**Teaching Fellow roles at Harvard Chan**

**Introduction to this document.** Teaching Fellows (TFs) are a vital part of successful teaching at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, as they are across the University.[[1]](#footnote-2) While not all courses include TFs as part of their teaching teams, many do, and we have heard that a document such as this one could help to facilitate course instructors and TFs working together with clarity about their roles, with the ultimate aim to develop and deliver courses that are excellent learning experiences for our students.

This document is meant to help you – course instructors and TFs – to meet those goals of having clear expectations as a teaching team and teaching successfully, by providing a common framework. As a framework, it is not meant to be a comprehensive guide to TFing. It is meant to facilitate alignment around a concise set of school-wide expectations, while recognizing and embracing that there is considerable variation in the specific expectations across the range of the School’s courses and disciplines. This is meant to be a “living” document and we in the Office of Education invite you to provide feedback and suggestions for amendments ([oed@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:oed@hsph.harvard.edu)).

**Seven Schoolwide Expectations for Successful TF-Instructor Teaching Teams**

1. **Upfront and regular communication. Instructors and TFs are expected to discuss and ideally document expectations in writing before the class begins, and to have open channels of communication throughout the course.** Regular and consistent communication from the beginning and throughout helps to confirm expectations, build trust and rapport, and address issues and problems that arise. Written documentation can be useful for ensuring aligned understanding; two examples of how Harvard Chan instructors provide written expectations for their TFs are included at the end of this document.
2. **Dedicated time on task. TFs are ordinarily expected to work on average ~10 hours per week for a standard 2.5 or 5 credit course (~5 hours per week in a 1.25 credit course).** TF responsibilities may start before and end after a term (the paid appointment period can be beyond the duration of the course itself). Time pressures vary over the course of a term, so responsibilities may be lighter in some weeks, heavier in others. Course instructors and TFs are expected to discuss when the work starts and ends, should plan for variations in workload, and should ensure that total hours worked are not unreasonably high.
3. **Clearly defined scope of duties. The scope of a TF’s responsibilities will vary based on the course instructor’s goals, the learning outcomes of the course, enrollment, the number of other TFs, modality (in-person or online), and other contextual factors.** A clear scope of duties is expected to be established between course instructors and TFS. A typical set of standard responsibilities includes the following:
   1. Attending the school-wide TF orientation, required the first time TFing, as well as any required departmental TF training
   2. Updating or modifying the syllabus
   3. Updating or modifying the course Canvas site
   4. Attending class sessions
   5. Grading (with review and oversight by the course instructor)
   6. Holding regular office hours (usually weekly)
   7. Preparing handouts, rubrics, exams, homework, problem sets, solution sets
   8. Running sections/lab sessions (if applicable)
   9. Attending regular meetings with the instructors and other TFs
   10. Answering questions from students over email or discussion platforms
   11. Connecting students to support resources as needed (e.g., Office of Student Affairs)
   12. Bringing forth issues or concerns to the course instructor (e.g., concerns about academic integrity)
4. **Meeting deadlines. TFs are expected to fulfill their responsibilities in a timely manner.** Course instructors and TFs should ensure that the expectations for meeting deadlines is clear, the time commitment is appropriate, and have a way to address any unforeseen issues (e.g., if the TF is ill, have a backup plan for grading).
5. **Gaining experience. Being a TF is a valuable professional development opportunity**. Many TFs gain important skills and the opportunity to practice teaching as part of their roles. Beyond the experience gained from engaging as a member of a course’s instructional team and undertaking the typical TF tasks, TFs may also be invited to, for example, give a mini-lecture, run a class session, or suggest ideas for diversified set of readings. The course instructor is responsible for determining whether this is appropriate. TFs should feel empowered to ask for opportunities to expand their pedagogical skills and teaching experiences beyond the TF standard duties, though should not expect that these opportunities will always be appropriate or granted.
6. **Receiving feedback. TFs will be evaluated and are eligible for teaching awards.** Students in courses with TFs complete evaluations of their TFs and TFs should be given these evaluations by their course instructors and have the opportunity to discuss and receive feedback from their instructors. TFs will automatically be considered for the School’s teaching awards through the course evaluation system. Administering an early or mid-semester feedback survey in the course, including asking for feedback about TF performance, can be an invaluable tool for making changes that are beneficial before the end of semester evaluations. For PhD students, teaching is often a required part of their training, and feedback in these roles is meant to help them gain competency as teachers.
7. **Knowing course policies and how to refer/draw on school and University resources. TFs should know the specific policies of the course and know how to make use of School and University resources.** Courses vary in their policies on participation and attendance, how late work is penalized, how student complaints or academic integrity issues will be handled, etc., and TFs are expected to know and discuss these policies with the course instructor for the courses they are TFing. Resources exist to help students gain access to needed accommodations, and in some cases to additional tutoring; TFs should understand how to appropriately refer students to those resources. In addition, TFs should work collaboratively with course instructors to determine how to handle incidents of suspected academic misconduct, sexual harrasmment, or unprofessional behavior.

