

Some Basic Guidelines for Teaching Fellows

Teaching experience under the guidance of a seasoned faculty member is considered an important aspect of graduate training and professionalization. TFs are critical to the Department's mission of educating informed citizens who are at home in and engaged with a diverse and constantly changing world.

The following are some general guidelines for TFs. Keep in mind that different instructors may have different expectations for what TF-led sections are supposed to accomplish and how those goals are supposed to be met. Your instructor should make those expectations clear. If they are not made clear, you should ask for clarification. What is offered here are some very general guidelines. Note that every year, the department hosts an introduction to TF-ing, as well as a number of supplementary workshops that touch on teaching-related issues, including directing a discussion section, an introduction to Title IX and procedures for dealing with sexual harassment, and best practices for running an inclusive classroom. You should take advantage of those opportunities to learn more about TF-ing and to raise any questions you might have.

1. **Your most important responsibilities are to attend all lectures, take notes, and be prepared to go over the material with students in your sections, answering any questions they may still have, unpacking difficult concepts, offering examples and clarification, and stimulating discussion.** Of course this requires that you do all of the assigned readings.
2. **Some instructors may ask that in sections you go over readings that were assigned but not covered in depth in lectures.** But normally it is not a good idea to introduce new or additional information that does not come from class lectures or readings. It is, for example, inappropriate to present your section(s) with your own alternative interpretation of something the professor has introduced; it is also inappropriate to assign additional readings or other materials unless you have cleared those materials with the professor before presenting them. An exception to this is perhaps to bring in a short news article or a photograph or YouTube video **that illustrates a point that was made in lecture and stimulates discussion.**
3. **Some professors will provide you with a specific set of discussion questions to go over in sections that accompany the lecture.** If you feel you are having difficulties stimulating discussion, you should discuss this with the professor or/and with your fellow TFs. As noted above, the department also regularly runs a workshop on how to run a successful discussion section.

4. **Most instructors appreciate your technical assistance.** Helping with power point set up and making certain that the system is on line and working allows the professor the time to interact with students before class and to field questions. The same goes for helping the instructor shut the computer system down, wrap up cords, etc. Having the Media folks on speed dial is especially helpful. Picking up and returning films, books, or course supplies is also expected.
5. **Most instructors also appreciate classroom assistance** for the same reason – that is, it allows the professor time to interact with students who come up before or after lecture. Getting a DVD out of the DVD player, making certain that the attendance sheet circulates and that late students sign in, picking up the attendance sheet instead of leaving it on a desk, handing out and picking up stray handouts—these are all forms of assistance that are universally appreciated.
6. **During class time, TFs should act as examples to the undergraduates in the class.** Please take notes and pay attention; do not look at your phone or social media on your laptop. Keeping an eye on what's going on in the class is also helpful to the professor who may be concentrating on delivering his or her lecture. Is a particular student always late, or bored, or spending class time on their lap top or talking with a friend, etc.? This information may be an important element in a student's participation grade.
7. **TFs should restrict all written comments about students to official media,** namely BU's email system, blackboard, and/or faculty link. TFs should assume that any written comment about a student MIGHT eventually be seen by the student concerned. Comments on students and their work **should not** be posted on any public site or discussed where the conversation could be overheard by other students.
8. **Like faculty, all graduate students in teaching roles are subject to FERPA, the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act.** This federal law requires instructors not to disclose personal information from students' educational records to anyone, including a student's immediate family members. Students can waive their right to these protections, but TFs should never assume that they have done so. This means that instructors should NOT answer inquiries from family members about grades, class performance, or even mental health. Those inquiries should be directed back to the student in question. If you have concerns about the well-being of a student, please reach out to your faculty supervisor and/or to the Dean of Student's office.
9. **Note that most classes with TFs are introductory or 200 level courses.** TFs should be cognizant of the fact that the material is introduced at a novice level and that complex arguments may be to some extent simplified; similarly, exceptions may be glossed over. It is not the job of the TF to contradict the instructor either during lecture or in sections; please stick to the spirit of an introduction to the subject matter, recognizing that in higher level courses the exceptions and alternative interpretations will be taken up in more detail.

