DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
UNIVERSITY of WASHINGTON

2026-2027 TEACHING ASSISTANT MANUAL

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INTRODUCTION

At some point in their graduate education, most graduate students become teaching assistants (TAs). These days, being a professional philosopher usually requires a teaching position at a college or university. Thus, your graduate school career involves not only training yourself to enter a community of scholars, but also training yourself to enter a community of teachers. Being a TA is the first step in this process.

The Department of Philosophy at UW has a strong commitment to continually improving the quality of the undergraduate education it provides, and TAs are an important part of this process. The faculty is aware of and respects the contributions that TAs make to teaching undergraduate courses and are always willing to help you improve your teaching.

Like any other skill, teaching is something that one typically gets better at with experience, but it can be somewhat overwhelming at the beginning, particularly for a new graduate student, with a host of other demands on their time. The material in this handbook is designed to make this initial stage of teaching go more smoothly for you. Be sure to also ask questions of the instructor you are teaching with and your fellow teaching assistants as they arise.

The purpose of this handbook is to let you know what to expect when you start teaching, explain available training and resources, convey department and university policies and procedures related to teaching, and provide you with general guidance in learning how to teach. This document contains departmental policies and procedures governing teaching assistants in the Department of Philosophy, as well as general guidance on serving as a teaching assistant.

The advice in this handbook is the result of the accumulated common experience of TAs and faculty in the department, who have worked together and shared information about teaching. Experienced TAs and faculty are another excellent resource, and you should never hesitate to ask them questions or for advice. There is no point during your tenure as a TA at which you are expected to have no more questions about teaching. Even experienced TAs and faculty consult one another about various aspects of teaching.

EMPLOYMENT INFORMATION

UNION CONTRACT

All graduate student teaching assistants/instructors are classified as Academic Student Employees (ASEs) and are represented by the UAW 4121 union and covered by the UAW Contract. This contract lays out the obligations of both the University and ASEs. You should familiarize yourself with this contract.

EMPLOYMENT DOCUMENTS

There are two employment documents that you will receive and will need to sign to be hired as a TA. The content and timing of these documents are governed by **Article 4** of the UAW contract.

Appointment Letter

TA appointments are typically awarded on an annual basis in the spring for the following academic year (autumn, winter, and spring quarters). Continuing students who request funding via the annual funding survey and to whom the department offers funding will receive appointment letters describing the details

of the following year's appointment, by June 1. In rare cases, a contract may be offered on a quarterly basis to students without an annual contract, as opportunities arise.

Once the appointment letter is signed, it becomes the employment contract for the following academic year. An ASE has the right to be released from any quarter(s) of an appointment, provided that the ASE gives at least 30 days' notice prior to the beginning of the quarter, and the nature of the job duties does not require continuity of service by the ASE.

This letter contains general information about dates of appointment, title, salary, benefits, and information about the union. It does not provide information about each quarter's specific teaching assignments.

Job Description

Each quarter that you teach, you will receive a job description for the specific course you teach, approved by the instructor of that course (or the course supervisor, if solo teaching). The general requirements of teaching will be similar, but different instructors may have different requirements for their TAs. You will receive your job description three weeks prior to the start of the quarter in which you will be teaching. You are expected to meet with the instructor to review all requirements of the course and the tasks included in the job description, addressing any questions or concerns before the course gets underway. The TA must sign the job description, obtain the instructor's signature on the job description, and return to the graduate program adviser (also known as the GPA or grad adviser) by the end of the first week of the quarter.

SALARY AND BENEFITS

ASE positions of 50% FTE include the following:

- **Monthly Salary** (effective July 1, 2026 – June 30, 2027) - $3,612 for premaster; $3,794 for intermediate; $3,984 for candidates (passed general exam)
- **Tuition waiver** – A quarterly tuition waiver covering the operating fee, building fee, and technology fee. (Students are responsible for remaining fees, which are currently set at $284 per quarter. See Quarterly Tuition and Fees for details.)
- **Health insurance –** For each quarter hired as an ASE, employees are automatically covered by the Graduate Appointee Insurance Program (GAIP). Students who are covered by GAIP for the *entire academic year* (autumn, winter, and spring) are also covered in summer quarter.

ELIGIBILITY

Graduate students must be enrolled full time (registered for at least 10 credits) to be eligible for ASE employment and benefits. (In summer quarter, only two credits are required for full-time status.)

DIRECTORY RELEASE

All those holding teaching positions in the Department of Philosophy are required to release certain directory information necessary for performing their teaching duties. (The department may make exceptions in the event of safety concerns.) By accepting a teaching position in the department, graduate students agree to the following.

- Profile to appear in a department directory, including: name, position (TA, predoctoral instructor, etc.), UW email address, and current office hours/location
- Name in the UW Time Schedule indicating which class(es)/section(s) are taught each quarter (these teaching appointments automatically also link to the department profile)

PAY DATES & APPOINTMENT PERIODS

University of Washington employees are paid twice per month, on the **10th** and **25th** (or closest business day if these dates fall on a weekend) for work done in the previous pay period.

Each month is divided into two pay periods: the 1st through the 15th, and 16th through the end of the month. Salaried employees receive half their monthly salary for each pay period worked.

Quarterly ASE appointments cover the following dates; note that these dates do not align exactly with the dates of instruction:

- Autumn: September 16 – December 15
- Winter: December 16 – March 15
- Spring: March 16 – June 15

Therefore, an ASE who works a full academic year will receive their first paycheck on **October 10** (for the September 16-30 pay period) and will receive their last paycheck on **June 25** (for the June 1-15 pay period).

WORKDAY (UW PAYROLL)

Workday is the tool used by the UW's Integrated Service Center to manage HR, payroll, and benefits support. Log in to Workday to access your paystubs, update direct deposit, and review or download tax documents.

EVALUATIONS & TEACHING REPORTS (REQUIRED)

TEACHING EVALUATIONS (BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS)

For the Professor

One part of your job as a TA is to assist in administering teaching evaluations of the professor unless the professor has opted to use online evaluations. If paper evaluations are used, evaluation forms are ordered by Liam Blakey ahead of time and come from the Office of Educational Assessment (OEA). There are two separate forms: a Scantron form and a Comments form (a "yellow sheet"). The students must fill out the Scantron form with a number two pencil. The department keeps several boxes of these in the supply cabinet in the department office. Take several dozen of these on the day you need to do evaluations, and find a student volunteer to collect the pencils and to return them with the evaluation forms to the department office.

Both kinds of evaluation forms come in one large manila envelope, which contains a sheet of instructions on how to organize the forms and return them to the OEA. They can be returned through any branch of

campus mail, but the easiest thing to do is to bring them to the Philosophy Department office and leave them in the outgoing mailbox.

For Yourself

TAs in the Department of Philosophy are required to have their own classes evaluated by students every quarter they teach (see the "Required Observations/Evaluations" summary on page 8 of this manual). Evaluations of your teaching are placed in your file and serve as a source of information about your teaching abilities for the faculty.

Liam Blakey will email the Philgrad list partway through each quarter to solicit requests to order teaching evaluation forms. You will have a choice between paper forms or an online evaluation. The department recommends paper forms, in part due to greater rates of response when students fill them out in class. However, you may also elect to use online evaluations. (You can plan to have students complete them during class to raise completion rates.) If you order paper evaluations, Liam will place them in your mailbox once they arrive from OEA.

There are two kinds of paper forms for TA evaluations, just as there are for evaluations of the professor: a Scantron form, and a yellow comments sheet. You will need to take number two pencils with you to section on the day you administer evaluations. There is an instruction sheet included in each manila envelope that includes a statement you should read aloud to the students. After distributing the forms, you must leave the classroom while the students fill them out. Please ask one of your students to collect the forms for you and drop them in campus mail (or bring them to the Philosophy main office). Some students will already be familiar with this procedure; for those who aren't, refer them to the sheet of instructions in the envelope.

Most TAs administer evaluations during the last two weeks (often the last week) of the quarter. You should reserve 15-20 minutes of your section for administering evaluations. It is often helpful to administer evaluations at the beginning of class. Doing so will encourage students to take the time to be thoughtful. When students are given evaluations to fill out at the end of class, they often rush.

If you opted for paper evaluations, it typically takes several weeks to receive your results from the OEA; you will receive them early the following quarter. The returned envelope will include the 'yellow sheets' with the students' written comments and a gray sheet, which summarizes the results of the Scantron forms. There are instructions on the back of the gray sheet that explain how to interpret the different results. The 'yellow sheets' can be helpful in identifying specific aspects of your teaching that were or were not successful, e.g., pace of lectures, availability outside class, enthusiasm, clarity, etc.

Student evaluations are sometimes helpful to you in determining which areas of your teaching need more work, and which are successful as they are. However, you shouldn't be surprised by comments that seem extreme, either positively or negatively, or potentially inappropriate. You can probably expect a small percentage of extreme comments every quarter. Moreover, the tone of the comments sometimes depends on the course itself. Faculty and other TAs may be able to provide guidance on how to think about and interpret evaluations, especially if you receive contradictory comments from students (which happens).

