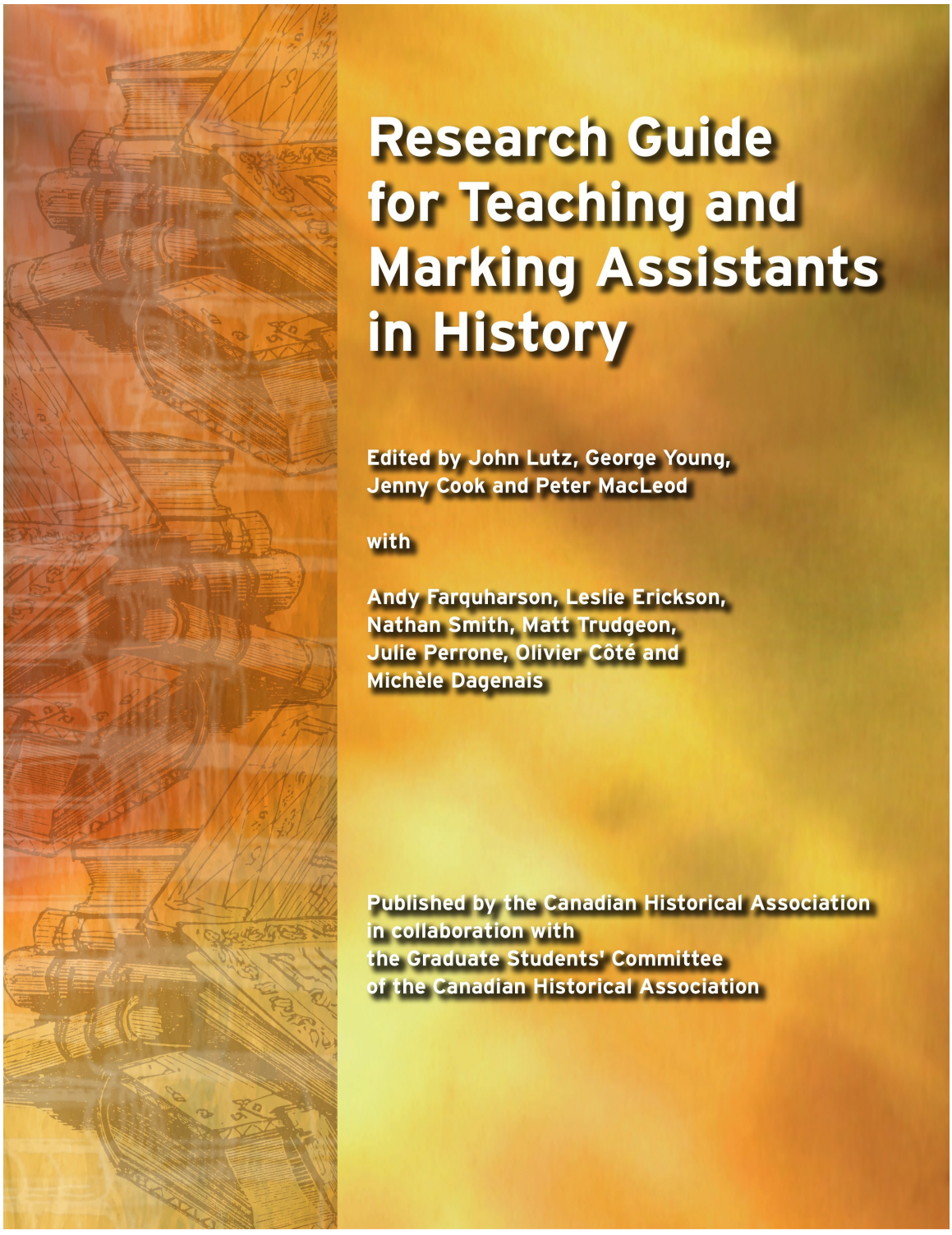

Research Guide for Teaching and Marking Assistants in History

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with

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Feedback

This is an evolving document that represents the contributions of teaching assistants, faculty, and students. Your suggestions and feedback are welcome and will be incorporated into future editions. Please visit **http://www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/** for contact information.

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching assistants (or TAs) have become a common feature of the university landscape. In large undergraduate classes consisting of anywhere from fifty to four-hundred students, professors lecture while graduate students conduct smaller-sized tutorials. Depending upon the university, faculty, or department, the term "assistant" can be misleading: teaching assistants often hold weekly seminars, mark assignments, grade participation, set essay topics, evaluate and correct essays, invigilate exams, and/or set and mark final exams. In francophone universities in Quebec, correcting exams is the most common responsibility of TAs, while in anglophone universities running seminars is more common. At some francophone universities, TAs are also responsible for general student support (five days a week). Find out from your department what “teaching assistant” actually means. Although professors and teaching assistants are a team with a common goal, the TA is not a miniature or inexperienced professor or assistant. Typically, professors devise the structure of the course, prepare the syllabus, and lecture, while TAs teach the mechanics of studying history. Through seminars and tutorials, office consultations and marking, teaching assistants teach students how to research and interpret historical facts, to read and synthesize information found in texts and lectures, and to develop critical writing and thinking skills.

Beyond their role as teachers, TAs also serve as a bridge between first- and second-year students and the university faculty. They function as advisors and role models for new students and lower-level students will occasionally base their decision on whether to continue at a particular university or discipline on their experience with teaching assistants.

Despite the pivotal role that TAs play at the undergraduate level, universities spend little time preparing them for their teaching duties. On many campuses, one-day generic seminars often constitute the only training a teaching assistant will receive before he or she steps into a lecture theatre or seminar. In recent years, however, universities, professional organisations, and individual instructors have sought to build upon the teaching experience of graduate students by offering workshops, pamphlets, websites, and seminars that seek to impart pedagogical skills to future faculty.

To enhance their skills as teachers, lecturers, and seminar instructors, this guide will lead teaching assistants through the various stages of their employment from signing a work agreement and meeting with the course instructor, to first class "jitters," marking papers and exams, and initiating seminar discussions. Individual departments and faculty interested in initiating teaching assistant workshops and seminars will find sample training programs and additional resource materials. For quick and easy reference, the pamphlet has been divided into four distinct parts. While Part One details teaching assistants' rights and responsibilities, Part Two imparts the skills, knowledge, and expertise required in the classroom. Part Three provides an extensive description of how to mark student papers and exams and encourages TAs to evaluate their own progress as teachers. Part Four concludes the booklet by providing the information, resources, and suggestions necessary to conduct teaching assistant training programmes at the

department or university level.

PART 1: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

BECOMING A TEACHING ASSISTANT

Congratulations on your appointment as a teaching or marking assistant. There are many benefits to be derived from your new position. Although teaching assistantships often provide graduate students with their primary financial resource, they also give invaluable teaching experience to prospective professors. Graduate work, particularly research and writing, can also be an isolating experience. Fortunately, becoming a teaching assistant will bring you into closer contact with the larger community of teachers and students that makes up every university. As a TA, you will have the opportunity to help students understand the origins of those cultures, norms, and relationships that they encounter in their day-to-day lives. Being a teaching assistant, however, also requires accepting an increased work load and the higher stress levels that result from having less time to work on your own research. Despite this reality, most teaching assistants do a remarkable job. Hopefully, this resource guide will prepare you for the task that lies ahead and save you valuable time in the process.

RESPONSIBILITIES AS AN EMPLOYEE

Teaching assistants acquire new rights and professional responsibilities. Take your duties as university teachers and employees seriously: you are a professional, a representative of your university and department, and even your discipline!

