



## Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Instructors

Duke University Graduate School is committed to the professional development of graduate students as effective college or university teachers. Graduate students may serve as Teaching Assistants (TAs), may teach their own courses while at Duke, and may pursue faculty positions in higher education. We offer relevant training that will prepare graduate students for the realities they will encounter as TAs and/or future faculty – realities such as classroom management, student learning styles, active learning, new expectations of junior faculty, appropriate uses of instructional technology, peer evaluation of teaching, and attention to student learning outcomes in higher education. In addition, we provide resources to assist faculty and departments engaged in direct training and mentoring of graduate student TAs or instructors.

While the primary mentoring of TAs often is handled by individual faculty within a department or program of study, the Graduate School offers various courses (GS301, GS302, GS305), workshops (like the Teaching IDEAS series), and programs to supplement this training. In fact, the *Preparing Future Faculty (PFF)* program provides an opportunity for advanced PhD students to learn about faculty roles and responsibilities across a range of academic institutions by interacting regularly with faculty mentors at our nearby partner institutions (Durham Technical Community College, Elon University, Guilford College, Meredith College, North Carolina Central University). Since the number of PFF Fellows is limited annually, we collaborate with the Career Center and other units to offer similar training and topics to a wider audience at Duke. Moreover, we collaborate with Duke's [Center for Instructional Technology \(CIT\)](#), the [Link Teaching and Learning Center](#), the [Thompson Writing Program](#), the [Scholarly Communications Office](#), the [Academic Resource Center](#), and the [Office of Judicial Affairs](#) (on academic integrity) to promote training on a wide range of topics related to effective teaching in higher education.

Because of the importance of any teaching responsibilities assigned to graduate students at Duke, serious consideration must be given to how we train, develop, and evaluate their teaching. The University expects that all graduate departments and programs -- particularly those in Arts and Sciences disciplines -- will develop their own training to prepare graduate students for their upcoming teaching roles in the discipline. Although these training programs are likely to have several elements in common, each program should be tailored to the signature pedagogies of the discipline and to the resources of the department. In addition, departmentally based programs are expected to contribute to the vitality of disciplinary and interdisciplinary units by fostering collegiality and intellectual exchange among faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates. A model program is the *Certificate in Teaching College Biology*, and we are working to develop similar certificate programs with other departments.

Ultimately, the overall pedagogical objectives of graduate programs can be separated into two distinct learning objectives. First, they must prepare graduate students for their specific roles in undergraduate instruction at Duke. Second, they must prepare them to enter subsequent employment as experienced teachers, researchers, or other professionals who are able to present their work more effectively than doctoral recipients from other competitive institutions.

Finally, in order to ensure fairness in financial remuneration, equal demands upon graduate students' time, open communication, adequacy of preparation for instructional roles, and ongoing professional development, the *Guidelines and Policies* that follow propose broad standards and a common foundation for these departmentally based programs. The *Guidelines and Policies* address the selection, assignment, training, payment, supervision, and evaluation of teaching assistants. They are intended, in most instances, to be suggestive rather than prescriptive and to raise issues that departmental and program faculty should consider and review annually.

# Duke University Guidelines and Policies for the Professional Development of Graduate Teaching Assistants and Instructors

## TEACHING ASSISTANT RESPONSIBILITIES

In numerous departments at Duke, graduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) perform a variety of roles related to teaching that represent different levels of independence and of direct contact with undergraduate students. The designations of these TA assignments may differ among the various graduate programs, and can include serving as laboratory assistants, laboratory directors, graders of essays and examinations, course development assistants, leaders of discussion sections, course instructors, teaching apprentices, and head teaching assistants. Often a single TA assignment will include more than one of these roles. With accompanying training, these roles might properly be understood as constituting an apprenticeship in teaching.

During the course of their graduate education, TAs should, where possible and appropriate, progress from TA assignments closely supervised by faculty to less closely supervised assignments. We strongly encourage departments to provide graduate students with rationalized and incremental experiences in teaching as they progress through their graduate programs. To the extent possible, departments should make assignments that contribute to the intellectual and professional development of graduate students, not ones that represent menial or highly repetitive tasks. Advanced students may assume full responsibility for their own courses or, in some programs, for coordinating the activities of beginning TAs.

Each faculty member and/or department should develop and publicize any specialized responsibilities assumed by TAs in their various instructional roles within the departmental curriculum or their individual courses. Where practical, these responsibilities should be communicated either in the annual contract letters provided to graduate TAs or in a separate letter prior to the semester in which they are to be employed.

Whether graduate TAs serve primarily as assistants to a faculty instructor, instructors of their own classes, graders, tutorial leaders, laboratory instructors, or as occasional lecturers or discussion group facilitators, all TAs at Duke University are expected to maintain the highest levels of professional and ethical standards. These standards include, among others, a respect for honest and responsible exchange of intellectual ideas, fair and equal treatment of all students, respect for individual differences, and avoidance of any interactions that could jeopardize the objective assessment of student efforts.

