

TEACHING ASSISTANT HANDBOOK



Department of Classics
Florida State University
2019/20

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I) Introduction

Graduate students who receive funding from the Department of Classics as a Teaching Assistant are usually funded for one of three positions: Instructor (the lead teacher of a course), Grader in a class taught by a faculty member, or Research Assistant assigned to help a faculty member (or to work in the main office). See section III below for the description and responsibilities of each position.

One of the missions of the Department of Classics is the training of graduate students to become effective teachers. In fulfillment of this mission, a person selected as a TA serves as a Grader under the supervision of a faculty member during the first year, takes the FLE5810: *Teaching Classics* course in the spring, and is eligible for placement in a classroom as an Instructor in his/her second year after achieving 18 graduate credit hours in Classics.

II) Description of Teaching Assistantship from the Graduate Student Handbook of the Department of Classics: Section VIII 'Financial Assistance'

TAs normally receive a stipend plus a tuition waiver for 9 to 12 hours, depending on their residence status (in-state or out-of-state). These waivers, however, do not cover certain required fees.

In return for this support assistants receive an appointment requiring an average of ten to twenty hours of work per week for the department. First-time applicants to the department's graduate programs are automatically considered for assistantship support and normally serve as Graders assisting instructors of large lecture courses.

Continuing students must reapply for funding each year. In early January, they will receive an email, from the DGS, informing them of the deadline by which they have to submit the Financial Request Form. On this form, they will specify for which semesters they would like to apply for funding, including the summer availability, and which courses they would like to teach in the following year. While every effort is made to provide students with their first choice of teaching, this is not always possible given scheduling and personnel constraints. Normally returning students teach their own sections of Latin, Mythology, Debates, or other classical civilization courses. Other assignments may include research assistantships or departmental library coordinator.

Teaching assistants who are assigned to be Instructors must already have taken a minimum of 18 hours of graduate coursework in Classics. In addition, all graduate students must attend the University's Program for Instructional Excellence (PIE) during Orientation Week before their first semester as graduate students at FSU, and obtain a certificate of attendance. They must also take, in their first year of study, FLE5810: *Teaching Classics*, the departmental course designed to prepare graduate students for their role as teachers of undergraduates. Students must achieve an 'S' grade in FLE5810 to be eligible for an appointment as an Instructor.

The department strives to fund as many of its graduate students as possible, but assistantships are limited in number and are awarded on a competitive basis. Retention of an assistantship depends on satisfactory academic progress towards degree and satisfactory performance of assigned duties.

Support for M.A. students is normally limited to two years. Renewal beyond the second M.A. year depends on satisfactory academic progress, availability of funding, and departmental needs. The length of support for Ph.D. students will depend on several factors. Students entering with an M.A. should expect to receive, assuming satisfactory academic progress, up to five years of assistantship support. Students entering with only a B.A. should expect to receive up to seven years of assistantship support. Renewal beyond those limits requires a petition from the student which shows a clear timeline of completion, and depends on satisfactory academic progress, availability of funding, and departmental needs.

III) Teaching Assistant Positions and Responsibilities

There are three different types of assistantships that graduate students may be granted. The essential definitions of each type are as follows:

- a) **Instructor:** The graduate student is given primary responsibility for a particular section of a course
- b) **Grader:** The graduate student is assigned grading duties under the supervision of a faculty member
- c) **Research Assistant:** The graduate student aids a faculty member in his/her research or performs departmental service (helping in the main office, assisting in excavation archives, slide library, Thompson Library, etc.)

The tables provided on the following pages describe the qualifications, responsibilities, and rights linked to each of the three assistantships listed above.

