

Teaching Assistant Handbook
Department of Religion

Florida State University
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Covid Statement

In the 2022-2023 academic year Florida State University will offer face-to-face instruction. The COVID-19 virus, however, is still an issue and policies and guidelines stipulated here may change as a result. FSU updates regarding the virus may be found here: <https://news.fsu.edu/tag/coronavirus/>.

Introduction

Graduate students who receive funding from the Department of Religion as a Teaching Assistant are funded usually for one of three positions: Instructor (that is, the lead teacher of a course), Teaching Assistant in a class taught by a faculty member or a graduate student, or Research Assistant assigned to help a faculty member. For purposes of this handbook, all three positions are called “TA.” The Religion Department sees as one of its missions the training of graduate students to become effective teachers. Thus a person who is selected as a TA participates in courses normally under the supervision of a faculty member during the first year and after achieving 18 graduate credit hours in Religion, is eligible for placement in a classroom as an instructor of record in his/her second year.

Students should also note that the Department of Religion has a required pedagogy class for graduate students that will provide pedagogical training and discuss university and department guidelines and procedures regarding instruction carried out by graduate students.

Also note that there is a PIE (Program in Institutional Excellence) Handbook that lays out guidelines for teaching by graduate students throughout FSU. A copy can be found [here](#).

Financial Assistance

In return for financial support, assistant TAs are required to work for twenty hours per week, on average, for the department. First-year M.A. students normally serve as graders or teaching assistants who help instructors of large lecture courses. Ph.D. students and on occasion upper-level M.A. students often teach their own sections of courses. Teaching assistants who are assigned chief responsibility for a course must already have taken a minimum of 18 hours of graduate coursework in Religion. In exceptional cases, when the first-year student has significant teaching experience at another institution, the Department may allow this student to teach before they have met the above requirements.

More detailed information on financial assistance can be found in the Departmental Graduate Student Handbook.

Teaching Assistant Positions & Responsibilities

Teaching assistants in Religion may receive appointments that may require a variety of tasks. A TA may be an Instructor, that is, assigned primary classroom responsibility for a particular course. A TA may be assigned grading duties under the guidance of a faculty member or another graduate student. Research Assistants aid a faculty member in his or her research or perform departmental service.

The standard appointment for an assistantship is 0.5 FTE, i.e. an average of twenty hours work per

week.

The following lays out the basic responsibilities of graduate instructors of record and teaching assistants in the Department of Religion.

1. Instructor of Record - Full Responsibility Classroom Teacher

An “instructor of record” is the main instructor of given course and has full responsibility for it.

An instructor of record must have the following qualifications:

- At least 18 hours graduate work in Religion.
- One year of teaching experience as a teaching assistant in the Religion department (can be waived under rare circumstances)
- Attended both days of the PIE conference

All instructors of record must achieve level 4 according to the standard for the certification of teaching assistants, a description of which can be found in the Departmental Graduate Student Handbook.). The supervisor of an instructor of record who is a graduate student is his/her advisor.

Following are the responsibilities of an instructor of record:

- Full classroom responsibility
- To post an up-to-date version of your syllabus on Canvas,
- to write the syllabus and all assignments for the class he or she teaches (graduate students shall work out with the faculty of their track provisions for faculty review and approval of their syllabi) (also note that there are provisions below regarding required language in syllabi)
- to order textbooks in compliance with FSU’s deadlines regarding book orders.
- to make the syllabus available to the students on the course by the first day of class and to discuss at that class meeting the core elements of the syllabus with the students.
- to be familiar with the university’s teaching policies
- to grade and return exams and papers within no more than 2 weeks
- to inform his/her advisor and/or the director of graduate studies and/or the chair if he or she has problems which impede their best performance in the classroom
- to arrange a substitute when necessary

Note regarding large classes taught by graduate students. The instructor of record may be assigned teaching assistants who are their fellow graduate students. In this case the instructor of record needs to inform at the beginning of the semester the chair and/or the director of graduate studies about how the distribution of work and responsibilities in the course will be conducted. The proposed arrangement for course duties must be approved by the chair or the director of graduate studies.

