



GRADUATE POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

A GRADUATE STUDENT ORGANIZATION AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

PEDAGOGY REFERENCE SHEET

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THE TAKE-AWAYS:

- *Be clear.* Set clear expectations and offer clear directions.
- *Be confident.* You know more than your students, but saying “I don’t know” is also fine.
- *Be prepared.* Do the readings, and spend time planning for each discussion.
- *Be available.* Host regular, reasonable office hours. Respond to emails promptly.
- *Be interested.* Make it evident that you care about your students and their experience.

Introductions and the First Day

1. The first day can be difficult, but it is also very important. Since there is often little material to cover, use the time to set the tone for the kind of section you want to run and to set expectations.
 - a. Tell your students a little bit about yourself and what you study. Tell them if you have taught before and share with them if you have special academic interests or expertise.
 - b. Do something other than “what did you do over break?” as an ice-breaker. Ask them things that will get them to open up more or to find things in common with each other (this will make for better discussion in the future). While you could ask question such as, “what are you watching on Netflix?”, even better would be to ask questions related to the course and its content, such as, “How did you get interested in politics?”
2. Make sure the students leave the first section understanding why they are attending discussion sections in addition to lectures.
 - a. What are your goals in the section? How does the material you will cover relate to the lecture material?
 - b. Obviously one key goal of discussion sections is to address questions the students have (ideally for them to help each other address outstanding questions) and to give students the opportunity to offer their reactions to the course material. Other primary goals might be to introduce interesting questions for students to grapple with, and to go more into depth with regards to particular topics.
3. Be clear about your expectations for students as well as what students can expect from you. (For example, you might ask them not to use laptops in section, and you might tell them that you will respond to any of their emails within, say, 24 hours.)
4. You don’t need to “dress like a professor,” but be respectful of the position you hold, including in the way you dress (on the first day, and throughout the semester).

Facilitating Discussion

1. There are a number of ways to stimulate an interesting discussion. You might start with a fun anecdote or question – perhaps a personal experience, a major news story, or a pop culture reference. Some examples:

- a. If you're teaching Comparative Political Systems, the Academy Awards offer a useful lesson in how different voting systems can produce different outcomes (they use a preferential voting system for Best Picture).
 - b. If you are teaching political theory, you can note that Sen. Marco Rubio said that the U.S. needs more welders and fewer philosophers – is he right? Is political theory/philosophy of any value?
2. Break students into small groups every now and then.
 - a. With students broken up into 4-5 groups, you can assign them distinct questions to discuss. This gives shy students a chance to participate without talking in front of a larger group, and it gives all students a chance to get to know each other a bit better. After 10 minutes or so, you can then ask them to provide you with the responses they came up with and bring discussion back for the whole section.
 - b. When breaking section up into small groups, remember to walk around the room a bit and to listen to the discussion, asking individual groups how their discussion is going, whether they've come to a consensus on a question you've given them, etc. The more engaged you are during these break-out sessions, the more productive they will be.
3. Set up a debate.
 - a. Divide students into at least two groups (either before section to give them time to prepare or in section), and assign them positions in a debate inspired by that week's readings.
 - b. If you assign the groups, you can attempt to assign students to the "side" with which they disagree. Thinking through the fundamentals of "the other side" can be very valuable. However, you may also wish to leave time after the debate for students to offer their candid thoughts – which will then be better informed by the debate you just had.
4. Be active: walk around the room, use the board, get beyond the podium, and otherwise demonstrate that you are engaged in the discussion too. The more engaged you are, the more engaged you can expect the students to be.
5. Be transparent about questions you struggle with. If there are difficult moral debates in the field or literature that you are torn on, share your thoughts with them, and tell them why you think these issues are not straightforward. This will show them that everyone must think (and re-think) seriously about the issues you are grappling with in class.

6. A \$3 bag of candy can sometimes make all the difference. It is a sweet surprise to them, in particular if your sections are at a more difficult time, e.g., Friday afternoons.
7. Always remember, each section is composed of a unique group of students, and thus what works for one session may not work in others (breaking out in groups may turn out great for some sections, but not in others). Remember to be flexible and to not be demoralized if a section doesn't go well – as long as you are adaptable and capable of gauging what works well, you will be able to have stimulating discussions!

