

PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT INSTRUCTOR INFO SHEET AND CHECKLIST FOR WORKING WITH TAs**Working with TAs Represented by a Union**

The GTA Union contract states each TA can work up to 140 hours per term. The average workload is considered to be 10 hours/week. The maximum a TA can be requested to work is 20 hours/week (for extraordinary occasions like exam or paper grading). The Duties Specification Letter you complete with your TA serves the role of a contract detailing how the TA should spend his or her 140 hours. The department will use some of the 140 hours for proctoring and required training.

For More Information: <http://www.pfac610.ca/collective-agreements>

Start of Term Checklist

This checklist can be used as a guide to help check that you have provided your TA with the necessary resources and information to start the course off on the right foot.

- Provide your TAs with a copy of the syllabus and course materials.
- Grant your TAs access to the OWL course site.
- Complete the Duties Specification Letter with your TAs.
 - In completing the DSL be sure to discuss...
 - How much time the TAs should spend prepping for a tutorial,
 - What their assignment grading schedule will look like for the semester,
 - How long should they spend grading an assignment or paper,
 - When the weekly TA meeting will be held, and
 - Be sure to ask TAs if they have any questions!
- Remind TAs to keep a timecard, tracking their hours.
- Discuss what the TAs should do when they come close to their 140 hours.
- Discuss what your grade appeals procedure is, and how the TAs should handle requests for re-grades or grade complaints.
- Inform TAs of university policies with respect to teaching, confidentiality, communicating marks, and personal information.
- Discuss procedure for practicing anonymous grading in your course.
- Discuss target averages: What are they for your class, and what will happen if the average is too high or too low.
- When and how you will introduce your TAs/Graders in the first day of class.
- If your TAs/Graders have the opportunity to guest lecture if they wish.
- Talk to your TAs about their previous teaching experience.
- Mentor the TAs, and discuss what they are doing with respect to teaching professional development (as a reminder this is something you can write into their Duties Specification Letter).

Top 5 Ways Instructors Can Create a Positive TA Experience

1. Maintain open communication with your TAs, and check in with them on a regular basis.
Check in with the TAs on the undergraduate students' progress in the course. See if the TA has been experiencing any problems in the classroom or office hours. Also check in with TAs about the usage of their 140 hours.
2. Provide TAs with grading guidance and a rubric.
*Providing this information to your TAs in advance can preempt many conflicts that can occur if there are grading discrepancies or if target averages are not achieved. Hands-on guidance is crucial: grade a few assignments **with** your TAs and explain why you have marked it at that level.*
3. Present a united front with your TAs to the undergraduate students.
Supporting your TAs, in cases such as marking decisions, helps to cement their authority in the eyes of the students. This is particularly important for TAs in underrepresented groups. However, in situations where you decide to adjust a student's mark, consider discussing your decision with the responsible TA in order to explain your rationale and have them modify their marking practices in the future.
4. Be more than a work provider and supervisor, be a teaching mentor to your TAs.
Talk to your TAs about good teaching practices, pedagogy, and why you teach the way you teach. TAs value when instructors take an interest in their development.
5. Ensure that TAs are communicating with each other about what they are teaching, how they are grading, their various policies, etc.
Tutorial TAs report that holding weekly TA meetings has been a great way for TAs to communicate with each other, and for everyone to be on the same page.

Additional Resources and Opportunities

The Teaching Support Centre (TSC) offers many online resources to Western faculty members on teaching, as well as guides on mentoring and graduate student supervision:

- Western Guide to Working with TAs (coming soon!)
- Western Guide to Graduate Supervision
- Western Guide to Mentoring Graduate Students Across Cultures

These guides can be found online:

http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/faculty_programs/graduate_supervision.html

The TSC also offers many workshops and programs for Western faculty members. A list of the various programs can be found online:

http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/faculty_programs/index.html

Finally, the TSC sponsors several funding initiatives to support faculty members interested in pursuing innovative teaching and curriculum development. Information for these grants and fellowships can be found here:

http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/awards_and_grants/western_funding_initiatives/index.html

http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/about/features/teaching_fellows/index.html