A Guide for Teaching Mentors in the Graduate Teaching and Learning (GTL) Program

Introduction

The Teaching Mentor in the GTL Program is viewed as the teaching analog of the research supervisor. The overall responsibilities of an individual who has volunteered as Teaching Mentor are to assist graduate students and facilitate their progress through the practicum and reflective components of the program. These components are crucial to developing teaching skills and an understanding of student learning. Graduate students will be engaged in a variety of teaching-related activities in their discipline to gain experience in teaching classes, labs, or tutorials and to regularly receive formative feedback on their performance. Collaboration with a Teaching Mentor is essential to assist, encourage, and reassure a novice instructor, who may be uncertain or insecure about this new role.

The specific duties of Teaching Mentors will vary according to teaching duties assigned to students who are being mentored, their previous teaching experience, if any, and other considerations. We hope that Teaching Mentors are experienced instructors who will benefit the graduate student by sharing their experiences and goals to instructing. The mutual objective of Teaching Mentor and graduate student mentee is to enhance teaching and learning.

Teaching Mentors may be concerned about the time commitment to this program. Each situation will be somewhat different, as some students require little guidance, while others may seem to want vast amounts of time and advice. As the Teaching Mentor develops rapport with the mentee, he/she should also establish mutual guidelines and clarify what the student’s expectations and major issues are related to teaching. Since each situation presents a personal and individual relationship, the time and depth should be negotiated and agreed to by both.

Teaching Mentors
• must have 5 years of post-secondary teaching experience and may include time teaching as a sessional and postdoctoral fellow (exceptions possible, such as fewer years teaching experience if mentor formally recognized for his/her quality of teaching: i.e. Teaching award recipient)
• can be full-time academic or non-academic staff employed by the University (exceptions possible, such as Professor Emeritus)

Basic Requirements of a GTL Program Teaching Mentor are to:
• observe the graduate student when she or he is teaching, provide appropriate formative feedback on the teaching and provide a written summary regarding the quality of teaching by the graduate student. Feedback should be presented in a supportive and non-threatening manner, highlighting strengths first and areas for growth second. Constructive feedback focuses on goals, objectives, and behaviors. Good feedback is unambiguous, trustworthy, informative, and readily accepted by the student as a valid representation of what actually occurred;
• provide opportunities for the graduate student to experience a variety of teaching duties, such as have student prepare assignments and discuss their marking and grading strategies
• be accessible for student to discuss issues related to teaching, such as dealing with student behavior, preparing appropriate discussion questions, or more philosophical questions relating to pedagogy or the scholarship of teaching. Issues may arise in a classroom setting and the graduate student may require guidance on how to best deal with a situation. Ask student to provide you with feedback on areas they wish to have guidance.
• discuss with the student whether they have a realistic vision of teaching. Materials prepared by students will be personal in nature, however they should meet a postsecondary level of writing ability.

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1 Program is also open to Postdoctoral Fellows. They will receive a letter confirming their completion of Level Two of the GTL Program but will not have any notation made on their transcript.
The Teaching Mentor is encouraged to provide opportunities for Graduate Students to gain experience in:

- creating a course outline complete with goals, objectives, strategies, etc.,
- strategies for choosing selected readings or the textbook for a course
- what to include in a Course Package
- creating appropriate course assignments (tests, quizzes, protocols, etc.) and determining their appropriate weights
- developing marking guides and protocols for assignments and examinations
- advising students and providing feedback to students on their work performance
- instructing whether in seminar, lecture, lab, clinical, or distributed instructional settings

Gaining experience in all of the above for an actual or current course may not be possible for a graduate student. In such situations, a hypothetical or imagined activity may be substituted and discussed by the graduate student and the Teaching Mentor.

Novice instructors can benefit significantly if Teaching Mentors engage in some or all of the following:

- supervise the graduate student's progress through the various elements of the GTL Program
- provide a good role model for a university teaching career (be available, supportive, and frank)
- meet with the graduate student before the beginning of the term and throughout the semester to discuss the goals, content, and methods of the course, lab, or tutorial
- provide the graduate student with discipline-specific input, such as sample course outlines, readings, and other materials that may help the student in his or her teaching, preferably before the beginning of the term
- observe the graduate student's teaching several times
- provide the graduate student with specific suggestions about how to improve his or her work
- invite the graduate student to observe your teaching in undergraduate or graduate courses
- review and provide appropriate feedback on the student's Teaching Dossier
- complete an evaluation that assesses the student's teaching abilities, development, and potential.

Setting Up Classroom Observation and Feedback by Teaching Mentor

1. Consult with the graduate student as to timing of classroom observation.
2. Meet prior to classroom observation to discuss the student's objectives for that particular class.
3. Observe and assess content, instructional techniques, instructor/student involvement, etc. Use the Mentor Evaluation Form\(^2\) as a guide. The Mentor Evaluation Form can be used as a prompting device for the student and Teaching Mentor to indicate the relevant issues for this particular instructional occurrence.
4. The Teaching Mentor should focus on the strong points of the instruction, such as: clearly stated main points; organization and presentation; student participation; active student engagement; clear and effective use of visuals; inclusive classroom.
5. Identify two to three most important issues and, with the student, brainstorm strategies that will help him or her improve.
6. During the feedback session:
   a) consider asking the student what he or she thought or felt about the class which the Teaching Mentor observed; was it a usual class, what went well, what might improve it, etc.
   b) compliment and celebrate what the student did well, be generous with praise;
   c) provide constructive and frank feedback, identifying areas for improvement and in a collegial manner develop strategies for improvement;
   d) review areas for improvement with the student periodically.
7. Ideally the Teaching Mentor would observe the student more than once before providing a written summary of their teaching.
8. Provide a written evaluation about the teaching performance of the student (See Template for Feedback from Peer and Mentor Teaching Observations).

\(^2\) See FGSR GTL webpage for all documents and templates: http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/gtl/index.htm
Checklist for Teaching Mentor

In departments without a Graduate Teaching and Learning Coordinator, or where the GTL Coordinator may also be serving as a Teaching Mentor, you may also be asked to take on the role of the GTL Coordinator. Students may have more than one Teaching Mentor to distribute the various tasks associated with the program.

I, the Teaching Mentor have:

- observed graduate student’s teaching, and using the Mentor Evaluation Form as a guide, have provided verbal feedback and a written summary for the graduate student
- read the graduate student’s teaching dossier
- discussed and provided feedback on the 5 reflections prepared by the graduate student from teaching sessions they attended
- discussed and provided feedback on the peer teaching observations provided to the graduate student
- discussed and provided feedback on the student evaluations/comments provided to the graduate student
- discussed and provided feedback on the self reflection of teaching by the graduate student
- confirmed that 2 Teaching Observation Forms were prepared by the graduate student for evaluations on their peers or alternative (may observe an academic if no peer was available).

I, the Teaching Mentor confirm the:

- graduate student demonstrates teaching skills in the classroom and appropriate writing quality in the teaching dossier. I have signed the Teaching Record Book.

If the graduate student requires additional improvement in their teaching or in writing their dossier, please explain to the student that they need to demonstrate improvement in these areas before you will sign.

I, the Teaching Mentor accept responsibility for the role of the Department/Faculty GTL Coordinator and:

- confirm the graduate student has accumulate 72 teaching hours of teaching experience as a teaching assistantship or equivalent, or with the credit of the Level Two GTL course
- confirm the graduate student has the letter for Completion of Level One Graduate Teaching and Learning Program
- confirm the graduate student has completed 10 additional hours of pedagogy sessions
- have signed the Teaching Record Book