

Tufts University GSAS and SOE  
Teaching Assistant (T.A.) Handbook  
2012/2013

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## Welcome to Tufts!

We are happy to welcome you to the Tufts teaching community, and hope that you will find this *Tufts Teaching Assistant Handbook* to be a useful resource.

Your colleagues from the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), Educational and Scholarly Technology Services (ESTS), the Academic Resource Center (ARC), and the Counseling & Mental Health Services are always available to help and answer any questions that may not be addressed here<sup>1</sup>.

This handbook provides a brief overview of Tufts University and its Teaching Assistant program, some guidance and inspiration for your career as a teacher, and lists the main University policies and resources important to teachers at Tufts.

Feedback and suggestions for future editions of this handbook are much appreciated, and can be emailed to [celt@tufts.edu](mailto:celt@tufts.edu)

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<sup>1</sup>Contact information to these and other resources are listed alphabetically at the end of the handbook.

***Part I: Tufts University***

## 1. Tufts University Vision Statement

As we shape our future, quality will be the pole star that guides us. We will seek quality in our teaching and research and in the services that support our academic enterprise. Our programs will be those that meet our own high standards, that augment each other, and that are worthy of the respect of our students and of scholars, educators, and the larger community.

For students, our search for quality will mean opportunities both in and beyond the classroom to become well educated, well-rounded individuals, professionals, and scholars. For faculty and staff, it will mean opportunities to realize their talents in the service of Tufts' goals. Fulfilling our vision of quality will mean choices. No university can do everything for everyone, and we will seek to do those things in which we can excel. Nor is quality static, and we will therefore welcome change and innovation, continually improving quality in every aspect of the University.

### *Learning*

Knowledge is important but alone it is not enough. Learning must be life-long. We will teach our students how to obtain, evaluate, and use information. We will prepare them to use historical perspective and to be receptive to new ideas. Our students will be sensitive to ethical issues and able to confront them.

### *Teaching and the Search for Knowledge*

As a teaching University, we will honor and promote effective teaching, both inside and outside the classroom. We will seek an environment in which faculty and students are mutually engaged in the search for knowledge. We value research and scholarly activities independently from their contribution to teaching, but they will never become so important that we forget our commitment to educating our students. We believe technology can help us to enhance our educational programs and the services that support them. We will seek opportunities to use it effectively.

### *Citizenship*

As an institution, we are committed to improving the human condition through education and discovery. Beyond this commitment, we will strive to be a model for society at large. We want to foster an attitude of “giving back;” an understanding that active citizen participation is essential to freedom and democracy; and a desire to make the world a better place.

### *Diversity*

We value a diverse community of women and men—of different races, religions, geographic origins, socio-economic backgrounds, sexual orientations, personal characteristics, and interests—where differences are understood and respected.

### *Global Orientation*

We will cultivate in our students an understanding of the citizens and cultures of the world, realizing this goal through our curriculum, study abroad, and students who come to Tufts from abroad. We will strive to contribute to global intellectual capital, harmony, and wellbeing.

### *Fiscal Responsibility*

Fulfilling the University's mission and its obligations to its students, faculty, staff and other constituencies requires that we pursue policies that ensure fiscal soundness, now and in the future. To accomplish this, we will seek out new resources as well as using those we have as efficiently as possible. Tufts believes its focus on its students and the profession of teaching leads to its agile and responsive research efforts and its rank as one of the top universities in the United States by U.S. News & World Report.

This vision statement, along with historical and current facts about Tufts, its faculty, and students, can be found in the annual Tufts Fact Book, compiled by the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation (see <http://institutionalresearch.tufts.edu/>)

## 2. Teaching Assistantships at Tufts University GSASE

### *What is a Teaching Assistant?*

Teaching assistants are resident students in the graduate school who are paid to teach part time at the university as part of their training. Full-time students who are teaching assistants receive resident credit for, and are charged tuition for, that fraction of the program spent in fulfillment of degree and residence requirements. Thus, the holder of one of these awards typically takes two courses per semester, and spends up to twenty hours per week in activities associated with instruction. Teaching assistants are eligible for other awards, including scholarships and fellowships.

Teaching assistants normally have full instructional responsibility in the recitation or laboratory sections of the courses to which they are assigned, or they grade papers and examinations.

International students are not usually eligible for appointments as teaching assistants in their first year of graduate work unless they have demonstrated proficiency in spoken English or they have received training at another American university.

Appointments to these positions are based upon the recommendation of a student's department chair and are effective for one academic year or one semester, but are renewable. All newly appointed teaching assistants are required to attend the Teaching Assistant Orientation, which will be held on August 30, 2011.

Many of you will communicate with faculty members regarding your Teaching Assistant responsibilities, documented in a written agreement of expectations. The relationship with a



faculty mentor can be extremely beneficial as you develop your teaching skills in preparation for an academic career.

Many departments, including all engineering departments<sup>2</sup>, have processes for evaluating the performance of teaching assistants to provide feedback for mentoring, document and address cases of unsatisfactory performance, and to resolve academic disputes. These processes have been developed mostly to provide useful feedback and mentoring. However, in extreme cases, the university reserves the right to terminate an appointment at any time for due cause. Inadequate degree progress as defined by departmental or program standards may constitute cause. Academic dishonesty may also constitute cause, as may incomplete or false information included on the application form provided to the graduate school. In all instances of dismissal, the student will be notified in writing of the reasons for the termination and may appeal the decision to the appropriate dean (GSAS or SOE).

### *How do you prepare to be a Teaching Assistant?*

All *new* Teaching Assistants (TAs) are convened to an orientation before the beginning of the academic year. This year the orientation takes place on Thursday, August 30th.

Many departments also offer a departmental orientation and / or training; check with the department or program that the course for which you are providing TA'ship is affiliated. In addition, some departments have electronic repositories and resources for TAs to allow one generation of TAs to share lessons learned with

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<sup>2</sup> [http://engineering.tufts.edu/docs/SOEFacMtg\\_2-2-11-TARAAssessment.pdf](http://engineering.tufts.edu/docs/SOEFacMtg_2-2-11-TARAAssessment.pdf)

the next. Ask a faculty member or more experienced TA in your department for additional department-specific resources.

