have sent it out in a message prior to today's session, as well. But now we wanted to switch over to take some time for questions. And we can both field things that you already submitted through the Jamboard or you could submit new questions in the chat, as well. And that's how we're going to use the remainder of our time. We have about five more minutes.

DERINA: So, Colleen, I was just going to start with the resources that might be helpful for you. I just—

COLLEEN MCLINN: Oh, yeah.

DERINA: It was more or less a question. I think they were asking for—

COLLEEN MCLINN: Fantastic. Let me get my screen sharing switched over.

DERINA: So I think if-- a couple people asked about advice from senior TAs, a book that came out of the Center for Teaching Innovation that I co-edited with three of the CTI teaching fellows is the Teaching Gradually book, and these are ideas from a variety of graduate teaching assistants from across the country, not just at Cornell, across the country and from Canada, about their experiences. So there's a lot of really good information. So highly recommend a chance to read it. It's available through the library. It's online. And so you could always take it out and read that. And they're very short chapters and give you very just nuggets of information that might be helpful. In terms of discussions with other TAs, I highly recommend that you join us for the New TA Welcome because we will have facilitators who are experienced TAs, and you will have a chance to talk to

them and ask questions about what their experience has been. They will most likely not be from your department, but that's always a good thing, because you could always find people within your department whenever you need to. But this is an opportunity to talk to people from other disciplines. And so an interdisciplinary perspective is wonderful to start to think about. So I just wanted to make sure we had that already because that just answered several of the questions right there in terms of labmates who have TA experiences. In terms of questions for your department, my advisor, some of those questions are things that you might want to talk to your department about. And I think we can switch to the questions for the next couple minutes.

COLLEEN MCLINN: Perfect. All right. And so, at this point, I am going to stop the recording, and that'll give us a chance to be a little more candid in questions and answers. And I think Derina may be able to stay on afterwards. We realize that the session is scheduled to end at 11:00 AM Eastern and that some people may need to go.