

## The Apprentice Teacher Program

### Background and purposes:

The Apprentice Teacher Program, inaugurated in Fall 1977, is a comprehensive in-service training program designed to smooth the way for new TA's as they tackle the challenge of teaching freshmen how to write.

In the Dark Ages of not-so-long-ago, new TA's were simply handed their course assignments, a syllabus, and a set of texts, and dispatched to the classroom to give unto others some of what had been given unto them. The Apprentice Teacher Program was born out of a belated recognition that such inadequate preparation often bred as much shaky teaching as it did unnecessary trauma. Basically, then, the program was conceived to humanely provide fledgling TA's a semester of gradual immersion in the Freshman English program. Equally important, it was conceived to give them sufficient training to become competent, confident teachers of composition by the time they took sole charge of a section.

Except for those persons who have had substantial prior teaching experience, all new English TA's are now designated "Apprentice Teachers" during their first semester of appointment. Each is assigned to work with a veteran composition teacher, or "Supervising Teacher," assisting him or her in running one section. During this term the apprentices' responsibilities are limited, their practice teaching carefully supervised, and their training supplemented both by a graduate course in pedagogy (398T) and by visits to other freshman sections.

By semester's end, their preparation will be considerable:

- They will be familiar with such matters as time management, the criteria and methods of grading, writing conferences, devising theme assignments, and the preparation of final exams.
- They will have been exposed to various approaches to teaching composition, both directly (through class visits) and indirectly (through books and articles encountered in 398T).
- They will have had 2-4 weeks' experience of supervised teaching, as well as some experience in team-teaching.
- They will have become acquainted with both the E.306 and E.307 syllabi, and thus become familiar with the texts, content, and rationales of our two chief Freshman English courses.

The specifics of the program are detailed in the two statements of responsibilities below, but one clarification is in order here. Since 398T-306 is only offered in the fall, and since 398T-307 is only offered in the spring, Apprentice Teachers hired for the fall will be assigned to assist in a section of 306 and will take 398T-306 in conjunction with it; those hired for the spring will assist in a section of 307 and take 398T-307. The next semester, as regular TA's, they will teach the other major freshman course--307 or 306, as the case may be--and take the corresponding 398T course in conjunction with it. It is imperative, then, that the Apprentice Teacher understand that during his semester as an apprentice, he is expected to familiarize himself with both freshman courses.

Responsibilities of Apprentice Teachers:

Attendance in both 306 and 307: The Apprentice Teacher (AT) must attend all meetings--excluding in-class themes and tests--of the section to which s/he is assigned, and also attend one section meeting per week of the other basic freshman course (307 or 306, as the case may be). We strongly recommend that the AT visit a variety of regular faculty and TA sections of this other course to gain exposure to different teaching styles and approaches to its syllabus. (A list of instructors who will accept AT visits to their classes will be available in the Freshman Office. AT's should, however, give an instructor the courtesy of at least a day's notice when they plan to sit it.)

398T and peer counseling: During the semester of apprenticeship, the AT will take 398T-306 or 398T-307, and will also attend peer-counseling sessions. (These sessions meet weekly for about an hour, either after a 398T class or at a time convenient to the group. The group is comprised of a TA counselor and 5-6 other TA's.

Staff conferences: The AT will regularly meet with his/her ST to discuss practical and theoretical matters relating to the teaching of composition.

Course policy statement: The AT will collaborate with his/her Supervising Teacher in drafting the course policy statement for the section they will teach.

Teaching: The AT will teach a minimum of one unit of the syllabus and a maximum of two units (i.e., between two and four weeks). But we recommend, in addition, that the AT and ST periodically team-teach, in part to strengthen the students' impression that the AT is not simply a grader or underling. The AT may also occasionally substitute for the ST by mutual consent.

Theme assignments: The AT will devise at least one theme assignment. This and any other assignment s/he devises, however, must be reviewed (and emended, if necessary) by the ST.

Grading: The AT will grade at least 1/3 and no more than 1/2 of all papers in the section in which s/he is assisting. The ST will review all grading, however, to ensure uniform evaluation.

Final exams: Although the AT should collaborate with the ST in devising the final exam (assuming an exam is given), reading of the final exam papers will be the sole responsibility of the ST. } none

Final course grades: The AT will collaborate with the ST in determining course grades, but final authority for them will rest with the ST.

Office hours: The AT must keep at least one regularly scheduled office hour per week.

Self-evaluation: At the end of the semester the AT will file a confidential self-evaluation with the program administrator (the Associate Director of Freshman English). This self-evaluation should discuss his/her performance as a classroom teacher, grader, and writing conference tutor. It might also discuss the effectiveness of the apprentice program itself and the helpfulness of his/her visits to other sections. A copy of the self-evaluation will be made available to the ST, who will treat it as confidential.

Responsibilities of Supervising Teachers:

Collegueship: The Supervising Teacher (ST) will make every effort to integrate his/her Apprentice Teacher (AT) into the class as a colleague--a junior partner, as it were. For example, the ST might occasionally team-teach with the AT near the outset of the semester when student impressions of the authority of the AT are apt to be indelibly formed. Also, the AT might be allowed to hold a class discussion on the second set of papers the day they are returned. Again, the ST might invite the AT to participate with him in some initial student writing conferences during office hours. These are but a few of the ways in which the ST can strengthen the ethos (hence confidence and effectiveness) of the AT as a credible teacher.

Conferences: The ST will hold frequent conferences with the AT on practical and theoretical matters relating to the teaching of composition. These might be best scheduled for immediately after class when pedagogical problems are apt to be fresh in mind.

Teaching: The ST will allow the AT to choose which unit or units s/he wishes to teach. (One unit is the minimum; two units is the maximum. This means between 2-4 weeks of solo teaching, not all of it necessarily in one block.) The AT's teaching, however, should be scheduled during the last half of the semester unless there are compelling reasons for scheduling part of it earlier. The ST will also periodically team-teach with the AT. As noted above, some of this team-teaching is desirable near the beginning of the course.

Teaching evaluation: The ST will give the AT a brief oral evaluation after his/her initial week of solo teaching, noting strengths, weaknesses, and suggestions for improvement.

Final evaluation: Near the end of the semester, the ST will write an evaluation of the AT's overall performance--as classroom teacher, grader, assistant, writing conference tutor, etc. This evaluation will be filed with the Associate Director of Freshman English, and will be kept confidential. A copy will be sent to the AT. At the AT's request, a copy of the evaluation will be placed in his/her permanent (open) file.

Conferring with program administrator: The ST will occasionally confer with the Associate Director of Freshman English, keeping him abreast of the program that the ST has devised for the AT.

Other responsibilities: It is assumed that the ST will read the preceding statement concerning the responsibilities of AT's, and will see that those responsibilities are met.