

English Program - GTA Handbook

Last Updated: January 2, 2018

1. You and the English Department

Goals

The Graduate Teaching Assistant program has two main goals: provide quality instruction to undergraduates, and to help you develop as a teacher. To these ends we encourage close working relationships between faculty and GTAs, and as far as possible we will treat you as a colleague. We recognize the difficult status of the GTAs: you are a student and must maintain good standing in the graduate program, but at the same time you are serving as a member of the teaching faculty. We are committed to helping you balance your teaching duties, your coursework, and other responsibilities. As a rule of thumb, you should budget about 19 ½ hours per week for your teaching, tutoring, and other GTA duties. If you find yourself spending significantly more time than this, talk with your supervising professor and with the chair of the department.

Appointments and Eligibility

Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA): Students who commit to enrolling in 9 hours per semester are eligible to apply for a GTA award. GTA awards are usually made starting in the fall semester. Although the appointment is made for a full academic year, GTAs are subject to evaluation each semester (see below) and will not have their appointment continued unless they complete their graduate classes successfully with a 3.00 GPA and are nominated by their supervising professors. To be awarded a second year at the GTA level, a GTA must have completed at least 18 hours by the beginning of that second year, have completed their graduate courses with grades of B and above and, once again, have their supervising professor's nomination.

We select GTAs on the basis of academic record and experience. You must be accepted into the English graduate program on a regular or provisional status in order to be appointed as a GTA. (Please consult the current UTPB Graduate Catalog for admissions criteria.) During your employment you must maintain satisfactory progress toward your degree and a graduate GPA of at least 3.0.

New GTAs are required to enroll in ENGL 6372, Rhetoric and Composition. If you have significant teaching experience or a similar course on your transcript, you may request that we

waive this requirement. All GTAs are expected to participate in departmental colloquia and workshops.

Responsibilities

First year GTAs will perform 19 ½ hours of service per week, as follows:

- Assist a professor in a class, preferably a sophomore or freshman level course.
- Grade tests and papers under the professor's supervision.
- Teach 3 or 4 sessions of the class in which they assist under the professor's supervision.
- Conduct research as required by the professor.

Second Year GTAs:

- Those who have completed at least 18 hours toward their degree will teach one section of Freshman English per semester.

Evaluation

To help you grow as a teacher, you will be evaluated frequently. Prior to earning 18 hours toward your degree, you will be observed teaching and will receive a written evaluation from the professor you assist each semester. Once you are teaching your own section of Freshman English, you will be observed and evaluated twice in your first semester. The first observation will be made by a tenured or tenure track instructor chosen by you. (If you have no preference, an observer/mentor will be chosen for you.) The purpose of the first visit will be to discuss and describe means for improving your teaching. The observation is unofficial and part of your mentoring process. The second observation will be official and will be made by a tenure track faculty member chosen by the English Chair. The observer will submit a written report to the Chair, the Head of Freshman English, and the GTA Coordinator. The purpose of the report is to describe your teaching strengths and weaknesses and provide both encouragement and ideas for improvement. While these evaluations are mainly intended to contribute to your professional development, they will also determine your suitability for reappointment. All reports and evaluations will be kept on file by the Chair and will be available for your perusal. In the case of a weak evaluation, you may request a return visit by the same reviewer. After receiving two satisfactory evaluations in the first semester, there will be an initial evaluation in the second semester. There will be a second observation only if the first one is not satisfactory.

The faculty who observe and evaluate your teaching will use various criteria, including, but not necessarily limited to, the following:

For Workshop or Studio Classroom Formats

- 1) Did the GTA provide, either during class or previously, adequate materials to prepare the students for the workshop task(s) assigned? Were workshop tasks adequately defined? What signs could you detect that the workshop tasks are linked to future tasks and skills that the students will be asked to master?
- 2) Did the students seem comfortable working with one another in an evaluative environment? Were all or most of the students contributing actively to the activity? Did they show enthusiasm for the task? Were there signs that most of the students were accomplishing the goals of the workshop?
- 3) What contributions has the GTA made toward making the students feel comfortable working together in an evaluative environment? What kind of rapport has the GTA established with the students? In what ways does that rapport work for or against creating an effective workshop environment?
- 4) How many students were in attendance? Does that represent a majority or a minority? Do you detect signs that the GTA may be having trouble motivating students to attend regularly? Can you discern the cause of the problem?