For further training and advice on teaching you can turn to the university-wide Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), UIT Educational and Scholarly Technology Services (ESTS) for consultation services on issues pertaining to teaching and technology, and the Academic Resource Center (ARC), which also offers coaching in public speaking.

For those of you planning to go into a teaching career and wanting more in-depth training, Tufts offers another resource: the Graduate Institute for Teaching (GIFT). GIFT is a competitive summer program in which TAs from across the different schools receive in-depth training and are paired with a faculty mentor with whom they teach the subsequent fall semester.

To find out how to apply to GIFT, or how to contact any of the other programs listed here, consult the alphabetical resource guide at the end of this handbook.

As a teaching assistant, you occupy a unique position in that you stand somewhere between the status of professor and the status of student as you are both. This position allows you to play the role of liaison between faculty and undergraduate students by communicating each other's needs and desires, understanding and misunderstandings to one another. This can be the most fruitful aspects of being a TA, especially when your participation facilitates the overall process of learning.

We hope that this handbook will stay with you as a resource throughout your career at Tufts and as you embark on your professional journey as a young faculty member. Some sections of the handbook may not seem immediately relevant in your first TA position, but will become more clearly pertinent as you assume

additional responsibilities and autonomy and eventually teach courses of your own design.

***Part II: Teaching Tips***

## 1. The First Class

The first day of class is always exciting. Even seasoned faculty get anxious, and often forget to focus on the group's relationship, leaping directly into the course content. The first meeting of a new class lays the foundation for the whole semester, and is critical to student retention. You have the opportunity in the first class meetings to create an atmosphere that will encourage student participation and engagement, adding to the richness of the experience.

Following are some tips to ensure a successful first day. They are written for all teachers, and will apply more or less depending on how much autonomy you have in leading the class. Do not hesitate to talk to more experienced TAs, a faculty mentor, or someone from CELT about any questions or doubts you may have as you prepare for the first day. We also want to hear from you with examples of "best practices" as you grow into your role.

Of course, we assume that before that first day of class you have prepared for it by revising the content to be discussed, preparing any materials you might need – and going through the whole lab exercise yourself if you're teaching a lab!

### 1. *Take attendance and get to know your students*

- Arrive early the first class and begin to know your students. This will help you relax and engage immediately with your students. Even a simple "hello" or "glad to see you" can set a climate of welcome.
- If class is of a reasonable size, confirm those in attendance correspond with your list of enrolled students.

- Pass around a sign in sheet to obtain relevant information that might be useful to you in communication with your students (telephone, email, background, learning issues, other concerns they might have upon beginning the course). Some of this information may be available in Tufts' Student Information System (SIS) and / or on Trunk. Decide whether you prefer that students keep the same seats throughout the semester or not. If so, prepare a seating chart to make it easier for you to call on students by name. You can use name tents if it is a large class, and challenge yourself to remember as many student names as possible.

2. *Establish a rapport through introductions*

- Introduce yourself and perhaps tell a little personal story or a little about your life. Specify how you want students to address you.
- Establish your credibility in relation to the course topic - relate your background and research.
- Have students introduce themselves and to share something either about themselves, where they are originally from, or why they chose the course - even in a large class, you can ask them to do this in small groups. Introductions give you another chance to learn students' names.

3. *Identify the value and importance of the introduced subject.*

- For some, this is the easiest part. What drew you to the field, what is exciting about the topic, what is current about it? Why should students spend a semester exploring this subject?

4. *Provide administrative information.*

- Hand out an informative, possibly artistic, user-friendly syllabus that includes the objectives for the class, your expectations around attendance and work, dates of scheduled exams, due dates of papers, and a reading list. Spend a few minutes describing what the books and readings listed are about and how they relate to the theme of the course. If the professor you are TA'ing for is responsible for handing out this information, consult with him or her to make sure that the office hours for TAs (if applicable) and contact information are included.
- Convey expectations regarding appropriate amounts of study time and homework assignments. Provide, in writing, policies regarding attendance, grading, late assignments, make-up exams, and explain the differences between academic dishonesty and legitimate collaboration. Many departments have detailed department-specific policies on academic dishonesty; make sure that you are aware of them so that you can share them with students. Again, if the professor is responsible for this information rather than you directly, ask her or him about it and make sure all TAs have the same information so that they can address students' questions.
- Maintain regular contact between professor(s) and TA(s). If there are several TAs leading recitations for a course, encourage the group to have regular meetings and / or summaries of what should be covered in each session to ensure that all TAs convey the same information to students. If you are the faculty member, you can distribute summaries to TAs, if you are the TA, you can suggest to the professor that the TAs put it together for the professor's review.

- Announce your office hours and location (then hold them without fail), the best way to contact you, and how quickly you will respond. It's absolutely fine to tell students that they should not expect an answer to their emails within the hour around the clock. 24 hours is a reasonable time for responses during the workweek, with the understanding that it may take longer to respond right before an exam when the number of requests has a tendency to spike. Let them know how you prefer to contact the class members. If you as a TAs don't have a private office to meet students in, or if your office is located far from "the hill", consider meeting students in a quiet space in the library. This is not an ideal solution, as some students do not like to be seen taking advantage of office hours, but it shows students that you are actively encouraging them to meet with you.

*5. Determine whether students are "on the same page" before you move on.*

- As faculty, we often want to relate so much material, that we forget to pause and take the pulse of the class before moving on. It is a good idea to end the content portion of each class five minutes early in order to summarize information, raise and answer questions, and preview the next class. On the first day, end class ten minutes early in order to pass out an evaluation card for students to provide informal feedback regarding the class. (e.g. Is there anything unclear?). Collect the cards and use them to transition to the beginning of the next class. Another version of this is to ask students to write a "One Minute Paper" where students write for one minute about their



thoughts on the topic or lingering questions. If you want to learn more about “one minute papers” and other quick assessment techniques, feel free to come and browse the CELT library (an annotated bibliography of the books we make available can be found on our website, at <http://celt.tufts.edu/?pid=47>)

- Assign homework and suggest an approach for the assigned reading. For example, ask students to keep in mind certain key points when completing their assignments, to connect their work to a current event, etc.