**Additional important things to know about TF roles**

* **Students are matched with TF positions in different ways at Harvard Chan**—for example, by request of an instructor who may have had the TF as a student in their class, by a department or program administrator, sometimes informed by a student’s advisor, etc. PhD students can also access the FAS Central Application for Teaching Sections [tool](https://gsas.harvard.edu/student-life/harvard-resources/centralized-application-teaching-sections) that posts some FAS TF opportunities (those not filled in other ways; note though that PhD program administrators may need to review whether academic requirements will be met by TFing in courses outside of Harvard Chan). The school has found that through instructors, departments, and programs, students who are seeking TF opportunities are able to find them. Prospective TFs should reach out to degree program and/or department administator with any questions or concerns about being considered for a TF role.
* **TFs who are graduate students are employees in the bargaining unit of the Harvard Graduate Student Union** and will receive an employment appointment letter.The union contract and executive summary can be found [here](https://studentunionization.harvard.edu/contract).
* **TFing work often starts before a term begins, and can end after a term**, in other words the paid appointment period can extend beyond the duration of the course itself, and in many courses advance work is especially important. Offer letters are expected to reflect the expectations for timing of work and should be sent within a reasonable period of time in advance of the appointment starting date.
* **Not all TFs receive payment in the same way**, it depends upon their appointment/role.For example, postdocs may TF and the schedule and manner of payments is likely to differ from a PhD student, or an advanced master’s degree student.
* **TFs are not the same as Head TFs or Pedagogy Fellows.** [Head TFs](https://bokcenter.harvard.edu/head-tfs) (sometimes called Lead TFs) have additional responsibilities for organizing and leading a team of TFs. Note that there may be restrictions as to who can be appointed as a Head TF related to visa restrictions. [Pedagogy Fellows](https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/office-of-education/pedagogy-fellows/) are hired through the School to work with departments and programs on a variety of teaching improvement activities, some of which can occasionally overlap with course-based TFs.

**Advice and Links**

* **TFs play a significant role in the success of a course**. Evidence from Harvard Chan course evaluations suggests that two qualities are common to highly rated TFs:
  + Being prepared, organized, and knowledgeable, and
  + Being engaged with and responsive to students in an inclusive and welcoming way
* **Graduate School of Arts and Sciences** (GSAS) links:
  + [Teaching overview](https://gsas.harvard.edu/financial-aid/teaching) with policies related to all PhD students at the University
  + FAS’s description of the [Teaching Fellow appointment](https://academic-appointments.fas.harvard.edu/teaching-fellows)
  + The [Bok Center’s “Hit the Ground Running” Canvas site](https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/68661) (Harvard ID pin required) includes links to orientation materials, teaching fundamentals, and other workshops and resources
* **Good resources from other institutions**
  + Carnegie Mellon University [Collected Wisdom: Strategies and Resources from TAs for TAs](https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/PublicationsArchives/CollectedWisdom/collectwisdom-teachingstrategies.pdf)
  + Johns Hopkins University [Teaching Assistant Manual](https://ctei.jhu.edu/teaching-academy/teaching-toolkit#tamanual)
  + **For instructors working with TAs/TFs**
    - Vanderbilt University’s [Supervisors of TAs](https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/ta-supervisors/)
    - University of Pittsburgh’s [Working with Your TA](https://teaching.pitt.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/GSTI-Working-with-Your-TA.pdf)
  + **For TFs working with instructors** 
    - Northwestern University’s [Questions to ask as a TA](https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/documents/taquestionnaire.pdf)

Example 1: Written expectations for TFs for an in-person course in GHP

TF responsibilities are shared across three TFs (one is typically doctoral and two are masters) and are often done in collaboration with the Instructor. These responsibilities are discussed and confirmed each year.

