

Teaching Fellow Handbook

Department of Comparative Literature

Harvard University

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1. Welcome

Welcome to the Comparative Literature Teaching Fellow Handbook. This handbook provides information, tips, and strategies on successful teaching practices for graduate students in the department—especially those at the beginning of their teaching careers.

This handbook is meant to complement the *Teaching Fellows Handbook* published annually by GSAS and the publications of the Bok Center for Teaching and Learning. Be sure to consult these materials, along with the Harvard edition of the popular MIT publication, *The Torch or the Firehose: A Guide for Section Teaching*, available free of charge at the Bok Center (Science Center 318, bokcenter.harvard.edu).

Resources: Bok Center and Departmental Teaching Fellow

The Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning – located in Science Center 318 (bokcenter@fas.harvard.edu; 617-495-4869; bokcenter.harvard.edu) works to advance the quality of undergraduate education at Harvard by providing Harvard's teachers with resources, programs, and support that promote excellence in teaching. Serving faculty, graduate students, and the General Education Program, the Bok Center offers video consultations and works with teachers of all levels on classroom dynamics, course design, creative assignments, and the uses of multi-media.

The Bok Center also sponsors teaching awards for graduate students, including the Harvard University Certificate of Distinction in Teaching and the Derek C. Bok Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Teaching of Undergraduates.

In recent years the Department of Comparative Literature has had a Departmental Teaching Fellow (DTF). The Bok Center's Departmental Teaching Fellows Program appoints experienced and creative TFs to focus on enhancing teaching in their disciplines by consulting with their peers within departments, advising individual instructors, and creating training programs, workshops, seminars, and other teaching-related projects. For the 2016-2017 academic year the Comparative Literature DTF is Yun Ni – yni@fas.harvard.edu.

The DTF is a resource for all TFs in the department; he/she receives special training from and works closely with the Bok Center. The DTF is available to provide support and advice to beginning TFs, as well as to graduate students who already have teaching experience, in order to develop strategies for handling new or unusual situations. When appropriate, the DTF will direct TFs in the department to the relevant resources in the Bok Center. Students are encouraged to take advantage of the many resources available at the Bok Center, but they also should consult the DTF and take advantage of the DTF's mini teaching retreats, micro-teaching sessions, discipline-specific and interdisciplinary workshops, and consultations on videotaping and midterm feedback.

2. Getting Started

The process of becoming a teacher begins long before the first day of class. Imagining yourself as a teacher, reflecting on how your particular areas of expertise and curricular training can contribute to undergraduate education, deciding what you might like to teach and for whom you would like to teach, and establishing relationships with professors and staff who are in a position to give you those teaching appointments: these are all things you will want to have done long before September of your G3 year.

One ought to begin thinking about teaching at the beginning of graduate school. Consider:

- Collecting syllabi you admire that can serve as models for courses you might want to teach in the future.
- Finding out what courses professors in your field and professors with whom you enjoy working are teaching. Ask them early on to keep you in mind as a Teaching Fellow, especially for their larger lecture courses and undergraduate seminars.

Being proactive about acquiring teaching appointments—and working to line up teaching at least by the beginning of the semester before you will actually be teaching—is critical to making sure you have the opportunity to teach courses that interest you and that will contribute to your academic profile.

3. Deciding What to Teach

Think about the types of departments to which you'll most likely be applying for faculty positions and plan your teaching accordingly. For example, if you think that you will be applying to French and Italian departments, make sure that you teach some French and/or Italian literature courses as well as at least one semester of each of your target languages. Remember that most faculty positions are in national literature/area studies departments or large language/literature departments that require you to focus primarily on a single language/literature.

Variety is key. By the time you graduate, you should have taught:

- Intro/Gen Ed courses (for non-concentrators);
- Specialized courses geared to students in the field (for concentrators);
- At least one language course (unless you are certain that you will be applying for jobs only in English or Comparative Literature; or unless the departments in which you work do not hire graduate student preceptors).
- You should consider applying to be a tutor in the department's undergraduate concentration; tutors conduct one-on-one directed reading courses with students writing junior essays and senior theses. It is helpful to your development as a teacher, not to mention very enjoyable, to teach a course that you design yourself. For more information on the department's tutorial program, see the *Guide for Graduate Students*. You should also contact Dr. Sandra Naddaff, Director of Undergraduate Studies and of the department's Tutorial Board (snaddaff@fas.harvard.edu). Applications are generally available in February or March for the following year.
- Although Harvard does not permit graduate students to teach their own courses (with the exception of tutorials), there are opportunities to teach your own courses at many institutions in the Boston area even while you are pursuing your Ph.D. at Harvard. You should let your advisers know that you would like to teach a course at a local institution, most often serving as a replacement for a professor on sabbatical. Many replacement positions are not advertised, but instead are arranged through personal contacts, so it is vital that you remind your advisers of your interest. Tufts also regularly has opportunities for graduate students, especially modernists; see the Tufts Experimental College website for details.

Keep these factors in mind as you build your **TEACHING PORTFOLIO** (see the **Teaching Portfolio section below**), and ideally make sure you have experience with the following:

- teaching both concentrators and non-concentrators
- teaching both General Education courses and departmental courses
- teaching both language courses and literature/culture courses

- teaching both literature in translation and literature in the source language

When applying for jobs, it is very important to demonstrate that you have broad experience teaching undergraduates in a variety of contexts as well as teaching courses specific to your field, including language courses.

Keep in mind that when you go on the academic job market, many institutions will ask you what makes you prepared to teach their students. If you have taught only Harvard undergraduates, schools might question your ability to teach their students. Remember that there is no typical “Harvard Student.” In Gen. Ed. and language classes, you will have the opportunity to teach students who consider themselves to be far from exceptional in the humanities.

4. Finding Teaching at Harvard College

As a graduate student in Comparative Literature you are qualified for a range of teaching positions. At the same time, it can sometimes be difficult to find teaching, since Comparative Literature itself offers only a limited number of lecture courses. You can teach for General Education, in the department's undergraduate program, and in those national/area/subject departments in which you have taken courses and/or will do your primary research. Take advantage of this flexibility to develop a diverse teaching portfolio.

