

APPENDIX IV:
Interview Questions

Questions to Teaching Assistants

1. Have you ever experienced problems of overwork?
 - a) Describe the problem(s).
 - b) What did you do about it?
 - c) In your opinion, why did the problem(s) arise in the first place?
 - d) If you have overworked, was it strictly a one-time-only occurrence due to some particular set of conditions (e.g. an unanticipated enrollment increase or a zany professor) or has it been more pervasive? Is overwork a widespread problem in your department?
2.
 - a) Have you always received a Job Description?
 - b) In retrospect, how accurate have these been in relation to your actual workload?
 - c) How involved were you in setting up the Job Description?
 - d) How conscientious are instructors and other responsible administrators when it comes to preparing (and following) Job Descriptions? What procedures do they follow?
3. What are the principal *areas* of overwork, in your experience (e.g. extra prep time, extra contact hours, more time marking than allotted, etc.)? That is, where is it *most likely* to occur?
4. How much of the overwork you have experienced is a matter of personal choice (i.e. putting in extra time to do a 'better job') and how much was necessitated by a poor Job Description, unrealistic expectations, etc. (i.e. circumstances outside your immediate control)?
5. Are there any particular conditions in your department which you believe might potentially *lead to* problems of TA overwork? Are there any *obstacles* that prevent or discourage TAs from voicing their concerns regarding problems of overwork?
6. If you have TAed in the same course for two years or more, how has your work as a TA been affected by stable (or even shrinking) TA budgets and increasing undergraduate enrollments? Respond in terms of:
 - a) size (in hours) of appointments
 - b) likelihood of getting an appointment
 - c) the amount of time allocated to types of tasks within jobs (e.g. 40 min per assignment down to 30 min)
 - d) number of tasks (e.g. three instead of four assignments per term)
7. If you have TAed in several different courses, how *consistent* are standards between courses, in terms of times allotted to tasks? Do assignments reflect some *de facto* set of guidelines or standards? Are these standards fair?
8. If you have been involved in running tutorials or labs have you been able to do what you wanted to, (or what is expected) given the amount of time available and the numbers of students attending?
9.
 - a) Did your training adequately prepare you for your TA job in terms of:
 - i. knowing what are reasonable expectations of TAs and;
 - ii. knowing how to deal with problems, should they arise?
 - b) What degree of contact with TAs did you have as a undergrad and to what extent did this contact influence your expectations?
10. Has your TA work (especially any overwork) affected your academic progress more than you originally anticipated? Has it ever affected your ability to meet specific academic deadlines?

**Questions to Department Chairs, Graduate Coordinators
and other Responsible Administrators**

1. Please outline the structure of decision-making in the department with respect to the following (ie. who is responsible for):
 - a) allocation of TA jobs/hours to courses
 - b) allocation of eligible candidates to available jobs
 - c) allocation of hours to specific tasks within jobs
 - i.e. who makes what decisions and when?

- 2.a) Does the department have uniform standards or guidelines for assigning total hours to job categories? (e.g. lab demonstrator for 26 weeks (two terms) = xx hours, or if course needs 280 hours of demonstrator time, is this one job or two, or more?) What *are* the standard assignments in this department?
 - b) Are standards codified or *ad hoc*/informal?
 - c) What is the enrollment trigger for the assignment of TA hours to any given course?

- 3.a) Does the department have uniform standards for assigning hours to specific tasks within a particular job category? If so, please specify. Specific tasks include:
 - running labs/tutorials
 - marking/grading assignments, labs, essays
 - background preparation
 - office hours (secondary contact)
 - attending lectures
 - other administrative duties (grades compilation)
 - organizational meetings
 - training
 - other
 - b) If (where) there are no standards, how are they assigned?
 - c) How much discretion does the supervising professor have?
 - d) Do Teaching Assistants have any input into the assignment of hours to specific duties (other than signing and accepting the allocation of duties form)?
 - e) Who, if anyone, checks Job Descriptions for fairness and consistency (within a course or between courses)?

- 4.a) In what ways, if any, are Teaching Assistants trained for their jobs (including health and safety awareness training, if applicable)?
 - b) Is such training now remunerated?

5. In light of shrinking (or stable) budgets and increasing undergraduate enrolment, over the past five years how has the department altered its standards or policies in allocating TA jobs to courses, applicants to jobs and hours to specific tasks? Respond in terms of:
 - a) number of jobs available (total and per course)
 - b) size (in hours) of appointments
 - c) the amount of time allocated to specific types of tasks within jobs (e.g. 40 minutes per assignment down to 30 minutes)
 - d) the number of tasks (e.g. 3 instead of 4 assignments per term)

- 6.a) How are problems handled within the department -- specifically problems with T.A. workload? If the issue is not settled between T.A. and supervisor, what is the next step?
 - b) What, if anything, are course instructors told about administering Teaching Assistantships (i.e. preparing job descriptions, following the Collective Agreement, etc.)?