Specific responsibilities

* Weekly 30-minute check-ins to discuss class status -- student progress, confusion, concerns, planning, etc. (All TFs + Instructor)
* Updating problem sets and final exam questions (Instructor + Doctoral TF)
* Friday section lecture (Doctoral TF)
* Quality checking the development of problem sets and exam questions -- this means working through problems and essay prompts and flagging any errors, things that don't make sense or should be clarified (Master’s TFs)
* Grading problem sets -- (Master’s TFs -- typically this means splitting the grading of the 4 problem sets 50/50 according to a mutually agreed upon arrangement)
* Grading final exams quantitative questions only (All TFs)
* Grading final exam essays only (Instructor)
* Holding office hours - one hour per week (All TFs + Instructor)
* Attending class (Doctoral TF; Master’s TFs choose one of the days -- Monday or Wednesday to be present)
* Managing Canvas site (Master’s TFs)
* Managing attendance quizzes / attendance taking (Master’s TFs)

TFs as a team

* Postings to the website
* Managing emails to students
* Preparing tools for in-class activities
* Printing materials for classes and sections

Example 2: Written expectations for TFs for an online course in Epidemiology

This course is a full-semester (16 week), 5-credit online course in the MPH in Epidemiology program. There usually are two TFs for this course (either doctoral students or post-doctoral research fellows in the Department of Epidemiology). These responsibilities are communicated with TFs before they agree to be involved in the course and are discussed and confirmed each year. Note that some of these responsibilities are similar to those for on-campus courses, but some are different. We have indicated which ones may be specific to online courses.

Before the course begins (over the summer)

For this online course materials need to be developed well ahead of time though TFs do not need to attend on-campus classes; in other words, TF work for this course is somewhat frontloaded.

* Attending 2-3 one-hour planning meetings (via Zoom)
* Assisting with reviewing syllabus and Canvas site for accuracy
* Assisting with updating and checking solutions for weekly homework assignments (including running analyses in Stata and checking Canvas quizzes for accuracy)

During the course (September-December):

* Attending weekly one-hour planning meetings (via Zoom) to discuss class status (e.g., student progress, any confusion or concerns, group project, general planning)
* Monitoring and responding to student questions on Canvas discussion boards and/or via email, usually within 24 hours **(specific to online courses)**
* Grading weekly homework assignments and/or releasing scores/feedback via Canvas quizzes
* Managing results from weekly learning objectives surveys **(specific to online courses)**
  + Many online courses have optional weekly learning objectives surveys that assess how well students feel that they have grasped the material for the week; TFs may help with organizing/summarizing the results and reaching out to individual students
* Creating Zoom links for seminars/office hours beforehand and posting recordings/entering attendance afterwards **(specific to online courses)**
* Leading approximately four 90-minute seminars/office hours (via Zoom), which usually are held on weekends **(specific to online courses)**; includes preparing/updating any materials beforehand and posting them on Canvas afterwards
* Meeting occasionally with individual students (via Zoom) to go over specific questions about homework assignments and/or exams; note that tutoring is available for students who need regular 1:1 assistance (TFs are not expected to provide regular 1:1 tutoring)
* Assisting with proofreading two exams and checking solutions for accuracy (including running analyses in Stata)
* Grading two exams (with oversight from course instructors)
* Advising one or two groups on their group project, which involves analysis of a publicly-available dataset that is provided to them; includes reviewing and giving feedback on their analysis plan and two progress reports, meeting with group at least once (via Zoom), answering questions via email, and attending and evaluating their final presentation (via Zoom)

After the course ends (January or February):

* Attending a one-hour wrap-up meeting to discuss how the course went, review student evaluation results, and discuss any potential changes in the future

1. At Harvard Chan sometimes TF roles are also referred to as Teaching Assistants (TAs). The school also appoints people in other less common teaching roles such as Course Administrators; the expectations for Course Administrators differ from that of TFs, and are not outlined here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)