Over the last few years, first-time Comparative Literature TFs have found most of their appointments in the following areas:

1. Gen. Ed. courses in the fields, areas, or periods of the TF's coursework or research
2. language courses (in any department) for which the TF is a native or near-native speaker of the target language or language courses for which there is a growing need for TFs, such as Arabic
3. departmental courses and tutorials

After a few semesters of teaching, you will have a better chance of securing teaching assignments for departmental courses or language courses closer to your primary research field, especially if you continue to maintain good relationships with faculty and support staff in those departments and continue to express your interest in teaching for them.

Don't be disappointed if, in your first or second semester of teaching, you are assigned to TF, for instance, a large Gen. Ed. course on the modern European novel when your interest is in modern novels of the Global South. As long as you are able to demonstrate clear expertise in your research areas (courses, qualifying exams, conference papers, articles, etc.), having a range of experience beyond your particular research focus will not only make you a more attractive job applicant, it will make you a better scholar.

5. Timeline for Finding Teaching

Many departments, including Comparative Literature, now have a streamlined application system for graduate students applying to TF departmental courses and Gen Ed courses taught by department faculty members, as well as to serve in department tutorial positions. You need to check with the administrator of each department in which you are interested in teaching to find out when the list of next year's courses/tutorial opportunities will become available, how to apply, and what the application deadline will be. (Most application deadlines are in February and March).

As of summer 2016, departmental contacts are as follows:

- AAAS – Kathleen Cloutier, cloutier@fas
- Comparative Literature – Melissa Carden, carden@fas
- English – Gwen Urdang-Brown, urdangbr@fas
- RLL – Katherine Killough, killough@fas
- Slavic – Suzie Desormeau, desormeau@fas

If you are applying to teach courses in, for instance, the English Department, but the professors of these courses don't know you, **DON'T just rely on the generic online application.** Contact the professors before the application is due, and meet and talk with them.

This is relatively easy if you've already taken classes with these professors and they know you, your interests, and your work. If faculty members don't know you, bring a CV with you when you visit and explain why you are well-qualified to teach the particular course. If you are a first-time TF, include a "relevant courses taken" section on your CV.

A few professors are very selective about the people who TF their courses, and they will often handpick TFs from graduate students with whom they have worked. These professors might not be open to having you as a TF. Furthermore, a faculty member's first commitment is generally to graduate students in his/her own department, so even if a faculty member wants to hire you, s/he might not be able to because of departmental obligations. **Don't take it personally.**

Please be advised that in some departments faculty members do not have the final word on whom they hire, so it is vital that, in addition to speaking with faculty members, you also apply for TF positions through the formal application process.

6. Dollars, Cents, and “Fifths”: A Note on the Harvard Pay Structure

The Teaching Fellow salary is based on the salary-model of a full-time position. Each course you teach is imagined to be a percentage of a year's full-time teaching. Teaching a discussion section for a lecture course for one semester is “**one fifth**” of that hypothetical full-time position.

Teaching a language course which meets daily for one semester is usually “**two fifths**” of that full-time position. Tutoring one student in the literature concentration is about half a fifth, thus “**one tenth**,” although Comparative Literature tutors are usually hired to work with more than one student.

Your salary as a first- and second-year teacher (during your G3 and G4 years) corresponds to somewhere between four- and five-fifths of the stipend you received during your G1 and G2 years. If you teach four-fifths over the course of the year, you will make slightly less than you did in your first two years of graduate school. If you teach five fifths, you will make slightly more. **It is not advisable to teach more than four or five fifths per year.** The graduate school has been supplementing, or “topping off,” the TF salaries of G3s and G4s so that your stipend remains the same for your first four years of graduate school.

The semester after you have passed your generals you are hired at a higher pay-grade; there is a small increase in your monthly paycheck.

As a Teaching Fellow, you are paid on a ten-month schedule, with five months per semester. The first paycheck of the year is dated August 15; the last, May 15.

Please note that if your TF appointment does not go through until the second or third week of classes, it is very likely that your first TF paycheck will not come until mid-October. Students are advised to plan accordingly.

7. What to Do Before Your First Day

Familiarize yourself with CUE evaluations before you start teaching and take a look at them with the eyes of a TF, even if you have filled them out before as a student. This is different; you need to be proactive about them now because they reflect some of what Harvard deems quality teaching. Otherwise, you might teach an entire semester without knowing, for instance, that you were supposed to present new material, not just discuss weekly readings.

Read online CUE results for the specific course you are teaching. You will see what students think of the course, what they appreciate about it, where the challenges lie, how they feel about the requirements (too much reading, too easy, graded too harshly, etc.). Check out previous final exams (in Lamont, and via Course Reserves online) and see what skills, methods, materials, and concepts students are asked to master upon completing the course. Knowing what they expect will help you better plan your individual sections as well as understand how each section fits into the overall arc of the course.

Ask the professor what s/he believes to be the purpose of section: to present new material that complements the lectures? Reinforce basic facts/concepts presented in lectures? Introduce methods of analysis? Once you understand the expectations, you will be in a better position to make your classes engaging and instructive.

Familiarize yourself with the student Facebook on the course website. What are the backgrounds of your students? Are they mostly freshmen? Or seniors who will be working on theses? What are their concentrations? Who is taking the class as an elective? You might also want to begin to learn their names in advance; once class begins, you will be expected to know and use these names frequently.

Be sure to attend the Bok Center's Fall or Winter Teaching Conferences, held immediately before the semesters you expect to have teaching appointments. The structure of these conferences has been updated recently for greater pedagogical efficiency. With numerous workshops from which to choose, both beginning and seasoned TFs and tutors will always find resources, guidance, and inspiration to improve their teaching practices. Please note, the Department of Comparative Literature requires all first-time section TFs to attend the Bok Center Teaching Conference. The department's Tutorial Board and many language programs also have required teaching orientations. Be sure to plan ahead.

