

**Report of the
Committee on the review and update of the
Assistantship System at AUC**

Final

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February 2015

In Fall 2014, the Deans' Council formed a committee for the review and update of the Assistantship System at AUC, with a focus on teaching assistants. The committee was chaired by Dr. Adham Ramadan, Dean of Graduate Studies, responsible for managing the Assistantship System. The committee included representatives from each of the schools using teaching assistants, as follows:

- Dr. Mohamed Al-Ississ, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy
- Dr. Nathaniel Bowditch, Dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences
- Dr. Ahmed Hassanein, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies and Administration, School of Business
- Dr. Russane Hozayin, Chair, Department of Comparative & International Education, Graduate School of Education
- Dr. Maher Younan, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies, School of Sciences and Engineering

The Committee defined its mandate as reviewing the Assistantship System at AUC and making recommendations on how to improve it regarding:

- Roles and responsibilities of assistants
- Determining assistants' loads
- Assistants' selection

The purpose of this review and update is to make better use of assistants as a resource, particularly pedagogically, as well as ensuring consistency of practice throughout schools and departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Research Assistants:

Research assistants (RAs) are to be hired through research grants (internal and/or external), as per needs determined in grant proposals. This is overseen by the Office of the Vice Provost for Research. Deans can hire research assistants (RAs) through their allocated research funds.

2. Hiring Teaching Assistants:

Teaching Assistants (TAs) are to be hired through AUC's Assistantship System, managed by the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies. They are to be used by departments and units in supporting undergraduate courses offered. In this respect, a TA must be typically assigned to an undergraduate course, and cannot be assigned to an individual faculty member, a group of faculty members, or an office.

In requesting the hiring of a TA, departments and units are to abide to the following:

1. The prospective TA must hold a bachelor's or a master's degree in a field relevant to the course(s) he/she would be supporting. In this respect, undergraduate students as well as holders of PhD degrees cannot be hired as TAs.
2. The prospective TA must have a GPA of at least 3.2 in the latest degree he/she holds;
3. The prospective TA must be competent in the field of relevance to the course(s) he/she would be supporting, as well as with good English Language skills and communication/interpersonal skills, as determined by an interview conducted by the relevant department chair/unit head or a representative designated by him/her. Appendix I includes a form to be used in this regard.
4. When hired, the TA will be requested to attend workshops aimed at improving his/her teaching skills (refer to section 9 below).

There needs to be a campus-wide discussion about having undergraduate students assisting peers in teaching and learning. However, undergraduate students currently hired through the Work-study Program at AUC to assist in undergraduate courses, are to be referred to as "student support"¹ and not as Teaching Assistants, and would only be involved in peer mentoring.

3. Responsibilities of Teaching Assistants:

TAs, who are graduates or graduate students, enhance their own learning experience and that of undergraduate students by assisting course instructors in facilitating learning activities for the

¹ It is subsequently agreed through the work of a different committee chaired by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies that these students would be referred to as "Undergraduate Classroom Support". Their hiring is conducted through the work-study program.

course in and/or outside the classroom. In meeting their responsibilities of assisting faculty teaching undergraduate classes, labs and studios, TAs are expected to carry out one or more of the following based on course and/or departmental guidelines:

1. Attend and observe classes of the course to which they are assigned
2. Take attendance in classes, labs and studios in presence of the course instructor
3. Run trials of the work to be carried out by students prior to the lab and/or studio session;
4. Support students in carrying out experimental and/or creative work in labs and studios
5. Assist in preparing answer keys for assignments where applicable
6. Assist in grading of quantitative components of course weighted assessments such as assignments, quizzes, reports, and exams (quantitative components are those which can be graded with a key, not requiring the grader to make judgment calls)
7. Assist in recording and/or calculating students' grades, which are NOT the final course grades
8. Assist in uploading course material onto online course management tools (e.g. Blackboard)
9. Assist in preparing course material under the guidance of the course instructor;
10. Conduct revision, review, and/or problem sessions which do not require the introduction of new materials to students
11. Lead in-class discussions and group activities which do not require the introduction of new materials to students
12. Assist in proctoring quizzes and/or exams, but not carry this out in the absence of the course instructor
13. Hold Office Hours.

Additionally, for blended learning courses and MOOCs, TAs are expected to carry out one or more of the following:

14. Interact with students on online discussions, and blogs where applicable
15. Responding to students queries on line
16. Holding online Office Hours.

