



A Brief Guide for Teaching Assistants at Brown University

Content

- Quick guide to the Sheridan Center Programs
- The Teaching Assistant experience at Brown University
- Teaching Tips
- Event Calendar

This handout should serve as a **quick guide** to the resources that are available to you as an instructor at Brown University. You can find a lot more resources at the *Sheridan Center for teaching and learning in higher education*. For descriptions of the Sheridan Center's programs and electronic versions of pamphlets published by the Center, visit our web site at:

http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center

Contact Information: Associate Director Kathy M. Takayama
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Web-CT: <http://mycourses.brown.edu/webct/>
To gain full access you have to signup:
http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/certificateprograms/
After a few days you can use your Brown AuthID and your password to gain access. (guest account: sheridan.guest; password: guest)

WELCOME TO THE SHERIDAN CENTER

The center offers a lot of programs and individual help if you would like to improve your skills as an instructor in higher education. All programs are voluntary, and it is up to you to take advantage of them.

We offer:

1. Certificate Programs:

With the goal to develop a reflective teaching style. The first program consists of a monthly lecture with accompanying workshop, a micro teaching session and an individual teaching consultation (see separate Info page for details). You can sign up any time throughout the year on the web-page. The second and third program are designed to prepare you for the academic job market and best taken after your first year as a graduate student.

2. Individual Teaching Consultations:

If you are curious about how effective you are as a teacher, invite one of our trained teaching consultants; he/she will film your lecture and give you detailed feedback.

3. Presentation Consultations:

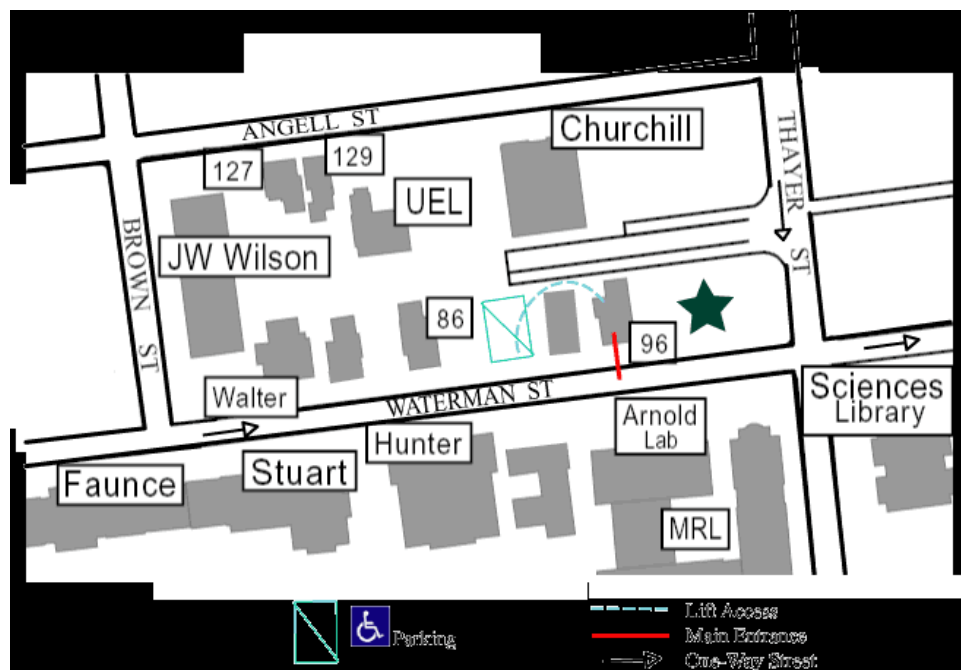
If you are dreading that important talk you have to give, e.g. at a conference or in your department, why not train it with a trained teaching consultant? You will get quick feedback and help.

4. Professional development:

We are assisting departments in preparing undergraduate and graduate students for the academic job market, e.g. with mock interviews, CV and cover letter workshops etc.

For descriptions of Sheridan Center programs and electronic versions of pamphlets published by the Center, visit our web site. There, you can also find an updated calendar, a list of department Graduate Student Liaisons as well as Faculty Liaisons.

The Center is located in Lippitt House at 96 Waterman Street and is open: 8:30-5:00 M-F (summer hours: 8 AM until 4 PM).



The Teaching Assistant Experience

(Excerpted from "Guidelines for Teaching at Brown," *Brown University Faculty Handbook*)

1. RESPONSIBILITIES

The four positions for those graduate students assisting faculty in teaching are: Assistant, Teaching Assistant, Senior Teaching Assistant, and Teaching Fellow. Herein they are referred to as TAs in general.

The **Assistant** in a course is not to have direct responsibility for its students but assists in other ways, such as preparing course materials, grading, or developing approaches that enhance the course presentation.

The **Teaching Assistant**, by far the most common position held by assistants in teaching, has responsibilities that extend to preparation (including the periodic meetings with the professor and, in some cases, attending the lectures), contact with classes, grading, and office hours.

The **Senior Teaching Assistant** performs the same functions as the Teaching Assistant, with some additional responsibilities. The STA is an experienced TA and advanced student who may help in the planning of a course and/or help supervise less experienced TAs. The STA does not have charge of the course nor should the professor, by inattention, lead the STA to believe that he or she is in charge.

The **Teaching Fellow** does have charge of a course. Therefore, only senior graduate students with proven teaching skills should hold such a position. The Department has responsibility for the performance of TFs as it does for that of other instructors.