| 3a. Instructor | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Qualifications</i> | <i>Responsibilities</i> | <i>Rights</i> |
| <p>At least 18 hours of graduate work in Classics</p> <p>One year of teaching experience as a Grader in Classics</p> <p>Successful Completion of FLE5810 <i>Teaching In Classics</i> (Receiving an ‘S’ grade)</p> | <p>Full classroom responsibility</p> <p>Write the syllabus and all assignments for the class he or she teaches in accordance with course guidelines</p> <p>Be familiar with the University’s teaching policies</p> <p>Grade and return exams and papers no more than two weeks after the initial due date</p> <p>Inform the TA Supervisor if he or she encounters circumstances which impede their best performance in the classroom</p> <p>Communicate to the TA Supervisor <u>before</u> canceling class</p> <p>Arrange a substitute when necessary and inform the TA Supervisor the substitution is taking place</p> <p>Hold office hours (at least two per week)</p> <p>Answer all emails from the TA Supervisor, Director of Graduate Studies, and the Department Chair within 24 hours</p> | <p>To receive notice of his or her teaching assignment before the end of the preceding term</p> <p>To be notified as soon as feasible of any changes in his or her teaching schedule or assignment</p> <p>To receive feedback on any teaching observation within a week</p> <p>To discuss with the TA Supervisor, the Director of Graduate Studies, or the Department Chair if he or she has any concerns about their work</p> |

| 3b. Grader | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Qualifications</i> | <i>Responsibilities</i> | <i>Rights</i> |
| Bachelor's Degree in any major, as long as at least 12 hours were taken in Classics courses at the junior or senior level | Complete 20 hours (on average) of work per week as specified by the supervisor | To receive notice of his or her teaching assignment before the end of the preceding term |
| | Grade major assignments in accordance with the supervisor's guidelines | To be notified as soon as feasible of any changes in his or her teaching assignment |
| | Return major assignments in the time frame specified by the Supervisor | To not devote more than 20 hours per week (on average) to his or her responsibilities as a grader |
| | Prepare the room before lecture if technology is needed | To receive specific grading guidelines from the supervisor for every assignment |
| | Attend all lectures and inform the supervisor if he/she will not be able to attend a lecture | To deliver one to two lectures for the course and receive feedback each semester, chosen in consultation with the supervisor |
| | Assist the supervisor in taking attendance and proctoring examinations when required | To seek help or advice from the supervisor if he or she has difficulties meeting the grading deadlines |
| | Bring any problems arising with students to the attention of the supervisor immediately | To discuss with the TA Supervisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or the Chair of the Department if he or she has any concerns about their work with the supervisor |
| | Apply the policies and directions of the supervisor when interacting with students | |
| | Offer office hours (at least one per week) in coordination with the supervisor | |
| | Respond to all emails from the supervisor within 24 hours | |

| 3c. Research Assistant | | |
|---|--|---|
| <i>Qualifications</i> | <i>Responsibilities</i> | <i>Rights</i> |
| Bachelor's degree in any major, as long as at least 12 hours were taken in Classics at the junior or senior level | <p>To devote no more than 20 hours per week (on average) to assigned tasks</p> <p>To complete assigned work within a timely fashion</p> <p>To communicate with the professor if he or she is not able to complete a specific task or meet a deadline</p> <p>To clarify with the professor where and when he or she should work on the assigned tasks</p> <p>To respond to all emails from the supervisor within 24 hours</p> | <p>To devote no more than 20 hours per week (on average) to assigned tasks</p> <p>To receive specific guidelines from the supervisor for each assignment</p> <p>To discuss with the TA Supervisor, Director of Graduate Studies, or the Chair of the Department if he or she has concerns about working with their supervisor</p> |

IV) Faculty Supervisors

There are three different supervisory roles overseeing different aspects of the TA Program. The supervision structure depends on the assignment of the TA (Instructor, Grader, or Research Assistant) as well as the subject the Instructor teaches (Latin vs. Liberal Studies).

- a) **Supervisor:** This title describes the faculty member who is listed as the Instructor for the course in which a TA is assigned as a Grader. In the case of TAs serving as mentors in a distance learning section, the faculty coordinator of that course is considered their supervisor. This title also describes the faculty member to which a TA is assigned as a Research Assistant.
- b) **Latin Supervisor:** This faculty member (appointed by the Chair) supervises all TAs who serve as Instructors for Latin (LAT) courses within the Department of Classics.
- c) **TA Supervisor:** This faculty member (appointed by the Chair) supervises all TAs not involved with the Latin program. The TA Supervisor makes all TA assignments (including Graders) in conjunction with the Director of Graduate Studies and Chair. The TA Supervisor also organizes observations every semester for all Instructors (see 'Observation' below) and teaches FLE5810: *Teaching in Classics* every Spring semester.

