

SGPS Teaching Assistant and Teaching Fellow Survey
Final Report

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Society of Graduate and Professional Students
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario

Summary of Report

In order to better understand the employment experiences of graduate TAs and TFs, the SGPS undertook a survey of its members in May 2008. The aims of the survey were to identify aspects of TA and TF work that members are satisfied with and aspects for which improvement is desired. The results of the survey are summarized in this report and inform recommendations which the SGPS will present to university committees and governance bodies.

Three hundred and seventy-seven people responded to the survey. Overall, we found that many people enjoy working as a TA or TF and widespread satisfaction with certain aspects of employment, in particular the current TA wage and how faculty listen to TA/TF concerns. However, respondents indicated that several other areas require consideration and improvement. Here we briefly identify these areas. First, a majority of respondents said that they work more hours than they are paid. Second, survey participants are concerned about non-transparent and, in some cases, arbitrary TA and TF appointment processes. Third, many people desire adequate TA and TF training. Fourth, a majority of respondents would like to see university-funded benefits (e.g., health, dental, childcare). Fifth, TAs and TFs in some departments experience a shortage of office and lab space. Sixth, most TAs are unaware of the current grievance procedure and some question its effectiveness. Seventh, and related, people would like to explore adopting a grievance procedure for TFs. Based on these results we make several recommendations aimed at improving TA and TF wages, benefits, and working conditions.

1.0 Introduction

While the majority of SGPS members are employed as teaching assistants (TAs), and a smaller proportion as teaching fellows (TFs), little is known about the views of this group regarding important work-related issues. As a result, the SGPS conducted a survey of its members in May 2008 to gain insight about the employment experiences of graduate TAs and TFs. The aims of the survey were to identify aspects of TA and TF work that members are satisfied with and identify aspects for which improvement is desired. The results of the survey are summarized in this report and inform recommendations which the SGPS will present to university committees and governance bodies.

2.0 Survey Methodology

The survey was administered by SurveyMonkey.com between May 9, 2008 and May 22, 2008. A draw for 5 prizes of \$100 each was offered to attract a large and representative sample. The survey was advertised via the SGPS E-Newsletter, on the SGPS website, and in a special email message that was sent to all SGPS members. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix of this report.

The survey questions were created by the SGPS Executive and SGPS members with TA and TF experience. Most survey questions asked participants to respond to a statement or question on a 5-point “Strongly Agree” to “Strongly Disagree” scale. A smaller number of questions invited people to elaborate on specific issues with written comments. Many people provided written comments and, in this report, we tried to provide a representative sample of the range of opinions – both positive and negative – on certain issues. With each written comment given in this report, we provided a unique number for the respondent. We did this to show that the views expressed across survey questions came from different people.

3.0 Survey Results

3.1 Survey Response Rate

Three hundred and seventy-seven people responded to the survey. This represents approximately 12% of SGPS members. The average response rate for each survey question was 87%.

3.2 Background Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Table 1 shows that most participants are pursuing a PhD (54%) followed by a Master degree (44%).

Table 1: Type of Degree Program

| Degree | Percentage |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| PhD | 54% |
| Master | 44% |
| Professional Program | 2% |
| Post Doc. | <1% |

Tables 2a and 2b show the number of semesters participants reported working as a TA or TF. There is significant variance in the number of semesters people are employed as TAs. In fact, 11% reported TAing 10 or more semesters. A minority of respondents reported working as a TF (18%). Within this group most were employed as a TF for one semester.

Table 2a: Number of semesters employed as a TA

| Number of semesters as TA | Percentage (rounded) |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 0 | 13% |
| 1 | 7% |
| 2 | 18% |
| 3 | 8% |

| | |
|------------|-----|
| 4 | 18% |
| 5 | 7% |
| 6 | 7% |
| 7 | 2% |
| 8 | 5% |
| 9 | 3% |
| 10 or more | 11% |

Table 2b: Number of semesters employed as a TF

| Number of semesters as TF | Percentage (rounded) |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| 0 | 82% |
| 1 | 8% |
| 2 | 4% |
| 3 | 2% |
| 4 | 3% |
| 5 or more | 2% |

Table 3 shows the percentage of responses by department. The sample is fairly representative of the SGPS membership, and it may reflect differences in TA and TF opportunities across departments.