TA expectations will vary between universities and within departments. Most universities host TA orientation seminars that introduce graduate students to their role on campus and in the classroom. Find out when and where your university holds its orientation sessions. If you discover that none are available, you might suggest that the university learning centre organise a seminar or workshop for TAs in general. You could also encourage your department to host one exclusively for graduate students in history.

The Teaching Assistant/Employer Contract

TA assignments are normally offered to students as part of their funding packages. There are some exceptions – at Université du Québec à Montréal and Université Laval, students must ask for TA assignments. Further, at Laval, prospective TAs are required to pass a French language exam, as well as an exam assessing their abilities to grade assignments and exams. These exams are offered twice a year in September and January. Be sure to find out how your university operates. As employees, teaching assistants usually sign contracts that are binding on the TA and the employer. Contracts are generally prepared by the department or Faculty of Graduate Studies in accordance with the collective agreement, although in some Quebec universities they are prepared by the course director or the union. In addition to these contracts – which often specify hours of employment, wages, and benefits – separate regulations also govern the relationship between the

university and its employees. Typically, you will be hired for an average of ten to twelve hours a week, although this can be as high as fifteen hours in some francophone universities. If you are responsible for leading a seminar, most of these hours will be worked at regular times throughout the semester. By contrast, marking assistants usually engage in intensive work sessions spaced sporadically throughout the term. The particulars of your teaching engagement should be negotiated with the course director and signed in a written agreement.

You should also be aware that, at many universities, teaching assistants are represented by unions. If this is the situation at your institution, the rules and regulations governing your relationship to the university will be spelled out in a collective agreement. Teaching assistants should be issued copies of these regulations.

Relationships with Course Directors

The TA often stands as an intermediary between students and the course director. You can assist your course instructor by ensuring that students understand the core themes and content of the lectures and by reporting any common areas of misunderstanding to the professor. TAs can also assist both students and professors by passing on general comments about the clarity of lectures and reading material. The course director may also ask you to help him or her prepare or assess exam questions.

The course director will have set out guidelines for readings, lectures, exams and the like by the beginning of the year, any they may or may not have clear guidelines for you as a teaching assistant. Your CD may leave it up to you to decide what should be discussed in tutorials. If this is the case, you can begin to build (and test) your own portfolio of in-class activities and discussion questions.

If your course director gives you specific directions on how to handle tutorials and course materials, you should follow her directions. Keep in mind that you may have little control over assignments and exams and you will need to stick to the course material so that your students will be prepared.

Observing how your CD interacts with students, manages course communications, handles dates and deadlines will give you a good idea of what she expects from you. Working alongside more established professors is also a good opportunity for you to begin thinking about how you would (or would not) manage your own courses. If you have an opportunity to voice your opinion, or ask questions, about the management of the class, you should do so.

Responsibilities as a Teacher

- creating an atmosphere conducive to learning
- detailing the policies, requirements and expectations of the course

- being available to students in lecture, seminar, and office hours

As a teaching assistant, it is your responsibility to create a comfortable and engaging learning environment for your students whether it be through lectures, seminars, informal discussions in your office, or comments on written assignments. As a teacher, you have a moral and legal responsibility to treat all of your students fairly and without favouritism. Ensure that your language and examples are free of prejudice. This responsibility also extends to your students: they should be given a chance to freely express their questions, ideas, and beliefs in class, but do not allow aggressive or opinionated participants to alienate or offend their fellow students.

To ensure that students get the most out of their university experience, it is incumbent upon you to explain clearly and concisely all course requirements, policies, and expectations. What will be graded and how will it be evaluated? Obtain a copy of the university plagiarism policy and give your students a definition of plagiarism. Explain other places where breaches of academic honesty may unknowingly occur. For example, it is considered cheating to submit a paper in more than one course without the permission of all relevant instructors.

To fulfill the requirements of your contract, you must also attend all required lectures, seminars, and office hours. If you are forced to miss a class due to illness or some other eventuality, notify your course director or the department secretary as early as possible. In some cases, another TA will be used as a substitute. Some universities have specific policies regarding sick-leave or class cancellations.

Developing a good relationship with your department's administrative staff is essential. Office staff can help you to navigate a range of administrative problems and navigate the university bureaucracy. Be friendly and professional to all!

The TA as Student Advisor

Given the size of modern-day university classes, teaching assistants may provide the only personalised instruction in a first-year undergraduate's career. As student advisors, TAs have an advantage over professors because they are often closer to students in age and experience. Most teaching assistants deal with introductory classes full of new students who are intimidated and confused by the university experience.

Students may not always come to your office hours and they may not necessarily follow the rules you have set out for them in tutorial. First year students may particularly struggle because they are not accustomed to being responsible for their own schedule and deadlines. This can be frustrating. It is important to set out clear expectations for conduct, email communication and meeting with students at the beginning of the year, and to reiterate these expectations frequently.

Treat your students like adults. Do not talk down to undergraduates, make fun of them in the TA lounge, or complain to them (or others) about how little they know about history.

Students come from a range of academic, socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds. It is your job to set out expectations, work with gaps and limitations in knowledge and show empathy to students who are struggling.

All of the above notwithstanding, you must maintain clear boundaries with your students. Don't give out your phone number or dedicate more than your allotted hours to a student. If a student is in crisis, plagiarizes or their conduct is problematic, contact your course director.

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is one of the most difficult issues that you may have to deal with as a teaching assistant. TAs hold a particularly vulnerable position on campus because they may be victims of harassment from their students, their colleagues, or their employer/course director. As instructors, they likewise hold a position of power over their students' grades and academic futures. In addition, as a student advisor, you may find that you are the first person that a student may talk to if he or she feels they are being sexually harassed. For these reasons, it is imperative to become familiar with your university's policies on sexual harassment.

What is Sexual Harassment?

- sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual attention
- it can be verbal, written, graphic, or physical
- it creates an offensive, intimidating or hostile learning or working environment
- it may result from an intentional or unintentional action and it can be blatant or subtle
- it has both males and females as its victims and perpetrators
- it can occur between members of the opposite or the same gender
- it can occur between people of different status or people of the same status
- if a student approaches you about having experienced sexual harassment, you should encourage him or her to pursue the assistance and remedies that exist at your university, which may include the university sexual harassment office, the university ombudsman, the women's centre or, if a physical attack has occurred, ask the victim if they wish to contact the campus security department or local police – in all cases, treat the allegations seriously and assure confidentiality

Safety Precautions to Avoid Becoming a Victim or Accused of Sexual Harassment

- schedule meetings with students/advisors during regular "business" hours
- leave the office door ajar if you are alone with a student/advisor
- restrict informal meetings and discussions to public settings such as the university café or restaurant
- avoid using sexist language, terms of endearment, and sexual innuendo
- do not ask students to do you favours - you may be misunderstood
- remember that professional ethics restrict teachers, including teaching assistants, from becoming personally involved with their students

TEACHING ASSISTANTS' RIGHTS

Teaching assistants and course directors are a team that is charged with teaching the material in a particular course as well as improving student skill levels and critical abilities. If all goes well, the TA-course director relationship can be mutually beneficial and enjoyable. Course directors may be asked to evaluate your teaching abilities on future scholarship and job applications. If problems occur, there are certain dispute resolution mechanisms with which you should be aware.

