

To: The Faculty of Arts and Sciences  
From: The EPC and COGS  
Date: November 19, 1997

As follow-up to the Final Report on Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows (on the Web), approved by the Faculty last May, an Advisory Working Group on Teaching Fellows (composed of Candice Brown, Tamara Burk, Matt Cohen, Mark Fowler, Franz Gross, Deonna Johnson, Heather Macdonald (chair), Hans Von Baeyer, and Sharon Zuber) was established and charged to advise the EPC and COGS on the teaching preparation of Teaching Fellows - advanced graduate students who serve as Instructors of Record for one or more courses. The Working Group was asked to develop a set of guidelines for evaluating department/program (unit) plans for the preparation and evaluation of Teaching Fellows (TFs) that would meet the legitimate interests of graduate students, undergraduates, and units with graduate programs. This report revised and approved by both COGS and EPC, contains the guidelines requested. After an opening statement, the report presents seven items that should be included in the plan units will submit regarding the preparation and supervision of Teaching Fellows in their unit.

#### Opening Statement

The responsibility for the preparation of Teaching Fellows (TFs) should be shared by individual units and by Arts and Sciences (specifically the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies and the Dean of Undergraduate Studies).

A unit plan should describe how students the unit intends to assign as TFs will be trained and prepared in the semester(s) prior to their assignment as a TF. This advanced training will depend on the discipline, but might include sessions on leading discussions, lecturing, or micro-teaching (an exercise in which TFs present a short teaching session to small groups of other TFs and a workshop leader for constructive feedback). Such training should continue into the semester(s) during which the students teach. In addition to these programs offered by units, we strongly recommend that all TFs be required to attend a one-day orientation/preparation session at the beginning of each academic year. This session will include the half-day orientation required of all Teaching Assistants (the anticipated content of the orientation session is given at the end of this document) as well as a half-day general teaching workshop for all TFs led by faculty and experienced TFs selected by the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies. The workshop might include sessions on one or more of the following topics: Plagiarism, Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity Issues in the Classroom, Tips on Lecturing, Leading Discussion, and Construction of Exams. The workshop could also include further sessions, on micro-teaching (to follow up and reinforce the previous training students have already received in their units). Alternatively, TFs might view and discuss video excerpts of teaching. The workshop might also include a question and answer session on insights from experienced TFs. The workshop would not only provide an opportunity for all TFs to discuss teaching, but would also teach basic classroom strategies that can be built upon throughout the teaching and mentoring experience. We also recommend that the Deans consider organizing one meeting each semester to provide an opportunity for the TFs to share teaching strategies and concerns and develop peer relationships.

We strongly recommend that the Dean of Undergraduate Studies and the Dean of Research and Graduate Studies evaluate the TF programs two years after approval of unit plans. They might use exit interviews, focus groups, and/or written evaluations that would include questions on the number and duration of TF/Faculty Mentor meetings, the topics of discussion, and the level of support provided by the Faculty Mentor.

**Unit plans should include the following seven items:**

**1. Description of the Teaching Fellow program/proposed program in the unit**

The description would include the following points as well as any other information the unit deems appropriate. We caution units to consider carefully before assigning junior faculty in their first two years to Mentor positions.

- Anticipated number of TFs per year, the course or courses the TFs will teach (e.g., an upper-level seminar course in the TFs specialty or several sections of introductory survey courses).
- Organization of the unit's TF program including a section on the selection of Faculty Mentors. Units that have several TFs might want to appoint a master teacher to run their TF program to give it focus, coherence, and accountability.
- Units should establish consistent expectations of Faculty Mentors. Preferably, TFs teaching the same course should have

the same Faculty Mentor.

- The logistical support that will be provided for TFs, particularly office space needed to meet students during office hours.

**2. Description of the criteria units will use in selecting TFs**

Careful selection is important. Teaching Fellows, who must be ABDs, should have had some previous teaching experience or be judged to be exceptional in their ability to teach, as demonstrated by observation of lectures and talks previously presented by the student.

