



Duke University Guidelines and Policies for Graduate Student Teaching Assistants and Instructors

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Roles & Responsibilities

A key component of the education of many graduate students is the professional development gained in serving as a teaching assistant (TA) or instructor of record (IOR). In many departments at Duke, across all schools, Graduate School students perform a variety of roles related to teaching. These activities represent different levels of independence, and of direct contact with undergraduate, graduate and/or professional students.

Types of roles: The designations of these TA assignments may differ among the various schools and graduate programs, and can include roles as laboratory assistant, laboratory director, grader of essays and examinations, course development assistant, leader of discussion sections, lead teaching assistants, and other roles in support of the principal instructor of a course. Sometimes graduate students are given an opportunity to be an IOR for certain undergraduate courses, in which case they are responsible for all aspects of the course, in consultation with faculty of the unit(s) in which the course is listed.

During the course of their graduate education, TAs should, where possible and appropriate, progress from teaching assignments closely supervised by faculty to less closely supervised assignments. To the extent possible, departments should make teaching assignments that support the ongoing intellectual and professional development of graduate students as they progress through their programs.

Students' responsibilities: A critical obligation of TA or IOR training is that the graduate student diligently performs all of the duties that are involved in the role. By accepting the assignment, the student commits to adequate preparation for teaching, punctual attendance of all scheduled class meetings and office-hours, timely and conscientious evaluation of student work, and prompt communication to students, faculty, or university administrators of any concerns, as appropriate to their nature. Teaching assistants or IORs must make arrangements for alternative teaching coverage or rescheduling if they are unable to attend a scheduled meeting or perform a duty.

Any TA or IOR who fails to fulfill the assigned duties for the teaching role may be relieved of duties, and teaching stipend support may be removed. Moreover, as teaching is a core part of the academic requirements of many graduate programs, failing to meet the obligations of the role may have serious implications for a student's academic status.

All graduate students involved in teaching must bear in mind that they must uphold the Duke Community Standard at all times. They should be mindful that using a position of authority for illicit gain, including sexual favors, is expressly prohibited. They must conduct themselves honorably and avoid potential conflicts of interest. For example, graduate student TAs must review their class roster(s) and disclose to the course instructor of record any reasonably perceived conflicts of interest involving students in the class, including any romantic or business relationships. Similarly, graduate student IORs must similarly disclose to the appropriate Director of Graduate Studies.

The appropriate program or department Director of Graduate Studies must inform all graduate TAs and graduate IORs that they are mandatory reporters for any disclosures of sexual misconduct they receive in their capacity as a TA/IOR. As such, they are required to report such disclosures to the Office of Student Conduct: <https://studentaffairs.duke.edu/sexual-misconduct-prevention-and-response>.

Training in Teaching

Departmental training: All units offering courses to which TAs are assigned should ensure that each TA has the training necessary to be successful. Depending on the teaching role, this training might include a discipline-specific introduction to issues of course design and planning, instructional methods, effective assignment sequencing, and issues of evaluation and grading. Such training should be offered either prior to or concurrent with their appointment. Departments that do not already have training programs are encouraged to work with The Graduate School in developing them.

Training from The Graduate School: Many departments provide multiple opportunities for graduate students to obtain high-quality teaching experience. Nonetheless, training and experience in teaching is important enough to graduate education that The Graduate School has cultivated several other means by which graduate students may gain instructional experience to better prepare them professionally. Such opportunities are especially useful for students in departments or programs with limited TAing or teaching roles for graduate students.

Graduate TAs should be encouraged to avail themselves of the extensive pedagogical resources, programming, and workshops offered by The Graduate School. In particular:

- The course [GS 750 "Fundamentals of College Teaching"](#) is very useful for graduate

students to take either the semester before or concurrently with their initial TA assignments.

- The [Certificate in College Teaching](#) offers a set of courses and experiences that can help students build instructional skills and pedagogical knowledge, useful both now as teaching assistants, and later as potential faculty members of colleges and universities.
- The [Bass Instructional Fellowships](#) support high-quality teaching experiences for Ph.D. students when normal means of funding are unavailable. The Bass program provides opportunities to be a TA, an IOR, or to receive training and experience in online college teaching.
- The [Preparing Future Faculty program](#) provides a direct view into the faculty experience at a variety of different kinds of higher education institutions, from small community colleges to large public research universities. As part of this program, The Graduate School maintains contact with other nearby colleges and universities who occasionally need temporary instructors. Although The Graduate School does not mediate such arrangements, these contacts can provide excellent opportunities for advanced Duke graduate students to gain teaching experience.

Why provide training in teaching: Because teaching expertise represents a set of skills and perspectives acquired through training, experience, and critical reflection, preparation for and practice in teaching are at the core of an effective professional development program for graduate TAs and IORs. Departments in which students routinely pursue academic careers should provide ongoing training to ensure that their graduate students are adequately prepared for their teaching responsibilities, both at Duke and as faculty members elsewhere.