Conflicts with the Faculty, Department, or University

If you should come into conflict with your course director or department, you have several options. If you signed a contract, consult it. If you belong to a union, contact your union representative and examine a copy of the collective agreement. If there is no collective agreement, ask to see the university's regulations governing university/employee relationships. These can be obtained from the personnel office. Most universities also have a graduate student association that may have some experience in mediating the type of problem you face.

You may also want to make your fellow TAs and your specific history department aware of the "Teaching Assistant Statement of Rights," which was approved by the Graduate Students' Committee of the Canadian Historical Association (CHA) at the CHA's annual meeting in 1991. A copy of this declaration is appended at the back of the booklet.

Training and Time Management

In general, universities have an obligation to provide you with adequate training for your role as a teaching assistant. This training should be completed to a basic level before you meet your first class. Of course, like any employee, you are entitled to limit your work to

the hours assigned and paid by the university. Remember that you are not simply an employee, but also a graduate student who must fulfill the university's degree requirements. If you find that you require more time than there are hours allotted, discuss the problem with the course director. If this does not work, speak to the department chair and, if all else fails, you can follow the university grievance procedure.

In addition to training time, you are entitled to an appropriate amount of time to prepare lectures and conduct seminars. Occasionally, TAs are told that they will be paid for preparation time, but the time allocated is insufficient to do an adequate job. If this occurs, you may tend to feel that you yourself are inadequate; this, however, is rarely the case. Consult with your colleagues and see how long they are spending on preparation. If you are not spending an unusual amount of time, see if you can renegotiate your hours. For example, you may want to hold fewer office hours at certain times of the semester. Frequently, teaching assistants are also asked to mark major assignments. If this is the case, you should be informed at the start of the semester when exams/papers will be handed in and how long before they must be returned.

Grievances

If you find that a dispute arises between you and the course director over hours, conditions of work, grading standards, or harassment, it is important to deal with these questions immediately. The first stage in dealing with most of these disputes is to bring them to a meeting with the course director. Prior to this meeting, it is a good idea to confer with your fellow TAs. If the issue cannot be resolved on a personal level, you may want to pursue the issue through your university's grievance procedure. This will include a first appeal to the department chair. You may wish to explore this avenue before instigating a formal procedure. Another option is to go through your union, if you are unionized.

PART 2: IN THE CLASSROOM

PRIOR TO THE FIRST CLASS

As a teaching assistant, you are part of a team that includes a course instructor and often several other teaching assistants. It is vital to meet with the course director before you meet the first class. If you have not met the course director within the first days of the semester, you may have to be persistent – he or she will be as busy, or busier, than you are.

Be prepared to ask a number of questions pertinent to the course and your duties:

- what are the goals of the course?
- how much leeway is there in running lectures and tutorials?

- are you responsible for making up assignments?

- how many students will you have and are there other TAs for the course?

- how much responsibility for grading will you have?

- if you are unfamiliar with the subject, should you do some preliminary reading? attend lectures? how will this preparation time be allocated in the total hours of work expected?

- if the university does not want to pay you to attend lectures, will the course director make them available to you?

- should you make yourself available to students via e-mail, phone, office hours etc…?

- how many hours should be allocated to each task?

- will you supervise mid-term and final exams?

- will you be provided with office space, textbooks, a photocopier, audio-visual and multi-media programmes?

Finally, prior to the first class it will be a good idea to get to know the departmental secretaries. In most departments, secretaries are invaluable components of the TA team because they know how to operate within the department academically and politically. Ask for advice and thank them for their time; they are the oil that enables the educational machine to roll. However, remember that secretaries are there to help you – not to do all of your work. Be considerate of their time: do not dump photocopying on them fifteen minutes prior to class. If you are considerate, you may enjoy a long and fruitful relationship.

Preparing a Syllabus

Some teaching assistants like to prepare an informal syllabus for their own tutorial group to accompany the course syllabus. Such a syllabus can contain any information you deem relevant for your students. The syllabus should be passed out and explained at the beginning of the first session.

The syllabus could include the following:

- your name

- course number, title, academic year and semester

- class location and time
- contact information: office hours, phone number, e-mail address
- a description of how the tutorial will be structured and mark allocation
- the university policy on plagiarism

Lesson Planning

You should have a plan for every lesson regardless of whether or not it is a video presentation, a seminar, a lecture, or a student presentation. If you are planning a lecture, prepare an outline that can be placed on the blackboard or on an overhead projector. For seminars or tutorials, you may want to devise a list of questions or provocative statements.

Preparation time for each class will vary depending on the activity and your familiarity with the material. Many teaching assistants find three hours to be a minimum preparation time for a one hour seminar. Depending upon your familiarity with the topic, each lecture will take no less than six hours to prepare.

Preparing Lectures

Some teaching assistants will be asked to lecture occasionally or regularly. The fine art of lecture-writing takes some time to develop. To avoid overlap, redundancy, or student confusion, you should discuss your lecture with the class instructor to ensure that it fits within the chronological and thematic guidelines of the syllabus. Always start with a solid and simple outline that will provide students with a visual guide or map to the lecture. One hour is a short time to introduce a topic, convey background information and concepts, illustrate them with examples, and draw conclusions. To achieve clarity, refrain from introducing more than three ideas per lecture and keep detail to a minimum: draw upon biographies, illustrations, and events to enhance the central theme of your lecture, not to obscure it. Refer to texts that you expect your students to read, but do not repeat everything written in the readings. Expand upon the reading by introducing recent discoveries and discussing their meaning. Where relevant, introduce your own research and ideas or discuss linkages between the lesson and contemporary events.

Help your students by providing a brief overview of the lecture and its main points. It is an excellent idea to provide continuity between lectures by illustrating how your lecture connects to the previous one and by introducing the topic of your next lecture at the end of the session. Engage your students' attention by asking questions. If you are met by silence, do not be afraid to wait for a moment – sooner or later someone will speak out.

Finally, attempt to speak rather than read to your students: even a normal conversational speed can prove to be too fast for note-taking. Talking to your students will also prevent

you from burying your head in prepared text and it will allow you to gauge your audience's reaction. Because the majority of students will be unfamiliar with your subject, try to explain and emphasise its historiographical significance throughout the lecture. By providing an analytical, rather than a descriptive, overview of the topic, you will not only aid in enhancing your students' interest and retention, but you will also be teaching them, by example, the basic principles of historical understanding.

Electronic Teaching and Audio-Visual Aids

Every history lecture can be enhanced by the multitude of electronic and computerised teaching aids that have become available to professors in recent years. Use visual aids such as overhead transparencies, slides, video clips, and website reviews to capture and sustain your students' attention. Studies repeatedly show that if you use audio-visual aids in addition to lecturing alone, students will retain more information. Maps are particularly useful for illustrating historical developments. Music clips can likewise help to set a particular mood or increase student interest in a subject.

To enhance the teaching experience, familiarise yourself with the various communication aids and multi-media facilities available at your educational institution. Find out what audio-visual or electronic aids are at your disposal and whether or not you need special permission to reproduce them.

Use the blackboard, overhead transparencies, or electronic presentations to highlight key ideas, words, dates, and personages. Powerpoint has become a popular tool to use during lecture or tutorial. Make sure that it enhances the material rather than detracts from it – for instance, you may find that it is a good tool for showing images, but too much text on the screen may be overwhelming. Films and videos are particularly useful for conveying concepts, background, and mood. When using visual aids such as videos or films, explain the content of the tape/film and its relevance to the class prior to screening. You may, for instance, want to provide students with a set of questions or themes to explore while they watch the production. Later, try to make students aware of the connections between the video and the assigned lecture or reading materials.

