

## Suggested checklist for working with course and teaching assistants

We offer the checklist below as a reminder of some of the key aspects of building an open, creative and collaborative working relationship with your course and teaching assistants.

### Before the semester

- Meet with the course assistants or TAs as a group to review the syllabus, discuss the expectations and answer any questions.
- Discuss how course assistants' and TAs' research, teaching interests, and experience might be incorporated into the course.
- If course assistants and TAs are expected to hold office hours, determine when they will be.
- Ask course assistants and TAs about their own important academic deadlines for the semester to avoid a major grading deadline coinciding with a major academic deadline (e.g., submitting a dissertation prospectus or chapter).
- Encourage course assistants and TAs to communicate openly about any tasks or assignments they are uncertain about or might require modification.
- Point course assistants and TAs to College resources for student health and emotional well-being, disability services, and academic support resources.
- Make the course assistants and TAs aware of the course, departmental, and College procedures for handling cheating and plagiarism
- Explain the departmental and College resources for photocopying, scanning, and audio-visual equipment

### At the beginning of the semester and for your syllabus

- Make time during your first class meeting for your course assistants and TAs to introduce themselves.
- Create an in-person and online support network with yourself and the course assistants and TAs to share ideas, teaching approaches and questions (e.g. weekly meeting, regular email communication throughout the semester).
- During the first class, make it clear to the students what the course assistants' and TAs' role will be (e.g., attending lectures/class meetings, grading, leading discussion sections, holding office hours).
- Be sure the explanations about the course assistants' and TAs' roles are also outlined on your syllabus.
- Clarify to the course assistants TAs and to the students the extent to which they will assist with homework, essays, papers, group projects, and exam preparation and note this on your syllabus.
- Clarify to the TAs and to the students in the course what the procedure is if students have questions about their grades and note this on the syllabus.

- Encourage course assistants and TAs to inform you of any prior or existing friendships or other relationships with students in the course that should exempt them from grading or teaching them.

#### During the semester

- Refer to the course assistants and TAs by name in class (rather than as “your course assistant” or “your TA”).
- Value the course assistants’ and TAs’ particular teaching and research experience and find ways to integrate it in the course (e.g., inviting them to give a lecture during one of the course meetings, contributing to the syllabus, leading discussion during the course session related to their research).
- Consider that graduate TAs with extensive prior teaching experience might be helpful as mentors to graduate TAs with little or no teaching experience.
- For course assistants and TAs leading discussion or lab sections, make it clear what key concepts and material should be covered in each meeting.
- Be sure that course assistants and TAs establish a consistent way to keep track of student assignments, attendance, and exam grades.
- Establish and review grading rubrics and have at least one session where the instructor and course assistants or TAs grade an essay/exam together to ensure the criteria is clear.
- At your weekly meeting with the course assistants or TAs, discuss how their discussion/lab sections are going, share ideas for addressing challenging topics and texts, and discuss feedback they may have about the course and any student-related issues.
- Require course assistants and TAs to communicate with you immediately about students whose attendance and performance in the course is impacted by extenuating circumstances or whose attendance or participation drops off suddenly.
- Create reasonable deadlines for submitting grades and/or paper comments in consultation with your course assistants and TAs.
- Be available to answer any questions about grading in a timely manner, especially during midterms and finals.
- Ask for feedback throughout the semester to make any necessary adjustments and/or to modify readings and assignments for a future version of the course.
- Make the course assistants and TAs aware of opportunities for their development as teachers and scholars, drawing upon resources such as workshops and talks at the [Center for Engaged Pedagogy](#) and at the [Columbia University Center for Teaching and Learning](#).
- Be consistently mindful of course assistants’ and TAs’ need to balance their own coursework, research and writing, their assistant responsibilities, and personal lives.
- Remain aware of undergraduate and graduate workers’ organizing efforts to better understand the issues they identify as of primary concern to their working conditions.

### After the semester

- Have a final meeting over lunch or coffee with all of the course assistants and TAs to discuss how the semester went and to get feedback about future iterations of the course.
- Offer to act as a reference or write a letter of recommendation for strong course assistants and TAs.
- Remain open to course assistants and TAs who want to consult about their own research and careers in academia.