Graduate students in programs that do not typically lead to careers in academia, or who do not expect to pursue such a career, also benefit from TA training and instructional experiences. Such activities hone professional abilities to marshal, summarize, and present concepts, data and other material in clear and effective form. These are skills important for all PhD graduates, and are therefore highly desirable for students planning careers in business, government or other non-academic sectors, as well as in the academy. Doctoral programs in this category are thus encouraged to develop training programs and other instructional activities that will provide students with opportunities to sharpen and refine their presentational skills.

Selection and Assignment of TAs

In order to ensure that graduate students are qualified and appropriate for their roles as TAs, the following minimum guidelines should be followed in their selection and assignment:

1. Only enrolled graduate students who demonstrate the necessary proficiency in English for a given role should be appointed as a TA in that role. The level of a non-native speaker's English proficiency can be determined by The Graduate School's English for International Students (EIS) program before or after the student has taken EIS courses.
2. First-year graduate TAs are normally expected to receive oversight from an individual course director or head TA, who should mentor them in carrying out duties in a specific laboratory or lecture course. First-year graduate TAs should have little if any independent instructional responsibilities, unless they have entered their graduate programs with significant prior teaching experience.

3. The assignment of teaching roles among graduate students should be made with competence, suitability, fairness and equity as key considerations. The assignment should reflect a professional development opportunity for the TA, as well as a role that the student has the ability to perform well.

Graduate Students as Instructors of Record (IOR)

The Graduate School encourages departments to allow well-trained and qualified graduate students to be an IOR for courses, as long as the following criteria are met:

1. The candidate instructor must have passed prelims or have a previous master's or doctoral degree relevant to the course being taught.
2. The course can only have undergraduates or non-degree-seeking students enrolled for graded credit; other graduate students cannot enroll in this course for a grade.
3. The instructor should have completed several terms of teaching or TAing in a role that includes being the primary facilitator of instruction (e.g., leading discussion sections, labs, etc.).
4. The instructor should have engaged in pedagogical training (e.g., completing several courses in the Certificate in College Teaching Program).
5. The Director of Undergraduate Studies for the unit sponsoring the course in which a graduate IOR will teach should orient the IOR to his or her unique roles and responsibilities (e.g., grade submission, reporting academic misconduct, Title IX reporting, etc.) before the start of the course, and be available for ad hoc consulting during the semester of teaching.
6. Graduate students may not be IORs for independent study courses.

TA Appointment Letters

Departments or programs sponsoring courses in which TAs will train must provide written TA appointments to the relevant graduate students in advance of any term in which they are to teach. To ensure a common understanding of TA duties, appointment communications should clearly specify

- the role and expectations of the position the graduate student will fill,
- the approximate average number of hours per week required, and
- the financial support the student will receive.

Departments and programs are strongly encouraged to prepare brief descriptions of the various TA duties for their courses in which TAs train, and to make these descriptions available to all graduate students.

Supervision and Evaluation

Departments and programs with TAs should provide feedback to the TAs on their teaching. This feedback should include a recap meeting and/or written evaluation by the appropriate staff or

faculty member responsible for the course, section, or laboratory taught by the TA. It should be based on direct observation of the TA in the classroom or lab, and/or follow-up consultations with the TA.

A teacher course evaluation instrument—whether the one currently used by the undergraduate college or one devised by the department—should be completed by undergraduate students to evaluate their TA's performance in lecture, laboratory, or discussion sections and made available to the TA after the course is over.

To enhance the training and teaching experience of graduate students, departments should provide graduate TAs with faculty teaching mentor(s) who can provide ongoing guidance during their appointment.

Stipends for Teaching Assistants

The Graduate School is committed to providing financial support to all doctoral students in years one through five. Graduate students teaching in courses offered by Arts and Sciences receive stipend support based on a per-course rate, set by Trinity College, which varies by the nature of the assignment. All students with a given assignment in a course receive the same rate. The Graduate School also follows the A&S instructional TA rate for Bass TAs and IORs. Other schools within the university may set TA rates as they deem appropriate.

The amount of support for teaching is typically supplemented with a graduate fellowship in order for the total stipend to remain at the annual recommended level, as posted on The Graduate School's financial information webpages, during the initial five years of graduate study.

Hours

The professional development of graduate students as teachers is considered part of their doctoral training. For this reason, the university has strict guidelines on how much teaching any graduate students may do so as to ensure that they retain sufficient time for other equally important components of their doctoral education. The required instructional duties of a TA or IOR must be limited to no more than 20 hours per week averaged over the semester in which the course occurs. Grader assignments typically require a few hours per week on average, while teaching assistantships with an extensive instructional role often involve more than 10 hours per week. The instructor of record should provide the expected hours per week for the TA role(s) in a given course, prior to the start of classes.

Grievance Procedures

If a graduate student has a grievance regarding teaching assignments or related issues, all efforts should be made to resolve them with the course instructor of record or other immediate supervisor of the TA or IOR. If the complaint cannot be resolved satisfactorily at this level, the student may bring this before the department or program's Director of Graduate Studies. If there still is no satisfactory resolution, the grievance can be brought to The Graduate School, which will be the final avenue of appeal.