

EFFECTIVE USE OF COURSE ASSISTANTS AND TEACHING FELLOWS: A TIPS SHEET

This tip sheet describes some of the ways that you (faculty members) can effectively use course assistants (CAs) and teaching fellows (TFs). Hopefully these tips are useful both in and of themselves and as a way to spur your thinking about other valuable uses of CAs and TFs.

Appendices, and the CA/TF Manual, can be found at the SLATE website:

www.hks.harvard.edu/SLATE

Setting The Foundation For Success: It Is Important To...

- Get a sense of who your CAs and TFs are: relevant background, strengths, challenges, and interests. (It might also be informative to see what we will be discussing at the CA / TF training sessions, listed as Appendix A.)
- Meet with your teaching team regularly, ensuring that everyone is working together and making the necessary adjustments to continually support student learning. Depending on the circumstances, you may be able to empower your TF to run some of these meetings as well.
- Be clear about the roles you want your CAs and TFs to play. (See Appendix B for details about the official duties of CAs versus TFs.)

Tips: Use Your Course Assistants and Teaching Fellows To...

1) Help Create Materials and Plan Class Sessions

- Have them help you brainstorm ideas about class sessions, assignments, and exams
- Have them help you create assignments and exams: writing first drafts, proofing, and perhaps actually working through them from start to finish (analyzing both quality and length)
- Have them distill down the essence of students' web posts, allowing you to use that information to hone your lesson plan (see Appendix C for more details)

2) Manage Technology

- Have them manage the course website
- Have them be in charge of classroom technology, submitting the media requests and managing the technology during class
 - It is best for them to practice using the equipment in the actual room before a given class session, and consult with Media Services (or the helpful Media Services website) for any difficulties or special needs.
 - If you want to use "clickers" or a tablet PC (which allows you to annotate PowerPoint slides), you can ask your CA(s) to attend an optional training session on these technologies. (See #3b of Appendix A for more details.)

3) Assist During Class

- Have them circulate during individual or partner work to help students answer questions and deepen reflections (often good to give them advanced notice, and answers, if they are going to be helping with specific quantitative problems)
- Have them give brief presentations, like explaining some data on a class experiment / simulation or summarizing web postings
- With the assistance of Media Services, have them videotape a given class, either to help you reflect on your teaching or to assist students who have to miss that class

- Have them collect data (e.g. noting the amount and types of questions you ask) for the purpose of providing you feedback about a given class session (see Appendix D for other examples of what they can focus on)

4) Assist Students Outside of Class

- Have them hold office hours that are spread throughout the week
- Have them hold some “on-line” office hours (through the course page, Gmail chat, etc) in the evenings, so students can get help promptly on nights with assignments
- If applicable, have your TF hold well-prepared Friday sessions
- If applicable, have them run a workshop on background material that some students may not have mastered, like using Stata software
- In special cases, have your TF hold an extra review for students who are really struggling

You can help make these interactions more effective by:

- *Encouraging your CAs / TFs to take the needs of students into account when scheduling these support sessions, possibly by having students take a poll to rank potential options*
- *Giving them guidance about how directive to be with students on problem sets and/or memos during office hours (see Appendix E for some thoughts on this topic)*
- *Helping your TF plan the Friday sessions, and ideally observing and giving feedback to the TF early on in the semester*

5) Help Give Written Feedback to Students

- Have them grade and give feedback on: problem sets with clear answers, assignments that receive a $\sqrt{+}$ / $\sqrt{}$ / $\sqrt{-}$, or assignments that get credit just for being submitted
- Have them do a “first read” of paper / memo assignments, sorting the work broadly according to quality and possibly providing notes to you on a separate sheet of paper (see Appendix F the HKS official policy on grading)

6) Give You Feedback About Students

- Have them inform you as to how students are doing with the material and workload (e.g. conveying the most common office hour questions and most common problem set mistakes)
- Have them keep track of the quantity and quality of student participation in class, especially if you grade participation
- Have them identify students who are particularly struggling (see Appendix G for university resources that might be helpful in these cases)
- Have them conduct an anonymous student survey early on in the semester to see if there are any productive course corrections you might want to make

7) Help Create Institutional Memory

- Have them assist you in debriefing the course experience, and making suggestions about possible changes that might be worth exploring for future iterations
- Have them conduct a poll asking students specific questions that are not addressed on the general end-of-semester evaluation
- Have them create an editable “Class X - CA / TF Tips Sheet” to pass along accumulated wisdom to your future CAs / TFs