For Discussion/Lecture Format:

- 1) What has the lecturer/discussion leader done to outline and define the goals of the class? What signs can you see that students (especially through their class participation and questions) understood the goals?
- 2) Describe the procedure whereby the GTA sought to obtain those goals. What kinds of questions were implemented to invoke discussion? What were some basic organizational devices used in the lecture portion of the class? What kinds of audio/visual devices were used? In general, what signs can you describe that strongly indicate that the teacher obtained all or most of the class goals?
- 3) Describe the rapport between GTA and students. Did people express themselves freely in a constructive manner? Were discussions helping the teacher and their classmates achieve a common goal? Did a majority of students participate or seem attentive? Overall, how did the rapport between the students and their teacher contribute or fail to contribute to an effective class?
- 4) How many of the enrolled students attended? Does attendance seem to be a problem in the class?

Copies of all written evaluations of your teaching will be sent to you and to the English Chair, Head of Freshman English, and GTA Coordinator.

GTA Files and Teaching Portfolios

After a written teaching evaluation is submitted to the English Chair and the College Dean, it will be placed on file in the Literature computer drive which is accessible to authorized faculty

only. You are encouraged to keep a teaching portfolio which will contain sample syllabi, handouts, writing prompts for paper assignments, workshop prompts, exams, quizzes, model student papers, intermediate drafts of student papers with your comments, and any other materials that you think give some indication of the type and quality of instruction provided in your classes. Essentially, the materials in the portfolio should provide reviewers a sense of the quality, focus, and scope of your teaching. You are urged to include a cover letter describing your teaching methodology, as it has evolved out of the mentoring process. The letter should also show how the materials in the portfolio illustrate the techniques used to realize that methodology in the classroom. You will find this material useful when applying for jobs.

End-of-Semester Review and Reappointment

At the end of each semester, the Head of Freshman English, the English Chair, and the Head of the English Graduate program will meet to review your progress and discuss your performance. The purpose of this review is to determine whether additional mentoring or aid--and of what kind--may be needed to help you improve your teaching skills.

You may appeal negative classroom evaluations by contacting the English Chair. If you are dismissed without renewal of contract, no appeal process exists.

Professionalism

You are expected to act professionally in all your dealings with students, other GTAs, the English Department faculty, and the university community. This means supporting all university and departmental instructional policies and promptly bringing any problems or questions about appropriate conduct to the attention of your mentor and other members of the department.

Absences

As is expected of regular faculty, you, too, are expected (except in cases of serious or contagious illness or emergency) to be present and on time for all class meetings, whether it be your own ENGL 1301/02 class or a class in which you are assisting. If you are going to be late or absent, it is your responsibility to contact whomever you are directly responsible to AND one of the following: the English Chair, the GTA Coordinator, the Freshman English Coordinator. Please do not ask your fellow GTAs to relay messages for you.

If --for whatever reason--you miss more than the equivalent of 25% of the semester in any one aspect of your GTA assignment, you will be dismissed from your employment as a GTA. You may be eligible for reappointment the following semester, depending upon the circumstances and reasons for the excessive absences.

Resources

For anything having to do with your teaching duties, you will have full access to the equipment, supplies, and services of the Department of Literature and Languages, including assistance by

the department secretary and by work-study students. Special requests should go to the English Chair or a faculty member.

2. GTAs in Freshman English

The following are intended as guidelines, not rigid rules.

Duties

All Freshman English sections will follow the program's stated goals and objectives. You will have primary responsibility for your own sections: running the course on a day-to-day basis, preparing materials, reading papers, handling difficulties and assigning grades. In addition to meeting your classes, you will hold at least two weekly office hours per section.