Table 3: Respondents by department

| Department | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| Biology | 8.3 |
| Psychology | 7.2 |
| Civil Engineering | 5.3 |
| English | 5.0 |
| History | 4.7 |
| Physics, Engineering Physics and Astronomy | 4.5 |
| Geography | 4.2 |
| Sociology | 3.7 |
| Chemical Engineering | 3.7 |
| Computing | 3.4 |
| Education | 3.2 |
| Kinesiology and Health Studies | 3.2 |
| Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering | 2.7 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------|
| Electrical and Computer Engineering | 2.7 |
| Biochemistry | 2.1 |
| Mechanical and Materials Engineering | 1.9 |
| Rehabilitation Science | 1.9 |
| Economics | 1.9 |
| Political Studies | 1.6 |
| Management | 1.3 |
| Art | 1.3 |
| Microbiology and Immunology | 1.3 |
| Mathematics and Statistics | 1.1 |
| Anatomy and Cell Biology | 1.1 |
| Classics | 1.1 |
| German | 1.1 |
| Chemistry | 1.1 |
| Nursing | .8 |
| French Studies | .8 |
| Philosophy | .8 |
| Mining Engineering | .5 |
| Pharmacology and Toxicology | .5 |
| Physiology | .5 |
| Religious Studies | .5 |
| Environmental Studies | .3 |
| Law | .3 |
| Pathology and Molecular Medicine | .3 |
| Urban and Regional Planning | .3 |
| Department name not given | 11.7 |

3.3 Responses to Employment Issues

3.3.1 Compensation and Benefits

We asked people about the adequacy of TA and TF compensation. Tables 4a and 4b show that respondents were about twice as likely to agree or strongly agree that TA compensation was adequate compared to TF compensation being adequate (65% versus 33%).

Table 4a: Responses to the statement: “The compensation for TAs is adequate” (N=330)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 13.9 |
| Agree | 51.2 |
| Neutral | 17.6 |
| Disagree | 12.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4.8 |

Table 4b: Responses to the statement: “The compensation for TFs is adequate” (N=101)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 4.0 |
| Agree | 28.7 |
| Neutral | 24.8 |
| Disagree | 23.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 18.8 |

We also asked respondents whether they think that their employer (Queen’s University) should contribute to their benefits package. Table 4c shows that over 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed.

Table 4c: Responses to the statement: “I feel as though my employer (Queen’s University) should contribute to my benefits package (e.g., dental, medical, childcare).” (N=327)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 36.7 |
| Agree | 40.4 |
| Neutral | 16.8 |
| Disagree | 2.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.7 |

3.3.2 TA/TF Appointment Procedures

We asked people if they know how TA/TF positions are distributed within their department. Only fifty-five percent said they understand how the appointment process worked.

We also asked about the fairness and transparency of the TA/TF appointment processes. Tables 5a and 5b show that respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree that the

appointment process was fair than to agree or strongly agree that the process was transparent (43% versus 23%).

Table 5a: Responses to the statement: “The process for distributing TA/TF positions in my department is fair” (N=336)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 4.8 |
| Agree | 37.8 |
| Neutral | 40.2 |
| Disagree | 13.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 3.9 |

Table 5b: Responses to the statement: “The process for distributing TA/TF positions in my department is transparent” (N=340)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | 2.9 |
| Agree | 20.0 |
| Neutral | 42.4 |
| Disagree | 23.5 |
| Strongly Disagree | 11.2 |

One hundred and two people provided written comments on the fairness and transparency of the TA/TF appointment process. Generally these comments elaborated on specific concerns about departmental procedures or lack thereof. Many respondents reiterated that they did not know the appointment procedure for their department. Here are some representative comments of the varying opinions:

1. Mostly fair but some TAs get multiple positions while others are left with none. (13)
2. International and immigrant students rarely get a chance. (22)
3. Seems really random. You provide a list of topics and hope like hell that you are assigned to a class that you have at least some familiarity with. [...] Can you say Patronage...this is coming from someone who benefits from this. (46)
4. The graduate students have no say in the TA position allocation and the decision is final. (48)
5. We do get a list of first, second and third choices for consideration as a TA for at least some courses. (70)
6. There seems to be no effort made to match TAs to courses in their area of expertise. (126)