#### *6. Follow up on the First Class Meeting*

By following up with students right after the first class, you convey that you are proactive and you set a model that will enhance course satisfaction for you and your students. It is a good idea to review the students’ evaluations of the first class meeting, if you have done them, and attempt to discern any patterns to the comments. Then write an email to send to students. In the email, you can:

- Thank students for their comments on the evaluation.
- Address questions having implications for the entire class.
- Clarify any information that you feel was not clearly presented in class.
- Remind students of the assignment for the next class.
- Encourage students to contact you individually if they have questions regarding the course and the material presented. If you prefer to receive questions by email – or on the contrary only during office hours – make that explicit.
- Conclude with a statement emphasizing your enthusiasm about the semester and your subject matter.

7. *Be Enthusiastic!*

- Enthusiasm comes with confidence, excitement about the subject, a striving for excellence and a real interest and joy in teaching. Enthusiastic behavior includes facial expressions and smiles, attentiveness to students, movement away from the podium or chalkboard, and eye contact which is long enough to observe students' expressions. It involves vocal inflections to emphasize and de-emphasize material, and a willingness to listen to students and express interest in their contributions. Students can spot an unenthusiastic instructor very quickly, and may assume that, if the subject matter is not of interest to you the instructor, then it is probably of no interest to them either.

## 2. Encouraging Student Engagement

From the literature, we know that learning can be enhanced in an active environment. Frequent interaction between students and faculty can improve comprehension of the course material, and can also develop a shared responsibility for learning. These interactions can happen inside or outside class time, and they can be more or less formal. Here are some suggestions for encouraging faculty-student interaction:

**Arrive at class early and leave late.** Doing so can provide opportunities for interaction and for students to ask questions or express concerns.

**Move around.** How many conferences have you attended where the format is exactly the same for every session? Sometimes even small variations can keep students' interest as well as your own. For a change of pace once in a while, consider starting your class from a location other than the front of the classroom and invite students to consider an issue along with you in order to convey the expectation that learning is a joint experience. You can also consider beginning with a story or a recent news item that relates to the subject at hand.

**Consider how you will “hook” students on the topic.** Think about engaging ways to introduce course topics to students to grab their attention. You might share an anecdote, give a demonstration, raise a controversial topic, give a real world application, tie it to a current event, or a sure way to engage them is to relate the material to their lives.

**Prepare some questions in advance** and begin with questions that are relatively easy to respond to in order to get the conversation started. Another “starter” is to present hypothetical, problem solving, and brainstorming questions and encourage student involvement in a large class by having students

discuss questions in small groups or pairs. Another possible conversation starter is to ask someone in the class to summarize the last session as a way to begin the class.

**Encourage student involvement** by establishing expectations about participation and what that means in your particular course. Evaluating participation can be a very subjective process, so if you are using this as a part of a grade, you should try to be as clear as possible about your expectations. Some students are less likely to volunteer in front of a group for many good reasons (fear, language barriers, cultural differences, etc.). Because some students are less likely to raise their hand or volunteer in the large group, varying the type of participation possible is a good idea. Some of these students might engage in a smaller group format, or even through a blog, which allows them to formulate their thoughts before “speaking up.” Explicitly request and encourage questions to emphasize that you genuinely value your students’ input and thoughts. Clarify questions if you need to by saying “Do you mean that...?” or “I don’t understand the question, could you rephrase that?”. Listen intently to students’ comments rather than dismiss them. Nothing shuts down participation more quickly than a student feeling embarrassed. Add to the students’ ideas (“lateral thinking technique”) so students feel their thoughts are valued. Finally, address your answers to students’ questions to the whole class and verify whether you sufficiently have answered their questions. You can simply ask: “Did I cover that?” or “Does that make sense?”

**Encourage regular feedback** by stopping the discussion five minutes before the class is scheduled to conclude. Pass out note cards or the Minute Paper format (see assessment section) and ask that students write down what they felt was the most important

information they learned that day and any questions they may have lingering. At the beginning of the following class, respond to the students' questions. You can also use eye contact as a means of determining a students' comprehension of material. If a student offers a questioning look, either clarify your last statement, or ask the class whether or not they are following you.

**If the class size permits, consider not returning tests and quizzes in class.** Instead, encourage students to pick up their assessments during your office hours. This provides an opportunity for informal discussion with your students. It also enables you to offer suggestions to students that may have done poorly on the test (e.g. clarification of material, recommendation to form study groups, meet with a tutor). This option is only feasible if the class size is small enough for you to have time to meet with all students individually, and if you are certain that they do not have scheduling conflicts during your office hours.

If you return student work in class, save it for the end of the class period in order to avoid having students focus on the feedback and grades received instead of actively engaging in class.

Last but not least, a few words about the basics of **public speaking**. Remember to speak clearly and slowly, at a volume that is audible to everyone in the room – even those furthest away from you. To keep the listeners engaged, avoid monotones and try instead to vary the tone of your voice and to introduce breaks. Look around the room and establish eye contact with as many students as you can. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) offers consultations on public speaking:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/speaking/>

### 3. Maintaining a Supportive Learning Environment

Supportive learning environments can validate the presence of individuals and encourage participation and involvement. No one likes to fail, and unfortunately it is often the students who most need help who are afraid to ask for it. The earlier in the semester you identify problem areas, the more likely it is that you and the students will be successful in resolving them.

1. *Be constructive when reviewing student papers and exams.*

We all like to do well. Congratulate students who did well. Offer help to those students who did not do as well and extend an invitation to come and talk and get help with study strategies. As a reminder that learning is the goal, consider allowing students to rewrite papers as a means of coaching students who are still learning the writing process.