THE FIRST CLASS: GETTING TO KNOW YOUR STUDENTS

Preparing a Class List/Register

Students will register for class in advance of the first meeting and you will be supplied with a list of their names. It is advisable to prepare a class register at this time, but be aware that students may withdraw from or be added to the list during the first few weeks. It might be useful to hand out a short questionnaire at the beginning of the first class to confirm who is in attendance and to find out more information about the class – such as students' class year, degree or other status, primary area of study, and what other courses they have had in the field.

If the class is a manageable size, it is a good idea to mark attendance for each class even

if it there is no participation mark – knowing who attends and how often will help you assess grades. Leave a column in your register for notes such as "led discussion," "interpreted problems well," or "disruptive."

Exploring Your Classroom

You should inspect the classroom before the date of your first class. An early visit will allow you time to arrange a room change if the assigned classroom turns out to be inappropriate for your class size or function. You will also be able to determine what audio visual aids are available, learn how to use them, or arrange for others.

Pre-Class Jitters

Even seasoned lecturers get nervous prior to class. Stage-fright is nothing new. So do not doubt your abilities! Remember that you know more about your subject than your students. In addition, nervousness can causes lectures to speak too fast for students adequately follow.

Strategies to Deal with Nervousness:

- if giving a lecture, practice it in front of a friend, colleague, or even in front of a mirror
- know your material well and develop a strong introduction that will get you through the first awkward minutes of the session
- use visual aids that you can explain in class; they will also focus attention away from you and your nervousness
- make sure you have a readily available supply of water
- think of your anxiety as positive energy
- remember that you have a responsibility to teach your students that should not be impeded by an ineffective speaking style

Personal Appearance

It is important that you have a well-kempt appearance that keeps with the common practice of your university. Teaching assistants tend to dress less formally than faculty. However, try not to be so trendy that students cannot take you seriously. Wearing a suit, by however, can distance you from students.

Arranging the Furniture

Now that you are in charge, it is your responsibility to provide the best arrangement for teaching and learning. You might want to have students sit in a circle to facilitate discussion or you may want to bring them closer to the front of the class so that you do not have to shout.

Introducing Yourself

Introduce yourself and the course you are teaching. Your students may not have met a TA before so explain your role and responsibilities. Some TAs discuss their personal interest in the course as a quick way to break the ice and convey enthusiasm for the subject. Do not be afraid to tell students about yourself and your interests – it will only make you appear more approachable. Also, let them know how you wish to be addressed. Most TAs are only a few years older than their students and feel uncomfortable being called anything but by their first names. Others prefer to be known by “Mr.” or “Miss” and their surname. If it is not on the syllabus, write your office hours and location on the board and provide your university email address and/or your office phone number for students to contact you outside of class hours. Be sure to make it clear that students should not expect you to return emails immediately. It may be helpful to set aside a certain time of the week to respond to student emails, otherwise it can become overwhelming and be incredibly time consuming.

Confirming the Register

At the commencement of first class, call out the names on your register. Add new names and delete those who are transferring out. Make sure that new students have registered properly with the administration. While reading the roll call, ask the students how they wish to be addressed: for example, "Bill" or "William.”

Reviewing the Course Syllabus

Students should already have copies of the official course syllabus, but bring extras just in case. Go over its highlights with the students. If you made your own unofficial syllabus for your tutorial, pass it out. Detail how the tutorial will run, the course requirements, and how the grades will be calculated. This may be an appropriate time to state any guidelines you have regarding racist and sexist language, late-comers, late assignments etc. You could introduce the essay requirements in detail. Some teaching assistants use this class to state the department policy towards cheating and punishments. Others prefer to keep the first class upbeat and to discuss guidelines, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty when they assign essays or review for exams. Emphasise the fact that it is your job to assist students through consultation if they are having problems.

Creating a Positive Environment

As a learning facilitator, it is your job to create a seminar environment that is comfortable enough that students can speak without fear of ridicule. Start by letting students get to

know one another. A standard technique is to have students pair-up and introduce each other to the class. You could also have each student simply introduce him or herself and explain why they took the course. Be creative – there are lots of ideas online. Informal quizzes are a fun way to let students know that they have a lot to learn in the class and that it is not a crime to be unfamiliar with a given fact or subject. You may want to learn more about the class, particularly their background in history, such as courses they have previously taken, why they think it is important to study history, or what they would like to get out of the course. At this point you could hand out the questionnaire discussed in previous sections or throw out these questions for informal discussion.

Setting a positive classroom environment, with clear ground rules and expectations, can help avoid disruptive behaviour, hostility and anger later in the year. Generally, clarity is crucial – as mentioned above, be clear about how tutorials will be structured, how you will be marking, and make sure everyone understands the syllabus. Then work collectively with the students to establish some ground rules for the tutorial. You could ask the students to brainstorm what they like and disliked in previous classes, from that list pull out "values" (for example, respect for others), and from those values ask the students to create an informal code of conduct for the classroom (for example, no interrupting, no lateness etc.). If you don't agree with something the students have come up with, be clear why you feel that way. Creating support systems in the classroom can also be effective for fostering a positive environment. For example, "ombuds buddies" can allow students to anonymously make suggestions or complaints that they would otherwise feel too uncomfortable to make. In the first class, leave the room and allow the students to choose one or two individuals to act as ombuds buddies. Students can then go to these individuals, who will bring their comments to you.

Give Them a Taste of the Course

In order to increase student interest – give them a taste of the course. Begin by stating a question or area of interest that you intend to cover during the session. You can then elaborate upon the topic by drawing upon historical incidents and examples, personal anecdotes, or contemporary parallels. Conclude the discussion by demonstrating how an understanding of a single historical episode can contribute to the larger aims of the course. If you give students a taste of the course in the first class, it will help them decide quickly if they are in the right place for their interests.

Library Introduction

Most university libraries have orientation sessions for new students and it is a good idea to encourage – if not insist – that students take a tour. If no such orientation is offered, you could provide your own introduction to the key elements of the library for students of history. Also try to direct students to the many university library introductions and orientations that are now available online.

After Class

Allow students to get to their next class, but be available for questions either outside of the classroom or in your office. Re-evaluate your present-day performance. Did you get your points across? Do you need to find out anything before next class? Have you noted when your next student appointments are? It would be helpful to consult your fellow TAs in order to determine if your classes are at the same point in the syllabus or if there are any problems.

Office Behaviour

Your office hours should be finalised after you consult the first class. Make sure that you are also available by appointment to those students unable to meet the scheduled hour. There are many reasons for making appointments with your students. You might want to discuss the progress or marking of written papers, or, you can continue a discussion that became too involved during a seminar. In many cases, students will want to discuss absences, late papers, or poor marks. Listen to their problems and be fair, but do not allow students to convince you to change their marks simply because they are extremely upset.

LEADING A SEMINAR

The Seminar Leader's Role

One of the most important elements in running a successful seminar is the personal approach of the leader; the leader's attitude can affect the dynamics of the group and, consequently, the level and quality of participation. You may recall from your own undergraduate experience that the best seminars or tutorials were the ones lead by an interested and spirited teaching assistant. On the other hand, nothing could be more uncomfortable or awkward than a seminar leader who could not draw his or her students into discussion. Keep in mind that, in many cases, the seminar is a new and uncomfortable situation for students; if a student musters the courage to express a thought – it should not be dismissed or ridiculed. A good seminar leader builds trust by being open to student ideas, while at the same time encouraging students to approach themes and problems from multiple perspectives.

