

Graduate Assistant Training Program

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Teaching Assistant Handbook

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WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

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Graduate Appointment Eligibility Requirements

Eligibility Requirements: To be eligible to hold any type of graduate appointment (e.g., assistantship, associateship, fellowship), students must have regular admission status in a graduate degree program, remain in good academic standing (3.0 GPA or higher), and meet the enrollment requirement for the term of appointment (see below). Appointments that do not meet these requirements will be cancelled by the Graduate College.

Form I-9: Every student on graduate appointment must complete Form I-9 during the initial academic term of employment through Human Resources to prove eligibility to work in the United States. Begin the process by going online to www.wmich.edu/hr/form-i-9-instructions.html to complete the Employee Verification and Information Section; this must be done on or before your first day on appointment (which is Aug. 29 for Fall 2011, and Jan. 9 for Spring 2012). (Your hiring department must enter your appointment in the online appointment system before you will be able to do this.) No later than the **third day** of your appointment (i.e., Aug. 31 for Fall, Jan. 11 for Spring), you must present your original, unexpired documents to the HR office in the Seibert Administration Building for verification.

Enrollment Requirement for Appointees: The minimum enrollment requirement each semester is **six** graduate credit hours for an assistantship or associateship. In a summer session, **three** graduate credit hours are required regardless of type of appointment. *The enrollment requirement is not pro-rated for students on less than full-time appointment.*

Individual departments *may* require an enrollment of more than the minimum number of credit hours. Thurgood Marshall Assistants must enroll in at least nine credit hours per semester and a total of nine credit hours over the Summer I and Summer II sessions. Appointees must be registered in semesters and sessions during which they receive financial support. **Please note that online, Extended University Programs, and undergraduate courses *may* satisfy the enrollment requirement only when prior written approval from the department advisor is presented to the Graduate College.**

All requests for underenrollment by graduate appointees must be approved by the Graduate College in advance or the student will not be paid the tuition award. The request for underenrollment should be submitted no later than the first day of class so that it can be reviewed before the close of drops and adds. Typical situations for approved underenrollment include having only one course left to take to complete a program or continuous enrollment in thesis or dissertation hours. Some underenrollment situations that are not approved include requests made for the convenience of the department or because the student has a partial appointment and thus a partial tuition award.

Under no circumstances will a student be allowed to hold a graduate appointment when not enrolled during the term of appointment.

Graduate Appointee Benefits and Privileges

Health Care: Appointees may elect to enroll in the graduate appointee health insurance plan. The University has designed a cost-effective insurance plan to protect students from catastrophic health

care costs and to offset routine care. The policy covers the majority of charges incurred due to illness and injury when treated at the Sindecuse Health Center (SHC) and elsewhere when authorized. More information is available on the Graduate College homepage and at:

www.wmich.edu/grad/sub-current-students.html

Graduate appointees receive a subsidy from the University toward their own University health insurance policy (spouses and dependents may be added at the full rate through Aetna) and have the opportunity to enroll in the graduate appointee health insurance plan at the beginning of the Fall and Spring semesters. Enrollment takes place through the Graduate College only; if you do not enroll through the Graduate College, you will not receive the insurance subsidy. The student share of the insurance premium is paid through payroll deduction as noted on the payroll schedule on the next page; students who enroll in Fall will have 6 insurance deductions in Fall and 6 in Spring, and students who enroll in Spring will have 6 deductions in Spring.

Parking: Graduate appointees are exempt from paying the campus motor vehicle registration fee but must register their vehicle with Parking Services and present their letter of appointment to receive a parking permit. Appointees with a teaching classification shall have the option of a graduate hang tag (good for the entire academic year) or temporary sticker parking permit. Appointees with research or non-teaching classifications shall be given a temporary sticker parking permit, and do not have the option of a hang tag. The temporary sticker parking permit is valid for one academic term at a time only. A new temporary sticker parking permit must be obtained from Parking Services each academic term on appointment, if needed.

Paychecks: The University pays employees on a bi-weekly basis. Graduate appointees generally receive 9 paychecks in Fall and Spring semesters and 4 or 5 in Summer I and Summer II sessions. Pay dates for graduate appointees are posted on the Graduate College website at:

www.wmich.edu/grad/funding/assistantships.html

The 2011-12 pay schedule for graduate appointees is also given on the next page. When a paycheck covers less than a full 14 days, this is noted in the comments column. For Fall 2011 appointments, the first pay date is 9/13/11 but this paycheck is for one week rather than two. **Note also that there is a gap between Fall and Spring semesters with no paycheck on 1/17/2012.**

It is recommended that appointees sign up for direct deposit of their net paycheck as soon as possible. This can be done by going to “Employee Self Service” through GoWMU. See more about “Employee Self Service” at:

www.wmich.edu/payroll/my pay/index.html

Direct deposit remains in effect until the Payroll office is advised otherwise (if you change banks, be sure to change your direct deposit information!). Graduate appointees who do not sign up for direct deposit will receive their paycheck in their department office.

It is the appointee’s responsibility to report any errors in compensation (including lack of payment) to the department office. In the event of an *underpayment*, a correction will be made to provide the appointee with the amount due. In the event of an *overpayment*, the appointee’s University account will be debited in the amount of the overpayment.

Pay Dates for Graduate Appointees (DA/DGA/GA)**Western Michigan University
Pay Schedule 2011–2012*****revised 8/8/11***

BEGINNING DATE	ENDING DATE	PAY PERIOD	PAY DATE	FORMS DUE TO HRIP*	REMARKS
6/13/2011	6/26/2011	R52	7/5/2011	6/21/2011	
6/27/2011	7/10/2011	S2	7/19/2011	7/5/2011	Final Summer I paycheck [7 of 10 days] and First Summer II paycheck [7 of 10 days]
7/11/2011	7/24/2011	S4	8/2/2011	7/19/2011	First full Summer II paycheck
7/25/2011	8/7/2011	S6	8/16/2011	8/2/2011	
8/8/2011	8/21/2011	S7	8/30/2011	8/16/2011	Last full Summer II paycheck
8/22/2011	9/4/2011	S08	9/13/2011	8/30/2011	Final Summer II paycheck [2 of 10 days] and First Fall paycheck [5 of 10 days]
9/5/2011	9/18/2011	S10	9/27/2011	9/13/2011	First full Fall paycheck
9/19/2011	10/2/2011	S12	10/11/2011	9/27/2011	
10/3/2011	10/16/2011	S14	10/25/2011	10/11/2011	Fall health insurance enrollee deductions begin
10/17/2011	10/30/2011	S16	11/8/2011	10/25/2011	
10/31/2011	11/13/2011	S18	11/22/2011	11/8/2011	
11/14/2011	11/27/2011	S20	12/6/2011	11/22/2011	
11/28/2011	12/11/2011	S22	12/20/2011	12/6/2011	Last full Fall paycheck
12/12/2011	12/25/2011	S24	1/3/2012	12/20/2011	Final Fall paycheck [7 of 10 days]
12/26/2011	1/8/2012	S26	1/17/2012	1/3/2012	No paycheck for graduate appointees
1/9/2012	1/22/2012	S28	1/31/2012	1/17/2012	First full Spring paycheck
1/23/2012	2/5/2012	S30	2/14/2012	1/31/2012	
2/6/2012	2/19/2012	S32	2/28/2012	2/14/2012	Spring health insurance enrollee deductions begin
2/20/2012	3/4/2012	S34	3/13/2012	2/28/2012	
3/5/2012	3/18/2012	S36	3/27/2012	3/13/2012	
3/19/2012	4/1/2012	S38	4/10/2012	3/27/2012	Last Fall health insurance deduction
4/2/2012	4/15/2012	S40	4/24/2012	4/10/2012	
4/16/2012	4/29/2012	S42	5/8/2012	4/24/2012	Last full Spring paycheck; last Spring health insurance deduction
4/30/2012	5/13/2012	S44	5/22/2012	5/8/2012	Final Spring paycheck [2 of 10 days] and First Summer I paycheck [5 of 10 days]
5/14/2012	5/27/2012	S46	6/5/2012	5/22/2012	
5/28/2012	6/10/2012	S48	6/19/2012	6/5/2012	
6/11/2012	6/24/2012	S50	7/3/2012	6/19/2012	Last full Summer I paycheck
6/25/2012	7/8/2012	S52	7/17/2012	7/3/2012	Final Summer I paycheck [7 of 10 days]

Please turn in all paperwork to HRIP ASAP, but no later than 5:00 p.m. on the due date to ensure adequate processing time prior to Kronos sign-off.

Taxes: Graduate appointees pay regular payroll taxes (federal and state income taxes) on their salary based on tax filing status and number of exemptions. Unless you file a W-4 form with the Payroll office claiming otherwise, all new employees are automatically considered single filers with zero exemptions (see www.wmich.edu/payroll/mypay/taxinfo.html).

Graduate appointees do not pay FICA taxes (Social Security and Medicare) unless they are enrolled less than half-time (i.e., fewer than 3 credit hours in Fall or Spring or fewer than 2 credit hours in a summer session); *or*, unless they have an additional instructional or staff position at the University (including part-time or temporary). (In the latter case, both you and the department that has hired you as a graduate appointee will be assessed FICA charges so *you must inform that department immediately prior to accepting additional employment at WMU while a graduate appointee.*) University requirements regarding payment of FICA taxes are stated here:

www.wmich.edu/payroll/mypay/fica.html

International students need to advise the Payroll office of their visa status in order to be exempt from paying FICA taxes (Social Security and Medicare). This exemption is not automatic. For more information, visit www.wmich.edu/payroll, where there is a form for international students to claim the FICA exemption.

Tuition Award: Graduate appointees are generally granted a full or partial tuition award depending on their degree level and type of appointment (for Fall and Spring, up to 9 hours for doctoral students and 6 hours for master's students; up to 3 hours in Summer I or II for all students). Any such tuition amount to be awarded will be specified in the appointment letter and appear on the student's WMU account as a tuition award. Students who are granted a tuition award and subsequently withdraw from a class after the refund period and/or resign from the appointment will be required to repay the portion of tuition that was granted as a benefit of the appointment.

Students on partial appointment may receive a tuition award that does not cover full-time enrollment. Full-time enrollment is still required and the student must pay the difference in tuition, unless a request for underenrollment has been approved (see p. 1).

Unused tuition award amounts are forfeited and cannot be carried over to a subsequent term.

Tuition awards will be credited directly to appointees' student accounts. Any overpayment or underpayment due to a change in enrollment will be corrected after the end of the drop/add period through an adjustment to the appointee's student account.

Tuition award amounts are based on resident or non-resident on-campus rates and will not automatically pay toward undergraduate, online, or Extended University Programs courses (even graduate courses) unless students have secured prior approval for such enrollments from the Graduate College. Students may be responsible for paying what is not covered by the tuition award for these types of courses; for example, rates for online and EUP courses are higher than resident rates for main campus courses and students receiving a resident tuition award will owe additional money for such courses.

Residency Status: U.S. students who enter Western Michigan University as out-of-state residents are encouraged to seek Michigan resident status as soon as they are able. Students are generally able to

apply for state residency after their first complete year as a student. The University requires that an applicant for state residency show that “his/her previous domicile has been abandoned and a Michigan domicile established.... Twelve consecutive months of physical presence immediately preceding the first day of classes is a strong indicator of domicile” (from the residency application available at www.obf.wmich.edu/documents/docs/residency-application.pdf).

There are several advantages to seeking Michigan resident status. Resident graduate tuition rates are much lower than non-resident rates (\$459.80 per credit vs. \$973.87 at 2011–12 rates). It is a burden for departments to continue to hire graduate students at non-resident rates, and some will offer non-resident tuition for only one year and thereafter expect the student to be a resident. Also, students sometimes have to pay their own tuition for additional classes or if they receive a partial tuition award; in such cases, it is to the student’s advantage to pay the resident rate.

Tuition and Fees Payment Deferment: Appointees may defer payment of tuition or fees by signing up for the installment payment plan available through Accounts Receivable. To be eligible, the student must owe at least \$500. The usual \$30 fee for this service will be required at the time of enrollment but the fee will be refunded to student accounts upon verification of the graduate appointment in about the sixth week of the term. Delinquent accounts are subject to monthly service charges of 1.5% and all University collection procedures, including referral to an external collection agency. All tuition and fees must be paid or arrangements for payment made prior to registration for the next semester/ session.

Important: Most appointments do not pay your student fees (see table below). It is your responsibility to pay these fees by the due date in order to avoid assessment of service charges or collection attempts, or having a registration hold placed on your account.

Summary of Required Fees		
Per semester, all students (full-time graduate enrollment is 6 or more hours):	5 or more cr. hrs.	1-4 cr. hrs.
Enrollment fee	\$393.00	\$199.25
Student Assessment Fee	21.00	21.00
Sustainability fee	8.00	8.00
Total:	\$422.00	\$228.25
International student fee	25.00	25.00
Total for international students:	\$447.00	\$253.25
Per session, all students (full-time graduate enrollment is 3 or more hours):	4 or more cr. hrs.	1-3 cr. hrs.
Enrollment fee	\$197.00	\$99.75
Student Assessment Fee	10.50	10.50
Sustainability fee (new for 2010–11)	4.00	4.00
Total:	\$211.50	\$114.25
International student fee	12.50	12.50
Total for international students:	\$224.00	\$126.75

Note that a graduate student enrolled full-time in a semester (6 or more hours) will pay the full-time fees from the middle column, while a graduate student enrolled full-time in a session (3 hours) will pay the part-time fees from the last column.

Campus Bookstore: Graduate appointees will receive a 10% discount on books for their classes and supplies (excludes class rings and sale items) in the term(s) they hold an appointment. To receive this discount, appointees must identify their status as graduate appointees at the service desk before purchases are made.

Library: Appointees will receive the same borrowing privileges as faculty at the University Libraries when they identify their status as graduate appointees before checkout. The borrowing period for graduate appointees is one semester. Appointees may borrow up to 50 items at a time, and are exempt from ordinary overdue fines. The exemption does not include fines for overdue recalled items and replacement charges for lost items. For more information, see www.wmich.edu/library/borrow/faculty.php or inquire at the library circulation desk.

University Housing: Graduate appointees will be accorded priority in securing University housing in residence halls or family housing apartments (if deadlines are observed and vacancies permit).

Facilities: Graduate appointees will be accorded the use of University facilities (e.g., offices, research facilities, etc.) authorized by the director of the facilities on the same basis as faculty. This does not apply to the West Hills Athletic Club.

Policies That Affect Graduate Appointees as Employees

Graduate appointees, as University employees, are subject to many of the same workplace policies as other employees. The following topics are especially pertinent. References to the online Employee Handbook (www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/index.html) and Teaching Assistants Union Agreement (www.wmich.edu/acb/docs/TAU%20Full%20contract%2009-12%20pdf.pdf) are given where appropriate, and graduate appointees should refer to these for the most current information.

Absences: Graduate appointees are expected to carry out their assigned duties during the academic term(s) of appointment at the times agreed upon with their supervisor. As specified in the letter of appointment, appointees are generally required to work a certain number of hours per term, or, if teaching, fulfill certain responsibilities for the assigned class(es).