**3. Description of initial unit orientation and training for TFs**

The description should include the content of the orientation and training as well as when it will be offered and by whom. As described in the opening statement, training should begin in the semester(s) prior to assignment as a TF and continue into the semester(s) during which the students teach. A unit orientation at the beginning of each year might include information about unit regulations and issues, unit handbooks, duplication policies, grading practices, assigning of mentors, clarification of roles, responsibilities, and resources, and office space. Units might decide to compile resources that might be of use to TFs (sample syllabi, exams, graded anonymous student papers, assignments).

#### **4. Description of monitoring and supervision of TFs by Faculty Mentor**

We expect that the TF and the Faculty Mentor will work closely together, recognizing that the TF is responsible for designing the syllabus, selecting readings, delivering lectures, leading discussions, preparing and evaluating all assignments, and determining the final grade. The Advisory Group strongly encourages plans in which the Faculty Mentor is assigned as early as possible and meets with the TF prior to the semester of teaching, several times during the semester, and after the semester.

For example, the TF and Faculty Mentor would meet prior to the semester of teaching to discuss syllabus, teaching methods, assignments, evaluation methods, and any other areas of interest. During the semester, the TF and Faculty Mentor would meet at various times (once a week to once a month) to discuss progress, issues of concern, and successes. The meeting after the semester would focus on reviewing end-of-course student evaluations (after the final grades are turned in) in order to put both the benefits and pitfalls of student evaluations into perspective.

The plan should include a procedure for resolving disagreements between the student and the mentor, and a procedure for reassigning students and mentors if conflicts arise which cannot be resolved.

An essential component in the supervision of the TF is classroom observation which should take place at least twice a semester. In contrast to the **Final Report on Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows**, we urge that the Faculty Mentor do at least two such observations, and that at least two observations also be made by one other person, who may be a graduate student. Such observations could be either live classroom visits or videotaped sessions. Both must be followed by an analysis session with the TF.

While some parts of the training program for TFs might be relaxed in subsequent semesters as a TF acquires experience, mentoring, including the classroom visits, should continue every semester the student is a TF.

#### **5. Description of professional development experiences regarding teaching/learning for TFs**

The **Final Report** recommended that each TF participate in at least two (hour-long) seminars or workshops on teaching/learning. We recommend that this be directly related to the type of course the TF will teach and his/her background/experience in teaching. We also recommend that such professional development opportunities be selected and discussed, if possible, with the Faculty Mentor so they provide good preparation for teaching. The workshops might be completed in the semester prior to or during the semester of teaching. The workshops, which we recommend be as hands-on and practical as possible, might be unit workshops, one of the campus-wide Teaching Project workshops, or one of the Tidewater Consortium workshops. The **Final Report** states that such workshops must be approved by COGS/EPC.

We strongly urge that the TF have one class session videotaped as this is a valuable method of self-assessment. This could be done as part of the classroom observation or solely for review by the TF.

## **6. Description of policies/procedures on formal evaluation of the TF by the Faculty Mentor**

In addition to the feedback and guidance provided by the Faculty Mentor to the TF during the semester, we anticipate that Faculty Mentors will submit a written evaluation on the TF on his/her strengths and weaknesses as a TF. The written evaluation could be placed in the graduate student's file for internal use only and would be used by the department in making future assignments. It could be used, at the student's option, by the TF in looking for jobs.

## **7. Description of evaluation procedure for unit TF program**

Program evaluations might take different forms in different units, but all would include carefully structured questions about the program and the mentor that might focus on the preparation for teaching, the support and guidance provided by the mentor, and the teaching experience itself. Program evaluations by TFs might include a written survey, an oral exit interview, and/or focus groups. (The mentor should not be present at the exit interview). It would be useful to have the Faculty Mentors evaluate the program as well. A careful evaluation of the TF program would provide an opportunity for the unit to discuss its TF program and how it might be improved.

We anticipate that formal TF program evaluations by units would begin two years after the plan is approved, and would be done at periodic intervals thereafter at the request of the Deans, COGS, or EPC.

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The Arts and Science TA and TF Orientation would include sessions on the following:

Academic Policies, Honor Code, Sexual Harassment/Consensual Relations, Support Services Writing Center/Oral Communication Program, and Overview of Teaching Training/Preparation Opportunities.

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