A brief guide for Head TFs in physics

Being a Head TF (HTF) is in a number of ways a different challenge than that of being an ordinary section TF. The overall responsibility for the course of course rests with the coursehead (the professor teaching the course), but as a Head TF you will be in charge of a fair bit of the day-to-day running of the course, and the coursehead will expect you to take on some official duties. That means that you are be a big part of making the course run smoothly and making students and TFs happy -- though it may occasionally involve some careful navigation.

Part of your job is ensuring that the work is getting done without your TFs getting stressed out. These guidelines are partly meant to allow you to do that. The Head TF in practice has great responsibility in making sure everything other than lecture goes well, but he/she does not automatically have the corresponding authority. Getting the coursehead and yourself on the same page from the start makes it a joint effort in both senses and will allow you to provide the leadership that a large staff requires to function well.

- Make sure you go to the Head TF lunch and orientation at the Bok Center Teaching Conference just before the beginning of the semester (check the Bok Center webpage for the program in advance, www.bokcenter.harvard.edu). Here, you will get to meet Head TFs from other courses, get useful tips from experienced HTFs, and be introduced to the Head TF Network and mailing list. If you cannot go to this lunch, you can find instruction on how to subscribe to Head TF mailing list at the Bok Center Head TF page (see resource list at the bottom of this guide).

- Sit down with the coursehead(s) and come to agreement on all aspects of course policy as early as possible. The coursehead may already have decided all of it, but the HTF needs to at least be aware of where the coursehead stands. Here are some of things you need to agree on:
  - **TF meetings**: Who runs them, the HTF or the coursehead? What gets covered?
  - **TF tasks**: Do TFs do more than just run their own sections? Which tasks can the Head TF delegate and what is his/her specific responsibility?
  - **Sectioning**: When will it be done? Can students switch sections after the initial sectioning? If so, what are legitimate reasons? Do all switches have to go through the HTF? (This is usually a good idea since it ensure equal treatment of all requests)
  - **Homework**: When is it due? Are late submissions allowed? Who can grant extensions? (Again, the right to grant extensions might be something best reserved for the HTF.)
  - **Grading**: Who does it? If there is an assigned grader, will the TFs get to review students' homework? How are grades recorded? (Remember that collecting grades centrally and in an organized format prevents data loss.)
  - **Homework problems**: Who comes up with new problems? Who writes up solution sets?
  - **Quality Control**: How will student feedback be arranged? Will you or the coursehead visit sections? Will any TFs get taped?

- Write up all these course policies that affect TFs in a semi-official document that can be distributed and discussed at the first TF-meeting. You should arrange to meet with your TFs before classes start, hopefully just after they're assigned to your course, and preferably with the coursehead present. Again, the goal of this meeting is to make sure everyone -- you, the coursehead, TFs -- are on the same page from the start. This will save much confusion later on. As with everything, the coursehead should take as much leadership as he/she wants, but you need to pick up the bits which are not addressed (always with the coursehead's awareness and acknowledgement).

- You and your coursehead may want to negotiate some aspects with the entire TF staff (e.g. does each TF grade their own students' work each week or do they take turns each doing the entire class's on different weeks). For such things, decide in advance what possibilities are acceptable and which aren't and only present the range of acceptable ones as options to the TFs.
Do not be arbitrary in your choice of policies, and do be prepared to state the reasoning behind them -- but do not be prepared to argue about it. The course belongs to the coursehead, and so anything he/she decides is what goes. Having the coursehead decide as much as possible in advance, whether with your input or not, will clarify both your role and the TFs’ role and will make everyone’s job easier in the long run. Build in flexibility where you can, but make sure there are agreed-upon bounds on that flexibility.

Be sure that you are familiar with the online sectioning system before sectioning actually starts. The registrar’s office runs workshops explaining how to use it and have online information on it (see the list below).

**Useful Head TF Resources:**

*Head TF resource page on the Bok Center webpage:*  
Contains a wealth of link to useful documents and resources (such a Head TF FAQ) and also serves as a contact point for the Head TF network:  
http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/progs/headtf/

*Information on the online sectioning system:*  
Lots of useful information on how to use the system and information on the workshops that the Registrar’s Office runs for users of it:  
http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/fasro/faculty/sectioning.jsp?cat=faculty&subcat=courses

*ICG website workshops:*  
The Instructional Computing Group (ICG) runs a number of workshop on how to use the various parts of the Harvard course website system (which will be changing to a new format, presumably by next year on all courses). Their homepage is:  
http://www.icg.fas.harvard.edu/

*The Prep Room:*  
If you want to organize small demonstrations for use in sections, you can to talk to the people in the Prep Room which holds a large reservoir of large and small pre-arranged experiments. The Prep Room itself is in the basement of the Science Center (room B-01). You can also mail them at prep@fas.harvard.edu