Teaching assistants should refer to Art. 12 of the TAU Agreement for information regarding leave time. For other appointees, the following types of absences may occur and procedures for dealing with absences should be discussed in advance with your supervisor:

- **Illness/Medical absences:** Notify your supervisor as soon as possible if you will not be present at work because of illness, or in advance whenever possible for planned medical appointments that must be scheduled during your regular work hours. Hours missed due to illness or medical conditions are expected to be made up.

- **Jury Duty/Court Testimony:** See Employee Handbook at www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/12-leaves-02.html#JuryDuty.
- **Bereavement:** No specific provisions are made for bereavement leave for research or service assistants, and such arrangements should be agreed upon with the appointee's supervisor.

Holidays and Closures: The University holiday schedule includes the following holidays when the University is closed: New Year's Day; Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (third Monday in January); Memorial Day; Independence Day; Labor Day; Thanksgiving Day and the following Friday; and Christmas Day. Spirit Day (the Friday before the beginning of Spring recess) is an academic holiday and no classes are held, but the University is open regular hours. In addition, there is a Winter Closure period between Christmas and New Year's Day when the University is officially closed.

If the University will be closed due to severe weather or emergency, this information will be posted prominently on the University home page and also available on the WMU Hotline at (269) 387-1001, as well as being reported to local media.

University Timesheets: Some University departments will require their graduate appointees—particularly research and service assistants—to complete a timesheet each pay period (every two weeks). Hours worked, as well as any absences, should be reported on the timesheet.

Work-Related Accident or Injury: If you experience a job-related or on-duty accident or injury, the procedures noted at www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/09-safety.html#Safety should be followed.

Work-related illnesses or safety hazards should also be reported to your supervisor.

Worker's Compensation: The Workers' Compensation program is administered by Human Resources. See www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/09-safety.html#Safety for more information.

Re-appointment: An appointee's letter of appointment specifies the length of the student's appointment, which may be for one academic term only or for up to a year at a time. Departments are encouraged to inform current appointees about subsequent appointments in a timely fashion, but re-appointment to the same or a similar position is never guaranteed.

Resignation or Termination: Should a graduate appointment be terminated or the appointee find it necessary to resign while an academic term is in progress, the appointee could be responsible for paying some portion or possibly all of the tuition award paid on the student's behalf, depending on the circumstances, including whether or not the student must withdraw from classes. Other benefits of the appointment, including health insurance, will be maintained only at the student's expense.

Simultaneous Additional Employment (inside or outside the University): Graduate appointees are expected to balance their appointment duties with their academic work and any additional interests, including other employment. While other employment in addition to a graduate appointment is not prohibited (although the number of hours of weekly work is restricted for most international students), in general any such employment greater than 10 hours per week can have an adverse affect on the appointee's ability to carry out the appointment responsibilities and devote enough time to

academic work. Some departments do expressly prohibit additional employment and will state this in the student’s appointment letter.

If outside responsibilities interfere with an appointee’s ability to effectively carry out the appointment responsibilities, the appointment could be terminated for poor performance or the appointee not re-appointed.

Smoking Policy: In recognition of environmental tobacco smoke health risks, the University will provide as close to a smoke-free environment as practicable for its faculty, staff, students, and visitors. The right of a non-smoker to protect his or her health and comfort will take precedence over another’s desire to smoke. Smoking is prohibited in all University facilities, including University vehicles, and is also not permitted within 25 feet of all building entrances, air intakes, and operable windows. The full policy is given at www.wmich.edu/policies/smoke-free.html.

Drug-free Workplace: The Drug-free Workplace policy, given at www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/10-discipline.html#DrugFree, covers restrictions on controlled substances on University property. The term “controlled substance” refers to all illegal drugs and to legal drugs used without a physician’s order. It does not prohibit taking prescription medication under the direction of a physician.

Sexual Harassment Policy: Sexual harassment complaints are handled by the Office of Institutional Equity. Sexual harassment will not be tolerated behavior at Western Michigan University. It is expected that each member of the University community will consider him-/herself responsible for the proper observance of this policy.

See the policy statement at www.wmich.edu/oie/policies.html for definitions of sexual harassment and the complaint procedure, as well as information about WMU’s consensual sexual relations policy. The policy statement through Institutional Equity also covers Affirmative Action, rights of persons with handicapping conditions, disabled veterans, equal opportunity practices, and human rights.

Consensual Sexual Relations Policy: From the Western Michigan University *Employee Handbook* (www.wmich.edu/hr/handbook/discipline.html#Relations):

In their relationships, members of the University community are expected to be aware of their professional responsibilities and avoid apparent or actual conflict of interest, favoritism, or bias. The relationships may constitute sexual harassment when one of the individuals is in a position to evaluate or otherwise influence the education, employment, housing, or participation in a University activity of the other. The subtle yet powerful element of coercion that may exist in such relationships is a legitimate concern of the University. Such relationships give rise to a conflict of interest and are potentially exploitative. Moreover, such relationships may affect the environment for other students, administrators, faculty or staff members, or the manner in which they are treated.

An administrator, faculty, or staff member should not make sexual advances, requests for sexual favors or other communications of a sexual nature to a person if he or she exercises direct influence over a person’s activities within the University. If a sexual relationship

develops, the administrator, faculty, or staff member must take steps to eliminate any current or potential conflict of interest and distance him- or herself from decisions involving the other person. Failure to eliminate a conflict shall constitute misconduct.

Further, administrators, faculty, and staff should be aware that any romantic involvement with students or subordinates may require formal action against them if a complaint is filed. Because of the asymmetrical nature of such relationships, an administrator, faculty or staff member's assertion that a relationship was consensual in defense of a complaint of sexual harassment is subject to doubt and will be thoroughly investigated.

Stress Management and Conflict Resolution Resources

Graduate appointees needing assistance with academic, work-related, or personal issues have numerous places to go for help, including:

- **University Ombudsman** (www.wmich.edu/ombudsman/) — an intervention agent and impartial person who helps students, faculty, and staff resolve academic and non-academic concerns. The Ombudsman listens to you and discusses your question or concern; provides you with information that answers your question or helps you locate someone who can assist you; explains the University's policies and procedures and how they may affect you; follows up with you and others at the University to make sure your concern is resolved; and recommends changes in the institution that will make it more responsive to every member of the community. The basic principles of the University Ombudsman are independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality. The Ombudsman is authorized to make thorough investigations and has access to most University offices and records, reports, and other documents. No person shall suffer any penalty for seeking assistance from the Ombudsman.
- **Office of Institutional Equity** (www.wmich.edu/oie/) — Oversees and administers the University's Affirmative Action and Equal Employment Opportunity programs and policies, the Americans with Disabilities Act and related accommodations, and also addresses issues of equality and justice for all members of the University as consistent with the University's Non-discrimination Policy. Western Michigan University is committed to an environment which encourages fair, humane, and beneficial treatment of all faculty, staff, and students. In accordance with that fundamental objective, the University has a continuing commitment to assure equal opportunity and to oppose discrimination because of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, handicap, height, weight, or marital status.
- **Campus Employee Dispute Resolution Services** (www.wmich.edu/cedrs/) — Offers free confidential mediation and community conferencing services that assist faculty and staff (including GAs) in finding mutually agreeable solutions to interpersonal disputes with other individuals in the workplace.
- **University Counseling and Testing Center** (www.wmich.edu/counseling/) — Offers one-on-one personal counseling to assist individuals in better understanding themselves and the emotional conflicts that may interfere with their everyday lives as students, to help them become more aware of alternative means of coping with conflicts and stress, and to aid them in developing more healthy, satisfying, and fulfilling lifestyles.

- **Teaching Assistants Union** (Teaching Assistants only) — Teaching Assistants with concerns relating to matters contained in the TAU Agreement (including but not limited to teaching assignments, benefits, performance reviews and requirements, etc.) should bring their concerns to the attention of their department steward or the TAU office (contact names and information available at www.tauaft.org/).

Additional Reading

Graduate school and your mental health:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Grad-School-Blues/29566/>

The Graduate College

The Graduate College at Western Michigan University (www.wmich.edu/grad/) provides an array of resources and services to assist graduate students and departments that house graduate programs. Headed by a dean and staffed with 8 professional staff members, the Graduate College provides services such as the following:

- Advocates for graduate education and programs across the University and seeks to sustain a high quality of programs. In this role, the Graduate College interacts with other academic colleges, the Graduate Studies Council of the Faculty Senate, Academic Affairs, and offices such as Admissions, Financial Aid, and the Registrar's office.
- Manages and oversees University policies and procedures related to graduate education and assists departments with consistent implementation of policies and procedures.
- Interacts with other graduate institutions through the Council of Graduate Schools and other organizations to share information and stay current with trends in graduation education.
- Oversees the appointment process for graduate faculty members.
- Oversees and monitors graduate student appointments across the University for student eligibility and department compliance with minimum standards.
- Offers financial assistance to graduate students in the form of grants for research and conference travel expenses as well as some fellowships for graduate study.
- Through the Graduate Center for Research and Retention, assists students with dissertation writing, proposal development, and statistical analysis.
- Assists departments with recruitment of graduate students.
- Publicizes the scheduling of doctoral dissertation defenses, reviews format of all doctoral dissertations and master's theses, and holds workshops for formatting of dissertations and theses.
- Schedules and carries out numerous events for graduate students, including the new graduate appointee training, graduate student welcoming fair, graduate program day, annual graduate awards convocation, many workshops of interest to graduate students, etc.
- Coordinates with Sindecuse Health Center to manage the GA health insurance enrollment program.
- Provides a home for the Graduate Student Advisory Committee and works with GSAC to address graduate student concerns and develop opportunities for graduate students to get involved.

WMU Mission Statement

Mission

Western Michigan University is a student-centered research university, building intellectual inquiry, investigation, and discovery into all undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. The University provides leadership in teaching, research, learning, and public service. Nationally recognized and internationally engaged, the University:

- Forges a responsive and ethical academic community
- Develops foundations for achievement in pluralistic societies
- Incorporates participation from diverse individuals in decision-making
- Contributes to technological and economic development
- Engenders an awareness and appreciation of the arts

Goals

Western Michigan University's mission is characterized by its pursuit of the following institutional goals:

- To foster a safe, civil, and healthy University community
- To provide access to academic programs at reasonable cost and in multiple settings
- To strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration and international programs
- To increase diversity within the student body, faculty, and staff through institutional practices and programs
- To recognize excellence in the teaching, research, learning, creative work, scholarship, and service contributions of students, faculty, and staff
- To conduct ongoing assessment activities and engage in continuous improvement initiatives within the University
- To establish lifelong relationships between alumni and the University
- To advance responsible environmental stewardship
- To support community and regional partnerships that elevate civic, cultural, social, and economic life

University Organization

Western Michigan University is led by its President, who reports to the Board of Trustees. The University consists of the following vice presidential units, each of which is headed by a Vice President:

Academic Affairs
 Business and Finance
 Development
 Diversity and Inclusion
 Legal Affairs
 Research
 Student Affairs

The University is further divided into a variety of colleges, departments, schools, institutes, centers, and other units.

The Academic Affairs area, headed by the Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, contains all colleges. Colleges are headed by a dean and all degree-granting academic programs are housed in colleges. Western Michigan University has the following colleges in addition to the Graduate College:

- Arts and Sciences
- Aviation (undergraduate only)
- Business (Haworth College of)
- Education and Human Development
- Engineering and Applied Sciences
- Fine Arts
- Health and Human Services
- Lee Honors College (undergraduate only)

Use of University Facilities and Resources

As a WMU graduate assistant, you will have access to numerous resources and facilities within your academic and/or hiring department. These may include University telephones, computer equipment, copying machines, fax machines, and the like. Your department will probably advise you on how to responsibly use this equipment. Please keep in mind the following:

Copy machines: Departments often assign access codes to graduate students for using department copy machines. Personal copying should not be done on department copy machines unless there is a procedure in place for reimbursing the department for such costs. Teaching assistants who need to make copies for their classes should inquire about procedures through their department.

Phones and fax machines: Avoid using University phones for personal business, even for local calls. Such calls are best made on your personal cell phone. Long-distance calls should never be made on University phones for personal business. Long-distance personal faxes should only be made with a calling card or credit card. That way, the University is not charged for these long-distance calls.

Computer equipment: Some departments allow graduate students to check out computer equipment such as laptop computers, projectors, etc., for use in teaching or other activities. Be sure you follow your department's procedures for checking out equipment. For any University computer equipment which you may use in your department, avoid thinking of it as "yours" even if you have exclusive use of it. Do not download inappropriate, illegal, or unregistered software or files to any University computer.

In general, be respectful of the University's resources and seek the guidance of your department if you are not sure what rights you have in regard to the use of department equipment.

Campus Safety and Security

The issue of security on college campuses hit the national spotlight in the spring of 2007 with the tragic shooting incident at Virginia Tech, followed in February 2008 by the tragedy at Northern Illinois University. Like campuses all over the nation, Western Michigan University has made campus safety and security top priorities and responded with intense scrutiny of its resources and procedures

for responding to immediate security threats. As a result, the University has implemented numerous procedures for notifying the campus community of threats and for protecting the safety and security of all campus citizens. Everyone in the campus community has a responsibility to be aware of potential threats to campus security and to follow these important procedures that will minimize such threats.

WMU's emergency procedures are detailed at:

www.obf.wmich.edu/safety/emergency/

Western Michigan University has a 24-hour-per-day Department of Public Safety with Patrol, Detective, and Community Policing divisions. The WMU DPS can be contacted anytime at (269) 387-5555 (7-5555 or 911 from any campus phone; calling 911 from a cell phone, even on campus, will reach Kalamazoo County emergency dispatch). Up-to-date campus information, including University closures, is also available on the WMU Hotline number at (269) 387-1001.

Campus-wide Emergencies: In the event of a campus-wide emergency, WMU Public Safety and the University's emergency response team will determine what methods will be used to alert the campus community. These methods may include use of police and weather alert radios, the WMU Hotline (387-1001), emergency email to campus offices or the entire campus community, posting a message on the University home page and/or the University telephone system, notifying local media to advise persons to stay off campus, etc. Should you be advised of a campus emergency, please follow all instructions for responding to the emergency, especially to stay off campus if so advised.

There are many local police jurisdictions that can be called for assistance with a campus emergency, including the Kalamazoo County Sheriff's Department, the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety, and other departments such as Kalamazoo Township and the City of Portage. Kalamazoo also has two regional hospitals within 10 minutes of campus (Bronson downtown, and Borgess on Gull Road), both of which boast Level I trauma centers.

Important Update: All members of the WMU community may register a telephone number (cell, office, or home) through the GoWMU portal for "WMU Alert," part of the Reverse 911 phone system. If an extreme emergency is identified (including but not limited to severe weather, terrorism, shootings, hazardous materials incidents), the system's mass call option will be activated, placing a phone call to registered users. **IMPORTANT:** To hear the emergency system message, you must answer the call and speak; the system will not leave voice or text messages. This voluntary registration is only for the emergency call system, and phone numbers registered will not be used by the University for any other purpose.

Building Security: Many campus buildings are open to the public only during University business hours (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays except during holidays). Other buildings, such as the Bernhard Center, the library, and many classroom buildings, are open in the evenings and on weekends. Public Safety and Custodial Services are responsible for locking and unlocking building doors at the appropriate times. If a building is not open at the usual time, please call the WMU Department of Public Safety (387-5555). *Please do not leave building doors propped open at any time.* (If you must let

someone who has business being there into a building, have him or her notify you upon arrival rather than propping open a door.)

