

FINAL REPORT ON TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND TEACHING FELLOWS
MAY 6, 1997

INTRODUCTION:

At the May, 1997 Faculty Meeting, the faculty approved the recommendations in The Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Assistants with the amendments and additions suggested by the Educational Policy Committee and the Committee on Graduate Studies in their collaborative report Supplement to the Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Teaching Assistants. For further background information about the original recommendations, and why they were amended or expanded, please consult those two previous reports and the minutes for the April and May 1997 faculty meetings. This final report on Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows contains all the recommendations endorsed by the faculty at the May Meeting.

I Final Specific Recommendations:

(1) Teaching Assistant Orientation as distinct from Training:

Teaching assistant orientation differs from teaching assistant training. Orientation, organized by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, is a 2 hour session in which teaching assistants are introduced to the Dean of the Undergraduate Program, are told about the Counseling Center and other services which the College provides to help students, are introduced to the Honor Code and issues of sexual harassment, and participate in a short group discussion of problems and fears which teachers often face while teaching. This program must be attended by all first-year teaching assistants (both graduate and undergraduate). However, it is in no way a substitute for the training and mentoring which is the most vital part of teaching assistant training.

True teaching assistant training only begins after teaching assistant orientation ends. The Dean of Research and Graduate Studies will annually provide up to one day of training for all Teaching Assistants beyond the initial 2 hour orientation period. Such training should include instruction on grading assignments and directing lab or drill sections. This limited training session may suffice for students whose sole responsibility is to grade or teach labs. But students who lecture or run review sessions should receive additional training and mentoring through a program run by the students' departments, and tailored to the needs of each discipline. Accordingly, below are five categories of students collectively labeled 'Teaching Assistants'. (See I (3) below for the distinction between teaching assistants and teaching fellows.) These categories are based on students' level of instructional responsibility and different recommendations attach to each:

(2) The Training of Graduate and Undergraduate Students as Teaching Assistants:

(a) Non-instructional assistants

These positions are not of an instructional nature, and are not associated with particular undergraduate courses. Examples include the Computer Science graduate students employed as computer/network "techies," students paid to work in the chemistry library, students paid to maintain the slides library for Art and Archaeology courses and to operate the projector. Such students are not classified as "teaching assistants".

(b) Graders

These positions have as a primary responsibility the grading of objective-answer materials (for example in physics, chemistry, economics, government, etc.). There may also be a small component of contact with undergraduate students (e.g. physics graders are required to have office hours to allow students to get assistance on problems they had done incorrectly).

These positions are held by graduate students or by upper-level undergraduates.

Recommendations: Graders should attend the collegewide orientation and training sessions, organized by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, to introduce them to appropriate College guidelines and regulations. The instructor of record has the responsibility of supervising the teaching assistant by meeting with the teaching assistant at the start of the course to discuss expectations and procedures, by periodically checking graded material to ensure that the teaching assistant is being conscientious and fair in grading, and by providing some assessment to the teaching assistant on the quality of his/her work.

(c) Lab Teaching Assistants

Laboratory teaching assistants are used in many of the teaching laboratories on campus (chemistry, biology, geology, computer science, mathematics, sociology, psychology, physics, etc.). Responsibilities generally include assisting students in performing experiments or working exercises, grading lab reports, enforcing safety regulations, etc. In some cases the teaching assistants may be expected to give short lectures at the beginning of the lab or to run tutoring sessions. These teaching assistants are supervised by a faculty member or laboratory coordinator, who is the instructor of record. These positions involve a greater level of contact with the students than grading.

These positions are generally held by graduate students or by upper-level undergraduates.

Recommendations: Same as for graders (see above), with two additions: I) the faculty supervisors, if they do not also regularly attend the labs, should make periodic visits to the lab and give the teaching assistant feedback on his/her performance, and ii) the teaching assistant should be provided with teaching evaluations from the students. The supervisor should discuss these evaluations with the teaching assistant. Both of these steps should be viewed as part of the mentoring process, to help develop the teaching assistant's teaching ability.

(d) Drill Leader

Here the teaching assistant runs an individual session, often to review materials previously presented by the instructor in the lecture portion of the course. Several departments use teaching assistants in this manner, particularly the Modern Languages program. However, unlike the TA who directs review sessions and discussions as described in the next category, drill leaders are not responsible for formally grading any assignments in the course.

Although such positions are generally held by graduate students, given the restriction on grading it is not uncommon to have qualified, upper-level undergraduates lead drill sessions.

Recommendations: Same as for Lab teaching assistants (see above).

