

*BEST PRACTICES FOR  
TEACHING ASSISTANTS &  
GRADUATE PART TIME INSTRUCTORS*

*in the*

*Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages and Literatures, German Program  
University of Colorado, Boulder*

*Approved by the German Program, October 6, 2020*

**1) The Importance of TAs and Graduate Instructors -  
To the Department**

- TAs provide vital assistance to instructors and professors in basic teaching duties and serving as a liaison between faculty and undergraduate students.
- TAs, in their role as recitation leaders and language instructors, play an important role in the department, because they encounter students at the introductory level and are their first personal contact with their discipline. The experience that students have with the TA may determine whether or not they develop enough interest in the discipline and pursue it further in future courses.
- GPTIs supplement the faculty by serving as instructors of record usually for lower level undergraduate courses. As such, they gain experience in all aspects of teaching.

**To Undergraduate Students**

Many undergraduate students take large lecture classes. TAs and language instructors have direct contact with students. The time spent interacting with undergraduate students plays a large part in determining how they view the entire academic process.

**To the University**

Well-trained TAs and GPTIs who perform their tasks effectively can contribute to improving the quality of undergraduate education at CU-Boulder. This is also a very important factor in retaining a diverse and enthusiastic body of students.

**For the TA's Professional Development**

An assistantship or instructorship provides a training ground where graduate students learn to teach and collaborate with the department and the university as a whole. Even if a teaching career may not be what is desired, TAs will gain valuable skills in time management, communication, supervision, assessment, and human relations which are applicable to other aspects of life and for other career paths.

**2) Types of Teaching Appointments for Graduate Students in the German Program:  
Language instructors**

- Work under the supervision of the language coordinator.
- Teach a total of 3 sections per academic year.
- Meet once a week with the language coordinator.

- Meet with their class four times a week.
- Receive all teaching materials, including lesson plans, quizzes, handouts, and exams from the language coordinator (unless mutually decided otherwise with language coordinator).
- Are responsible for all grading.
- Hold one office hour a week and are available to meet students who are unable to attend office hours due to schedule conflict.

#### **Teaching Assistants for content classes**

- Attend all lectures and read all assigned materials.
- Teach 2-3 recitation sections weekly, with the number of recitations depending on enrollment
- Receive all teaching materials, including lesson plans, quizzes, handouts, and exams from the instructor of record (unless mutually decided otherwise)
- Meet weekly with the instructor of record
- Hold one office hour a week and are available to meet students who are unable to attend office hours due to schedule conflict.

#### **GPTIs Teaching their Own Class**

- Are responsible for all class materials (syllabus, handouts, quizzes, exams and all other assignments).
- Meet regularly with a supervising faculty member.
- Hold one office hour a week and are available to meet students who are unable to attend office hours due to schedule conflict.

### **3) Leads and Representatives**

2 Representatives are elected by the graduate students at the beginning of each academic year (if possible, one from the MA program and one from the PhD). Representatives are ideally experienced TAs whose role is to represent the graduate students' interest in faculty meetings as well as liaison between TAs and faculty members. They assist in various issues that TAs might encounter. Representatives are also responsible for organizing a biannual workshop with the Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance (OIEC).. <https://www.colorado.edu/oiec/education>  
Lead TAs work directly with and are compensated by the Graduate Teacher Program: <https://www.colorado.edu/gtp/about-us>

### **4) Evaluation of TA performance:**

- Evaluation is done each semester for all instructors at the University of Colorado via a Faculty Course Questionnaire (FCQ) administered to the students during the final weeks of the term. Results are reported to the department administrators and to the instructor.
- TAs, GPTIs and language instructors are observed and evaluated at least once a semester by a faculty member. The language coordinator will notify the graduate student of a range of 2-3 class sessions during which they will be observed.
- TAs, GPTIs and language instructors meet to discuss their FCQ results with their supervising faculty for the class taught.

- Graduate students intending to pursue careers in academia should be advised that FCQs are required for most job applications. For this reason, they are encouraged to write reflections on their teaching evaluations and FCQs.

