

Recommendations for Departments Organizing Orientation Activities for Graduate Student Instructors

Compiled by the CTL Graduate Student Advisory Committee

Background

In Fall 2023, the Center for Teaching & Learning (CTL) launched a new [Graduate Student Advisory Committee](#) to obtain community-centered input and advice on graduate student teaching support needs, CTL offerings, and effective modes of outreach.

In 2023-24, the Committee focused its attention on refreshing the CTL's [Teaching Orientation for Graduate Students](#); as a result of Committee guidance, the CTL expanded its in-person orientation in Fall 2024, refined complementary synchronous materials, and planned additional supports to aid first-time graduate students in their teaching development and practice beyond the first day of class. An additional outcome of the Committee's work is this list of recommendations for departments looking for ways to support first-time graduate student instructors.

Recommendations

- 1. Build CTL resources into departmental orientations & conversations, including:**
 1. [CTL's on-demand orientation modules](#) (geared toward preparing for Day 1)
 2. [On-demand resources](#) on a variety of pedagogical topics
 3. [On-demand resources](#) for using CourseWorks as an instructor
 4. Suggested starting points for students to join CTL programming
 1. [Essentials of Teaching & Learning](#) 4-part series of workshops
 2. [Teaching Development Program](#) (open to all PhD and MFA students)
 3. Connect with & attend [Lead Teaching Fellow](#)-led events in department
- 2. Connect first-time instructors to more experienced instructors; for example, via:**
 1. Panel of experienced graduate and/or faculty instructors to share strategies for overcoming common challenges and anxiety points
 2. Peer observations (a first-time instructor observe another instructor's class)
 3. Brief videos of successful graduate student instructors sharing insights/tips for teaching common courses in your department
 4. Peer mentorship programs, in which experienced graduate instructors support first-time graduate instructors
- 3. Set clear expectations for graduate student instructors; this can include:**
 1. Previewing the range of possible assignments for departmental teaching assignments, including syllabi and sample assignments
 2. Making clear the process for assigning TAs
- 4. Provide community support for teaching beyond orientation through:**
 1. Ongoing, low-stakes community gatherings
 2. Peer mentorship

5. **Acknowledge the emotional aspects of teaching for the first time**

1. Common points of anxiety include teaching what you don't know, teaching in times of stress and challenge
2. Underscore the value of graduate student instruction for student learning

Consult with the CTL

The Graduate Student Programs and Services Team at the CTL would be delighted to meet with departments interested in planning and/or rethinking their orientation activities for new graduate student instructors.

Contact CTLgrads@columbia.edu to set up an appointment.