8. Special Considerations for International TFs

If you are an international TF, teaching in a Harvard classroom or working with Harvard undergraduates can differ significantly from your experiences elsewhere. When you start teaching as a G3, you will likely have taken part in seminars taught by professors, but probably not in sections taught by graduate students; this possibly unfamiliar format can present unique challenges and opportunities. Know that you are not alone in this. Harvard offers a number of resources to assist you.

You might not be able to speak English or the target language without an accent or carry yourself in a way that makes you blend in. You do not have to. Being aware of the cultural and academic expectations in the Harvard classroom will make you feel confident and successful as an international TF.

The Bok Center for Teaching and Learning has a wide array of resources and programs dedicated to helping international TFs make the most of their experience. Do not hesitate to make use of them.

Be sure to obtain a free copy of the Bok Center's publication on *Teaching American Students* and watch its helpful videotapes, especially *Teaching in America*.

Read *The Torch or the Firehose*, the illuminating and lighthearted publication originally produced by MIT.

Contact Virginia Maurer, Associate Director at the Bok Center, who provides consultations and workshops especially geared to international TFs; she is very helpful. All consultations are confidential (vmaurer@fas.harvard.edu).

Attend Bok Seminars designed for international TFs in Spring 2017: 1Teaching Practice for International Teachers and Scholars, who provides consultations and workshops espe(<http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/seminars>).

If you are still uncertain of what is expected of you in the classroom, consider asking a fellow TF if you can sit in on one or two of his/her sections. Doing so not only will make you aware of good practices and often unspoken expectations at work in classroom discussions, but also will give you needed confidence.

Finally, know that the teaching quota for international TFs in GSAS currently differs from the quota for American graduate students, which means that there are additional restrictions you need to be aware of. Your teaching appointments cannot currently exceed 2.7 sections per semester, which in practice means no more than two sections—the equivalent of two-fifths—plus half a section's worth of tutorials (the latter being the equivalent of one tenth). Exceptions can be made where appropriate, so be sure to consult the Harvard International Office and the GSAS Teaching Fellow Office, as well as the DGS.

9. Planning and Preparing

This is obvious, but it's worth repeating: **being a teacher isn't like being a student.** When you're a student, you come into section/lecture/seminar, sit back, and someone else makes everything happen. When you're a teacher, *you* are the one making everything happen. To be an engaging teacher, you have to leave the more passive student mode and enter an active, in-charge "teacherly" mode. For some people, this can be very easy; for others, it can be a major transition.

One thing that can make the transition to teaching particularly stressful is failing to prepare for section until the last moment and/or not doing all the reading you have assigned your students. These are the sorts of things we may have done as students, but it's essential to avoid them as teachers. Feeling underprepared makes it harder to maintain an air of confidence as you sit or stand in front of your students.

Prepare well: do all the reading ahead of time. If there's secondary reading – theory or criticism – take notes on it to make sure you understand the material well and can present it to the students. If there's a passage that has to be read closely, make sure you "crack" it thoroughly.

Make a solid lesson plan. Especially at first, it's better to over-prepare than under-prepare. This means preparing more material or activities than you'll have time to get through in 53 minutes. You can't always predict how long an activity or discussion will take: some groups will spend a long time on a discussion that others get through very quickly. If you have extra material, incorporate that into the following week's lesson plan.

If you get a choice as to the day and time of your section or sections, take advantage of this and think strategically about when you prefer to teach. If you know you write best first thing in the morning and are organized enough to prepare your lesson plan the night before, teach in the afternoon. If you prefer working at the library in the afternoon, try to teach in the morning.

It is unwise to teach section directly after the course lecture for the following reasons:

1. The professor might say something in lecture that forces you to modify your section plan; you might need a half hour (or more) to incorporate new material into your plan.
2. It's always good to leave yourself extra time to do tasks such as making photocopies or printing out your lesson plan.

You and the students will both have to hurry over to the seminar room directly from the lecture hall. The section room may be located far from the lecture hall, in which case your students may be late, and you yourself won't have time for a break.

Leave yourself ample time to prepare and grade papers so that you aren't forced to take major breaks from your dissertation work in any given week. Get adequate sleep, eat well, exercise, etc. Don't skip breakfast if you're teaching in the morning.

And don't forget: before your first section, visit the room(s) where you have been assigned to teach. This way, you won't have to spend time looking for the room when you do have to teach, and you'll already have an idea of the room's configuration (how many students it fits, where the blackboard is, what A/V equipment is available, etc.).

Think about how you would like to arrange the chairs; if chairs are moveable, consider putting them in a circle before class. Think about where you would like to sit; if there is a long seminar table, consider sitting in the middle rather than at the head of the table.

If at any point you decide you don't like the space that has been assigned to you for your class(es), contact the Classrooms Office and request a new room. And if you need special A/V equipment delivered to your room on a particular day, you can request that through the Classrooms Office as well.

Despite the high importance of teaching, you should also devote time each day to writing and researching; keeping up with course reading, preparing your weekly lesson plan, and responding to student work should ideally be scheduled around your regular writing and research routine.

10. First Day of Class

Although your first day will be exciting, and a little frightening, there are many things you can do to ensure that you and your students have a productive first section and that you emerge as a confident and competent teacher. By now you will have already visited the classroom, saved the tech person's phone number into your speed dial, read previous exams of the course (What kinds of questions are students likely to encounter?), checked earlier CUE evaluations (What percentage of students recommended the course? What did they (dis)like last time around? What changes have been made since then?), and started learning the names, years, and concentrations of your students from the my.harvard tool.

Take a few moments the morning of your first section to visualize how you plan to conduct yourself and what you intend to do and say during the first few minutes.

Arrive early to make sure the AV works. Even if you checked the equipment the day before, someone might have changed the settings of the DVD player. Make sure the remote control works. See to it that there is enough light, air, and seating—and make sure the set-up is comfortable and conducive to discussion. Check to see if the thermostat is adjustable; the last thing you want is a room at 80 degrees and windows that won't open.