Staying Organized

1. Give yourself a set amount of time to respond to student emails (preferably somewhere between 24 and 48 hours). Tell them that they can follow up with you if you don't respond within that amount of time, and reinforce that office hours offer a wonderful opportunity for them to discuss their questions with you.
2. Read the syllabus. Know how much each assignment is worth, what readings have been assigned each week, etc. Remind students in the first section that they are expected to have read the syllabus as well and highlight any parts that you expect might be confusing to them or that merit reinforcement.
3. Plan ahead. Budget time to do the readings as well as some additional time to prepare, to think about the questions you want to ask students that week, etc.
4. You might begin sections (i.e., before the actual discussion begins) in the following way:
 - a. Offer various reminders (upcoming due dates, the time and place of office hours).
 - b. Periodically, you might contextualize the material for the day by recalling for students where you are in the course, where you've been, and where you're going. This can help you and your students connect the readings/topics of that week's discussion to previous lessons and will demonstrate how the week's discussion will be relevant to future discussions as well.
 - c. Outline the day's activities for the students. If discussion will revolve around, for example, three questions or topics, briefly note those on the board at the beginning of the section. If you're going to start with discussion and later transition to small groups (or vice versa), tell them at the beginning of the section.
 - d. In general, you might consider outlining the main topics/activities in advance of section and sending that rough outline to your students 24 hours or so prior to section. Students often appreciate knowing what they should expect to discuss.

5. Your personal preferences may differ, but asking for both hard and electronic copies of papers can be helpful. Asking students to submit papers via email can ensure there is no ambiguity regarding the lateness of papers, and if you suspect someone of plagiarism, you will have a copy you can put through Turnitin or other plagiarism detection software.
6. In addition to running discussion sections, grading is one of the primary responsibilities of Teaching Assistants. When major assignments are due, or exams are pending, make sure to keep the following in mind:
 - a. Professors may want your feedback on the content of an assignment or exam, so make sure you schedule some time to review those materials.
 - b. Similarly, make sure to discuss with your professor *how much* and *what type* of feedback to provide students while grading their assignments or exams. This will affect how much time grading will take you.
 - c. Students may want to discuss assignments with you during office hours, so you may need to schedule additional time to meet students before a deadline or exam.
 - d. Make sure that expectations are clear with your professor with respect to when grading should be completed (e.g. within two weeks of the assignment deadline or exam). Looking ahead, make sure to adjust your schedule accordingly so you can meet those deadlines.
 - e. Finally, students may want additional feedback on their assignment or exam, so keep in mind that your office hours may be busy after grades have been distributed. Again, you may need to schedule additional time to meet students.

Office Hours

1. Be reasonable about scheduling these. If possible, make them work with undergrad schedules (e.g., don't hold them on Monday mornings).
2. Tell students in your first discussion section or before that via email what your office hours will be. Even if few students come to some of your office hours, they all want to know what time you are available just in case.
3. Use scheduling/sign-up programs for office hours, especially if students will be writing papers. This will ensure that you don't have crowds of students waiting a long time to speak with you. Google Calendar has an office hours sign-up feature where you can set up timed slots of a duration you choose.

4. Think about what kind of office hours you want to have. If you want them to be formal, you might hold them in the library or an office – the Department can typically offer you a professor’s office for some recurring time throughout the semester. If you want informal office hours, choose a coffee shop on campus (but beware that it can be hard to routinely get a seat at the time you need one, and you don’t want your students struggling to find you or additional seating).

Grading and Assessment

1. Be as transparent about your grading procedures as possible.
 - a. Tell students *exactly* how you will grade their exams/papers. How many times will you read each essay/paper? Will you first assign letter grades, then number grades? (This will vary by professor and course.) Will you somehow obscure their names to avoid any bias? Will you consult with the professor or other TAs in any way while determining grades?
 - b. Once you’ve finished, tell each section how the average grade for that section compared to that of other sections, and reinforce that you went about grading in the way that you had outlined previously.
 - c. Finally, be clear that grading policies are set by the professor, not by individual TAs. There should not be much variance across sections as most professors use strategies to encourage consistency.
 - d. When it comes to grading appeals, be open to changing the grade you originally assigned, but do not feel compelled to do so. The professor will often have the final say on grading appeals.
2. Provide a reasonable amount of feedback on exams and papers.
 - a. This helps students to understand why they received the grade they did, both discouraging them from challenging the grade and informing them how to improve for the next assignment. Doing so also helps you remember why you assigned the grade you did if a student comes to you with questions about it.
3. Participation grades.
 - a. Explain in your first section how you will assess student participation. In general, this will be some combination of attendance and your subjective assessment of the quality of their contributions. You probably want to emphasize that quality is more important than quantity when it comes to participation.
 - b. There are various ways to take attendance. You can simply check students off a list at the beginning and/or throughout the section. Alternatively, you could give them opportunities to offer feedback by responding in writing to a brief question.