The Many Roles Played by a Successful Seminar Leader:

- an initiator, who gets things started quickly and effectively
- a task classifier, who previews events in the discussion to clarify the goals of the session or set its direction
- a questioner, to provide the general direction of the discussion
- an evaluator, who asks questions or makes comments to set the standards of the interaction

- a summariser, who recounts the group's progress
- an encourager, who elicits participation from all members and does not allow a few to dominate
- a supporter and cheerleader, who provides positive feedback and enthusiasm

Preparation

Teaching assistants often take the preparation for seminars too lightly, especially when they feel that the material is familiar. Begin by reviewing the material to be discussed so that you are prepared to answer any questions that may arise. Try to shape the material to meet your students' goals and interests. What perspectives and background material are useful to increase the students' awareness of the reading or lecture? To ensure a successful discussion, give students a set of questions or themes to explore as they cover the material and make sure they do their homework by having pop quizzes or reading reviews.

Shaping a Seminar to Meet Course Goals

Seminar groups are typically organised to either review the material covered in the lectures or to extend or enhance the lecture material – or both. If the intent of the group is a review, the role of the leader will be much closer to that of the lecturer. Typically, you will have to cover in one session what the lecturer covered in two or three. Concentrate on theme highlights, arguments, and significant examples. In the same session, you will probably want to leave room for questions about the material and ask students about the progress of their own work.

More commonly, the seminar is intended to enhance the students' awareness of the underlying themes and problems of the lecture material through discussion and further reading. For instance, where can the reading be placed in the current historiography? What is meant by historiography? Does the course instructor agree with the author? Is the argument or evidence controversial? Students should be encouraged to think critically rather than simply memorise or regurgitate the material.

Structuring a Seminar or Tutorial

Seminars can be structured around group discussion of lectures or readings, student oral presentations, or small-group discussions or exercises.

<u>Facilitating Group Discussion</u>

There are a number of ways to facilitate or guarantee student participation in a seminar situation. To begin, you could go around the room and ask each student to say one thing they liked, disliked, found confusing, found interesting etc. about the reading. You could

have them collectively come up with key words or ideas from the readings and explain their meaning. You can ask your students to prepare one or two questions based upon the current lecture or reading. The seminar leader can then use the best or most common questions as the basis for discussion. If the class is an introductory course, you could alternatively have students make note of the lecture or reading's basic thesis and have them explain at least one fact or example that the author used to make his or her argument. You could have them fill out a reading sheet, which could include the topic and thesis of the reading, as well as the sources used in the reading and a critical evaluation of the article's usefulness. Finally, one of the surest ways to promote student participation is to provide them with two or three questions to explore while reading an article or listening to a lecture. Tell them that they may be called upon to answer the questions during the next class.

Questions: A Seminar Leader's Most Useful Teaching Aid

Used by a skilled leader, a question can exploit the full potential of the learning experience and make the seminar a treat for students and leader alike. There are different types of questions:

- factual questions ask for specific information, usually beginning with who, what, where, or when
- divergent questions have no right or wrong answers and are used to promote possibilities to be explored
- probing questions are used in a series to elaborate upon or clarify a student's response or understanding
- higher order questions go beyond the mere recall of information and require more analysis from the student

Focussing the discussion

In order to focus a seminar discussion, begin with questions that will evoke specific answers. Start at the most elementary level and then build upon the students' knowledge and understanding of the material. If students begin to make remarks out of context, respond to an aspect of the remarks that will lead back to the main subject. In order to avoid unduly alienating students, let them know that their comments can be discussed after class or during office hours. When there are lulls in the discussion, summarise points to remind the group of the material already covered.

Expanding the discussion

If you feel that the students are exhibiting a good basic understanding of the material, you can expand the discussion by introducing a divergent question: e.g. did the author's

feminist leanings influence her depiction of nineteenth-century criminal justice? Ask for guesses and encourage students to explain their reasoning. Brainstorming can also be one of the most effective ways to draw all students into a discussion. In order to avoid overly controlling the session, keep out of the discussion as much as possible and invite and allow the students to interact with each other. Intercede only when the discussion begins to dwindle or when a student tries to dominate or side-track the session.

Dealing with Silence

Periods of silence can be the most difficult and awkward aspect of teaching seminars-for professors, teaching assistants, and students alike. However, although it may be uncomfortable, wait for an answer. Students need the time to think before they answer and you should allow them to do so. Waiting also provides some of the slower responding students the time to respond and gives you a better opportunity to bring in more respondents. The more verbal students will likely speak simply to fill the silence.

Student Presentations

As an alternative to group discussion in the seminar, you can have individual students prepare weekly oral presentations on select themes, topics, or on the readings for that week. Each seminar session will then revolve around one or two presentations followed by a question or discussion period.

Small-Group Discussions

Some seminar leaders find that students are more willing to participate and become involved in debates if the class is divided into smaller groups. You could, for instance, have individual groups deal with specific questions that can be reviewed by the entire class at the end of the period.

Dealing with Problems in the Seminar

The Quiet Student

It is easy to overlook the silence of some students when there is an abundance of contributions by three or four others. Getting a quiet student to speak requires patience and understanding: do not force the individual to speak by putting him or her on the spot. Draw shy students into the group discussion by asking for comments on the reading material from each student, as suggested in the earlier section. This practice will give the quiet student an opportunity to express ideas in a less threatening situation. When you ask questions of the group, wait until the slow responders are ready before you ask someone to answer, it may be that they just need a little more time to think or act. Look for non-verbal clues that the shy student has something to say. Finally, if you break up the group into smaller groups, it will be more difficult for the student to hide and it will likely be easier for him or her to speak in front of fewer people.

The Domineering Student

There will always be one or two students who try to dominate the discussion. Try to turn their comments into a topic of discussion for the entire class. You can also acknowledge these students' comments by noting that they deserve more time than is available for discussion and suggest that they be taken up after class or in office hours. As a final resort, speak privately with the student and illicit his or her assistance in drawing out responses from the less vocal students. Let him or her know that they have made a valuable contribution to seminar, but that they tend to intimidate more reserved students.

The Disruptive Student

If a student is being deliberately disruptive there are several ways you might approach the problem. You can make a general announcement in class that you are not impressed by the behaviour of class members. For example, say that constant tardiness is one thing, but disrupting the class by making a noisy entrance is unfair to other students and interrupts your lecture presentation. If you speak privately with these students, remind them that they are not forced to attend your class, or learn, but that they do have an obligation to not ruin the experience for others. Avoid arguments and keep your course professor updated if problems continue.

Safety in the Classroom

Creating a positive classroom environment will ultimately be the best way of ensuring safety in your classroom. However, no matter how many preventative measures you take, you still may run into seriously disruptive students, or students who threaten your safety, as well as that of the class. When dealing with students who become seriously agitated to the point of yelling in class, there are many ways you can help to diffuse the situation. Do not engage in a yelling match with the person; allow the person to vent, actively listen to them by looking at them, being sincerely interested in what they are saying, and, after they have vented, asking questions of clarification. Acknowledge the feelings of the individual. Set limits and explain clearly what behaviours are unacceptable (for example, you will not speak to them until they lower their voice). Hopefully the student will calm down and, if prompted by something in the course, you can incorporate it into the course as a learning experience. If the individual simply will not calm down, you may have to call campus security. After such an incident it is useful to debrief with the class as a whole, and let your course director/department know what happened. You may want to take a workshop in conflict resolution to learn techniques in more detail – your university likely offers them.