Welcome students as they enter the room. There is no need to be overly chatty, but a few nice remarks or a pointed question showing your genuine interest can help students see you as a human being rather than as only a TF. Make them comfortable with you and each other. Invite students to move closer, if they tend to sit at the back.

Get some information. Whether you're teaching a departmental course or a Gen Ed course, it's a good idea to gauge your students' familiarity with the material and disciplinary expectations of the course as early as possible. Freshmen, especially in the fall semester, can struggle with essay writing and efficient reading. Many humanities courses have no prerequisites, which means non-concentrators can take them. In the very first class meeting, ask the students to fill out a notecard, giving their year and concentration (if they have one), explaining why they're taking the course, and telling you whether they've taken literature/language courses in the past (and if so, which ones). This will give you an idea of the level to which you'll need to pitch the class; what concepts you'll need to cover; what background knowledge and writing competence you can expect.

Set time aside for introductions. Write your name on the board. You should say a few words about yourself and your relation to (or expertise in) the subject matter. Even if you do not have much of a background in the subject or discipline (since, as a Comparative Literature student, you will often teach outside your area of expertise), or especially if you are an expert, take this as an opportunity to convey your enthusiasm about the subject. (Find something, anything to be enthusiastic about!) Have students introduce themselves (name a favorite film or book; say why they are taking the class). Add an ice-breaker, if you like. After students have all introduced

themselves, make a point of repeating all of their names and continue to use them throughout section.

Go over requirements/expectations. Distribute a section syllabus and explain course and section goals. What skills and knowledge will you expect them to master by the end of the semester? How often are they allowed to miss section without repercussions? What is the composition of the section grade? How strict are you about assigned readings? When and how can they reach you outside of class? Take this as an opportunity to convey the ways in which you are all in this learning experience together, given that both you and your students are here to engage with the material and course concepts in a meaningful and productive way.

Do actual work in the first section, even if it is only for 20 minutes. Bring something on which everyone can focus: a short passage, an object, an image, a key concept or metaphor. Think about engaging students who have different learning modalities or have backgrounds outside the discipline. Do some collaborative work or ask students to relate the text/object/etc. to what they anticipate about the course themes.

Keep an eye on section dynamics: who talks readily, who hesitates, who is silent. It will be important for you to manage those dynamics in future section meetings in order to give the group a sense of cohesion, camaraderie, and fair participation.

Wrap up. At the end, ask for questions/comments/concerns. Above all, end the class on time!

Stay around for a few minutes after section is over and chat with the students. Just as at the start of section, now is a good time to establish a rapport that shows them that you care about them as people. It also helps them feel accountable to you for their effort and performance in your class.

After the first section, contact absentees, and write a follow-up section message.

11. Sample Section Handout

THE ROME OF AUGUSTUS SPRING 2007

Section Meeting: Lamont 402, Tuesdays 7:00-8:00 pm

TF: Stephanie Frampton

Email: frampton@fas.harvard.edu

Office Hours (Barker Center 019AA): Thursday 11:00-12:00, and by appointment

BREIF DESCRIPTION

The course explores the history, literature, art, and society of Rome during the lifetime of Octavian, later called Augustus (63 B.C.-14 A.D.).

Section discussions will focus on interpreting various forms of primary evidence for the Augustan period; section work will include regular short written assignments to provide practice in analyzing historical, literary, and visual materials.

IMPORTANT DATES

Feb 22 – Quiz (in lecture)

Mar 1 – Short paper due (in lecture)

Mar 5 – “Fifth Monday” (last day to drop/add)

Mar 15 – Midterm exam

Mar 24-Apr 1 – Spring Break

May 3 – Final Lecture

May 3 – Final Paper (due in lecture)

May 5-16 – Reading period

May 18 (tentative date) – Final exam

COURSE GRADE

Quiz – 5%

Short paper, 3-5 pages – 10%

Hour-long midterm exam – 15%

Section work and participation – 20%

Term paper, 8-10 pages – 20%

Final exam – 30%

FINE PRINT

- You must attend every section. If you are planning to miss a section, you must email me before the section meeting begins. Section attendance, preparation, and participation is a significant component of this course. Your grade is based on attendance, response papers, and discussion.
- Missed work of any kind may be made up only if missed because the observance of a religious holiday, a medical situation (message from UHS required), or a *pre-approved* obligation. Missed sections cannot be made up by attending another section, but rather missed material must be covered by contacting me personally. DO NOT attend a section to which you are not assigned.
- You must provide a hard copy of ALL assignments. If you miss a section meeting, please leave your response paper in my mailbox in the front hall of Dana Palmer (open 9-5).
- The course webpage contains lecture notes and images, additional background materials for selected topics, section assignments, announcements, and other information. The web page will be updated weekly: www.courses.harvard.edu/~lac61.

12. Teaching Languages

Teaching languages is vital if you will be applying for jobs in departments other than English or Comparative Literature. Many colleges and universities require junior faculty to teach beginning language and often intermediate/advanced language courses. Having taught a language course or courses is an important credential to have when you go on the job market as a candidate from Comparative Literature.

Don't worry if you've never taught language before; you're not expected to know how. Some departments (e.g., RLL) offer a pedagogy course that graduate students take either before they start teaching language or concurrently with their first teaching appointment. In every case, there is a course head—usually an experienced language teacher from the department—who holds regular meetings with you and the other instructors, explains the rules, sets the pace at which material is presented, etc.

Teaching language can be much easier than teaching literature courses because the curriculum is highly prescribed, but the degree of freedom and structure that you get as a language instructor varies from department to department and from course head to course head.

Most language instructors will have an experience similar to the one described by Comparative Literature graduate student Svetlana Rukhelman:

When I taught second-year Russian (Slavic B), my course head was extremely specific as to what she wanted me to do; she would spend hours briefing and training me, in person and by phone, especially in preparation for my first classes, and *she* would prepare the syllabus for each week. She, I, and the other instructor took turns writing tests and quizzes.

