

TA TALK



VOLUME 7, ISSUE 3
FEBRUARY 2011

Exclusive Excerpt

Lecturing: The Non-Definitive Guide for TAs

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From the Editor's Desk: Let's TALK

Welcome to a new issue of TA Talk, the ezine for Carleton's Teaching Assistants. The goal of this abbreviated, monthly ezine is to provide you with a lot of information in a little space, so that you're informed, aware, intrigued and interested in what's happening with your TAs at Carleton. We wanted to bring you timely information in an easier to read format, and we thought a new look would be a nice compliment to that.

In this issue, we wanted to set the record straight and get you excited about a couple of different initiatives. **The main feature is a Q&A** of all the big questions that the EDC and the TA Mentors get asked on a regular basis. These 11 questions are the most common, but we have a whole host of others on the EDC website, which holds a bounty of information (be sure to look it over if you haven't already).

Other articles of interest include **training options for experienced TAs**. Experienced TAs have so much experience, we wanted to ensure that there was an opportunity to share your knowledge, so we came up with a list of alternatives to attending traditional workshops.

One such example is our **exclusive excerpt** of an essay by experienced TA, Derek Caners, on his experiences preparing and delivering a TA workshop in the History department. And

speaking of good use, the EDC welcomed two new instructional designers in the fall and immediately set them to work on creating **Canada's first online TA training workshops**. These interactive, complete-at-your-own-pace workshops (one for discussion groups and one on time management) are a good tool for TAs who have trouble committing to an in-person workshop and should yield some great reflective pieces.

Reflection is a key part of our **EDC Teaching Certificate**, which underwent its own facelift in the Fall. We wanted to highlight some of these changes to ensure everyone pursuing the Certificate is addressing all the requirements. And finally, we wanted to advertise a rare **career opportunity** to join the esteemed ranks of TA Mentors this coming Fall. As we bid adieu to our outstanding crew, we're looking for new TAs to take their place and lead the program into its fifth year.

So flip the page and explore what's happening in February for TAs and be sure to let us know what you think of the new look!

Joe Lipsett
Educational Developer - EDC
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Clearing the Slate: Answering Your Burning TA Questions

Both the EDC and the TA Mentors have encountered a number of questions about TA responsibilities throughout the fall term. In an effort to better communicate key information, here is a sample of some of the common questions we get asked:

Q1. Who or what is the EDC?

A. The EDC is the Educational Development Centre, the teaching and learning centre that supports all of Carleton's faculty, contract instructors and TAs.

Q2. Who are the TA Mentors?

A. The Mentorship Program is a group of experienced TAs that run departmentally specific training sessions, in addition to mentoring and developing the teaching community in participating departments.

Q3. What is the difference between the EDC and the TA Mentors?

A. There isn't one! The EDC supervises the Mentorship Program and works with the Graduate Supervisors in those departments. This provides full support to TAs and doubles their training opportunities.

Q4. What about the different workshops?

A. The EDC workshops are open to all TAs, though they are primarily oriented towards those departments that do not have Mentors. If you are in Mentor supported departments, you should make an effort to attend these departmentally specific sessions unless you have a conflict or if an EDC subject is particularly appealing.

Q5. Please explain the 5 hrs of training?

A. All TAs who are assigned 65 hrs or more are expected to complete 5 hours of training throughout the school year, per their collective agreement. This includes new TAs, continuing TAs, undergraduate TAs, etc. If you want more information about this requirement, please contact the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Affairs or your CUPE 4600 rep.

Q6. What sessions should I take?

A. You are encouraged to view their training as an opportunity to develop and hone the skills necessary to do your job. With this in mind, you should attend workshops that address the duties you are required to do (ie: grading, running labs or discussions). Special topics and more general topics are also introduced to help round out your training experience.

Q7. What is this about new requirements to the EDC Certificate?

A. The requirements for the Certificate in Teaching Assistant

Skills changed Fall 2010. Participants must now attend 10 sessions, write response papers for two of those workshops (within two weeks), and submit an article to this magazine or to the EDC blog. Additional details are available on the EDC website.

Q8. I'm confused about the distinction between the 5 hours and the Certificate stuff. Explain?

A. All TAs working more than 65 hrs must complete their training requirements. Individuals who elect to pursue the EDC Certificate in Teaching Assistant Skills can count many of those training sessions towards their Certificate, which is measured in the number of workshops (NOT hours). The only sessions that don't count for the Certificate are professional development and orientation sessions.

*Please note that some departments do not recognize training credit for professional development sessions.

Q9. What's the deal with new training system in Carleton Central?

A. This project has been in the works for years, and finally provides TAs a one-stop shopping experience for all things training. Here you'll find workshops, as well as a record of your previously attended sessions (available as an official transcript). It is still a work in progress, and unfortunately will not capture training before Fall 2010, but moving forward, this new system will be a great asset to all TAs.

