TEAM TEACHING GUIDELINES AND TIPS

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I.   RATIONALE FOR TEAM TEACHING

In our department, team teaching is one of the main ways in which graduate students develop their teaching skills. Unlike other departments, Comp Lit does not have large lecture classes in which GSIs can gain teaching experience but not have major responsibility for the overall design and execution of the class. The team-teaching system was invented to allow GSIs to ease into teaching, so that there could be a middle step between never having taught in the department and taking on one's own class. It is not a perfect system, but it largely works well and suits our department culture.

One challenge presented by this system is how to accommodate the fact that the teaching partners are peers, and yet one is meaningfully more experienced than the other and is given greater responsibility for the overall direction of the class. It's important that both partners are treated with respect and that the students in the class see both as authoritative. Although different people will come into the system with different kinds of experience and different levels of skill, generally, it makes sense to see team-teaching both as a way for a person new to teaching (or to this kind of teaching) to gain experience under the guidance of a more experienced mentor *and* as a collaborative effort in which two teachers get to pool their ideas and energies for a single course.

Another challenge presented by this system is that team teaching requires different skills than teaching alone and/or being a good scholar. Sometimes, the partners do not know each other or have much opportunity to collaborate closely before the class begins. In order for the team to be most effective, both partners must be willing to:

- work collaboratively rather than merely side-by-side
- share responsibility and authority
- communicate often and openly
- be flexible
- respect and trust each other
- support each other
- keep the welfare of the students uppermost in their minds.

Team teaching is most likely to succeed and be enjoyable for instructors and students if the instructors are committed to the process. That means being willing to invest a reasonable amount of time and energy in making it work. The payoff for this effort is not only a more productive and enjoyable class; mentoring and teamwork skills are important in professional academic life (and, indeed, in nearly every line of work).

II.   GUIDELINES

II.A.   *Basic Rights and Responsibilities*

11.A.1.   Division of Labor

During the TA's first semester of teaching in Comp Lit, s/he will grade 50% of the papers and teach 50% of the class sessions.

During the TA's second semester of teaching in Comp Lit, s/he will grade 50% of the papers and teach 50% of the course sessions. (See "Grading," below.)

II.A. 2.   Syllabus and Course Planning and Procedures

Optimally, the Lead and TA will discuss and negotiate most aspects of the class together. However, since the Lead GSI (or Lecturer) has more experience, s/he has final say on and ultimate responsibility for such matters as course policies, grading procedures, and syllabus planning.

The Lead GSI (or Lecturer) typically chooses the topic of the course and some of the texts and plans the progression of writing instruction. The Lead GSI is also responsible for providing constructive feedback to the TA on choice of texts, reasonable expectations of students, grading, lesson plans (including group activities, writing workshops, and homework assignments), discussion-leading skills, and other teaching topics. (See "Mentoring," section 11.C., below.)

The TA chooses the texts that s/he will teach. S/he should also be encouraged to help determine course content and policies. The TA has the right to plan his or her own teaching sessions, but should seek guidance from the Lead GSI (who should provide guidance). The TA is also expected to provide feedback to the Lead GSI on his or her teaching.

11.A.3. Communication

The collaboration is much more likely to be effective if the Lead GSI and the TA meet regularly, and it is usually more effective to meet in person than via e-mail or phone.

At a minimum, both partners should expect to confer for a $half$ hour per week, with additional time allotted before the semester begins, when first papers are assigned, during midterm evaluation, and during final grading.   .

Both partners should make clear at the outset what they desire regarding frequency, duration,   and means of communication, and what their limits are, e.g. no e-mail after 10 pm, e-mail not more than twice a day, etc.. (But as noted, teams should plan to confer for at least a $half$ hour a week, preferably in person.)

11.A.4. Attending Class

Both the Lead GSI and the TA must attend every class session unless they are sick or must be absent because they are giving a paper at a conference, taking an exam, or have a job interview. Absences should be limited to dire necessity. If you need to miss a class, please try to provide 24 hour notice to your co-teacher and to the GSI Faculty Advisor. If you need to miss consecutive classes, please discuss your situation with the GSI Faculty Advisor, Victoria Kahn, or the Graduate Vice Chair/Head Graduate Advisor, Rob Kaufman.

11.A.5. 5 . Holding Office Hours

The Lead GSI and the TA must each hold at least two hours of office hours every week at a specified time and place that is readily accessible to all students. During those hours, they must be available to consult with students.

If a GSI needs to reschedule office hours in unusual circumstances such as illness, s/he should provide as much advance notice as possible to students and make it clear how students can reschedule their meetings.

The Lead GSI and TA should try to schedule their office hours at different times and on different days to accommodate the greatest number of students.