If a threat has been made against you, immediately go to your course director. The proper course of action will likely vary between universities, as will the university bodies that get involved (such as the Faculty of Graduate Studies, the Office of Student Conduct, etc.). If you don't feel like your department is advocating for you in the proper way, be proactive – contact people in higher positions of authority, and call on your union for help. You should never feel unsafe going to class. If you feel that the university as a

whole is not dealing with it or taking it seriously, call the police. In the very unlikely event that a student should bring a weapon into class, it is important to remain calm. If you don't, your students won't. While we can't offer much in the way of advice if this happens, one tip could prove helpful. At the beginning of the course, choose one or two students to agree to sit by the door every class and carry the number for security (York University, for example, has little cards with all the relevant phone numbers on them). In the event where physical safety is threatened this student could perhaps get out of the room and call for help. It is important, however, to remember that while this may be possible in a large lecture hall, it likely will not in a small tutorial seminar room. Again, check to see if your university offers workshops about safety in the classroom, and if they don't, perhaps you can suggest it.

What about the Zinger Question?

No matter how well prepared you are, there will always be questions you cannot answer. Use the occasion as a mutual learning experience between teacher and student. You can redirect the question to a student or ask the class to discuss it. If this does not resolve the question, ask the questioner to bring an answer to class the following week. You can also simply say that you do not have an answer at present but you will for next class. Any of these approaches will maintain class interest and, more importantly, faith in your credibility.

What if you run out of material early?

What do you do when your lecture or discussion ends too early? The easiest solution is to recap the main points of the session and introduce your next lesson. You can also ask students if they have any questions about the lectures, exams, or writing assignments. If there is no response, let your students know that you have prepared a quick quiz to determine their progress in the course to date. When all else fails, let the class leave early-they will appreciate the free time. Do not, however, make it a common practice.

PART 3: EVALUATING YOUR STUDENTS AND YOURSELF

EVALUATING STUDENT SEMINAR PERFORMANCE

Given that most teaching assistants are responsible for conducting seminars and tutorials, they are often solely called upon to provide a grade for students' seminar performance as a percentage of the total mark. If you asked students to do written work or assignments, make sure that they factor into the final grade. Because marks for seminar discussion tend to be more ephemeral, you should explain the various factors that contribute to the final grade. For instance, in your estimation, how significant was attendance or the quality versus the quantity of the oral contribution? Did the student contribute often, but reveal unfamiliarity with the concepts, themes, and reading of the class? Was there a qualitative discrepancy between a student's prepared presentations and their informal contributions to class discussion?

Use whatever scale is comfortable. You may find it convenient to use a shorter scale such as 1-5. Give one point for showing up and allow the students to earn the other four points in participation contributions. Do not, however, record marks during the seminar discussion. Students will find this habit disconcerting and – if they feel that they are constantly being assessed – they may withdraw from the discussion. To avoid problems, record your marks after each session when the seminar is still fresh in your mind.

GRADING ESSAYS, PAPERS, AND EXAMS

The task of assigning grades should not be taken lightly. The grade communicates valuable information: How is the student performing in accordance with the standards expected in the course? And, will the grade provide future honours or graduate studies committees with an accurate assessment of the student's performance?

To ensure that your marking system meets universal standards, consult the course director, fellow TAs, and university guidelines. If you have doubts about the standard with which you are working, it is a good idea to have the course instructor review the first few papers you have marked. He or she should let you know whether or not they prefer a percentage or letter grade and how to convert between the two systems. You should also ask the course director to explain the relative importance of style or content for each paper or exam and if he or she has any personal policies on late papers, incorrect style or documentation, and failures.

Preparation and Preview

Preparation for marking begins early in the course when you communicate your expectations to students. If you are leading a seminar you have a golden opportunity to stress personal and university standards. Do not assume that your students are familiar with correct formatting, documentation, or style: Do papers have to be double-spaced or typed? Do you wish to avoid fancy binders? Ensure that students know what plagiarism is and how to avoid it. Some teachers prefer to mark "blind" – not knowing who wrote the paper until after the mark is assigned. For this purpose, students can be asked to hand in a title page with their name on it separate from the paper itself. Their paper can be identified by title alone.

Students should be encouraged to consult you for information on approach, sources, and resources. Let them know that you are available in office hours for consultation purposes and direct them to all available services and sources on campus and in the library. Are there standard bibliographies in the field that your students should be made aware of? Does your library have special collections of primary or secondary sources relevant to student papers?

When the papers begin to show up or the exam is finished and you are sitting before an immense pile of paper, you should still do some further preparation. Familiarise yourself with the university or department’s writing guide so that you can make easy reference to it in your comments or suggestions.

Finally, you should quickly preview the papers or exams. Read a few papers without marking them in order to become familiar with the class standard.

Choose a Marking Method

Three Marking Methods

The Model Answer: This method is most appropriate for marking exam questions. Make a list of points which should be made in order to answer each question and attach values to each point.

The Formula Approach: This method is appropriate for papers or essay-style exam questions. Begin by assigning specific percentages for content, style, and presentation. Separate the papers or exams according to topic so you can more readily compare depth of research and analysis – in addition to writing skills. To level the playing field, you may want to mark style first, and then read for content.

The Holistic Approach: This method is most typical of marking research papers. The paper is read completely and a grade is assigned according to the success of the student at addressing the significant points. However, you still need an agenda: What are you looking for? You should examine the style (how it is said) and content (what is said).

Holistic Marking: What is an A Paper?

A Paper

A paper of this calibre displays a mastery of the information and the theoretical context in which it is presented. It contains original thought that is expressed with a style distinguished by its freshness and clarity. The argument is sound, substantive, and organised; the author introduces other points-of-view and uses sources effectively. One is impressed by the author's understanding of the topic and where the subject is going.

B Paper

The author demonstrates a substantial knowledge of the information and theoretical concepts associated with the subject. The paper is well-writ-ten and presented with no serious flaws: it is based on solid research and has a clear thesis. Although the conclusion is sound, it is not original.

C Paper

The author demonstrates an acceptable grasp of the material and an awareness of the sources and general theory. The organisation is logical and the style follows proper form, but with some lapses. The paper would be described as descriptive because it lacks any substantial analysis and the student demonstrates a modest ability to work with the material critically. One senses the author does not fully understand the issues of the subject because the ideas are shallow, undeveloped, and tend to stray from the subject.

D Paper

The author shows a familiarity with the subject, but not an understanding of it. He or she lacks the writing or communication skills required to intelligibly relate what knowledge has been comprehended. The paper is disorganised, lacks structure, and the ideas are undeveloped. There is no evidence of substantial thought.

F Paper

The author is without any writing skill. Grammar and spelling errors dominate and disguise the lack of organisation. The ideas are unrelated to the subject and reveal a complete misunderstanding of the task.

Structured Marking Systems

If you are marking first- and second-year papers you may want to utilise a more structured marking scheme by creating a standard form that breaks the overall essay mark into component parts: introduction and thesis, structure, relevance, coverage, content, conclusion, style, paragraph structure, documentation. Assign a specific percentage of the total mark to each element of the paper. Review your marking system with your students as a way of teaching them how to write a good research paper. Let them know why each element is important to the overall work and why you feel that some elements deserve more weight than others.

