

TEACHING ASSISTANTS: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES –AY 2020-21

The purpose of this document is to ensure that teaching assistants (TAs) are neither overworked nor underutilized. Teaching assistantships are required of all second-year students during the second year of the department's Mentored Teaching Program through which students become exposed in a structured way to the pedagogical skills they will need to succeed as scholar/teachers. In some cases, the teaching assistantship will be the student's first exposure to classroom teaching. Because assistantships are primarily a learning experience for the student, TAs cannot be used as substitute teachers. If the faculty supervisor will be absent for more than one class session in a given semester (see below), s/he can use research or personal funds to hire an advanced student as a replacement. All logistical inquiries about paid substitutes should be addressed to the Graduate Administrator.

SELECTION

TAs and faculty supervisors are matched through a two-step process. First, faculty are asked by the Graduate Administrator (GA) whether they would like to make their course(s) available to potential assistants. The GA then sends a list of those courses to all eligible graduate students, who rank their preferences. The GA and the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS) match students to courses based on these preferences. Students who do not get their first or second choice in the first semester of their TA year will be given preference in the second. TAs will not always get --or ask for-- assistantships directly in their field of study.

PREPARATION

Supervisors should meet with TAs before the semester begins to go over the syllabus and articulate their expectations for the semester. TAs should also be invited to talk about their teaching experiences (if any) and their goals for the teaching assistantship. When possible, TAs should be exposed to the process of syllabus construction. Supervisors should be aware (see above) that they can be matched with a TA who has little or no experience with the field/materials for a given class and to take this into account when assigning teaching responsibilities.

ATTENDANCE/CLASSROOM DYNAMICS

TAs are expected to attend all class meetings and should be formally introduced during the first class session. It is helpful to include the TA's name and office hours on the syllabus. Supervisors should have already discussed with their TAs their expectations regarding participation in class discussion.

CLASSROOM TEACHING

TAs should teach no fewer than one week's worth of classes and no more than two weeks' worth of classes in a given semester. The classes do not have to be sequential. The faculty supervisor should offer specific feedback on all aspects of the teaching experience from the lesson plan forward. The supervisor can be absent during only ONE of the classes taught by the TA and should give at least two weeks of warning of the intended absence (see above).



PAPERS, EXAMS, ETC.

Class enrollments vary, so it is hard to create strict guidelines for the number of papers a teaching assistant should be asked to grade. Under no circumstances should the TA be asked to grade more than half the papers and/or exams for a specific course. We suggest that, when possible, the TA be asked to grade at least some of the papers from two different sets so that s/he will have experience with different kinds of assignments at different times in the semester. Supervisors should discuss their grading standards and procedures with the TA before the grading begins, and provide feedback afterwards.

Faculty supervisors are ultimately responsible for the grades given in the course, although they should be careful not to undermine the authority of the TA. If a student challenges a grade, that student should be encouraged to meet with the TA before meeting with the supervisor.

The teaching assistant may participate in the construction of exams, paper assignments, etc. Under no circumstances should a TA be used as a clerical assistant.

EVALUATION

At the end of the semester, the supervisor must ensure that departmental TA evaluations, typically given to the TA by the GA, are passed out to the students in the class.

The supervisor must submit a detailed evaluation of the TA's performance to the Graduate Committee for inclusion in the student's dossier. This evaluation will be part of the student's third-year review.

Students can report their own experience in their annual self-assessment. Students wanting to report a concern or a grievance should contact the department chair.

By my signature, I acknowledge that I have read, understand, and agree to the policies and procedures outlined in this document.

TA Name: _____ Faculty Member Name: _____

TA Signature: _____ Faculty Member Signature: _____

Date: _____ Date: _____