

**Center for Instructional
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Information for People who Teach
at the University of Washington

Planning Guide for Faculty and TAs

TA roles vary tremendously – even within a single department – and TAs bring diverse teaching backgrounds to their UW classrooms. Because of this variety in TA roles and backgrounds, it can be helpful for faculty members and TAs to meet early and discuss expectations for the quarter. Doing so can create an atmosphere of mutual support, paving the way for a smooth and productive quarter. Taking time for this discussion may also alleviate confusion and even avert potential crises. Based on our experiences consulting with UW faculty and TAs, we suggest the following questions for faculty members and TAs to discuss when they are working together on a course.

CLARIFYING COURSE STRUCTURE AND GOALS

- What is the relationship between the work done in sections/labs and that done in lecture?
- What are the roles of reading materials, assignments, and exams in the course?
- What do students typically expect in this course? What do they typically find most challenging about it?
- What are students expected to learn in this course?
- How does the course fit into the “bigger picture” of the department’s goals and students’ programs of study?

ESTABLISHING LINES OF COMMUNICATION

- How will course information be communicated throughout the quarter? Will there be weekly meetings? Regular email? Coordination by a lead TA?
- What sort of information should the TA expect to report throughout the quarter (such as student questions, quality of student work, difficult classroom situations)?
- How should the TA handle student emails and inquiries? Late homework? Requests for make-up exams? Suspected cheating?
- How should the TA refer to the professor in front of students – by first name? Dr.? Professor? How will the TA be introduced on the first day of class?
- What kind of feedback will the TA receive from the professor on grading, section content, etc.?
- What are important dates and deadlines for the course?

DEFINING ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Who is responsible for creating content for sections/labs (assignments, quizzes, review sheets, overheads, etc.)? Are archives of past materials available?

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- How will responsibility be assigned for course logistics such as proctoring exams, conducting review sessions, answering student email, monitoring online discussion boards, planning and leading meetings, operating audiovisual equipment, photocopying and collating, etc.?
- Are TAs expected to attend or contribute to lectures? Participate in designing course assignments or tests?
- What will be the roles of the TAs and the professor in grading? What is the expected turnaround time for grades and homework? Who is responsible for addressing student grading inquiries?
- If there is more than one TA, are TAs expected to collaborate in planning sections and other tasks?
- How can TAs be sure to keep teaching responsibilities within the timeframe of their TA appointments, and in balance with their other graduate student work? Do TAs need any accommodation to fulfill their duties?

ENCOURAGING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR TAs

- How might the TAs' current role contribute to their professional development? For example, TAs can gain experience with different teaching methods and assessment techniques; they can also further develop their research, presentation, and collaboration skills.
- How can TAs develop their teaching during the quarter? TAs may want to have the professor or a peer observe their teaching. TAs may also want to invite a CIDR consultant to observe a class or conduct a midterm class interview to gather feedback from their students.

HOW CAN CIDR HELP?

CIDR staff are available to consult with both faculty and TAs as you plan, teach, and assess your classes. To arrange an appointment with a CIDR consultant, call 206-543-6588 or send a message to info@cidr.washington.edu



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CIDR promotes excellence in teaching and learning at the University of Washington through its work with individual faculty and TAs, departments, campus-wide initiatives, and University leaders. CIDR staff are available year-round to collaborate on the design, implementation, and assessment of ways to advance teaching and learning for all students in the diverse UW community. Consultations are confidential and offered at no charge to UW faculty, TAs, and departments.

If you have questions about teaching and learning, or you would like to find out more about working with CIDR, you can call us at 543-6588, send a message to cidr@u.washington.edu, or visit our web site:

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