Comments

Teacher comments provide feedback that is necessary for a truly rewarding learning experience. They should be plentiful, but not repetitive and they should address the strengths and weakness of the paper and offer suggestions for improvement. At all costs, avoid the use of sarcasm or humour. The former serves no purpose in the classroom and the latter will most likely be misunderstood as hurtful rather than helpful. The colour of the pencil you use can also contribute to the way in which the student receives your criticism. Some markers prefer red because it stands out from the page. Others feel that red is overly intimidating and hostile-especially when the page is heavily marked.

Rather than burdening yourself with extra work by marking each page, pick one or two pages for comments and let the student know where they can be found. Many standard

problems can be identified with short phrases which refer to the writing guide, e.g.: "run-on sentence." Many others can be dealt with – with standard abbreviations such as "sp." for spelling error.

Many new markers have a tendency to edit everything in the paper. Seek out the best and the worst aspects of the paper for extensive comments and use shorter remarks for less notable aspects of the work. Assess the student's style: Does the student use correct grammar and spelling? Does the student's sentence and paragraph structure, vocabulary, and organisation enhance or detract attention away from the research and thesis? Does the paper have a clear thesis, introduction, body, and conclusion? In terms of content, does the student exhibit familiarity with the most recent and relevant research in the field? And, does he or she draw upon the best examples to illustrate his or her argument?

Assigning Grades

The final grade should be placed on the last page of the paper. After you have assigned a mark, you may want to pile the papers according to the A's, B's, C's etc. and quickly review each pile. This will assure that you marked consistently.

What does each grade mean? Keep in mind that what is considered "mastery" or "acceptable" in a first-year student differs from what can be expected of a more advanced student. In addition, first-time markers tend to mark too harshly: judge the individual's work in relation to their fellow students' – do not compare it to your own. In a large class it would be unusual if there were not some "A" students, even the occasional "A+," just as it would be unusual not to have any "D's."

A student's grade is not for public consumption. To protect your student's privacy and your own academic position, make sure that you hand out the papers individually: do not throw them in a pile to be picked up by the students. If you must do the latter, staple the paper together so student grades remain private.

Grading Disputes

Only discuss a student's grades in private. Be prepared to explain your grades by showing the student your criteria and keys. If a student wishes to appeal a grade, ask him or her to return the paper/exam in question so that you can review it. If the concern is a miscalculation of marks, recalculate and make changes if necessary. If the student convinces you that their answer is acceptable, acknowledge that you had not thought of that possibility and alter the marks accordingly. If the student has not convinced you that a grade change is in order, advise him or her of the proper procedure for appealing grades. Normally, the first level of appeal will be to the course director.

Plagiarism

In cases where you suspect academic dishonesty on assignments, essays or exams, retain possession of the material in question and contact the course director immediately.

Academic dishonesty is a serious infraction with severe penalties. Cases sometimes conclude in a court of law. The course director will be responsible for pursuing the investigation.

The Ultimate Assessment: Letters of Recommendation

Students may ask you to write a letter of recommendation for a particular job, scholarship or admission to an academic institution or program. It is probably wise to remind the student that letters from regular faculty members will carry more weight than a letter from a teaching assistant. The student may rightly believe that you are in a better position to comment on his or her work. If you feel that you must decline do so immediately with a short explanation to the student. If your are willing and able to write a positive letter, note the nature of the job or position sought and use the forms provided by the student. Letters should state the context and length of your relationship with the applicant. Be as specific as possible and take into account the requirements of the job, award or program sought, make an honest assessment of the student's abilities, and mention weaknesses as well as strengths.

EVALUATING TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Being a teaching assistant should be a learning experience for both the instructor and the student. Your teaching-skills will be improved and – in the long run – your students will benefit if you engage in some form of self-evaluation. You can be evaluated by your course director, your thesis advisor, your chairperson, your fellow TAs and graduate students, or by your students.

Self-Evaluation

As a teaching assistant you should engage in rigorous self-examinations. Are you achieving the goals set out in your course outline, syllabus, or lesson plans? Are you finding that you consistently run out of time? Do you think that your students are following your lectures or tutorials? Are you becoming more, or less, self-assured with the passage of time? To help you answer these questions, consider video-or audio-taping your class performance at various stages throughout the semester. There may be university facilities and classes available for your use.

Another way to determine if you are making yourself clear to students is by asking some of them for copies of their notes. Are your main points coming across, or just the details? Is there evidence of wide-scale boredom? Are you talking so fast that the notes are hasty and sketchy?

Student Evaluation

You can judge your own performance by gathering mid-term feedback. Distribute a short class questionnaire and ensure student honesty by keeping the forms anonymous. Tell students that you want constructive criticism so that you can improve your performance – and their learning experience – over the remainder of the semester.

If your university has no formal year-end student evaluation, it is a good idea to do a second evaluation at the close of the semester but before the final exam.

Peer Review

Often, it is less nerve-racking to ask a friend or fellow student to sit in on your class. Encourage them to comment on everything from your appearance, posture, and command of the subject, to your teaching style and ability to communicate.

Faculty Review

If your department does not already require it, have your course director evaluate your performance at least twice during the semester. His or her evaluation will become an integral component of your future job applications. The professor should look at your class style, the accuracy of your lecture or tutorials, student response and overall performance. Although the evaluations can be informal, you should ask for a formal evaluation that will be kept on file for future reference. If your department keeps files on your teaching performance, they should be kept completely separate from your own academic file and totally confidential. You should be able to remove these teaching files after graduation and have access to them during your tenure. Many universities are now encouraging their faulty to keep a teaching portfolio that consists of their teaching evaluations over a period of years. This allows teachers to spot recurring problems and patterns, check for improvements, and to have their evaluations available for inspection when applying for tenure or teaching positions.

Getting the Most Out of Your Teaching Assistantship

If you plan on becoming a teacher, there are several ways to increase what you can learn from being a teaching assistant. Watch your course director and other teachers with an eye to adopting those techniques that work and avoiding those that do not. If you are sitting in on a lecture course that you think you may teach in the future, use the opportunity to build a course outline and to learn how to successfully put together a compelling lecture.

Teaching assistants are often employed by the department to fill a gap in staffing – not to enhance the teaching abilities of their graduate students. This practice can lead to demoralisation on the part of the teaching assistant. Make sure that your course director realises that you expect to acquire valuable teaching experience during your tenure as a teaching assistant.

PART 4: TEACHING ASSISTANT TRAINING AND ORIENTATION

Although most universities offer generic training sessions for teaching assistants, history departments can contribute to their graduate students' expertise as lecturers and tutorial leaders by organising or hosting two-day orientation sessions, weekly courses, or workshops. Within each of these sessions, "critical incidents" or "problems" can be used to stimulate discussion among teaching assistants and between TAs and faculty. A number of published and online resource manuals are available for further reference.

ORGANIZING TEACHING ASSISTANT TRAINING

Who should lead the teaching assistant training program? Obviously, the faculty must play a major role, especially those members who employ teaching assistants. But faculty need not, and probably should not, shoulder the whole responsibility. Although the teaching of history has its own particular set of techniques and problems, experts in particular fields can be brought in from the teaching centre or education department on campus. In addition, experienced teaching assistants will frequently have much to offer in terms of practical experience. Any member of the department can be involved in the orientation and teaching process.

What follows are sample teaching assistant training programs that can be used as a starting point for sessions of differing lengths.

Orientation Seminars

Orientation seminars can provide teaching assistants with a brief introduction to their various tasks and responsibilities. Ranging anywhere from a few hours to a few days, these seminars will provide the department with an opportunity to introduce the graduate advisor and the graduate secretary. Administrative details, goals, and objectives can be explained to all participants in the teaching project. If organized for an entire day, sessions can be composed of discussion groups, panels, and participatory workshops.