### **5) How Are Teaching Positions Assigned?**

- Teaching assignments are determined each year by the Chair, the Graduate Associate Chair, the program coordinator, and the language coordinator. The department aims to provide a range of teaching experiences (including both language and content) to graduate students, and particularly to Ph.D. students, taking into consideration the department's own varying needs and the graduate students' skills and experience.
- Ph.D. students are usually given the opportunity to teach their own class in their fourth or fifth year. Ph.D. students submit a formal request to be considered for this position no later than September 1<sup>st</sup> of the preceding year. Requests should be emailed to the Director of Graduate Studies and cc-ed to the department chair and are evaluated according to the skills and experience of the applicant.

### **6) Grading**

- Language instructors who teach the same sections divide grading responsibilities evenly (for all assignments throughout the semester) to ensure similar grading workload.
- In content courses grading is shared equally between TAs and the supervising faculty member.
- Instructors should consider making shared grading anonymous to minimize bias in appeals.
- Every class in GSLL has a grade appeal process determined by the faculty member. It should be communicated to the appealing students that all grade-appeal decisions are made collectively by the instructor of record and all TAs which teach the course.
- As per University policy, grades cannot be discussed over email.
- Students wishing to have additional grading opportunities during the summer will submit a very brief email request to the program coordinator and Chair by the beginning of spring semester. Students' prior teaching experience will be taken into consideration for this assignment. Compensation will be done in the form of a fixed hourly rate of \$35 for a number of hours established by mutual agreement. The hourly rate includes the time needed for the grader to become acquainted with the class materials.

### **7) Absences and Subbing Policy**

- In case of medical or family emergency, or for a professional occasion (such as a conference or interview) that would require cancelling a class or finding a substitute, TAs or GPTIs should notify their supervising faculty with as much notice as possible. A class should not be canceled without prior notice or approval.
- When subbing is needed a general call will be circulated via email. Students will not be approached individually by faculty members about subbing.
- No graduate student is expected to sub for more than two hours per semester.
- Compensation will be offered to students who wish to sub for more than two hours per semester. Because the department needs approval to offer additional pay to students, this compensation must be approved in advance by the departmental chair. International students with most types of visas are not eligible for extra compensation.

- Students should keep a record of the number of hours they have subbed during the semester. This number will have to be confirmed by the supervising faculty or program head.

## **8) Workshops and Training**

- Entering Teaching Assistants and GPTIs must complete workshops on Discrimination and Harassment, and on the CU Honor Code Policy.
- First-time language instructors are required to participate in language teaching workshops provided by the department during orientation week.
- All TAs and GPTIs are encouraged to participate in workshops on learning and/or teaching styles provided by the Graduate Teacher Program. The GTP program offers a fall-intensive during orientation week as well as workshops throughout the semester. (See GTP workshop schedule: <http://www.colorado.edu/gtp/> )
- Graduate students are not obligated to attend the same workshop more than once.

## **9) Disruptive Behavior**

Supervising faculty members will support TAs dealing with disruptive students, by advising them and by connecting them to campus resources. TAs should notify the supervising faculty member immediately of any disruption or potential disruption in the classroom.

## **10) Resources**

### **Helping Students with Problems Outside of the Class**

On occasion, your students may come to TAs with problems outside the scope of the class. Such problems may include anything from trouble with some other class, or picking a major, to conflicts with family members, financial difficulties, psychological conditions such as depression or eating disorders, and even sexual violence. The University of Colorado has a number of offices set up to address these problems, and you may wish to help your students contact these offices.

TAs and GPTIs have a reporting obligation. All employees who have the authority to hire, promote, discipline, evaluate, grade, formally advise, or direct faculty, staff, or students are considered "responsible employees" and are required to report alleged misconduct to OIEC. This includes, but is not limited to resident advisors, teaching assistants, professors, academic advisors, coaches, or other university employees with supervisory authority. For more information, see the [OIEC web page](#) on "Who is Required to Report."

Student Resources and Related Links on the [Grad School website](#):

[University of Colorado Police Department](#) 303-492-6666 (non-emergencies). For emergencies dial 911

[CU Red Folder](#)

[Office of Institutional Equity and Compliance \(including mandatory reporting guidelines\)](#)

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

[Ombuds Office](#) Center for Community N440 303-492-5077