

The Vital Role of Graduate Student Instructors

Congratulations on your appointment as a Graduate Student Instructor! GSIs play an extremely important role in teaching at the University of Michigan. You are generally in charge of teaching small introductory classes, facilitating discussions in small sections connected to large lecture courses, running laboratory sections, teaching lessons in the studio, and holding office hours where one-to-one teaching occurs. Your responsibilities frequently include grading and giving feedback on students' written work as well.

Because of the teaching responsibilities that are given to graduate students, you are in a good position to:

- Provide the personal touch, the individual feedback, and the encouragement students need.
- Answer questions and help clarify course material.
- Help students develop higher-level thinking skills through active involvement, guidance, and feedback.
- Provide a communication channel in large lecture courses between the instructor and the students in order to help integrate the course.
- Create a classroom climate in which students of diverse backgrounds can learn and succeed.

A considerable body of research indicates that active engagement with course materials and peers promotes long-term and deep learning. For this reason, it is important to get students actively involved in your classes. You can create the climate needed for students to feel safe enough to ask questions and participate in discussions. We challenge you as a GSI to learn how to facilitate good discussions and to ask questions that require much more than learning facts. We encourage you to build a repertoire of good teaching techniques that will promote active learning, not only through discussion but also through such techniques as group work, simulations, role-playing, and projects. Student participation leads to higher-level thinking and problem-solving skills.

This Guidebook is designed to help you during your first teaching experiences and beyond. It contains ideas that will let you accomplish your objectives with greater ease. We hope it piques your interest so that you will continue to seek out information to guide you along the path to becoming a good teacher.

To help you along that path, the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT) provides workshops for GSIs during the Fall and Winter terms, as well as individual, confidential consultations on any teaching-related topic you would like to discuss. We also have an extensive guide to teaching improvement available at the CRLT website. And we encourage you to fulfill the requirements for the Graduate Teacher Certificate which will improve your teaching and prepare you for the job market. We also offer a series of preparing future faculty programs to assist graduate students. CRLT's role is to help you succeed, so please give us a call!



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