11.A.6. 6. Grading and Returning Papers

The TA should have input into grading policies and procedures, but the Lead GSI will make final decisions in cases of disagreement. Both GSIs are responsible for grading students' papers competently and returning them in a timely manner, i.e., within two weeks. (Students should have at least one week to revise papers, preferably longer.)

, Instructors are responsible for providing their students with clear and constructive feedback on both the content and style of their papers. Commentary should be specific, substantial but not overwhelming, and focus on the most important issues. It should also be forthright but respectful.

11.A.6.1.   1. Norming Grades

The Lead GSI should provide a grading rubric to both the TA and students that explains how papers will be evaluated (or the Lead and TA can formulate the rubric together).   Before they grade each paper or other assignment, the Lead GSI and TA should discuss what they are looking for in that assignment and how they will evaluate the students' work.

When they receive the first papers that are to be graded, the Lead GSI and the TA should "norm" the grading, i.e., make sure they are using approximately the same grading scale. One way to do this is to Xerox the same two or three ungraded papers. Separately, each instructor then comments on and grades these papers. Then, the instructors exchange the graded papers, look them over, and meet to discuss and work out any differences in grading.

Another way to norm grades is to comment on and "grade" the diagnostics just as you would a normal paper (the grades on diagnostics usually do not count) and then look at some samples together in a detailed way to identify and work out any differences in grading.

11.A.6.2.   Determining Final Grades

Ultimate responsibility for determining final grades and entering them online (at CalCentral) belongs to the Lead GSI. However, the TA should help determine final grades, and the instructors should strive for consensus. (It is very important that the instructors stick to the grading criteria they have included on the syllabus in case a student should challenge a grade.)

Lead GSIs are responsible for informing Tony Soyka (the Undergraduate Student Affairs Officer) about any students in their sections who are receiving failing grades or incompletes.

Once the GSIs have entered final grades online, the instructor of record for CL R1A/R1B (a faculty member) officially submits those grades to the registrar.

II.A.7.   Clarifying Administrative Responsibilities

Typically, Lead GSIs take care of most administrative aspects of the class. But the TA should be encouraged to share in these tasks, provided that both partners have agreed who is responsible for each task. Such tasks include:

- establishing and communicating course policies on
  - o attendance, including for meetings outside normal class time
  - o plagiarism
  - o late papers, extensions, rewrites, make-ups for absences
- maintaining attendance records
- keeping track of missing or delinquent students
- dealing with late papers (tracking, penalties, etc.)
- communicating with students, via e-mail or otherwise (recommended: have the students cc both instructors on all e-mails, and instructors cc each other in their responses)
- accommodating students with special needs
- administering bCourses

Please note: It is very important that the partners keep each other informed of any problems that arise in administering the class or questions concerning course policies.

11.B.   Mentoring

Team teaching provides an unusually good opportunity to get feedback on your teaching from a colleague. Providing feedback is integral to team teaching in Comp Lit. **In particular, the Lead GSI is expected to provide substantial feedback to the TA at least every week or two.** The TA is also expected (and should be explicitly invited by the Lead GSI) to provide regular feedback to the Lead GSI. Feedback is useful on such issues as the following:

- use of space, seating arrangement, audibility and visibility of speakers
- reasonable assignments and expectations of the students
- lesson plans: clarifying objectives and varying format
- management of class time
- quality of discussion questions posed (clarity, specificity, mix of directed and open-ended)
- demeanor with students
- grading content and style
- methods of teaching writing
- pacing of syllabus

- ways of encouraging students to participate and equalizing participation
    use of blackboard or powerpoint

In giving feedback to the TA, the Lead GSI should remember that three goals are equally important:

- encouraging and supporting the TA as s/he finds his or her footing in the classroom
- letting the TA experiment and helping him or her reflect on the results
- helping the TA identify areas where s/he could improve and making suggestions for improvement .

When giving feedback, each partner should comment on the other's strengths as well as areas for improvement. An effective starting point is to ask your partner what his or her goals were in a particular session, why s/he chose the tactics s/he did, and how s/he felt about the results.

Other methods of giving feedback include:

- a mock observation: one instructor observes a whole class session and takes notes, copies the
- notes for the other partner, and they meet to discuss their reactions.
- using the students' midterm evaluations to do a formal analysis of the class overall (see Appendix I for a sample worksheet).
- asking for specific feedback on a written workshop plan, handout, or lesson plan.

II. C. <u>Solving Problems That May Arise in Team Teaching</u>

If you and your teaching partner encounter conflicts or ambiguities not covered in these guidelines, figure out whether you simply need more information or to work out some aspect of your collaboration. If you need more information, ask GSI Faculty Advisor, Victoria Kahn, Graduate Vice Chair/Head Graduate Advisor, Rob Kaufman, Graduate Student Affairs Officer, Rita Lindahl-Lynch, or Undergraduate Student Affairs Officer, Tony Soyka.

