MESAAS Teaching Fellow Policy

Overview
Teaching fellowships are an important component of the Columbia PhD student experience and afford valuable professional training. MESAAS PhD students begin teaching during their 2nd year in the program and typically teach for a total of three years during the course of the PhD.

This document has been prepared at the request of graduate students, to clarify expectations for students, language lecturers, and professors. MESAAS PhD students and the language coordinators have contributed substantially to the draft. The availability of such a document in every department is also an expectation of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences.

Responsibilities of the Department and Supervising Faculty

- **TF assignments.** Recognizing that it is in the best interest of students, the department endeavors to assign students to a range of classes over the course of their PhD training. Student input is sought in the process—students are invited to indicate their top 3 choices—but, inevitably, it is not always possible for student preference and curricular needs to be in perfect alignment.

- **Timely notification.** In most cases the department can notify students of their TF assignment at least 6 weeks prior to the start of the semester but a small number (perhaps 10%) of TF assignments can only be provisional until enrollment numbers are clear.

- **Communication.** Faculty members should be in touch with their TF soon after the notification goes out and should indicate their expectations of the TF as early as possible.

- **Syllabus and coordination of desk copies.** The supervising faculty member should provide a draft syllabus and a clear indication of the textbooks 6 weeks before the start of the semester so that TFs can order desk copies; if the full list cannot be provided (syllabi often evolve as the term draws near), then the textbooks used in the early weeks of the course should be identified. In case a course has multiple TFs the faculty should coordinate the ordering of desk copies among them. Many publishers will not send desk copies until they see an order for the book, or will ask for confirmation that the order as been placed. In cases where TFs are unable to procure complimentary desk copies in a timely fashion due to no fault of their own (say, due to a late book order), it seems only right that the faculty member reimburse them for the expenses incurred. There is no problem in charging such expenses to a faculty member’s research account.

- **Pedagogical training.** The department, in conjunction with its Lead Teaching Fellows, provides additional resources for graduate student teachers beyond the training offered by GSAS.

- **Faculty guidance.** Supervising faculty are expected to observe a discussion section of new teaching fellows and provide feedback. They should also consider how to make the TF experience pedagogically enriching for the PhD student by providing guidance on
grading, the design of course materials, and other matters. Regular meetings between faculty and TFs are valuable for keeping the communication channels open and allowing students to express any concerns they may have about teaching and to seek advice. TFs might also be invited to give a guest lecture and receive feedback on performance.

- **Evaluation.** TFs are provided with an evaluation of their performance and recommendations for improvement at the end of the course.

- **Reasonable workloads.** By GSAS regulations TFs are not permitted to work more than 20 hours/week, and it is better to aim for a workload of 15 hours/week.

- **Office space.** The department provides keys to TF offices at the start of term. TFs must return the keys at the end of their appointment.

**Responsibilities of the Teaching Fellow**

- **Timely arrival on campus.** At the time of their TFship notification PhD students are given a deadline by which they must return to campus to take up their fellowship. Compliance is expected.

- **Being flexible.** Occasionally, unforeseen enrollment spikes and dips require the department to make some last minute changes. So no TF assignment can be fully guaranteed until the 2nd week of classes of a given semester.

- **Attendance at GSAS and department teacher training sessions.** The GSAS orientation for new teaching fellows is mandatory. TFs are also expected to attend workshops on pedagogy that are organized within MESAAS, including those conducted by Lead Teaching Fellows.

- **Use of Columbia CTL resources.** The Columbia Center for Teaching and Learning (http://teachingcenter.gsas.columbia.edu) is a valuable resource. Students are strongly encouraged to seek out consultations about teaching and to take advantage of various training opportunities and fellowships that the Teaching Center offers.

- **Desk copies.** Most publishers provide free desk copies of their books to instructors who have adopted the material as required reading for a given course. Each press has its own protocols and requirements, which you can easily find out through an internet search. For instance, the search term “Columbia University Press order desk copies” takes you straight to this page, where you can place an order for desk copies after you fill out basic information about the course and expected enrollments, etc.: [http://cup.columbia.edu/for-instructors](http://cup.columbia.edu/for-instructors)

Some publishers will not send desk copies until they see an order for the book, or will ask for confirmation that the order as been placed, so TFs may need to coordinate with the supervising faculty member.

- **Faculty instructions and communication.** Teaching Fellows are expected to heed the directives of their supervising faculty and stay in regular communication.

- **Attendance.** Unless otherwise instructed, Teaching Fellows attend all of the classes of the course to which they are assigned.

- **Hours.** The recommended workload of teaching fellows is an average of 15-20 hours/week.
Additional Guidelines for TFs in Language Programs

The study of the languages of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa plays a central part in the academic life of MESAAS. Assisting in the teaching of language provides MESAAS PhD students not only with a stronger command of that language and language teaching strategies and techniques, but also a set of skills and best practices that are invaluable in teaching other subjects. In addition, language teaching experience demonstrably makes our graduates more competitive in the job market.

Language Teaching Fellows have the same responsibilities as other Teaching Fellows and avail themselves of the same resources but they are also provided with additional training in language pedagogy. A few additional expectations enumerated below represent an effort on the part of MESAAS faculty to ensure that Teaching Fellowships in language courses are as rewarding as possible and, to the extent that it is feasible, consistent across the languages.

- **Attendance.** Teaching Fellows attend at least once weekly a class of their supervising instructor (and more if they are inexperienced, as per faculty recommendation) in order to familiarize themselves with the teaching and pedagogical strategies of the class.

- **Regular meetings.** Regular meetings with the supervising instructor provide TFs the opportunity to talk through issues of pedagogy (both broad issues such as classroom management and learning strategies and more language-specific issues).

- **Classroom visits.** Instructors visit TF-led classes at least twice, usually in the beginning of the semester, to discuss their approach and provide them with feedback and guidance.

- **Predictable workload.** The language coordinators in MESAAS have banded together to standardize as much as possible the workload of language TFs, although there may be minor variation in obligations across the languages. Occasionally the TF may be called on to administer or grade tests or be put in charge of other academic activities; however, the general weekly workload of a language TF is as follows:

  i. Preparation of instructional materials (2-4 hours)
  ii. Classroom teaching (1-2 hours, two class sessions). TFs do not teach the first and last week of classes.
  iii. Grading (2-4 hours)
  iv. Courseworks site maintenance, if necessary (1 hour)
  v. Office hours (1-2 hours)
  vi. Communication via email or face-to-face meetings with the supervising faculty member (1-2 hours)