

MESAAS Teaching Fellow Guidelines

Overview

Teaching fellowships are an important component of the Columbia PhD student experience and afford valuable professional training. MESAAS PhD students begin teaching during their 2nd year in the program and typically teach for a total of three to four years during the course of the PhD.

This document has been prepared at the request of graduate students, to clarify expectations for students and professors. The availability of such a document in every department is also an expectation of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Responsibilities of the Department and Course Faculty

- **TF assignments.** Recognizing that it is in the best interest of students, the department endeavors to assign students to a range of classes over the course of their PhD training. Student input is sought in the process—students are asked for their preferred assignments—but, inevitably, it is not always possible for student preference and curricular needs to be in perfect alignment. The DGS determines the final assignments, which require GSAS approval. For courses to qualify for discussion sections, they must have a minimum of 30 students, per GSAS requirements.
- **Timely notification.** In most cases the department can notify students of their TF assignment at least 6 weeks prior to the start of the semester but a small number of TF assignments can only be provisional until enrollment numbers are clear.
- **Communication.** Faculty members should be in touch with their TF soon after the notification goes out and should indicate their expectations of the TF as early as possible. Faculty should communicate duties and expectations in as much clear detail as possible. (See sample list of possible duties below.) TFs should respond in a timely manner and initiate requests for any needed clarification. The course professor is responsible for monitoring the fulfillment of TF duties and communicating any concerns or issues to the DGS.
- **Syllabus and coordination of desk copies.** The supervising faculty member should provide a draft syllabus and a clear indication of the textbooks 6 weeks before the start of the semester so that TFs can order desk copies; if the full list cannot be provided (syllabi often evolve as the term draws near), then the textbooks used in the early weeks of the course should be identified. In case a course has multiple TFs the course professor should coordinate the ordering of desk copies among them. Many publishers will not send desk copies until they see

- an order for the book, or will ask for confirmation that the order has been placed. In cases where TFs are unable to procure complimentary desk copies in a timely fashion due to no fault of their own (say, due to a late book order), it seems only right that the faculty member reimburse them for the expenses incurred. There is no problem in charging such expenses to a faculty member's research account.
- **Pedagogical training.** The department, in conjunction with its Lead Teaching Fellows, provides additional resources for graduate student teachers beyond the training offered by GSAS.
 - **Faculty guidance.** Supervising faculty are expected to observe a discussion section of new teaching fellows and provide feedback. They should also consider how to make the TF experience pedagogically enriching for the PhD student by providing guidance on grading, the design of course materials, and other matters. Regular meetings between faculty and TFs are valuable for keeping the communication channels open and allowing students to express any concerns they may have about teaching and to seek advice. TFs might also be invited to give a guest lecture and receive feedback on performance.
 - **Evaluation.** TFs are provided with an evaluation of their performance and recommendations for improvement at the end of the course.
 - **Reasonable workloads.** By GSAS regulations TFs are not permitted to work more than 20 hours/week, and it is better to aim for a workload of 15 hours/week.
 - **Office space.** The department provides keys to TF offices at the start of term. TFs must return the keys at the end of their appointment.

Responsibilities of the Teaching Fellow

- **Timely arrival on campus.** At the time of their TFship notification PhD students are given a deadline by which they must return to campus to take up their fellowship. Timely arrival is expected.
- **Being flexible.** Occasionally, unforeseen enrollment spikes and dips require the department to make some last minute changes. So no TF assignment can be fully guaranteed until the 2nd week of classes of a given semester.
- **Attendance at GSAS and department teacher training sessions.** The GSAS orientation for new teaching fellows is mandatory. TFs are also expected to attend workshops on pedagogy that are organized within MESAAS, including those conducted by the DGS or Lead Teaching Fellows.
- **Use of Columbia CTL resources.** The Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (<https://ctl.columbia.edu/>) is a valuable resource. Students are strongly

encouraged to seek out consultations about teaching and to take advantage of various training opportunities and fellowships that the Teaching Center offers.

- **Desk copies.** Most publishers provide free desk copies of their books to instructors who have adopted the material as required reading for a given course. Each press has its own protocols and requirements, which you can easily find out through an internet search. For instance, the search term “Columbia University Press order desk copies” takes you straight to this page, where you can place an order for desk copies after you fill out basic information about the course and expected enrollments, etc.:

<http://cup.columbia.edu/for-instructors>

Some publishers will not send desk copies until they see an order for the book, or will ask for confirmation that the order has been placed, so TFs may need to coordinate with the supervising faculty member.

- **Faculty instructions and communication.** Teaching Fellows are expected to heed the directives of their supervising faculty and stay in regular communication.
- **Attendance.** Unless otherwise instructed, Teaching Fellows are expected to attend all of the classes of the course to which they are assigned.
- **Hours.** The recommended workload of teaching fellows is an average of 15-20 hours/week.
- **Other duties.** Other duties will usually include directing discussion sections, grading assignments, taking attendance at lectures and sections, holding office hours, and meeting with other TFs and the course professor. Every course is structured and run differently, so TFs must consult their course professor on specifics.

Sample Teaching Fellow Responsibilities:

- Organize course roster and grading spreadsheet.
- Assemble readings and organize the Courseworks site.
- Attend all classes and take attendance.
- Teach weekly discussion sections and take attendance.
- Review/assess weekly assignments and grade major assignments per standards jointly set with the professor.
- Hold a minimum of 1 hour of office hours per week.
- Meet with the professor as needed for coordination (typically a brief weekly check-in, or more frequent/longer as needed).