

THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

BROWN UNIVERSITY • VOLUME 3 / NUMBER 1 • SEPTEMBER 1998



The 1998 Math TA/TF Training Program - Math 9

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MAY 18-21, 1998 / 10 AM TO 12 PM

The purpose of this exercise is to help prepare those graduate students who are going to be Teaching Assistants in the Mathematics Department for the first time in 1998-99, and also those who have already been TAs this past year and are going to be Teaching Fellows in the Fall. TAs "interpret" the lectures and text for their sections; TFs develop and teach their own classes.

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DAY 1 MONDAY, MAY 18

10:00-10:45 / Introduction

Welcome and discussion of our purpose. Trainees were then asked to respond to a few questions about their expectations as TAs/TFs:

1. What do you think your job will be like as TA (or TF)?
2. What do you think you will like about it?
3. What will be easy?
4. What will be hard?

The purpose of this is, first, to engage the trainees' attention by having them imagine themselves in the new role of TA or TF; and

second, to provoke some discussion of what the job is really about.

The responses were then read out (anonymously), and we discussed them. Several faculty members, as well as a couple of more experienced graduate students and consultants from the Sheridan Center attended.

11:00-12:00 / Math 9 Video

Review of the videotape (about 20 min.) of various people teaching Math 9 (faculty, TFs, and TAs), followed by discussion.

Assignments:

1. Review of handouts: meeting your class for the first time; advice on how to use your voice, your body, and the blackboard; planning a lecture (or other class); the use of examples and questions in teaching; responsibilities of TAs and TFs.
2. 2. Assign topics for Day 2.

DAY 2 TUESDAY, MAY 19

10:00-12:30 / Presentations

TA and TF training will be split into two simultaneous sessions for this day. Two Sheridan Center consultants were present, one for each session.

Each TA/TF presented for 10 minutes on a pre-assigned topic. Immediately after each presentation there was verbal feedback from designated people - one from the Sheridan Center, one from the faculty, and one experienced student. All others present made written comments for the presenter. Guidelines were offered on how to make criticism constructive.

DAY 3 WEDNESDAY, MAY 20

The main purpose of Day 3 was to get the trainees thinking about "problem situations": confrontations with students, disruptive behavior in class, disagreements with course heads.

10:00-11:45 / Scenarios A & B

There were two improvised scenes, with several senior Math TAs and a Sheridan Center consultant playing the "class of problem students" and another experienced math grad student playing the

"teacher." Each scene was followed by discussion.

- A. The "teacher" will go over a particular idea carefully the "class" asks a million questions ranging from good, insightful questions to the aggravating, "stupid" questions ("will this be on the test?").
- B. This "class" is very disruptive (talking while the "teacher" is talking, getting up and leaving class, and returning, doing a crossword puzzle, etc.).

11:45 AM-12:00 / Math 9 Plans

Remarks by Tom Goodwillie on plans for Math 9, and his expectations of how the Math 9 team (TFs, TAs, graders) will function as a team.

DAY 4 THURSDAY, MAY 21

10:00-12:30 / Presentations

TA and TF training was split into two simultaneous sessions (A & B) for this day. For both groups the "audience" played the role of the class. Both groups were videotaped by Sheridan Center consultants. The videotapes will be available for viewing in the Math Dept. after the sessions are over. TA/TFs were requested to watch their segment and then fill in a Feedback Questionnaire. The questionnaire was submitted to the Dept. secretary for Prof. Goodwillie to review.

- A. The TA group taught material that was covered in lecture.
- B. The TF group were videotaped doing "teaching" segments, followed by discussion of their accomplishment of stated teaching goals.