FACULTY AND PEER TEACHING OBSERVATIONS

Each year, a TA should have at least one teaching observation performed by a faculty member. (Graduate students in their first year of teaching must have faculty observations in their first *two* quarters.) Ordinarily, this will be done by the professor of the class you are teaching at the time. This observation is an opportunity to get feedback from a more experienced teacher. It is important to remember that the professor is observing the class to help you by noting successful strategies and suggesting areas of improvement. These observations often provide more helpful guidance for teaching than end-of-class student evaluations, so be sure to read them.

You should schedule a time and a section for observation with the professor with whom you are teaching. You might want the professor to visit a section you find challenging, so they can offer teaching tips or suggestions for making the course run more smoothly. That said, it can also be helpful to have a professor observe a section that you think is going very well. This allows the professor to see the effective strategies you've developed and could be helpful down-the-road for any letters of recommendation. Think about scheduling the observation earlier, rather than later in the quarter, as sections later in the quarter sometimes tend to be dedicated to review. When scheduling the observation, talk to your professor about what sort of feedback you are looking for.

The professor will fill out an observation comment form, which you should include with your teaching report in the fall. Forms are found on the Forms page (under the Resources menu) of the department website.

In addition to faculty teaching observations, a TA should have at least one peer observation. (If you are new to the department and don't have anyone in mind for this, consider asking your peer mentor or the other TAs assigned to the same course as you.) Like a faculty observation, a peer observation will help you address challenges and understand what is working well. It's also very likely that the graduate student who observes your sections will learn some new strategies for their own teaching.

When a peer observes your sections, make sure that they fill out a peer evaluation comment form (also found on the Forms page online).

In addition to being observed, you will be asked by your fellow TAs to observe their teaching. It is useful to do this early and often in your time as a TA, because it can provide ideas for your own teaching.

When you write a peer observation, note the best aspects of the teaching. Also jot down one major suggestion, because it can be nice for the TA to be able to demonstrate improvement in teaching over the years. Peer observation also helps the writer think about effective ways to provide feedback, a key aspect of being a teacher.

ANNUAL TEACHING REPORT

In the fall, the graduate adviser will call for teaching reports from all third-, fourth-, and fifth-year graduate students who had teaching appointments for three quarters during the previous year. (Second-year and sixth-year or higher students are also welcome to turn in reports.) Your teaching report must include all of the following.

- Complete sets of student evaluations, both the summary and the comments, from two quarters
- The syllabus that goes with the student evaluations, if you wrote it

- At least one faculty observation comment form
- At least one peer observation comment form
- A statement of your teaching philosophy

The most difficult aspect of putting together your teaching report will be writing the statement of teaching philosophy. This is a one- or two-page statement of theories or methods that inform your teaching strategy. The purpose of requiring this document is to help graduate students reflect on their teaching methods. In addition, it gives students practice writing a teaching statement for academic job applications should the student decide to pursue academic jobs.

At least two faculty, often the director of the graduate program and director of undergraduate studies, will review the teaching reports of all TAs to select the winner of the annual departmental teaching award, but this is not the main purpose of these reports. These reports are extremely valuable practice for becoming (and being) teaching faculty later in your career.

ANNUAL SELF-EVALUATION

At the end of spring quarter, you will be required to turn in a completed self-evaluation form. This self-evaluation covers your teaching and your progress in the graduate program and asks you to set goals for the coming year. You then will meet with your faculty adviser to discuss this evaluation and all aspects of your graduate student career.

AT-A-GLANCE: REQUIRED OBSERVATIONS/EVALUATIONS

SUBMITTING EVALUATIONS: All evaluations (with the exception of student evaluations submitted directly to OEA) should be submitted *both* to the graduate student/TA being evaluated *and* to the graduate adviser (philgpa@uw.edu).

FOR TEACHING ASSISTANTS (EMPLOYMENT EVALUATION)

EVALUATION TYPE	DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY REQUIRED
Faculty Evaluation of TA Job Performance*	General job performance evaluation – written feedback about TA's performance of the duties outlined in the job description	First two quarters that student TAs At the instructor's discretion thereafter
Faculty Course Observation Report*	Completed "Class Observation Report" (see Forms) or narrative on TA's teaching performance	First two quarters that student TAs At least once annually thereafter
Peer Course Observation Report	Completed "Class Observation Report" (see Forms) or narrative on TA's teaching performance	At least once annually
Student Evaluation of TA	Students complete written and scantron or online evaluations of all instructors/TAs	Every quarter of teaching

*This evaluation has minimum requirements according to Graduate School policy. Department of Philosophy requirements meet and/or exceed Graduate School requirements (see https://grad.uw.edu/policies/5-1-departmental-responsibilities-regarding-instruction-by-tas/).

FOR ALL GRADUATE STUDENTS (ACADEMIC PROGRESS)

EVALUATION TYPE	DESCRIPTION	FREQUENCY REQUIRED
Faculty evaluation of graduate student course performance	Narrative evaluation of general performance in seminar setting (including, but not limited to written assignments)	Every quarter until qualifying paper is passed
End-of-Year Self Evaluation & Adviser Assessment	Both graduate student and faculty adviser complete respective forms assessing general academic progress during the year (see Forms)	Once annually, usually in the spring

POLICIES

UNIVERSITY AND UAW/UW RULES TO KEEP IN MIND

Holidays & Vacation Time

Article 10 (Holidays), Section 1 states that academic student employees (ASEs) cannot be required to work on any University-designated holidays that fall within the term of their employment. ASEs are responsible for reporting these holidays in Workday.

Article 10 (Holidays), Section 2 states that academic ASEs shall not be required to work on any university-recognized holidays. In addition, ASEs employed 50% FTE for three or more quarters during the 12-month period starting Sept 16 shall be entitled to one personal holiday during that 12-month period. Personal holidays must be requested in advance and require that the ASE find an acceptable substitute for scheduled work activities, if any. Personal holidays will be requested per departmental policy and all holidays will be recorded and tracked in Workday.

Article 32 (Vacation), Section 1 states (in part) that ASEs employed 50% for twelve months will have a minimum of twenty hours per quarter of paid vacation time off during those 12 months, with other appointment types prorated accordingly (see parts a-d for details). **Section 2** states that **vacation time off shall be taken during academic quarter breaks** except when used as a Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) supplemental benefit, or as otherwise mutually agreed to by the ASE and a supervisor.

All vacation time off requests must be submitted according to departmental policy, and time off use must be recorded and tracked using Workday.

Teaching Stand-Alone Courses

Article 18, Section 2 states that the University has the sole and exclusive authority to make all decisions involving academic matters, including, but not limited to, who is taught, what is taught, how it is taught, and who does the teaching. All matters involving academic judgment shall be made at the sole discretion of the University.

This means that when you are assigned to teach a course on your own, you will also be assigned a faculty supervisor for your course. This faculty member will work with you on the content and schedule of your course. **At least three weeks prior to the start of the quarter, you are required to have your course syllabus (and course schedule) approved by this supervisor**.

It is important to note that, although you are teaching on your own, you need to get approval from your course supervisor, and the director of graduate studies (or chair of the department) to be absent from a class (even if you have found a substitute to teach for you), to cancel a class, or to make **any** substantive changes whatsoever to your approved syllabus.

Final Examinations

The University of Washington requires that, "Final Examinations be administered in accordance with the examination schedule". See the guidelines here.

FERPA (FAMILY EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS & PRIVACY ACT)

As a teaching assistant, you have access to certain information about your students that is protected under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. As a graduate student, your own records are also protected under this act. In your role as a teaching assistant (or instructor) you will need to be familiar with and ensure compliance with FERPA regulations.

The UW provides FERPA guidance for faculty and staff. This guidance applies to you when you are working as a teaching assistant.

> FERPA (Family Education Rights and Privacy Act) was enacted in 1974. It is a set of regulations that applies to those institutions that receive funding from the Department of Education. FERPA was written specifically for students and guarantees them the right to inspect and review their education records, the right to seek to amend education records, and the right to have some control over the disclosure of information from those education records.
>
> An **education record** is defined as any record that directly identifies a student and is maintained by the institution or educational agency or by a party acting for the institution or educational agency. A key distinction of education records is that education records are shared. Education records can exist in any medium, including the following: handwritten, typed, computer generated, videotape, audiotape, film, microfilm, microfiche, e-mail, and others.

How Does This Regulation Affect You?

1. If the student has **not** restricted access to directory (or public) information, you may release the following.
    - Name
    - Address
    - Telephone number
    - E-mail address
    - Enrollment status
    - Major

- Degrees & awards received
- Most recent previous school attended

Note that you must first confirm that the student authorizes release of directory information through a UW system of record such as the Student Database, EARS, or MyGrad, which only advisers have access to. So, in practice, you will likely never be in a position to share your students' information.

