Dear Graduate Teaching Assistant:

You are cordially invited to participate in the 2009 Teaching Assistant Orientation (TAO) at the University of Massachusetts Amherst on Friday, September 4, 2009, from 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. in the Campus Center. The TAO gives both new and returning graduate student instructors an important opportunity to discuss college teaching issues with fellow graduate students and faculty from across the campus.

Supported by your academic department, the Graduate School, the Provost’s Office, and the Center for Teaching, the TAO provides you with an initial career preparation opportunity to support the teaching and learning skills of future professors. Your department has made a commitment to participate in the day’s program and is eager for you to attend as well. In addition, the Graduate Employee Organization strongly supports teaching development opportunities on behalf of graduate students.

The day’s program will give you a broad overview of teaching at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, an introduction to your department through a lunch with your colleagues, and a range of workshops tailored to specific questions and issues, such as leading effective discussions, evaluating written assignments, and creating effective learning environments for diverse students. The agenda also includes the opportunity to talk with experienced TAs in your school and a reception at the end of the day. (Please see the enclosed agenda.)

In addition to the opportunity to talk to experienced TAs and faculty and to hear a range of presentations, you will receive the Handbook for New Instructors. The Center for Teaching produces this as a resource for graduate instructors.

Please confirm your participation in the TAO by returning the enclosed reservation form or filling out the online form at the Center for Teaching’s home page www.umass.edu/cft by August 21, 2009.

Sincerely,

Dr. Mathew L. Ouellett
Director

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Preliminary Agenda
Teaching Assistant Orientation
Friday, September 4, 2009
University of Massachusetts Amherst, Lincoln Campus Center Auditorium

8:00 - 9:00 REGISTRATION AND COFFEE  (CAMPUS CENTER AUDITORIUM)

9:00 - 9:40 WELCOME

9:45 -10:40 ADVICE FROM TAs TO TAs
Organized by colleges and schools, panels of experienced TAs will answer questions, offer strategies, and describe “best practices” based upon their teaching development experiences at UMass. These sessions are an informal opportunity to explore with peers how to make the most of teaching development opportunities at UMass.

10:45 -12:00 CONCURRENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS I
Workshop sessions focus on fundamental teaching skills and discussion of classroom issues. (Please see the enclosed description of workshop.)

12:00 - 12:45 TA / FACULTY LUNCHEON

1:00 - 2:15 CONCURRENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS II

2:15 -2:30 BREAK

2:30 - 3:45 CONCURRENT WORKSHOP SESSIONS III
Concurrent Workshop Descriptions
Teaching Assistant Orientation
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Friday, September 4, 2009

These descriptions of selected workshops are intended to provide an overview of the kinds of workshops typically offered during the TAO.

Lecturing Effectively
TAs will identify essentials of effective lecturing, including advance preparation, delivery technique, and ways to actively involve students.

Course Design, Syllabus, And the First Day of Class
This session will discuss setting goals and objectives for a course, the essentials of a good syllabus, and how to prepare for the first day of class.

Learning Styles and Stages
This session will provide an overview of learning styles and developmental patterns TAs are likely to encounter in their students. Advice on how to use appropriate teaching strategies with each of these styles and stages will also be provided.

Critical Moments in College Teaching
TAs will discuss problems in teaching (e.g. disagreements over grades and grading standards, students talking during class, confronting issues of plagiarism or cheating) and identify possible solutions.

Cross Cultural Teaching and Learning
International TAs may face special issues in teaching at the University. For example, issues such as cross-cultural communication, English as a second language, and varying student perceptions and expectations. This session will afford international TAs the opportunity to discuss these issues with experienced faculty and graduate student instructors.

Leading Effective Discussions
The focus of this session will be on the preparation needed to ensure a lively discussion. TAs will practice questioning skills to keep discussion on target. The emphasis of this session will be on creating a classroom environment that fosters student participation.

Responding To and Evaluating Written Assignments
This session will suggest methods for providing timely and instructive responses that are appropriate to the nature of an assignment, evaluating fairly, and using your time efficiently.

Social and Cultural Diversity Issues in The Classroom
This workshop will examine four dimensions of the teaching and learning process—what we teach and how we teach, who we are and who our students are—to help TAs create learning environments that support an increasingly diverse student population.

Strategies for Effective Assessment and Evaluation
TAs will identify the dimensions of effective assessment and grading practices by learning how to better articulate learning outcome objectives, clarifying grading criteria, and timely communication of expectations.
Teaching Foreign Languages
This workshop will address strategies for creating and maintaining student motivation and enthusiasm in the introductory and intermediate level classrooms. Suggestions will be offered for warm-ups; pacing language instruction; and teaching in the target language.

Knowing Who are Our Students: Tools for Dialogues
TAs will examine several profiles of entering UMass students — including their educational backgrounds, learning styles, expectations, goals and values. TAs will identify practical strategies for teaching and creating academic support systems for students in their early, most critical years on campus.

Improving Lectures by Actively Involving Students
TAs will identify essentials of effective lecturing, including advance preparation, organization, delivery technique and ways to actively involve students. Discussion will offer strategies useful in a wide range of disciplines.

Teaching and Learning in the Diverse Classroom
In this session, TAs will explore the diversity-related dimensions of teaching excellence by exploring what promotes learning and success for all. “Diversity,” in this case includes what we bring to the classroom as instructors, who are our students, our pedagogical choices, and our core learning goals. We will identify personal teaching strengths and share some strategies and techniques for establishing an inclusive classroom.

Leading Laboratory Sections in the Sciences
A guide to help TAs develop good skills for conducting laboratory sections in the sciences will be presented in this session. Topics include promoting safety, preparation before the lab, how to conduct the lab, grading, office hours, and promoting good relationships with faculty, staff, and students.
2009 Teaching Assistant Orientation
University of Massachusetts Amherst

Essential Information for TA Orientation
Friday, September 4, 2009

When: 9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., Friday, September 4, 2009
Registration starts at 8:30 a.m. Morning refreshments will be available at
8:30 a.m. The formal program begins at 9:00 a.m.

Where: The Lincoln Campus Center. Registration, the opening welcome, and lunch
will be in the Campus Center Auditorium. All sessions will be in rooms on
the same floor.

Lunch: Lunch is provided and will be served in the CC Auditorium between noon and
12:45 p.m. Both vegetarian and meat entrees are available. We will do our
best to accommodate any specific dietary requirements you might have if
notified in sufficient time. If you have not done so already, please let us know
your preference.

Access: All Campus Center facilities are fully wheelchair accessible.

Questions: Center For Teaching (413) 545-1225
or email us at cfteach@acad.umass.edu

We look forward to seeing you on Friday, September 4, 2009!