(e) Communication Consultant

Here the teaching assistant is trained specifically to work as a writing or oral communication consultant in conjunction with the Writing Resources Center and the Oral Communication Studios located on campus. The teaching assistant will have direct contact with undergraduate students seeking assistance in improving their communication skills.

These positions are generally held by upper-level undergraduate students.

Recommendations: In addition to attending the collegewide orientation session organized by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies, communication consultants are required to attend the specific training sessions arranged by the directors of the Writing Resources Center and the Oral Communication Studios. In the case of the former, this includes a one-credit course taken during the spring semester before the student becomes a writing consultant; in the latter, intensive training sessions are conducted prior to the beginning of each academic year.

(f) Discussion Leader

Here the teaching assistant runs a regularly-scheduled individual session (these classes are known by such terms as review session, recitation session, problem session, etc.). Such arrangements have been used by several departments (religion, history, economics, etc.). Grading of materials such as quizzes may be a component of the job as well. The instructor of record is not the teaching assistant, but is the faculty member delivering the formal lectures associated with the discussion section. The position of discussion leader involves a large instructional component, and a great deal of contact with undergraduate students.

These positions are normally held by graduate students, and we do not believe that it would be appropriate for undergraduates to be given this level of responsibility.

Recommendations: Same as for Lab teaching assistants (see above), with the addition that departments/programs should offer supplemental training in leading discussions.

(3) Teaching Fellows: The Training and Use of Advanced Graduate Students as Instructors of Record

The following is a set of recommendations concerning the use of graduate student Teaching Fellows as instructors for undergraduate courses. These recommendations are modeled on the longstanding, successful teaching intern program utilized by the Department of History at William and Mary. Each department/program which trains graduate students to serve as instructors of record in undergraduate courses at The College of William and Mary is required to submit a set of written guidelines re: training and supervision of such students to the Committee on Graduate Studies for its approval.

(a) Definition of "Teaching Fellow"

A "Teaching Fellow" shall be defined as a graduate student of The College of William and Mary who is the instructor of record for a particular course. Although he/she will receive direct supervision from regular faculty within the department, the Teaching Fellow is normally responsible for designing the syllabus, selecting the readings, delivering the lectures, preparing/ evaluating all written or oral assignments, and determining the final grade.

(b) Qualifications of a Teaching Fellow

Teaching fellows must be graduate students at the ABD (post-comprehensive exam) level. This is not to say that all ABD graduate students should be allowed to teach their own courses; rather, teaching fellows must be ABD students who have distinguished themselves in their classwork and comprehensive exams, and have shown themselves capable of teaching their own courses.

(c) Eligible Courses

The individual departments/programs should determine in which courses--introductory and/or advanced--they will allow their teaching fellows to serve as instructors. The single exception is Freshman Seminars, which may not be taught by Teaching Fellows.

(d) Department Orientation

Each department or program which decides to employ graduate ABD students as Teaching Fellows should arrange a department-level orientation--beyond the collegewide orientation conducted by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies--to introduce the Teaching Fellows to applicable department regulations, the department handbook, etc.

(e) Workshops

There is a strong presumption that departments/programs will arrange for EPC/COGS approved workshops on issues relevant to teaching within their discipline (leading discussion, preparing syllabi, evaluating coursework etc.) This presumption may be defeated where departments/programs provide alternative means for training which are demonstrably at least as effective. Workshops may be co-organized by more than one discipline and so be cross-disciplinary in nature. Whether single- or cross-disciplinary, they should be scheduled to ensure that Teaching Fellows are exposed to ideas about discussion-leading, evaluating coursework, etc. before beginning their work as Teaching Fellows. Workshops may also train Teaching Assistants other than Teaching Fellows, thus serving a dual purpose: first, as an educational experience for teaching assistants of several kinds; and, second, as practical preparation for those graduate students who will eventually become Teaching Fellows.

(f) Supervision

Close supervision being the key to a successful Teaching Fellow program, each department will be expected to arrange a system of supervision consistent with the following guidelines:

- The graduate director should oversee the administration of the Teaching Fellow program, including the department-level orientation, reviewing the proposed course syllabi, etc.
- The individual Teaching Fellow's graduate advisor should also play an integral role in training the Teaching Fellow, particularly in reviewing the syllabus and visiting the classroom.
- Each Teaching Fellow should have a classroom visit at least twice during the semester by one of the following three persons: the graduate director, the department/program chair, and/or the graduate advisor. If the Teaching Fellow wishes, he/she may schedule more than two classroom visits, including visits by persons other than those listed above. Faculty members should be as accommodating as possible in scheduling these visits.
- Following each classroom visit, the faculty member should write a brief evaluation of the Teaching Fellow's performance to be placed in the Teaching Fellow's graduate file with a copy given to the Teaching Fellow. Such reports are advantageous, not only in terms of their immediate feedback, but also during the preparation of job dossiers. In addition, the Teaching Fellow should schedule a brief visit with the visiting faculty member to discuss the Teaching Fellow's strengths and weaknesses.