2. *Think of ways to help students who are having difficulty in the course:*

- You may need to reach out to students who would benefit from advice and guidance but do not seek it out.
- Advise students to form small study groups – this not only helps to reinforce topics covered in class, but has the added benefit of contributing to a positive class climate.
- Advise students who need it to work with a tutor. At Tufts, the Academic Resource Center is available to support students who need help (see contact information at the end of this handbook).
- If you are worried about a student, consult the guide developed by the counseling center (see contact information at the end of this handbook) for advice on how best to deal

with the situation. You will also find helpful information under 'Tips for dealing with students'.

3. Make yourself available outside of class. There are multiple ways that you can make this happen, so be creative and find what works for you.

- Make yourself available in your office during certain office hours.
- If feasible in your department, designate a room in your building as a “drop-in” room (less intimidating than a TA’s or professor’s office).
- If preferred, simply announce you will be checking email and responding during your office hours.
- Set up an on-line course “chat room”
- Offer a regular weekly extra meeting.
- Pass around a sign-up sheet during the first class. Those students interested in an additional opportunity to learn and provide feedback may sign up. The meeting time is always the same and you make it clear that this not intended for extra credit.

*2. Offer review sessions outside of class.*

Before the first exam, consider holding an evening review session. It may be required for freshmen and optional for others. If essays are part of your upcoming assessment, spend a few minutes describing how best to answer an essay question and provide old essay exams for students to read and interpret. This will help them to think more critically and respond with greater precision when writing their essays. It might also help you to develop a rubric for evaluating student work.

5. *Post past exams on a class website.*

Past exams can provide students with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the format, level of detail, number of *questions*, your style, etc. Posting is important because it enables all students to have the same opportunity to review them, and it can give students for whom English is not their first language a more even opportunity for review.

6. *Provide non-verbal encouragement.*

There are several ways of encouraging such an encouraging such an environment that do not involve the spoken word. Maintain eye contact with students, move around the room. It is important that you be animated and expressive in your presentation. Smile, nod and acknowledge students contributions.

7. *Educate students about other Tufts resources*

To both encourage student engagement and maintain a supportive learning environment, consider integrating library research into your syllabus. Tisch librarians, all of whom have liaison responsibilities to teaching departments, can work with you to design meaningful assignments that will direct students away from Wikipedia and Google and towards academic resources befitting university-level research. In addition to teaching students about resources, Tisch librarians also teach systematic search techniques and how to evaluate and think critically about information. Their contact information is provided at the end of this handbook.



#### 4. Assessing Student Learning

Why do we give students quizzes, exams, tests? There are two uses for assessment in educational settings:

**Summative assessment** (“Assessment of Learning”) is generally carried out at the end of a course or project. In an educational setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign students a course grade, and often a scaled grading system enabling the teacher to differentiate students will be used;

**Formative assessment** (“Assessment for Learning”) is generally carried out throughout a course or project. It is used to aid learning in that it helps the student and teacher to find out what the student knows so that the teacher can address any areas of weakness or misconceptions in subsequent lessons. The purpose of formative assessment is to see if students have mastered a given concept and can typically be assigned a pass/fail grade (if used for grading purposes).

Whatever the use, when constructing assessments you should keep in mind your learning objectives for the course. Questions should directly be linked to a learning outcome. If you do not find the information you are looking for here, CELT has a lending library with several volumes on assessment

(<http://celt.tufts.edu/?pid=47>) You can also email us at: [celt@tufts.edu](mailto:celt@tufts.edu)

Students are very sensitive to grades and the criteria on which they are based: “Will this be on the test? How much does the quiz count toward the final grade? Do you consider attendance

and participation?” Grading is one of the most difficult jobs in teaching but one of the most important and takes time and careful thought.

Now, let’s review some different assessment formats, starting with the traditional multiple-choice and open-ended written assessments, and ending with assessment formats more suited for formative assessment (e.g., minute paper, muddiest point, student surveys).

*i. Multiple-choice questions*

It’s advisable not to write the entire test in one day, but rather to keep note cards and write a question or two after each class. With the material fresh in your mind, the test will be more apt to reflect your teaching emphases. You may also want to consider developing questions that resemble miniature “cases” in order to assess more than simple recall (e.g. present graphs or a small collection of data and then ask questions based on the presented material).

Here are some guidelines for formulating question stems (lead-in information) and answer choices:

- The item stem should be presented clearly and formulate a problem. Avoid extra language in the stem. It adds to a student’s reading time, cuts down the number of questions on the test, and reduces its reliability. Write the correct answer before creating distracters. This enables you to pay attention to designing one clearly correct answer.
- Questions posed in negative form are often misread by students.
- Do not use double negatives and use negatives sparingly. If they are used, underline or place the negative words in

capital letters. All answer options (correct answer and distracters) should be of approximately the same length and grammatical structure, i.e. if the stem ends with “an” and only one answer option starts with a vowel, that’s a give-away!

- Avoid: “All of the above” (if you eliminate one distracter, then this response is eliminated also), and “None of the above” (only use it if you are absolutely certain that there is only one correct answer). If used, it should be the correct response about 25% of the time in tests having four response options to their questions.
- Questions should stand on their own. Do not design questions that depend on knowing the answers to others on the test. Make sure information provided in some items does not give clues to answers on other questions.
- Limit the number of answer options to five. The most popular number is four. Randomize the placement of the correct answer (e.g. don’t tend to make the correct answer “C”). Placing responses in alphabetical order will tend to randomize the responses.

After you’ve administered the multiple-choice questions and rated student responses, it’s a good idea to perform a quick test-item analysis to determine the difficulty level of each question and the suitability of your distracter answer options. This is especially important if you plan to use the same questions again in subsequent classes. You can determine question item difficulty by the percentage of students who answered a question correctly. If you use a four option response, there is a 25% chance of guessing the question correctly, so items answered

correctly by less than 30% of students are too hard and those answered correctly by more than 70% are too easy and should be rewritten. If no one chooses a particular distracter, rewrite that option before using the question another time. On the other hand, if many students chose one particular distracter, it likely denotes a common misconception and you should take this into account when you teach the course the next time.