7. Although I have known students who have given input or asked for a change after placements are determined, this is not invited. (137)
8. If your direct [...] supervisor requests you, you are usually assigned to be the TA for their course. Otherwise, the graduate students are more or less at the mercy of our departmental administrative assistants' whims. (174)
9. Distribution is based on the courses TAs have themselves taken, and on their research interests. (237)
10. There aren't enough positions for every graduate student in the department to have a TA/TF position, which itself isn't fair. Despite this, my department tries to fairly allocate the positions to best benefit undergraduate students AND graduate TAs. (275)
11. There is some variation, depending on who the graduate coordinator is. (287)
12. Some of the TA assignments appear to be somewhat arbitrary, and I have ended up with positions for courses I knew nothing about. Other students have complained about the same thing, and when they requested a different course (or to trade assignments with a fellow student), were told that this was not possible. (300)
13. I have seen TAs assigned to courses for which they have NO experience whatsoever. (329)
14. I think they are mostly fair. I don't like how those who get external awards (i.e., those who have high quality research/research proposals) are put at a disadvantage when it comes to getting TAships. (363)

3.3.3 TA/TF Office and Lab Space

We asked several questions about office and lab space. Nearly 85% of respondents said they had access to an office or lab on campus that they use for TA/TF work. Table 6a shows the number of people with whom TAs and TFs share an office or lab.

Table 6a: Number of people sharing office or lab

| Number of people sharing office or lab | Percentage |
|--|------------|
| 0 | 8% |
| 1 | 10% |
| 2 | 9% |
| 3 | 17% |
| 4 | 10% |
| 5 | 9% |
| 6 | 10% |
| 7 | 3% |
| 8 | 4% |
| 9 | 1% |
| 10 or more | 20% |

We also asked people about the adequacy of office and lab space for addressing their needs as a TA/TF. Table 6b shows that almost 50% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed that their space is adequate. However, a large minority (36%) disagreed and strongly disagreed with this question.

Figure 6b: Responses to the statement: “I feel my office/lab space adequately addresses my needs as a TA/TF.” (N=324)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 8.3 |
| Agree | 40.7 |
| Neutral | 15.1 |
| Disagree | 21.9 |
| Strongly Disagree | 13.9 |

3.3.4 TA/TF Resources and Training

We asked people if they have enough resources and time to provide students with a high quality learning experience. Table 7a shows that nearly 50% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they have enough time to do their TA/TF work. Table 7b shows that 64% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough resources to do their TA/TF work. However, in response to the follow up question: “Which resources would improve the quality and safety of your TA/TF work?” only 38% indicated that they had adequate resources to perform their TA and TF work.

Table 7a: Responses to the statement: “I feel that I have enough time to provide students with a high quality learning experience.” (N=331)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 6.0 |
| Agree | 43.5 |
| Neutral | 22.7 |
| Disagree | 22.4 |
| Strongly Disagree | 5.4 |

Table 7b: Responses to the statement: “I feel that I have enough resources to provide students with a high quality learning experience.” (N=331)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 9.1 |
| Agree | 54.7 |
| Neutral | 20.5 |
| Disagree | 13.9 |
| Strongly Disagree | 1.8 |

Table 7c shows the percentage of respondents who identified specific resources they thought would improve the quality and safety of their TA and TF work (people could select more than one item). The top five responses were photocopying, TA/TF training, smaller class sizes, smaller tutorial sizes, and course books.

Table 7c: Responses to the statement: “Which resources would improve the quality and safety of your TA/TF work?”

| Resource | Percentage |
|--|-------------------|
| Have adequate resources | 38% |
| Photocopying | 38% |
| Departmental TA/TF training | 31% |
| Smaller class sizes | 31% |
| Smaller tutorial sizes | 29% |
| Course books | 28% |
| Professional development Opportunities | 28% |
| Lab materials | 20% |
| Computer/internet connections | 19% |
| Other | 17% |
| Library resources | 10% |
| Safety equipment | 4% |
| Safety training | 3% |

Respondents were invited to comment on “other” issues that affect the quality and safety of their TA and TF work. Fifty-three responses were collected. Many people elaborated on the points above. Here are some representative comments of the varying opinions:

1. Reasonable work load, assignments designed in such a way that most of our time is spent in helping students and not in endless marking. (15)