2. If a student **has** blocked release of directory information, you may not release any information about that student. We recommend that you say, **"I have no information about that individual."**

3. Departments may not release non-directory or personally identifiable information about a student to a third party (parents included) without the student's written authorization. Currently enrolled students must submit a Release of Records Request to identify specific UW education record(s) to be released, the recipient(s) of the records, and the purpose of the release. Once this has been received by the Office of the University Registrar, the individual department will be contacted to release the requested information.

Do not release any of the following without written authorization.

- Student number
- Grades/Exam Scores
- Grade Point Average
- Social Security Number
- Parent Address/Phone
- Detail of Registration Information (i.e., courses, times)
- Race, Ethnicity, or Nationality
- Gender
- Date of Birth
- Total Credits
- Number of Credits Enrolled in a Quarter
- Emergency Contact

4. The **public posting of grades,** either by the student's name, student number, or social security number without the student's written permission is a violation of FERPA. This includes the posting of grades to a public class/institutional website (does not include Canvas gradebook) and applies to any public posting of grades in hallways and in departmental offices for all students, including those taking distance education courses.

   Notification of grades via e-mail is a violation of FERPA. There is no guarantee of confidentiality on the internet. The institution would be held responsible if an unauthorized third party gained access, in any manner, to a student's education record through any electronic transmission method.

5. The student has a right to inspect and review any departmental or college records you maintain on them except for 'sole possession records.' A sole possession record is a record you never share

with anyone else and that is maintained solely by you. Sole possession records are not subject to FERPA.

6. **FERPA considers teaching assistants to be an extension of the faculty member.** Faculty members may even share their sole-possession records with their TAs. However, if other faculty and department members can inspect those notes, they are no longer sole possession and become education records. Students have the right to inspect and review those records.
7. Employment records are not education records, unless employment is conditional upon the individual being a student. Since you must be a student to be a TA, TA employment records are education records.

Contact Helen Garrett in the Office of the University Registrar, 206-685-2553, helenbg@uw.edu, if you have any questions about this information.

You may also want to review the FERPA page for students for further information.

UW POLICY – IT ACCESSIBILITY

The UW Policy on IT Accessibility states: "The University of Washington (UW) strives to ensure that people with disabilities have access to the same services and content that are available to people without disabilities, including services and content made available through the use of information technology (IT). IT procured, developed, maintained, and used by the UW should provide substantially similar functionality, experience, and information access to individuals with disabilities as it provides to others. Examples of IT covered by this policy include web sites, software systems, electronic documents, videos, and electronic equipment such as information kiosks, telephones, and digital signs."

The policy aligns with:

- The UW's vision to educate a diverse student body and its values of diversity, excellence, collaboration, innovation and respect
- The UW's obligations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- The Americans with Disability Act of 1990 together with its 2008 Amendments
- Washington State Policy USER 01 – Digital Accessibility Standard
- UW Executive Order 81 – Nondiscrimination and Affirmative Action
- Information Technology, Telecommunications and Networking Projects and Acquisitions

As a TA or solo teacher, this applies to the various ways you convey information to your students, including syllabi, Canvas websites, presentation slides, or assigned readings.

Resources that can help individuals and UW units understand and meet their obligations under this policy include:

- IT Accessibility Guidelines
- IT Accessibility Checklist
- Accessible Technology at the UW

TRAINING & RESOURCES

TA CONFERENCE (REQUIRED AT ORIENTATION)

Each autumn, the Center for Teaching and Learning hosts a TA Program for new TAs. All newly admitted philosophy graduate students are required to participate in this program as part of orientation, regardless of when they will start teaching.

PHIL 504 & PHIL 505 – TOPICS IN TEACHING PHILOSOPHY I & II

These are a sequence of two one-credit courses (graded CR/NC) on preparing to teach, sharing experiences with other TAs, and gaining practical tips to use in the classroom. Students are required to take PHIL 504 autumn quarter of their first year. This course focuses on the role of a TA. The second course in the sequence (PHIL 505) is taken winter quarter of the third year and focuses on teaching as a solo instructor. (Students become eligible for summer solo teaching following the third year if they have completed the requirements for the M.A.) While these teaching workshops are required at specific milestones in the program, students interested in continuing to improve their teaching may register for additional quarters at any point in their graduate studies.

TA RESOURCES FROM THE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING (CTL)

The UW Center for Teaching and Learning has additional resources for TAs beyond the TA Program at orientation. Explore their tips on inclusive teaching, engaging students, and promoting well-being in the classroom.

ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY

The UW-IT Accessible Technology department provides many resources on their website, as well as in-person training opportunities to assist all of us with making sure the documents we create are accessible to all students and in compliance with UW Policy on Accessible IT. Try these resources to get started.

- Getting Started with Accessibility
- Creating Accessible Documents
  When creating a syllabus to upload to a course site, make sure to follow these guidelines.
- Ally accessibility tool for Canvas: FAQs for instructors

USEFUL LINKS – DEPARTMENT TEACHING RESOURCES PAGE

See the Department's Teaching Resources page for links to campus tools (e.g., help with Canvas) and the Center for Teaching and Learning on campus.

BECOMING A TA & GETTING ASSIGNED TO CLASSES

FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

First-year students will receive information about their full funding package and first year of funding in their initial offer of admission letter. Accepting the offer of admission includes accepting the funding package. By June 1, all students withing their funding packages, including incoming students, will receive an appointment letter—essentially, a contract—for the coming academic year. You will be required to sign and return the appointment letter to confirm that you accept the appointment.

ANNUAL FUNDING APPLICATION (SURVEY)

Each year, typically in winter quarter, all graduate students will be required to request funding (if needed) for the following year via an online survey. This is necessary for the department to know how many students would like TA appointments the following year. *Students who have guaranteed funding packages that cover the year are required to complete the request for funding* but are guaranteed to receive a TA appointment (or equivalent ASE position) for the quarters requested. Students beyond their funding packages are still eligible to apply for funding, and it will be awarded based on the student's good standing and funding availability.

GETTING ASSIGNED TO A COURSE

Before the beginning of each quarter, every TA is sent an email that lists the classes that will require TAs for that quarter. You should list the courses (in order of preference) that you are willing to TA for. Make sure NOT to list any courses that have lectures or sections that will conflict with the courses you will be taking. This is very important for you to do because the grad director (also referred to as graduate program coordinator or GPC), who assigns TAs to courses, does not check for scheduling conflicts.

Once everyone has responded to this email, the grad director assigns TAs to the various courses. You will then receive notice of which course you are assisting and the other TAs for that course. The grad director will do their best to assign people to their first or second preference. In addition to preferences, which are given the most weight, assignments are decided according to a variety of factors. These include, but are not limited to: avoiding time conflicts, section enrollment, TA time in program, balance of teaching experience across TAs, and intersections between research and teaching interests.

CHOOSING SECTION ASSIGNMENTS

Once you receive your course assignment for a quarter, you and your fellow TAs must work out who will teach which sections. Each TA is typically responsible for two quiz sections (three quiz sections for PHIL 120 and occasionally for some other classes, including PHIL 115, PHIL 118, and PHIL 322). The largest courses in the department (PHIL 100 and PHIL 120) usually have more quiz sections, and thus more TAs for the course. The time and location for each section are listed on the UW Time Schedule for that quarter. Sections are listed in alphabetical order (AA, AB, AC, AD, and so on). Once you've agreed on who will take which section, delegate one TA to email the list of who is taking each section to *both* the program coordinator, Liam Blakey (liamb20@uw.edu), and the graduate adviser, Carla Saulter (philgpa@uw.edu). Liam will then enter your section assignments into the Time Schedule, thereby giving you access to your course in Canvas.

SUMMER TEACHING

To be eligible for summer teaching, students must have passed their qualifying paper and completed their M.A. course work. Preference is given to students in years 3-5 who have completed their general exam. Students who have not yet completed their general exams or who are beyond year five are eligible (though assigned a lower priority) and will be supported as circumstances allow. As always, curricular needs usually help to determine who is supported.

We seldom have enough summer teaching to support everyone who requests it, but we do manage to support most students who indicate interest. Unlike other quarters, summer quarter is self-supporting,

and low-enrolling classes may be cancelled. To minimize the likelihood of this happening, the department's summer quarter course offerings are limited to those with a solid enrollment history. That said, we cannot guarantee that a particular course will not be cancelled.