However, there are also times when a language TF will have more freedom. For example, in second-year language courses in Classics, TFs design their own reading lists and set the pace each week.

Lesson plans for language classes can be quite lengthy and detailed, especially at the beginning of the semester. Some departments will even require you to write these out for yourself. It is a good idea to save a few of these in preparation for your job application process—they may come in handy as part of your teaching portfolio.

13. Your Teaching Persona

Body language and eye contact are important: Sit up straight or lean forward; turn to students when they're speaking; look students in the eye; show them that you are engaged.

Lighten the mood: Don't be afraid to crack a joke when appropriate or to share a personal anecdote if it might loosen up the class.

Project your voice! It's important that students can hear you.

Be Confident! Even if you're not an expert in the material you're teaching that day, you're an expert reader and a skilled thinker. Share these abilities with your students. Remember that **teaching is a performance**—if you're enthusiastic about the material, even in your criticisms of it, the students will be as well.

Engage students: instead of cold-calling randomly, after having read their response papers, you can call on your students, commenting, for instance, "Well, Susan, you made some insightful remarks on Bourdieu and cultural capital in your paper. Can you please share those with the class?" (If the student doesn't remember, be sure to remind her what you're talking about.)

Turn it back on the students: Instead of answering a question someone raises, pose it to the class first and then put in your own five cents at the end. If someone gives an abstract or generalized critique, gently steer the class back to the day's topic. If a student makes an erroneous comment, you can reformulate it into something more appropriate. When dealing with provocateurs, be Socratic. Alternatively, don't be afraid to challenge the student by asking, "Does everyone agree with this statement?" You need not always cater to student whims, and students will appreciate it when you keep the discussion on task.

Give encouragement: Some Harvard students may need a little extra positive reinforcement. Don't hesitate to praise thoughtful engagement.

14. Asking Good Questions

Ask specific questions that invite a close reading—and make sure you get a conversation going about what close reading is.

Ask provocative questions, playing devil’s advocate to incite discussion. You might even say something such as, “Many people argue that literary studies has very little value. How would you respond to this claim?”

Ask questions about basic concepts. Don’t assume your students know the definitions of terms used in lecture. Prepare a handout with the definitions of relevant terms, using your own notes as a resource, the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Literary Terms*, or the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

Ask students to sign up for presentations, which help foster class discussion and are an excellent way for students to practice giving brief talks. Alternatively, ask each student to sign up to “lead” class discussion, having those students email you the night before with 2-3 questions to go over in that week’s section. Finding activities that engage students with the materials and involving them in course planning can also take some of the onus off of you.

Prepare. Especially at the beginning, write out all of your questions for section, and important concepts that you’d like to cover in classes. It’s helpful to have everything at your fingertips.

Adapt with Focus. Don’t be afraid to depart from your original questions if the discussion takes you elsewhere. That said, make sure the conversation is going somewhere productive.

15. Section Goals and Lesson Plans

Objectives: Sometimes the course head will tell you what the objective will be for each class meeting, but that's not always the case.

Some course heads give you considerable freedom, dictating only what primary text you should focus on what week, or not even that. In these cases, it's up to you to decide what to focus on in class.

Specific goals: It's not always easy to choose what your goals will be for a given class meeting. Before the first class meeting, you will have talked with the course head about course and section goals.

If you're teaching a discussion section, decide how you can use your class to supplement the professor's lectures and help the students get out of the course what you and the course staff think is most important, whether that's content or critical skills.

If you're teaching concentrators and the emphasis is on close reading, do close reading in class and assign close reading exercises for homework in the form of response papers.

If you are teaching in a Gen. Ed. course in which the emphasis is on aspects of literary or cultural history and the students are reading texts in translation, you might focus instead on thematic and other interpretive approaches.

The most important question you need to ask yourself each week as you're preparing for section is: **What do I want my students to get out of this particular class meeting?**

In a literature class, the answer might be something like: I want them to see how a close reading is done; or I want them to learn certain critical concepts (e.g. story vs. discourse); or I want them to come to understand how certain themes work in *Madame Bovary* and make sure they gain greater familiarity with Chapter 8; etc.

Being clear about section goals is especially important for courses that have a substantive final exam or final paper.

You will want to help your students succeed on graded assignments by teaching them in class what methods and approaches they'll need to be successful paper writers and exam takers.

Ask the course head what the final course work will be and how it will be evaluated.

Be Prepared. Whatever your goals for your class, it is always helpful to prepare some kind of guide for yourself.

A helpful lesson plan can be as low-tech as writing a short note about the key passages and concepts that you've prepared and want to make sure to discuss with your students.

Or it can be helpful to have prepared a longer document outlining the key topics you'd like to cover and questions you'd like to ask.

In any case, it is always a good idea to have **prepared something to which you can refer back** in case you lose your train of thought or get distracted or sidelined by student comments or your own tangents.

Most importantly, having prepared even a loose lesson plan in advance will give you a sense of the arc of the class and where you'd like the conversation to go.

Here is an example of a moderately fleshed-out lesson plan from a departmental course in Comparative Literature:

Lesson Plan, Section, Week 6 - Hadji Murad, Bakhtin, Goody
Stephanie Frampton
Writing across Cultures: Literatures of the World (1700-present)

How did you like the novel?

JC - What did you take away from reading it again in the context of the course?

We have now read several novels - *If on a winter's night*, *George*, and *Hadji Murad* - along with one long "nonfiction" piece - *Journey to Arzum* - and quite a few short poems.

On Monday, I talked a bit about the possible "novelization" of two major epics - the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*, where representations of heroic, epic past are made to come up into the present moment of narration. (*Shield of Achilles* looks like contemporary Athenian law court; the prophecy for *Aeneas* refers to events that had just taken place in contemporary Rome.) Still, the models of "epic" and "novel" may be useful to think with - or not.

In a nutshell, how does Bakhtin categorize categorize epic? novel?