2. TIME SPENT

While serving as a TA is a valuable experience in the training of the future professoriate, it should be remembered that TAs are graduate students first and foremost, and so must have sufficient time to remain effective students and scholars. Brown University policy has been, and continues to be, that the student as TA should - in all time spent as a TA in class contact, preparation, grading and office hours - **average no more than twenty hours per week**. Faculty should plan assignments with some thought to the amount of time that the TA will need to grade them, and should give advance notice of heavy workload periods so that any flexibility that the graduate student has in his or her schedule can be applied. The professor in charge of the course should inquire into any scheduling problems that exist for the graduate student and minimize problem periods.

3. PREPARATION

A TA should never be put in contact with students unless he or she has been given adequate preparation. This preparation is for the benefit of the students taught as well as the TA. Such preparation includes mastery of the concepts and material, mastery of English (including speaking, listening, and writing ability), and instruction in effective teaching. Departments should develop rigorous preparation programs within the department or through the Center for the Advancement of College Teaching.

It is expected that periodic meetings (weekly is the norm) of the professor and the TAs in a course will take place for evaluating the progress of the course, with respect to teaching by professor and TAs and learning by students, and for planning the next segment of the course.

4. GRADING

As noted above, the professor in charge of a course has final responsibility for assigning grades. TAs typically participate in the grading of exams, homework, papers, and other student work. The TA should have adequate supervision regarding standards for grading, the sorts of comments that would be helpful, and so on. However, the instructor should play at least a supervisory role in determining final grades, as well as grades for major milestones in the course.



Basic Procedures at Brown

Records:

TAs should keep detailed records of student grades on all assignments, as well as copies of graded papers and exams when feasible. These will be invaluable if a grievance arises, and will help also in writing Course Performance Reports and future recommendations.

Course Performance Reports:

In addition to grades, a student may request a detailed written evaluation of his or her work., known as a Course Performance Report (CPR). You should advise your students at the beginning of the semester that:

- CPRs are particularly appropriate when the S/NC option has been chosen.
- CPRs are more important if the course is within the student's area of concentration. The CPR will not be part of the student's official record.
- Students must request that a faculty member or TA fill out a CPR prior to mid-semester.

You should emphasize the last point, as students often show up with CPRs late in the semester or even at the final exam. If this happens, it is at your discretion whether or not to accept the form. Finally, you may always decline to comply with the request if you feel that you do not know the student well enough. For more information, see http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Registrar/guidelines/acad_regs/index.html#grading or contact the Registrar.

Grade-related grievances:

A student must discuss a grievance with the TA first, before proceeding to the Professor and the department Chair. Only after those steps have been made should a student go to a Dean of the College.

Support for various problems:

The most complete and up-to-date list of dean assignments can be found at http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Dean_of_the_College/people/

On the next page is a partial list that addresses many common concerns. The Sheridan Center's *Teaching at Brown Handbook* and the University's annual *Student Handbook* are also good resources.

Academic Grievances	Office of the Dean of the College
Academic Code violations	Office of the Dean of the College
Academic Support:	
Dyslexia, dysgraphia, ADD	Office of Disabilities Support Services
ESL	Center for Language Studies
Math tutors	Math Resource Center
Support courses	check w/ specific department
Study skills & Tutoring	Office of the Dean of the College
Writing Problems	The Writing Center (Rockefeller Library)
Audits and Vagabonding	Registrar
Burnt-out undergraduates	The Resource Center, Office of Dean of the College
Cheating, Plagiarism	Office of the Dean of the College
Concentration advice	Departmental Concentration advisors
Disabled Student Services (academic)	Office of Disabilities Support Services
Exam excuses	Office of the Dean of the College
Harassment (sexual, racial, etc.):	
racial, by faculty or staff	Office of the Dean of the College
racial, by students	Deans of Student Life
sexual, by faculty or staff	Office of the Dean of the College
sexual, by students	Police and Security, Dean of Student Life
Health problems	Health Services
Health-related excuses	Office of the Dean of the College
Personal problems	Psychological Services, Dean of Student Life



Teaching Tips

Next to the handbooks you can find a lot of useful teaching tips at the centers website at

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/teaching/teaching_tips.html

A few useful articles from the above web-page to get you started are:

- **The First Day of Class: Teaching Tips.** How to break the ice when you meet your students for the first time? A quick guide to survive the first day of class.
- **Elements of an Effective Teaching style.** What does make a teacher an effective instructor? A few general guidelines to help you develop a reflective teaching style and become a better teacher
- **Grading Rubrics.** How do you give fair grades? Most of you will be required to grade students work in one way or another. Grading rubrics are a useful tool to develop a fair grading technique.
- **Constructive Grading: How to get Students to Read Faculty Comments.** How can you encourage students to read your comment? A very good method primarily for assignments without simple correct/wrong answers can be found in this article.
- **The Scholarship of Teaching: a Teaching Portfolio.** How do you convey to others what kind of teacher you are? A teaching portfolio is a good way to present your experience as a teacher (e.g. in your post-doc application).
- **Course Syllabus and Educational Goals.** You have to prepare your own lecture (e.g. for the summer@brown program) and do not know where to start? A well worked out syllabus will be your entry ticket into a well worked out course.
- **Preparing to use Instructional Technology in your Course.** Are you hesitant on using technologies like a laptop during a lecture? A few tips on when and how to use modern technologies can be found in this article.
- **Variations in Student Learning: Hints for Faculty & TAs.** How can you recognize and help students with a diverse learning style like ADD? A few guidelines and hints are provided in this short article.

See also “**Students know How Your Teaching Helps Them Learn**” from the Center’s *Teaching Exchange* at: www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/pubs/teachingExchange/sept2007/06_UG_Survey_07.pdf

More detailed handbooks are available at the center or online at

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/publications/

Keep in mind that it is up to you to develop your teaching skills. The Sheridan Center is here to assist and help you, but you have to take the initiative, e.g. be starting the Certificate I program, where most of the above topics will be addressed in detail through lectures and small practical workshops.

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