PERFORMING THE DUTIES OF A TA

PRIMARY DUTIES OF A TA

As a TA, you will typically be expected to:

- **Run discussion sessions, typically twice a week for a large lecture course, and attend all lecture sessions for that course.** If you must miss section for any reason, you are responsible for emailing **all** staff members (philstaff@uw.edu) and the professor you work with. If you anticipate needing to miss any discussion sections or lecture due to planned travel, e.g., for a conference, please let the professor know as soon as possible. If you are missing a discussion section, the professor is likely to request that you try to find someone to cover that section. Usually and preferably, the first people to ask will be your co-TAs for the course. You should also email the professor if you have to miss lecture. Note that different professors and teaching teams might handle absences differently, and so you should talk at the start of the quarter about how to handle expected and unexpected absences. When scheduling travel during the term, e.g., for conferences, you should limit the number of discussion sections and lectures you will miss.
- **Assist with the grading for the course.** You may also be asked to write exams or exam questions for the course.
- **Hold office hours two hours per week**
- **Work an average of 20 hours per week (no more than 220 hours per quarter)**
- **Maintain full-time graduate student status.** You must be registered for at least 10 credits every quarter except summer. If you teach in the summer, you must register for 2 credits.
- **Make satisfactory progress toward your degree.** See the Philosophy Graduate Student Handbook for standards of satisfactory progress.

IF YOU ARE SICK

If you are going to miss quiz section or a stand-alone course for any reason, you need to let your **professor/supervisor** and **the staff** know about this, even if you have found someone to cover the class for you. If you need to miss lecture, you should communicate that to the instructor for the course. Here is how to proceed if you are sick.

The first thing you need to do if you are sick and cannot attend your quiz sections (or your stand-alone course) is to make this decision at least a few hours before your section starts. This gives the office staff the best chance of handling the situation in the most efficient manner possible.

The next thing you need to do is to email philstaff@uw.edu AND the professor that you are TAing for to let them know that you will be absent. Use the philstaff address, rather than emailing just one person on staff, to ensure that someone sees your message. When you send this email, there is a record of what happened (required by the Union contract), and your professor will know that your students are going to miss their quiz sections. Some professors will want to fill in for their sick TAs. Others may ask your fellow TAs if they are available, so it is very important that you include your supervising instructor in this email.

Many TAs also email their students to let them know that they will be out sick. If you are up to that, great. If not, your students will just have to go to class and read the "class canceled" signs that the office staff has posted in your classroom.

OFFICE HOURS (OR DROP-IN HOURS)

Shortly before the start of the quarter, you will receive an email asking you for your office hours for that quarter. Make sure to respond to this email by the third day of classes.

TAs are required to have at least two office hours per week; some TAs may have more. In deciding on office hours, you should bear your own schedule in mind to ensure that there are no conflicts. Remember that many students take courses in the morning. You should also avoid scheduling office hours on Friday afternoons; that time is usually when the department hosts colloquia that you will want to attend. It is, of course, impossible to schedule office hours that everyone in your sections can attend, and for this reason, you should inform your students that you are also available by appointment. You may prefer to have your office hours on different days (e.g., one hour on Wednesdays, and one on Thursdays), or you may prefer to have a large block of time one day a week. **You are expected to be at the official location of your stated office hours for the duration of the published time**. If for some reason you need to leave your designated office-hour location during your stated office hours, please let staff know this and post a note for students stating when you'll be back.

During the pandemic, TAs also held office hours on Zoom; these can be scheduled on Canvas. Holding office hours on Zoom has its benefits and drawbacks. Now that we are back on campus full time, it can sometimes be difficult for students to find a quiet place on campus to join a virtual meeting. On the other hand, Zoom can be helpful for students who commute or might not otherwise be on campus. Consult with the instructor you are TAing for to determine what will work best for the class.

When students ask you for an appointment, make sure that it is because they cannot make your office hours. Sometimes students forget when office hours are, or that you have any at all. Announce your office hours several times at the beginning of the quarter. When making appointments with students, bear in mind that you also have work of your own to do and keep outside appointments within reasonable limits. The number of outside appointments and the number of students who come to office hours typically increases around exam time. Encourage students to come see you the minute they have problems with the material, rather than waiting until just before an exam. It also helps to encourage students to come in groups, since many of them have the same questions.

There is space set aside in Savery 300H (the Big Table) and Savery 372 (graduate library) for office hours and small meetings. You can also use Savery 359 and 408 for overflow if nothing else is scheduled there. Check with the office staff about the schedules of those rooms.

MEETING WITH PROFESSORS

Sometimes professors meet with their TAs before the quarter begins, but since people are not always around during breaks between quarters, the first meeting with the professor you are TAing for is often on the first day of class, immediately following the lecture. Please note: Sometimes quiz sections will meet BEFORE the first lecture. In this case, it is helpful for TAs to email the professor to see what they want you to cover during this first quiz section or if that section will be held at all. During this meeting, everyone decides when, and how often, the TAs will meet with the professor. Once or twice a week is standard.

Some of the matters you may discuss at an initial meeting include: exam information (e.g., how many there are, formats, whether they are comprehensive or not); how grades will be determined; policies on late homework and making up exams; and grading your own sections vs. team-grading. When students ask you this sort of policy question, and you don't know or aren't sure of the answer, tell them you will check with the professor. It's better to appear unsure than to have to retract something later. These policies vary from professor to professor, so be sure to ask.

Meetings with the teaching team also provide an excellent opportunity for you to give the professor feedback regarding how things are going in your sections. The professor can teach the course more effectively if they are aware of what material students are having a hard time with, what they seem to grasp well, whether more examples are needed to illustrate a particular concept, and so on. As a TA, one of your jobs is to serve as a liaison between the professor and the students, and in courses with 100 or more students, this role is a very important one. You will have a better idea than anyone else of how your students are dealing with the material in the course. Sending emails to the professor (cc'ing your fellow TAs) as soon as problems or questions arise is important. Establishing yourself as an open line of communication between the students and the professor helps the course go better for all involved.

There is some information that helps professors. If the students have difficulty understanding a particular argument or concept, despite your best efforts (and this happens to all TAs at some point regardless of experience), you can ask the professor if they can spend a few minutes in lecture talking about the issue or ask them to perhaps suggest some strategies for you to use in section.

That said, the information provided to the professor about sections need not be wholly negative. If your students seem particularly excited about a certain issue, or a certain argument, you should inform the professor. This helps the professor see what material is particularly engaging to the students.

Keeping mental track of your students' grasp of the material is helps the professor create effective exams. Some professors will give the TAs a copy of the exam they plan to give, and you will have an opportunity to discuss individual questions. Take advantage of this opportunity to let the professor know which questions work better than others. If you didn't spend much time in section on the subject matter of a particular question, or if your students had a difficult time with some part of the material, let the professor know. You will need to be able to say something like, "my students won't be able to answer this question." If you think a certain topic would be particularly good as the subject of an exam question, let the professor know.

You will be in a better position to provide this sort of feedback to the professor if you get into the habit of writing exam questions yourself. There are several reasons for this, in addition to assisting the professor. First, the TAs and the professor may work as a team to create the exam, so you need to be prepared with questions. Second, even if a professor prepares the exam, they are happy to look at your exam questions and discuss them with you. If you have an idea of what works and what doesn't regarding test questions, then you will be more prepared to teach a course of that sort on your own**. We cannot emphasize enough that professors are a resource for you, both as a TA and as a graduate student.** Take advantage of your opportunity as a TA to learn as much as you can about teaching a particular course.

One helpful way to take advantage of the accumulated wisdom of the professor is to ask them to sit in on your sections during the term. It is often helpful to your own teaching to have an experienced teacher observe you. **You must have a faculty member observe your sections in your first two quarters of**

TAing and at least once a year after that (see the summary of required observations & evaluations). Many TAs find it helpful to have a faculty member observe their sections for each course they assist.

ATTENDING THE COURSE YOU TA

You are expected to attend the lecture sessions of the course you TA. You aren't required to take notes; however, it is important to remember that "modeling" appropriate behavior is a critical part of your job in lecture. Be quiet, be interested, and show the students how a good student behaves and learns by being a good example in lecture. Taking notes also puts you in a better position to relate lecture material to section discussions. Your notes are also a record of what the professor discussed during lecture, which can be helpful when a student asks if or when something has been covered in class. Be aware of the themes, concepts, or questions emphasized in a particular lecture and start thinking of discussion questions and examples that will get those points across to your students. Occasionally, the professor will say, "this is something you can discuss further in your quiz sections" or "you will go over problems of this sort in section." Make notes of these topics and then discuss them (or solve problems of that kind) in section.

You should also listen carefully for anything that might be particularly puzzling to students and think about ways it can be made clearer. Sometimes students will ask a lot of questions in lecture about a particular topic, or they will come up to you after the lecture and ask you something. Paying close attention to these sorts of things is helpful in preparing for sections.

The goal to have in mind is to make sure sections and lecture overlap and match each other as best they can. It's always handy to be able to start a discussion in your section by saying, "Yesterday, Professor X was discussing the problem of evil. Let's discuss why this is a problem, and how we might solve it," or "Yesterday, Professor X went over indirect proof. Let's go through some examples of this strategy." Unless explicitly requested by the professor, TAs should never get ahead of lecture in their sections. Sections, with rare exceptions, will not introduce new material not yet covered by the professor. Attending lecture will enable you to keep pace with lecture.