Also do not prop open security doors within buildings. Such doors are usually identified as security doors and are essential to securing areas within buildings and to contain a fire if one should occur.

Graduate assistants are often entrusted with outside door keys or swipe cards to campus buildings where they have responsibilities, as well as keys/cards to specific rooms and areas of the building. University keys are never to be duplicated or given to other individuals without the permission of the building coordinator.

Since the campus is a public place, sometimes persons who have no affiliation with WMU wander into or loiter in campus buildings. If you encounter someone in a building who seems lost or to have no business there, do not take it upon yourself to determine their business being in the building. If a department office in the building is open, report the person to that office and ask for assistance. If it is after hours or there are few people in the building, leave the building or retreat to a safe location to call WMU Public Safety (7-5555 or 911 from a campus phone) for assistance in dealing with the person. (If you can get to an elevator quickly, they can be locked from inside and contain a police call box.) Let the campus security professional make the determination about whether or not the person is suspicious or dangerous—*do not take this upon yourself*.

Walking on Campus: Students are encouraged to protect their own safety by not walking alone on campus after dark, particularly in remote areas of campus. If you are not able to walk with a group, walking escorts are available through Public Safety 7 days a week from 6 p.m. to 2 a.m., and vehicle escorts are available from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. for providing transportation between parking lots and residence halls. Call WMU Public Safety at 387-RIDE to arrange for campus escorts.

Police Call Boxes: Outdoor call boxes for contacting Public Safety are distributed around campus in parking lots and near buildings. They have a phone handset and a rotating blue light on top that flashes when the box is activated. Once the box is activated, the location is connected to Public Safety's 911 line and the light will continue to flash until turned off by Public Safety. These call boxes can be used whenever you have a concern for which you need to contact Public Safety. All campus elevators also contain direct phone contact to Public Safety.

Responding to Threats to Personal Security: Anytime you are on campus and perceive a threat to the security of yourself or others, you should immediately contact WMU Public Safety (387-5555 or 911, or by using a campus call box). At the same time, you must take action to protect your own security. If possible, retreat to a room that can be locked where you can call for help. Another safe location is the nearest elevator—the elevator can be locked from inside and you can use the police call box to communicate with WMU Public Safety. (Get in the habit of locating the red stop button when you are in campus elevators so that if you ever need to use it, you will know exactly where it is.)

What should you do if you have reason to believe someone at WMU (e.g., a classmate, a student in a class you teach) is a threat to himself or to others? Campus security threats are sometimes precipitated by mental health crises in individuals. Campus mental health professionals are trained to identify

these kinds of issues in persons with whom they have contact. Other individuals on campus who don't have specific mental health training may also have concerns about the mental stability of persons they encounter in the campus setting. If someone you know at WMU has made threats against others or you believe he poses a possible danger to himself or others, you should immediately report your concerns to the WMU Department of Public Safety. They will investigate the potential threat and help determine what interventions may be necessary. Don't take it upon yourself to assess such possible threats, and don't assume that someone else will do something about it or that your concerns are not valid. Public Safety will listen to your concerns and take appropriate action.

Additional Reading

An important read illustrating intervention efforts in a campus setting:

<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Safety-Official-Discusses/49374/>

Confidentiality/Disclosure of Student Records

Western Michigan University is bound by federal law to comply with the provisions of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA). Maintaining confidentiality of educational records is the responsibility of all users whether the individuals are faculty, staff, or students. According to FERPA, an education record, with limited exception, is a record which is maintained by the institution, directly related to the student, and from which a student can be identified. As graduate assistants, whether or not you are teaching you may be asked to handle student records, such as grades, as part of your assistantship responsibilities. It is important that you understand the limits of confidentiality in regard to student records (including your own records).

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act affords students certain rights with respect to their educational records. These include the right to consent to disclosures of personally identifiable information contained in the student's educational records, **except to the extent that FERPA authorizes disclosures without consent.**

Disclosure without consent is permitted when the information consists solely of "directory information." Directory information may be published or released by University faculty and staff at their discretion. Unless a student specifically directs otherwise by requesting confidentiality of his personally identifiable information, WMU designates all of the following categories of information about its students as "Directory Information":

- Name
- Address
- Telephone number
- WMU E-mail address
- Curriculum and major field of study
- Dates of attendance
- Enrollment status (full/part-time)
- Degrees/awards received
- Most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student

Participation in officially recognized activities and sports
Weight and height of athletes

A student has the right to request that directory information not be disclosed without the student's consent. If a student exercises this right, it will mean that no directory information pertaining to the student will be published or otherwise released to third parties without the student's consent, a court order, or a subpoena.

Any student wishing to exercise the right of withholding some or all categories of personally identifiable information must inform the Registrar's Office in writing by not later than the fifth day of the semester or session. The form for doing so is available at:

www.wmich.edu/registrar/pdf/forms/Invoke_Privacy_Info.pdf

The annual printed campus directory is published late in the Fall semester, and anyone who wishes to withhold their information from publication must make the request by the Fall deadline. A student's notification to withhold information will remain in effect until the student requests in writing that the confidentiality hold be revoked. A student who exercises this right of withholding all categories of personally identifiable information will have a "confidentiality flag" placed on his student record in the Banner student records system. This means no information can be released about the student without his consent.

Confidentiality Procedures: Please observe the following procedures in order to protect student records:

Grades should never be posted by a student's name or any portion of the student identification number (WIN). This includes the posting of grades to a non-confidential Web site. There are ways that grades can be posted securely, such as to use code words or randomly assigned numbers that only the instructor and individual student know, and to post the list non-alphabetically. Semester/session and mid-term grades are typically available to students through their GoWMU account within a few hours of the grade submission deadline. Since access requires the use of the student's Bronco NetID and password, midterm and final course grades can be viewed securely. The Elearning system also allows instructors to release grade information securely to students and control how much is shared (see www.wmich.edu/wmu/news/2011/06/036.html).

Graded papers or tests should not be left unattended in publicly accessible places, nor should students be allowed to sort through them in order to retrieve their own work.

In office settings, paper containing personal information about students beyond directory information (particularly WIN numbers, financial data, grades, and other sensitive information) should be kept in a secure location. Such records should not be discarded in wastebaskets or recycle bins but must be shredded.

The Registrar is the University officer charged with ensuring compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. More information on FERPA is available at:

www.wmich.edu/registrar/pdf/brochure_FERPA_2010.pdf

Western Michigan University Libraries

University Libraries recognize that WMU graduate students engage in significant research and teaching while at WMU. The libraries are committed to providing resources and services that enhance your academic experience as both a researcher and an instructor at WMU.

Get to know your library liaison

WMU librarians are available to assist you whether in person, by phone, e-mail, or IM. Each academic department has an assigned liaison librarian whom you can contact about topics ranging from general inquiries to arranging in-depth research consultations. Your library liaison is the point person for many services available to you in your role as researcher as well as instructor. For example your liaison can assist with any of the following:

- Overview of services or introduction to resources (print, electronic, multimedia) available for your field
- Scheduling an in-depth research consultation
- Arranging hands on library instruction for a class
- Recommending items you'd like the library to purchase, or requesting a library workshop or service
- Find your library liaison here: www.wmich.edu/library/liaison

WMU Libraries collections and facilities

- Collections include millions of print items as well as electronic books and databases, streaming video, DVDs, CDs, and maps.
- Off-campus access to databases, electronic journals, streaming video, and other online resources is available via Bronco Net ID.
- University Libraries consists of Waldo Library which houses collections in humanities, social sciences, science/technology, business, maps, government documents and special collections (includes medieval collection, rare books, women's poetry).
- Branch Libraries include:
 - Education (Sangren Hall)
 - Music and Dance (Dalton Center)
 - Archives and Regional History (East Hall)

Course reserves

WMU Libraries offer a reserve service for materials you would like set aside for your class. You can place physical or electronic materials on reserve for use by your students. More information about setting up reserves for your classes, including copyright guidelines, can be found at www.wmich.edu/library/reserves/.

Library instruction services

University Libraries provide a variety of instructional support services including course-related instruction, one-on-one consultations, virtual and self-guided tours, handouts, and tutorials. Librarians can work with you to develop research assignments that help students learn how to locate, evaluate,

and effectively use information for their subject. Librarians can help you develop assignments using print collections, primary source materials, statistical information, etc. More information about Library Instruction Services is available at www.wmich.edu/library/instruction/.

Borrowing books and other materials

- Books from WMU libraries may be checked out by graduate students for one semester. You may borrow up to 50 items from the general collections. (See summary of library services for graduate students at www.wmich.edu/library/grads/.)
- Present your Bronco Card whenever you wish to borrow library items.
- Items may be renewed online or in person.
- DVDs and videotapes from the **Instructional Video Collection** may be borrowed for seven (7) days.
- For information on borrowing other types of materials, as well as further information on borrowing and renewal policies see www.wmich.edu/library/borrow/faculty.php.

Interlibrary loan

The interlibrary loan service allows you to borrow items that are not in the WMU Libraries collections. Requests are placed through the interlibrary loan system by creating an account with your Bronco Net ID and password. Journal articles and book chapters are generally delivered electronically. Books, microfilm, CDs, DVDs, etc. can be picked up at Waldo Library. For more information about interlibrary loan services and to sign up for an account see www.wmich.edu/library/ill/.

Recommend new books, journal subscriptions, etc.

The libraries welcome your suggestions for new materials to add to the collections: books, electronic resources, journal subscriptions, media materials, etc. To recommend items for purchase you may either contact your library liaison or use one of the forms at www.wmich.edu/library/forms/.

Writing style guides

The Libraries website provides “quick guides” as well as more extensive help with several of the more popular writing style systems: APA, Chicago, MLA, etc. These can be found at: www.wmich.edu/library/help/guides/style.php

RefWorks online research management tool

WMU offers the RefWorks system, an online research management, writing and collaboration tool. RefWorks is designed to help researchers easily gather, manage, store, and share all types of research material, as well as generate citations and bibliographies in a wide variety of formats. To find out more about RefWorks and set up an account go to <http://www.wmich.edu/library/db/R/>.

Additional Reading

Homage to university library professionals:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Marian-the-Cybrarian/65570/>

Teaching Assistant Roles and Responsibilities

As a teaching assistant, you may fulfill a variety of instructional roles at Western Michigan University. Here are some examples of typical TA responsibilities.

Assisting the Professor: Assisting a professor with a course might include helping design the course, constructing tests, preparing materials, updating the course website, or grading assignments. You may even assume the responsibility for teaching a class session. In any case, you need to understand the objectives and goals the course professor has set for the students so that you can communicate effectively with them. Above all, be sure you know the professor’s expectations of you.

Holding Office Hours: Some TAs are required to hold office hours for the professor whom they assist. Whether it is the only assignment you have or part of another assignment, tutoring or holding office hours is one of the most important responsibilities a teaching assistant can have. It is your chance to work with students one-on-one and to learn about the problems students are having with the course material. You must schedule regular office hours and adhere to that schedule. Word spreads rapidly that a TA is unreliable and inaccessible if you fail to meet your regularly scheduled appointments. Students may need to be motivated to use office hours. Schedule office hours when students are available or right after class when students are most likely to have questions. Be sure to provide your office location, email address, and office phone number if you have one.

Grading papers/exams: Some TAs start out with the task of grading papers, homework, exams, and if you are teaching independently, you will certainly grade. To be a grader, you need to understand the course content and be able to follow a student’s thinking to interpret answers that might not be complete. You need to be consistent so that your grading is fair and reliable. Know your department’s grading procedures and policies and work with your course supervisor to develop grading criteria. [See the section later in this booklet on “Grading and Its Challenges” in “Principles of Grading and Evaluation.”]

You will also want to be familiar with your department’s and the University’s policies on academic dishonesty. Do you really know what plagiarism is, and can you convey this to your students? What is the department’s policy on cheating? Finally, develop strategies for dealing with angry or aggressive students. Learning how to communicate with students about grading procedures can help you work effectively with those students whose performance is not up to par.

Additional Reading

Incivility in the classroom:

<http://chronicle.com/article/When-Students-Become-Class/123733/>

Leading discussions/recitations: As a discussion/recitation leader, your primary challenge will be to identify the most important content from the large class lectures or readings and then elaborate on the information to help students understand the material. You may even be responsible for testing and grading students’ work. If you’re assisting in one section of a large lecture class, be sure to attend class lecture so you understand what the students need to know.

Conducting laboratory sessions: Lab assistants are responsible for reviewing experiments beforehand, asking and answering student questions, and evaluating students' lab work. As a lab assistant, you must demonstrate knowledge about safety procedures and provide a safe environment in which students can work. Advance preparation for lab experiments or assignments is the key to successfully teaching a lab. Learn how to guide students' thinking and answer questions without giving the answers. Work closely with your departmental supervisor or faculty member to learn the protocol or your lab.

Teaching studio courses: In art or music you might be assigned to teach a studio course. Work closely with your departmental supervisor. You'll need to know the expectations for studio projects and how you will communicate these expectations to your students. An awareness of your department's resources should help you determine what teaching aids/tools are available and where you can find them.

Identifying help: Your department is responsible for all of your work, from making your assignment to supervising and evaluating your classroom performance. When you have a question relating to your assignment, your department is the primary source to consult. The department chair, the director of graduate studies, the faculty member in charge of GA training, your own graduate advisor or the faculty member you assist, and the department's administrative assistants are all sources of information and guidance. Ask questions; seek advice!

Remember you have a "Rescue Squad" made up of the faculty and veteran GAs who have helped with this workshop. They are willing to be helpful, so call them!

Sources:

McKeachie, W. J. (1994). *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* (9th ed.). Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath.

Nyquist, J. D., & Wulff, D. H. (1996). *Working Effectively with Graduate Assistants*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc. Adapted with permission from "Instructional Guide for UNL Teaching Assistants," prepared by Laurie Bellows and April Lilja, University of Nebraska.

Getting Started

Before the term begins . . .

1. Meet your chair and any faculty member(s) you will be assisting.
2. Read carefully the catalog description of the course(s) you will teach or with which you will assist. WMU's Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs are available on line at <http://catalog.wmich.edu/>.
3. Visit the site of the classroom or laboratory where you will teach or in which you will assist. Check for necessary supplies (chalk, maps, blackboards, etc.), see what technology is available, and determine possible seating arrangements. Discuss any problems you may have discovered with your department chair or person in charge of facilities.
4. Check with the bookstore to ensure that any books required for your class are available. You can do this online at www.wmubookstore.com/.
5. Check with your department chair or administrative assistant if you expect to need assistance with the preparation or copying of syllabi, exams, or other class materials. Be aware that some departments have budgetary limitations on the amount of support that they can provide.