This allows you to get their perspectives on questions of interest to you – e.g., do they prefer small group discussions, debates, or some other format for discussions? How does their experience in your class compare to their other experiences in the department? etc. Finally, you may consider opening each section with an “attendance quiz” where students respond to a question about the assigned readings (this will give you an opportunity to have additional data upon which to base your participation grade).

- c. It can be helpful to keep track of student participation each week so that you have data to refer to when assigning the participation grade.

Relations with Professors

1. Some professors are hands-on managers of their TAs; some are hands-off. Similarly, some professors are very responsive to email; others are not. The way you interact with the professor in your course will depend in part on the type of professor with whom you’re working.
2. Throughout the semester, you should do your utmost not to diverge too much from what the professor taught in lecture.
 - a. You may, on occasion, think that the professor should have presented a topic differently. That’s fine, but highlighting your disagreements with a professor’s presentation could confuse your students and/or hurt them on exams. To be diplomatic, you might simply note that there are different opinions on X, Y, or Z in the academic literature and that you and the professor are in different academic camps. It is important to underscore to your students in such cases that your sections do not generally include testable material; the professor’s lectures do.
3. Keep in mind that professors’ teaching evaluations can have a real impact on their salary, tenure cases, etc. Your TA evaluations can be useful in improving your own teaching, but they will not otherwise affect you in any tangible way. Don’t paint the professor as the “bad cop” to your “good cop” or otherwise attempt to curry favor with your students at the expense of the professor’s relationship with the students.

Other General Suggestions

1. Do a mid-semester evaluation. Ask students to anonymously answer some questions about what is working and what they would like to see done differently. You might get conflicting suggestions, but you might also notice trends that can help you improve.

- a. Every section has its own personality and preferences. Group discussions might work well in one section and flop in the other. When a discussion flops, remember it's not necessarily, or exclusively, your fault.
 - b. A side benefit of midterm evaluations is that students will generally take your conducting one to mean that you care about their learning and are willing to adjust if need be.
2. Be clear on the first day about your technology policy.
 - a. In general, you probably won't want students on their laptops absent a note from the Academic Resource Center.
 - b. If students later violate your policy, you can address it in various ways – you can send the students violating the policy an email after section asking them to refrain from future use of their laptop, phone, etc. You could also address it in section without necessarily singling that person out and perhaps causing them undue embarrassment (e.g., by offering a general reminder during the section or, if they've split up into small groups, by going over to that student's group and asking them to close their laptop. This latter approach still singles them out to some extent but can be done somewhat discreetly.)
 3. The last discussion section will often be set aside for a final exam review, an overview of the semester, or some other topic that needs less substantive discussion than other weeks. You can set aside the last 5-15 minutes for two purposes.
 - a. Offer your own summary of the course -- for example, you can ask students what they're taking away from the course, what they learned, etc. After getting some responses, you can share what you want them to take away from the course.
 - b. Conduct end-of-the-semester TA evaluations.