What are some "epic" aspects of Tolstoy's portrayal of *Hadji Murad*?

What are some "novelistic" aspects?

How does this narrative differ from *If on a winter's night*? Is it more or less novelistic?

What about *Journey to Arzum*?

Last week we talked about translation, and in particular the non-equivalence of words in some of the poems we read. **What strategies are used to deal with the non-equivalence of language - on a big or small scale - in the narrative of *Hadji Murad*?**

How are Russian, Chechen ("Tartar"), French, etc. represented? - nontranslation, explication, pidgin

How does the translation itself deal with this issue? - transliteration, endnotes, etc.

How does *Hadji Murad* - or any other character (*Nicholas I*) - deal with multilingualism or monolingualism?

Can we relate this to Bakhtin (heteroglossia)? Bhabha (mimicry, hybridity)?

Is the world of *Hadji Murad* open or closed? - temporality, narrative voice, surplus, etc.

To what extent do we think *Hadji Murad* resembles Orientalist discourse described by Said?

How useful is Bakhtin?

How do this week's themes fit into the idea of the course? World Literature?

Looking ahead to next time, how is gender figured in the novel?

16. Responding to Student Writing

The challenge of responding to student writing is figuring out how to make effective and helpful comments without taking an enormous amount of time. Here are a few tactics that can help achieve that balance:

- **Skim through all the papers before you write comments on any.** This “first read” should be a brief one (you will give yourself time to go through each paper more carefully later on); the primary goal will be to get a sense of the range of papers and to quickly identify any problem cases that may need to be brought to the attention of the Head TF or course head. Assign tentative grades; it can be helpful to put the papers in order from strongest to weakest, which is easier than you might expect. Having already looked through a paper can make it much easier to diagnose its major strengths and weaknesses and to comment efficiently when you do go back and do your closer reading later on.
- **Comments in the margins.** Avoid over-commenting. The ideal is to find a balance between the paper that looks like it has hardly been read and the paper that is covered in ink. It is tempting to think “the more feedback I give, the more helpful I will be,” but covering the paper in ink not only slows down your grading, but also can be counter-productive for the student: you think you are being helpful, but from the student’s perspective this can be discouraging, and may even seem aggressive. (A good rule of thumb when responding to student work: how would this look to me if I were the student?)
- **Final comments.** Final comments should both diagnose the paper’s major strengths and weaknesses and give the student an idea of how the paper could be improved; you should also comment on things the student should think about for future papers. Don’t feel the need to be utterly exhaustive; the final comments will be much more productive if they boil down your diagnosis to a few major points rather than providing a laundry list of spots where the paper has fallen away from your Platonic ideal. One possible template might be as follows:

A couple of sentences that “mirror” the paper’s argument (i.e., this is what I understand the paper to be about);

Several sentences that note strengths and weaknesses in the argument and/or organization;

Several sentences that note strengths and weaknesses in the paper’s handling of evidence;

A final, positive comment about some concrete aspect of the paper: something that especially appealed to you or surprised you.

There are other possible end comment structures; whatever structure you choose, having some kind of **default format** in mind speeds grading and allows you to produce end comments more efficiently.

If possible, type your final comments; this will make them more readable for your students (and, in theory, will make it more likely that they will actually be read). This will also make it easier for you to refresh your memory of what the paper was like; this is especially important if the student comes to you with questions about the grade. Typing comments can also make it easier to repeat the same language, where appropriate, when commenting on multiple papers.

17. Classroom Challenges

Charlotte Szilagyi

At some point in your teaching career, you might encounter a situation where a student gets upset by something that was said or done in section. If this happens to you, keep in mind that more often than not, this is less about what you actually say or do in section (after all, the other students did not feel it necessary to come to you), and more about **acknowledging the student's strong feelings and/or the particular point of view that s/he brings to the classroom.**

I once had this experience when teaching a section on disaster humor in a class dedicated to “Wit and Humor.” A student who identified herself as Jewish wrote me a follow-up email after section (of which she been excused for the last 10 minutes for an approved commitment) stating that it was hard for her to discuss the Holocaust movie *La vita è bella* in a class dedicated to “Wit and Humor.” The fact that she had cc’ed the course head in the email suggested to me that she regarded this as a serious issue. Although she emphasized, repeatedly, that as a TF I had said nothing wrong or inappropriate during section discussion, she still felt that there was something wrong about discussing humor with regard to the Holocaust.

It took me some time to recognize that this was not about me. After I took a moment to step back, I recognized that behind her discomfort there was genuine confusion steeped in personal experience. As someone who felt strongly about the Holocaust, how was she supposed to reconcile the possibility that suffering and tragedy of this scale could be met with comedy and laughter? I realized that this conversation could be potentially fruitful, but that I would have to respond appropriately.

I wrote her an email (cc’ing the course head), acknowledging that she was asking a legitimate question. By sending her the links to various sources—books, articles and websites I had used to prepare my section—I tried to show her that there is a vast amount of secondary literature available that grapples with the same crucial question. I explained to her that given that she had left class early, she might have taken away only a partial view of what we ultimately achieved in section.

As I was writing the email, I realized that she was, in fact, helping me clarify and articulate something to myself. The overarching question was not only whether disaster humor should be discussed in an academic forum, but also what the implications might be of not discussing it.

In the end, I concluded the email by telling her just that. In the next section, we started discussion by broaching this meta-question—which in turn led to a lively debate on the stake of academia (and comedy) in the legacy of the Holocaust. The course head, who had been privy to the email exchange, later wrote a note thanking me for what he deemed a tactful and appropriate way of dealing with this sensitive situation.

There are a few things that you can do to help you deal appropriately with similar situations.