6. The syllabus is important (see next section). The syllabus is considered a contract and the University requires one for each course. Make sure that it is informative, listing your name, office address, office telephone, and office hours and all pertinent general information for the course. List the required textbooks or readings, the obligations of the class, overall requirements (including your attendance policy), and grading scale. Indicate the expected assignments, tests, exams, reports, or papers, and then give a tentative course schedule. If you must make a change in the syllabus, the assignments, or the schedule, explain the change carefully and distribute a written explanation of the change to the class, post to the class website, or send an email to the class. (Please refer to the sample syllabi in the handbook). If you are assisting with the class rather than teaching it yourself, be sure to discuss the syllabus with the faculty member you are assisting.
7. Office hours are very important. List them on the syllabus and post them on your office door. Then, keep those hours. If an emergency forces you to cancel your office hours, place a notice on your office or ask the department office staff to post the notice. Make up any missed appointments with students promptly.
8. Waldo Library provides many essential services. The Reference staff is very helpful to students and there is a Reserve desk (387-5884) on the first floor where you can leave books or articles placed on reserve.

Developing a Syllabus

If you have primary responsibility for teaching a course, the syllabus is the end-product of your course planning activity, and it is written primarily—though not exclusively—for your students. The major purpose of a syllabus is to provide a “road map” for students to enable them to get through the course successfully. Research has shown that students who are instructed in what they are supposed to learn and how they are to be evaluated perform better than those who are not so instructed. The course syllabus is an excellent medium for providing the kind of information students need to guide their own learning. Moreover, a syllabus can point out connections between various parts of the course and, therefore, help students understand the course as an integrated whole.

A syllabus is also a legally binding contract between you and your students. It specifies the duties and responsibilities of both parties and clearly states the benefits they are to derive from the experience. A professor once pointed out that there seemed to be an inverse relationship between the length of his syllabi and the length of the line at his office door—if he put more information in the syllabus, fewer students had questions about the organization of the course (and he had more time to consult with students about more significant questions).

Your course syllabus may be an online document as part of a course website, or it should at least be linked to the course website if there is one [see next section on developing a course website]. Here is an example of a syllabus linked to a faculty member’s teaching website: <http://homepages.wmich.edu/~karowe/BIOS%201510%20Syllabus%20Spring%202010.pdf>.

Once you have decided upon the rules, procedures, and requirements for the course and have articulated them to your students in your syllabus and in class, you should never arbitrarily change these elements—this is the equivalent of unilaterally changing a legal contract after it has been signed.

Students will feel justifiably upset if you change the rules in the middle of the game. Plan your course carefully so as to avoid making changes to the syllabus as you go along.

The syllabus is an important document for the instructor as well as the students because it is one of the few tangible records of the course itself. It provides an account of your activities and it reflects your conceptualization of the course as a whole, proof of which may be important for job applications. When you accept a faculty appointment at a college or university, your course syllabi may become part of your promotion/tenure file.

Although every syllabus is unique to the course it represents, the following elements should appear in every one.

Basic Course Information:

1. Title of the course, course number, semester, and year
2. Name of the instructor, office location(s), office hours, telephone number(s), email address(es)
3. Building and room in which the class meets
4. Days and hours of class meetings

Course Description:

1. Statement of course goals (preferably written in terms of what the students will gain from the course).
2. Your teaching formats (lecture, discussion, lab work, field work, etc.) and their implications for students.
3. A detailed explanation of course procedures involving (for example) papers, homework assignments, lab work, field trips, and so forth.
4. All required texts, workbooks, study guides, additional readings, and other materials students will need for the course (e.g., scientific calculators, dissecting kits, graph paper, etc.).
5. Grading procedures and scales. List every activity that will be graded, how each will be graded, and the exact percentage (or points) of the final grade each one represents. Also explain the procedures by which you will determine the final grade.
6. An explanation of the formats you will use in quizzes and exams. Also, if you intend to use “pop” quizzes, you should warn students about them in this section.

from syllabus developed by Douglas Johnson, Ph.D. student in Psychology:

Regarding assessment, more precise ways of evaluating student performance are needed. Precision Teaching suggests that rate of accuracy, rather than accuracy alone, is a more effective basis for evaluation (Merbitz, Bieitez, Merbitz, & Pennypacker, 2004). In everyday interactions, we recognize there’s an important difference between someone who is hesitantly correct and someone who is immediately correct (i.e., “can think on their feet”), but this is rarely probed for in education. Precision Teaching suggests that building performance up to a pre-defined rate leads to better long-term retention and improved ability to learn more complex skills. Thus, I have begun incorporating rate assessments in addition to typical essay examinations.

7. Guidelines for writing reports, research papers, reviews, etc. These guidelines should include the preferred format for each assignment, advice on how to research and write the papers, and the criteria that will be used to grade.

8. Policies about class absence (and lateness), missed exams, late papers, cheating, and plagiarism. For example, you should clearly delineate the types of source materials and the extent of collaboration permitted on homework and other assignments. Try not to scold students in this section, but be specific, firm, and clear in your expectations. Explain the different types of academic misconduct (cheating, plagiarism, multiple submission, fabrication of data, etc.).

9. Strategies for success in the course. If you were a student in your class, how would you approach the course? What pitfalls can you warn the student against? How would you prepare for the quizzes and exams? How would you budget your time? What would your note-taking strategy be? (Remember that many undergraduates have poorly developed study skills, and anything you can teach them about how to study and learn will improve their performance.)

10. The schedule of classes, with meeting dates, topics, and appropriate readings; deadlines for papers, projects and assignments; school holidays; and test dates. At the very least you should provide an outline of class meeting dates with dates for important assignments and tests noted. The more complete the information you provide here, the more subject the information will be to change, so consider carefully how much information to include.

Other General Points

Although you may feel that a syllabus of this length is excessive, you will discover that students appreciate your effort to create a truly useful and comprehensive syllabus, particularly if you take time to review it on the first day of class and show them its features. Some teachers have carried these guidelines even further and developed course manuals which include the assignments and activities for an entire semester, with handouts, illustrations, and special instructions for each class day. Of course, as a TA teaching a course for the first time you may not have time to create a manual, but you might keep the idea in mind for your future teaching career.

Finally, do not be afraid to ask faculty members and other TAs for copies of their syllabi for inspiration and guidance in creating your own. Look for syllabi posted by faculty in the department in which you will be teaching. Although your syllabus should express your own teaching goals for the course, there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” on your own. Those who have taught the course before have had to solve many of the same problems, and their solutions can provide a rich source of time-tested ideas for your own syllabus.

To Include in Every Syllabus

According to the Registrar’s Office (www.wmich.edu/registrar/faculty-staff/instructors/faqs.html), every syllabus must contain the following two paragraphs:

Accommodation for Disabilities

Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychiatric, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations must contact Ms. Beth Denhartigh at 387-2116 or at beth.denhartigh@wmich.edu at the beginning of the semester. A disability determination must be made by this office before any accommodations are provided by the instructor.

And also:

Student Academic Conduct

You are responsible for making yourself aware of and understanding the academic policies and procedures in the Undergraduate or Graduate Catalogs (found online, <http://catalog.wmich.edu>) that pertain to student rights and responsibilities. These policies include cheating, fabrication, falsification and forgery, multiple submission, plagiarism, complicity, and computer misuse. If there is reason to believe you have been involved in academic dishonesty, you will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs. You will be given the opportunity to review the charge(s). If you believe you are not responsible, you will have the opportunity for a hearing. You should consult with me if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty prior to the submission of an assignment or test.

Course Syllabus Checklist

Because the syllabus helps instructors provide students with the kind of written criteria required by the University's *Student Rights Policy*, it is one of the most important documents in a course. The syllabus should contain the following information.

COURSE INFORMATION

- Course number and name (e.g., ENGL 1050, Thought and Writing)
- Semester/session and year (e.g, Fall 2011)
- Meeting days
- Building name and classroom number (omitted if the course is taught online)
- Course website, if there is one

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

- Name and title
- Office address
- Phone number(s) with restrictions
- Email address
- Office hours
- "By appointment" statement

COURSE DESCRIPTION

- Textbook(s) or other sources, in bibliographic style you require
- Supplemental reading and where available, listed in your bibliographic style
- Catalog course description (taken from <http://catalog.wmich.edu/>)
- Course purpose, goals, and objectives
- Topic outline for course
- Rationale for content

GRADING

- Assignments and weighting
- Grading scale
- Grading criteria
- Testing methods

___ Feedback to students about grades

CLASS POLICIES

___ Written work guidelines and policies

___ Attendance and excused absences

___ Reporting illness

___ Make-up and late-work

___ Extra-credit work

___ Academic honesty/misconduct [required—see above]

___ Accommodations for students with documented disabilities [required—see above]

PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES

___ Beliefs about teaching and learning

___ Methods of instruction

CLASS CALENDAR

___ Tentative schedule (clearly note this is subject to change)

___ Due dates for readings, papers, projects (also may be subject to change)

___ Quiz, exam, and final exam dates

___ Holidays

___ Last day to drop (see www.wmich.edu/registrar/calendars/index.html)

Here are some examples of some good syllabi that illustrate many of the above characteristics:

ANTH 3480 (<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~bstraigh/AN348/348SYL.htm>)

EDLD 6090 (http://homepages.wmich.edu/~shen/teaching/edld609/syllabus609_fall03.html)

SOC 6630 (<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~scarlson/SOC6630.SYLF2010.pdf>)

As you review and compare these syllabi, notice in what aspects they do and do not conform to the characteristics listed above (how many list the term the course is being offered or give the catalog description of the course, for instance?).

Developing a Course Website

If you are responsible for teaching a course on your own, you may very well want to create a course website. Or you may be responsible for creating and/or maintaining a website for a course in which you are assisting a professor. Creating a basic website is not difficult and you do not even need special software (like Dreamweaver, which is not free) to create one. One free software program for creating uncomplicated webpages is Netscape Communicator version 7.2 (increasingly harder to find but still available for download at <http://sillydog.org/narchive/#ns7>, although no longer supported; choose Netscape 7.2 full version for your operating system); it contains a feature called “Composer” for authoring web pages.

Course websites are linked to faculty and instructor homepages. Homepages for WMU faculty and instructors are found at:

<http://homepages.wmich.edu>

Information on setting up a WMU homepage can be found at:

<http://homepages.wmich.edu/fac-staff/index.html>

This site contains all the essential information you need for setting up a WMU homepage, including a FAQ list, steps to getting started, how to use and modify a template, documentation and purchase information for Dreamweaver, and some advanced features.

Additional information on web publishing is available through the Office of Information Technology (OIT) at:

www.wmich.edu/oit/facstaff/web.html

A course website is a very valuable tool for keeping your class up-to-date on the latest assignments, providing access to the syllabus (and updates to the syllabus) and other materials handed out in class, providing additional resources and links to other information, etc. When the instructor makes course information available on a website, students have no excuse for missing assignments or information they may have missed if they were not in class (or not paying attention), and the onus is on them to check the website and keep up. You may not be available 24 hours a day to provide your students with information, but your course website is.

Here is an example of a course website:

<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~cpietras/psy330.htm>

While the site is basic, note that it includes a link to the syllabus, test objectives, PowerPoint slides from previous classes, information on grading (including a link to a grade sheet for students to track their own grades), an announcements section, and a link to the professor's email. Note also that some features of the site are password protected. Browse around through some of the faculty pages on the homepages.wmich.edu site and you will find a wide variety of course webpages, some very basic and some with more advanced features such as Flash programming, videos, music, etc.

If you need additional help with your course website, the Faculty Technology Center (www.wmich.edu/ftc—see flyer on next page) offers online and walk-in assistance with creation of personal and course webpages and with teaching technology resources. Course instructors such as teaching assistants are eligible for up to 10 hours of free work in the FTC per semester, which can include repetitive tasks like converting documents to PDF or other format, scanning slides, converting quizzes to an online format, etc.

Additional Reading

The tech-savvy classroom:

<http://chronicle.com/article/A-Braina-Book/46547/>

You are HERE

panic

Go HERE!

Faculty Technology Center
 ... for Teaching Assistants, too!

- Computer lab on the west end of the second floor of the University Computing Center.
- Use Windows and Macintosh computers.
- Get help with E-learning, Web pages and software.
- Scan photos, slides, and documents.
- Walk-ins welcome. Open M-Th 9-5 and F 9-4.
- Call 387-6958 for phone help and appointments.
- More information at www.wmich.edu/ftc
- Get 10 free hours of work on your courses per semester!

Cool Tools for Teaching!

Are you interested in learning high-tech, low-tech, and no-tech tools to enhance your teaching methods? Cool Tools will show you how to create a stellar teaching portfolio, how to use grading rubrics to improve student learning, how to incorporate iClickers into your classroom, and much more! For a complete schedule, visit <http://www.wmich.edu/facdev/Programs/CoolTools.html>.

These popular workshops are free and open to all, including but not limited to adjunct faculty, full-time faculty, and graduate teaching instructors. Register online at <https://www.wmich.edu/ftc/workshops/>. Register early, because space is limited.

All sessions will be held in University Computing Center 2033.

Office of Faculty Development

Phone: (269) 387-0732

Website: www.wmich.edu/facdev

Communicating With Your Class

Email Your Entire Class Using GoWMU

Since 2004, the University has used only official wmich.edu email addresses for all emailed correspondence. All students, faculty, and staff automatically receive an official wmich.edu email address at the time of their Bronco NetID account creation. Using GoWMU, it is very easy for instructors to email their entire class, or individual members of a class.

1. Go to <http://gowmu.wmich.edu/> and login using your Bronco NetID and password.
2. In the Faculty/Staff Home channel, click “Detailed Class List” or “Summary Class List”.



3. Select a term from the drop-down menu.



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Select Term". Below the title is a horizontal line. The form contains a label "Select a Term:" followed by a drop-down menu. The menu is currently displaying "Fall 2007" and has a small downward-pointing arrow on the right side. A red oval is drawn around the drop-down menu. Below the menu is a "Submit" button.

4. Then select your course and CRN (Course Registration Number) from the drop-down menu.



The screenshot shows a web form titled "Select a CRN". Below the title is a horizontal line. The form contains a label "CRN:" followed by a drop-down menu. The menu is currently displaying "Admin Child Devel Centrs - 20482" and has a small downward-pointing arrow on the right side. A red oval is drawn around the drop-down menu. Below the menu is a "Submit" button.

5. The class list will now be displayed. You may choose to email a specific student by clicking the appropriate icon. Or, at the bottom, you may choose "Email class". Whichever you choose, your default email client will pop open a window and the selected student or your class list will be populated in the "BCC" field, which allows the email addresses to remain private to all recipients. (Due to privacy rules, you should not provide student email addresses to other class members unless you have permission in writing from all students to do so.)

back to Home Tab

e-mail groups admin logout help


Course Information

CRN: 21122
 Duration: May 02, 2005 - Jun 22, 2005
 Status: Active


Enrollment Counts

	Maximum	Actual	Remaining
Enrollment:	25	14	11
Cross List:	0	0	0

Summary Class List

Record Number	Student Name	ID	Reg Status	Level	Credits	Midterm	Final Grade	Detail
1	[blurred]	[blurred]	Registered	Graduate	3.000	Enter	Enter	

Your class list is displayed here

[Email class](#)  send e-mail to the entire class

[Return to Previous](#)

send e-mail to a specific student

If you do not want the “Email class” feature to open a default email client (which many people do not use anymore), let your mouse “hover” over the icon and you will see an email address (after mailto:) containing the course CRN that you can use in Webmail Plus or other program to send an email to the entire class.