V) Program for Instructional Excellence [PIE] Conferences

All students who have received departmental assistantships must attend the fall teaching conference put on by the Program for Instructional Excellence. The annual fall PIE TA Orientation/Teaching Conference is held the Wednesday and Thursday the week prior to the first week of classes each fall. Students must attend both days of the conference. This conference includes sessions that provide graduate students with teaching policy training requirements as stated in the University-wide TA Standards along with best practices in grading, communicating with students, encouraging critical thinking in the classroom, and Canvas and technology usage. By the end of this training, participants will be able to explain and have procedures in place to address University policy issues related to the Academic Honor Policy, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Discrimination-Sexual Harassment-Retaliation. Participants will also be equipped with strategies to help navigate use of Canvas features essential to their role as a TA, communicate effectively with students, and provide productive student feedback. Students only have to attend this conference once.

More information on the PIE TA Orientation can be found on their website:

<https://pie.fsu.edu/ta-orientationsteaching-conference-trainings>

VI) Office Hours

All teaching assistants must set up office hours and be available during those hours for student meetings. These office hours must be clearly posted in the syllabus and on the office door of the TA. The amount of office hours required depends on the position of the TA. For Graders, one office hour a week is the minimum (consult the supervisor for additional instructions). For Instructors, the TA will schedule a minimum of two office hours per week. If there are students who have conflicts with the scheduled hours, the TA should be flexible in setting up alternative meeting times. Supervisors may occasionally check to ensure that posted office hours are being held. Failure to hold office hours, or failure to show up is a very serious matter and may constitute an unsatisfactory performance of assigned duties.

TAs are assigned office space based on availability and courses being taught. In most instances offices must be shared, and in some cases Graders may need to share a desk with one other Grader.

VII) Special Section for Instructors

While Instructors are given wide power over the form and content of the individual sections they teach, they must remember that they are in fact teaching sections of a much larger course. Because of this, there are some limits and requirements imposed in order to maintain parity and continuity across sections. These limits and requirements are as follows:

a) *Textbooks*

Instructors may not alter the required textbooks for their course in any way. Textbook orders are placed by the TA Supervisor and are uniform across all TA-taught sections of a given course.

If an Instructor has a suggestion for a textbook change, he or she should bring it to the attention of the TA Supervisor and provide a rationale for the change.

The list of required textbooks for each course is listed in the appropriate course guide which will be distributed to relevant Instructors by the TA Supervisor.

b) *Syllabi*

Instructors write the syllabus for each course they teach following the guidelines laid out by the TA Supervisor (or Latin Supervisor for Latin courses). These course guidelines (if determined necessary by the TA or Latin Supervisor) will be distributed to the relevant instructors well in advance of the coming semester.

Instructors must submit their syllabus to the TA Supervisor (Latin Supervisor in the case of Latin courses) one week before the start of the term in which the course is to be taught. This is to provide ample time for feedback and changes to both the syllabus and the associated Canvas page. [Remember: TAs and faculty are on the payroll for at least two weeks prior to the start of every term and are expected to use that time for class preparation and organization].

As the Instructor gains more experience teaching a given course, the course guidelines may be 'relaxed' at the discretion of the TA Supervisor (Latin Supervisor in the case of Latin courses). This promotes the continued development of these courses by allowing experienced instructors to experiment with different approaches and assessments. However, the Instructor should be prepared to accept closer supervision and direction if assigned to a new course.

c) *Observation*

The TA Supervisor or a designated faculty member will attend and evaluate at least one class period each semester. The date of the observation will be mutually agreed upon by the observer and the instructor no less than one week prior to the observation.

The class session will be assessed using the Class Visitation Record form, which is attached to this handbook.

The observer will fill out the Class Visitation Record Form, a copy of which will be provided to the Instructor. The form will also go into the Instructor's permanent file. At the Instructor's request, the observer will meet with the Instructor to discuss the ratings and comments contained in the evaluation form.

If an Instructor's performance during the observation does not meet the high standards of the Department of Classics (as determined by the TA Supervisor and Chair), then a second observation may be carried out later in the semester.

d) *SPCI Forms*

Instructors are required to administer SPCI (Student Perception of Courses and Instructors) forms for every semester of teaching. These forms are administered by the Office of Distance Learning (ODL).

