Teaching Assistantship

Roles and Responsibilities
1. A Teaching Assistantship (TA) is a contractual agreement between a department and a student for a specified number of hours of teaching support delivered within a specified period such as a term.

   The awarding of teaching assistantships serves several functions. A teaching assistantship provides teaching support to undergraduate courses; it is a basic component of financial support for many graduate students; and, for many graduate students, it is an important part of their professional development.

2. The stipend for teaching assistantships is for an average of 10 hours per week (no more than 130 hours per term). This includes all duties including attendance at lectures, preparing and giving tutorials, any administrative duties, and all marking including any marking for final exams. Each instructor shall detail weekly duties and estimated times for such in the contract.

   It is the responsibility of the graduate student to monitor their time and to consult with the faculty member teaching the course if there is a risk of reaching or exceeding this limit.

3. In accordance with university policy, the department affirms its commitment to the principles of employment equity.

4. Teaching assistants are assigned to undergraduate classes with enrolments of 50 students or above. (The ratio used to determine the number of TAs per course is one TA per 50 students.) This number is presently being reviewed and might potentially be lower.

   Teaching assistants must inform the instructor and the graduate program assistant if it is necessary for them to be away during any part of the academic session.

Duties
Your first responsibility is to attend two workshops “on being a teaching assistant”. The first one is run by the Centre for Teaching and Learning, a full-day workshop, not compulsory but highly recommended and the second one, a half-day, compulsory workshop, run by the Sociology Department. This year, the Centre’s workshop is scheduled for Wednesday, September 6. The Sociology Department workshop is tentatively scheduled for Friday, September 8. More information on these is forthcoming.

Specific duties to be performed by a teaching assistant are assigned by the faculty member responsible for the course. It is stressed that the stipend associated with the teaching assistantship is not an award but rather payment for services. General duties usually consist of the following:

1. Instruction of one hour per week per tutorial group. The specific format this instruction will take (seminar, discussion group, lecture) is decided in consultation with the faculty member responsible for the course.

2. Regularly scheduled office hours. Office hours are for the purpose of counselling and assisting students in the tutorial group(s) with course-related problems, discussing issues that arise from the
academic content of the course, and answering questions related to the operation of the course. One hour per week per tutorial is suggested. This includes email and social media contact.

3. Mark assignments, exercises, examinations as assigned by and under the supervision of the faculty member teaching the course.

4. Meet on a regularly scheduled basis with the faculty member teaching the course and with other teaching assistants for the purpose of exchange of information and discussion of any problems that may arise.

5. Under Regulation 297 of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Health and Safety Awareness training is now mandatory for all employees, including teaching assistants. The Queen’s policy on Health & Safety Awareness can be viewed at http://www.safety.queensu.ca/orient.htm.

6. To ensure that the University achieves regulatory compliance with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, everyone who interacts on its behalf with the public must be trained in accessible customer service. This training requirement applies for all employees, including teaching assistants. The Accessible Customer Service Online Training can be viewed at http://www.queensu.ca/equity/training/accessible-customer-service.

7. Attendance at class lectures is usually required by the faculty member teaching the course. The time so spent is to be counted as part of the overall workload.

8. Teaching assistants are not expected to give class lectures, but they may do so on a voluntary basis. Time so spent (including preparation time) is to be counted as part of the overall workload.

Procedures for Resolving Employment-Related Disputes

From time to time, problems arise in relation to the performance of duties. If you have a problem with the instructor regarding your responsibilities, you should, when possible, speak first to the instructor. When you do not wish to, or feel that you cannot do this, you should consult the Head of Department or the Coordinator of Graduate Studies. This discussion will be confidential. When appropriate, the Head or Coordinator will undertake to resolve the problem in consultation with you and the instructor. Every effort will be made to resolve problems by reasonable discussion within the department.

If no resolution is possible at the departmental level, the university grievance procedures are available to you as they are for all employees. Copies of these procedures are available in the Office of the Senate of the University, http://www.queensu.ca/secretariat/senate.

Express Prep is an entrepreneurial effort to get graduate students to teach cram courses for exams, charging students for the ‘service’. The Department of Sociology does not support the activities of Express Prep and other similar enterprises, and advises people associated with our department not to associate with Express Prep or other similar enterprises.