

Teaching Commons News For Graduate Students

A Spooktacular Start to the Semester

The corridors of the Teaching Commons are bustling again as we welcomed new Teaching Assistants (TAs) with our TA and International TA (ITA) Orientation sessions during the first week of September. We were delighted to offer introductory support to over 200 TAs at York, and even enchanted to offer repeat sessions for those new TAs that were unable to attend (see below for more information and registration details).

The first week of September was also the unveiling of two new programs for TAs offered by the Teaching Commons. Research Assistant with the Teaching Commons, Jennifer Bolt, worked tirelessly over the summer researching what international graduate student TAs needed in terms of teaching support at York. The feedback she received was used to design, develop and deliver an orientation session for International TAs (ITA Orientation) as well as compile a comprehensive International TA (ITA) Handbook, which is available on our website for ALL TAs. Teaching Commons Tutors and International TAs, Andrea Valente and Khyati Nagar were instrumental in developing these supports, contributing their own experiences and points of view. To download a copy of the International TA (ITA) Handbook, please visit our website: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-all-graduate-students/>

In collaboration with contract faculty member Dr. Jon Sufrin and Teaching Commons Tutor and PhD Candidate David Cappadocia, the Teaching Commons offered its first full day Marking and Grading Workshop for Graduate Students. This session offers a theoretical framework of good assessment design and practices, combining this with tips and strategies for marking and grading as well as a hands-on approach, where participants get the chance to grade a sample of student's work and discuss the process and outcomes. Due to popular demand, we will be offering a repeat session of this workshop as well (see below for more information and registration details).

Repeat Sessions for New TAs and ITAs

During Orientation, TAs and ITAs, learn more about the roles and responsibilities of being a TA at York. Participants get the chance to discuss their fears or uncertainties of their new role with one another and brainstorm strategies for overcoming them, with the guidance of an experienced TA. In addition to providing resources and guidance to prepare ITAs for the Canadian classroom experience at York, the ITA Orientation allows ITAs the opportunity to share and explore how their nationality and cultural distinctiveness can become an asset to the York learning community.

TA Orientation repeat session: Wed. Sept. 24, 2-5pm in TEL 1014. Register here: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=199750>

ITA Orientation repeat session: Fri. Sept. 26, 10am-1pm in TEL 1009. Register here: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=200271>

Marking and Grading Workshop for Graduate Students: Thu Oct 16, 10am-4pm in TEL 1014. Register here: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=201183>



What did International TAs say about ITA Orientation?

"Thank you for providing a great workshop. I feel more at ease about doing my first TAship. I feel I have a lot of support through the TC."

"What I found most helpful was information about the Canadian classroom environment and Canadian students' expectations."

"I found it is useful to know what to expect from the CD and where to find resources."

"Very practical tips."

TA Drop-in Hours at the TC Lounge

Do you have any questions or inquiries about your TAship, your roles and responsibilities in your TA position or about teaching? Would you like the opportunity to speak with an experienced TA about these issues and/or for advice? Then, the TA drop-in hours at the TC Lounge are for you! Every month, a Teaching Commons Tutor (TCT) will hold drop-in hours for ANY TA, or future TAs, to stop by to ask questions or to network and discuss teaching as a TA at York. The Teaching Commons Tutors are experienced TAs at York who have completed all of the TA support programs and accredited courses at the Teaching Commons. They are eager and delighted to share their experiences, offer advice and suggestions as well as answer any questions you may have.



The September drop-in hours will be facilitated by TCT David Cappadocia on Friday September 26, 2014, 12-1pm and Tuesday September 30, 2014, 12-1pm in the TC Lounge, located in TEL 1050, through these glass doors...

For a schedule of future TA drop-in hours at the TC Lounge, including the TCT facilitators, please see our website:

<http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta-drop-in/>



TA Feedback Guide

Are you interested in obtaining feedback on your teaching for the purpose of your own professional development, to improve the learning experience of your students, for your teaching dossier or to support your applications for academic positions? Then the newly created TA Feedback Guide can help. It contains guidance and strategies on how to elicit feedback on your teaching from your students, peers or mentors, that is, your supervisor or course director who may write reference letters for you. The TA Feedback Guide also contains a variety of samples of different feedback forms to give to your students, peers or mentors as well as a collection of various questions and observations that you can use to create your own feedback forms. To download a copy of the TA Feedback Guide, please see our website: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/for-all-graduate-students/>

