

Guidelines for Faculty who employ Graduate Assistants

The main point to remember is that Graduate Assistants are students who are aiming to become Teaching Assistants and that both are included under the term Teaching Associate. Because Graduate Assistants will soon be in our classrooms teaching our freshman composition courses, their assignments should be designed with this end in view. The most appropriate tasks for Graduate Assistants include:

(1) Learning to grade and mark papers. What is a fair grade for a particular paper? What comments are most helpful? (A workable procedure may be to grade half of a batch of papers, then to let your GA use your grades and comments as models when he or she grades the other half.) As you find the GA becoming more proficient, you may safely delegate more of the grading. You remain, of course, the person responsible for all grades given in your class. But remember that your GA will soon have that responsibility for two sections of composition. On both counts, then, it is important that he or she learns to grade accurately and to comment helpfully.

(2) Learning to hold productive student conferences. GAs should not only grade some of the tests and essays, they should also attend your classes and master the reading assignments. (They are to be paid for this work according to their regular rate.) They should then be in a position to answer questions about the material and to explain clearly and tactfully why a paper was marked as it was and how a student's work might be improved. Conferences, we know, are an important part of teaching, especially of composition teaching. So you should give your GA some experience in this mode, as well as some coaching. (Having your GA present when you hold a conference or two might be an effective form of coaching.)

(3) Learning to teach a class. Besides modeling, which you're always doing, it would be helpful if you could give your GA the opportunity to conduct a class or two. Such opportunities might be rare, depending on your type of class and your level of comfort with practice teaching, and in no case should the GA become merely a substitute teacher. But bear in mind that your GA, who may have never stood before a class, will soon be facing two sections of freshmen. Anything you can do to ease this transition and to help the new teacher become more confident, relaxed, and effective, will be good for the new teacher--and good for his or her students.

These, then, are the appropriate tasks for a GA. For the same reasons, clerical work and errand running are *not* especially appropriate tasks. Think of your GA as an apprentice teacher and let this relationship guide your assignments. If all works well, the time and effort you spend supervising and training will be balanced by the GA's taking on some of the grading and conference time. The relationship will work best if you profit from it yourself, but let's remember our larger goal: if you help your GA prepare to be a better teacher, we'll all come out ahead in our collective enterprise.

[Passed by the English Graduate Committee, 11-3-93]