2. You should have let us rank these options -- training would be my number one choice. (21)
3. Orientation for new TAs/TFs regarding course schedule, design, resources, and grading before they start their work. More faculty support for TFs. (22)
4. The [number] of students per tutorial has risen over the last few years, reaching up to a maximum of [over 50] students. This is far too many for Teaching Assistants to adequately provide students with the kind of individual attention that they do not get in the lectures. Also it should be mandatory for TAs to hand in time sheets regularly throughout the semester so that they do not do additional hours on top of what is stipulated in their contracts. (60)
5. Better schedule for tutorials, which can sometimes be scattered throughout the whole week, making it difficult to devote time to research. (106)
6. Paid preparation time. (202)
7. Quite simply, it comes down to this: The amount of time you are paid for is significantl[y] less than the amount of time required to adequately teach the number of students you have in each section. (221)
8. Office space to meet with students. [Not] having a private place to meet with students (the only office available is a shared grad student space/office). (239)
9. Lab equipment is outdated and there is not enough of it. (255)
10. More interaction with the course supervisor. (270)

3.3.2 Work hours

We asked people about their work hours. Twenty-eight percent indicated that they have never had a concern about their work hours. Table 8 shows the percentage of respondents that have experienced specific concerns related to work hours (people could choose more than one concern). Fifty-six percent said that they worked more hours than they were paid. A minority (14%) indicated that they have no formal agreement on work hours at the beginning of their employment contract.

Table 8: Responses to the question: “What, if any, concerns have you had about your TA/TF working hours?”

| Concern related to work hours | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| No concern | 28% |
| Working more hours than paid | 56% |
| Not all facets of work (e.g. marking, office hours, reading, tutorial prep., etc.) are counted as paid work | 43% |
| Distribution of hours inhibits academic performance | 32% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| No advanced notice of when/how much you will be working over the semester/year | 18% |
| No formal agreement over hours at the beginning of the semester | 14% |

Respondents were invited to comment on “other” concerns they have about TA and TF work hours. Thirty-one responses were collected. Many elaborated on the points above and some raised other concerns. Here are some representative comments of the varying opinions:

1. Proper mark[i]ng takes way mor[e] time then I'm paid for + I don't get paid for helping students outside the lab period. (72)
2. An expectation that even though you've signed a contract to work a fixed number of hours that you will do more than that without complaining. (77)
3. The department tells you how many hours they will pay you for regardless of how many hours you actually work... and they definitely low-ball the figure. (161)
4. Other students are assigned more hours (= more money) and do 1/2 the work. TAs assigned more hours should be doing more of the work - everyone is busy, this is a lame excuse not to pull your weight. (201)
5. You do not allow for the possibility that T.A.s are paid for more hours than they work. This is frequently the case as I know from both personal and shared experience from others (as well as TA's who have worked for me.). (319)
6. There is often a position of power of the prof and it is hard to know what is "appropriate" for the TA to expect or say. (339)

3.3.3 Voicing and Resolving Concerns Related to TA/TF Work

We asked people who they speak to when they have concerns about their TA and TF work. Table 9a shows that respondents were most likely to speak to their supervisor or someone in their departmental office. Twelve percent of respondents reported always doing nothing when they have concerns.

Very few people take up TA and TF concerns with the SGPS and 96% reported that they had never used the SGPS Student Advisor Program for a TA or TF concern. This may be due relatively low awareness of the Student Advisor Program. Fifty-one percent of respondents reported not knowing about the Student Advisor Program.

Table 9a: Targets of voice

| Response | Always (%) | Sometimes (%) | Never (%) |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| Speak to an SGPS Student Advisor | 2.9 | 5.3 | 91.8 |
| Speak to your supervisor | 22.1 | 54.3 | 23.6 |
| Speak to someone in your departmental office | 9.1 | 48.7 | 42.3 |
| Speak to a faculty member who is not your supervisor | 6.2 | 40.0 | 53.8 |
| Speak to someone in the SGPS office | 1.6 | 8.4 | 90.0 |
| Do nothing | 12.3 | 54.3 | 33.3 |

Thirty-eight people listed “other” comments such as talk to the instructor, head TA/course coordinator, and, most commonly, other TAs/TFs.

Table 9b shows the extent to which respondents felt their concerns about TA/TF work were heard by faculty, their departmental administration, the SGPS, and the university administration. A majority (59%) felt that faculty heard their TA/TF concerns.

Table 9b: TA/TF concerns are heard by... (N=328-335)

| Response | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neutral | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| Faculty | 13.3 | 45.8 | 23.3 | 14.5 | 3.2 |
| Department administration | 7.7 | 32.3 | 30.5 | 24.1 | 5.5 |
| SGPS | 5.9 | 17.8 | 45.2 | 22.2 | 8.9 |
| University administration | 2.7 | 3.4 | 32.7 | 33.3 | 27.9 |

We also asked respondents if they are satisfied with how their concerns are addressed. Forty-eight percent of people agreed and strongly agreed that they were satisfied. In contrast, 20% of respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Table 9c: Responses to the statement: “Overall, I am satisfied with how my TA/TF concerns have been addressed.” (N=282)

| Response | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 9.2 |
| Agree | 39.0 |
| Neutral | 31.9 |

| | |
|-------------------|------|
| Disagree | 15.6 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4.3 |

3.3.4 TA and TF Grievance Procedures

We asked respondents whether they were made aware of the TA or TF grievance procedure in their department. Table 10a shows that a majority (66%) of respondents were never made aware of the grievance procedure.

Table 10a: Responses to the question: “If and when you have concerns about your TA/TF work are you made aware of the TA/TF grievance procedure in your department?” (N=222)

| Response | Percentage |
|-----------|------------|
| Always | 10.8 |
| Sometimes | 23.0 |
| Never | 66.2 |

We also asked about the effectiveness of the grievance procedure. Table 10b shows that a large majority (71%) said they did not know. Slightly more respondents indicated that they disagreed and strongly disagreed that the TA grievance procedure was effective compared those that agreed and strongly agreed (9% versus 7%).

Table 10b: Responses to the statement: “I feel that the current TA grievance procedure is effective.” (N=336)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|------------|
| Strongly Agree | .3 |
| Agree | 6.5 |
| Neutral | 14.0 |
| Disagree | 6.0 |
| Strongly Disagree | 2.7 |
| Don't Know | 70.5 |

We asked people to elaborate on any aspect of the TA grievance procedure. Twenty-six responses were collected. The vast majority of these comments indicated that people are unaware of the grievance procedure. Here are some other representative comments of the varying opinions:

1. It is effective if you have a faculty [member] who is understanding. Unfortunately this is not always the case. All too often TAs will not speak up because they depend on faculty

for letters of recommendation or course evaluations and fear that addressing the concern will back fire on them. (60)

2. It is effective. (299)
3. I actually don't know what the grievance procedure is in my department; it's not something they advertise and they certainly don't openly admit that there are problems PERIOD. (304)
4. I have never had to use it, nor do I know of anyone using it. (319)

We also asked about the need for a grievance procedure for TFs. Table 10c shows that 45% of respondents said they do not know if one was necessary. More people indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed that a TF grievance procedure was needed compared those that disagreed and strongly disagreed (32% versus 13%).

Table 10c: Responses to the statement: "I think there should be a grievance procedure for TFs." (N=372)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 10.5 |
| Agree | 21.2 |
| Neutral | 11.0 |
| Disagree | 8.3 |
| Strongly Disagree | 4.3 |
| Don't Know | 44.6 |

Here we asked people to elaborate on the need for a grievance procedure for TFs. Sixteen comments were collected. Here are some representative comments of the varying opinions:

1. This is a job were the employer/employee relationship is quite precarious. (149)
2. Employees should always have access to formal grievance procedures whether they need them or not. (213)
3. [I was told] the more than double hours i worked was 'just the way it is'. I'm sorry, but something being 'just the way it is' does not make something right. (221)
4. [I'm] not sure what it would be about. (302)

3.3.5 TA/TF Issues affecting International Students

We asked international students about their experiences as a TA or TF. Table 11a shows that more international students indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed that the difference in international tuition influences their decision to TA or TF compared to those who disagreed and strongly disagreed (47% versus 38%).

Table 11a: Responses to the statement: “The difference between tuition for domestic and international students influences my decision to TA/TF.” (N=64)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 31.3 |
| Agree | 15.6 |
| Neutral | 15.6 |
| Disagree | 17.2 |
| Strongly Disagree | 20.3 |

Table 11b shows that fewer international students indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed that linguistic differences complicated their academic and professional working relations on campus compared those who disagreed and strongly disagreed (31% versus 52%).

Table 11b: Responses to the statement: “Linguistic differences complicate my academic and professional working relations on campus.” (N=65)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 10.8 |
| Agree | 20.0 |
| Neutral | 16.9 |
| Disagree | 23.1 |
| Strongly Disagree | 29.2 |

Finally, Table 11c shows that fewer international students indicated that they agreed and strongly agreed that cultural differences complicate their academic and professional working relations on campus compared those who disagreed and strongly disagreed (30% versus 52%).