Course Descriptions

Together, Composition I/II emphasize academic (transactional, critical) writing rather than personal (expressive) writing, although the latter has an important place in students' discovery of interest in and commitment to the ideas and topics that may be handled in the former way. Composition I begins with expressive writing, moving toward more analytical and persuasive strategies by the end of the semester. Composition II then focuses and expands on analysis, argumentation and research. See the UTPB website for sample syllabi.

Placement

Students are placed on the basis of directed self-placement, or on the basis of dual enrollment, AP courses or transfer courses. This process is reliable, but errors are possible. If a student is strikingly out of place in a course, encourage the student to switch into a more appropriate course. All section changes must be completed by the last day to add a course.

Class Meetings and Conferences

Because individualized instruction contributes significantly to improvement in writing, instructors are encouraged to have substantial (15-30 minutes) individual conferences outside of class. If you would like to designate an occasional class for individual conferences, please consult with the Head of Freshman English. In addition to the substantial individual conferences, instructors may use class time for mini-conferences while students are engaged in group or individual projects.

Teaching the Writing Process

Our approach in English 1301/1302 emphasizes the writing process, in which students do multiple drafts of several papers. At least four of the papers to be assigned in English 1301 should receive commentary by the instructor in a rough or intermediate draft stage and by peers in either a rough or an intermediate draft stage. The instructor's commentary may be either written or oral but in either case should be detailed. However, the instructor should not correct. Model and coach, yes; correct, no. Commentary should be appropriate to the draft stage: ideas, focus, thesis at the rough stage; organization, development, paragraphing at the early intermediate stage; sentence mechanics and style at the later intermediate stage.

The Curriculum

All Freshman English sections will focus on the official goals and objectives for the course. Experienced teachers are encouraged to develop their own curriculum and assignments within the framework of the stated goals and objectives. Be sure to consult the official UTPB calendar for important dates and holidays each semester. See Rebecca Babcock for objectives, sample syllabi and rubrics for English 1301 and 1302.

3. GTAs in other English classes

Duties

Specific duties for GTAs in sophomore and junior level classes will vary somewhat from course to course. Be sure you contact the professor with whom you will be working at least a few weeks before the start of the semester to discuss and define these duties and begin preparing for the course. In general, you will be responsible for attending all class meetings, for sharing the grading of exams and papers, for holding two office hours each week, and for conducting lectures and/or leading discussions two or three times.

Writing in Sophomore and Junior English

Although completion of the Freshman English requirement is a prerequisite for our sophomore courses, and one sophomore course is a prerequisite for many of our junior courses, many students in sophomore and junior courses will still need special assistance with their writing. Writing instruction in these courses should concentrate on writing about the subject matter; students with more fundamental weaknesses in grammar, organization, editing etc. should be referred to the professor. The Success Center is also available for help at all stages of the writing process. Remember that your objective is to help students master the course content, not to provide instruction in basic writing.

4. Important Contact Information

- **Sophia Andres**, Professor of English, Kathlyn Cosper Dunagan Professor in Humanities
 - 552-2293
 - andres_s@utpb.edu
- **Rebecca Babcock**, William and Ordelle Watts Professor of English, Chair of the Dept. of Literature and Languages, Freshman English Coordinator
 - 552-2304
 - babcock_r@utpb.edu
- **Jason Lagapa**, Associate Professor of English
 - 552-2301
 - lagapa_j@utpb.edu
- **Todd Richardson**, Associate Professor of English, Head of Graduate Program
 - 552-2294
 - richardson_t@utpb.edu
- **Mark Wildermuth**, Professor of English and Kathlyn Cosper Dunagan Professor in Humanities
 - 552-2296
 - wildermuth_m@utpb.edu
- **Karen Aycock**, Administrative Assistant
 - 552-2280 or 552-2281

5. Planning Your Two Years as a GTA

The English GTA award is based on the assumption that a diligent, motivated, well-prepared student can complete the English M.A. program in four regular semesters. Doing so requires careful planning. Please keep the following in mind:

