GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING WITH UNDERGRADUATE LEARNING ASSISTANTS (ULAS)

Developed by the Committee on Teaching and Learning, the following guidelines are intended to help instructors provide a well-supported learning experience for undergraduates who work as ULAs. Because appointing undergraduates to an instructional role raises concerns and poses potential risks, these guidelines are necessarily more extensive and stringent than those for other instructional roles. Hiring departments and supervising faculty should understand their responsibilities in providing extensive guidance and supervision of the ULAs.

Expectations of ULA Stakeholders

INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The University funds ULAs through the Teaching Fellow Program. Working in partnership with the sponsoring department, the Poorvu Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) provides resources to train ULAs. The CTL offers foundational training that covers basic pedagogy and addresses topics such as confidentiality, academic integrity, and Title IX issues. This training is offered every semester and is required for all students appointed as ULAs for the first and second times. The CTL will provide recommendations to the department about effective mechanisms for ongoing guidance for the ULAs. These recommendations may include formats for weekly ULA meetings with the instructor, such as discussing problems sets and reviewing challenging concepts.

DEPARTMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Working with course instructors, departments select their own ULAs and appoint them through the Teaching Fellow Program. Under no circumstances may departments hire first-year students as ULAs. It is recommended that departments implement a sequential program for ULAs, wherein they serve first perhaps as peer tutors or graders and only then are hired as ULAs.

Departments must secure permission to use ULAs before hiring, by contacting Dean Pamela Schirmeister (pamela.schirmeister@yale.edu). Departments may use ULAs only if no graduate student teaching fellows are available.

The DUS facilitates the partnership between the CTL and faculty. The DUS is thus the primary departmental contact and should meet with the ULAs at the beginning of each term to discuss the responsibilities, expectations, and limitations of the assignment. Each DUS, in consultation with the DGS, should establish the qualifications for their own department's ULAs (e.g., whether ULAs must have taken the course to which they will be assigned, whether ULAs must be juniors or seniors, etc.).

Departments designate one or more faculty members to partner with the CTL to train ULAs. Departments will coordinate communication between the CTL & the ULAs to facilitate training and assessment.

All departments using ULAs are reviewed after an initial three-year trial period. The review is based on student responses to the OCE custom question discussed below, the teaching verification survey administered by the Teaching Fellow Program, as well as responses provided by the ULAs to the CTL questionnaire (see "Evaluation of ULA Use").

FACULTY RESPONSIBILITIES

The instructor of record must closely supervise the ULA throughout the course and participate in ULA training.

- Course instructors inform ULAs whether they are required to attend class sessions.
- Course instructors hold weekly staff meetings with the ULAs to review topics on which their peers may request help, advise ULAs on assigned grading duties, and help ULAs prepare for sections.
- Course instructors provide grading rubrics to ensure consistent grading by ULAs.
- Course instructors facilitate blind grading mechanisms (see examples in Appendix 1 below; consult the CTL for further assistance).
- Course instructors review ULA grading and must be responsible for calculation and assignment of final grades. ***Under no circumstances may ULAs grade essays or perform any type of qualitative assessment.***
- Course instructors observe each ULA at least once per term, either by visiting during the ULA's office hours, or by observing the ULA's discussion section, and offer feedback and suggestions. This is a core responsibility of faculty toward students, both graduate and undergraduate, who assist in the teaching of their courses.

Other faculty responsibilities include:

- preparing their own course materials, including syllabi, papers, essays, lectures, homework assignments, problem sets and examinations, and scoring keys
- reserving and printing course materials
- obtaining audiovisual equipment
- maintaining course websites
- managing the distribution of students in sections at the start of the term
- recording grades and reporting them at the end of term
- administering their own examinations
- grading graduate students' examinations and graduate students' coursework that requires qualitative evaluation

ULA RESPONSIBILITIES

ULAs are expected to hold office hours, lead review sessions, and work one-on-one with students. They are permitted to grade student work, although the expectation is for "blind" grading —where students' names are hidden from the ULA during grading— and that they grade only quantitative assignments. ULAs may grade graduate student work when the course instructor provides them with an answer key.

- ULAs may work during reading period, if they choose to do so, and they must indicate this preference at the time of hiring.

- ULAs should expect to spend 1-2 hours per week, individually or as a group, with the instructor of record in the course in which they assist.
- An undergraduate may only serve as a ULA for one course per term. ULAs work an average of 10 hours per week and no more than 12 hours per week. They are paid an hourly rate of $18.50. These hours include the weekly meeting with the instructor and include, where appropriate, attending the class.

[See Use of Undergraduates to Support Instruction for descriptions of other student course support roles (Teaching Fellow, Course-Based Peer Tutor, Grader).] See also the chart for Comparison of Student Course Support Roles.

The CTL provides ULA training, which is mandatory for all ULAs to attend. ULAs must comply with University policies governing confidentiality, academic integrity, and Title IX regulations. ULAs must follow the pedagogical practices for peer instruction presented in ULA training: for instance, how to provide assistance without giving the answer; how to teach inclusively; how to grade consistently and fairly; and so on. ULAs inform course instructors of any possible conflicts of interest arising from personal relationships with students in the course.

Duties assigned to ULAs vary, and they may include the following:

- Grading quantitative assignments, laboratory reports, and examinations. The course instructor must provide detailed guidelines for grading these assignments. To avoid conflicts of interest, ULAs cannot knowingly grade the work of friends.
- Holding office hours in specified campus locations, leading review sessions, and working one-on-one with students in the course.

ULAs with complaints or issues that require the attention of someone other than the faculty member may contact the Teaching Fellow Program for assistance.

EVALUATION OF ULA USE

All stakeholders are expected to facilitate the ongoing evaluation of the ULAs' performance. The Teaching Fellow Program will administer a midcourse survey to all ULAs to ask about their weekly work experience (e.g., number of hours worked; types of duties performed), and to provide ULAs a means to identify any concerns. At the end of the term, the University will assess both the performance of the ULAs and the impact of the teaching experience on the ULAs themselves.

At several points during the term, the CTL will also administer brief questionnaires to all ULAs. These questionnaires will ask ULAs whether the CTL training and weekly faculty meetings provided sufficient guidance for the role, and how these experiences might be improved.

Similarly, students in courses staffed by ULAs will evaluate ULA support by means of a *required* custom question added to the Online Course Evaluation. This additional question will help the CTL get feedback on the preparation and performance of the ULAs from their peers.

APPENDIX 1. SAMPLE BLIND GRADING APPROACHES

- Labeling assignments with ID numbers instead of names
- Putting names on the back of the last page of an exam or assignment so it isn't viewed by grader
- Swapping assignments between sections
- Grading by question

Handwritten assignments can be an obstacle to blind grading when graders recognize someone's writing. A detailed scoring key helps maintain consistency.