Q10. How come my training hours aren't in the new system?

A. As explained above, not all training from previous years will be captured. Other sessions, such as those from Fall 2010, are being manually input and may require some additional time. For sessions from the Winter term, please allow up to a week for your attendance to be recognized. Each unit is also responsible for inputting their attendance records, so, for example, EDC is not responsible for inputting the Graduate Orientation.

Q11. How is my progress on the EDC Certificate being tracked in Carleton Central?

A. Unfortunately this is an add-on to the new system that is not currently available. If you began the Certificate this year, you can count your attended sessions in your transcript (so long as you don't include professional development or orientations). If you began earlier than Fall 2010, you can contact the EDC to clarify your sessions if need be. It is recommended that you track your Certificate progress to ensure you know how many requirements remain to be completed.

For all your TA questions, be sure to visit the [TA FAQs page](#) on the EDC website.



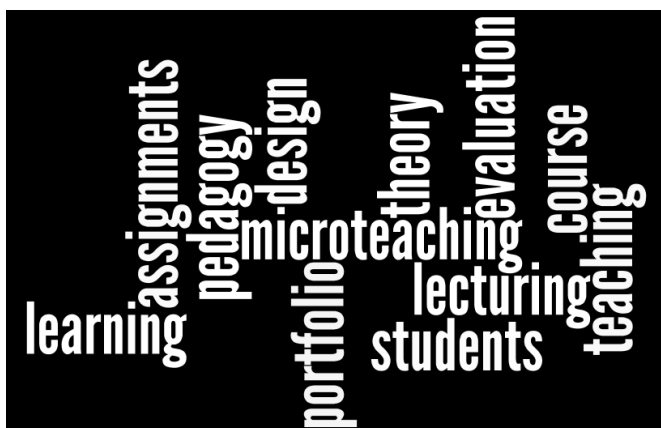
“I CAN’T BELIEVE I DIDN’T KNOW” Training Options for Experienced TAs

After a few terms acting as a TA, it can be challenging to find new and unique training experiences. The best approach, however, is to look for an outlet to share your experiences with your fellow TAs, either in your department or with the rest of the university. You are a wealth of information, so why not put that to use? Here are a few ways to contribute to improving the culture of teaching at Carleton:

1. Provide the voice of experience in a workshop (as a panelist or collaborator)
2. Create and run your own workshop (3 hours of prep; 1-2 hour workshop).
3. Observe a fellow TA in their teaching environment (discussion group, tutorial or lab) and offer feedback on their teaching, including their strengths and areas for improvement.
4. Speak with the graduate supervisor or chair of your department to investigate other work that could be beneficial. Some individuals have developed or updated a departmental handbook; or provided mentoring for new TAs (This option should still pertain to your experience as a TA)
5. Contribute to the EDC Blog or this e-zine –up to 2 hours . (Please note that this cannot count for duplicate credit for individuals pursuing the EDC Certificate.)

Contact the EDC or your TA Mentor for options 2 or 3 (option 5 is only available with the EDC).

Coming Attractions



The next generation of
Certificate is coming...
Do you have what it takes?
Find Out **May 2011**
More information coming soon

Want the BEST Job on Campus?

The Mentorship Program is looking for a few good TAs in 2011-2012

The best kept secret on campus is now accepting applications!

The TA Mentorship program offers discipline-specific support in teaching and learning in select participating departments. These experienced TAs (in either the second year of their MA or PhD or higher) act as mentors, as well as workshop facilitators in order to promote the values of good teaching, professionalism and professional development in their departments. The program, moving into its fifth year, replaces a traditional TAship (for most departments), thereby allowing individuals to develop and deliver workshops, meet with fellow TAs and the graduate supervisor, participate in training and professional development workshops with other Mentors, in addition to other tasks such as peer observations and microteaching sessions.

This is the ideal opportunity for individuals considering a career in teaching to take their skills to the next level and make an impact in your department. The position affords freedom and flexibility, in addition to foregrounding the practice of teaching and learning. Applications are open in Carleton Central from Jan 31st - March 1st.

Want to find out more? Attend an information sessions on one of the following days:

- February 8 @ 5:15 pm (422 DT)
- February 10 @ 12 pm (422 DT)

To confirm your attendance at one of these sessions, visit the TA Mentorship page on the EDC website.

Can't make the information sessions? Contact your TA Mentor or the EDC (edc@carleton.ca) for additional information.

Applications are
open Jan 31st -
March 1st, 2011
in Carleton
Central

Let Your Fingers Do The Learning

Last fall, the EDC hired two new instructional designers and tasked them with creating two online training workshops for TAs. Fast forward to Winter 2011 and their hard work is now available to all Carleton TAs.

These online workshops are exciting because they allow TAs with challenging schedules to complete a portion of their training on their own time. Each workshop is valued at 1.5 hrs or 1 workshop credit, and can be completed all at once or in portions. There are even logical points at which to take a break since each workshop is divided into separate learning "modules" that focus on a particular component of the larger topic.