Additional Reading

Should you be Facebook friends with your students?:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Facebook-The-New-Classroom/48575/>

And a cautionary tale about venting on Facebook:

<http://chronicle.com/article/How-Not-to-Lose-Face-on/24101/>

Accessing Records, Submitting Grades

Instructions for accessing class rosters, submitting grades, etc. are available on the website of the Office of the Registrar. The following links are particularly relevant and helpful:

www.wmich.edu/registrar/faculty-staff/instructors/GradeSubmitInstructions.html

www.wmich.edu/registrar/faculty-staff/instructors/FAQ-instructors.pdf

What is an “Instructor of Record?”

The Banner student record system lists instructors of record for each course. These are of two types: primary instructors of record (only one per course) have overall responsibility for a course, including submitting grades, while secondary instructors of record assist with a course but do not have primary responsibility for it. As a graduate teaching assistant, you may be listed as either a primary or secondary instructor of record in one of the following ways:

- Graduate teaching assistants who teach subordinate (linked) lab or recitation sections should be listed as primary instructor of record for zero-credit lab or recitation sections (and should be listed as secondary instructors of record for the linked lecture section at the discretion of the department chair). Faculty who teach the lecture sections and who are responsible for assignment of grades must be listed as the primary instructor of record for the lecture and must also be listed as the secondary instructor for the laboratory or recitation sections.
- Graduate teaching assistants who teach stand-alone sections (including the stand-alone lab sections in some science departments) should be listed as the primary instructor of record. Supervising and coordinating faculty should be listed as the secondary instructor of record for these sections.
- Graduate teaching assistants should be listed as secondary instructors when they assist a professor in teaching or grading a large class.
- Part-time and adjunct faculty should be listed as instructors of record based on the same rules as those which apply to graduate teaching assistants.

To View and Print Class Rosters

If you are listed as a primary or secondary instructor of record for a course, you are able to obtain a roster of students registered for your course by doing the following:

1. In your web browser, go to gowmu.wmich.edu
2. Enter your Bronco NetID and password and click the “Login” button.
3. From the GoWMU home, select the “Faculty/Staff Home” tab.
4. Select “Summary Class List”.
5. Select a term, click submit.
6. Select the appropriate CRN/Title, click submit.
7. To print the class list, use the print option in your browser, OR copy the class list to a spreadsheet.*
8. To choose another course, scroll to the bottom of the screen and click on “Return to Previous”.
9. Select the appropriate CRN/Title, click submit.
10. Select “Summary Class List”.
11. Follow steps 8 through 10 for additional courses.

*To copy the class list to a spreadsheet:

1. Highlight the list of names
2. Select Copy
3. Open a spreadsheet
4. Select Paste (or Paste/special on a Mac)
5. Perform a “save as” and/or print

When you have completed viewing your class rosters, log out of GoWMU and close the browser.

If Your Class List Does Not Match the Students Attending Your Class

If you either have students attending your class who are not registered, or students registered in your class who are not attending, you should notify the Registrar’s Office by using the function “Report Student Not Attending/Not Registered” in the Faculty Menu of GoWMU. The Registrar’s Office will contact these students to clarify their registration status.

Grade Submission Instructions

Course grades are entered by the primary instructor of record through GoWMU at the end of each semester. Grading is opened the Monday following the last day to withdraw for the semester and grades are due by noon on the Tuesday following the last day of the semester or session. Students will not be able to see their grades online until the grade roll process is completed in the Registrar’s Office. This is done shortly after noon on the day grades are due, and nightly thereafter.

Change of Grade: grades can only be changed by the instructor who gave the grade. The link to “Remove Incomplete Grade/Change Grade” is available through the faculty menu in GoWMU. Grade changes are accepted according to the timelines published in the catalog.

To submit grades:

1. In GoWMU, click on the link “Final Grade Worksheet.”
2. Select the appropriate term from the drop down box.
3. Select the appropriate CRN/Title.
4. Enter a grade from the drop down list for each student. If you have multiple pages, it is recommended, but not necessary, to submit each page before moving to the next **Credit/No Credit Grade Option:** If a student is registered with a credit/no credit option or audit, assign the letter grade earned. The system will default the correct CR/NC or AUD.
5. **Non-Attendance:** for any listed student who discontinued attendance or never attended and was not pre-assigned a “W” (official withdrawal), enter a grade of “X.” (Note: It is not necessary to enter last attendance date and hours.)
6. Click the “Submit” button at the bottom of the page to save your grade entries. You do not have to have all grades entered before submitting. You may change any grade, including submitted/saved grades, until the deadline for grade submission (noon on the Tuesday following the end of the term).
7. Note: You will not receive an email confirmation.
8. **Warning:** Submit your work often. Faculty Self-Service will automatically log you out after 60 minutes of inactivity.

9. To choose another course, scroll to the bottom of the screen and click on “Select a New CRN.”
10. Choose the appropriate CRN/Title, click submit.
11. Select “Final Grade Worksheet.”
12. Repeat steps 9–11 for additional courses.

When you have graded all of your courses, log out of GoWMU and close your browser. You can verify that grades are saved by logging back in and looking at the grade worksheet again.

When can I give an “Incomplete?”

From the undergraduate catalog:

“This is a temporary grade, which the instructor may give to an undergraduate student when illness, necessary absence, or other reasons beyond the control of the student prevent completion of course requirements by the end of the semester or session. The grade of ‘I’ (incomplete) may not be given as a substitute for a failing grade.”

The grade of ‘I’ must be removed (through the change of grade form in GoWMU) by the instructor who gave the grade. A student has up to one year from the time the incomplete is given to make up the work and have the grade of ‘I’ replaced. The instructor is not obligated to provide one year to complete the work and can designate a shorter time if desired.

The instructor should indicate the length of time allowed for the student to complete the work. When the length of time is not indicated, the student is automatically given one year to complete the work. Please keep this in mind when speaking with the student about your expectations. You will be responsible for reviewing the student’s work and changing the grade from ‘I’ to a letter grade when the work is completed.

Extensions beyond the one-year deadline are sometimes granted; in a situation where the instructor is convinced that the student should be given more time to complete the work, the instructor should either email or write to the Registrar’s office and the extension will be granted.

Instructors receive notification from the Registrar’s Office about 6 weeks before all incompletes they have granted expire. For undergraduates, incomplete grades for which an extension has not been requested will be converted to an ‘E’ (fail) about one month after the year has expired. For graduate students, incomplete grades (except those for dissertation and thesis, and courses related to them) for which an extension has not been requested will be converted to an ‘X’ (unofficial withdrawal) about one month after the year has expired. Note that both ‘E’ and ‘X’ grades generate 0.0 honor points and the ‘X’ grade has the same effect on the student’s grade point average as a failing grade.

Incomplete grades are removed by going to GoWMU, clicking on the Faculty tab, and selecting the “Removal of Incomplete Grade/Change Grade” form.

Since TAs are essentially temporary instructors with no guarantee of employment beyond the current period of appointment, they should be especially judicious in giving incomplete grades. For many TAs it may not be possible to give a student a year in which to complete the missing work (and in many cases a year may not be justified). These additional time constraints should be clearly communicated to

students who request incomplete grades. If necessary, a department chair can step in to change a grade when an instructor is no longer available to do so.

“First Work” and Mid-term Grades

WMU has implemented an option for instructors of record to submit “first work” (within first 4 weeks of semester) and mid-term grades through GoWMU if they wish. These non-final grades do not appear on a student’s official record, are not calculated in the student’s GPA, and are only visible to the student by logging into GoWMU. Instructors are encouraged to use this system to inform students of their class progress early or midway through an academic term. Instructions on the availability and use of first work and mid-term grading will be emailed to instructors of record each term.

Principles of Grading and Evaluation

Grading and Its Challenges

Whether or not you are responsible for teaching your own course, you may be asked to grade daily assignments, papers, and exams. At the most basic level, grades should reflect the degree to which students meet stated course expectations. The primary goals of grading are to provide feedback to students on their progress in a course (and, if necessary, provide guidance on how they can improve their future work) and to accumulate data on which the final course grade will be based. Effective grades will accomplish these goals and be perceived by students as fair and reasonable.

Unfortunately, too often a secondary goal of instructors in assigning grades is the desire to avoid criticism or complaints from students. Grading can be an intimidating process that may leave the grader open to student complaints of inconsistency, arbitrariness, partiality, or worse. As an attitude of consumerism and entitlement has crept into higher education, students sometimes expect to receive good grades whether or not they have earned them, and they may demand reconsideration of grades they consider to be “unfair,” arbitrary, or just too low. Too many student complaints leads to instructors growing tired of defending their grading policies. Students may also lose motivation to work in a course if they feel they are being graded too harshly and their efforts are not being rewarded with the grades they believe they deserve (an outcome of the “motivation vs. reward” cycle). The result has been “grade inflation” and lower standards as instructors have capitulated to these pressures from students rather than give (and be prepared to defend) meaningful grades.

Additional Reading

The agony of grade appeals from students (and ideas on framing your course syllabus and requirements to avoid them): www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/05/08/dinkins

The Office of Faculty Development (www.wmich.edu/facdev/) has much information on instructional topics and provides many services designed to improve teaching. In addition, the following points are intended to make you aware of the pitfalls of grading and how to successfully navigate them.

Inexperienced instructors (i.e., most new TAs) tend to grade too leniently. There are several reasons for this. Inexperienced teachers may lack the confidence in their subject knowledge and ability to discriminate gradations of quality in student work, so they err on the side of assigning grades that are too generous. Or they may not take enough time to make the kinds of discriminations necessary to support carefully deliberated grades. Another common problem, particularly among TAs, is a strong desire to be liked by students and thus an unwillingness to assign deserved grades for fear of alienating the students. Teaching assistants are more prone to this problem because they are more likely to be close in age to undergraduate students and find it more difficult to be perceived as an authority figure than an experienced professor would. The prospect of unfavorable comments on student evaluations also may make an inexperienced instructor shy away from being perceived as a harsh grader.

Keep in mind that the definition in WMU’s Undergraduate Catalog of a grade of ‘C’ is “Satisfactory, Acceptable, Adequate.” Thus a student who is doing the expected amount of work in a course, and work that is of satisfactory quality, would be deserving of a grade of ‘C.’ A grade of ‘B’ by catalog standards is “Very Good, High Pass” and to earn a grade of ‘A’ a student’s work should be “Outstanding, Exceptional, Extraordinary,” signifying effort that is far beyond that of an average student.

from syllabus developed by Douglas Johnson, Ph.D. student in Psychology:

Approximate Amount of Study Time Required and Type of Study Time Required

This course is designed to require two to three hours of outside work for every hour in class in order to receive a C or a B. Therefore, depending upon your background in behavioral psychology and your study skills, you will have to spend about **6-8 hours** studying outside of class **each and every unit** in order to get a C or a B. More study may be required in order to receive an A. **Please take the study time seriously.** When students have trouble in the class, and have come to see me for help, the problem (almost always) is either (1) they simply do not have enough time to study due to the number of credit hours they are taking, the number of hours they are working, family obligations, or some combination of the three, or (2) they are trying to squeeze their studying in around other activities; that is, when they have a few minutes between classes or while they are at work and are not busy. Attempts to study this way often result in distractions that disrupt concentration and focus. This type of study time is usually not productive, yet students “feel” like they have studied a lot.

Additional Reading

How real is grade inflation, and what can be done about it?:

<http://gradeinflation.com/>

Strategies for Relatively Painless (and Virtually Indisputable) Grading

1. Have clearly stated expectations for learner outcomes in the course syllabus and establish a clear relationship between these expectations and grades. The direct relationship between clearly stated expectations and grading outcomes cannot be overstated. For each assignment, communicate clearly to the class—and have in mind as you grade—what the expectations are for that assignment and how it will be graded. Students who are unclear about the expectations of an assignment will become frustrated trying to hit an unknown target. If the student work you are seeing does not meet expectations, ask yourself if your expectations were stated clearly enough, or if there was too much room for interpretation. Being able to discern and effectively convey ex-

Expectations to students is one of the most important skills an inexperienced instructor needs to work on.

2. Use objective grading criteria whenever possible, especially as you are gaining experience in evaluating student work. Grading scales based on percentages (A = 93–100%, etc.) are often used and stated in course syllabi. Grading assignments on a points and percentage basis is easier on the instructor and more difficult for a student to dispute, but may not be appropriate for all assignments (term papers, for instance). Objective grading allows the instructor less leeway, however, in how the spread of grades turns out for a given assignment; thus, if an assignment was relatively easy, most of the class may earn A's under objective grading. That's not necessarily bad for the occasional assignment, but if it happens with most of the assignments in the course the final course grades will likely be inflated and it will be difficult to differentiate actual student achievement.
3. For more subjectively graded assignments, as you begin to grade a stack of papers, have clearly in mind what an 'A' paper will look like, a 'B' paper, etc. You may want to make a quick first pass through the papers and assign them to different stacks based on broad quality descriptors (outstanding, satisfactory/meets minimum requirements, inadequate) and then go back through the stacks and make finer distinctions in the quality of the work in order to convert the quality descriptors to actual grades. It may be possible to rank order the entire stack of papers from best to worst, then assign (or at least confirm) grades based on ranking. (This is not the same as grading on a curve.) Finally, if you can grade student papers 'blind,' without knowing the students' names, you can avoid any perception of partiality.
4. Grading rubrics can be especially helpful for grading papers and other assignments that are not based on objective questions, including classroom participation. The grading rubric helps the instructor determine in advance how much each criterion counts in the overall grade, and also helps students understand where points were taken off. For more information on grading rubrics, see www.cmu.edu/teaching/designteach/teach/rubrics.html.
5. Whenever possible, provide feedback on the reasons for a particular grade. This can serve to both advise the student what they can do better next time (e.g., help them understand your expectations), and justify why you gave a particular grade. For assignments or exams with objective questions graded on a points basis, this may simply mean indicating how many points were taken off for each question as well as indicating why only partial credit was given.
6. On exams especially, and for some assignments, use questions that require students to stretch and apply their knowledge rather than just regurgitate information. Such questions will help separate out the students who have truly absorbed and mastered the material from those who have not. If you're concerned about such questions dragging down the grades of the majority of students, you can make them extra credit questions. (You can also change a question on an exam that proved to be especially difficult to extra credit if only a few students did well on it; this way the students who didn't get it are not penalized but the students who did still receive credit—throwing the question out penalizes the students who were correct.)

7. Ask your teaching supervisor to explain the grading standards that exist in your department. Departments will often have their own profile of typical grades for courses in that department—the average grade in one department may be ‘C’ while in another department it may be between ‘B’ and ‘A.’ There may also be different standards within a department for introductory courses for non-majors as opposed to upper-level courses in the major. As a teaching assistant, it is not your role to change the department status quo or make a statement by using grading standards that are vastly different than the department as a whole. Find out what the department standard is, and take that into consideration as you develop your grading policies.
8. Be very careful about making exceptions to deadlines, giving make-up exams, etc. Life happens, and there are sometimes unforeseeable circumstances (illness, family emergencies, etc.) that result in students missing class or being late in submitting work. You will have to use your discretion in determining when such events are legitimate and what the appropriate recourse is; whatever recourse is offered to the student, make sure that it doesn’t open the door to abuse of your good nature and that fairness to other students is taken into consideration. One of the ways to handle this is to allow each student to throw out one or two quiz or daily assignment grades each term. This tactic is fair to everyone because it accommodates the students with unplanned absences or “situations” while allowing the students who consistently did the required work to throw out their worst grade(s).

