

Guide For Head Teaching Fellows

Being Head Teaching Fellow in a large course requires a certain organizational wherewithal, patience, and persistence. Your most public role consists of coordinating students, but you are also assisting the professor, talking to your other TFs, liaising between all three entities, and dealing with various administrative groups from Classrooms to the Registrar to publishers, libraries, the Disabilities Office, Senior Tutors, AV, or the Coop. All of this can take a lot of time and energy, especially at the beginning and end of semester, so the following are some tips to smooth the process.

Before the semester starts, contact your professor and check whether the texts have been ordered from the Coop and what the estimated enrollment is. The Coop almost always under-orders texts, plus you'll want to discover any mismatch or shortfall between what you ordered and what's on the shelves well before 150 students do. When you know the reading list, order desk copies. If this info is hard to discover, call the Coop. They have a finely-tuned database of publishers that they're happy to share. Publishers frequently only send one desk copy despite your clearly worded request for 6, so you might have to repeat the process or be persistent. And put copies of all required texts on reserve at Lamont. You can collect the relevant forms from the Lamont information desk well before the semester begins.

Classrooms are most usefully secured by the traditional method of emailing Ron Cooper and his FAS Registrar's Office team a few weeks in advance: classrms@fas.harvard.edu. Check out available spaces and permanent AV features at [their web site](#):

www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/classrooms. If you think you'll have 12 sections, order 15 rooms and see which times are most suitable for your busy students.

Once you have rooms and students, you need sections. You can perform this task either on paper or electronically; ICG at 20 Garden St will show you how to use the computer method, either in group sessions or individually. The balancing act occurs between sectioning early, which can help students think of your times as firm from the beginning, or sectioning later, when the inevitable adds, drops, and undecideds will have settled. I've never found sectioning by hand difficult because a large course has so many time slots that a student who has to rank his or her top 5 choices will almost always get one of them. Sectioning electronically relies on students' actually signing up, and you will certainly have to fine-tune by hand, but it can be a good take-off point if piles of paper daunt you. One advantage of paper sectioning is that you can customize the forms to ask about year, concentration status, sex, any special needs – in large courses, it's worth knowing when you have just one senior with 14 sophomores, or one woman in a sea of men. You can't solve all those problems, but you might spot the more egregious cases and prevent them.

Once the students are settled, you remain their contact point for many issues, both personal and academic. Since emotional energy is not part of your job description, try to preempt common complaints. Two big ones are:

1. "You haven't given us topics for the assignment in 4 weeks so I need an extension because I'm traveling for athletics and I have a mid-term, etc etc etc." Yes, the undergrads have incredible commitments and pressures, so you need to get your topics organized long in advance, and to have a crystal-clear extension (preferably, non-extension) policy. Extensions are a nightmare in a big course. And work out very early with your professor who is responsible for assignments. Sometimes you will be prompting and coordinating quizzes, topics, rubrics and questions from TFs; sometimes professors do all this themselves.

2. “My TF hates me/ My TF grades harshly.” Usually, these two are synonymous. The best defense and comfort you can offer to both sides is to make sure you cross-grade. This does not amount to looking over your TFs’ shoulders, but personalities and differing experience do mean that TFs might grade differently, and you should do your best to protect both them and students from irregularities by spending an hour discussing problems with each assignment and comparing B+, B, and wacky papers. Sometimes, of course, students do very genuinely feel disliked by a TF. Even though this may be imaginary, it’s real for them and you should transfer them out of that section. Be very slow and reluctant to allow most section shifts, though. TFs are hired on the assumption that each section will be full, and you will not want to adjust your finely balanced group dynamics.

You should be able to spot any serious student problems by mid-term at the latest, when you will complete the Registrar’s mid-semester reports on (un)satisfactory progress. Immediately contact the Senior Tutors of students who are struggling and create a paper trail. You can see which house a student is in from the enrollment list the Registrar will eventually send you via the Internet. Your course will probably have a homepage, and you and the TFs can easily be authorized by the professor to access it.

Among your TF colleagues, you might be a good sounding board for new teachers, and you should be upfront about discussing what goes on in section in the first couple of weeks. Be clear about expectations for attending lecture, holding office hours, responding to student emails, etc. You need to stress consistency from the TFs to reduce the perception of any inconsistency from the students. Laying it all out clearly at early meetings beats having to call emergency meetings later. Some professors like to run TF meetings, others don’t see any need for them – if your professor doesn’t want to meet regularly, it may still be a good idea to meet amongst yourselves, especially in the first 4 weeks so you can check that no-one falls through the cracks of registration or attendance, and make sure your TFs are comfortable. TFs in large courses (like students) are not always there because they deliberately chose to be there. Build a sense of community early on. One bonus to TF meetings is that there is a reasonably generous lunch fund – check the details and amounts with Jude.

Professors don’t always settle their reading lists or lecture schedules far in advance of semester – your initial contact can prompt them, and you may find that you know the highlights and pitfalls of a course better than they will. In 4 years of Head TFing one course, I worked with three different professors – save yourself and them the trouble of reinventing well-oiled wheels. Read the previous years’ CUE guides, know when the religious and national holidays fall, see how students respond to the reading load, think about how to encourage attendance in a compulsory course, predict assessment schedules – and enjoy the intricacies of it all!

RESOURCES AND SUGGESTIONS

The Previous Summer or Semester

–Course Materials

Other than the faculty member teaching the course, the one person you may want to contact as early as possible is the graduate student who last served as Head TF for the course. Often Head TFs are (by necessity) extremely organized and may well have some excellent materials for you such as previous exams, paper topics, sourcebooks, agendas from previous staff meetings, review questions, or in some cases, handouts on specific texts or topics.

–Syllabi

It is helpful to students to have access to a complete course syllabus early in the term and preferably before the first meeting of a class. Syllabi can be distributed electronically to students on campus through the FAS network. To provide on-line access to your syllabus, please call the Faculty and Staff Support Line at 496-2727 and specify that you are interested in instructional support. Ideally, the syllabus should include a reading list, a lecture schedule, dates of hour exams, due dates for papers or other assignments, course policy with respect to late work and makeup hour exams, and the basis on which the course grade will be awarded (percentages for section participation, papers, exams, etc.). It should also include your name, e-mail and place and time of office hours (to put aside time for students in your own section(s), it is a good idea to schedule Head TF office hours *and* regular office hours).

Before finalizing the syllabus, you and your Course Head may want to at least glance at *Information for Instructors*, available on the registrar's website (www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu). Crosscheck the exam and paper due dates with the university's (newly published) list of religious holidays. You may also want to take note of specific deadlines for undergraduates (note the add/drop and withdrawal deadlines, for example, and see if assignments such as the mid-term paper and/or mid-term exam can possibly be scheduled early enough to give students a sense of their performance in the course).

– Instructional Lunch Fund

These funds generally provide \$50 per person per semester for lunch/staff meetings. To request these funds, contact the department administrator, Anna McDonald (495-7861). While you may end up going to restaurants for meetings, you may also want to schedule a classroom for meetings just in case.

–Initial Letter to Teaching Fellows might include:

place and time of lectures

day and time of staff meetings/lunches

course syllabus (if just tentative)

information about payment (for those teaching in the Core)

–Prepare for Sections

Request information from TFs on section preference days and times. At the same time, however, be sure to let everyone know that while you will try to create section times based upon preferences, all TFs should be available Monday through Friday to teach the sections that are ultimately assigned to them.

Contact Classrooms Office. Classroom assignments are coordinated by the Office of the Registrar and you should contact the Classrooms Office as early as possible at 495-1541.

While the Course Head will generally reserve the lecture room, you will need to reserve section rooms before the course is sectioned. Establish good relations with those working in Classrooms before the term begins (as the semester progresses, you may find classroom availability to be directly proportional to your capacity for charm) and keep them informed about section additions and cancellations.

–Sourcebooks

If the course requires a sourcebook, the Core has a pamphlet on how to prepare one (of course, if you are teaching for the Core, the Sourcebook Office there will do everything for you if you simply xerox the articles, provide a preliminary table of contents, and fill out the forms they provide). If you are not teaching for a Core course, you may want to ask the Sourcebook Office (located on the 3rd floor of the Core Building, 38 Kirkland St., 495-4692) for a sample permissions request form. As permissions often take a good deal of time to arrive, you may want to get started on this process as early as possible.

