

Teachers at the Helm or Teachers Adrift? Results of the APA Survey on T.A. Teacher Training

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FOLLOWING THE 2000 CAMWS panel in Knoxville, Kenneth Kitchell, George Houston, and I drew up a simple survey to serve as a basis for assessing the level of pedagogical training given to Classics graduate students in America. This survey was sent to all the chairs of graduate departments listed in the *APA Guide to Graduate Studies in Classics*. I would like to begin by thanking the chairs who returned the survey. Of the 68 institutions that received surveys, 49 replied, for a 72% response rate.

A copy of the survey questions and a tabulation of the responses appear as an Appendix at the end of this paper.¹ From the responses, we see that 73% of the responding departments use graduate students to teach elementary Latin and 92% of those departments offer some kind of formal training for their T.A.'s.

What form does this training take? In-class observations are used in 86% of the departments; for those that only offer the Ph.D. this is the only method used. Some sort of faculty mentoring is reported by 72% of the departments. A number of respondents replied that they do not offer formal training as such, but make faculty mentors available to help the T.A.'s if they have questions. I note that 89% of the M.A./M.A.T. and M.A./M.A.T./Ph.D. programs use this format, while only 71% of the M.A./Ph.D. programs use it.

The third most common method of training involves some kind of pre-semester training and was reported by 47% of the departments that offer formal training. The pre-semester training ranges from a few hours on one day to two weeks in two cases, although one program has revamped its training because two weeks became too costly. The average time for pre-semester training seems to be two to three days.

¹ Note that all the percentages are for reporting institutions. The numbers would be different if compared to the number of institutions using graduate students as teachers of record.

Slightly more than one in three programs, 36%, coordinate their training with a center for teaching on campus. Exactly one third of M.A./M.A.T. and M.A./M.A.T./Ph.D. programs use it, but 50% of the M.A./Ph.D. programs use it. A semester-long course is offered at 28% of the departments and a year-long course at 11%.

The responses therefore are not terribly encouraging. While most departments are aware that their T.A.'s require some training, the bulk of this training consists of Classics faculty simply observing T.A.'s in the classroom and employing a kind of mentoring that seems to be largely informal. Fewer than half of our programs offer training before the T.A. takes full charge of a classroom, and what training there is is of short duration. Only one in three programs avails itself of the expertise of campus-based experts in teaching to help train their T.A.'s.

Although this initial survey did not ask what material was covered in T.A. training, it is clear that a program of a few hours can hardly move beyond simple syllabus writing, testing, and noting the institutional requirements for class management. Such a program can offer little practical guidance about teaching or pedagogical methods. One- to two-week programs can better prepare the T.A. for what he or she will meet in the classroom, but the costs of the program may be too high to bear and such programs are therefore rare.

On the fourth question, only 17% of departments using T.A.'s coordinate their T.A. training program with a School of Education. One should note that only schools offering an M.A.T. coordinate their programs and 33% of such schools do so.

Responding to the fifth question, departments reported that their training programs have been in place for widely varying periods of time. I should note that the two 30-year-old programs are M.A.T. programs. There are several that are fairly new.

Finally, most departments report that they are satisfied with their T.A. training program. Still, a number of chairs indicated that they thought more could be done in their program if they had more resources, including money, faculty time, faculty expertise, and the like. The following papers address these issues in greater depth.

On a final note, recent advertisements through the APA Placement service were surveyed and it was noted that 84% of job ads require evidence of teaching. This too will be dealt with below.

APPENDIX: T.A. TEACHER TRAINING SURVEY 2001 RESULTS

1. Please indicate which graduate degree(s) your department offers:

MA	14
MA/MAT	4
MA/PhD	18
MA/MAT/PhD	10
PhD	3
Total = 49 institutions	

2. Do you use Teaching Assistants as the "Teacher of Record" for elementary Latin courses?

	MA/ MAT	%	MA/ PhD	%	MA/MAT/ PhD	%	PhD	%	Total	%
yes	9	50%	17	94%	9	90%	1	33%	36	73%
no	9	50%	1	6%	1	10%	2	67%	13	27%

3. Do you offer formal training for Latin T.A.'s?

	MA/ MAT	%	MA/ PhD	%	MA/MAT/ PhD	%	PhD	%	Total	%
yes	9	50%	14	78%	9	90%	1	33%	33	67%
no	0	0%	3	17%	0	0%	0	0%	3	6%

If "yes," please mark all that apply

	MA/ MAT	%	MA/ PhD	%	MA/MAT/ PhD	%	PhD	%	Total	%
pre-sem	6	33%	5	28%	6	60%	0	0%	17	35%
yr course	2	11%	1	6%	1	10%	0	0%	4	8%
sem course	5	28%	2	11%	3	30%	0	0%	10	20%
in-class	9	50%	13	72%	8	80%	1	33%	31	63%
T-center	3	17%	7	39%	3	30%	0	0%	13	27%
mentoring	8	44%	10	56%	8	80%	0	0%	26	53%

(continued)

4. Is your training program coordinated with a school of education?

	MA/ MAT	%	MA/ PhD	%	MA/MAT/ PhD	%	PhD	%	Total	%
yes	4	22%	0	0%	2	20%	0	0%	6	12%
no	5	28%	13	72%	7	70%	1	33%	26	53%

5. How long has your T.A. training program been in place?

MA/MAT		3yr=1		10yr=5	14yr=1		30yr=2
MA/PhD	recent=1	3yr=1	5yr=1	10yr=2	several = 3	20yr=1	25yr=1
MA/MAT/ PhD	1yr=1		5yr=3	7yr=1	8yr=1	several=2	
PhD		2yr=1					

6. How satisfied are you with your T.A. training program?

	MA/ MAT	%	MA/ PhD	%	MA/MAT/ PhD	%	PhD	%	Total	%
very satis	5	28%	2	11%	3	30%	0	0%	10	20%
satisfied	7	39%	8	44%	6	60%	1	33%	22	45%
not satis	0	0%	2	11%	0	0%	0	0%	2	4%