By being clear in stating expectations, giving solid feedback, and being consistent across assignments in how you treat all students in the course, it is possible to give students meaningful grades based on how well they have met course expectations. In this way you will earn and maintain the respect of students, and both you and the grades you give will be perceived as fair and reasonable.

Grading System at WMU

The grading system at Western Michigan University is as follows: A = 4.0; BA = 3.5; B = 3.0; CB = 2.5; C = 2.0; DC = 1.5; D = 1.0; E = failure; X = failure because of non-attendance or unofficial withdrawal. Note that there are no “plus” or “minus” grades.

The ‘E’ and ‘X’ course grades: Note that although both the ‘E’ and the ‘X’ grade count as 0.0 in the GPA calculation, there is a difference. A student who completes all work in the course, but whose work is failing, should receive the ‘E’ grade. A student who has either never attended class or who has discontinued attendance and does not qualify for an incomplete should receive the ‘X’ grade.

Additional Reading

Thoughts of graduate teaching assistants on grading:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Wielding-the-Red-Pen/126200/>

Painful teaching evaluations (everybody gets them sooner or later):

<http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i25/25a00104.htm>

Creating Well-Crafted and Useful Exams

Effective and fair grading begins with well-crafted exams. Often, teachers dash off exam questions the night before and spend little time crafting or honing them. The result can be detrimental to both student and teacher. Effective exams should be an accurate reflection of the student's ability to comprehend and interpret information as well as the amount of time the student has devoted to the class, not simply a test of his or her ability to cram and use short-term recall. Therefore, the type of exam to be used must be carefully considered.

In most cases, essay exams are more effective in testing a student's comprehension and reasoning skills than are multiple-choice exams. They ask for interpretation and explanation of information rather than simple recall. A good essay question will require the student to examine causation and ramifications of problems. The instructor can then determine whether the student truly understands the subject being studied. In addition, essay exams require the student to use writing ability and test expression of knowledge.

Multiple-choice exams may be required in very large classes simply due to time constraints. Even if this is necessary, multiple-choice questions can be formulated to test comprehension and reasoning skills. This will take considerable time and effort but will be worth the effort. Good multiple-choice exams should use a variety of question types such as cause, result, exception, definition, insertion, match/mismatch, completion, graph, map or illustration-based, chronology and others. Using a variety will ensure that the student is tested on more than simple recall.

It is very important for the instructor to craft questions carefully, whether they be essay or other type of questions. Wordiness should be avoided and clear, precise terms used. Vagueness in questions creates vague answers and can make it difficult for the student to determine what the instructor is asking for. It is also important to make questions specific while avoiding too many minor details. A good exam question should cover the whole of a particular, significant problem. Other considerations for the instructor are bias and stereotyping in exam questions. Gender-biased statements or racial stereotyping should be avoided, as should other prejudices and personal convictions.

Another important consideration is directions to students. It should be made clear to the students what is expected on exams, what the instructor looks for in an essay answer, and how much information should be included. The instructor should also make clear ahead of time what information will be covered on the exam. This will ensure a more accurate picture of the student's grasp of the course material, which is, after all, the purpose of exams. Using a variety of exam types may also be helpful in that some students will excel on some rather than others. Quizzes provide weekly feedback for both teacher and student and can be very helpful in catching problems early. Take-home exams are often inaccurate because it is difficult to enforce uniform time constraints or to control collusion. No matter what type of exam is used, clear and direct questions formulated to test specific teaching goals will be the most helpful in grading students.

Getting Ready: Checklist for Constructing Better Tests

Well-constructed tests help motivate students and reinforce their learning while enabling you to assess their mastery of course objectives. Tests also provide you with feedback on your teaching, often showing you what was and was not communicated clearly. Designing tests is one of the most challenging tasks confronting college instructors. Unfortunately, many of us have had little, if any, preparation in writing tests.

Test writing may be made easier by considering the following suggestions for general test construction.

1. Overall Guidelines

- Test questions should reflect your objectives for the unit.
- Your expectations should be clearly known to the students.
- Each test item should present a clearly formulated task.
- State each item in simple, clear language free of nonfunctional material, extraneous clues, and race, ethnic, and gender bias.
- One item should not aid in answering another.
- Allow ample time for test completion (your estimate on how long it will take your students to complete a test may be wildly optimistic, especially when you first begin teaching!).
- Assignment of points should be determined before the test is administered and relative percentages for each section indicated on the test; this allows students who are pressed for time at the end of the test to determine where to direct their efforts if they cannot finish.

2. Test Format and Directions

- Place similar type items together in the test to minimize the number of directions needed.
- Balance the proportion of correct answers (e.g., A, B, C, D) and avoid patterning when sequencing answers (e.g., A, B, C, D).

3. True/False Items

- Write the statement so that it can be unequivocally judged true or false.
- Make statements brief and in simple language.
- Use negative statement sparingly. Eliminate confusing double negatives.
- Avoid specific determiners (e.g., always, sometimes, may) and other clues (e.g., length).

4. Multiple-Choice Items

- The stem of the item should present a single, clearly formulated problem.
- The stem should be stated in positive form, whenever possible. If negative wording is used in the stem, emphasize by underlining or caps.
- The intended answer should be correct or clearly best. Make distracters plausible and attractive to the uninformed but not deliberately confusing.
- Alternatives should be grammatically consistent with the stem, parallel in form, and free from verbal clues to the correct answer.
- Avoid the alternative “all of the above.” Use “none of the above” carefully and sparingly.
- Vary the relative length of the correct answer to eliminate length as a clue.

5. Matching Items

- Each matching item should contain only homogenous material.
- Keep lists of items short with brief responses on the right.
- The list of responses should be longer than the list of premises to provide an uneven match.

- Directions should clearly state the basis for matching and whether the responses can be used once or more than once.
6. Short-Answer Items
 - State item so a single, brief answer is possible.
 - State item as a direct question whenever possible.
 - Place blanks at the end of the statement.
 7. Essay Test
 - Restrict each question to the measurement of complex learning outcomes.
 - The thought processes involved in answering essay questions should have been demonstrated and practiced prior to the testing situation.

Adopted with permission from *Teaching Today*, vol. 2, November 1995. Buffalo State University: Center for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching.

Final Exams

When and where do I hold the final exam?

From the WMU *AAUP Contract*:

38.§3 FINAL EXAMINATIONS. In every class taught, all faculty shall give a final examination, i.e., some form of comprehensive evaluative academic exercise appropriate to the course content and according to the published schedule of examinations, during the last week of the semester (which shall be set aside for final examinations), or at or near the scheduled conclusion of the session. The final evaluative exercise may be distributed before the time scheduled for the final exam providing that it is due and collected on the day during the final week of the semester on which the final exam has been scheduled. Exceptions to the requirement of scheduling a final examination (or other appropriate evaluative activity) may be granted, in writing, at the discretion of the appropriate chairperson and/or dean, upon request from the faculty member.

WMU has an official “exam week” at the end of Fall and Spring semesters. Exams for courses which meet during daytime hours are to be given during that week at special times other than the normal class times. A schedule of those times is available through the Registrar’s website, <http://wmich.edu/registrar>. Contact the department/school office coordinator with any questions.

Be sure to list the final exam time on your class syllabus since it will likely not be at the same time of the week that your class normally meets!

The First Day and Beyond: Establishing and Maintaining Authority and a Professional Demeanor

First impressions are very important. A successful first day of class is essential for establishing instructor-student relations and setting the dynamics of your classroom. Below are some tips on how to accomplish this as well as how to maintain authority throughout the semester.

Look and act professional. While this should go without saying, your students expect it and will react accordingly. Because most new TAs are not very much older than their undergraduate students, it is

especially important to establish an instructor-student relationship based on both scholarly and personal professionalism. Even for the most accomplished scholars, extensive knowledge of the material is not the sole guarantee of a successful teaching experience.

- Show up for class early and prepared. Start class formally on time.
- Introduce yourself as Mr., Ms., or Mrs., not by your first name.
- Your demeanor, dress, diction, and manner of expression should be professional. Even such things as grooming and attire set the tone and reflect the importance we attach to the work of teaching and learning.
- Cover your syllabus completely on the first day. Be sure to establish just what the nature of the intellectual inquiry is for your course. Students appreciate clarity.
- Do not shortchange students on the first day! Keep your class for the entire period or at least for the majority of it. Get your class started on the first day with activities that engage students in the subject matter, or do an ice-breaking activity that allows students to get to know one another and you to know them.

There is a thin line between confidence and arrogance. Students appreciate and react positively to instructors who are self-assured and teach with confidence. Arrogance will gain you nothing but negative reactions, will alienate the students, and result in an undesirable classroom experience for everyone.

Additional Reading

Some thoughts about instructor classroom demeanor:

http://chronicle.com/article/Its-Your-Fault/128098/?sid=ja&utm_source=ja&utm_medium=en

Take your students seriously. There will inevitably be differential knowledge bases among students but you must treat them with intellectual respect and acknowledge their intellectual abilities and potential despite any relative differences.

- Internally this is accomplished personally and orally. Speak to your students, not at them.
- Externally this is accomplished through recommended readings and other media related to the subject matter. Encourage use of outside material—this implicitly acknowledges their abilities and gains their respect by showing your interest in what you are teaching.

Maintaining effective instructor-student relations throughout the semester requires effort on your part. Consistency in personal presentation and conducting of class sessions will make the semester go more smoothly for all concerned. Below are some tips on the constructive maintenance of authority.

- Each TA must learn to be appropriately friendly and open to students without succumbing to the temptation to be “one of the guys” or a “buddy.” As a TA, you are not “one of them.” You are the instructor or the assistant with legitimate authority and responsibility to maintain the student-teacher relationship. You’ll establish more trust, more confidence in your fairness to all, if you treat all students impartially.
- Establish a rapport of respect through a “slow windup” with attention-getting reiteration of material from the previous session. This jars memory and lessens the burden of redundant repetition of material for you.
- Make an effort to wrap up treatment of each session’s new material five minutes early and “informally” remain in class to disengage students with ease by answering questions.

Disruptive students are a reality of the teaching experience. Below are some tips on effectively handling situations prior to their arising or without appearing to have lost control of the classroom.

- It is important to state your ideas about students' purpose for being at the University and in your particular class from the outset.
- Humor works when done right. Little things like “let us in on your secret” or “would you like to share that with us” which draw attention in a non-threatening or non-sarcastic manner to disruptive students can be very effective.
- Television, cell phones, and the advent of distractions and rudeness: One way of sensitizing students to what you expect in terms of classroom comportment is to use the following analysis. People at home talk persistently in front of the TV and carry that behavior over from the privacy of their homes into public, shared territory (which your classroom is). The notion of boundaries between public and private space has become further eroded with the pervasive use of cell phones. Encourage your students to respect the boundaries of classroom decorum in the same way that is still expected with film, lecture, or concert attendance.
- Some students will not understand your initial presentation and may “tune out” or create a disruption as a result: forfeit some content to get through their immediate questions within reason. Be sensitive to their problems but sensible with regard to time expenditure. “I’ll explain it as best I can for now, but stick around after class and we’ll cover it further.”

Adapted from material prepared by David Waara, TA Mentor in Comparative Religion, and Dr. Susan Fox, former instructor in the School of Communication

Additional Reading

Preparing for your first semester of teaching:

<http://chronicle.com/article/Summer-Prep-for-New-Teachers/45882/>

What Constitutes Good Teaching?

Effective teaching can take many forms. Students and faculty know good teaching when they experience it, but often find it difficult to articulate the specifics of good teaching. The many approaches to understanding teaching have been addressed in broad reviews of the research literature on post-secondary teaching.

One such review synthesized 31 studies in which students and faculty members specified characteristics important to good teaching. The analysis revealed extensive similarities across studies and between the two groups. In these studies, students and faculty members at the same institutions (universities, four-year colleges, and two-year colleges) were asked to describe attitudes or practices important to good teaching; some studies asked respondents to characterize “best” or “ideal” teachers. Both students and faculty members gave high rankings to the following seven categories (although students placed somewhat more emphasis than faculty on instructors' stimulation of interest and their eloquentionary skills).

Faculty and Students Agree—Good Teaching Involves:*Sensitivity to, and Concern with, Class Level and Progress:*

- Instructor communicates effectively at a level appropriate to students' understanding
- Textbook is of appropriate difficulty for students
- Instructor seems to be concerned with whether students learn the material
- Instructor determines if one student's problem is common to others
- Instructor realizes when students are bored or confused

Additional Reading

Use of PowerPoint and student boredom:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/may/12/university-teaching?DCMP=EMC-thewrap08>

Preparation; Organization of the Course:

- Instructor is well-prepared for class
- Instructor organizes the course in a logical manner
- The course organization assists students in developing basic concepts
- New information is presented in a logical progression and is related to ideas already introduced
- Students perceive the instructor as well-organized
- Lectures are easy to outline

Knowledge of the Subject:

- Instructor demonstrates comprehensive knowledge of the subject
- Instructor knows the current research and literature in the field
- Instructor knows his/her field of specialization very well

Enthusiasm (for Subject and for Teaching):

- Instructor seems interested in teaching the course
- Instructor is able to convey interest and enthusiasm for subject matter
- Instructor is dynamic and energetic

Clarity and Understanding:

- Instructor explains clearly and attempts to answer all questions
- Students are able to follow and understand class lectures/presentations
- Instructor relates concepts in a systematic manner that helps understanding
- Instructor uses well chosen examples to clarify points
- Instructor summarizes major points
- Instructor interprets abstract ideas and theories clearly

Availability and Helpfulness:

- Instructor encourages students to see him/her if having difficulty
- Instructor is readily available to students outside class for consultation
- Instructor has rapport with students
- Special "group help" sessions are provided for students who need it
- Instructor is conscientious in keeping appointments with students

- Instructor is willing to give personal assistance

Impartiality of Evaluation; Quality of Examinations:

- Concepts emphasized in class are those emphasized in exams
- Exams cover material on which students expect to be tested
- Exams require students to do more than recall factual information
- Exams allow students to adequately demonstrate what was learned in the course
- Grades are based on a fair balance of course requirements and content
- Students are quizzed frequently
- Instructor announces tests and quizzes in advance
- Instructor uses more than one type of evaluation device

Reference:

Feldman, K. A. (1998). "Effective College Teaching from Students' and Faculty's View; Matched or Mismatched Priorities?" *Research in Higher Education*, 28(4), 291–344.

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Additional Reading

How to not take student reactions too personally:

<http://chronicle.com/article/I-Hate-Myself-When-Im/48904/>

Strategies for Classroom Success

Begin class on time—close the door, take roll, answer questions about upcoming assignments, introduce the agenda for the day. Your beginning on time models punctual, professional behavior to students. Beginning the class with an occasional quiz is often a good way to reinforce your intention to keep the class starting on time.

End class on time—allow time for a final question, briefly summarize the main points you've covered, remind the class of an assignment that's due, announce the topic for next class. Show courtesy to both your students and your colleagues by dismissing class at the scheduled time.

Learn and use your students' names—perhaps no other single teacher behavior is more valued by students.

Build in flexibility in planning each class. Allow for coverage of both more and less material than you think can be covered in the class time allotted. Many teachers have horror stories to tell of their novice days when they completed all the material they had with them in the first 10 minutes.

Make sure your overhead transparencies or PowerPoint presentations:

- use a large-size type font (18 pt. is recommended);
- present only a small amount of information (no more than six main items or lines);
- use a horizontal rather than vertical presentation of information;
- can be easily read from the back of the room

If you use a chalkboard, make sure your writing is large and clear enough to be read at the back of the room, and that you don't turn your back on the class while you're writing. At the end of class, be sure to erase the board as this is a simple courtesy to your colleagues.

Communicate effectively through

- projecting your voice to the back of the room;
- enunciating clearly;
- avoiding overuse of “okay,” “you know,” and other annoying speech habits;
- maintaining eye contact with students, rather than speaking to the floor, walls, or ceiling;
- smiling when appropriate;
- letting your sense of humor show.

Remember your students are a mix of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.

Many teachers teach only to their own learning style, but your challenge is to meet the needs of all students, not just those who learn the way you do.

- Visual students will need to see information and will appreciate charts, graphs, videos, pictures, and other visual images.
- Auditory students need to hear information, and lectures that list important material will work well with them.
- Kinesthetic students need experiential approaches and hands-on work to learn effectively.

Allow time for answers when asking questions. Some research suggests that most teachers wait only about one second before answering the question themselves! Allow a minimum of three or more seconds, keeping in mind that silence may simply mean that students are thinking about the questions.

Grade and return student work promptly. Students need your feedback to perform effectively. Keeping grades on a computer spreadsheet can assist in making the recording and reporting process efficient and effective. You can periodically provide the students with a copy of the spreadsheet; this helps them know exactly where they stand in the class at all times. Use some kind of code for this purpose (see earlier section on confidentiality of student records).

Save time at the end of class for returning major papers, unless you intend to devote the entire class session to talking about them. Although no approach is ideal for students, when you return papers at the beginning student attention becomes focused not on what is happening in class, but on the grade they've received.

Use anonymous, informal classroom assessments/evaluations on a regular, ongoing basis. This allows students to give honest feedback on their impressions of your class and how well they are learning without fear of reprisal.

Additional Reading

How to handle “stage fright” in the classroom:

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/03/2009031201c.htm>

Classroom Discussion

Classroom discussion can be a means of review, explanation, clarification, analysis, critique, application, and expansion of course content. But meaningful discussion of this sort comes about only with a great deal of preparatory work by both teacher and students; if either is unprepared, discussion will not be productive.

Just as preparation of a lecture requires defining the objectives of the lecture and organizing the materials in a logical way, so does preparation for a discussion. It will probably be harder, in fact, to set up and facilitate a good discussion than to prepare a good lecture.

The Students

When you want an effective discussion to take place, be sure that you give a clear assignment and let students know what topic or topics they’ll be expected to discuss during the next class session. Sometimes it is useful to assign responsibility for some parts of the discussion to certain students and to tell them in advance that during the next session they’ll need to be prepared to lead certain parts of the discussion.

To ensure that students have read the text or have studied the materials, some instructors have them write main points or notes on a 3 × 5 card which is the “ticket” or “price of admission” to the class. This requires that the instructor be at the door to check the cards, but those who use this method insist that it pays off. Others ask students to take a few minutes at the beginning of class to write out some answers to questions or some points to make during the day’s discussion.

The Instructor’s Role

The instructor will of course review the material for the lesson and define the objectives for the discussion. Do you want the discussion simply to be a recitation and review—an exercise in recall? Should the discussion clarify the difficult points? Are there inferences to be drawn or implications to be noted? Will you be expecting analysis or interpretations? Are there debatable or controversial aspects to the material? Do you want students to be able to apply concepts to practical situations?

You will need to develop questions that will elicit the kinds of responses that will lead to the mental operations necessary to the objectives you plan. If the day’s lesson is to solve a certain mathematical problem, discussion will probably involve the students in re-stating the problem and the steps or strategy for solving it. If you’re learning a sociological theory, you’d probably want the students to review the theory and then to discuss its implications and applications. Sometimes there are grounds for challenging prevailing notions or offering variable interpretations. Sometimes the discussion might raise more questions than answers, might identify more problems than solutions.

Ground Rules

It is probably useful to set some ground rules—especially if the materials might promote debate or controversy or strong differences of opinion. Here are some sample ground rules for discussion:

- Anyone who has read the materials has the right to contribute to the discussion.
- Statements should be supported by evidence from the assigned material or other appropriate outside sources.
- Students have the right to disagree with, qualify, or challenge another student’s statements or opinions, but they need to do so respectfully.
- No one or two persons should dominate the discussion. Students who do may be asked to sit out for a time.

Just as you would summarize the main points of a lecture or presentation as you bring it to an end, take time toward the end of discussion to review the points or ideas that developed during the discussion.

Prepared by Shirley Clay Scott, former dean, WMU Graduate College

Dealing With Difficult Students

Even in well-planned courses where goals, instructional objectives, and evaluation criteria are clearly spelled out, explained, and adhered to, there are possibilities for misunderstandings or interpersonal conflicts to arise. The following section contains suggestions for dealing with these problems or conflicts if they arise.

Being thoughtful with your students can save you from many problems. If you phrase questions and criticism carefully, you will generally avoid defensive or hostile responses. If you are supportive, encouraging, and respectful of student ideas in class, then you may correct wrong answers, point out feeble arguments, or highlight weak points in a positive manner without discouraging your students. Rather than asking what is wrong with a written paragraph or a problem solution, ask how it could be improved. Instead of asking what the weak point of an argument is, ask how well it applies to or uses the material from the class. Rather than dismissing an idea immediately, ask the student to clarify using the class material. Don’t, on the other hand, respond with “good point” when the idea was in fact poorly presented.

You are more likely to work smoothly with your students if you resolve any conflicting feelings you may have about your authority as a teacher. Students are confused by, and often alienated from, a teacher who alternatively acts as a friend or peer, then as a stern authority figure. You must also be careful about teasing or using sarcastic humor since these are too easily misinterpreted. On the other hand, don’t lose your sense of humor or the ability to laugh at your own mistakes.

However careful you are, you may still run into students who present specific problems. A few recurrent types—and ways to work with them—are discussed below.

The Arguer

If a student insists that you are not “allowing him (or her) his opinion” when you disagree with a statement he/she has made, point out that you disagree because the statement does not correlate well with the course material for that class. If the student begins to disrupt the discussion, offer to talk privately after class or during office hours. Remain calm and nonjudgmental, no matter how agitated the student becomes. Always use evidence when disagreeing with a student. Using the authority of your position as a teacher rarely proves anything in a disagreement and might inhibit discussion. You can largely avoid students feeling that you put them down by not beginning critical statements with “I.” Often instructors find it helpful to tell students that any critical position should be examined with healthy skepticism—including the comments of the professor. Phrase criticism with reference to the material from a class or other commonly shared information.

If a student is stubborn and refuses to postpone a disagreement until after class or office hours and completely disrupts a class, remain calm. If the student is agitated to the point of being unreasonable, ask him or her to carry the grievance to a higher authority (e.g., the department head or dean). Make apparent your willingness to discuss the issue calmly, but do not continue trying to reason with a student who is highly agitated. If you remain calm in the presence of the group, the student may soon become cooperative again. In an extreme case, you may have to ask the student to leave the classroom, or even dismiss the class. Try to respond as calmly as possible. Avoid making an issue out of a small incident. The hardest part of such a situation is to maintain your professionalism, and not to respond as if you feel personally attacked.

The Over-Talkative Student

Over-talkative students can deaden a class. If a student is dominating a section, try to elicit responses from other students. Call on someone else even though the over-talkative student volunteers. Emphasize to the group that it is the quality, not the quantity, of responses that most interests you, but do so carefully. You don’t want to unnecessarily discourage students who lack self-confidence. Make sure class members see that you consider the class’s goal a communal, and not a competitive, activity. If the over-talkative student does not recognize the importance of listening to other members of the group, talk with him or her about this privately. Do not ridicule an over-talkative student or make comments to other students in the class, but try as tactfully as possible to keep the group’s activity going without reinforcing one student’s talkative behavior.

The Silent Student

The student who never speaks out in class also presents a problem. By making sure that all members of a class (if small enough) know each other by name, thus creating a safe environment, you will sometimes overcome the silent student’s fear of speaking. Occasional small group activities where the students discuss issues in pairs, for example, may also make it easier for a shy student to join the discussion. As with the over-talkative student, do not ridicule or put the silent student on the spot, but do try to elicit answers from him or her—at first once every class and later more frequently—when he or she begins to appear more comfortable about responding.

Talking with the student privately may also help. Reasons for a student being silent vary. One silent student may merely enjoy listening. Another may feel too dumb to contribute. The latter is very

common among first-year students. Some students simply have quiet personalities; others may be undergoing personal stress that inhibits their speaking in class. Even after you gently encourage students to speak, they may remain silent. This is their right, which you must ultimately respect. Requiring all students in your classes to talk with you during office hours at the beginning of the course—assuming your classes are small enough to make this feasible—helps alleviate both over-talkativeness and silence.

Additional Reading

A lesson in humility: What you see in class is not all there is to your students:

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/01/2009012101c.htm>

The “Grade Grubber”

You may find that some students will unrelentingly pursue you if you give them a lower grade than they expected. Many faculty and TAs complain that they have even had ‘A’s vigorously contested! There are ways to minimize such incidents. Make it clear from the beginning of the course exactly what you expect in papers or tests. If possible, hand out guidelines for a good essay or examples of a superior exam answer. When you do give a grade, note in some detail weak or strong points of the work and suggestions for improving performance. You might give students the option of handing in an initial draft that you will not grade but will comment on.

When students actually come to you to contest grades for term work, indicate that when you reconsider their paper, assignment, or problem-set mark, you retain the right to adjust their grade either up or down. If you are the TA, advise students that in the case of unresolved differences, the professor will make the final decision. (Be sure to discuss this with the professor beforehand!) When no resolution is possible, brief the student on which office to turn to (such as the department head, dean’s office, or the Ombudsman’s office) to pursue an appeal. Although grade grubbers may discourage you and appear to undermine the academic enterprise, remember that this generation of students is under pressures you may not have had as an undergraduate. Competition for employment and graduate and professional schools is fiercer and the appeal to counter-culture options more muted. You will have more success with these students if you listen to and respond to their anxieties as well as their complaints. Remember also that it’s possible that you’ve made a mistake in evaluating a student’s work and a re-evaluation might be in order.

Additional Reading

How to discern when students are “full of it:” <http://chronicle.com/article/On-Students-Who-Are-Full-of-It/127755/>

Troubled Students

As mentioned back in the section on “Campus Safety and Security” (p. 14), sometimes students exhibit troubling behavior that may be indicative of an unstable mental status or some other problem such as domestic abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. The office of the Dean of Students investigates reports of concerns about a student’s mental health or well-being. If you have such concerns about a student in your class, you may report such concerns on a confidential form available at:

www.wmich.edu/students/health.html [click on “Student Concern Form”]

Resolving Conflicts

Sometimes serious conflicts do arise between teacher and student concerning charges of poor instruction, irregular or unfair grading, deviation from announced procedures about course requirements, or the use of nonacademic criteria in computing grades. Although you may assume such problems are rare, in fact they are not; even experienced instructors face these kinds of issues.

Ideally, such problems should be averted by carefully formulating and announcing classroom policies, especially regarding grading. Once a problem does arise, however, you should first try to resolve it through discussion with the student. If you are a TA, involve the professor early on. Fortunately, most conflicts can be worked out cooperatively at this stage. Otherwise, informal or formal discussions or procedures at the departmental or faculty level may lead to a satisfactory resolution.

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Helping First-Year Students Study and Learn

Few freshmen can keep pace with their courses if they study only an hour between classes and if their only study activities are reading, highlighting, and copying their notes. Faculty expect more, and those who teach freshmen play an important role both in making expectations about college work explicit and in helping freshmen develop their study skills. What then, might we do to get students to spend more time studying and to study in more productive ways?

Set the stage for new study practices by stressing that learning in college involves more than memorizing. One reason students spend so much time underlining, taking verbatim notes, and then copying them over is that they try to memorize information, often exactly as it was presented. For a variety of reasons—some experiential, others developmental—freshmen tend to equate learning with memorizing. If we aim for more—if understanding and thinking are important goals—we must explain in understandable terms what those goals entail.

Showing students the types of questions they can expect on exams or papers is a good way to start. Point out that they will need to know some things in order to address these questions, but answering them requires more. They must be able to apply their knowledge to examples, problems, issues, or situations that may not have been discussed in class or in their texts. This ability to use knowledge in new situations requires study activities different from memorizing.

Talk about good study practices early in the course and in the syllabus. What techniques and strategies might help students learn more from the readings and from class? Many freshmen need to see demonstrations and to practice these activities before they can use them, but describing them in the syllabus signals their importance and reminds students what their responsibilities for learning include. Also discuss more general questions about work outside class. How much time should students expect to spend studying between classes? How do class meetings, readings, and other assignments connect? Should students read assignments before they are discussed in class or afterwards?

Teach students how to take notes in your class. Even students who are good note-takers or who have participated in study skills workshops benefit from help in adapting those skills to particular classes. What cues do you provide in lecture for helping students identify key ideas? Should they record examples in their notes? How much detail should they try to get down? What about taking notes during discussions or other class activities? Suggest, too, that students should do more than simply read over or copy their notes between classes. Recommend instead that students go back over their notes, identify the key ideas, and write them in the margins. Then tell them to cover their notes and try to explain the ideas in their own words, as if they were teaching the material to someone else. Paraphrasing may go slowly at first, but it is an important step toward understanding, synthesizing, and remembering ideas.

Early in the course, take some time to model good note-taking and to provide guided practice. Ten or fifteen minutes into a lecture, stop and show students the notes you would have taken. Ask them to identify differences between their notes and yours. What did they miss and why? Are they trying to write down too much detail? What should they try to do differently? Repeat the exercise once or twice more during class. Follow up in the next class by showing them how you identified key ideas or issues in your notes and how you would paraphrase an explanation.

Plan similar instruction on strategies to learn from reading. Keeping up with the reading is a source of anxiety for most freshmen. Many incoming freshmen identify “to improve reading and study skills” as a very important reason in deciding to go to college (Fact File, 1994). Once enrolled, many more discover they must improve their reading comprehension skills in order to succeed. Fortunately, research shows that students benefit from instruction in how to learn from reading, especially when the instructor shows them how to adapt general skills to particular texts (McKeachie, Pintrich, Lin, & Smith, 1986).

Begin by stating explicitly what students should try to get from the reading so they know what expectations you have in mind. Suggest that they skim the assignment to identify main ideas before they read. Help them see how the book is organized and what cues the authors provide to signify main ideas. Then encourage them to *actively* read with pen in hand, marking the main ideas or writing them in the margins. Most importantly, urge them to stop every ten minutes, to look back at the key ideas and to try and summarize what they’ve read. Stress that pausing to review is at least as important as reading itself. The periodic review helps one maintain concentration, process information more deeply, and remember it longer.

To illustrate, show students your text. Talk about what you have marked and why, what cues you used to know these were important points. Then model how you review and summarize what you read, what you say to yourself during those pauses to review. Ask students in pairs to try the same thing with the next two sections, each taking a turn in identifying the main ideas and summarizing.

