

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY TEACHING HANDBOOK

I. Introduction

The purpose of this handbook is to describe the Department's policies regarding our appointment of teaching assistants (TAs) and instructors, to state guidelines regarding the teaching responsibilities and workloads of TAs and their faculty supervisors, and to bring to the attention of all members of the Department the standards of professional conduct expected of teachers. The handbook can be used as a resource for addressing many of the issues and problems that arise for TAs.

Typically, graduate students on support serve as teaching assistants and instructors for at least a few semesters. TAs and instructors for the Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program play an important role in undergraduate education. In many of our larger classes, TAs lead discussion sections in which undergraduate philosophy students have a chance to discuss and to ask questions about the material from their readings and lectures. TAs often spend a great deal of time working with students individually on their papers and in preparation for tests. And, of course, TAs grade papers and tests. In performing these duties, TAs enhance the undergraduate philosophy program.

Most graduate students in philosophy are preparing for careers as teachers, and serving as a TA or writing instructor provides training for that goal. TAs typically learn something about speaking in front of a group of students, organizing classes, grading tests and papers, and dealing with students.

II. Policies Regarding Appointment as a Teaching Assistant

Although serving as a TA is not a degree requirement, most graduate students receive at least part of their stipend in the form of a teaching assistantship. (During the first year of graduate study, students receiving stipends are awarded fellowships.) TAs must register for PHL 580, Supervised Instruction in Philosophy, (0 credit hours; graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory), unless they are registered for PHL 581, Supervised Instruction in Philosophy: Lecturing to Undergraduates (4 credit hours; graded Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory). Students who have taught WRT 105 are not required to register for PHL 581, but all other TAs must choose one semester in which to register for it, in consultation with the supervising faculty member.

Prior to each semester, graduate students will be asked for their preferences for teaching assignments. So far as possible, these preferences will be honored. Of course, the needs of undergraduate courses and competing preferences may prevent some students from being assigned to their preferred courses. No graduate student will be required to alter his or her own course schedule in order to accommodate the Department's need for TAs. The Department, on the recommendation of the Graduate Program Director will make final decisions about TA assignments.

III. Workload Guidelines

The amount of work that a TA is required to do varies greatly from one course to another. TAs who lead discussions sections typically spend more hours per week on their TA assignments than those who only do grading and consulting with students. It is not possible to assure equity in these assignments.

To avoid the possibility that TA assignments become overly time-consuming, the Department has adopted the policy that the number of hours a TA devotes to teaching related duties should not exceed 250 hours in any semester. In any case in which a TA believes that this limit has been, or will be, exceeded, the TA should first consult with the faculty member teaching the course and attempt to overcome the problem. If that does not lead to a satisfactory resolution of the problem, the TA may consult with the Department Chair, the Graduate Program Director, or any other member of the faculty.

The following estimates of the time devoted to the various aspects of a TAs duties are provided in order to assist faculty and TAs in predicting the workload associated with any TA assignment. These estimates are starting points for calculations, and more precise estimates should be used when they are available.

- A. All work for the course, including office hours, attendance at lectures, preparation for discussion sections, grading, and conducting discussion sections will be used in calculating time devoted to TA duties.
- B. The typical amount of time spent grading a five-page paper is 40 minutes. The typical amount of time spent grading a short answer exam is 20 minutes. These estimates, together with class enrollments and requirements, provide the data for rough estimates of the amount of time a TA will devote to grading in a course.
- C. Typically, a TA spends an average of 2.5 hours per week holding office hours and meeting with students. An additional 2 hours per week are spent doing required reading and 2 or 3 hours per week are spent attending the course lecture. This amounts to approximately 100 hours of work other than grading in a 14-week semester.
- D. These guidelines have the result that a TA leading 2 discussion sections each week and grading 2 exams and 2 papers for 50 students will have a maximal assignment. TAs not leading discussion sections may have considerably more grading.

IV. Teaching Responsibilities

In courses in which a graduate student serves as a TA working with a faculty member, final responsibility for organizing the course and assigning grades to students falls on the faculty member. A considerable amount of responsibility for the course may be delegated by the faculty member to the TA.

- A. So that the responsibilities of the TA and the faculty member in a course are clearly understood, the Department requires that at the beginning of each semester the instructor of each undergraduate course meet with his or her teaching assistants to discuss the objectives of the courses and the TAs' responsibilities. It is important that a clear understanding of the roles of the instructor and the TAs be obtained at this time. The following points should be clarified at that meeting: (i) whether the TA is expected to attend all lectures; (ii) whether there will be discussions sections and what sort of material is to be presented in them (in particular, is the point of the section to review lectures or to present new material); (iii) how many office hours the TA is expected to hold each week; (iv) grading practices for the course, including who does the grading, how promptly

grading is to be done, and how complaints about grades will be handled.

- B. In order to insure fairness to undergraduates, instructors are strongly encouraged to meet with TAs to establish clear guidelines for grading each set of papers and exams. Instructors should review some of the graded papers and exams to see that these guidelines are being followed. In courses with more than one TA, it is the responsibility of the instructor to assure that there is parity of grading. No TA shall ever grade the assignments, tests, or papers of another graduate student or assign a course grade to another graduate student.
- C. Faculty members are encouraged to send students to their TA to resolve issues about grades. If the TA cannot resolve the issue or the student wants the matter adjudicated by the faculty member, then the faculty member may intervene, following whatever policies have been adopted for the course. Faculty is urged to consult with their TAs on these matters and to report and explain any grade changes that they make.
- D. If a TA believes that these guidelines have not been followed, he or she should first consult with the instructor. If the difficulties can not be resolved by this consultation, the TA should appeal to the Chair of the Department or his or her advisor or to another faculty member who will seek to adjudicate the disagreement.
- E. At the end of the semester, TAs are encouraged to administer to their discussion sections an evaluation form that may be modeled on the samples attached. TAs are also encouraged to share the results of those evaluations with the instructor, who is encouraged to review them carefully. In addition, the instructor is encouraged to attend at least one meeting of the discussion section and to report his or her observations to the TA. (Samples of the evaluation forms are attached at the end of this packet.)
- F. It is important that TAs report suspected cases of academic dishonesty to the instructor. It is the responsibility of the instructor to deal with such cases, usually by reporting them to the River Campus's Board of Academic Honesty. TAs should not attempt to resolve suspected cases of academic dishonesty on their own.

V. Policies Governing Appointment as Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program Teacher

Students in their second year or beyond who are receiving teaching assistantships are eligible to apply to teach two sections of Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program (WSA) in lieu of serving as assistants in Philosophy courses. The Writing, Speaking, and Argument Program course* (WRT 105: Reasoning and Writing in the College) is required of all freshmen; it introduces students to “written argument” at the college level. Prior to teaching a section of WSA Program, a student who is accepted as a WSA instructor must take a summer training course. This course is expected to take place in May and June, and for the two weeks prior to the fall semester. There is financial compensation for taking this course (currently \$2,000). There is an enhanced stipend for each semester during which a writing course is taught (currently \$1,750 per semester). WSA instructors must meet monthly while teaching for a practicum.

VI. Professionalism

As members of the University and representatives of the Department, it is important that all teachers, both faculty and TAs, behave in a professional manner. This applies to behavior both inside and outside the classroom. The guidelines listed below describe some of the standards of professional conduct that all teachers (including faculty and TAs) in the Department are expected to meet. Although the points listed concern primarily the ways teachers are expected to treat their undergraduate students, it is important that similar standards of professional conduct be maintained in interactions with all members of the Department, including faculty, graduate students, and staff.

- A. Inside the classroom, teachers must avoid behavior that discriminates against any student or group of students. They must avoid behavior that suggests that the members of any group of students, for example women, minorities, or athletes, are less competent, less serious, or less important than any other students. Any sort of sexist or racist remark or humor is completely out of place in the classroom (or anywhere else).
- B. Teachers have the responsibility to create an environment conducive to learning for all students. To do this they must avoid behavior that insults or demeans students. Comments on papers should be informative and must not be insulting. In the classroom, teachers should avoid responding to questions in ways that belittle or humiliate students. For many students, especially those in introductory classes, philosophy is a new and strange discipline. It is not uncommon for even the most talented students to have difficulty understanding the ideas and the methodology. In addition, students come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and some are unfamiliar with open and lively discussions of the sort we encourage in our classes. These differences among students should be respected and a student's reluctance to speak in class is not a definite sign of inability or indifference.
- C. Sexual harassment, whether blatant or subtle, is a serious violation of professional standards. A teacher sexually harasses a student if, for example, the teacher makes unwanted or unwelcome sexual remarks or comments about the student or makes any kind of sexual demand of the student. Since it is extremely difficult to know what a student may find unwelcome teachers must exercise care to be sure that they avoid all potentially harassing behavior. What may seem to a teacher to be an innocent joke or an innocuous comment may appear to the student, and may be, sexual harassment.
- D. It is important that teachers realize that they have considerable power over their students and that students perceive them to have that power. Undergraduates may believe, sometimes with justification, that they will be harmed if they do not go along with the ideas, requests, and suggestions of their teachers. This can make it difficult for students to refuse sexual advances without fear of reprisal and even more difficult for them to get out of close relationships with teachers once they are in them. It can also make it difficult for students to express their intellectual disagreements with their teachers.
- E. While it is natural and often academically beneficial that teachers (faculty and TAs) and students maintain friendly social relationships, it is important that teachers maintain a professional relationship with their students and that they avoid situations that can compromise their objectivity and fairness. Evaluating impartially the work of someone

with whom one has a close social relationship can be difficult. Therefore, teachers should not grade students who are their close personal friends and they should not date their students. It is important to realize that teachers and students who date may find themselves in awkward and embarrassing situations, especially if their relationship should change. Even when these matters are handled with utmost diplomacy and fairness, the existence of such relationships is apt to arouse suspicion among other students.