PROCTORING EXAMS

In large undergraduate introductory courses, which typically have at least 100 students, part of your job may be to help administer exams. It's a good idea to be a few minutes early to lecture or section on the day of an exam; that way, you can pass out the exam and announce whatever instructions you need to, without significantly cutting into the students' exam time.

When you are administering an exam to an entire class (rather than just your own sections), you should walk around the room and keep an eye on the students. You also might need to answer questions. Remind students to put their name and their TA's name on their exam; this makes it easier to separate the exams by section. Collect the exams of students who finish early but resist the temptation to look at them (or to start grading them)—this makes the remaining students nervous. If you are in a classroom without a clock, or one that students cannot see easily, write the time on the whiteboard every 10 or 15 minutes.

If you suspect a student is cheating while proctoring an exam, you will have to make a judgment call. Most cases of in-class exam cheating can be stopped simply by approaching the student and making it clear that you are watching them. If the professor is in the room at the time, let them know about the situation. Ultimately, the professor is responsible for resolving issues of cheating, so always consult them.

MAKEUP EXAMS

When a student needs to make up an exam (or has disability accommodations through DRS), you, and only you, are responsible for proctoring your student's makeup exams. This is part of your job whether you are a TA or teaching on your own. If for some extraordinary reason you are unable to be present to administer a makeup exam, you need to find another graduate student to do it for you. Department staff cannot proctor makeup exams. They can reserve a room for you for your makeup exam, but they cannot hand out or collect exams.

GRADING PAPERS AND EXAMS

The degree to which grading is your responsibility, or the joint responsibility of the professor and the TAs, is a topic that should be discussed prior to any grading. The degree to which you are required to set conventions or determine the number of points deducted for errors, or to determine general grading strategies, can vary depending on the professor you are assisting. The professor and the TAs should all be clear about how these responsibilities are to be shared. A general discussion of grading procedures prior to the grading of any major (and sometimes minor) assignment is an important part of assisting a professor with any course. The final decision on grading policies is up to the professor.

The following suggestions assume that the mechanics of grading are in large measure up to the TAs.

Before any grading is done, the professor and the TAs will decide whether the TAs will grade their own sections or whether there will be team-grading, where grading is divided by question, rather than by section. Each method has its pros and cons. You might use both methods; for example, each TA might grade their own section's homework, but the exams might be team graded. If you are grading your own sections, you can either grade entire individual exams, or you can grade individual questions; that is, you can grade John Doe's entire exam, or you can grade all the answers to the first question, all the answers to the second question, and so on. The choice is yours.

Once it has been decided who is going to grade what, you can get down to the actual business of grading. It would be nice if grading were a completely objective task (that is, they either get the right answer or they don't); alas, such is not the case in philosophy. Even grading proofs in logic can require judgment. Grading essay questions and papers might involve more judgment. In addition to discussions with your professor and fellow TAs, the following guidelines might help, whether you are grading proofs or essays on your own or as part of a team. (Always consult any rubrics used in the class, as well.)

- Set conventions for the problem or the question. To do this, you need a good idea of what a full credit answer to that question will be. Once you know that, you can decide how many points should be deducted for each part that is missing. Some professors will provide rubrics.
- You don't need to set conventions for every error that the students might conceivably make; in fact, it would be impossible to do this. What you need are grading conventions for big or systematic errors; if necessary, you can deduct additional points for errors that are peculiar to one exam or another (e.g., you can take off a couple of points for lack of clarity). A good way to figure out what conventions you need for a particular question is to read through a representative sample of the answers before you grade any. If you do that, chances are you will find that the students tend to make the same errors. It might be helpful to discuss any recurrent problems with fellow TAs and the professor.

- Be consistent. Make sure you are taking off the same number of points for the same error on every test. This often requires looking again at exams you have already graded. It sometimes happens that a particular convention will evolve as you go through a set of answers, or you change your mind about a convention for some reason. When this happens, go back and make sure that you have consistently applied that standard.
- Some TAs find it helpful to jot down comments on an answer that corresponds to their conventions. For example, if a student is missing a crucial claim in an argument, or part of an explanation, it helps to jot that down on his or her exam, next to the number of points missed. This sort of procedure is helpful for two reasons: first, if you are checking for consistency, it will be easier for you to tell if you have achieved it; second, when you go over the exams with students, the more you can explain to them as a group about conventions, the less you have to repeat things to individual students. If a certain point deduction and its justification is on their exam, they are likely to have fewer questions.
- Ask the other TAs and/or the professor to look at a sample of the grades you have given. Even when you are team-grading, and each TA is grading a different question, it helps to get other people's impressions about the grades you're giving. One way you might approach this would be for the whole team to look at a few samples of answers to each question to help the person who is grading a particular question establish some conventions. If you are grading your own sections, it is often helpful to trade exams with the other TAs, to make sure your conventions are largely the same, and you are giving the same number of points to the same sort of answers. When TAs grade their own sections, it shouldn't be the case that students of one TA are at a particular advantage or disadvantage. Discussing grades can help.
- When you can, avoid giving only negative comments. If the student has done something well, let them know. Your students need to know what they are doing right as well as what they are doing wrong.
- Grading papers will be different from grading essay answers on an exam. You are going to have much higher standards for writing when you are grading a paper, and, depending on the preferences of the faculty and any provided rubric, considerations of grammar, spelling, and punctuation may be considered. This is generally not the case with essay answers on an exam; the writing criterion there has more to do with coherence.
- If you are a TA for a course that requires papers, you should let your students know about the Philosophy Writing Center, which is run by a graduate student supervisor and undergraduate philosophy majors (under the supervision of Gina Gould) and is designed for the express purpose of helping undergraduates write philosophy papers.
- Although grading logic proofs might seem much easier than grading papers, it still requires judgment. It's difficult to simply take off points for each error, since some errors are more serious than others, and it's also difficult to simply give points for correctly derived lines, since it is possible to use the rules correctly and yet not get anywhere. Discuss the grading method for handling mistakes in proofs with both the professor and the other TAs.

- Remember that grading takes time, and the more you do it, the more proficient you become at it. Often, it can be better to spread out grading over several days—five papers a day for 10 days, say—rather than grading a large pile at one time over one or two days.

DISCUSSING GRADES WITH STUDENTS

NOTE: Sending grades via email (either in the body of the email, or as an attachment) is not allowed at the University of Washington!

As a TA, talking to students individually about their grades is something of an art. Your role is often ambiguous: on the one hand, you are in a position of authority with respect to them (and their grades); on the other hand, you are also a student yourself. Some students think that TAs can be "talked" into changing grades when a professor couldn't be. You should reach out to the course professor for any help when discussing grades with students. Often, the best strategy might be to make the professor aware of the complaint and ask if you can send the student directly to them.

If you have done your best to discuss a grade with a student who remains dissatisfied or upset, remember that you **should** refer them to the professor. You are not completely on your own in dealing with the students, and it helps to remember that the professor will back you up.

COMPUTING AND POSTING FINAL GRADES

When you have computed the final grades for your students, the professor has to enter them through the online grading system. If the professor uses Canvas gradebook and then imports that into the online grading system, you'll have to be sure to enter grades for all assignments, including zeroes. As a TA, you might be required to help with this process, or the professor may prefer to do this on their own.

Final exams, and any other remaining assignments on paper, should be put in alphabetical order, put in the accordion folders located in the main office, and labeled appropriately. If you are unsure of where to put these, please ask the staff for help. Students should be told that final exams and any other remaining assignments can be obtained from the main office. Exams and other course assignments are kept behind the main office counter until the end of the following quarter and then shredded. (Spring quarter course work is kept until the end of the following fall quarter.) Students must be informed that unless they specify otherwise or make special arrangements (i.e., have their exams mailed to them or held separately), their exams will be left in the main office. It is a UW policy that we cannot leave a student's exams or assignments in a public place without their consent; doing so constitutes a violation of the student's privacy (as does sending grades via email).

MASTERING DISCUSSION SECTIONS

THE FIRST DAY OF SECTIONS

Sometimes, the professor you are TAing for will have specific topics they would like you to discuss on the first day of sections, but if not, that first 50 minutes can seem like a week. The amount you must do on the first day of sections depends on the amount of introductory course material (as opposed to official course business—exams, grades, papers, etc.) the professor has covered.

The first day of sections is your students' first impression of you as a TA. Think about how you want your students to perceive you, what you will expect from them during the quarter, and how you want them to approach the course. It's often helpful to ask other TAs what they have done on the first day of sections.