(g) Exit Interviews

Each department should conduct exit interviews of the graduate Teaching Fellows when their courses are complete. At this interview, the graduate director should discuss the student evaluations of the Teaching Fellow, as well as request comments from him/her regarding the department's entire Teaching Fellow program.

II Final General Recommendations

- (1) Departments and programs training graduate students as Teaching Fellows should submit formal plans for their training and supervision for the approval of the Educational Policy Committee and the Committee on Graduate Studies. Normally, such plans should incorporate the recommendations listed in the above section entitled Teaching Fellows: The Training and Use of Advanced Graduate Students as Instructors of Record. But alternative approaches will be considered when supported with appropriate rationales.
- (2) Departments and programs training students (graduate and undergraduate) as teaching assistants (as defined above) should report their implementation of the recommendations concerning training and supervision procedures to the Educational Policy Committee and the Committee on Graduate Studies. Alternative approaches will be considered when supported with appropriate rationales.
- (3) Logically, ABD adjuncts having little or no teaching experience should receive the same mentoring and supervision while teaching William and Mary undergraduates as do our teaching fellows. Although we may not be responsible for the adjuncts' career preparation, our responsibility to William and Mary students is the same whether they are taught by such adjuncts or Teaching Fellows. This is so whether ABD adjuncts are hired from other universities or colleges or from William and Mary departments or programs. In the event that adjuncts lack the necessary teaching experience, departments and programs hiring those adjuncts should make sure that they receive appropriate training during their first year here. Where appropriate, such adjunct training may be co-sponsored with departments having Teaching Fellow programs.
- (4) Faculty who do not hold a terminal degree in their field may not teach Freshman Seminars without the approval of the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences.

III Implementing the Final Recommendations

(A) Advisory Working Group on Teaching Fellows

A working group will be formed to advise EPC and COGS on the evaluation of plans for training and supervising Teaching Fellows. This committee will be comprised largely of experts in different facets of pedagogy as well as student representatives. Thus it will be composed of one faculty member experienced in teaching writing, one faculty member experienced in teaching oral communication, one faculty member experienced in teaching quantitative material, one faculty member with significant prior involvement in the Teaching Enhancement project (possibly but not necessarily a Teaching Chair with a background in pedagogy), two graduate students (one from the natural sciences and one from the humanities/ social sciences), and one undergraduate-- a total of 7 members. Its function will be to establish guidelines for assessing plans for training and evaluating teaching fellows, and then use those guidelines to appraise the Teaching Fellows plans put forward by specific departments/programs. Presumably the guidelines will include, for example, a statement about the number and types of workshops needed for preparing

teaching fellows to teach writing, plus appropriate measures for evaluating Teaching Fellows' efforts in this direction. Working Group membership will be diverse enough to ensure that the peculiarities of different disciplines would be taken into account.

Members will be appointed jointly by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Dean Research and Graduate Studies after consultation with EPC and COGS. The Working Group will be a strictly advisory body, with EPC and COGS retaining ultimate authority to assess the merits of plans for training Teaching Fellows. Provided both EPC and COGS agree, moreover, the Working Group could disband after the first round of plan approvals, leaving EPC and COGS free to use its established guidelines for appraising any plans proposed in the future. EPC and COGS will use these same guidelines to appraise the relevant aspects of the training and evaluation plans of teaching assistants other than Teaching Fellows, such as graders or discussion leaders.

(B) Implementation Schedule for the Final Recommendations

1. Fall, 1997: The appointed Teaching Fellow Working Group recommends, and EPC and COGS approves, guidelines for appraising plans for the training and evaluation of teaching fellows. The Working Group will be appointed by September 15 and make its recommendations for guidelines to EPC and COGS by November 1. EPC and COGS will announce their jointly approved guidelines at the December Faculty Meeting.
2. Spring, 1998: By February 1 departments/Programs will submit plans for training and evaluating teaching fellows to the Teaching Fellow Working Group, who will evaluate them according to its previously established guidelines. By March 1 the Working Group will forward its recommendations for or against approval to EPC and COGS, who will together decide whether a given plan is acceptable and notify departments/programs of their decisions by March
3. Departments/programs may appeal those decisions until April 1.
4. Fall, 1998: The plans for training and evaluating Teaching Fellows are implemented.