Online and Campus Resources

1. *Blackboard*

While Georgetown is transitioning to Canvas, a new online course management system (see below), Blackboard is the system that many TAs are familiar with from their own course-work. Although Blackboard may sometimes be unintuitive, there are numerous useful resources such as photo rosters (useful to review before the first section), Turnitin, discussion boards, class-wide emails, etc. Click the link here to access:

https://blackboard.georgetown.edu/webapps/portal/execute/tabs/tabAction?tab_tab_group_id= 8_1

2. *Canvas*

Canvas is the new online course management system that is being adopted at Georgetown. Canvas offers similar tools as Blackboard, but in a more intuitive and modern design. To get familiarized with Canvas, UIS (University Information Services) offers online training sessions (additional information on these and other trainings below). Click the link here to access Canvas: <http://canvas.georgetown.edu/>

3. *Academic Resource Center (ARC)*

The ARC is an institution dedicated to providing disability support, student-athlete support, and academic support for students at Georgetown who need such assistance. If students require additional time to complete exams, they will take their exam at the ARC facilities – as a TA, you will need to coordinate with the ARC to pick up the exam responses. Click the link here for more information:

<https://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/>

4. *Student Health Services*

In the event of emergencies or medical concerns, you should be aware of the Student Health Services center on campus. You can click the link here for more information:

<https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/>

5. *Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS)*

CAPS is a special center under the umbrella of Student Health Services, serving the mental health care needs of all students at Georgetown. It may be useful to highlight to students that this center is available for them, and to emphasize the importance of mental health. You can click the link here for more information:

<https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/mental-health>

6. *GPSA (Graduate Political Science Association)*

GPSA is the student organization dedicated to improving the experience of graduate students affiliated with the Government Department. As of July 2017, GPSA has a new website which contains links to useful resources related to teaching at Georgetown. Click the link below to access the GPSA web-page regarding teaching and TA resources:

<https://gradpsa.wordpress.com/links/teaching/>

Teaching Programs at Georgetown

- The CNDLS (Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship) is a Georgetown institution dedicated to providing faculty and graduate students with tools, resources, and opportunities that further their development as teachers. The Center hosts a variety of useful events for graduate students, and has a variety of online resources regarding inclusive pedagogy, assessment, etc. Below we describe some of the key programs and resources that they provide. Check out their website linked here for more information: <https://cndls.georgetown.edu/atprogram/>
 - *Apprenticeship in Teaching (AT) Program*
 - The AT program consists of six workshop sessions held throughout the academic year (four required, plus two electives), which includes multiple writing assignments (e.g., creating a teaching philosophy), class observation, and teaching (while being filmed) in a structured environment. The four required sessions are as follows: effective classroom interaction, assessment and grading, the teaching portfolio, and syllabus design.
 - Link: <https://cndls.georgetown.edu/atprogram/>
 - *Teaching, Learning, and Innovation Summer Institute (TLISI)*
 - A week-long summer (late May) institute that includes workshops, presentations, poster sessions, focus groups, roundtable discussions, and more. Themes this year include evidence-based teaching and learning, inclusive pedagogies, technology enhanced learning, and more, but topics do vary somewhat from year to year. One may apply to present, but presenting is not required for attendance.
 - Link: <https://tlisi.georgetown.edu/session-formats/>
 - Link: <https://tlisi.georgetown.edu/institute-themes/>
 - *Course Design Consultations*
 - One-on-one meetings with CNDLS staff, by appointment only.
 - Link: <https://cndls.georgetown.edu/support/course-design/>
- University Information Services (UIS) provides an *Education Training Workshop* for interested faculty and graduate students. These Workshops are usually offered online as webinars. Topics include Blackboard, Canvas, and instructional continuity tools. Check out their website linked here for more information: <https://uis.georgetown.edu/training-course-schedule-edtech>

Recommended Readings

- Butler, Daniel M., and Ray Christensen. (2003). "Mixing and Matching: The Effect on Student Performance of Teaching Assistants of the Same Gender." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 36(4)
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- Musgrave, Paul, and Mark Rom. (2015). "Fair and Balanced? Experimental Evidence on Partisan Bias in Grading." *American Politics Research*, 43(3)
- Roach, K. David. (1997). "Effects of Graduate Teaching Assistant Attire on Student Learning, Misbehaviors, and Ratings of Instruction." *Communication Quarterly*, 45(3)
- Szarejko, Andrew, and Matthew Carnes. (Forthcoming) "Assessing an Undergraduate Curriculum: The Evolving Roles of Subfields, Methods, Ethics, and Writing for Government Majors." *PS: Political Science and Politics*
- Webb, Derek A. (2005). "Twelve Easy Steps to Becoming an Effective Teaching Assistant." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38(4)
- Yaylac, Sule, and Edana Beauvais. (2017). "The Role of Social Group Membership on Classroom Participation." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 50(2)