If you need to work out an issue within the partnership, set aside time to have a discussion:

- Identify the subject or source of conflict or ambiguity.
- Explain to each other why the issue is problematic for you or the students.
- Consider getting feedback from your students, if relevant.
- Brainstorm possible solutions.
- Make a concrete plan.
- Commit to talking on a specific date in the near future about whether you are making progress.

If you can't resolve the issue in this meeting, please consult (jointly or individually) with Victoria Kahn, Faculty GSI Advisor, or Rob Kaufman, Vice Chair of Graduate Studies/Head Graduate Advisor.

In the unlikely event that you feel you are being harassed by your teaching partner, please discuss your situation with Victoria Kahn or Rob Kaufman immediately.

(See also "Make Use of the Midsemester Conference," III. 13, below.)

III. **TEAM TEACHING TIPS**

These tips will likely save you time and trouble and make your teaching go smoothly. They may also help you get more positive student evaluations.

III.A.   Divide duties exactly.

It is tempting to take more than one's fair share of responsibility for a class, but it is not a good idea. Lack of precision in distributing duties can breed resentment later on. Hence, decide in advance exactly:

- how many class sessions each partner will be responsible for
- which dates those sessions will fall on
- how to negotiate dates of instructors' exams or giving papers at conferences (note guideline 11.A.4: both instructors are expected to attend all classes except when they are ill, taking exams, giving a paper at a conference, or doing a job interview)
- who will do what parts of the writing instruction
- who will grade or respond to which homework assignments and papers (it is preferable that each student have some papers graded by each instructor)
- what you will do if one instructor must be absent. (You should not cancel class in this situation but have a backup plan, such as a writing workshop.)

111.B.   Plan the syllabus CAREFULLY.

Don't assign too much reading. Remember, this is a reading and COMPOSITION class. At least 40 percent of class time should be spent teaching writing. It is also wise to leave some room for expansion in the syllabus by having some days on which no new reading is assigned.

Students do not like changes to the syllabus once the course is underway. More than one or two such changes can give the impression that you are disorganized.

If it becomes necessary to change the syllabus, the teaching partners should discuss this together, agree on a plan, and present it to the students with a rationale.

111.C.   Talk regularly about the content and goals of the course.

Team teaching works best when there is a coherent intellectual agenda that is clearly articulated. Ideally, the two partners will collaborate in formulating this agenda and developing it as the semester proceeds.

111.D.   Set appropriate expectations.

CL RIA/RIB is a generalist course, and it is a required course. Few of the students will major in literature. In terms of writing, your goal should be to teach your students how to formulate and defend debatable claims about a text. Particularly in the case of RIA, it is not appropriate to expect the students to present groundbreaking interpretations. Ideally, students will gradually learn how to formulate claims that are more original and complex.

Teaching literary or cultural theory can be useful, but the students may need help understanding it. It is also important to reflect explicitly in class on how the theory helps the students to understand the primary texts and their broader significance.

The university's plagiarism policy should be enforced strictly by both instructors.

111.E.   Share duties on the first day of class.

On the first day of class, share the job of introducing the content and format of the class with students. Show by doing that both instructors share responsibility and authority. Many teams do not make a big point of differentiating between the roles of the two partners on the first day (or subsequently). But you can choose to describe your respective roles if you think that will help students understand how the class will work.

111.F.   The TA should teach at least one class within the first two weeks.
The TA should get a chance to start teaching within the first two weeks so s/he can establish himself of herself as a co-teacher.

111.G.   First-semester TA: Don't start with a long or complex work.
It is not wise for a TA teaching for the first time to start teaching with a 300-page novel or an abstruse work of literary theory. Start with something accessible and short and work up to a longer or more complex text.

111.H.   Review grading norms carefully.
While it is not realistic to expect both instructors to grade in exactly the same way, on exactly the same scale, it is crucial that students feel they are being evaluated fairly and consistently.

III.I.   Do group work regularly.
Especially in a larger section, students often feel more comfortable interacting with a small group. The dynamics of the class are likely to be better if the students often get to work together in small groups and then present their work to the class as a whole and discuss it. Give the students a chance to get to know each other, address the students by name, and encourage the students to do the same.

111.J.   . Consider adding supplementary activities.
Students at Cal are very busy and don't like it when they feel overburdened by a class. However, judicious use of supplementary activities such as film screenings, theater performances, or museum viewings, and group projects outside class, such as reading circles or a midterm project, can enhance their experience significantly.
Consider applying for a Course Improvement Grant from the GSI Teaching and Resource Center if you need funding for tickets to an event.

111.K.   Invite feedback from students.
Give your students regular opportunities to give each instructor feedback on his or her teaching. Example: at the end of a class session or a week of classes, ask students to write down what was the most valuable activity they did that day or week and why it was valuable. Also, ask them what they felt was least valuable, and whether they have suggestions for how class could be improved.