The rights of instructors of record include the following:

- to receive notice of his or her teaching assignment
- to be notified as soon as feasible of any changes in his or her teaching assignment
- to receive timely feedback after any teaching observation

- to discuss with the faculty of their track, the director of graduate studies, or the Chair of the department if he or she has any concerns about their work

Teaching an Online Class

At the present time the Religion Department offers only REL 1300 online. Please consult the separate handbook for teaching REL 1300 online.

2. Teaching Assistants—Assisting an Instructor of Record

To be certified as a teaching assistant, one must have attained level 2 of the certification standards, a description of which can be found in the Departmental Graduate Student Handbook. A key provision of these standards is that the TA has attended at least day 1 of the PIE conference. The supervisor of a teaching assistant is the instructor of record of the course to which he/she is assigned.

The responsibilities of a teaching assistant include:

- to do complete twenty hours, on average, per week as specified by the instructor of record (who is often a faculty member but may be a fellow graduate student; see the approval policy mentioned above which pertains to graduate instructors of record having fellow graduate students as teaching assistants)
- to grade and return major assignments within 1–2 weeks
- to attend all classes
- to grade major assignments in accordance with the lead instructor's guidelines
- to check with the lead instructor, at a reasonable time before the lecture, to see if anything is needed
- to prepare the room before the lecture, especially in the case of courses taught in technologically enhanced classrooms
- to come to lectures and to inform the lead instructor if he/she will not attend a lecture
- to monitor students' behavior during lecture
- not to do his or her homework during lecture
- to bring to class materials from previous lectures (e.g. handouts, exams, papers, etc.)
- to, with instructor supervision and permission, teach some of the class lectures.
- to bring immediately to the instructor's attention any potential problems with students
- to apply consistently the instructor's directions and policies when dealing with students
- to assist the instructor with proper administration of student evaluations (see "Student Evaluations" section below)

Depending on the class' needs, you may be assigned to it as a grader. In this case you should still attend class regularly, but the grader's responsibilities for the class will be reduced to essentially grading student work.

The rights of a teaching assistant include:

- to receive notice of his or her teaching assignment before the end of the preceding term
- to be notified as soon as feasible of any changes in his or her teaching assignment
- not to devote more than 20 hours per week, on average, as a grader

- to receive specific grading guidelines from the lead instructor for every assignment
- to give a lecture or presentation in the course, as deemed appropriate by the lead instructor
- to seek help or advice from the lead instructor if he or she has difficulties meeting the grading deadlines
- to receive timely feedback on performance of assigned duties
- to discuss with the graduate teaching supervisor or the chairman of the department if he or she has any concerns about their work with the lead instructor

3. Research Assistants

Research assistants are not covered by the certification standards mentioned above that shape the teaching responsibilities of graduate students.

The responsibilities of a research assistant include:

- to devote no more than twenty hours per week, on average, on the assigned tasks
- to complete the assigned work within a timely fashion
- to communicate with the professor if he or she is not able to complete a specific task or meet a deadline
- to clarify with the professor where and when he or she should work on the assigned tasks

The rights of a research assistant include:

- to devote no more than 20 hours per week, on average, on the assigned tasks
- to receive specific guidelines from the professor for each assignment
- to discuss with your advisor, director of graduate studies or the chair of the department if he or she has concerns about their work with their supervising professor

Faculty Evaluation of Teaching Assistants

An assigned faculty member (typically determined by the track to which the graduate instructor of record belongs) shall attend and critique at least one class meeting every academic year. The faculty member is encouraged to discuss the class with the graduate instructor afterwards. This may involve a written evaluation. In the case of team taught classes, both graduate student instructors should have their teaching evaluated.

Program for Instructional Excellence [PIE] Conferences

In addition to the PIE conference described above which is critical for the certification of graduate students (see the Departmental Graduate Student Handbook), the PIE Office conducts numerous workshops throughout the year designed to enhance the teaching performance of graduate students. More details can be found here <http://pie.fsu.edu/>.

Awards

It is possible for outstanding graduate instructors to win awards that recognize their achievement. These are run by the PIE program. More information about this can be found here: <http://pie.fsu.edu/Outstanding-Teaching-Assistant-Award>.

Office Hours

All teaching assistants must set up office hours and be available during those hours for student meetings. If the TA teaches a three credit hour class, he or she will schedule at least one office hour per week. If there are students who have conflicts with the scheduled hour, the TA should be flexible in setting up alternative meeting times. TAs are assigned office space based on availability and courses being taught. In most instances offices must be shared, and in some cases graders may need to share a desk with one other grader.