–Reserve books

Often the Course Head does this by contacting Lamont Library (495-2979). Either you or the course head will need to fill out reserve forms, either at the libraries, or through the website at <http://hcl.harvard.edu/services/reserves/hillam/>.

–Order Books

While Course Heads generally order books by contacting the Coop, you may want to write to publishers to request desk copies of all required texts. In general, you may request one desk copy for every twenty books ordered.

–Technical Equipment

If your Course Head plans to use films, slides, audio-visual, contact Audiovisual Services at 495-9460.

–Enrollment

Questions should be directed to the Office of the Registrar, 20 Garden St., 495-1544.

Once the Semester Begins

–The first day of class

–Ask specific Teaching Fellows (well in advance) to come early, distribute syllabi, and count heads.

–If a microphone or other equipment is required, double-check arrangements with Audiovisual Services.

–Student Disabilities

Inquire early on about student disabilities. A good place to do this is on section forms. Getting this information early on will enable you to make accommodations for students who have hearing or vision problems, writing problems, or particular needs in terms of note-taking, exam taking, access, section room arrangements, the taping of lectures, extra assistance, etc). Contact the Student Disability Resource Center: 20 Garden Street, 496-8707.

–Sectioning

There are two ways to section. The first way to section is through the creation, distribution, and collection of section forms. To simplify this process, you might get a number of very large envelopes, write on each (in large letters) the day and time of each section for the course, and line them up on a table in the front of the lecture room (or by one of the exits). Ask students to drop their section form in the envelope with the day and time of their first choice (this sounds like a bit of trouble, but it will save you hours of sorting the forms into “first choice” piles). If there is a class scheduled immediately after your lecture (call classrooms to find this out), be sure that five minutes are left at the end of lecture for students to do this in an orderly way. Then ask three or four Teaching Fellows to help you sort the section forms into piles of approximately 20. Take them out for lunch after.

The other way to section is to section by computer. For information on how to do this, contact FAS computer services (see information on teaching with technology below).

–Enrollment

If the course has a higher enrollment than expected, as soon as you know this, call Classrooms to reserve rooms for more sections. Do your best to schedule sections for the same time as other sections (this way you won't have to create a new sectioning form).

–At the first staff meeting

The Course Head may want to use this meeting to set the tone, articulate standards of evaluation, basic course policies, expectations of Teaching Fellows in lectures and sections, and answer other basic questions (can the course be taken pass/fail? will there be any uniformity in terms of work assigned in sections, in terms of section discussions?). At the same time, if you want help with sectioning, assembling exams and paper topics, or other labor-intensive aspects of course organization, now is a good time to ask Teaching Fellows to sign up.

–Classroom Technicalities

Any problems with the temperature or ventilation of classrooms should be referred to the University Operations Center (495-5560) and classroom maintenance or repair requests should be referred to Facilities Maintenance (495-1722).

–Midterm Evaluation

The registrar will send your Course Head grade sheets, lists of deadlines, and copies of mid-term report forms. Make enough copies of the midterm report forms to distribute to all Teaching Fellows. These forms (only filled out for those students doing unsatisfactory work) go to Senior Tutors. In the case of particular difficulties with student attendance, performance, or participation, you (or the student's Teaching Fellow) may well want to contact the Senior Tutor (or in the case of a Freshman, the Assistant Freshman Dean) directly (see telephone numbers and e-mail addresses below).

–Troubled Students

Instructors and Teaching Fellows are not responsible for counseling students on personal or emotional difficulties, even when those problems affect academic work.

Undergraduate students who seem to be unusually upset or who are in need of special help should be referred to their Resident Dean (Allston Burr Senior Tutor or Assistant Dean of Freshmen). The Mental Health Service of the University Health Services (495-2042) and the Bureau of Study Counsel (495-2581) are also available to help students. Student's House affiliations are listed on the final course enrollment list (sent to the course head early in the semester). The names and numbers of Senior Tutors may be found in the Harvard Telephone Directory.