*i. Short Answer and Essay Assignments*

Keep in mind what processes you want measured (e.g. synthesis, analysis, mastery of concepts, critical thinking, original idea generation, application of knowledge to a real-world situation). Here are a few things to keep in mind as you write the assignment:

- Be mindful of tailoring the prompt to the level of the student writer (e.g. freshman or upperclassman). Make sure to clearly convey your expectations, especially if you are teaching younger students or introductory courses where students are not yet familiar with the conventions of the discipline.
- Be precise when choosing the verb command in the prompt. Some commands such as discuss, consider, examine, and explore can be confusing, as they do not point to a specific task. Design the prompt so it is specific enough to invite the degree of detail that you want in the answer.
- Sequence the assignment (e.g. annotated bibliography, outline, first draft, second draft, final version) in order for students to write a draft and receive feedback and then make revisions before handing in the final paper.
- Indicate the mode (e.g. description, narration, or analysis) and format (e.g. essay, memo) for the assignment.

- If research is required, provide research instructions (e.g. use variety of sources or specific ones).
- Provide contextual information so students' responses will be precise.
- Define the audience for the paper (e.g. the whole class). Otherwise, if students believe only the instructor is the reader, they may not be apt to provide detailed explanation.
- Be clear about the requirements of the paper (e.g. due date, how many sources are required, and length of the paper).
- And here are a few things to consider when scheduling assignments in order to help students manage their time and produce the best work they can:
  - Allow adequate time for students to complete the various writing processes (pre-write, writing, revisions).
  - On the day that a major paper is due, do not require a reading assignment to be due as well.
  - Consider assigning Monday due dates for written assignments so you will have the weekend free and they will have the weekend to complete the assignment. Also, keep due dates consistent to enable planning.
  - Consider sequencing assignments that allow the students to explore the course material and to move through increasingly complex thinking and writing skills.

Finally, it is important to not only think through how you will rate and grade an assessment, but also to be explicit with your students about it. No doubt you will at one point or another (probably more than you would wish!) encounter a student who is not satisfied with the grade you have assigned, and who will ask

you to justify it. Here are a few tips on defining your evaluation criteria and grading:

- Provide an explanation for how you are weighting the assignment with respect to quality of writing and the assignment's content.
- Include a rubric with the assignment to provide grading guidelines to the student and a checklist to ensure that the assignment has properly been completed. Do not make it so specific that students merely follow the checklist and do not integrate their ideas into a structure that is more organically discovered.
- Before formally grading the essays, skim over several essays to see if the scoring rubric requires modification.
- Grade essays anonymously. In order to avoid a "halo effect", by which your scoring is influenced by a student's prior performance, request students to put their identifying information (e.g., name or student ID number) on the back of their exams so accidental identification is not made while grading.
- Grade each question separately. If students were asked to respond to several short answer to essay prompts, grade the responses to each prompt separately to avoid student performance on one question to influence your scoring of that student's answer to another prompt, and to make it easier for the grader to keep in mind one answer key at a time. This also will help prevent a possible tendency for the grader to assign lower scores to later exams if the grader becomes bored or tired.
- Provide students an explanation for their grade. Students deserve to know the reasons for receiving a particular grade

(e.g., elements that may have been omitted or the number of points lost).

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iii. *Quick Formative Assessments*

If you use these formative assessments to get ongoing feedback and information about student learning and teaching effectiveness, you can let students respond anonymously. Incorporate feedback into your subsequent classes so that students will know that you value their input and take their comments seriously.

- **Minute Paper.** Set aside two to five minutes of class time to ask students to respond to two questions: “What is the most important thing you learned? And “What important question(s) remain unanswered?” If your focus is on prior homework, ask the questions at the beginning of class. If it concerns the day’s lecture, reserve the assignment for the conclusion of class. Specify whether you want responses to be in phrases, short sentences, etc.
- **Muddiest Point.** Ask students to respond to the question “What is the muddiest point in this lecture / this assigned reading /...?” and be explicit about what you want feedback on (e.g. a specific segment of the lecture or homework). A few minutes before the end of class, pass out slips of paper or index cards for the students to write their responses on. Let them know how much time to spend on the assignment and either stand by the door and have them hand their cards to you on their way out or leave a “muddy point” collection box by the door and have them drop them in on their way out. Address students’ feedback during the next class.
- **One-Sentence Summary.** Ask students to answer the question “Who does what to whom, when, where, how, and why?”

(WDWWWWHW) about a specific topic covered in class and have them put the **information** into a sentence in order to provide a summarization. Practice the exercise yourself first and note how long it takes you to complete it. Assign it to the students with clear instructions and allow them twice as much time to complete as it took you.

- **Directed Paraphrase.** Ask students to take a few minutes to describe a concept for a lay audience and hand in their response at the end of class.
- **Concept Map.** Provide students with a brief explanation of concept mapping (nodes represent concepts and lines represent relationships) and ask students to draw a concept map exhibiting the relationship between concepts covered in a specific class. You can also use software available through UIT Academic Technology for students to create electronic concept maps; check out the resource guide at the end of this handbook for more information.
- **Student survey.** It is common to ask students for feedback on the course at the end of the semester – but asking for feedback mid-term so that there is time to respond to the feedback and make modifications if necessary is even more helpful! Sample forms for soliciting student feedback can be found on the CELT website: <http://celt.tufts.edu/?pid=81>



## 5. Facilitating Discussions

Discussions differ from lectures in many ways. A major difference is that the students can be more active and that there can be more personal contact. Good discussions give students an opportunity to formulate principles in their own words and to suggest applications of these principles; they help students become aware of and define problems implied in readings and lectures; they can also increase students' sensitivity to other point of view and alternative explanations. Discussions are a way of developing student critical analysis skills by posing thoughtful questions.

Before the session meets, decide what kind of discussion is most useful to your class. Is there a certain topic to be discussed? Does the group have to reach a conclusion or come to an agreement? Is there subject matter that must be learned? Is the class a forum for expressing and comparing views? Is it important that students carefully analyze the topic or that they learn certain skills? Once you have decided what kind of discussion you want, **tell the students**. It is easier for everyone if the goals for the class are clearly stated.