The first day of sections typically divides into two parts: a review of the official business of the course, and an unofficial introduction discussion. The former essentially consists of reviewing information given by the professor the previous day (e.g., exams, papers, grading, etc.), making sure that everyone has a syllabus (if on paper), and making any needed announcements about overloads, which is information you should get from the professor. You also need to make sure to announce your name, your email address, where your office is located, and your office hours. Anyone who wants to attend another section should talk to you after class. It is a good idea to tell the students to bring their books to class, so that everyone can participate in the discussion of a passage, or know which proof is being done.

After the official business is taken care of, you can go on to some introductory material, introducing the students to one another and to philosophy. Aside from doing any of your preferred icebreaker activities, some general topics for the first day of sections might be: Why did the students want to take the course? What are their majors? What do they think philosophy is? Another suggestion is to tell them something about yourself, such as where you are in the program, what your area of philosophical interest is, how you got interested in philosophy, etc.

Discussion topics might suggest themselves depending on the course you are teaching. Talking about arguments (and perhaps validity), what distinguishes philosophy from other disciplines, how to read philosophy, and anything else the professor emphasized on the first day might be some things you might want to discuss.

PREPARING FOR SECTIONS

The purpose of sections is to find and clarify student confusions and to lead discussion of assigned material. The most crucial thing to remember in preparing for sections is to carefully read the material you plan to discuss. The degree to which you review any course material covered in lecture depends on both the professor's preference and the difficulty of the material, but you will always need to have read anything your students read. It's a good idea to read ahead if you have time (which you won't always), and it's generally not a good idea to skip the reading and try to "wing it" in sections. Even if you have read the material a dozen times, it always helps to review.

The degree to which you write lecture notes on course readings depends on you. Some TAs are more comfortable with just reading the material carefully and then leading sections spontaneously; other TAs are more comfortable with something written down to which they can refer, if necessary. As long as you read the material carefully and are open to unexpected but interesting discussions of various aspects of it, then it is hard to make an error here. If anything, new TAs are likely to err on the side of over-preparing or doing more than they need to. Moreover, if you have taken notes in lecture or if you are TAing with a professor who shares lecture notes, then you may already have done a lot of your section prep. With practice, you acquire a better sense of how much you need to do in the way of writing notes.

With this general qualification in mind, here are some specific tips on writing or preparing notes for sections.

General Themes/Philosophical Motivation

What philosophical issue or question is being raised in the reading, and why is it interesting? How does it fit into the course in general? What is the "payoff" for considering this issue or this argument carefully? If the author is an important figure in the history of philosophy, you might talk about their life, and their conception of the issue. For example, what did Descartes think he was doing in using his method of doubt? Why are the beliefs that survive particularly important? What else did the author do in their career that was interesting? Students generally appreciate any amusing or interesting anecdotes you might have about a particular philosopher; it makes the person more "real" to them, and less of just a Famous Dead White Guy (who doesn't have anything interesting to say about their experience).

Arguments and Dialectical Structure

Most (or all) of your students will not have taken a philosophy class before and so will need your help in figuring out the overall dialectical structure of an essay. You need to be able to set out the main argument carefully (or recapitulate it from lecture), and you need to be able to help students distinguish between (for example) the author's positive arguments for his or her own position, positions similar to the author's but different in some significant respect, objections to the author's position that someone might raise, the author's objections to other positions, and so on. It sometimes comes as a shock to students that philosophical essays are not always concerned with arguing for some "big claim" but are instead often concerned with a much narrower topic.

The clearer you make dialectical structure of an argument, the greater your students' chance of understanding it. It's often helpful to prepare students by telling them what you are going to talk about, talking about it, and then telling them what you just said. Doing this is immeasurably easier if you can introduce certain parts of the material with phrases like: X considers two objections to this view and has two responses; X wants to distinguish themselves from philosophers who have this view; X offers the following criticism of the argument for Y, and so on. It helps to draw your students' attention to such phrases in their reading; being familiar with certain kinds of qualifying phrases enables them to see dialectical structure more clearly.

Of course, presenting arguments and general dialectical structure to your students requires that you understand it yourself, and just as this requires practice on the part of your students, it requires practice on your part as well. Learning how to teach philosophy makes you a better philosopher, and so you will find that having to present material clearly to your students will help you understand it better yourself.

Cases, Examples, and Illustrations

Since students who are encountering philosophy for the first time generally find it abstract, you will often need to come up with cases or examples that illustrate a particular concept. Sometimes an article in the course readings will contain examples or cases, but sometimes (particularly with historical figures) there won't be any, or there won't be any that the students understand.

Whether you are discussing an example that is in the reading, or coming up with one on your own, there are some general points to consider. First, what is the case supposed to show? Second, is the case explained in a student-friendly manner? One way to make a case or an example more student-friendly is to construct or explain it in terms of the popular culture they are familiar with: movies, books, plays,

political events, and so on (think here of connections between *The Matrix* and Plato's Allegory of the Cave and Descartes' Dream Argument; though even this reference is outdated). Finding student-friendly examples not only makes sections more fun for everyone, but it also helps the students see how many of their everyday interests and concerns involve philosophical questions and issues. Making those sorts of connections can be quite helpful in engaging their interest.

PRESENTING ARGUMENTS IN SECTION

To the extent that you do have to do any lecturing in sections, a lot of it will involve presenting (or recapitulating) arguments for your students. Becoming proficient at this requires some practice, but the following tips should help:

- Make the conclusion of the argument clear. The students need to see what the argument is an argument for, and how it fits in to the topic under discussion. So, if you are discussing H.L.A. Hart's argument against Patrick Devlin, you should point out both that the conclusion of Hart's argument is that Devlin's version of legal moralism is false, and that this is part of a general discussion about the degree to which the law can legitimately restrict individual liberty.

- Repeat the argument several times. You will have to do this for the students to understand it. Tell them first that you are going to present an argument, then present it, and then think about re-stating the argument you've just given them. Alternatively, and perhaps even preferably, you can ask them to restate it in small groups or to the class.

- If some part of an argument is particularly susceptible to misunderstanding, point it out. It's helpful to use phrases like "be careful not to confuse this claim with this other claim, which it sounds a lot like," or "resist the temptation to think that these two claims are the same" or "notice that this isn't a very strong claim, even though it may sound that way," etc.

- Make sure that the students understand the argument before considering objections to it. If you consider more than one objection, make clear which part of the argument is engaged by each objection. One way to see if your students understand an argument is to ask them to present it in their own words. Informal, ungraded writing assignments, or short quizzes in section are a useful evaluative tool for this purpose. You should check with the professor to see if this is an acceptable procedure. Even students who are used to taking essay exams may not be sure exactly what's required of them on a philosophy exam and writing assignments like these are very helpful.

FACILITATING DISCUSSION IN SECTION, OR GETTING STUDENTS TO TALK ABOUT PHILOSOPHY

This may be the single hardest thing to learn to do. It sometimes seems as if one of your sections simply won't discuss things, no matter what you do, and sometimes that really is the case. Keep trying to find ways to engage their interest. Don't give up! Every TA and every professor has struggled at some point with this problem. You're not alone. However, we should point out that on occasion, you will have a section that won't stop talking. When that happens, count your blessings, sit back, and enjoy yourself. For sections that are not like that, however, the following tips might help.

- The single most important thing we recommend is to avoid the temptation to fill silence yourself. This temptation can be overwhelming, since you are basically wedged between the front of the class and a group of silent bodies. You will be overcome by the feeling that **you must say** something**!** This is especially likely to happen if you have posed a question, or asked the students what they think, and gotten no response. **Force yourself** to wait at least 30 seconds or so before you start talking. One trick is to ask a hard question and then turn away to write something on the board or pass papers out, so that the students have time to think about the questions without the pressure of you looking at them. Another trick is to let students write down their answers first. Preparing questions beforehand can be helpful.
- Divide the students into small groups to use the "think-pair-share" technique, or divide the class in half, and give them specific tasks; e.g., arguing for or against a certain view, and then have each group respond to the arguments offered by the other groups. We can't overemphasize the effectiveness of small group discussions in generating engagement.
- Try to have some interesting cases in hand that illustrate certain points or come up with variations on cases in the reading.
- When a student makes a comment or a point, repeat it, and give credit to that student by name. One reason to do this is that others in the class may not have heard it, but it also makes students aware that their contribution is important. This also helps the students learn one another's names, which in turn enables them to talk to one another, instead of just talking to you.
- If most or all the students seem convinced that a particular view is right, argue for the opposite view yourself. Be careful to do this in a cooperative, rather than hostile manner, so that it doesn't make the students think they have nothing to say, or that they can't do philosophy. One way is to tell them explicitly when they have made a particularly good point, but that you will push back for the sake of argument.
- Try to be animated and enthusiastic about the material yourself. Have fun! Your students are much more likely to find philosophy interesting or exciting if they see that you do. Make it clear that the issues they are discussing are important.
- Relate material that's being discussed to ongoing work in philosophy—your own or that of other philosophers—or some other academic disciplines. Students are more likely to think something is worth discussing if they see that there is real debate about it.
- When asking questions about either the reading or the subject of the lecture, don't rely on the question, "Do you understand?" Students may say they understand when they don't (for a variety of reasons). Have them tell you what the reading is about or ask other questions whose answers presuppose some understanding of the reading. Ask them specific questions about the reading, or about a particular argument or view. Don't be afraid to reuse poll questions from lecture. Not only can this lead to further discussion, but it lets you know who is doing the reading, and how well they understand it. You should also look for controversial passages in the reading, since these can generate lively discussion.

