Based on my experience as a Teaching Assistant/Instructor at the University of Florida, I have realized that teaching can be a very uplifting, satisfying and challenging experience. For the first two years, I worked as a Teaching Assistant for various courses in Statistics. At that time, my duties included holding office hours, teaching lab sessions and grading. But my first experience as an instructor was in Summer 2011, when I was appointed to teach Statistics for Engineers, STA 3032. I had to work hard, but as I went along, my presentation, organization and ability to get through to the students improved sharply. The most challenging task that I faced was to motivate engineering students to admire statistics as a subject rather than just looking at it as a bunch of formulas. I convinced them through examples and by showing applications of abstract statistical theorems. I enjoyed teaching the class and was appointed to do the same job in Fall 2011. These experiences taught me that teaching can be hard work, but the rewards, especially the personal satisfaction at being able to help someone, and the admiration of students can be immensely satisfying. Based on the teaching experience for the past four years, I have learned that the following notions are crucial for teaching a class effectively.

It is important to plan well ahead to prepare a course outline from a broad perspective at the beginning of a semester. It is also crucial to prepare the course material in accordance with the educational background of the students of a particular class and also to keep the balance between the pace and the content of the course to accommodate the weaker students, but still keep the stronger students interested. So I design the course material in such a way that it contain harder (but non-mandatory) material regarding different concepts, and also put harder problems for extra credit in homework and exams. This way, the weaker students don’t get scared off and the stronger students have something interesting and challenging to work on.

I believe that lecturing should not be a one-way communication system. It should be more of a dialogue between instructor and student. That is why I try to make my classroom an environment where all the students feel free to respond, make a comment or to ask a question no matter how stupid, trivial or wrong it sounds to me or any of the other students. Sometimes it is also necessary to repeat a particular concept several times or in several different ways, if the students are having problems understanding it.

During Fall 2012, while teaching STA 3032 for a class with almost 150 students I realized it can be challenging to cater to the specific learning needs of each student individually. I make myself approachable for the students, encourage them to email me and come to my office hours. I also put specific comments while grading. After grading the first two or three assignments I try to identify the weak students and email them personally expressing my concern along with
relevant advise for improvement.

What I have discussed so far are general guidelines which I have developed based on my personal teaching experience. I do realize that it is important to adapt one’s style and techniques based on the content of the course. Teaching can be challenging sometimes, but I believe that hard work, patience and an openness for new ideas and techniques are of great help to overcome these challenges. My experience at University of Florida has been valuable and I hope to continue to broaden and strengthen my teaching skills.