Suggestions for topics that would be appropriate for orientation day:

- how to prepare for the first day and week of teaching
- working with diverse students
- instructional resources on campus
- facilitating discussion in a seminar
- teaching history
- the balancing act – combining research and teaching
- grading

Workshops or Micro-teaching

Workshops or micro-teaching offer teaching assistants longer sessions where they are offered pedagogical training and the opportunity to practice teaching in front of peers. Their performance is occasionally video-taped and critiqued by the group. Another approach involves having the teaching assistants be "students" in a class where a skilled seminar leader or lecturer attempts to "teach" them a skill or body of knowledge by illustrating teaching techniques. A related, but more passive approach, would have teaching assistants sit-in on regular classes with a skilled instructor. Workshops do not necessarily need to involve video-taping or active participation, but can include panel discussions or any other format deemed appropriate.

<u>Suggested topics for workshops</u>

- teaching philosophies
- working with students in the classroom – diversity, encouraging participation, creating safe spaces, confronting “isms” (racism, sexism etc.)
- working with individual students: office hours, personal relationships, sexual harassment
- improving student research and writing skills
- evaluating your teaching
- managing stress and balancing work
- resources on campus for TAs and students
- evaluating student work
- dealing with the problem student
- safety in the classroom
- conflict resolution
- approaches to student-centred learning
- planning effective classes
- preparing and presenting lectures

- micro-teaching workshops where TAs "teach" peers
- technology in the classroom-the effective use of audio-visual and multi-media materials
- problem-solving for international teaching assistants
- critical incidents (see below)

Critical Incidents

Critical incidents are intended to be discussed by teaching assistants in workshops to familiarise them with, and prepare them for, potential problems. They are designed to be used with a resource person who can comment on the suggestions and act as a reference regarding university policies. Teaching assistants might be asked to create their own critical incidents and discuss them with the group. Here are a few examples.

Critical Incident 1: Personal Relationships

You have become particularly friendly with one student in your tutorial group who is bright, enthusiastic, and has a good sense of humour. Following class one day, this person invites you to join him or her for coffee. How would you respond? Would you respond differently if they invited you for a beer? For a date?

Critical Incident 2: Unfair Workload

Your supervising faculty member (course director) is a very busy person who appears to be bogged down in a wide range of academic projects and responsibilities. Lately he has asked you to take on more responsibilities for the course. Your proportion of the work, particularly grading, is now well in excess of the load that was originally contracted when you began. How would you deal with the situation?

Critical Incident 3: Friends in Need

A student who has struggled all semester submits an A- paper that is intelligently argued and well written. The essay has some flaws (the ideas do not hold together, there are some awkward sentences) so you are quite sure that it has not been copied verbatim from a published source. In fact, it is a good undergraduate paper. Nonetheless, you have some doubts about the sudden burst of excellence and you talk it over with the student. "Oh sure," he cheerily acknowledges, "my girlfriend is pretty good in this stuff and she tutored me." What exactly does "tutoring" mean? He replies, "Well, we talked it over and she gave me some ideas and then she looked at the paper after I wrote it and caught a bunch of mistakes." How do you respond?

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TEACHING ASSISTANT STATEMENT OF RIGHTS

Preamble

Teaching assistants play a vital role in the University. As teachers of undergraduate students they are an important adjunct to the instruction performed by faculty, and in some cases are exclusively in charge of a course. As teachers, TAs perform labour in which stipulated duties are exchanged for pay.

Universities assist some graduate students by offering scholarships which do not require the students to perform duties outside of the scholastic program determined by university regulations. By contrast, a teaching assistantship involves the performance of duties for the university in return for wages. Hence a teaching assistantship is not an academic award, it is a job in an academic institution.

As contributors to the university's teaching function, teaching assistants have certain rights. Teaching assistants also have responsibilities. These are based upon the right of undergraduate students to professional instruction and to fair and non-discriminatory treatment.

Teaching assistants' responsibilities are also tightly bound to their own rights. For example, TAs have a duty to provide competent instruction. But this cannot occur without proper training or in a class containing too many undergraduates.

Teaching assistants have the following fundamental rights:

Fair Hiring Procedure

All teaching assistantships must be publicly advertised, these advertisements should include conditions of work and rates of pay. Applicants are to be judged exclusively on qualifications for the position. They may not be discriminated against on the basis of age, creed, colour, national or ethnic origin, maternal language, political or religious beliefs or affiliations, citizenship or permanent resident status, race, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, income, family ties, handicaps or membership or non-membership in any organisations.

Training

The right to professional training in pedagogical methods and standards and in the scholarship unique to the discipline or sub-discipline being taught. This training is to be completed to a minimum level before or while classroom instruction is in the initial stages. This training should be considered paid work.

Wages

Wages should be commensurate with the responsibilities incumbent in the position and should reflect both the contribution to the university and the level of responsibility of the duties. Wages should be calculated on an hourly basis and should be paid for all the time a TA must spend on employment-related duties.

Job Security

Once hired, a teaching assistant has the right to hold a TA for the duration of his/her academic program.

Class Size

The right to be assigned to instruct a class of a size appropriate to its intended function and of such a size that all duties can be reasonably performed within the contracted paid hours.

Job Performance and Evaluation Process

The right to receive regular evaluations of job performance and the right of access to the TAs own employment file.

Separation of Employment and Academic Records

The right to have employment and academic records kept separate so that work performance as a teaching assistant may not be used to influence academic evaluations.

Grievance Procedures

The right to have disputes heard and judged according to a formalised and well-publicised procedure in which methods and consequences are clearly set out in advance.

Collective Bargaining

The right to be presented by an association or union of their choice, if they wish to organise collectively. Teaching assistants have the right to take action, including strike, to achieve a contract.

Working Conditions

The right to work in a safe and healthy place that is free from harassment due to age, creed, colour, national or ethnic origin, language, political or religious beliefs or affiliations, citizenship or permanent resident status, race, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, income, family ties, handicaps, or membership or non-membership in any organisation.

Right to Information

The right to be informed, at the commencement of their employment, of university and departmental policies regarding working conditions.

Approved by the Graduate Students' Committee Canadian Historical Association 2 June 1991

Graduate Students' Committee of the Canadian Historical Association

All graduate students in history are encouraged to participate in the activities of the graduate students' committee. The committee holds annual meetings and socials as part of the Canadian Historical Association's Annual Meeting. The committee sponsors sessions at the CHA annual meetings on issues of interest to graduate students, teaching assistants and sessional instructors. On behalf of students and other researchers and teachers in history, it makes representations to the Canadian Historical Association, government bodies, commissions on education, archives and other organisations. Through consultation with TAs across the country it has developed "The Teaching Assistant Statement of Rights." The committee has representatives in many graduate history programs in Canada and seeks representatives in departments where none exist. If you wish to find out more about the committee, visit **http://www.cha-shc.ca/gsc-ced/**

Becoming a Historian

The CHA is pleased to present this new Canadian edition of *Becoming a Historian*, also sponsored by the American Historical Association.

This handbook is intended to provide guidance and practical advice to graduate history students in Canadian universities and junior history professors employed in Canadian institutions. The manual will guide you through the various stages of becoming a historian, from promising graduate history student to a practicing scholar.

It is available online, free of charge:

http://www.cha-shc.ca/becoming%20a%20historian/