The topics, *Discussion Groups* and *Time Management*, were chosen because they are applicable to a large number of TAs. Individuals whose duties include running discussion or tutorial groups will learn about ground rules, facilitating discussion and engaging learners. Individuals who complete the time management workshop will learn about managing their time, issues surrounding organization, procrastination and delegation, as well as maintaining a well balanced life.

Both sessions incorporate interactive elements that help to facilitate the transmission of information. Since these are prototypes, we strongly value your feedback, so be sure to let us know what you think once you've completed the session.

These workshops do come with certain conditions, however: in order to demonstrate completion, individuals must complete a reflexive paper at the end of the session and submit it to the EDC (individuals completing the workshop for their Certificate should expect to submit some additional documentation). Additionally, duplicate credit will not be given if an in-person session on the same topic has already been attended, and individuals who are not conducting a discussion or tutorial should not complete that workshop.

Both workshops are available in WebCT now.

Please note: The *Discussion Groups* workshop is time sensitive and should be completed for Feb 4. *Time Management* will remain open for the duration of the Winter term.



Select TA Training can now be
done online in WebCT

What's a Response Paper?!

The EDC Certificate Changes You Need To Know

In an effort to create a more reflexive, learning oriented Certificate, the EDC made a few changes to our Certificate in Teaching Assistant Skills last Fall. The only issue? Many of you don't know about them!

Many of the requirements for the Certificate remain the same as ever. The first big change is that we're asking all individuals, **including experienced TAs**, to write a letter of intent so that we know how many individuals are pursuing the Certificate. This will be used to identify how many individuals are currently pursuing the Certificate and keep track of your progress in order to ensure you reach completion.

The principle focus of the Certificate in Teaching Assistant Skills remains on attending training sessions in a variety of topics, but in an effort to address the need for particular kinds of sessions that may require additional time in order to fully

flesh out the content, **workshop attendance is now being captured in "units", as opposed to hours**. Participants need to attend 10 sessions in total, with particular emphasis on TA

Mentor sessions if you are in a Mentor supported department (after all, these sessions are being developed specifically for you!)

The other significant change is **the introduction of reflexive workshop response papers**. These one page documents will help you identify the workshop content that is most applicable to your teaching and should be a great addition to your teaching portfolio.

The final element remains the same: the submission of an article to this ezine (or to the EDC blog), although **we now require academic references or sources** to support your work.

For a more fleshed out version of these requirements, please visit the [EDC website](#).



Lecturing: The Non-Definitive Guide for TAs

EXCLUSIVE EXCERPT

The following is an exclusive excerpt of an essay by experienced TA Derek Caners (History) about his experiences developing a TA Workshop on lecturing..

In early November, I had the opportunity to conduct a workshop for some of my fellow Teaching Assistants (TA) in the history department. The focus of the workshop was to guide TAs towards preparing to give their first lecture to a class of undergraduate students. I based my lesson plan almost exclusively from experience gained while lecturing to a third year history class of about sixty students during the Winter 2010 term. Admittedly my familiarity of the topic was limited, but based on what was by all accounts a successful first foray into teaching, I believed that I had some relevant experience-based knowledge to share with my history colleagues.

As a perpetual student, I have witnessed a number of different approaches to teaching, and one of the things that I have recognized is that each person needs to adopt a style of teaching that reflects who they are as an individual. Partly for this reason, and partly due to a lack of theoretical knowledge, I opted to name my workshop, "Lecturing: The Non-Definitive Guide for TAs." The rather ambiguous nature of the title was specifically chosen to highlight that my approach to preparing to lecture was meant to be a guide and not a strict set of steps.

I divided the workshop into two parts. During the first part, I lectured about what I felt was the most important things that TAs should prepare for before lecturing. I used a Powerpoint presentation, complete with a number of stimulating images with

easy to read bullet points that highlighted the main points of my lecture. In the second half of the workshop, I had the group divide into teams of two or three people in order to apply my lecture to a specific case study. In this way, I hoped to provide those in attendance with the simulated experience of preparing to lecture by immediately granting them the opportunity to apply the knowledge they had just learned. As T. Wedig noted in a recent article, "[s]imulations offer students the opportunity to manipulate content knowledge in an active context that engages a variety of learning styles and offers the opportunity to experience the subject matter in a dynamic way."

The content of my presentation consisted of a single theme and was broken into four parts. Seeking a 'state of preparedness,' I identified four major aspects of any lecture for which TAs should prepare. The first two are fairly obvious: 1) it is imperative that lecturers know the classroom (location, technology, etc.) and 2) a presenter must know their audience (first year undergrad, grad students, etc.) and prepare a lesson accordingly. The following two aspects are more complicated and, therefore, require more forethought...

To read the rest of Derek's thoughts on preparing to lecture, please visit the [EDC Blog](#).