

Freshman English Office
August, 1979

The Teaching Assistant Program

The Teaching Assistant Program in the Department of English acquaints TA's with procedures and methods of college instruction and provides regular faculty with aid in marking papers, devising assignments, holding conferences, etc. Most TA's in the English Department eventually go on to become Assistant Instructors (AI's) who are completely responsible for their own sections of E306, 307, or 308. TA's however, are ordinarily assigned to work with a veteran composition teacher, or "Supervising Teacher," assisting him or her in running one section of a freshman course. During their semesters as TA's Teaching Assistants bear limited classroom responsibilities, and their work is carefully supervised.

In past years TA's normally were required to take a E398T in each semester of their first year. This program has changed so that new TA's should not take a E398T at all; they should take their first E398T in their first semester of handling an autonomous class as an Assistant Instructor.

The details and responsibilities of the Teaching Assistant program are outlined in detail below.

Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants

Attendance in both 306 and 307: The TA must attend all meetings--excluding in-class themes and tests--of the section to which she/he is assigned. We strongly recommend that the TA visit a variety of regular faculty and AI sections of this other course to gain exposure to different teaching styles and approaches to its syllabus. (A list of instructors who will accept TA visits to their classes will be available later in the semester in the Freshman Office. TA's should, however, give an instructor the courtesy of at least a day's notice when they plan to sit in.)

Staff conferences: The TA will regularly meet with his/her ST to discuss practical and theoretical matters relating to the teaching of composition.

Course policy statement: When possible, a TA will collaborate with his/her Supervising Teacher in drafting the course policy statement for the section they will teach.

Teaching: The TA will teach a minimum of one unit of the syllabus and a maximum of two units (i.e., between two and four weeks). But we recommend, in addition, that the TA and ST periodically team-teach, in part to strengthen the students' impression that the TA is not simply a grader or underling. The TA may also occasionally substitute for the ST by mutual consent.

Theme assignments: The TA will devise at least one theme assignment. This and any other assignment she/he devises, however, must be reviewed (and emended, if necessary) by the ST.

Grading: The TA will grade at least 1/3 and no more than 1/2 of all papers in the section in which she/he is assisting. The ST will review all grading, however, to ensure uniform evaluation.

Final exams: Although the TA should collaborate with the ST in devising the final exam (assuming an exam is given), reading of the final exam papers will be the sole responsibility of the ST.

Final course grades: The TA will collaborate with the ST in determining course grades, but final authority for them will rest with the ST.

Office hours: The TA must keep at least one regularly scheduled office hour per week.

Responsibilities of Supervising Teachers

The Supervising Teacher (ST) will make every effort to integrate his/her Teaching Assistant (TA) into the class as a colleague--a junior partner, as it were. For example, the ST might occasionally team-teach with the TA near the outset of the semester when student impressions of the authority of the TA are apt to be indelibly formed. Also, the TA might be allowed to hold a class discussion on the second set of papers the day they are returned. Again, the ST might invite the TA to participate with him in some initial student writing conferences during office hours. These are but a few of the ways in which the ST can strengthen the ethos (hence confidence and effectiveness) of the TA as a credible teacher.

Conferences: The ST will hold frequent conferences with the TA on practical and theoretical matters relating to the teaching of composition. These might be best scheduled for immediately after class when pedagogical problems are apt to be fresh in mind.

Teaching: The ST may allow the TA to choose which unit or units she/he wishes to teach. (One unit is the minimum; two units is the maximum. This means between 2-4 weeks of solo teaching, not all of it necessarily in one block.) The TA's teaching, however, should be scheduled during the last half of the semester unless there are compelling reasons for scheduling part of it earlier. The ST will also periodically team-teach with the TA. As noted above, some of this team-teaching is desirable near the beginning of the course.

Teaching evaluation: The ST will give the TA a brief oral evaluation after his/her initial week of solo teaching, noting strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement.

Final evaluation: Near the end of the semester, the ST will write an evaluation of the TA's overall performance--as classroom teacher, grader, assistant, writing conference tutor, etc. This evaluation will be filed with the Associate Director of Freshman English, and will be kept confidential. A copy will be sent to the TA. At the TA's request, a copy of the evaluation will be placed in his/her permanent (open) file.

Conferring with program administrator: The ST will occasionally confer with the Associate Director of Freshman English, keeping him abreast of the program that the ST has devised for the TA.

Other responsibilities: It is assumed that the ST will read the preceding statement concerning the responsibilities of TA's, and will see that those responsibilities are met.