Plagiarism and Honor Code Violations

Florida State has developed a policy that should be followed in the case of plagiarism and other violations of the FSU Honor Code. The details and relevant forms can be found here <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academic-Resources/Academic-Honor-Policy>. You will also find there resources designed for prevention of plagiarism and education of students on this issue. Also note these guidelines developed by Strozier Library (<http://guides.lib.fsu.edu/plagiarism>).

The key steps of the process are the following

- Call the Office of Faculty Development and Advancement (at 644-6876) to see if the student has a prior incident on his/her record (if he/she does the Office will instruct you on how to proceed).
- Fill out the Step 1 Agreement with the student when you discuss the issue with him/her (see the link in the above paragraph for the appropriate form).

Graduate instructors are to use anti-plagiarism software in their courses. Such resources are likely available on Canvas.

Graduate instructors and teaching assistants should also be aware that the department of Religion has established a set punishment for cases of plagiarism. The following text should appear in your syllabi:

The policy of the Department of Religion is that all violations of the FSU honor code, even first offenses, will result in a grade of 0 for the assignment and will be reported to the Office of the Dean of the Faculties. Additional sanctions may be imposed by FSU as part of the procedure for resolving academic honor allegations.

If you have questions concerning a specific case, within the department you should contact either the Director of Undergraduate Studies or the Director of Graduate Studies..

Required First Day Attendance Policy

University-wide policy requires all students to attend the first day of class meeting of all classes or which they are registered. Students who do not attend the first class meeting of a course for which they are registered will be dropped from the course by the academic department that offers the course.

You are therefore required to note which students on your roster are not in attendance on the first day and have them dropped. You can do this by sending a message to registrar@admin.fsu.edu. Please include the student's name, EMPLID, the course prefix and number and the course section number. You may also give a copy of your first day attendance roster to Jon Bridges, who will drop the appropriate students.

Please refer to 'Class Attendance' in the "Academic Regulations and Procedures" chapter in the Graduate Bulletin for additional information.

Student Evaluations

Undergraduates fill out evaluation forms on-line. Instructors have the option of reserving time in class for students to fill out evaluation forms online. If instructors choose to do this, they must leave the classroom for an appropriate period of time,

If the course has teaching assistants, ask the students to give feedback regarding them (there is no slot on the form specifically designed for evaluating TAs)

The SPOT forms are not returned to the TA until the following semester.

Further information on course evaluations can be found here:

<https://distance.fsu.edu/instructors/course-evaluations>.

Final Exam Policy

(from the PIE teaching handbook)

The University Undergraduate Final Exam Policy states:

- Final examinations in all undergraduate courses are discretionary within any given department.
- All students enrolled in an undergraduate course having a final examination, including graduating seniors and graduate students, are required to take the examination at the time scheduled.
- The scheduling of a final examination or a test in lieu of a final examination at any time other than the regularly scheduled final examination period is a violation of University policy.
- A test covering a portion of the semester's work which is given in lieu of a final examination, sometimes called "a unit test," must be given in the regularly scheduled final

examination period.

The **final exam schedule** is published on the Registrar's Web site (see below) and is based on the regular class meeting time or is a block examination in which all students in certain courses take final exams at the same time, regardless of class section. Exceptions to this schedule for individual students are made by the academic dean of the unit teaching the course (in response to a written request from the instructor). Exceptions to hold the entire undergraduate course exam at a time different from the published exam schedule are considered by the Undergraduate Policy Committee of the Faculty Senate, in response to a written request received at least three weeks in advance.

Examination papers of students should be kept by faculty members for one year after the end of the semester. Faculty members leaving the University before the completion of that year should leave the examination papers in the departmental files. Registrar's Web site: <http://registrar.fsu.edu/>

Grades

(from the PIE TA Handbook)

FSU uses the following grading system:

Grading System A 4.00 A- 3.75 B+ 3.25 B 3.00 B- 2.75 C+ 2.25 C- 1.75 D+ 1.25 D 1.00 D- 0.75 F 0.00