While electronic forms are available, the default method of delivery for the Department of Classics is on paper. Anyone wishing to administer electronic forms instead will receive information during the semester on how to request electronic delivery. The Department of Classics strongly discourages instructors from utilizing electronic delivery due to low response rates.

SPCI forms are not returned until the following semester and will be examined by the Chair and TA Supervisor. If teaching assistants would like feedback *during* the semester, the Office of Distance Learning administers a system known as TABS (Teaching Assessment by Students) and Midterm Evaluations which can provide feedback within a few weeks. To learn more or schedule an evaluation, see the ODL website at <https://distance.fsu.edu/instructors/midterm-evaluations>

e) *First Day Attendance*

Regardless of whether an Instructor has an attendance policy, Florida State University requires that attendance is taken at the first class meeting. Attendance should then be entered through the Teaching portal of MyFSU.

Students not present on the first day of class will be dropped automatically from the course.

f) *Grade Changes and Extra Credit*

On occasion, it may be necessary for an Instructor to change a grade after final grades are due. This can be due to a variety of reasons, including a student fulfilling the remaining requirements after being given an Incomplete or from user error entering the final grades. When an Instructor needs to change a grade after grades have been submitted, they must notify the TA Supervisor for approval. The instructor should describe the rationale for changing the grade in their communication with the TA Supervisor. Once the TA Supervisor approves the grade change, the proper form can be obtained from the Academic Program Assistant.

It is up to the Instructor whether to offer extra credit; however, any extra credit must be offered to all students. An instructor cannot make an extra credit assignment for individuals.

VIII) Mandatory Reporting and Associated Procedures

All TAs, as part of their appointment, are considered mandatory reporters in cases of sexual misconduct. The most thorough guidance on reporting can be found here <https://knowmore.fsu.edu/> but reporting basics are included below.

If you need to report an act of sexual misconduct, based on your own experience or if someone disclosed to you, the University has dedicated employees who handle these matters. If the person being accused of the behavior is a student, then the report/complaint needs to go to the Title IX Director in the Title IX Office. If the person being accused of the behavior is an employee or other third party, then the report/complaint needs to go to the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance in Human Resources. The most straightforward way to make a report is to go to https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?FloridaStateUniv&layout_id=1

The report must be made within two days to the Title IX Director or the Office of Equal Opportunity and Compliance. To make a report, you can go to report.fsu.edu, send an email, or make a call. Remember, even if you report the information to others, like FSUPD, your supervisor, or the Victim Advocate Program, you still need to make an official report.

IMPORTANT: As a mandatory reporter, a TA cannot promise confidentiality to a disclosing party. When in doubt, file a report.

IX) Plagiarism, Academic Misconduct, and Associated Procedures

The FSU Academic Honor Policy covers a variety of violations including but not limited to plagiarism, cheating, unauthorized group work, and multiple submission. Attempting any of the actions listed within the Academic Honor Policy is also considered a violation.

As students themselves TAs should be familiar with FSU's Academic Honor Policy, but in case a TA needs to consult the policy to determine whether a violation as occurred, the current policy can be found here <https://fda.fsu.edu/academic-resources/academic-integrity-and-grievances/academic-honor-policy>

Graders

If a Grader believes that a violation has occurred, he or she should immediately bring it to the attention of his or her supervisor. The supervisor will then deal with the violation from there.

Instructors

If an Instructor believes a violation has occurred, he or she should follow the procedures outlined by the Office of Faculty Development and Advancement at the above link. Most often, this will include meeting the student and creating a Step 1 Agreement. The Instructor should also notify the TA Supervisor that a violation has occurred and they have initiated the formal disciplinary procedures.

X) General Advice and Troubleshooting

This section is intended to address some of the more common issues that arise in the course of performing duties as a TA. It is by no means comprehensive, and any concerns relating to the performance of duties as a Grader, Research Assistant, or Instructor should be addressed to the TA Supervisor.