OTHER INFORMATION FOR HEAD TFs AND COURSE HEADS

(Much of the following information is summarized from *Information for Instructors*)

Exam Booklets

Examination booklets for hour or midterm examinations may be obtained from Charles Botosh Jr. in the Science Center 125 (495-5094). A Harvard officer or faculty identification card must be shown to receive them.

Take-Home Exams

Take-home examinations are considered substitutions and, like other substitutions, must be due before the end of Reading Period. Course heads should be careful to explain to students in writing the extent of collaboration and any source materials that may be permitted in the preparation of the examination.

Exam Scheduling

For most courses an examination group is published in Courses of Instruction within the course description. Since the days and hours for courses are subject to change, official dates and times for examinations are published on the Final Examination Schedule. It is posted throughout campus, is mailed to departments shortly before Reading Period, and is available at the Registrar's Office Web site (<http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu>). The Final Examination Schedule will be available during the first week of January for fall final/midyear examinations and during the first week of May for spring final examinations.

Preparation of Exams

Most courses handle the printing and photocopying of their own examinations. The Office of the Registrar will, however, have exams duplicated at the Office of the University Publisher for courses with enrollments greater than 100 FAS students provided that the exam copy is received

at the Office of the Registrar (20 Garden Street) at least five working days before the date of the exam.

Exams on File

In preparing an exam or planning a review section, it may be a good idea to see if there are previous course exams on file in the library. Ordinarily, exams are collected, bound in volumes, and placed in various Harvard libraries for the convenience of students. However, the head of a course may request at the time of the exam that the final examination not be included in the library collection.

Religious Conflicts with Final/Midyear Exams

Students are expected to anticipate any religious conflicts with examinations well in advance of the examination date. For final/midyear examinations students must report the conflict to the Office of the Registrar at 20 Garden Street, Room 210 (495-1542), by the last day of classes each semester. Accommodation may not be possible if the conflict is reported after that date.

Exams In Absentia

Students who for sufficient reason cannot be within 500 miles of Cambridge at the time of a final, midyear, or makeup examination may request to take the examination at another location. All examinations in absentia must be approved by the Administrative Board. A petition to take an examination in absentia will not be accepted without the Course Head's signature, indicating approval and a willingness to provide the Office of the Registrar with an early copy of the examination. Student applications for in absentia exams are due in the Office of the Registrar 30 days before the examination date. Occasionally, the Administrative Board will grant examinations in absentia after the 30-day deadline has passed. An in absentia examination is administered at the same time as the examination in Cambridge and must be proctored by someone approved by the Office of the Registrar. After determining that these conditions can be met, the Office of the Registrar will request a copy of the examination from the Course Head. For reasons of equity, this copy must be identical to that given at the regular examination in Cambridge. After the examination is written and returned to Cambridge, the Office of the Registrar will deliver it to the Course Head for grading. Students are charged \$100 for each examination taken in absentia to cover administrative costs such as long distance telephone calls and special mailing services. The in absentia fee is waived for students who are participants in intercollegiate competition and for students who are studying abroad for Harvard degree credit with prior approval from the Faculty Committee on Out-of-Residence Study.

Makeup Exams

The Administrative Board of Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges has sole jurisdiction over granting makeup examinations. Course Heads may not give a makeup midyear or final examination without notification from the Office of the Registrar. Moreover, course heads may not give a makeup examination at any time or location other than that specified by the Office of the Registrar. The granting of a makeup examination by the Administrative Board does not imply that the student may receive credit for any assigned work in the course not submitted by the end of the Examination Period.

The Board grants makeup examinations in cases of medically documented illness or extraordinary circumstances over which the student had no control, such as a death in the family. Makeups are sometimes granted to undergraduate participants in intercollegiate competition, but only when examinations in absentia cannot be arranged. By vote of the Faculty Council, makeup examinations may also be granted when a student who is in good standing in the course misses an examination because of inadvertence, provided the petition is supported by the Course Head and filed on time. Undergraduate and graduate students in FAS may be granted a makeup examination on the grounds of inadvertence only once during their tenure at Harvard. If called upon to do so, Course Heads must prepare appropriate makeup examinations and grade them. Ordinarily a makeup examination should not be a duplicate of the original exam. Course records of all students granted makeup examinations should be kept until the makeup has been taken and the final grade submitted.