There are a number of techniques you can use in opening up discussion. The most obvious is to draw upon students' questions and comments and to enlarge upon their remarks. What do you do if the subject matter is new and your students are too? You may want to write several statements or questions on the board so that as students walk in they can be thinking about the topic.

When you start a discussion with a question, ask open-ended questions which will get students thinking about relationships, applications, consequences, and contingencies – rather than merely the facts. You'll want to ask your students the sorts of questions that will draw them out and actively involve them, and

you will also want to encourage your students **to ask questions of one another**. Most importantly, you want to convey to your students that their ideas are valued and welcomed.

i. *Techniques to facilitate discussion*

- If you can't get a discussion started, ask a question that relates to their experience - "do you know anyone who has been bullied?" this provides a safe environment for students to begin to talk about their experiences without fear of being wrong
- If one or two students constantly monopolize the floor you may want to try one of these approaches. You can throw their comment back to the class to get someone else to answer or you can acknowledge the comments and offer an outlet (those ideas deserve a lot of time and maybe we can discuss them after class).
- If there is a lull in the discussion relax. Every conversation needs a chance to pause and digest what is heard. This also gives students who are more reflective a chance to take some time to think about their answers and respond.
- If students are talking only to you and not each other you can help students by leading with your eyes, looking occasionally at others in the room rather than answers.
- If there are students who never talk, talk to them after class to see if they are shy, confused, or turned off. Try think/pair/share techniques to give students time to think about their answers and to talk with a fellow student before answering.

However, be careful you don't embarrass a student into participating.

## **6. Using Instructional Technology**

There are many new and exciting technologies available for classroom use. Using instructional technology can strengthen the learning by stimulating student interest and actively engaging them in the learning process. However, like any new idea, care must be given in deciding what media to use and when to use it.

Here are some questions to ask as you consider incorporating technology into your classroom.

- How does the technology advance the learning objectives for this class?
- Would the information be more effective presented in another way?
- Is there a strong possibility that ideas and new thinking will be generated?
- Will the technology enhance the quality of discussion, or increase students' ability to apply and use information?
- Am I comfortable with the technology?
- Do I have a backup plan for unforeseen technology glitches?

With careful planning and use, instructional technologies can provide new and unique ways to present material and engage students.

## **7. Refining your teaching philosophy statement**

If you are planning to apply for an academic job, you will most likely be asked to submit a teaching philosophy statement in

addition to a description of your research interests. Take advantage of your time as a teaching assistant to think over and refine your statement.

What should it contain? Think about your own career as a student and a teacher: what makes for effective teaching? What do you think “good teaching” should look like? Try to come up with concrete examples and experiences to illustrate your points. If you feel that you do not have much teaching experience to draw from, use your extensive experience as a student!

What should it look like? Teaching philosophy statements need not be very long, 1-2 pages are sufficient. You will be asked to submit a full academic vita in addition to your statement, so do not use the latter to cram in all the information from the former.

How do you know if it’s good? It’s important to do some research about the institution you are applying to: there are not good and bad teaching philosophies as much as there are good and bad fits between an individual’s philosophy and that of an institution! As with any important document, try to get a friend or colleague to review it and provide critical feedback.

***Part III: Tips for dealing with students***

## 1. Working with student mental health issues

Tips from Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service

### What to look for

The following list identifies symptoms, which, *especially if repeated or severe*, may suggest that the student is distressed and would benefit from assistance.

#### Behavior or Appearance

- Depressed or lethargic mood
- Deterioration in personal hygiene or dress
- Unusually disruptive behavior
- Strange or bizarre behavior indicating loss of contact with reality
- Exaggerated emotional responses obviously inappropriate to the situation (e.g., unexplained crying or outbursts of anger, unusual irritability)
- Expressions of apathy or feeling worthless
- References to feelings of helplessness or hopelessness (verbal or in an assignment)

References to suicide or homicide: All such references need to be taken seriously. A judgment about the seriousness of the suicidal thought or gesture should not be made without consultation with a professional counselor.

### When is it an emergency?

If a student mentions suicide intention or a plan, an immediate response is critical.

An emergency situation may include any of the following behaviors:

- Reference to suicidal intentions, suicide plans, or recent suicide attempts
- Imminent threats or aggressive behavior towards others
- Incoherent or disjointed speech
- Loss of contact with consensual reality, including hallucinations and delusions

- Extreme panic

#### **What to do in an emergency**

- Do not leave the student alone.
- During business hours (M – F; 9am-5pm), call CMHS at x73360
- Evenings/weekends: Call TUPD at x73030 and ask to have the on-call counselor paged. Give the police your name, the name of the student in question, your phone number, and your location.

#### **When it's not an emergency, what can you do to help?**

- **Talk** with the student in private when both of you have the time and are not rushed or preoccupied. If you have initiated the contact, express your concern in behavioral, non-judgmental terms.
- **Listen** to thoughts and feelings in a sensitive, non-threatening way.
- **Give hope**, and help a student realize there are options. Suggest resources: friends, family, clergy, or professionals on campus. Refer students to the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs or to CMHS. Point out to students that: (1) help is available, (2) we all need help at some point or another, and (3) seeking help when needed is a sign of wisdom. Leave the option open, except in emergencies, for the student to accept or refuse counseling.
- Follow-up with the student later to see how they are doing and whether they followed up with a referral you suggested.
- Consult: You can always consult with your Department Head, DOSA, or CMHS. Don't worry alone!

#### **How to make an appointment at CMHS**

- By phone at 617-627-3360 or in person at 120 Curtis Street.
- During the school year CMHS is open weekdays, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

***A note about confidentiality***

People often have a natural interest in whether someone they referred to counseling has come in and how they are doing. However, ethical and legal mandates dictate that mental health counselors keep all information related to their clients confidential. We do encourage students to follow up with the person who referred them.



