

## Expectations for faculty instructors partnering with graduate student teaching assistants

### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

1. A TAship not only provides valuable teaching experience, but also an opportunity to form a professional relationship with a faculty member focused on the student's development as a teacher.
2. As with other mentoring relationships, in addition to respect, trust, and cooperation, *clear communication and expectations* are essential for a successful partnership.
3. Faculty instructors are well-positioned to help TAs think about the prior understandings (including misconceptions) that students tend to bring into a course. Consider discussing these with your TA, along with strategies for productively engaging with and addressing these during the course.
4. Faculty may help TAs to grow as teachers by sharing and modeling the methods that are most effective for teaching within their particular field or discipline.

### BEFORE THE COURSE BEGINS

#### **1. Meet with the TA to discuss learning goals, course expectations, and their role as a TA.**

**Learning Goals:** What do you want students get out of this class? What do you want them to know or be able to do by the end of this course?

**Responsibilities:** Both TAs and faculty should be aware of relevant institutional policies. Under [Title IX](#) policy, both TAs and faculty have Title IX reporting requirements. Under [FERPA](#) policy, student records including grades are protected and thus best handled within a secure platform such as Canvas. Faculty and TAs should also have a working knowledge of accommodations offered through [Student Disabilities Services](#). If faculty or TAs have concerns about a college student's academic progress or behavior, these should be referred to the student's academic adviser (who is listed on the course registration website).

**Grading and Assessment:** What metrics will be used to allocate grades? Will rubrics be used? Will TAs be reading and/or grading all assignments, some portion, or alternating?

**Professional Behavior:** Remind TAs of their position of power and responsibility over students, as well as how they should show mutual respect. This may include how to provide critical feedback in a positive manner. It is never appropriate for a TA to enter into a romantic relationship with a student in their class.

**Overall Role:** Do you want the TA to act as an intermediary, communicating student questions and concerns brought up in discussion sessions and office hours back to you? Are they expected to hold office hours, if so, how often and in what duration? What specific teaching duties will the TA have?

**2. Identify and map out opportunities for the TA to develop their pedagogy.** Will the TA deliver discussion sessions, review sessions, or perhaps part or all of a class session? Will the TA have the opportunity to help develop an assignment with you or a rubric for grading one of the assignments? Consider referring them to the [CCT's programs and resources](#) as opportunities for pedagogical development. **Note that if a TAship is to count for divisional academic credit in BSD, a significant teaching experience is required – see online TAship forms.**

**3. Establish clear channels of communication.** How often and in what ways will you be interacting with the TA? Will you be meeting with them regularly throughout the quarter? Touching base regularly before or after class? How should they contact you if they have a question or issue?

**4. Go over the syllabus with the TA, and make sure their name and contact information (including office hours, if applicable) are included on the syllabus by the first day of class.** Reviewing the syllabus is also an opportunity to discuss the course design process and solicit feedback from the TA. For

example, what was your thought process in formulating the learning goals, selecting topics, and designing assignments? What motivated your choice of readings and how you organized the course content?

**5. To ensure clarity, a written statement of mutual responsibilities should be developed.** This statement should include a clear plan, agreed to by both faculty and TA, that outlines the various topics covered above including the TA's responsibilities for teaching, grading, communication etc. **This statement should be submitted as the "TAship plan" in the on-line Course Director's form for TAships.**

#### **DURING THE COURSE**

**1. Feedback:** Meet regularly with the TA to provide (and receive) feedback, discuss how the course is going, and respond to questions or concerns the TA may have. Bear in mind that the TA may be nervous about their first forays into teaching and in need of support. Remember TAs are also conducting dissertation research, and will need to learn how to manage their time effectively to ensure research progress during a TAship.

**2. Hours:** Inquire about the number of hours TAs are working/how long tasks and responsibilities are taking, and be prepared to adjust tasks and expectations accordingly. TAships, including class attendance, are generally expected to be ~10 hours effort per week.

**3. Grading:** If the TA is grading, consider having them collaborate with you on the creation of an assignment, e.g. writing one of the midterm essay prompts.

Meet with TAs to discuss assignments prior to sending them out to students, and consider using a rubric as a useful way to clarify the goals of the assignment and to promote consistency in grading practices. If there are multiple TAs, consider having the same TA grade all copies of any given question to ensure consistency.

For the first assignment it can be useful to have the TA grade only a portion of the assignments or for you to select a subset of assignments to grade yourself and compare. This will ensure that you and the TA are on the same page when it comes to assessment and providing student feedback.

**6. Discussion Sections:** If the TA is running a discussion section, **attend at least one of these discussion sections to observe their teaching.** Remind them of their role to facilitate discussion among all students and not to use this as another time to lecture. Provide oral feedback and/or written feedback in your final evaluation.

**7. Lectures/Classes:** As the TA will generally be present during lecture or class, consider having them participate by facilitating learning activities and/or teaching part of (or a whole) class session. You should still be present if a TA teaches a class session.

#### **NEAR THE END OF THE COURSE**

1. Consider soliciting the **TA's input on final assignments** or exams. TAs can be very helpful in identifying points of potential confusion in exam questions.

2. **Encourage students in the class to complete the course evaluation** and communicate to them the importance of providing constructive feedback for the TA.

3. **Provide your written reflection—on the TA evaluation form—**of the TA's contributions, role, and teaching strengths during the course for them to use in their professional development (e.g. include in a teaching portfolio).

4. Include the TA in your deliberations when **assigning final grades.** If there is a discussion section, ask TAs for their specific feedback on students in their section.

5. After the course is over, schedule a **meeting with the TA to debrief how the course went**. This is an excellent opportunity for the TA to reflect on what may be their first teaching experience and to provide feedback that may be useful for you for improving the course in future iterations.

## REFERENCES

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The suggestions in this document were crafted not only from the literature referenced above, but also based on responses of [CCT Fellows](#) reflecting on their own experiences in various graduate teaching assistant roles at the University of Chicago.

An excellent resource for guidance on mentoring and supervising TAs is the TAs themselves. Be sure to set aside time after the course has ended to meet with your TA to debrief and reflect on the teaching experience.