- Whenever they ask you what you think, ask them what they think. You can also tell them what you think but try to use questions of this sort to generate further discussion. (You will sometimes have to tell them explicitly that the fact that you or the professor thinks something is true or false is not a good reason for them to think so; moreover, you don't want a discussion of your views to come back to haunt you later.) A good rule of thumb is to try to make them answer their own questions. Let them know when you find something puzzling and ask them to help you think about it; tell them to look away from their computers or put down their pencils and think through something with you. Show them that philosophy can be a joint enterprise by jointly engaging in it with them (and/or circulate to their small groups). Think of discussions you have with your fellow graduate students and try to have those sorts of discussions with your students.
- Some TAs find that discussion is promoted by having everyone sit in a circle whenever possible. Other TAs sit in one of the desks among the students or sit on the table at the front of the room (rather than standing behind it).
- Remember your own undergraduate philosophy courses. Why did you find philosophy interesting or exciting? If you can inject that sort of enthusiasm into your sections, chances are many of your students will find philosophy exciting too. If you had teachers who were particularly good at getting their students to talk, try to remember what they did, and do something of that sort yourself.

PREPARING STUDENTS FOR EXAMS/RETURNING EXAMS TO STUDENTS

If you have time, it's a good idea to devote an entire section to reviewing for an exam. The more thorough the review session can be, the better. Give the students what information you can about the exam (or repeat the information that the professor has given in lecture). You should also expect more students at your office hours immediately prior to an exam.

When you return exams to students, be prepared to go over the conventions that were used on particular questions. The more information you can give to your class about how an exam was graded, the more quickly you can move on to new material. If you can devote an entire section to going over an exam, do so. One good strategy is to go over general conventions and then spend the rest of the section allowing students to talk to you individually.

The preceding suggestions are not intended as an exhaustive list of things to do in sections. You may wish to modify some of the suggestions here, or you may have strategies of your own that work well. Feel free to consult with faculty and other TAs about strategies. If you develop effective methods of your own, we urge you to share them with other TAs and with faculty.

PARTICULAR COURSES

There are eleven courses the department offers that always need TAs. There are occasionally other special courses that sometimes also require TAs, but the 11on this list are courses that you will likely TA.

PHIL 100: Introduction to Philosophy

PHIL 102: Contemporary Moral Problems

Phil 114: Philosophical Issues in the Law

PHIL 115: Practical Reasoning

PHIL 118: Persuasion or Manipulation? The Ethics and Psychology of Influence

PHIL 120: Introduction to Logic

PHIL 149: Existentialism and Film

PHIL 160: Why do We Believe…

PHIL 240: Introduction to Ethics

PHIL 242: Medical Ethics

PHIL 243: Introduction to Environmental Ethics

Occasionally, some 300-level classes also have TAs, like Phil 322: Modern Philosophy or Phil 338

You'll notice that many of the tips below for the different classes overlap. They are also quite general. When in doubt about how to tackle a text, problem, or activity, consult with the faculty member and TAs you're teaching with.

PHIL 100 – INTRODUCTION TO PHILOSOPHY

This is a popular course for students who have had no philosophy, and either want to satisfy a requirement, are curious about what philosophy is, or both. While each professor has their own way of teaching the course, with certain problems or issues emphasized over others, the course is generally a survey introduction to the major problems in philosophy: free will, the existence of God, the external world, the mind-body problem, and so on.

Tips for TAs:

- The students will be unfamiliar with principles of analyzing arguments, and dialectical structure. You will probably have to spend a lot of time on this. A good thing to do on the first day of section would be to discuss arguments (unless you are given a different specific task by the professor).
- You will need to spend some time motivating each problem or issue for the students. Unlike other courses, which are more specialized as regards their subject matter, students in PHIL 100 typically encounter a variety of philosophical problems: metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical. You might think about how to begin discussion of each problem with a discussion of why we care about

it, and why it's important. One good strategy is to start with what "common sense" tells us about that problem and go from there.

- You might have some students who are particularly excited by an issue, or by philosophy generally, and who would like to discuss something in more detail than the course or any given section allows for. Encourage those students to come talk to you during office hours, rather than devoting time in section.

- Have as many cases or illustrations at your disposal as possible. Some of the problems and issues are unfamiliar to students, and cases or illustrations you can provide will not only help them understand but will get them more excited about the problem.

PHIL 102 – CONTEMPORARY MORAL PROBLEMS

This is another popular course for students who have had no philosophy. The course is essentially what the name suggests: a discussion of the philosophical issues and views surrounding such problems as abortion, animal rights, capital punishment, world poverty, and euthanasia. Different professors may emphasize different problems.

Tips for TAs:

- Be prepared for students to have strongly held opinions about course topics. Even if they have not had a philosophy course, they may argue for a view with more tenacity than you might expect because the subject is one they have had discussions about.

- Some TAs have discovered that some of their students think that these problems are "too important for philosophy." There are a lot of things they might mean by this, but it generally has something to do with their view of philosophy as abstract and quibbling over small logical details. You might have to spend some time convincing them that clear philosophical thinking is useful with respect to problems of this sort.

- It might be a good idea to use part of one section at the beginning of the quarter to discuss solutions to these problems that depend on religious appeals. This could be part of a more general discussion about how a philosopher would approach the question "is abortion ever permissible?" as opposed to how a historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist, and a theologian might.

PHIL 114 – PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN THE LAW

This course does not presuppose knowledge of law (on the part of the TA) or knowledge of philosophy (on the part of the student). Some of the issues covered include: the nature of law and legal reasoning, privacy, the limits of law, the nature of crime and criminal responsibility, and liability in tort.

Tips for TAs:

- Make it clear to the students that this isn't a course about the content of the law exactly, although understanding the legal meaning of the cases is important to doing well in the class. It's a philosophy course. They should know that you are not a lawyer (unless, of course, you are), and that you may not have the answers to specific questions about what the law is in some area. You should also let them know that we are only skimming the surface of really complicated legal

doctrines, but for the sake of our class, we only need to know the legal content of the cases we read and discuss. Feel free to send them to the professor if they have questions about the law that go beyond the cases read in class.

- In this course, the reading is almost exclusively legal case law from the United States, and occasionally shorter introductions to legal concepts. Since this material is likely to be new to most graduate students, reading a week ahead is very helpful. It will also be necessary to help the students learn how to read cases. They need to look for the principle of law that's being decided in the case (called the "holding"), and the argument or "reasoning" that the judges give for the holding. Many of these students intend to go to law school, so if they can learn how to extract this sort of information from cases now, it will benefit them later.
- When you are discussing a case, you will have to spend some time discussing the philosophical issue that it raises, which may not be immediately obvious to students.
- In this class, the cases we read will bring up political topics like abortion, policing, gay rights, immigration, gender, and racial equality. It is important to balance open discussion so students can explore their views and the views of others with boundaries so that students feel supported, particularly those students who are from marginalized groups. This is admittedly tough to do!

PHIL 115 – PRACTICAL REASONING

This course does not presuppose any knowledge of logic or philosophy and attracts students from many different majors and minors. It fulfills the quantitative reasoning requirement (Q requirement) for the undergraduate degree; so, students are generally not surprised when elementary predicate and sentential logic are introduced as techniques for reconstructing and evaluating everyday arguments.

Tips for TAs (for Carole Lee's version of the course):

- The sections are designed to be "active learning" sessions where students have an opportunity to practice applying concepts to practice problems in teams. The role of the TA is to guide and supervise these practice sessions. Carole Lee will provide a list of questions and answers that student teams are supposed to work on in section.
- Grading for this course consists of weekly quizzes (in weeks 2-10). There is no graded homework or final exam. Because of the critical role that graded quizzes play in giving students feedback about how well they are mastering the material, which is cumulative in nature, it is important for TAs to hand back graded quizzes in section before the next week's quiz.

PHIL 118 – ETHICS OF PERSUASION

This course is intended to attract students who would not otherwise take a philosophy course. It can satisfy one of the requirements for the Informatics major and minor, and so will likely have many students from the Information School. It is not a writing course, and instead focuses on students learning some basic ethical concepts and some psychology, and then trying out different techniques on each other.

Tips for TAs:

- Since this is not a writing course, there will be more students per TA than many other courses. Assignments will be much faster to grade than papers, but there will be more of them, and potentially more students during office hours.
- Much of the material in this class comes from social psychology. This material will not be familiar to most philosophy students, and so, if possible, is worth reviewing in advance of the class.
- Since many students will have never considered taking a philosophy class before, the course provides an opportunity for letting them know about other philosophy classes (and potentially doing a minor or major in philosophy).