- F. Despite the guidelines described above, it is possible that there will arise cases in which TAs do have a relationship with a student in their class that may, in fact or appearance, compromise their objectivity. When that happens, the TA should report to the faculty member that it is inappropriate for him or her to grade the work of that student and it is the responsibility of the faculty member to make other arrangements for the grading of that student. It is also possible that there will be other situations in which previous interactions or personality clashes make it inappropriate for a TA to grade or evaluate the work of a particular student. Whenever that is the case, the TA should report that fact to the faculty member and other arrangements would be made. Since these situations can be a matter of some awkwardness and embarrassment, faculty should simply accept a TA's word on this matter and not delve into the reasons for the special arrangements.

VII. Conditions for Summer Course Assignments

The Philosophy Department offers approximately 2-3 courses each summer. Our primary goal in assigning these courses is to assure that we offer a good program to undergraduate students. Regular faculty who wishes to teach in summer school will be encouraged to do so. Graduate students who have given evidence that they will be effective teachers will also be permitted to teach summer courses. The following guidelines govern the assignment of summer courses to graduate students.

- 1) All graduate students who have completed three years of graduate work and are making adequate progress towards the Ph.D. are eligible to teach summer courses. Since summer school assignments are made during fall semester, students in their third year at the time assignments are made may be eligible. A student writing a dissertation will be assigned a summer course only if the student is, at the time of the assignment, making adequate progress on the dissertation, as judged by the student's advisor. No course will be assigned to a student unless the student is judged by the faculty to be capable of teaching the course effectively.
- 2) Among eligible students, priority will be given to groups in accordance with the following guidelines, from highest priority to lowest, so far as that is feasible and consonant with providing a good general summer program.
 - (a) Students who have passed the qualifying exam and have not previously taught a summer school course.
 - (b) Students who have not passed the qualifying exam and have not previously taught a summer school course.
 - (c) Students in their fifth year of graduate study who have passed the qualifying exam and have taught one summer school course previously.

- (d) Students in their fourth year of graduate study who have passed the qualifying exam and have taught one summer school course previously.
- (e) Students in their fifth year of graduate study who have passed the qualifying exam and have taught more than one summer school course previously.
- (f) Students beyond their fifth year of graduate study who have completed the qualifying exam.
- (g) Students beyond their third year of graduate study who have not completed the qualifying exam.

Notes: (a) For the purpose of making these assignments, students who take time off from the program and students who enter the program with advanced standing will be assigned to a year of graduate study by the Director of Graduate Studies. (b) Summer school assignments are typically made during the fall semester. Students who are expected by the Graduate Program Director to complete all requirements for the qualifying exam prior to the beginning of the spring semester will, for the purposes of these assignments, be counted among those who have completed the qualifying exam. (c) The likely effect of this policy is that students will typically teach courses following their third and fifth years of graduate study.

- 3) Students will not be given teaching assignments during periods in which they hold fellowships intended to free them from teaching responsibilities.

VIII. Positions in Other Colleges in the Rochester Area

The Department is sometimes asked to recommend one person for part-time teaching positions at other colleges in the Rochester area. Such requests typically include, implicitly or explicitly, a request that the person recommended is the most highly qualified candidate available. The Department will respond to these requests by recommending the person it judges to be most highly qualified. It should be noted, however, that students on support must abide by the College's rules. If support is in the form of a teaching assistantship, then no other employment is allowed. If support is in the form of a fellowship without teaching responsibilities, the student may work no more than 20 hours a week. In no case, should a full-time student on support be working full-time during the academic year.

Revised September 2016

SAMPLE STUDENT EVALUATION FORM (1)

**STUDENT EVALUATION FOR PHL 105 DISCUSSION SECTIONS
FALL 2012**

- 1) How often did you attend the Monday/Wednesday classes?
_____ 00-25 % _____ 51-75%
_____ 26-50 % _____ 76-100 %
- 2) How often did you attend the Thursday discussion sections?
_____ 00-25% _____ 51-75%
_____ 26-50 % _____ 76-100%
- 3) Did you find the discussions helpful? In what way did they help you in PHL 105?
- 4) What aspects of the discussion sections did you find most appealing? What aspects did you find most appalling? Why? Did this keep you from attending the sections?
- 5) What improvements would you suggest for the content of the discussion sections?
- 6) What improvements would you suggest for the format of the discussion sections?
- 7) What are the weak and strong points of the TA for PHL 105?
- 8) Any additional comments?

SAMPLE STUDENT EVALUATION FORM (2)

**Complete this form only if you have time after your exam!!
DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ON THIS PAPER!!!**

This survey is being taken to help us understand your reactions to, interests in, and concerns with your assigned recitation/discussion section. Our goal is to use your responses to help us improve the sections. Response to this survey is completely voluntary.

1. TA name?
2. How often do you attend your recitation section?
3. Do you believe you were graded fairly on the last exam? Why or why not?
4. Do you find the readings assigned Easy? Moderate? Hard?
5. What do you find most difficult about the lecture/reading material?
6. Do you feel free to speak in the discussion section?

Do you speak in the discussion section? Why or why not?
7. If you met with your TA outside of class, did you find him/her helpful?
8. Do you find you recitation section helpful? Why or why not?
9. What would you like to see less of/more of in your discussion section?

Additional comments? Feel free to use the back.