10. **Most instructors appreciate it if their TF checks in with them weekly.** Some faculty will schedule regular or semi-regular meetings with their TFs. Faculty like to know how the class is going from your perspective. What materials do students seem to be struggling with? Should the lectures be slowed down or sped up? Are the students doing the reading? Is there too much of it? What seems to be working and what doesn't seem to be going so well? Of course we prefer positive comments, but helpful suggestions for improvement are also welcome.
11. **TFs are responsible for meeting with their sections, arriving on time, and being prepared to lead discussion.** If you must be absent due to illness, it is your responsibility to alert the professor and contact the students. You must let the instructor know if you have to cancel a section for personal, professional, or other reasons.
12. TFs are expected to work to create inclusive classrooms that allow students from a wide variety of different backgrounds to share different perspectives, arguments, and even epistemologies. All TFs will be required to take a workshop on creating inclusive classrooms run by University or College DEI experts.
13. **TFs are expected to hold weekly office hours,** alert students to any times they may have to be cancel their office hours, and set up alternative hours when necessary.
14. The number of **TF office hours per week** should be decided in consultation with the faculty supervisor, but is usually in the range of **2 hours a week** per course taught.
15. **Note that while GRS indicates that TF instructional and other duties can total up to 20 hours per week,** <https://www.bu.edu/cas/admissions/phd-mfa/fellowship-aid/aid-for-phd-students/>; more often Anthropology graduate students work in the range of 12-15 hours per week. Of course, hours per week may vary over the semester -- grading exams and assignments may periodically require more time intensive work. TFs should take this into account in their own time assessment as final exams and papers for undergraduates happen during the same time period as final exams and papers for grads.
16. **Specific tasks assigned will vary from instructor to instructor.** In addition to running discussion sections, tasks may include: proctoring, showing films, writing exam questions or quizzes, and grading exams and papers.
17. **TFs should expect faculty** will apprise them of all course changes or adjustments in readings or assignments in a timely fashion.
18. **TFs should expect faculty** to be cognizant of and sensitive to the student's own schedule of courses, papers, and other requirements as well as their other personal responsibilities. (This requires, of course, that students apprise the faculty member of any issues or conflicts.)

19. **A faculty member may request a TF to take over a class** in the case of a planned absence discussed in advance (such as a single day conference) or in an emergency (car trouble on the way to work). If the student is willing, this could be an opportunity for the TF to try teaching a class for which the faculty member supplies lecture notes or a power point -- or it could consist of a film showing with or without discussion afterwards.
20. **The point of being a TF is to introduce you to the classroom and to teaching.** You should take advantage of the opportunity by asking questions and getting feedback from the instructor and from your fellow TFs. If you are interested in trying your hand at offering a lecture, you should discuss it with the instructor. Some instructors expect TFs to offer at least one lecture over the course of the semester. **If you are not comfortable doing so (because it is not your area of expertise, or you have other time commitments, etc), you should let the instructor know.**
21. **Use your fellow TFs as resources.** Introductory courses are often taught in teams, and TFs can use that to their advantage. A different TF can take the lead each week in developing discussion questions and a lesson plan, sharing their work with their fellow TFs. Faculty often find this kind of approach particularly helpful because it means there is some consistency across sections taught by different graduate students.
22. **Be welcoming and open to student feedback, but set limits.** Because you are often closer in age and stage to undergraduates than faculty, students may open up to you about their personal lives. Anthropology PhD students are not trained as therapists or social workers; you cannot help students with their often very difficult and complicated lives. You can, however, make sure they know about the university resources available to them (see further below). And you can reach out to your faculty member if you need help setting boundaries with a student. If one student is taking all your time and energy, you will not have the time to be a good TF to your other students.
23. **When in doubt, ask.** Your professor is there to help guide you through this process so that everyone involved—faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates—have the best possible experience in the course.

Resources for Students in Distress

Mental Health Resources: <https://www.bu.edu/shs/behavioral-medicine/behavioral-resources/>

Sexual Assault Resources: <https://www.bu.edu/shs/sarp/>

Study Resources: <https://www.bu.edu/erc/>

Writing Resources: <https://www.bu.edu/writingprogram/the-writing-center/>

Administrative Resources:

-Steven Jarvi, Associate Dean for Student Academic life, sjarvi@bu.edu

-Office of the Ombuds, <http://bu.edu/ombuds/>

More Resources for Teaching Fellows

CAS Guidelines for Teaching Fellows can be found at <https://www.bu.edu/ctl/teaching-resources/preparing-to-be-a-teaching-fellow/responsibilities-of-graduate-teaching-fellows/>.

ERC Handbook for Teaching Fellows: <https://www.bu.edu/erc/files/2015/07/teaching-fellow-handbook.pdf>

CTL Resources for Teaching Fellows: <https://www.bu.edu/ctl/teaching-resources/preparing-to-be-a-teaching-fellow/responsibilities-of-graduate-teaching-fellows/>