

Development of Teaching Assistant Support Materials and Training Workshop for the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences CTLW Graduate Teaching Mini-grant Proposal

Applicant

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Overview and Project Proposal

For many graduate students, their first experience teaching is when they are assigned teaching assistantships. For a first-time teaching assistant, this task can seem overwhelming when they are adjusting to the area and the academic challenges of graduate school. Currently, the only training and support materials that are provided to teaching assistants in the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences (NSOEE) are from the lecturing professor, and this happens only informally or not at all. As a result, many of the logistics and skills that are critical for serving as an effective teaching assistant are gleaned from experienced graduate students. Since there is a large pool of prior information from current graduate students and professors, the development of support materials and training would reduce the information lag between experienced teaching assistants and beginning teaching assistants. It would also allow graduate students to use the meeting time spent with the lecturing professor to learn how to be an effective teaching assistant instead of focusing almost solely on logistical details. Providing new teaching assistants with support materials, therefore, will aid them in being successful teaching assistants, and they will gain the skills needed to prepare them as potential future faculty members.

After discussions with first-time and experienced teaching assistants, numerous graduate students expressed the need for a manual and training workshop. It was stated that these resources would efficiently provide them with fundamental information for their teaching assistantship. Additionally, faculty and staff have expressed support for the development of a training mechanism to allow them more time with the teaching assistants to focus on course preparation instead of logistical training. To address the concerns expressed by graduate students, faculty, and staff, this project will: (1) generate teaching assistant support through the development of a manual and (2) create and implement a training workshop that will better train incoming graduate students to become teaching assistants.

Development of Teaching Assistant Manual

The development of a teaching assistant manual will be accomplished through general research, a discussion group of teaching assistants, and a survey. Much of the information that students learn through trial and error during the course of their teaching assistantship could be provided in a manual. The manual content would primarily result from discussions and a survey of current graduate students. From a preliminary assessment of current first-time teaching assistants, information that would be useful in a manual includes:

- *Logistics*
 - Reserving classrooms
 - Blackboard
 - Copies
 - E-reserves
 - AV equipment
 - Fleet training
 - Medical emergencies
 - Class funds

- *Management of Teaching Assistantship*
 - Deadlines
 - Email and grading flux times
 - Reasonable expectations
 - Working with lecturing professor(s)
 - Working with other teaching assistants
 - Nature of the class
 - Role of teaching assistant in the course
- *Working with Students*
 - Undergraduate students
 - Graduate students
 - Degree requirements
 - Office hours
 - Advising
 - Answering questions
 - Inappropriate relations
 - Cheating
- *Teaching*
 - Grading
 - Leading class discussions, labs, etc.
- *Field trips*
 - Driving students
 - Permission forms
 - Medical forms
 - Insurance
 - Safety
- *Lessons learned*
 - General advise from current and past teaching assistants
- *Resources*
 - Websites
 - Books
 - Journal articles
 - Maps with key locations highlighted
- *Contact information*
 - Key individuals
 - Duke resource offices
 - Frequently contacted office campus businesses

Development of Teaching Assistant Training

Currently, incoming graduate students receive no formal training to perform their teaching assistant duties. Basic skills and information that could reduce the frustration that many first-time teaching assistants experience could be provided through a teaching assistant training program during orientation week. The design of the training session could be formatted in a similar manner as the manual. The training session would additionally include small discussions with experienced teaching assistants on specialized teaching topics and short presentations from individuals from offices such as the Center for Teaching, Learning, and Writing. A training session will quickly introduce new students to the resources, responsibilities, and wealth of opportunities that are available to assist them in performing their teaching duties.

Expenses

The expenses to complete the proposed project include:

Xeroxing	\$100
Refreshments - discussion	\$075
Refreshments – training	\$225
Library resources	<u>\$100</u>
<i>Estimated expenses</i>	\$500

Xeroxing funds would cover the costs of a finite number of manuals. (The manual will also be made available on the Internet to reduce the number copies and to allow the manual to be easily updated and accessed.) Funding for refreshments during discussions and the training session will encourage participation and conversations. I intend to have 5 discussions to develop and finalize the manual (the current amount allotted for our teaching discussion group is \$15 per discussion). Additionally, refreshments will be provided at the training session. Since the training session will involve incoming and current graduate students, faculty members, staff, and guests, there are more people participating for a couple hours and therefore more substantial refreshments are necessary. The remainder of the funds would be used to purchase exceptional books that can be included in a library of teaching resources available to graduate students in the NSOEE.

Potential for Long-term Success

Through the development of these tools, I hope to create a cohesive information flow for all teaching assistants in the NSOEE. Filling this niche will provide the seed money to aid in the development of support mechanisms that will equip graduate students to become better teachers and to allow students the opportunity to use their teaching assistantships for professional development. The notable results of a successful training and support mechanism for teaching assistants are: (1) graduate students will gain a more rewarding professional experience from their teaching assistantship and (2) the undergraduate and graduate students will have improved courses as a result of better teaching assistant training. Following the initial development of the manual and training session, the NSOEE can annually update and improve the manual and training session based on comments from graduate students and logistical or policy changes. Once the manual is complete and available online and the training workshop is designed during orientation week, NSOEE can easily finance the small costs of the updates to the manual and training workshop design. Providing funding for this project will be the initial step to improve the pedagogic training that NSOEE provides incoming graduate students and first-time teaching assistants.