Introducing our 2014-2015 Senior Teaching Assistants (STAs)

The Senior Teaching Assistant (STA) Program is a professional development program for experienced TAs at York, accredited by [SEDA](#). The Senior Teaching Assistants (STAs) will be designing and delivering the majority of the Professional Development Workshops for Graduate Students and TAs this 2014-2015 academic year, including facilitating sessions at the 3rd annual Supporting Teaching At York (STAY) Symposium on Friday May 1, 2015. The Teaching Commons is proud to present the following individuals in the Senior Teaching Assistant Program this year:

Gloria Adagbon
Marshia Akbar
Alex Bicket
Dhruv Jain
Masaki Kondo
Brian Nairn
Roland Shainidze
Jean Smith

Soudeh Afsharian
Nicole Bernhardt
Ann Henley
Andrea Kalmin
Afarin Mansouri
Veronika Novoselova
Raj Singh
Irma Spahiu



Look for these names as facilitators when registering for our Professional Development Workshops to benefit from their experience as TAs at York and their knowledge of teaching and learning through the various support programs offered by the Teaching Commons, including the TA Certificate in Teaching (TACT) Program.

Highlighting Some Professional Development Workshops

I'm not just new to York, I'm new to Canada: Strategies for International TAs October 9, 2014, 12-1pm in TEL 1014

Being an international Teaching Assistant (ITA) can be an exciting experience that contributes to one's personal development and professional growth as an educator. International TAs (ITAs) may encounter challenges associated with the cross-cultural differences in education systems, including differences in teaching methods, marking and grading schemes and teacher-student interactions. This workshop will demonstrate how international TAs can effectively interact with their students from diverse ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and provide tips and problem-solving strategies that international TAs can apply when faced with unfamiliar or difficult situations in and outside the classroom. This workshop will engage the audience to explore their experiences as international TAs and provide information of support services and resources available for international TAs at York University. The workshop will be facilitated by Veronika and Marshia, doctoral students who have several years of experience of teaching as international TAs at York University.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=171216>

Supporting First Year Students in Transition and Maintaining Student Retention October 27, 2014, 12-1pm in TEL 1014

This workshop will discuss the issues with transition of students to a university setting that is not just an important step for their educational goals, but a path to career advancement. The process of transition to university is a life-changing event for a student, which extends beyond academic adjustments. The institutions of higher education carry an important burden of facilitating and making the transition as smooth as possible. The role of TAs is important in this regard as they can help students go through this process and make the experience at university an enjoyable one. We will look at potential needs of first year students, best practices for student support and retention as well as explore case studies that help each person to understand what their role could be in assisting first year students. More specifically, we will look at programs in place at York U in supporting and retaining first year students and at the resources available. Information is key for all parties involved.

To register, please visit: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/forms/view.php?id=173217>

Upcoming Professional Development Workshops

Participatory Learning: How to Engage your Students October 6, 2014, 12pm-1pm in TEL 1014

Making Meaningful Connections with your Students October 15, 2014, 12pm-1pm in TEL 1014

Using Active Learning Strategies in Your Teaching October 21, 2014, 12pm-1pm in TEL 1014

For more information and to register for these sessions, please visit <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/ta-sessions/>

Record of Completion Certificate

Did you know that attending our Professional Development Workshops can earn you a 'Record of Completion' Certificate? To honour outstanding Graduate Students for their ongoing dedication to the enhancement and improvement of teaching and learning at York University the Teaching Commons offers a 'Record of Completion' Certificate. There are different requirements for the 'Record of Completion' Certificate, depending on whether you are a new TA (junior certificate) or more experienced TA (senior certificate). Visit our website for more details:

<http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/teaching-assistant-record-of-completion-certificate/>



What did participants say about the new Marking and Grading Workshop for Graduate Students?

"I feel much better prepared to start teaching this year and I will be recommending this workshop to my colleagues."

"I have learned to handle marking and grading in a consistent manner, discuss my expectations with my students prior to assessing them and comment on work so students know where their grades are coming from."

"I really like the point brought up about professional/objectivity/subjectivity – these points I will try to integrate into my teaching."

"Marking methods seem very useful and I have definitely learned that it is important to communicate with my fellow TA's for consistency."