TAs should **never** be responsible for:

- 1. Grading qualitative components of course weighted assessments such as assignments, quizzes, reports and exams.** Qualitative components are those which require the grader to make an independent judgment call.
- 2. Independently proctor quizzes and/or exams.** Independent proctoring entails the presence of the TA in the room where the quiz and/or exam is held while the course instructor or qualified substitute proctor are absent.
- 3. Independently introduce new material to students.** A TA may not substitute for the course instructor in delivering new course material to students, where the effect is to relieve the instructor of his or her teaching responsibilities. This rule stands whether the instructor is present in the classroom and/or lab or not.
- 4. Record or calculate official grades.** A TA cannot have access to Banner, and any grading of course weighted assessments the TA carries out must be reviewed and approved by the course instructor for the grade to become official. Instructors are ultimately responsible for course grading.
- 5. Take attendance without the course instructor being present.**

4. Responsibilities of course instructors towards Teaching Assistants:

A faculty member is fully responsible for the delivery of his/her courses, labs and/or studios. He/she is solely responsible for the follow-up on the progress and performance of students in the course, lab and/or studio. When using TAs, course instructors assume the responsibility for the TAs' performance in assisting with their courses, labs and/or studios. In this respect, course instructors are expected to:

1. Mentor TAs in performing duties assigned to them
2. Monitor and record TA availability to students
3. Monitor and assess TA performance, ensuring quality control
4. Regularly meet with their TAs outside of class sessions to follow up on the TAs progress in assisting with the course. These meeting should take place at least once every two weeks during the semester

5. In cases where more than one TA is used in a course, lab and/or studio, ensure that those TAs work as a team, with clearly defined division of responsibilities where applicable.

For TAs in multiple section courses, the different course instructors must also ensure that those TAs work as a team, following the departmental guidelines in place for course coordination.

5. Evaluation of Teaching Assistants:

The evaluation of the TAs' performance and experience is deemed important. In this respect, three types of evaluations are to be carried out:

1. Students' evaluation of TAs performance:

This is currently carried out, to a limited extent, within the online course evaluation form. However, this information is not extracted separately from the form. In addition, the form could possibly be developed further to reflect more details of the TAs performance evaluation by students, based on the set responsibilities for TAs.

2. Course instructor evaluation of TAs performance:

This is not currently carried out in any formalized way. Course instructors' feedback on TAs assigned to their courses is to be carried out online, based on the set responsibilities for TAs. This evaluation is to be quantitative as to streamline data manipulation. An online form is to be developed in this respect.

3. TA reflective self-evaluation:

This is to be carried out at the level of the department and reviewed by the course instructor and departmental chair/unit head. A form is to be developed in this respect.

6. Responsibilities of departments/units using Teaching Assistants:

Departments and units using TAs are responsible for implementing and abiding to regulations of the Assistantship System, namely:

1. Adhering to set TAs hiring criteria
2. Developing departmental and/or course guidelines for determining TAs specific responsibilities within the TAs responsibilities set in this document.
3. Ensuring that TAs and course instructors abide to set TA responsibilities.

4. Properly determining TAs load.
5. Ensuring that TAs attend training workshops held for the development of TAs' skills in teaching/learning.
6. Implementing TAs evaluations.

7. Determining the load of Teaching Assistants:

The load of a TA is determined weekly per course section the TA is assigned to. For lecture course, the weekly load is based on the student's credit hours of the course in question, as well as the total number of students enrolled in the specific course section and the total TAs assigned to the course section, with the minimum assistantship course load being equal to the student's credit hours for the course:

$$TA\ load = \frac{\left(\frac{\text{number of enrolled students}}{20} \times \text{students credit hrs}\right) + 0.5}{\text{number of TAs assigned to the course section}}$$

For laboratory/studio courses the weekly load is based on the session contact hours and the number of TAs assigned to the session:

$$TA\ load = \text{session contact hrs} + \left(\frac{1.5}{\text{number of TAs assigned to the session}}\right)$$

The total weekly load of a TA **cannot** exceed 30 hours.

8. Training of Teaching Assistants:

In order to ensure that TAs are best used as a pedagogical resource, and that they best enhance their own learning experience and that of undergraduate students, TAs are to attend training workshops organized by Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT).

Appendix I

Teaching Assistant Hiring Interview Form

Teaching Assistant Hiring Interview Form

Please fill out this form after interviewing the applicant and submit to your school dean.

Department/Unit:

Semester:

Applicant name:

Please tick where appropriate and add comments:

	MEETS REQUIREMENTS	DOES NOT MEET REQUIREMENTS
1. Knowledge/expertise in the field		
<i>Comments:</i>		
2. English language skills		
<i>Comments:</i>		
3. Communication/interpersonal skills		
<i>Comments:</i>		

Based on the interview and the submitted resume, the departmental/unit recommendation is:

Hire

Do not hire

Name of interviewer:

Signature:

Date: