

Report of the Sub-Committee on the  
Training of Teaching Assistants at  
Queen's University  
to the  
Senate Committee on Academic Development  
April 2002

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**I Introduction**

Rationale

Queen's University is committed to maintaining the quality of the teaching and learning environment and promoting excellence in the entire educational experience for its students and faculty. Moreover, the important role played by Teaching Assistants in achieving these goals is acknowledged.

The Senate Committee on Academic Development (SCAD) has, as part of its mandate, the responsibility of recommending to the Senate principles, policies and priorities for the overall academic development of the University. As a standing committee of Senate, it also has the ability to establish sub-committees for special issues or purposes that may be ongoing. Recognizing the

March 2000 and the Report of a Conference entitled "TAs at Queen's: Realizing their Potential, Improving Teaching and Learning" which was held in January 2000. These reports are appended hereto as *Appendices "B", "C", and "D"* respectively. Furthermore, "Survey of Documents on TA Issues", which is essentially a bibliography of some of the materials that were available to the sub-committee, appears in *Appendix "E"*.

There is no doubt that the importance of TA training is a theme that runs through a number of these documents, and the sub-

A teaching fellow is a graduate student who takes the major responsibility for planning, teaching and evaluation in an undergraduate or graduate course. Graduate students who take major responsibility for a course should have training (e.g., SGS-901) and demonstrated competence (e.g., teaching

The hour-long workshop introduces international TAs to Canadian academic culture and offers communication strategies for the classroom.

In summary, tremendous variation in the teaching development experiences of individual TAs. Many TAs receive absolutely no preparation and minimal support for their duties, others participate in specialized TA training workshops offered by their departments and/or the IDC, while some enrol in SGS-901 or other discipline-specific credit courses which are designed to prepare them for a future life as a university professor as well as their immediate TA duties.



### Components of TA Training

Preparation for a TAship should include, but not be restricted to, practical hands-on training for specific duties. It must also include mentoring and monitoring and other forms of support for the

First and foremost, TA programs must include a significant degree of training at the disciplinary level in order to create a close link to the respective scholarship and values in a given area of study and to reflect the discipline-specific culture of teaching and learning.

While a minimum of mandatory preparation is desirable and necessary, it cannot compensate for a lack of incentives to actively participate in training programs. It is important to offer meaningful incentives and to construct TA training programs that can facilitate and take advantage of many

motivational, inspirational and personally relevant. TAs deserve and benefit from programs that challenge and encourage them to experiment, to reflect on their teaching, to be creative, to care about teaching, to share ideas and to discover the importance and value of their work. Instructors play a major role in motivating TAs and assisting them in their professional development.

Consistent and ongoing TA assessment and evaluation are necessary for reasons of accountability and improvement, and are thus essential components of effective TA training programs. It is important for TAs both to receive and to provide feedback.

### The Role of Faculty and Peers

Because of its significant impact on the quality of the TA experience, special attention has to be given to the quality of the relationship between TA and their supervisors. (ev-6(p)11ng)11( t62-9( t62-9( )11(-)-)11( 406.39 TJETB'

***Recommendation 1***

*That Departments and/or Faculties review their current TA training practices with the goal of creating comprehensive approaches to TA development (including workshops for beginning TAs, support for more experienced TAs and self-directed programs for TAs who want to improve their teaching). That Departments and/or Faculties also review the way they*

***Recommendation 4***

*That consideration be given to having Internal Academic Reviews contain a section on TA training and development and faculty members be encouraged to include their TA training and development activities in their annual reports.*

***Action:*** *Faculty Deans and Dean of Graduate Studies and Research*

Many Departments already organize TA workshops at the beginning of each academic year and/or at the start of each term. In order to achieve consistency and to prepare TAs for their duties (lab

To support graduate students who were required to obtain satisfactory results in an English language proficiency test for admission, we recommend that a mandatory diagnostic assessment of ESL oral proficiency be developed and administered. All new graduate students who fall into this category must pass this supplementary test before they can be employed as TAs. Therefore, the test should be administered after the students have been accepted into a graduate program but before they begin to work as TAs. Those students who demonstrate that they possess adequate oral skills may take up their assigned TA duties immediately.

***Recommendation 7***

*That a mandatory diagnostic assessment of ESL oral proficiency be developed. That all new graduate students who were required to obtain satisfactory results in an English language proficiency test for admission be required to undertake this supplementary assessment before they begin their work as TAs.*

***Action:*** *School of English and School of Graduate Studies and Research*

Those graduate students whose English language and communication skills are judged to be inadequate as a result of the diagnostic assessment need to be given the opportunity to improve their proficiency before they can work as TAs. To assist these students in acquiring the communicative teaching strategies, classroom communication skills, cross-cultural awareness and English pronunciation (for a more detailed description see *Appendix "H"*). Students who fail the diagnostic test must take and pass this course before they can work as TAs.

***Recommendation 8***

*That a new term-length course entitled English Language Communication Skills for Teaching Purposes be developed and offered in the fall term. That this course be mandatory for all graduate students who were required to obtain satisfactory results in an English language proficiency test for admission and who have failed the diagnostic test of ESL oral proficiency.*

***Action:*** *School of English and IDC*

This course should be supplemented with a voluntary mentoring program to assist students in their efforts to improve their general language skills. The attached chart (*Appendix "I"*) summarizes our

## Additional Matters

In addressing the issues mandated by SCAD, members took notice of a number of related matters that were outside the terms of reference of our committee. The following items, among others, were flagged as also meriting attention: ongoing monitoring of TA training and development; evaluation of TAs; and rights and responsibilities of TAs.

To contin

would like to see consideration given to establishing an appropriate committee or working group to address these and other issues as needed.

## **V Required resources**

To implement the new initiatives, the Committee recommends that the following resources be made available:

Mandatory diagnostic ESL test (based on intake of approximately 240 visa students each year at an assessment cost of \$12.50 per student: \$3,000 (ongoing)

Development of diagnostic test: \$1,000 (one-time cost)

TA Development Coordinator position (PhD required, salary level grade 9): \$46,744 (ongoing)

Respectfully submitted,

Ulrich Scheck

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