- **Don't get defensive.** This is not necessarily an issue of your competence. Rather, the student him/herself might be grappling with what the question or issue discussed means to him/her. Take this to be a learning opportunity for yourself, and take time to think deeply about what is at stake.
- **Reflect.** Take a moment to find out (or try to discern from his email) what the student missed and why he/she might have misinterpreted you. Did he/she miss the end of the discussion? What is his ethnic/religious/racial background and how is he/she bringing that to the classroom?
- **Acknowledge** your student's strong feelings explicitly.
- **Reach out.** Ask the student to join you in questioning his/her own assumptions. Invite him/her to office hours. Very often, students have a hard time reconciling their own ideas with the ways that we approach difficult questions in the academic context. Remember, as long as you explore your subject matter with integrity, tough subjects are legitimate and productive things to explore with your students.
- **Focus on the learning process,** not on being right.
- **Send a follow-up email to the class,** without reference to the particular student, to clarify certain points.
- **Never reprimand a student publicly.**
- If this is about **grades:** Your course head will know what the regarding policy is for your course. You can always offer to reread a student paper and discuss it with him/her, but if re-grading is at issue direct the student to the Head TF or course head.

18. Teaching and Professional Development

If you are hoping for a career in academia (and many Comparative Literature graduate students are), it is imperative that you begin assembling your teaching portfolio as soon as you start teaching. Read this advice on The CompLitter's Teaching Portfolio from a former CL student who has experience on both sides of the job market. Harvard's Office of Career Services also has a large selection of programs geared to preparing for both academic and non-academic jobs. Be sure to explore their website for scheduled workshops for both tracks.

19. The CompLitter's Teaching Portfolio

Erika Boeckeler

When teaching Nikolai Gogol's novel *Dead Souls*, I once asked students if they could relate to Chichikov, the main character. Chichikov travels around the Russian countryside meeting with the quirky land-holding nobility in order to buy their list of dead "souls" (aka serfs). A senior who had spent more time interviewing for jobs than reading for the class exclaimed, "He's just like me! He has to reinvent himself every time he meets a new landowner and wants to make a sale!"

On the job market, you too will become a Chichikov, reinventing yourself for each job posting in the hopes of impressing often quirky hiring committees. Ideally you will cultivate a teaching profile that both enhances your primary area of research and that also offers you flexibility as you tailor each application to the advertised position. That is to say, you will naturally show scholarly depth in the area of your dissertation; you may then use publications, conference presentations, coursework, and especially teaching experience to underscore that depth and to demonstrate that you are not a one-trick pony who can only teach about how the medieval theologian Duns Scotus uses footnotes.

Remember, however, that the flexibility of a scholarly profile does not entirely inhere in what you have done; you will also need the flexibility of mind to interpret and present your work to future employers in ways that speak to each position. For applicants with degrees in Comparative Literature, this flexibility is particularly important since we often apply to positions in more than one academic department, and to different kinds of postdoctoral appointments.

Let's say your research focuses on sixteenth century English, French, and Latin poetry. In the future, you might find yourself applying for jobs in English Departments, in French Departments, in Comparative or World Literature Departments, and more generally for positions in poetry. What kinds of teaching might enhance your candidacy for positions in those departments?

Finally, keep in mind that "the teaching portfolio" is not just one thing; it's a set of documents acquired throughout your entire graduate career from which you can draw at various moments in the application process. This essay will discuss how to begin thinking about what kinds of teaching you should seek, how to document that teaching in meaningful ways, and how to present that information effectively during the job search.

Getting the right kinds of teaching experience

First, develop your scholarly profile. No matter where you are in your graduate career, pause every so often to think long and hard about how you want to shape your future. The job market is capricious; today's smoldering hot field might be a barren wasteland tomorrow, so although it is good to stay abreast of trends, you should be developing yourself into the scholar best suited to your own interests and abilities.

To make things more complicated, most graduate students find that their interests change over time. This is a normal part of scholarly development, but you will occasionally need to take stock and readjust your goals.

Glance at the job postings each fall in the MLA/APA job list so that you have some familiarity with hiring trends, with the variety of institutions and their needs (small vs. large school, research- vs. teaching-oriented, particular student populations, etc), and with what kinds of materials employers are requesting.

Once you have articulated your goals, **persistently pursue teaching opportunities** in the kinds of courses that fit the profile you aim to cultivate. At Harvard, talk to professors early on, send emails, introduce yourself in person, keep your ear to the ground, follow every lead, have copies of your resume at the ready when you visit professors about potential positions, attach your resume to emails about potential positions, and talk to head TFs, department administrators, other students, the Gen. Ed. office, etc. about teaching possibilities.

If you can't find what you're looking for as a TF, and even if you can, **look into opportunities at other local schools**. It will be that much more impressive if you've taught your own courses. Again, keep your ear to the ground, use contacts, and check the MLA job listings (password protected; contact the department administrator) or the Chronicle of Higher Education (online, free) for potential lectureships and openings.

If you find you cannot get what you want and need to take some seemingly random positions, **don't be discouraged**. Remember that these, too, can unexpectedly enhance your profile in ways you might discover only later as you apply for jobs.

It is important to **remain flexible** when interpreting your own experience for your (potential) interviewers.

Documentation

You would do well to **document carefully every aspect of your teaching for later use and reference**.

- If you haven't done so already, begin a dossier with interfolio.com. (The Harvard Office of Career Services -OCS- can tell you more about this.) The majority of jobs these days ask for materials to be sent through Interfolio. This will make your life significantly easier.
- Always have professors observe your classes. If they do not volunteer to do so, you should inquire whether they would be willing. Most professors will be happy to help out.

- Always ask for a letter of recommendation. Know that these recommendations vary greatly among faculty members; learn what you can about who is diligent and invested in the success of her/his TFs.
- Always keep student evaluations. Since the Harvard ones are generic, you can create your own with more specific questions to accumulate the kinds of feedback you'd like to have appear later in your job applications.
- Always keep syllabi and other course materials and maintain a record of any materials you create for the courses.
- Keep track of any extra work you do for the courses (e.g. writing workshops, videotaping, outside fieldtrips and activities, etc).
- Finally, as you go on the market, prepare general syllabi of ideal courses you would like to teach.

