

DEPARTMENTAL TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Guidelines and Suggestions

Prepared by the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning (CTAL), Summer 2012

Surveys of graduate teaching assistants (TAs) show that TAs need training and information related to their specific instructional responsibilities in their discipline in order to be effective in their classrooms and laboratories. The following suggestions are ones that you can incorporate into your departmental TA training program. The CTAL staff are available to help you plan your agenda: phone: 831-2027; e-mail: ctal-info@udel.edu

Departmental TA Orientations

Topics Recommended for all Departments

1. Departmental Expectations and Resources:

- what TAs are expected to do.
- what time commitment is required.
- procedures to handle administrative tasks like copying, equipment orders, test scanning, and drop-add.
- what equipment is available for use (computers, technology in the classroom or lab; who will orient TAs to equipment).
- what procedures are recommended for resolving disagreements.
- what information or training will be available to TAs during the academic year; whether a formal pedagogy course is offered or required.
- how TA performance is evaluated (including improvement-based feedback from both students and supervising faculty with discussion early in the term, teaching observations by faculty, followed by discussion); who evaluates TAs.

2. Supervising Faculty Members:

- expectations of the supervising faculty member or course instructor (including policy for handling grading disputes).
- suggestions for effective communication between supervisor and TA.
- what to do or whom to approach if communication breaks down.

3. Meetings with Assigned Course Instructor:

- specific responsibilities of each TA (e.g., will TA be tutoring, holding office hours, supervising labs, conducting review sessions, assisting with testing and/or grading, leading discussions, managing Sakai).
- appropriate teaching methods in the discipline.
- extent to which TA activities are structured.
- learning objectives for the course and individual class sessions.
- characteristics of the student population in the course.
- difficulties students have in learning course concepts.
- departmental policy with respect to homework, grading, attendance.
- procedure TAs should follow regarding student complaints about the course, grading, submission of late work.
- discussion of handouts and resource materials.
- TA questions and observations of student learning in their classes.

4. Sessions for Practice and Guidance:

TAs should have the opportunity to practice doing those instructional tasks that you expect of them. Senior TAs and supervising faculty should model the appropriate tasks and pedagogical practices and give first-time TAs guidance and frequent, constructive feedback on their performance. Opportunities to observe master teachers, videotaping and discussion of practice teaching, discussion of case studies, and informal conversations about teaching are highly encouraged.

5. Instructional Technology, Teaching Online and Sakai Sessions

Refer to the online schedule of sessions offered by LearnIT@UD: <http://webapps.css.udel.edu/calendar/index.php>

Sessions for Specific Teaching Appointments (Minimum Level)

Disciplines assign TAs to various teaching responsibilities – some TAs may grade essays and writing samples, others will conduct office hours, teach labs, recitation sections, discussion sections, or problem-solving sections. Design sessions for your TAs dependent upon the teaching skills you wish them to develop. Sample sessions you may wish to include in your training program are described below:

1. Teaching Laboratory Sections

- how labs are taught in your department.
- what skills are necessary for effective lab instruction.
- what difficulties students generally experience in their lab sessions.
- how TAs might prepare for lab teaching and equipment setup.
- safety concerns in your lab classes.
- how students' performance is evaluated.
- how to communicate content to novices in the field (freshmen, nonmajors).
- how the labs relate to the content discussed in lecture.
- how multiple lab sections of the same course that are taught by different TAs are coordinated.

Activity: Senior TA demonstrates effective lab teaching techniques, while first-time TAs play the role of students; this role-play is followed by discussion and reflection on observed teaching practices.

2. Teaching Discussion Sections

- how discussion sections are taught in your department.
- how TAs might prepare for a discussion - what are some effective ways of involving students in discussions.
- what issues tend to be difficult for students in these courses.
- how TAs can maintain control of the class, while encouraging students to talk.
- how to handle difficult questions and situations.
- how students' performance is evaluated.
- how to communicate content to novices in the field (freshmen, nonmajors).
- how the discussion sections relate to the content discussed in lecture.
- how multiple discussion sections of the same course that are taught by different TAs are coordinated.

Activity: Senior TA leads a discussion to model effective questioning and discussion management techniques, while first-time TAs play the role of students; this role-play is followed by discussion and reflection on observed teaching practices.

3. Teaching Problem-Solving Sections

- how problem-solving sessions are taught in your department.
- what are effective techniques for teaching problem-solving in your discipline - “coaching” students.
- are TAs free to choose problems, or does the instructor assign the same problems to all sections?
- what specific difficulties students have in these courses.
- how students' performance is evaluated.
- how the problem-solving sections relate to the content discussed in lecture.

Activity: Senior TA conducts a problem-solving session to model effective problem-solving techniques, while first-time TAs play the role of students; this role-play is followed by discussion and reflection on observed teaching practices.

4. Teaching Using Group Work

- how groups are used in your department and courses.
- what are appropriate group tasks.
- what group agreements and ground rules are appropriate.
- what roles students should play in group work to ensure everyone's contribution to the group effort.
- how the group's performance is graded; how the individual student's performance is graded.
- how the TA might prepare for a group-based class.
- how the TA can handle difficulties within the group.

Activity: Senior TA facilitates a group session, demonstrating effective group techniques, while first-time TAs play the role of students; this role-play is followed by discussion and reflection on observed teaching practices.

5. Using Instructional Technology

If your TAs will be using instructional technologies (e.g., computers, Internet, Sakai, statistical programs, presentation software, i>clickers), an appropriate orientation or skills training needs to be provided for them to help them use these technologies effectively. Refer to: LearnIT@UD: <http://webapps.css.udel.edu/calendar/index.php>
Academic Technology Services: <http://ats.udel.edu/>