## 2. When students cheat

Per the 2006 faculty vote, professors and instructors at Tufts are required to report all incidents of academic misconduct to the Dean of Student Affairs. Detailed policies are described in the Academic Integrity Handbook

(<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/publicationsandwebsites>)

*Academic misconduct includes:*

- Cheating on an exam or violating exam policies (e.g., accessing unauthorized materials during an exam, “texting” on a cell phone during an exam).
- Submitting another’s academic work as one’s own. Buying, stealing, or “borrowing” a paper or lab report written by someone else.
- Plagiarism. Failure to adequately cite, document, or paraphrase sources of incorporated text, even if the student claims carelessness, ignorance, or no intent to deceive.
- Inappropriate collaboration on graded work, including lab reports, take-home exams, papers, problem sets, projects, and homework assignments.

*Why do students cheat?*

- Poor time management, which results in last-minute panic.
- They do not realize they are committing plagiarism or collaborating inappropriately.
- They think others are doing it, so they need to cheat to keep up with the competition.
- They think no one cares. They think the rules are not actually enforced.
- They think that high standards do not apply to low-stakes assignments.
- They think they cannot live up to the standards set by a favorite professor.

*If you catch cheating or suspect academic dishonesty . . .*

- Gather the evidence immediately. Keep formal notes on dates, times, and your observations. Inform the professor, a faculty advisor, or department chair immediately.
- *Always maintain the student's confidentiality:* never make an accusation in front of other students and don't mention the student's name to colleagues (except, of course, to the professor teaching the class or to the Dean of Students).
- Calmly inform the student that you suspect academic misconduct and have referred the incident to the Dean of Students. Do this by email, over the phone, or in a private place where other students cannot overhear.
- If you are not sure what to do, or if you are not sure if the student's actions constitute academic misconduct, contact the Dean of Student Affairs office for guidance.

*Use the university's student judicial process*

- Submit evidence of cheating or a description of the incident to Veronica Carter, the Judicial Affairs Officer at the Dean of Student Affairs Office: 627-2000 or [veronica.carter@tufts.edu](mailto:veronica.carter@tufts.edu)
- The dean's office will conduct an investigation, and if academic misconduct is found, will determine a disciplinary consequence. If disciplinary action is taken, you will grade the student's work according to the grading guidelines for academic misconduct.
- The student may NOT drop your class while an investigation is pending! Students found responsible for academic misconduct have a right to continue in the course, unless they are immediately suspended or expelled.

### 3. Upholding Academic Integrity

#### *Know your department's policies and procedures*

- Your department may have policies in place to prevent some forms of academic misconduct. Learn your department's guidelines or “best practices” for giving exams, grading exams, re-grading policies, student collaboration, and assigning writing.
- If you are TA'ing for a professor, talk to the professor about ways to prevent academic misconduct in the course and what to do if a student is caught cheating.

#### *Anticipate problems*

- Anticipate ways that students could engage in academic misconduct in your class, and devise rules and procedures to prevent it from happening.
- Be aware that various electronic gadgets, such as iPods and cell phones, can be used to cheat on an exam, as can good-old-fashioned crib notes hidden in a bulky winter coat.
- Modify exams and assignments to make them cheat-proof. *Never give the identical exam semester after semester, or year after year!*

#### *Communicate with your students*

- Include warnings about cheating, inappropriate collaboration, and/or plagiarism in your syllabus or on a handout. Remind students that you are required to report all suspicions of academic misconduct to the Dean of Student Affairs.
- Repeat your rules in class, especially before exams, labs, or when assigning papers.
- Clarify your expectations for each assignment. If you assign group projects or labs, carefully delineate appropriate collaboration and inappropriate collaboration.
- Hold a class discussion about the importance of academic integrity and research ethics in your field or discipline.

- **IMPORTANT:** Offer to answer questions students may have about whether or not they are within the rules. For example, offer to answer questions about appropriate citation on drafts of assigned papers. Students should feel comfortable approaching you for clarification about whether they are meeting your expectations for the assignment.

*Reduce pressure on students without lowering standards*

- Assign several short papers due at various times over the semester instead of one long paper due at the end of the term.
- Devise a late-paper policy, and put it on your syllabus. For example, your policy may allow late papers, but will reduce the grade by so many points for each day the assignment is late. Or, you may allow students to submit one paper late during the term, no questions asked.
- If you give multiple quizzes and tests, consider a policy that allows students to drop their lowest test grade. Alternatively, you may allow students to rewrite one paper for a (potentially) higher grade.
- If you assign take-home exams, be sure that you are measuring application of knowledge and students ability to critically think, not the recitation of facts and information from class notes. Be clear about the parameters of the assignment – can students use class notes, the text, and other resources on the internet. Knowing that students will probably contact each other, be sure that you specify that every answer must be unique. If you are not comfortable in devising such an exam, then do not assign a take home.
- Allow your students to use Turnitin.com to scan their papers for accidental plagiarism before they submit the final version of the paper to you for a grade.

#### **4. Privacy of Student Records**

Federal law provides for the confidentiality of student records. Each instructor must take care that student records are not revealed to anyone other than the student. If you post grades of any kind, be certain to establish a special ID number for each student (perhaps the last four digits of their Tufts ID). If using electronic grade book, be sure to set the privacy settings so that a student may only see their grades. In accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) access to student educational records are available to the student and the right to limit or prevent their disclosure to third parties. Further information is available at:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/publicationsandwebsites/FERPA.pdf>

***Part IV: Policies and contact information***

## **1. Important University Policies**

There are a number of University Policies that you should be aware of as a Teaching Assistant. Here is a brief description, with links to the full policies on-line:

### **Academic Integrity**

If you have not had a chance to explore the Tufts policy on academic integrity in your role of student, it is a good idea to review it in your capacity of TA. The most up-to-date version of the Academic Integrity booklet can be found on-line at:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/publicationsandwebsites/AcademicIntegrity09-10.pdf>

### **Equal Opportunity**

“Tufts University is committed to the fundamental principle of equal opportunity and equal treatment for every prospective and current employee and student. It is the policy of the University not to discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, age, religion, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or status as a veteran, in the administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, employment policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic or other university-sponsored programs.”