The University employs a plus/minus grading system where grades earn the quality point values. Instructors must explain, in writing, an evaluation (grading) statement that will be used to determine grades in each course. Final grades should be reported to the Registrar's Office by the deadline set each semester and in accordance with the procedures that will be communicated by each academic department. "Incomplete" ("I") grades should be recorded only in exceptional cases when a student, for documented reasons, has failed to complete a well-defined portion of a course, but was passing the course up until the time he or she failed to complete the work. Even under these circumstances, the authority for determining whether to grant an "Incomplete" rests with the instructor. Graduate Teaching Assistants must have approval from the supervising faculty member to grant an "Incomplete." (One exception to this guideline occurs when an "Incomplete" is applied as a result of allegations of academic dishonesty that have not been resolved by the end of a semester.) Deans' offices usually provide guidance to instructors regarding individual cases. Unless an extension of time is requested by the instructor, "Incomplete" grades turn into "Incomplete Expired" (computed as "F" or "U" grades, depending on the course grading format) at the end of the next semester in which the student is enrolled. For this reason, it is critical that faculty work closely with the student and with department staff regarding the clearance of an "Incomplete" grade.

Please see the General Bulletin sections on grading policies and grade appeals at:

[http://registrar.fsu.edu/bulletin/undergraduate/.](http://registrar.fsu.edu/bulletin/undergraduate/)

Medical “Excuses”

(also from the PIE handbook)

Documentation regarding missing class because of illness must be provided by the student to the instructor in a timely manner. Instructors may further specify deadlines for documentation submission in their syllabi. The University Health Services will issue a signed document attesting to the fact that the student received medical treatment at the Wellness Center. These documents, or other medical information submitted by the student, should be used by instructors in making decisions regarding whether an absence is excused but should not be construed as a “medical excuse.” Ultimately, the authority for deciding whether the documentation presented by the student justifies an excused absence rests with the instructor.

Privacy Rights

The PIE conference will give you training with regard to knowing student privacy rights. Information on this topic can be found here:

<http://registrar.fsu.edu/records/ferpa/definitions/>

You can also learn more about this issue by consulting the PIE teaching assistant handbook.

To ensure FERPA compliance, graduate instructors are to give all exams, course papers, and student lists to the staff (Susan and Jon) at the end of each academic year. They will be stored under lock and key and eventually disposed.

Sexual Assault/Harassment

The PIE conference will also give you training on FSU’s policies and procedures relating to sexual misconduct on campus.

Information on this topic can be found here: <https://knowmore.fsu.edu/>

You can also learn more about this issue by consulting the PIE teaching assistant handbook.

Student Grade Complaints

If a student has a complaint involving a teaching assistant or faculty member, s/he should first approach the teacher. If there is no resolution, then a student should make an appointment with either the director of undergraduate studies or the department chair. If a student has a complaint about a staff member, one should contact the chair. If you have any doubts about where to go or where to send a student, you should ask the chair.

Required Language for Syllabi

What language will be required in your syllabi will depend on what liberal studies requirements your course meets. All FSU liberal studies courses are categorized into seven broad headings, with specific requirements for each type of course. The seven General Education Requirements (Course Areas):

- Quantitative and Logical Thinking
- English Composition
- Social Sciences
- History
- Humanities and Cultural Practice
- Ethics and Social Responsibility
- Natural Sciences

In addition your course may also meet several University Wide Graduation Requirements (sometimes also called Designations):

- E-Series and “W” (State-Mandated Writing)
- Scholarship in Practice
- Formative Experiences
- Diversity Requirement¹
- Oral Communication Competency
- Computer Competency
- Upper Division Writing

This information can be found here: <http://liberalstudies.fsu.edu/faculty>

Your first step is to learn what requirements your course meets. You can do that by looking at the liberal studies website (<http://liberalstudiescourses.fsu.edu/care/LS-courses/course-display.php>). Enter your course number and it will display required language you are to put in your syllabus, with respect to “course goals and expectations,” “Student Learning Objectives,” assignments, and other required syllabus language that pertain to the specific liberal studies requirements that your course meets. For your convenience, the liberal studies core information for several Religion courses taught by graduate studies is given below:

REL 1300: Introduction to World Religions

Course Area: Humanities and Cultural Practice

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

¹ The traditional format in which the student would need to satisfy both an X Diversity Requirement (Cross-Cultural Diversity) and a Y Diversity Requirement (Diversity in Western Experience) no longer applies. Classes used to be approved for either the X or Y Diversity Requirement. Now all such courses satisfy the Diversity Requirement, and students must take two such courses.