111.L.   Do a midterm evaluation.
Sometime around week 6-8, do a midterm evaluation. Ask the students to comment on the quality of discussions, writing instruction, group work, homework assignments, workload, grading, reading assignments, etc. Also, ask the students to offer specific feedback for each instructor.
Take the time to read the evaluations carefully, discuss them with your co-teacher, and respond in class as a team to the students' concerns as soon as you can.
Use the midterm evaluation as a basis for giving each other formal feedback (see next section).
See Appendix 1 for a sample midterm evaluation.

III.M.   Make use of the mid-semester meeting with faculty advisor.
Each team teaching partner will meet mid-semester with either the GSI Faculty Advisor or the Graduate Vice-Chair. It's optimal to have this meeting after you have done a midterm evaluation in your class and discussed it with your co-teacher (see previous item).

The goal of this meeting is to help you identify any issues that need to be addressed and come up with some possible solutions. This meeting is an excellent opportunity for each teaching partner to think about how the class is going, what could be improved, and how you are feeling about the co-teaching arrangement.

There is no automatic follow-up to this meeting, nor does the department maintain written records of the contents of these conferences. If the person you meet with feels it is appropriate to hold further meetings with you or your co-teacher or both to resolve issues, s/he will let you know.

See Appendix II for a form you can use to give your teaching partner feedback and to prepare for the mid-semester conference. This form is for your own use and does not need to be submitted to anyone.

III.N.   Inform students of what they can do if they are dissatisfied.
Put on your syllabus a paragraph such as the following. The goal of this notice is to identify serious problems and address them before they become intractable.

> *If you are seriously dissatisfied with any aspect of the class, please bring your concern to one or both instructors. If you remain dissatisfied after discussing your concern with both instructors (or with one instructor if you do not feel comfortable talking to the other instructor), please consult Tony Soyka, the Undergraduate Student Affairs Officer in Comp Lit, in 4118 Dwinelle Hall.*

IV.   **Further Information**
For more information about team teaching in Comp Lit, please consult Victoria Kahn, GSI Faculty Advisor (vkahn@berkeley.edu) or Rob Kaufman, Graduate Vice Chair/Head Graduate Advisor (robkaufman@berkeley.edu).

V.   Acknowledgements

Please see following pages for a sample midterm evaluation and mid-semester conference form.

Appendix I.

<p align="center">**Sample Midterm Evaluation**</p>

Our goal is to make this class as interesting and enjoyable as we can. We value your feedback highly. Please take the time to write a full and thoughtful response to the questions on both sides of this form. Your responses will help us improve the class. Thank you for your time.

1. What has been most valuable and/or enjoyable in our class so far?

2. What are the most important things you have learned about literature and/or writing so far?

3. Are there aspects of the class or activities that you think are not especially valuable or enjoyable? If so, what are they, and why are they not satisfying?

4. Do you feel like group projects are productive and enjoyable? Why or why not?

5. Do you feel like we are spending enough time discussing writing issues? Are there specific topics you'd like to cover?

Midterm evaluation/10

6. Please comment on the written feedback you have gotten on your essays. Was it clear? Helpful? Might our responses have been more helpful to you than they were? If so, how? (Please note who has graded your essays so far.)

7. Do you feel like the workload has been fair and manageable? Please comment.

8. Does class feel comfortable? Do you feel able and encouraged to participate? If anything is interfering with your participation, please describe it.

9. Have you found office hour appointments to be helpful so far? Is there anything we could do to make them more useful?

10. Do you have any specific feedback or suggestions for **[one instructor's name]?**

11. Do you have any specific feedback or suggestions for **[other instructor's name]?**

Appendix 2.

Sample Midsemester Conference Form

This form is only for your private use and does not need to be submitted to anyone. It should be treated as confidential.

The goal of this form is:

• to help each teaching partner articulate his or her sense of how the class is going and what could be improved, and

| *• to help the team share their perspectives with each other in a spirit of constructive collaboration.*

1. Tally the number and kind of both *positive* and *negative* comments students gave in each of the following areas:

a) dynamics between instructors or between instructors and students

b) quality of discussions

c) participation patterns

d) class formats (variety, effectiveness of group work, etc.)

e) pacing of syllabus; reading and writing assignment workload

f) paper grading

g) writing instruction

h) office hours

i) other areas (exams, quizzes, outside projects, etc.)

2.   Based on the feedback students gave on the midterm evaluation and on your own sense of how the class has gone so far, what are your suggestions for improving the class generally?

3.   What suggestions do you have for yourself?

4.   For your teaching partner?

5.   How will you assess the progress you are making as a team and individually in the remaining weeks of the semester?