Table 11c: Responses to the statement: “Cultural differences complicate my academic and professional working relations on campus.” (N=69)

| Response | Percentage |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | 14.5 |
| Agree | 15.9 |
| Neutral | 17.4 |
| Disagree | 21.7 |
| Strongly Disagree | 30.4 |

We asked respondents to elaborate on these issues and collected 10 responses. Here are two comments:

1. There is a language barrier that prohibits me from being as an effective teacher as I would like to; Some people just black out if they hear an accent in someone's speaking; There are students and even worse faculty members that in practice do not respect different mentalities or at least the different ways people perceive an environment to be fertile for development and learning. They believe academic work is just a matter of projecting your ego onto others but in my culture humility is very important. (15)
2. I have never encountered language or culture impeding TAing. (331)

3.4 Other Comments

At the end of the survey we asked people: "Are there any other concerns (as a TA, TF, or graduate student) that you may have that were not addressed by this survey?" We collected 93 responses. Many of these responses were detailed. Due to space limitations we can only provide a few representative comments of varying opinion. The most common response related to unpaid TA hours.

1. I think there should be some blanket regulations for the TA work in our (at least) department so that when an issue arises it does not become a personal thing between the student and the instructors of the course (usually a prof). (15)
2. I am concerned that any changes to TA position (e.g. higher hourly wages) will be taken out of the funding for the QGA monies paid. Overall, everything would stay the same. (34)
3. Student evaluations of TAs are a concern. Students are often unaware of the time restrictions TAs work with and the limit this places on the quality of service they can provide students. Also students disgruntled with their grades often give TAs poor evaluations. It has been my experience that TAs who give students higher grades, get better evaluations which puts in question the grading system. Because academic departments require more and more that TAs provide them with student evaluations, this is something that needs to be addressed. In my opinion, this is the result of consumer driven educational system in which the students (i.e. consumers) demand the services they paid for (i.e. higher grades). This in turn impacts the quality of education. (60)
4. I just want to say that for this survey I was concentrating on the few times I've had problems. Most of my TA experiences have been fantastic, with professors who were totally fair and concerned to make sure that they weren't asking too much of my time. (77)
5. [There] is not enough TA hours to run effective labs. More TAs are needed not just more hours, because labs are more effective with multiple TAs to help students. (79)

6. This year I was frustrated by how much the prof I was TAing for relied on me, as a function of not doing his own job or preparation. I recognize that this isn't a problem with everyone, though it may be useful to offer or require courses for new faculty on how to work with TAs and prepare lectures/tutorials/exams. (137)
7. I am concerned that the compensation for each course in my department doesn't really match the actual work load. Also, the department doesn't seem to care because they have "a certain amount of money allocated for TAs that they can't exceed" and they make it seem like you just have to do all of the work for the course and they will pay for however many hours they can afford to. (161)
8. Overall my TA and TF experiences have been very positive. I have been given a great deal of freedom to teach independently and to develop curriculum. My only concern is that preparation time is not paid so it is not possible to do a proper job without working many extra hours over what is paid. (202)
9. [I was told] "you're going to work 70, 80, 90 hours, but we can only pay you for 40". That doesn't seem fair to me. If they can only pay that much, then they should only assign me work that will take 40 hours. (206)
10. I was once, as a TA, evaluated low after a term and got disqualified for the next term. I didn't know where to appeal on this kind of issue. I think TA should be well informed of their rights and what to do. (208)
11. The only problem that I have is that sometimes professors will ask too much. They need to recognize that our contracted hours are finite in number. I don't mind working extra hours, but I should be fairly compensated, and the hassle to get this compensation should be minimized. (231)
12. Issues of graduate program funding overlap with TA and TF funding and time issues. in my 4th and 5th years i have been forced to work up to 3 ta/tf positions a semester in order to support myself and finance my education. adequate upper year funding would definitely make things easier. (235)
13. I think it'll be a great idea to have a legal/strong agreement on the total number hours (including labs, tutorials, e-mail response, meetings, etc.) that a TA is expected to spend for a particular slot. Also, I don't think that many TAs are aware of the grievance procedure. (236)
14. Office space is the number one issue for me. I met with almost half of my students in a hallway because [over 10] of us shared an office. Students need privacy and meeting in the hallway does not generate respect. (272)
15. Honestly my major issue is with how much a TF is paid to teach a course over a term. I feel that \$7500 is rather low, particularly when a course has to be designed from scratch. I was paid more than this to TA a course where I taught 20 hours per week for a term; I would say I easily spent 20 hours per week between prep, teaching, office hours, marking, etc. when teaching a seminar course and made less - it means that taking a TF involves a pay cut and the student is really doing it just for the experience. (301)
16. Co-taught a course as TF, got paid less than the TA's for the course. [...] [Preparing] lectures and teaching the course obviously takes far more time and effort than marking midterms/assn's, seemed ridiculous that my TA's were getting paid more than I was. (333)

17. I would appreciate some more organization on the instructors' part. Sometimes they do not realize that many TAs are out of their depth in a given course, and that TAs rely on teaching notes / lesson plans, TA meetings, etc., to properly prepare for a lesson. Instructors should put as much effort as possible into preparing these items (or preparing for them). (366)

4.0 Limitations

A concern with any open on-line survey is the integrity of the data. Three potential problems with this approach are 1) that some participants may submit more than one survey; 2) individuals outside the target sample may participate in the survey; and 3) respondents tended to be less (or more) satisfied with being a TA or TF than the entire population of Queen's TAs and TFs . We used multiple approaches to explore the potential impact of these threats.

First, we asked participants to provide their Queen's email address if they wished to be entered into the draw for \$100. The majority of respondents (84%) provided this information. Second, collected the IP addresses of survey respondents. We found one unusual pattern where nine responses originated from one IP address. Finally, we compared the responses of individuals that provided an email address and those who did not. We found that people who gave their email address were more likely to agree that TA pay was adequate, agree that the TA/TF allocation process was fair and transparent, be satisfied that their concerns were addressed, and less likely to have spoken to the SGPS when they had concerns about TA/TF work.

4.0 Recommendations

To our knowledge this is the first survey of SGPS member's views regarding a wide range of TA and TF work-related issues. Overall, while we found that many people enjoy working as a TA or TF and widespread satisfaction with certain aspects of employment (e.g., TA wages, how faculty listen to concerns), people identified areas of improvement (e.g., systemic problem of unpaid work, arbitrary TA and TF appointment processes). Based on these results we make the following recommendations aimed at improving TA and TF wages, benefits, and working conditions:

Compensation and Benefits

1. Increase TF salaries to bring greater equity with TA wages.
2. Provide additional compensation for TFs who develop new courses or have large classes.
3. Provide a university-funded health, dental, and childcare benefit to TAs and TFs.

Appointment Procedures

1. Establish standardized policies for TA and TF appointments and make graduate and professional students aware of these policies.
2. Establish effective mechanisms for appealing TA and TF appointment decisions.
3. Classify PhD students as sessional instructors instead of TFs after they have defended their dissertation but have not graduated.

Office/Lab Space

1. Conduct a review of departmental TA and TF office/lab space to address departmental specific space needs.

Work Resources

1. Mandate appropriate training for all TAs and TFs.
2. Compensate TAs and TFs for participating in mandatory training sessions.
3. Conduct a review of departmental TA and TF resources and address specific departmental needs (e.g., photocopying, textbooks, lab materials).
4. Reduce the number of students in large tutorials, labs and classes.

Work Hours

1. Mandate that all TA contracts be negotiated at the beginning of each semester and clearly state the allocation of work hours.
2. Establish an effective mechanism for recording and reporting TA hours.
3. Establish an effective mechanism for TAs to be compensation for hours worked above the stated number of hours in their contracts.
4. Provide adequate financial resources to departments for TAs.
5. Fairly distribute TA hours to prevent inequity created by under- and over-payment.

Grievance Procedures

1. Establish an effective grievance procedure for TFs with input from graduate and professional students.
2. Raise awareness among students, departmental assistants, and faculty regarding the TA grievance procedure.
3. Review the TA grievance procedure to improve its effectiveness.

TA/TF Issues and International Students

1. Raise awareness about accent discrimination among undergraduate students and faculty.
2. Establish paid training for international students.

5.0 Feedback on this Report

Comments and questions about this report are welcome and can be sent to Sean Tucker, at vpig@sgps.ca. Thank you.

Appendix – Teaching Assistant and Teaching Fellow Survey