REL 2121: Religion in the United States

Course Area: History

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 2210: Introduction to the Old Testament

Course Area: Humanities and Cultural Practice

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 2240: Introduction to the New Testament

Course Area: Humanities and Cultural Practice

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 3112: Religion and 20th Century Fantasy Literature

Course Area: Humanities and Cultural Practice

Designations: "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 3145: Gender and Religion

Course Area: Humanities and Cultural Practice

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 3152: Religion, Race, and Ethnicity

Course Area: Ethics

Designations: Diversity

REL 3170: Religious Ethics and Moral Problems

Course Area: Ethics

Designations: Diversity, "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

REL 3431: Critics of Religion

Course Area: Ethics

Designations: "W" (State-Mandated Writing)

There is also language that should be in all syllabi of courses offered by the Religion Department (<https://facsenate.fsu.edu/Curriculum-Resources/syllabus-language>). This boilerplate language is as follows:

University Attendance Policy

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid written excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Academic Honor Policy

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to "... be honest and truthful and ... [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy>)

Academic Success

Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. The following information is not exhaustive, so please check with your advisor or the Department of Student Support and Transitions to learn more.

Americans With Disabilities Act

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; and (2) request a letter from the Office of Accessibility Services to be sent to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and (3) meet (in person, via phone, email, skype, zoom, etc...) with each instructor to whom a letter of accommodation was sent to review approved accommodations. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For the latest version of this statement and more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Office of Accessibility Services
874 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-8504 (TDD)
oas@fsu.edu
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

Confidential campus resources

Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success. These include the following:
Victim Advocate Program
University Center A,
Room 4100, (850) 644-7161,
Available 24/7/365,
Office Hours: M-F 8-5
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap>

Counseling & Psychological Services
Askew Student Life Center,
2ndFloor,
942 Learning Way
(850) 644-8255
<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

University Health Services
Health and Wellness Center
(850) 644-6230
<https://uhs.fsu.edu/>

Free Tutoring from FSU:

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options –see <http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoringorcontacttutor@fsu.edu>. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

The following language is recommended for your syllabi:

Suggested Syllabus Statement on Public Health Protocols

In our classroom, I will expect everyone to wear a proper, well-fitting mask. As our President has informed the university community, FSU expects everyone on campus to use face-coverings. In regions where virus rates are high, the CDC recommends that even vaccinated individuals wear masks in public indoor spaces, like classrooms, especially where social distancing is not possible. Florida infection and hospitalization rates are greater now than they were at the height of the 2020 surge due to the Delta variant, a more infectious and easily transmissible version of the COVID-19 virus. The best way to protect against serious illness is to be fully vaccinated, but not everyone among us can be. Because the Delta variant can infect even vaccinated individuals and can be spread by them to others, it poses a special threat to members of the community with underlying health conditions and children at home who are too young for vaccination.

For these reasons, FSU expects each member of the community to comply with the public health protocols our President set forth on August 9, 2021, including (1) wearing masks in public indoor spaces, (2) getting fully vaccinated, (3) being tested for the virus if you have symptoms, and (4) staying home and away from others if you are sick. Please remember that you should NOT attend class in person if you have tested positive for COVID-19 or are quarantining after exposure. Finally, please bear in mind that the COVID-19 situation is fast moving and that university guidance on the issue may change at any time.

Suggested Syllabus Statement for Classes Subject to HB233 Recording

In this class, consistent with state law and university policy, students are permitted to make recordings of class lectures for personal use only. As noted, sharing, posting, or publishing classroom recordings may subject you to honor code violations and legal penalties associated with theft of intellectual property and violations of other state law. Moreover, students and educators have expressed concern that recording classroom activities may negatively impact the learning experience for others, especially in classes that involve questions, discussion, or participation. To protect a learning environment in which everyone feels free to experiment with ideas, we ask you refrain from recording in ways that could make others feel reluctant to ask questions, explore new ideas, or otherwise participate in class. Students must monitor their recording so that they do not include participation by other students without permission. Students with disabilities will continue to have appropriate accommodations for recordings as established by the Office of Accessibility Services.

Suggested Syllabus Statement for Courses Not Subject to HB233 Recording

In this class, consistent with state law and university policy, you may not make recordings of classroom activities without the permission of the instructor. This policy applies to both audio and video recordings.