

Teaching with GSIs: A Checklist for Faculty
GSI Teaching & Resource Center
UC Berkeley
gsi.berkeley.edu

The suggestions below were contributed by faculty members and GSIs as part of our annual seminar for faculty on teaching well with GSIs.

Before the Semester Begins

_____ Review the Appointment Letter that has been sent to your GSIs. Remember, you are their formal supervisor.

_____ Review the contract that governs the GSI position. In particular, look at Article 31 that addresses workload (<http://ucnet.universityofcalifornia.edu/labor/bargaining-units/bx/contract.html>).

_____ Find out who the Faculty Adviser for GSI Affairs is in your department (<http://gsi.berkeley.edu/basics-for-gsis/find-adviser-for-gsi-affairs/>). In case there are problems you cannot address or questions about University policies, the Faculty Adviser for GSI Affairs is your go-to person.

_____ Review the GSI Teaching & Resource Center webpage for faculty on working effectively with GSIs (<http://gsi.berkeley.edu/faculty-departments/teaching-with-gsis/>). In particular, review the Statements of Mentoring Philosophy written by recipients of the Faculty Award for Outstanding Mentorship of GSIs.

_____ Schedule a pre-semester meeting with your GSIs.

_____ Complete the form “Mentoring Plan for Faculty” as a way to set goals for your work with GSIs in the coming semester.

Pre-Semester Meeting

_____ Either orally or in the form of an information sheet, gather information from GSIs about their previous teaching experience, what they are looking forward to in teaching, what they may be dreading, and any constraints on their schedules. This information will enable you to draw on the previous experience GSIs may bring to teaching and to keep them motivated throughout the semester.

_____ Outline expectations such as attending lecture, turnaround time for grading student work and responding to emails, types of activities GSIs should use in section, relationship of section to larger course, whether sections are optional or mandatory, what part of the grade will be allocated for work done in section. **It’s important to have clarity in expectations right from the beginning.** This is particularly true if you have multiple GSIs. Put these expectations in writing.

_____ Go over the syllabus with the GSIs. Read through all of the course policies so that there are no misunderstandings. Make sure GSIs know how you want them to handle grade disputes, plagiarism, and cheating and what policies GSIs may establish for their section. Point out dates they should expect to grade midterms, papers, or finals so that they can plan ahead.

_____ Establish a communication plan up front for communicating with one another and with students. Have an agreement on what types of email you should be copying each other on.

_____ Establish a firm, regular meeting time for the entire semester and stick to it. Should you not need to meet, you can always cancel a meeting. Bottom line: have the GSIs reserve the time for the whole semester.

_____ Have GSIs complete and discuss the “Goal Setting for GSIs.”

During the Semester

Regular Meetings with GSIs

The Graduate Council Policy on Appointments and Mentoring of GSI requires that faculty meet regularly with their GSIs throughout the semester (<http://gsi.berkeley.edu/faculty-departments/core-gsi-policies/gradcouncil-gsipolicy-excerpt/>).

_____ Make sure GSIs know what is expected of them at meetings — should they come prepared to discuss previous or upcoming lesson plans, bring up issues from section, participate in a general “check-in”?

_____ Plan an agenda for the meetings to make them productive. Effectively run meetings will save you time and make less work for you and for the GSIs.

_____ Use the time to plan ahead for upcoming assignments and the work that will be involved for GSIs.

Communication

_____ Respond promptly to email messages from GSIs.

_____ Don't override GSI decisions (for example, grading decisions) without talking to the GSI first.

_____ Let GSIs know when you are available to meet one-on-one should that be necessary.

_____ If you have dealings with a student, let the student's GSI know. Similarly, make it clear to GSIs that they should keep you apprised of significant issues, e.g., a mental health situation with a student.

_____ Maintain a united front in public, but be open to disagreements in private.

_____ Team-taught courses with rotating professors have special challenges. Transitions from one faculty member to the next can be very difficult for GSIs and students alike as expectations and philosophies of teaching and of working with GSIs may change. Weekly meetings are especially important in this situation. In those meetings be transparent about how things are going to change when the new faculty member takes over.

Grading

Grading is one of the most common areas that come up when we talk to GSI about problems they are experiencing. Without clear expectations and guidance, grading can become time consuming and can result in unevenness across sections. GSIs need to know how to grade efficiently. Also, coordination among GSIs needs to be emphasized to ensure equity and fairness across sections.

Here's what you can do to make this part of the course go smoothly:

_____ Be consistent and establish course-wide norms and protocols for grading.

_____ Make sure everyone knows up front course grading policies and policies for grade disputes, regrade requests, etc.

_____ Be crystal-clear about your expectations for the grading process: discuss how long GSIs should spend on each paper, what type of turnaround time is expected, and how detailed GSIs' comments should be on students paper. You might wish to show GSIs sample graded work as models for what you expect.

_____ Use a common grading rubric to help GSIs save time and ensure fairness.

_____ Meet once when papers are handed in to establish norms and go over a few papers together using the grading rubric.

_____ Consider having GSIs grade in teams or as a group.

_____ Meet again after grading (prior to returning papers or exams) to make sure grades line up across sections (or, if they don't, check why that is the case).

_____ If GSIs approach you about how long grading is taking, discuss it with them and find solutions. Consider reducing assignments, revisiting the grading rubric, or doing some of the grading yourself. If departmental resources permit, consider hiring a Reader to assist with some of the grading.

Professional Development and Mentoring

Remember that GSIs are apprentices learning to teach. See your course as a learning experience for the next generation of faculty.

_____ Have GSIs set goals for their development for the semester. Periodically, revisit those goals to see how much has been achieved.

_____ Invite GSIs to give input to the course syllabus. Should you not be able to do this as the beginning of the semester, ask them for feedback at the end of the course (and let them know at the outset of the course that you will be doing so).

_____ "Pull back the curtain" on the art of teaching — what does it take to write a lecture, how do you craft effective assignments, why have you designed the syllabus in the way you have, etc. Show them the notes and outlines you use to conduct class and give lectures.

_____ Have GSIs visit one another's classes not to critique it but rather to learn from observing another teaching.

_____ Set up a time to visit each GSI's section and have a discussion afterward with the GSI about what went well, what you learned from watching the section, and what could be strengthened. GSIs who have not been observed in the classroom often state that they would like this opportunity.

_____ Assess the strengths of your GSIs and then encourage them to contribute to the course in a way that will foster their development and growth. This could mean inviting GSIs to submit questions for exams and help design assignments or guidelines for a project, having a GSI give a 15-minute review session to the whole class, giving GSIs the opportunity to deliver a lecture (or part of one), especially in a large intro-level course for non-majors. Do remember that you are the Instructor of Record and need to provide oversight and quality control if you allow your GSIs to participate in these ways.

At the End of the Semester

At the end of the semester, it is important to gather input from GSIs on their experience of the course, both in terms of how the course supported student learning and their own development as GSIs. To this end, the following are recommendations based on input from faculty and GSIs at Berkeley:

_____ Have your GSIs revisit the goal-setting forms they completed at the beginning of the semester using the “End-of-Semester GSI Self-Assessment” form. Use this as an opportunity to also revisit the mentoring plan you created at the beginning of the semester.

_____ Ask GSIs to write out a summary of what worked well in the course, what did not, and what should be changed the next time the course is offered.

_____ Have GSIs write a letter to the next group of GSIs providing insights on how they experienced their work over the semester and what advice they would give the next group of GSIs.

_____ Have a colleague gather input from your GSIs as to how you might improve your work with the next cohort and then report back to you.