Active reading takes practice. Acknowledge that students may feel awkward at first, but the more they read actively, the more skilled they will become. As they develop their skills, both their reading speed and comprehension will improve. Point out too that when they pause to review, they may find they cannot summarize the main ideas—a sure sign that they have not understood the section. They

need to reread and then try again to summarize the main points. If they still cannot explain the ideas after two of three tries, tell them to formulate a question about the section, write it down, and bring it to class. Requiring that they submit questions on sections they do not understand discourages students from giving up too soon.

Develop assignments that actively engage students in study activities. Few freshmen will take the time to write summaries or look for additional examples or work problems unless an assignment prompts them to do so. If we want students to adopt new study practices, initially we will need assignments that require them to engage in those practices. To develop such assignments, it helps to think about the mental activities that characterize deeper processing of information. To involve students in organizing and connecting ideas, for example, ask them to make outlines or draw concept maps. Prod them to make material meaningful by requiring that they paraphrase, summarize, or teach the material to someone else. To extend meaning and broaden connections, ask them to find additional examples in newspapers or media, to compare and contrast new ideas with those discussed earlier, or to rethink a position taken earlier in light of new material. Encourage them to consider ideas in a variety of contexts and situations by assigning problems drawn from different settings.

Help students to form study groups. Research indicates that students working together in groups learn more and remember it longer (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Light, 1992). We ought not leave the formation of study groups to chance in any of our courses, but freshmen especially need help in forming study groups and getting started. During the first or second week, help students form their groups and set a meeting time and place. Describe the purposes of the study groups, the nature of the work to be done there, and the responsibilities of each member. Initially, at least, give specific assignments to provide structure and guidance. Check periodically to see how the groups are working by reviewing assignments completed in the study groups, for example, or by asking members to take turns writing and submitting minutes of their meetings. From time to time, invite students to evaluate the effectiveness of their study groups and the contributions of each member.

Encourage students to reflect on various study techniques and adopt those best suited to their learning styles and the material they are studying. Research on learning styles indicates that people differ in the ways they carry out basic information processing activities. We know, for example, that only meaningful information is transferred from working memory to long-term memory and that paraphrasing is a powerful strategy for making material meaningful, but paraphrasing can take different forms. Students who learn best by thinking things through in solitary study will likely prefer assignments that ask them to write a paraphrase or to think about different ways to explain the ideas. Students who learn by talking things through with others will benefit more from paraphrasing assignments in which they actually explain the material to someone else.

Getting freshmen to reflect on the suitability of various study activities does not require administering a battery of learning style inventories, although students usually find such inventories interesting and helpful. Two things are required, however, if we are to help freshmen identify the most effective study strategies for them. First, we must expose students to a variety of study techniques, not just those that served us well. Second, we must encourage students to reflect on the usefulness of various study strategies for them. After modeling different forms of paraphrasing, for example, ask students to try them

out and let you know their reactions. Did they find it easier to paraphrase by talking or in writing? Which do they think helped them more? Which technique will they most likely use on a regular basis? After the first quiz or exam is also a good time to get students to reflect on their study activities. Ask them to indicate how satisfied they are with their performance, to identify which study techniques they think helped them most, and to describe what they intend to do differently before the next exam.

Additional Reading

Inspiring students to achieve:

<http://chronicle.com/article/How-Do-We-Inspire-Them-/44260/>

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McKeachie, W. J., Pintrich, P. R., Lin, Y. G., & Smith, D. A. F. (1986). *Teaching and learning in the college classroom: A review of the research literature*. Ann Arbor: National Center for research to Improve Postsecondary Teaching and Learning, University of Michigan.

Academic Integrity in the Classroom

What should I do if I suspect a student of cheating?

Academic Conduct Policy

The Office of Student Conduct is charged with coordinating the student academic conduct process as well as providing resources and information for faculty, staff, and students. More information is available on: <http://www.osc.wmich.edu/>. This office coordinates all hearings and procedures related to charges of academic dishonesty.

Academic Honesty Policy

If a student is uncertain about an issue of academic honesty, he/she should consult the faculty member to resolve questions in any situation prior to the submission of the academic exercise. Violations of academic honesty include but are not limited to:

Cheating

Definition: Cheating is intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, notes, study aids, or other devices or materials in any academic exercise.

Clarification

1. *Students completing any examination are prohibited from looking at another student's examination and from using external aids (for example, books, notes, calculators, conversation with other) unless specifically allowed in advance by the faculty member.*
2. *Students may not have others conduct research or prepare work for them without advance authorization from the faculty member. This includes, but is not limited to, the services of commercial term paper companies.*

Fabrication, Falsification, and Forgery

Definition: Fabrication is the intentional invention and unauthorized alteration of any information or citation in an academic exercise. Falsification is a matter of altering information while fabrication is a matter of inventing or counterfeiting information for use in any academic exercise or University record. Forgery is defined as the act to imitate or counterfeit documents, signatures, and the like.

Clarification

1. *“Invented” information shall not be used in any laboratory experiment, report of results, or academic exercise. It would be improper, for example, to analyze one sample in an experiment and then “invent” data based on that single experiment for several more required analyses.*
2. *Students shall acknowledge the actual source from which cited information was obtained. For example, a student shall not take a quotation from a book review and then indicate that the quotation was obtained from the book itself.*
3. *Falsification of University records includes altering or forging any University document and/or record, including identification material issued or used by the University.*

Multiple Submission

Definition: Multiple submission is the submission of substantial portions of the same work (including oral reports) for credit more than once without authorization from instructors of all classes for which the student submits the work.

Clarification

Examples of multiple submission include submitting the same paper for credit in more than one course without all faculty members’ permission; making revisions in a credit paper or report (including oral presentations) and submitting it again as if it were new work.

Plagiarism

Definition: Plagiarism is intentionally, knowingly, or carelessly presenting the work of another as one’s own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the ideas, information, etc., are common knowledge. Instructors should provide clarification about the nature of plagiarism.

Clarification

1. *Direct Quotation: Every direct quotation must be identified by quotation marks or appropriate indentation and must be properly acknowledged, in the text by citation or in a footnote or endnote.*
2. *Paraphrase: Prompt acknowledgement is required when material from another source is paraphrased or summarized, in whole or in part, in one’s own words. To acknowledge a paraphrase properly, one might state: “To paraphrase Locke’s comment,...” and then conclude with a footnote or endnote identifying the exact reference.*
3. *Borrowed facts: Information gained in reading or research which is not common knowledge must be acknowledged. Common knowledge includes generally known facts such as the names of leaders of prominent nations, basic scientific laws, historic events, etc. Materials which add only to general understanding of the subject may be acknowledged in the bibliography and need not be footnoted or endnoted.*
4. *Footnotes, endnotes, and in-text citations: One footnote, endnote, or in-text citation is usually enough to acknowledge indebtedness when a number of connected sentences are drawn from one source. When direct quotations are used, however, quotation marks must be inserted and acknowl-*

edgement made. Similarly, when a passage is paraphrased, acknowledgement is required. Faculty members are responsible for identifying any specific style/format requirement for the course. Examples include but are not limited to American Psychological Association (APA) style and Modern Languages Association (MLA) style.

Complicity

Definition: Complicity is intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to commit an act of academic dishonesty.

Clarification

Examples of complicity include knowingly allowing another to copy from one's paper during an examination or test; distributing test questions or substantive information about the materials to be tested before the scheduled exercise; collaborating on academic work knowing that the collaboration will not be reported; taking an examination or test for another student, or signing another's name on an academic exercise.

Additional Reading

Catching (and penalizing) student plagiarists: www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/07/02/couser
 A look inside an essay mill: <http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i28/28a00102.htm>

Working With Students With Disabilities

Western Michigan University maintains the Office of Disabled Student Resources and Services to help assure compliance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The primary goal is to ensure access for students with documented disabilities and to contribute to the development of self-advocacy and confidence of students with disabilities.

Disabilities include: attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, chronic health issues, brain injury, emotional/psychological disorders, mobility impairment, autistic disorders such as Asperger's Syndrome, and temporary disability. Many students' disabilities are not apparent.

Services are based on documented need and could include:

1. Letters for instructors stating classroom accommodations.
2. Advocacy for classroom accommodation – additional time for tests (50% more time), quiet/distracted-reduced testing environment, copy of overheads/notes, test reader, sign-language interpreter, FM system, closed captioning, preferential seating, accessible classroom furniture, recommendation for regular contact with instructor.
3. Mobility information – information about campus travel, living arrangements, transportation, snow removal.
4. Alternative text format – scanned text material for use with screen reader.
5. Priority registration
6. Advocacy and liaison with professors and other campus offices.
7. Referral for disability evaluation.

Decisions About Disclosing a Disability

Students are encouraged to contact DSRS to discuss their needs if they think they have a disability and register with the office to gain support and legal protection. Submitted documentation is confidential. Students can help decide the wording in letters to their professors. Accommodation is not typically retroactive so if a student decides not to disclose, they are not entitled to accommodation after the fact. Students may be hesitant to disclose because they do not think they will have difficulty, they're concerned about stigma or discrimination, or they assume instructors will automatically accommodate. Some graduate students either have not been diagnosed or they have acquired a disability since their undergraduate work.

Information for Teaching Assistants

Provide a statement in your syllabus similar to: “Any student with a documented disability (e.g., physical, learning, psychological/emotional, vision, hearing, etc.) who needs reasonable accommodations must contact the instructor and/or Disabled Student Resources and Services at the beginning of the semester.” If possible, this statement should be read aloud to the class to assure those students with print disabilities hear the information. This approach also demonstrates to students that you are sensitive to and concerned about meeting the needs of all of the students you teach. It further affords students the opportunity to make their accommodation needs known to you early in the semester.

Disability information must remain confidential. The entire class should never be informed there is a student with a disability enrolled, except at the request of the individual student. Any information a student with a disability provides you is to be used solely and specifically for arranging reasonable accommodations for the course of study. DSRS recommends that students with disabilities bring their accommodation letters to you during office hours or by special appointment, and not to hand them to you just before or after a class session. During the appointment, the particulars of arrangements for accommodations can be discussed and agreed upon in private. (Please see “Information for Faculty and Staff” on the Disabled Student Resources and Services website: www.dsrs.wmich.edu).

If at any time you have questions about how to work with a student with disabilities, please contact the office of Disabled Student Resources and Services at (269) 387-2116.

Your Professional Future

Satisfying as teaching, research, or service can be in its own right, a record of successful assisting has become increasingly important to Ph.D.'s seeking their first academic position. Even at research universities, search committees look for candidates who combine outstanding scholarly credentials with evidence of assisting ability. In fact, appointment papers at many universities now specifically include a section in which a candidate's promise as a teacher or researcher must be documented. In these days of five-figure tuition and student consumerism, colleges and universities cannot afford to provide inadequate levels of instruction.

When you apply for an academic position, you typically will be asked to include a curriculum vitae and three or more letters of recommendation. A vitae should list the courses you have taught or assisted in and those you are prepared to lead, but this by itself is not very informative. You can increase the significance of your experience by making sure that at least one of your letters comments

on it. This will not happen automatically; you have to plan in advance to make it happen. To aid you in this planning, here are five bits of advice:

1. Make sure your faculty supervisors are aware of your future intentions in academia. Let them know that you will want a letter of recommendation from them.
2. Be visible. Your professors cannot praise your abilities if they never see or hear them. If you give some lectures, try to arrange for the professor to be present. If you mainly lead discussion or laboratory sections, arrange for an observation. At the very least, spend some time discussing the course and your contributions to it with the professor, making sure that you convey your enthusiasm and mention your good ideas (i.e., do not just talk about your problems).
3. Show evidence of organization and efficiency. Most assistants approach their initial assignments enthusiastically. They are willing to devote a great deal of time and effort toward making their section intellectually stimulating and informative. This kind of enthusiasm makes teaching and learning exciting, but remember not to neglect your own graduate work. Learn to budget your time carefully; the need to do so will probably stay with you the rest of your academic life. Your future job will probably require a number of things besides instruction, and you will only be able to accomplish this by developing an organized and efficient approach toward your classes. Therefore, you should realize that your faculty supervisor may not be impressed by the simple fact that you spend a great deal of time on your course or section (in fact, you may make a very bad impression in this way); the best way to make a good impression is to show that you can juggle both your assignments and your own work. Be as systematic as possible in things like classroom preparation and grading. Keep your outlines, notes, classroom handouts, etc., in proper files; when the time comes to evaluate your performance (i.e., when the professor is writing that letter of recommendation) you can make these files available.
4. Arrange for student evaluations of your teaching and make the most of these. They can help you learn more about yourself and improve your techniques. But these evaluations can serve another purpose—to allow other people to judge how good you are. Many assistants design their own evaluation forms, but you may use a standard form instead to provide meaningful numerical data for future letters of recommendation. If you use mid-term evaluations, keep samples of them.
5. Consider putting together a professional teaching portfolio, a more comprehensive way of documenting, reflecting on, and strengthening your record of activities. With teaching becoming a more important factor in the academic job market, the portfolio is a practical asset as well as a way to develop professionally. [The Office of Faculty Development can assist with developing your portfolio.]

Remember too that if you make the “short list” (list of final candidates) at a college or university where you have applied for a position, your instructional abilities may be directly or indirectly tested. You may have to present a seminar or either a traditional job talk or a pedagogical job talk (or both) or you may be asked, in the course of the on-campus interview, to describe in some detail the design of a course that you would be prepared to teach. In all these cases, if you have taught or used the GA opportunity to improve your skills, you are much more likely to appear confident and knowledgeable. Your publications or dissertation will also be crucial, of course, but search committee members often comment that it is the job talk or interview that makes the greatest impression and serves to separate the candidates.

Once you obtain your first academic position, your previous experiences will continue to serve you well. New assistant professors are expected to assume and be successful at multiple roles—teacher, researcher, university citizen (committee work)—very quickly. If you already know how to prepare courses, deliver lectures, lead reviews, and all the rest, then you will have more time for publishing and university service.

Later when you go for tenure, teaching—together with research—will again be a major determinant of your success. This is true even at the best research universities in the sense that even a brilliant scholar is expected to be competent in his or her teaching. Collect sample syllabi, tests, assignments from effective professors to use as guides when preparing your own courses.

Even if you do not stay in academia, your GA work will still have been a valuable experience. The more responsible a job you hold anywhere, the more likely that you will need effective self-presentation and interpersonal skills. These are precisely the areas which successful assisting requires that you develop.

Further Reading

Still want to know more about how to be successful as a graduate student and graduate teaching assistant? Check out the following online articles:

General Reading on Graduate Student Success

A graduate advisor's view on new advisees as “BFFs”:

<http://chronicle.com/free/v55/i35/35b02401.htm>

Starting on the path to becoming a professor (book review):

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/02/2009020301c.htm>

Attending your first academic conference: <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2008/12/2008120801c.htm>

Additional Reading for Teaching Assistants

How useful is technology in the classroom? www.insidehighered.com/advice/instant_mentor/weir10

Classroom learning environment, improving student presentations:

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/03/2009030401c.htm>

Building confidence in students: <http://chronicle.com/jobs/news/2009/05/2009052801c.htm>

The benefits of both teaching and doing research: <http://chronicle.com/article/Want-to-Be-a-Good-Researcher-/128753/>