Course grades dependent upon makeup examinations should be reported to the Office of the Registrar one week after the date of such examinations.

The Administrative Board does not grant makeup examinations for midterm examinations. Offering such makeup examinations or substituting other work is at the discretion of the Course Head, except in the case of an absence for the observation of religious holidays. Ordinarily, the Office of the Registrar has no role in midterm examinations.

Letter Grades for Undergraduates

The following excerpt about grading standards, from the University *Guide for Instructors*, while helpful in perhaps the most general way, is typical of many efforts to articulate grading standards which use abstractions to define abstractions, which use “good” to define “B,” “adequate command of the material” to define “C,” and so on:

Grades A through B- are honor grades. All grades C- or higher are considered satisfactory. Grades D+ through D- are passing but unsatisfactory. Generally speaking, A and A- represent work whose excellent quality indicates a full mastery of the subject and, in the case of A, work of extraordinary distinction. B+, B, and B- represent work of good quality which, however, does not merit special recognition. C+, C, and C- designate work exhibiting an adequate command of the material. D+, D, and D- are given for work which shows only a minimal understanding of the material. E represents work which deserves no credit. E, ABS (Absent), NCR (No Credit), FL (Fail), UNS (Unsatisfactory), and EXLD (Excluded) are failing grades.

Given the broad range of standards of evaluation both within departments and across disciplines, be sure to discuss issues of grading with the professor of the course as early in the semester as possible.

Non-letter Grades, Undergraduate Students

ABS The designation ABS (Absent) is used in the case of a student who is absent from a regularly scheduled midyear or final examination. Note: take-home examinations are not “regularly scheduled” examinations; therefore, ABS cannot be used in courses with take-home final exams. If, after an absence from the final exam, a student is subsequently granted a makeup exam by the Administrative Board, the appropriate grade is then submitted after completion of the exam.

EXT Instructors may allow students extensions of time up to the last day of the Examination Period. However, after that date only the Administrative Board of Harvard and Radcliffe Colleges may grant extensions of time for undergraduates to complete course work. Until the date of the extension set by the Board, a final grade should not be reported by the instructor; instead, the designation EXT (Extension) should be entered on the grade sheet.

INC Incomplete is not an acceptable grade for undergraduates. This option is appropriate for graduate students only.

PA/FL The grade of Pass represents letter grades of A to D-; the grade of Fail represents the letter grade of E only. Students admitted to a course on a PA/FL basis are so identified on the grade sheet. For such students, only a grade of Pass or Fail can be accepted by the Registrar. Independent Study is always graded PA/FL.

SAT/UNS The grade Satisfactory includes letter grades from A to C-; the grade of Unsatisfactory represents work below C- and is considered a failing grade. No student enrolled in courses graded SAT/UNS may receive letter grades in those courses.

Withdrawal

An undergraduate has the option of withdrawing from the course before the seventh Monday of the term.

Reports of Undergraduates with Unsatisfactory Records

The Office of the Registrar encloses unsatisfactory grade report forms with final, midyear, and midterm grade sheets. Teaching Fellows are urged to use these forms to comment on undergraduates who have earned unsatisfactory course grades. (Unsatisfactory grades are: D, E, FL, NCR, UNS, ABS). The written comments on these deficiency reports are of great value to the students' advisors and Senior Tutors. The Head Teaching Fellow should forward unsatisfactory grade reports to the Registrar along with their grade sheets.

Dishonesty in Course Work

Although instructors have the responsibility for evaluating students' academic performance, the Faculty has granted jurisdiction over matters of student dishonesty to the Administrative Boards. Therefore, any incidence of possible student dishonesty in course work should be reported to the Dean of Harvard College. After a preliminary investigation, the Dean will decide whether to refer the matter to the appropriate Administrative Board.

If a teaching fellow suspects a student of academic dishonesty (including plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, dual submissions, etc.) they should first contact the professor.

Submitting Late Grades

Grades must be delivered to the Office of the Registrar at 20 Garden Street on or before the due dates printed on the grade sheets. Instructors who anticipate that they will be unable to meet these deadlines should contact the Registrar (495-1546).