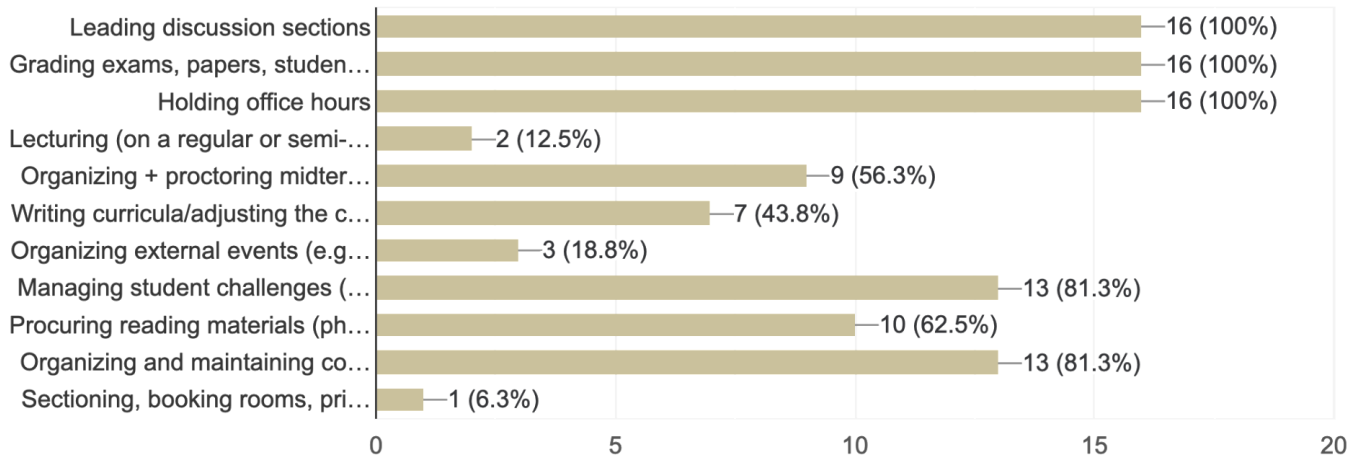


TF - Course Head Collaboration Assessment & Recommendations

What kinds of responsibilities have you had as a TF in the department? (Check all that apply).

16 responses



Capstone Goals

One of the most important aspects of being a Teaching Fellow is developing a productive working relationship with the faculty course head(s). I noticed from conversations with graduate students across the History Department that faculty have a wide range of norms and expectations for their TFs, which sometimes leads to miscommunication and stress for first-time teachers.

My **goal** for this project was to 1) assess TF experiences and 2) create potential guidelines for TF-course head collaboration.

Survey Results

The survey was sent out in April to History PhDs year G3 and above, and collected 16 responses (mostly from the current G3 and G5 cohorts). The most common responsibilities that TFs reported having were 1) leading discussion sections, 2) grading student work, 3) holding office hours, 4) managing student challenges and 5) organizing course websites. The most common ways that TFs interacted with course heads were 1) meeting to discuss grades (80%), 2) getting faculty feedback from a teaching observation (56%) and 3) getting specific guidelines for grading and holding sections (50%). Less than 1/3 of respondents

worked with course heads who had unclear, unspoken, contradictory or excessive expectations or were not responsive.

The qualitative answers demonstrated that TFs prefer working with course heads who are *proactive about communicating* expectations, *provide guidelines* (formally or during periodic check-ins), and *respect the TF's work-life boundaries*. TFs appreciated flexibility in trying out their own teaching styles paired with guidance for important aspects like grading or student issues. It was reportedly challenging to work with faculty who were either completely hands-off or who micromanaged the TF(s).

Recommendations

History Department faculty and graduate students value the freedom that TFs are given to develop their own teaching style and work out innovative pedagogical approaches. A rigid set of rules for faculty-TF collaboration could interfere with that independence. However, creating departmental guidelines around course-head TF communication could alleviate graduate student stress and help standardize certain teaching practices. The following are my initial recommendations:

- 1) Conduct a similar survey (and follow up with individual conversations) among **department faculty** about their approaches to working with TFs. Future guidelines should be created with the needs of both faculty and graduate students in mind.
- 2) Begin department-wide discussions about the following **potential policies**:
 - a) faculty *must meet with TFs at the start of the semester* and decide on
 - i) how teaching responsibilities will be divided and
 - ii) how the course head expects to communicate with the TF(s).
 - (1) The Bok Center's ['preterm planner'](#) can be adapted by the course head for their purposes, for example.
 - b) TFs should have a minimum of 1 week to return graded student work.
 - c) TFs are not required to reply to course heads on weekends (5:00 Fri - 9:00am Mon).

Codifying these ideas as departmental policies can ensure that TFs have meaningful recourse to set boundaries on their time and to request explicit guidance if the course head is not initiating teaching meetings. According to survey results, the *majority of faculty already implement the best practices* considered here and actively engage TFs in pedagogical discussions, so this policy proposal should not strain the faculty workload.