PHIL 120 – INTRODUCTION TO LOGIC

This course introduces students to the syntax and semantics of both sentential and quantificational logic. This course also satisfies the Q/SR, and many students take it to avoid taking math. Different professors use different texts for this course; there is no department logic text.

Tips for TAs:

- In this course, more than any other in the department, the students depend on their TA a lot. You can expect students during your office hours from the moment the quarter begins.
- A lot of the students who take this course seem to think that it is an easy way to avoid taking math. Impress upon them that it isn't an easy alternative but try to do this without scaring them out of the course.
- You will also encounter students here who have math anxiety. There may not be as many in this course as there are in 115, but there will be some. Tell them to come see you as soon as they start having problems with the material.
- In this course, as in 115, you will have to use a lot of examples of different kinds of problems. Most of your time in section will be spent on this. It's critical here to let the students think their way through a problem, instead of just doing a proof for them. Proof strategy may be what you spend the most time on. Let the students tell you how to do the proof, and why they are taking each step that they take. Show them alternative ways of deriving a conclusion from a set of premises.
- Encourage students to try doing the proofs on their own, before they come to section. Make sure they know that following the proof in class isn't enough to develop the skills for doing them on their own.

PHIL 149 – EXISTENTIALISM AND FILM

This introductory course attracts many students with no philosophy background, but also the occasional major who needs another philosophy class and thinks the material looks fun. The way quiz sections and assignment grading work in this course is different from other courses in the department, so make sure to talk with the instructor and read the syllabus carefully.

Tips for TAs:

- TAs don't need any previous experience or knowledge of existentialism but might have to do more background reading in that case.
- Sometimes a student will have considerable background in existentialism, especially from literature (Camus, Sartre) or film. That can be a great benefit for their peers, but also present challenges if the way the instructor frames the material is different from what the student expects.

PHIL 160 – WHY WE BELIEVE…

As expected for an introductory philosophy of science course, PHIL 160 attracts quite a few budding science students. More surprisingly, the course's free-wheeling title also attracts students with more general epistemological concerns (even if they don't yet call them that). The course presupposes no substantial background knowledge of science or philosophy on the part of the students, though a willingness to engage both is essential. TAs without much science background may have some trouble motivating the issues at hand or drumming up useful examples, but here the professor is happy to help.

The course is largely epistemological in its cast, inquiring into unobservables, the problem of induction, scientific method (confirmation, falsification, holism, etc.), and what makes for good science. There is also some deliberation on the role of science in society, politics and values in science, and the interplay between science and religion.

Tips for TAs:

- Make clear to students that this course enquires into science and scientific reasoning but is not itself a science class. Don't be afraid to make clear your strengths and weaknesses. The fact that you are a philosopher rather than a scientist is no fault when it's made clear that philosophical thinking about science brings its own merits.
- It can be difficult to handle students with considerable science background alongside those without. Strive to keep the discussion at a level where those lacking specific knowledge of quantum mechanics, say, can still understand the thrust. Invite students to continue more involved discussions with you (or the professor) in office hours.
- Reading philosophers of science and writing their own short papers about philosophy of science presents both science students and humanities students with real challenges. Fruitful discussion can draw upon the strengths of each group to supplement the other.
- Perhaps the biggest challenge presented by the material is to motivate the issues without inviting (too much) despair from students, who may become frustrated by repeated poking at cherished approaches to scientific reasoning. Be mindful of the tantalizing skepticism waiting in the wings.

PHIL 240 – INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS

This course is a general introduction to moral theory; it does not deal with specific moral problems (except perhaps as far as these might serve to illustrate theoretical points). Some of the topics that might be covered include: relativism, egoism, divine command theory, utilitarianism, Kantian ethics, care ethics, collective action problems, and virtue theory.

Tips for TAs:

- There are no prerequisites for this course, so you will likely have to spend some time with the students on the principles of analyzing arguments and how to construct them. This will include providing guidance on how to take a philosophy test and/or write a philosophy paper.
- It's commonly thought that students who take this course are convinced that some form of relativism or subjectivism is not only right, but obviously right. Whether most students are relativists or subjectivists, you'll likely have to engage students who think there can be no objective moral truths in ethics. That might be right, but Paul Franco, who often teaches this class, emphasizes that any such conclusion should come at the end of investigation, rather than the beginning.
- Make it clear to them that the point of the course isn't to learn a set of moral rules, or a bunch of theories, to live by forever. They won't leave the course with "the answer" about what right action is, or what exactly they must do to be a moral person. This is true in any philosophy course (students become frustrated when there isn't a clear "answer" to various philosophical problems), but perhaps more so in 240 (or 102), because these are subjects that they care about.

PHIL 242 – INTRODUCTION TO MEDICAL ETHICS

This course combines the rigor of PHIL 240 with the topicality of PHIL 102 and PHIL 114. After a brief primer on ethics and moral theory, most of your attention will be on topics such as cloning, genetic testing, selective abortion, the metaphysics of disability and disease, justice and equity in health care, and physician-assisted suicide. The course draws on the writings of bioethicists and other philosophers, medical professionals, disability rights advocates, legal theorists, and judges.

You might expect that this course attracts many budding nurses, doctors, and other future medical professionals, and you would be right. Many of these students have little to no philosophy experience and sometimes little experience in humanities courses at all, but they do tend to be more advanced in their academic careers than are students in other introductory philosophy courses. Thus, you will have many third- and fourth-year biology/biochemistry students with some real familiarity with the "medical" bit and considerably less with the "ethics" bit of the course title.

Tips for TAs:

- Don't be afraid to work through the texts during section. Many of your students will be unfamiliar with how to read moral philosophy; help them to identify and critically engage the arguments as distilled from the text.
- For many PHIL 242 students, writing papers will be a new experience. So, you might expect to spend a decent amount of time in office hours assisting them in writing papers.
- Make your students' disparate knowledge bases work for you. Be explicit about the fact this is a philosophy class and that you are a philosopher, not a medical doctor (unless you are).
- While those TAs with little familiarity with bioethics or medicine will need to brush up a bit on such things, be open about your field of specialization. Admit when you do not have answers to specific empirical questions that may be relevant; distinguish between empirical and moral questions; push your students to identify the moral significance of their empirical observations.

PHIL 243 – INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

This is a popular course for students involved in environmental studies and the UW's interdisciplinary Program on the Environment. There are also students without backgrounds in either philosophy or environmental studies who take this course because the material interests them and seems timely. Hence, while many of your students will have some mastery of the scientific issues, most will not have had any exposure to philosophical thinking about ethics. Depending on who teaches this course, it may or may not begin with a week or two of a brief overview of the most prominent ethical theories. Material that has been covered in the past includes: anthropocentrism vs. non-anthropocentrism, individualism vs. holism, monism vs. pluralism, intrinsic value, global warming, the moral status of nonhuman animals, recycling, population issues, deep ecology, ecofeminism, environmental pragmatism, and restoration ecology.

Tips for TAs:

- There are no prerequisites for this course, so you will likely have to spend some time with the students on the principles of analyzing arguments and how to construct them. This will include providing guidance on how to take a philosophy test and/or write a philosophy paper.
- Some students enter this course with firmly held views on environmental issues while others will be apathetic. This can create difficulty in class discussions as both these kinds of students will sometimes find the debates discussed pointless (either because they have already made up their minds or because they simply do not care). It is important to motivate the discussion by using timely examples and making clear why there is debate around these central issues. One way to do this is to emphasize how quickly issues about the environment become very complicated once we start thinking about them philosophically. For example, many people take it for granted that nature has intrinsic value, but articulating the source of that value and how it could translate into moral consideration is difficult. This course pushes us to consider precisely these kinds of issues.
- As often happens with introductory ethics courses, students in environmental ethics sometimes become frustrated that they are given arguments for and against a position but no answer as to which is the better argument. In situations where these frustrations are voiced in class, it is important to remind students that this is a class introducing them to philosophical issues related to environmental concerns and that it may be some time before they know which side of a debate they will ultimately endorse. That is a perfectly normal position to be in when first studying any field of philosophy. Presumably these students are in the room because they care about the issues discussed and this course is a very good way to become more adept at discussing and debating these issues even if it does not provide definitive answers.

CONCLUSION

We wish you good luck in your experience as a TA at the UW, and we hope that this handbook has been of some help to you. We welcome any suggestions you might have for expanding and/or revising this handbook; our hope is that it will expand to reflect the accumulated knowledge and experience of every TA in the department.

We began by inviting you to participate in an ongoing discussion about teaching. We would like to end it the same way, by encouraging you to discuss your teaching with other TAs, graduate students, and faculty members. Feel free to ask us any questions you might have. We look forward to talking to you.