

Teaching as a Graduate Student
AKD Teaching & Learning Workshop
Midwest Sociological Society 2019

Working as a teaching assistant (TA) or a lecturer can be a challenge during graduate school, but it is a requirement of the job market. Today we will talk about problems and strategies for teaching undergraduates (or even high schoolers) while you are working on your graduate studies.

Question #1: Am I Qualified for This?

- Graduate students consistently report feeling that they are not qualified for their teaching positions – do I hear imposter syndrome?
- People worry that they don't have the expertise to teach 20-100 students.

Response: YES. You are.

- There are few mechanisms in academia where you can be assigned to something you know absolutely nothing about...
- If you feel you don't know enough, you are more experienced than your students at doing research and finding out all the necessary information for teaching.
- You are likely the most educated person in the classroom on that particular topic.
- CONFIDENCE (or faked confidence) is essential for teaching. Dive into this opportunity!

Question #2: Where can I get help?

- You will likely want and need to get help regularly. Where you go will depend on what you need.

Response: EVERYWHERE

- Look to lead instructors for help if you are a teaching assistant. They can be a good place to start, particularly if your question is about class procedure and expectations.
- Ask for materials and strategies previous graduate students have used in the same (or different) course.
- Fellow graduate student teachers are your best resource – they do not have to be at the same university.
- The internet is a gold mine of activities, lesson plans, discussion questions – be comfortable with digging around. (i.e. ASA Teaching & Learning page, TRAILS, Sociology Blogs)

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Question #3: What If I Don't Know the Answer?

- You will not know the answer to everything. Teaching is this mythical profession where we expect one human to be omnipresent in knowledge.

Response: ...Then You Are Human...

- It's okay to say, "I don't know – great question!" and make that moment into something you return to during the next section or lecture to show students that you are invested in their questions.

Question #4: What About Time Management?

- Graduate school and teaching are two massive undertakings by themselves, let alone put together.

Response: Protect yourself – there is only one of you to go around...

- Make sure you have time to complete everything and make detailed schedules and to-do lists to help you.
 - Courses you are taking + work time outside of class
 - Courses you are teaching + lesson planning + grading
 - Meetings with advisors, supervising teachers, colleagues
 - Writing and research time for your own research interests
 - Blocks of time for hobbies, TV, cooking, cleaning, wellness appointments, etc.
- **Don't punish yourself if you don't do everything perfectly**

Other Top Tips for Teaching

- **Mid-semester Evaluations**
 - This might be the most important task I do every semester.
 - Make a Google Form or print on paper a survey about your students' experiences.
 - Compile their responses and talk to your students about the results.
 - Respond to them fairly and LISTEN to what they are saying (within reason).
 - When? After the first exam or assessment. Early enough to make changes.
- **Know Your Students**
 - Make every effort to know students' names and something about their lives.
 - Building camaraderie with students will help them to trust you and see you as invested in them.
- **Accommodations**
 - Anything you do in the classroom must be accessible for all students.
 - Be aware and make changes for students related to sightedness, hearing, physical movement, etc.
 - Never assume students' background – invisible (dis)abilities are right in front of you.
- **Grading**
 - If you can, type your written feedback for student assessments (this helps keep track of what you communicated to the student and it is FASTER).
 - It's okay to write on an assignment "Please see me to discuss" to save time.
- **Your Office/Work Space**
 - Keep tissues on hand – I mean it.
 - Make it a place you want to and can work.
 - Have a box of snacks stashed away.