## SELECTION AND ASSIGNMENT OF TAs

In order to ensure that graduate students are qualified for their roles as TAs, the following *minimum* guidelines are provided:

1. Only enrolled graduate students who are in good academic standing are eligible for teaching assistantships;
2. Only enrolled graduate students who demonstrate oral proficiency in English are eligible for appointment as a graduate teaching assistant. This proficiency is determined by the Graduate School, as currently the policy, in consultation with individual Directors of Graduate Study and may vary depending upon the requirements of the TA assignment;
3. Only graduate students who have completed one year of academic study in their discipline at Duke and who have completed or are currently taking either a departmentally based or Graduate School training course or program should be given complete instructional responsibility for a free-standing course;
4. First-year graduate TAs are normally expected to work under the supervision of individual faculty, who mentor them in carrying out duties in specific laboratory or lecture courses.

A limited number of exceptions to the second of these guidelines may be required in departments where all first-year students serve as laboratory or other instructional assistants. In such cases, exceptions will be granted on condition that students are enrolled in the appropriate classes of the English for International Students program. Exceptions to the third guideline may also be made in individual cases, particularly where students have entered their graduate programs with outstanding professional experience or commensurate work experience and demonstrated contributions to the teaching discipline presented in lieu of formal academic preparation. In all cases, departments and programs must document all exceptions granted.

Clear procedures for the selection and assignment of graduate students as TAs are essential to prevent misunderstandings about, and inequities in, the allocation of departmental resources to graduate students. Departments should make written guidelines available to their graduate students. To ensure a common understanding of TA responsibilities, departments should offer each TA a contract at the time of assignment that clearly specifies both the expectations of the position the graduate student will fill and the financial remuneration the student will receive. Departments are strongly encouraged to prepare brief descriptions of TA duties for each of their courses in which TAs serve and to make these descriptions available to all graduate students.

### **TA TRAINING**

Because teaching expertise represents a set of skills and attitudes 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. Departments in which students routinely pursue academic careers should provide ongoing training to ensure that their graduate students are adequately prepared for their responsibilities as both TAs at Duke and faculty members elsewhere. This training, ideally, should include a discipline-specific introduction to issues of course design and planning, instructional methods, effective assignment sequencing, and issues of evaluation and grading that is 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. Graduate TAs also should be encouraged to avail themselves of both the extensive pedagogical resources available in and the pedagogical workshops offered by the Graduate School (i.e., GS301 “Instructional Uses of Technology” and GS302 “Introduction to College Teaching”). Additional resources are available through the Preparing Future Faculty program, the Teaching IDEAS discussion series, and the Teaching Mini-grant program coordinated by the Graduate School. Graduate students in programs that do not typically lead to careers in the academy also benefit from TA training and instructional experiences. Such activities hone professional abilities to marshal, summarize, and present research and other material in clear and effective form and are therefore highly desirable for students planning careers in business or industry. Departments 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.

### **PAYMENT OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

The Graduate School is committed to provide financial support to all doctoral students in years one through five that is competitive with comparable programs elsewhere. In support of this goal, the Graduate School regularly establishes minimal stipend expectations for departments in the four basic academic divisions of humanities, social sciences, biological sciences, and physical sciences. Graduate students in these divisions who are involved in undergraduate education are paid a fixed per course rate, set by Trinity College, for their instructional services. This amount is supplemented with a graduate fellowship in order for the total stipend to remain consistent across the initial years of graduate study.

Duke University also is committed to ensuring that the professional development of graduate students as teachers is considered as part of their doctoral training, not simply as paid service to the institution. For this reason, strict guidelines have been placed on how much teaching any graduate students may do and still retain sufficient time for other equally important components of their doctoral education. The Graduate School has consequently stipulated that no graduate student can be required to perform instructional duties

that would take more than 19.9 hours per week averaged over the course of an academic year.

## **SUPERVISION AND EVALUATION**

To enhance the training and teaching experience of graduate students, the departments should --wherever possible -- assign graduate TAs a faculty mentor who can provide ongoing guidance during their appointment. In smaller programs, departments might wish a single faculty member to serve as the “teaching mentor” to all graduate students; in others, mentors could either be singly assigned or a subset of the faculty could agree to assume this responsibility. In either case, departments should also develop a procedure for providing feedback to TAs on their teaching. This procedure should include a formal written evaluation by the faculty member responsible for the course, section, or laboratory taught by the TA; direct observation of the TA in the classroom or lab; and 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. As an institutional resource, the Center for Instructional Technology assists departments in developing assessment instruments and, to the extent possible or necessary, in providing training for faculty members supervising TAs.

## **RECOGNITION**

Duke University has a number of teaching awards that recognize graduate TAs for their performance in the classroom. Each year, the Graduate School awards up to three recipients for the Dean’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. Departments are encouraged to develop additional ways of rewarding TAs for their outstanding teaching contributions. Some departments, for example, have developed formal Teaching Certificates as one mechanism to recognize teaching competence and to add a significant pedagogical credential to their graduate students’ *curricula vitae*.

## **MONITORING DEPARTMENTAL PROGRAMS**

Each department or program will provide the dean of the Graduate School with a copy of its current procedures for the professional development of graduate TAs. In addition, as part of their annual “budget requests” departments are expected to report not only on the anticipated levels of instructional and financial need for the budget year, but also on any changes in how TAs are trained, assigned, and assessed. The dean of the Graduate School will be responsible for soliciting from the deans of the individual schools any additional information that might be necessary to assess the overall activity of the various professional development programs for TAs and for forwarding this material annually to the Office of the Provost to ensure compliance with the institutional *Guidelines and Policies* by all units in the University.