1. Before you begin the program, you should familiarize yourself with the four program options (scholarly article, thesis, project, exam) and should tentatively determine which one will best fit your personal and professional goals. Discuss these options with the English faculty member who directs the M.A. program (currently Professor Richardson).
2. Also familiarize yourself with the role of your committee. In all cases you will have a 4-person committee consisting of a chair (who will serve as your advisor), two other English faculty members, and a non-English faculty member. All three English faculty members should be interested in the topic of your final exercise, should have some familiarity with the scholarship on the topic, and should be willing to commit to working with you on the topic. The fourth member (often referred to as the “external member” or the “graduate faculty representative”) is usually also involved in reviewing and approving all written documents.
3. During your second semester, you should decide which option you will pursue. At this time you should select an English faculty member to chair your M.A. committee. This person will prepare for you a degree plan, specifying the option you’ve selected and the other two

English faculty members you wish to have on your committee. (You may also request a specific non-English faculty member as the “external member”; if you do not, the Graduate Studies Office will assign someone.)

4. During the summer after your second semester, you should begin work on the option you select.
 - a. If you select either the thesis, article or project option, you should draft a prospectus, have your committee chair review it, and revise it as necessary; ideally you will also secure the approval of the other committee members at this time. This is a crucial step. All committee members need to review and approve the prospectus very early in the process. A copy of the approved prospectus will be placed in your file. You should also get a good start on your research and writing. It is also a good idea to request a meeting of your committee to discuss the prospectus.
 - b. If you select the exam option, you should consult with your committee chair to determine your three exam areas; with each respective faculty member’s guidance you should also develop a reading list for each area and begin reading/reviewing. Each of your committee members will be responsible for guiding you through one of your exam areas.
5. During your third semester
 - a. For the thesis option, enroll in three thesis hours (plus six other hours of course work) and commit yourself to completing by the end of the semester a draft that meets the expectations of your committee chair.
 - b. For the project or article option, you may enroll in three directed-reading hours (plus six other hours of course work); you should commit yourself to completing by the end of the semester a draft of the Research Report or article that meets the expectations of your committee chair.
 - c. For the exam option, you should enroll in three directed-reading hours (plus six other hours of course work) and should commit yourself to completing most of the preparation for your exam. (Such preparation usually includes meeting frequently with each English faculty committee member.)
 - d. For the portfolio option, enroll in nine hours of regular course work.

See the Head of the English Graduate Program for additional information on each option.

6. During your fourth semester
 - a. For the thesis option, enroll in three thesis hours (plus six other hours of course work) and commit yourself to completing a defensible draft of the thesis (one that has been in principle approved by all committee members) no later than the mid-point of the semester. Early in the semester, determine, with your committee chair, a schedule for completing the thesis and taking your oral exam. Be mindful of deadlines—ideally, you will be able to complete the oral exam several weeks before the end of the semester.

- b. For the article or project option, enroll in a total of nine hours (three of which will be directed reading unless you did this the previous semester) and commit yourself to completing a defensible draft of the Research Report or article (one that has been in principle approved by all committee members) no later than the mid-point of the semester. Early in the semester, determine, with your committee chair, a schedule for completing the Research Report or article and taking your oral exam. Be mindful of deadlines—ideally, you will be able to complete the oral exam several weeks before the end of the semester.
- c. For the exam option, enroll in three directed-reading hours (plus six other hours of course work); do final preparation for your exam; and take the written exam. Early in the semester, determine, with your committee chair, a schedule for taking the written and oral exams. Be mindful of deadlines—ideally, you will be able to complete the oral exam several weeks before the end of the semester.
- d. For the portfolio option, enroll in nine hours of regular course work and choose three papers that meet the graduate program objectives for your portfolio. Schedule your portfolio defense by the required date and distribute the papers to your committee at least three weeks before the meeting. At the meeting be prepared to show how your papers meet the requirements of the graduate program.