These policies are reaffirmed annually by President Anthony P. Monaco in a signed statement that can be found on the Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action website at

<http://www.tufts.edu/oeo/non-discrpolicy.html>

## **Grading policy**

Grading policies are department and program specific, so we cannot provide a comprehensive review here. Make sure that you are informed of your course's grading policy before you start teaching. Chances are that no matter what course you TA for, at least one student will have questions about the grade that they receive. Under "Teaching Tips" we discuss possible ways of dealing with disgruntled students.

## **Plagiarism**

In addition to the section devoted to Academic Integrity in this booklet, you will find many resources related to plagiarism on the website maintained by the Academic Resource Center (ARC), including descriptions of different forms of plagiarism, tips for helping students prevent "accidental" plagiarism, and a self-quiz to test your own knowledge of what is and what is not considered plagiarism. All these resources can be found here:

<http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/>

## **(Amorous) relationships with students**

In your role as Teaching Assistant, you are subject to the same university policy on dating as faculty members and other staff and instructional personnel, no matter whether your students are undergraduates or fellow graduate students. The policy applies as long as you are in a position of power over the student. If a romantic interest develops, the least you must do is to wait until the end of the semester (until grades have been submitted!) or find a way to teach a different group of students. Remember however that if there is a possibility that you will be in a position of power again in the future (TA another class, be



asked for a letter of recommendation, etc.), a relationship should be avoided.

Here is what the policy states:

“Tufts University seeks to maintain a professional educational environment. Actions of faculty members and academic administrators that are unprofessional or appear to be unprofessional are inconsistent with the university's educational mission. It is essential that those in a position of authority not abuse, nor appear to abuse, the power with which they are entrusted. Faculty members and academic administrators exercise power over students, whether by teaching, grading, evaluating, or making recommendations for their further studies or their future employment. Amorous, dating, or sexual relationships between faculty members, academic administrators, and students are impermissible when the faculty members and academic administrators have professional responsibility for the student. Voluntary consent by the student in such a relationship is suspect, given the fundamental nature of the relationship. Moreover, other students may be affected by such behavior, because it places the faculty member and academic administrator in a position to favor or advance one student's interest to the potential detriment of others. Therefore, it is a violation of university policy for a faculty member or academic administrator to engage in an amorous, dating, or sexual relationship with a student whom he/she instructs, evaluates, supervises, or advises, or over whom he/she is in a position to exercise

authority in any way.”

(see <http://www.tufts.edu/oeo/consensualrel.html> for this text  
and further information on the topic)

## 2. Important Contact Information

### Academic Resource Center

Website: <http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/>  
Email: [arctutoring@ase.tufts.edu](mailto:arctutoring@ase.tufts.edu)  
Main Phone: (617) 627-4345  
Fax: (617) 627-3971

### UIT Educational and Scholarly Technology Services (ESTS)

Website: <http://uit.tufts.edu/at/>

### Trunk Course Management

Website: <http://trunk.tufts.edu/>

### Counseling & Mental Health Services, Medford campus

Website: <http://ase.tufts.edu/counseling/>  
Main Phone: (617) 627-3360  
Emergency phone: (617) 627- 3030

The counseling center offers *Students in Distress: A Guide for Faculty, Staff and TAs* which can be downloaded from their website (<http://ase.tufts.edu/counseling/concerned.htm>)

### Disability Services

Website: <http://uss.tufts.edu/arc/disability/index.asp>  
Main Email: [disability.services@tufts.edu](mailto:disability.services@tufts.edu)  
Main Phone: (617) 627-4539  
Fax: (617) 627-3971

**Office of Institutional Diversity**

Website: <http://oid.diversity.tufts.edu/>  
Phone: (617) 627-3298  
Fax: (617) 627-3150

**Office of Equal Opportunity**

Website: <http://www.tufts.edu/oeo/>  
Phone: (617) 627-3298  
TTY: (617) 627-3370

**Graduate Institute for Teaching**

Website: <http://gs.as.tufts.edu/teaching/gift/index.htm>  
Email: [GIFT@tufts.edu](mailto:GIFT@tufts.edu)

**Tisch Library**

Website: [www.library.tufts.edu/tisch](http://www.library.tufts.edu/tisch)  
Phone: (617) 627-3460

**Tufts Police**

Website: <http://publicsafety.tufts.edu/police/>  
Main Phone: (617) 627-3030

**Student Affairs**

Website: <http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/>  
Main Phone: (617) 627-3158

An administrator from the Division is on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

## **Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT)**

Website: <http://celt.tufts.edu>

Email: [celt@tufts.edu](mailto:celt@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-4000

### **Undergraduate Academic Deans**

Each undergraduate is assigned to a dean who helps the student with questions and issues relating to academic and intellectual direction, academic difficulty, course work, extended absence from class, choice of major, change of advisor, and leave of absence, among other things. If you have concerns about a student, the first person to contact is that student's dean.

**Engineering** undergrads: Kim Knox

Email: [Kim.Knox@tufts.edu](mailto:Kim.Knox@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-2000

**Arts & Sciences** undergrads with last names

**A - E** Jean Herbert

Email: [Jean.Herbert@tufts.edu](mailto:Jean.Herbert@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-2000

**F - K** Carol Baffi-Dugan

Email: [Carol.Baffi-Dugan@tufts.edu](mailto:Carol.Baffi-Dugan@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-2000

**L - Ri** Karen Garret Gould

Email: [Karen.Gould@tufts.edu](mailto:Karen.Gould@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-2000

**Last names Rj - Z:** Jeanne Dillon

Email: [Jeanne.Dillon@tufts.edu](mailto:Jeanne.Dillon@tufts.edu)

Main Phone: (617) 627-2000

### **Special undergraduate populations assigned to specific deans:**

**Jean Herbert:** REAL Program (Resumed Education for Adult Learners); Initial Contact for new Transfer Students

**Carol Baffi-Dugan:** Post-Bac Program; Pre-Health Dual-Degree Programs

**Jeanne Dillon:** NEC/SMFA Adviser; Students returning after many years