Presentation

You will be asked to provide a variety of different documents which draw from this vast store of materials you have been diligently accumulating. These pieces may include:

- teaching experience/references on your CV
- a teaching portfolio
- a conference interview portfolio
- campus interview materials for a sample class
- statement of teaching philosophy
- letters of recommendation specific to your teaching

Let's take a look at these pieces individually:

1. CV

This document shows teaching experience in the context of your complete scholarly profile. It should highlight especially the teaching relevant to the job for which you're applying. As a Comparative Literature student, you might find that you have teaching experience in disparate fields. Experiment with different kinds of groupings to play up those experiences that are particularly relevant to the specific positions for which you are applying. If you are applying to different types of jobs, have different versions of the CV.

Discuss and/or highlight any unusual experiences. Did you teach your own class? Did you teach a tutorial? (Describe the topic.) Were you Head TF? Have you taught masters students? Did you work as a writing tutor? Did you win any prizes? Were your evaluations exceptionally enthusiastic?

2. Teaching Portfolio

When a school requests a portfolio, either along with the initial application materials or later in a separate email to potential interview candidates, you'll want to use this material to show that you have a lot of experience, to give the impression that you are ready to jump right into their program and begin teaching tomorrow, and to show that you have thoughtfully considered your pedagogical strategies.

Some job ads will tell you upfront which materials they would like to see included; other postings will be ambiguous.

Avoid overwhelming the search committee with material.

When asked to send many pieces, you should provide a cover sheet listing the materials enclosed. These materials might include:

- course syllabi, including courses you propose to teach at the school
- course evaluations
- statement of teaching philosophy
- supplementary materials you have designed for specific courses (e.g. handouts)

It is advisable to look over the potential department's own offerings and consider how you might fit in, discussing, for example, particular resources upon which you might draw.

3. Conference Interview Portfolio

Some interviewers will ask you to bring (additional) materials to the conference interview. If they don't, but have not already seen some of the key materials you would like them to see (particularly course syllabi), consider creating an interview portfolio.

Your goal in the conference interview is to receive an invitation for a campus visit.

Preparing an interview portfolio can demonstrate that you've thought about their school and the kinds of teaching they do there, help you show how you might fit into the department, and that you are flexible, creative, and ready to teach. An interview portfolio might also give you a boost of confidence during the interview; having tailored this set of materials towards this specific school, you might be able to answer questions more fluently and confidently.

This portfolio might include any of the materials listed under the preceding heading, especially sample course syllabi.

As you prepare these syllabi, be sure to note course levels and class sizes, and include a variety of classes from first-year offerings up to through graduate courses (if appropriate). You can often check on course sizes and enrollment figures on the school's website.

4. Campus Interview Materials for a Sample Class

If you are lucky enough to have been invited for a campus visit, you will likely bring along some extra teaching-related materials. These might simply be copies of the documents you have already created, which you can pass around during conversations about teaching, or that you might give to the dean.

If you have been asked to teach a sample class, this could require another set of documents (e.g., informational handouts or readings).

Be sure you learn in advance WHO will be present and whom you will be teaching (is it a regular class, is it a class that has been cobbled together, is it a "class" of faculty members posing as students, how many faculty members will be sitting in the back evaluating you, etc), the length of the class, the number of students and their knowledge of the field, and the preferred topic.

If possible, practice the class in advance with some willing Harvard students (bribe them with pizza!) so that you can both test your pedagogical approach and receive feedback on the readings and/or handouts.

Sound like a lot of work? Well, it is. But it's also an exciting and wonderful experience when, having at last reached the twilight of your graduate years, you look back over your work and craft applications that tell your own unique story.

5. Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Many institutions ask for a Statement of Teaching Philosophy; it is likely you will also be asked to submit such a statement when being considered for tenure. So view what you write now as a good investment in your future. The ideal statement is a page or two and includes both specific and personal examples as well as broader reflections on the art of teaching. Sample statements are included in Kathryn Hume, *Surviving Your Academic Job Hunt*. The University of Michigan Center for Research on Learning and Teaching has published a particularly helpful guide for writing such statements; see

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/CRLT_no23.pdf

20. Publishing and Other Non-Academic Career Paths

The academic job search gets a lot of press, but remember your Ph.D. can open a variety of career paths. Literary and scholarly publishing are two such paths. Publishing is difficult to break into—and in the case of commercial publishing, your advanced degree might make you seem overqualified for an entry-level position—but if you are persistent, and devote energy to meeting people in the industry, it can happen.

Here are a few tips and suggestions for finding a job in publishing. (Some of these could easily apply to other fields as well.)

The Why? Any interview will likely include a version of the question, “Why do you want to work in publishing if you’re getting your Ph.D.?” Have a ready answer to this question (and not “Because I couldn’t find a teaching job”). Be able to relate the practical aspects of your teaching and literary study to the job you seek.

Make (alumni) connections; be aggressive about finding someone who can forward your resume to editors who are hiring. Jobs in publishing often happen through contacts, not through cold emailing. The Department of Comparative Literature maintains an active alumni database, available on the department intranet.

Get specific information. If a job requires you to apply to a general HR email address, don’t be afraid to call the company for the name and contact information of the hiring party. Many postings will say “No phone calls,” but this is a preventative measure to screen out true crazies. If you call, they will not hang up on you.

Intern. If you have time and financial resources, do an internship. (The summer after the G1 year is an ideal time for this.) Much less difficult to find than full-time jobs, unpaid internships are a great way to learn who’s who in the field, and to start building your network in the industry.

Don’t limit yourself. Even if you imagine becoming an editor someday, don’t restrict your search to editorial jobs. You could find your start in marketing or publicity, for example.

www.bookjobs.com has postings for both internships and full-time jobs. Another site with a useful job board is publishersmarketplace.com.

The Columbia Publishing Course, a summer program in Columbia’s Journalism School, is also well known for leading to jobs. It is costly – several thousand dollars for a six-week course – but you pay for classes, connections, and cocktail parties that can get you recruited. Google “Columbia Publishing Course.”