

## Scenario 1:

You are a teaching assistant for a U.S. History survey class of 300 students with discussion sections. This means that your students attend lecture two hours a week with the professor you work with, and one hour a week of discussion with you. Each discussion section has 30 students, and you teach two sections, back to back.

Three weeks into the semester, the syllabus indicates that students should have read The Narrative of Frederick Douglass this week and should be able to discuss it. You and your fellow TAs have met with the professor and decided on an exercise in which students will discuss the significance of Douglass's childhood experiences.

The only problem is, when you ask who has completed reading the assignment, only 5 of the 30 raise their hands. When you ask who has read up through the section depicting Douglass's childhood, 10 more students raise their hands. This means  $\frac{1}{2}$  the class has not done the assigned reading.

How do you cope?

Consider these points:

- What can you do in anticipation of this situation?
- How can you make this a learning experience for all students without letting those who haven't done the reading "mooch off" those who have?
- What can you do to make this the last time students come to class unprepared?

## Scenario 2

You are a teaching assistant for a U.S. History survey class of 300 students with discussion sections. This means that your students attend lecture two hours a week with the professor you work with, and one hour a week of discussion with you. Each discussion section has 30 students, and you teach two sections, back to back.

Immediately after the first exam, a student comes to you to dispute her grade. Before you can say anything, she has told you that everyone knows that you are the least experienced TA and that the more experienced TAs have graded much more leniently than you have. In fact, her study partner made an A, while you gave her (note the verb) a C. She demands that you re-grade her exam and threatens to go to the professor if you do not raise her grade.

How do you cope?

Consider these points:

- What can you do in anticipation of this situation? Specifically, how can you establish credibility with your students so a situation like this won't happen?
- If a student comes to you in this frame of mind, what can you say and do to ensure a positive outcome for both of you?
- How can the professor help you deal with this situation? What information do you need to provide the professor to help him or her help you?

## Scenario 3

You are a teaching assistant for a U.S. History survey class of 300 students with discussion sections. This means that your students attend lecture two hours a week with the professor you work with, and one hour a week of discussion with you. Each discussion section has 30 students, and you teach two sections, back to back.

You are working with four other TAs, one Americanist, one Europeanist, one Latin Americanist, and one person who studies the Middle East. This is the first year of TA'ing for everyone except the Latin Americanist, who has TA'd for four years, including three semesters of the U.S. survey, and two semesters with this professor. The professor meets with you an hour before the first class meeting and informs you that she takes a hands-off approach, so you will need to establish any standards and resolve any conflicts among yourselves. Only if you can't reach a consensus yourselves should you bring issues to her – but she does mention a few areas you'll need to deal with:

1. Review sessions. She doesn't do them.
2. Consistency in grading. Grading has to be fair, but you'll need to figure out how to make it so.
3. Length of grading periods. She doesn't care how long you take, but she doesn't want any complaints from students.

How do you cope?

Consider these points:

- The issues the professor has raised have one thing in common: they all relate to exams. What can you and your colleagues do to anticipate problems before they arise? Specifically, how should you deal with review sessions, grading standards, and length of grading periods?
- You're being asked to work as a team, but one of you has more experience in the situation than the rest. To what extent should that person take the lead? What does this mean for the rest of you?
- If one TA fails, for example, to abide by agreed-upon time limits for grading, what should the group's response be? If the professor refuses to intervene, should the group take other action? What?