- Canvas
 - Break the course down into modules (weekly modules work well) to give the Canvas page structure and increase readability
 - Familiarize yourself early on with the course Canvas page, particularly the gradebook functions
 - Make sure the assignment weights match those in your syllabus
 - If you are accepting documents digitally, make sure that you restrict file types to those that are easy to work with (.pdf, .docx, etc.)
 - Make sure that PDFs of readings or other course files are ‘Published’ in Canvas so that the students can see them
 - Use the ‘student view’ function to double check
 - Canvas issues can be resolved here <https://support.canvas.fsu.edu/home/>
- Communication with Students
 - Maintain a professional tone in all communication with students, regardless of how well you think you know them
 - Keep a record of all electronic communication with students (Do not delete your emails)
 - These can become extremely important in adjudicating student grade challenges and complaints
 - For those TAs with actual offices, leave your door open during office hours and whenever you are meeting with a student
 - If you feel uncomfortable meeting with a student one-on-one for any reason, contact the TA Supervisor
- Creating a Syllabus
 - Clearly define how students are meant to submit work
 - If a paper is due on Friday, what time is it due?
 - Do you want both paper and electronic copies?
 - Establish a policy on late work
 - Will you accept work after the deadline? If so, what is the penalty and how is it applied?
 - Establish communication policies
 - Is email the best way to contact you? If so, when can students expect a response?
 - Can they just drop by your office anytime or do they need to make an appointment?

FINALLY, THE GOLDEN RULE:

If you are asking yourself, ‘Is this something the TA Supervisor should know about?’ then it is something the TA Supervisor should know about!

The Department of Classics
 Instructor’s Evaluation (Class Visitation Record)

Instructor: _____

Class – Section: _____

Observer: _____

Evaluate each statement below with the following scale.

1 = Does Not Meet Acceptable Standards

3 = Satisfactory

5 = Exceeds Expectations

Organization

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Presented an Overview of the Lesson | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Paced Lesson Appropriately | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Presented Topics in a Logical Sequence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Related the Lesson to Previous/Future Lessons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Identified and Emphasized Key Concepts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

What were the key concepts of the class and how did the organization of the session help/hinder the delivery of these concepts?

Presentation

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Mastery of the Content Taught | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Explained Concepts with Clarity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Used Good Examples to Clarify Points | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Defined Unfamiliar Terms, Concepts, and Principles | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Discussed and Interpreted Visual/Written Texts <u>with</u> the Students | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

| | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Used Varied Explanations for Complex or Difficult Material | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Used Appropriate Audiovisual or Supplementary Materials | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Voice was Clear and Audible | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Demonstrated Authority/Command Over the Classroom | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Communicated Enthusiasm for Learning | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Professional Appearance and Demeanor | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Effectively Connected the Lesson to the Assigned Reading | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Offered Original Material/Did Not Simply Repeat the Textbook | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

Give an example of a new/unfamiliar concept which the instructor defined.

What strategies did the instructor use to discuss text/material with the students and how did the students respond?

What original material/insights did the instructor offer beyond standard approaches to the topic? Please provide an example.

Interaction

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|-----|
| Actively Encouraged Student Questions and Listened Carefully to Students' Questions and Responses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Asked Questions to Monitor Student Understanding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Waited Sufficient Time for Students to Answer Questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Responded Appropriately to Student Questions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Re-Stated Questions and Answered when Necessary | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |
| Created an Atmosphere Consistent with Dialogical Inquiry | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | N/A |

Were student questions more aimed at clarifying content or did they build on the content delivered to gain new knowledge? In other words, did the student questions indicate confusion or curiosity? Please provide an example.

Did the questions asked by the instructor require analysis and reflection or were they mostly recitation of previously learned fact? Please provide an example.

Describe the atmosphere of the classroom.

Did the instructor utilize any active learning strategies in the course of the session? If so, which ones? If not, what activities might you suggest to promote active learning?

Summative Questions

What are the major strengths of the instructor as demonstrated by the classroom observation?

If you were to select one aspect of the instructor's approach/methods which other instructors should learn from what would it be and why?

If the instructor did not demonstrate clear mastery of the subject matter, what are some suggestions you have for acquiring and displaying this knowledge?

What are the current weaknesses of the instructor's teaching methods?

If you were to select one aspect of the instructor's approach/methods that need the most attention, what would you choose and how would you suggest they go about improving?

Open Response: Please feel free to use this space to comment on any aspect of the observation not sufficiently addressed by the above responses.

Observer Signature: _____

Date: _____