

HARVARD LIFE

Teaching Fellows Desperately Want More Teaching Conferences

Cambridge, MA - A recent survey polling GSAS teaching fellows (TFs) shows that they desperately want more teaching conferences. In answer to the question "What could be done to improve your teaching experience?", an overwhelming 95% answered "having more teaching conferences", far ahead of the other most popular answers, "having more TF positions available" (3%) and "receiving more sexual bribes from students" (2%).

"I knew that we were doing a great job, but I am very pleased and surprised of the impact we seem to have on the lives of the TFs", commented James Dean, director of the Derek Bok Center for Kids Who Can't Read Good. The Bok Center organizes two two-day conferences every year. HSP was literally flooded by ardent emails when it started investigating this phenomenal popularity with TFs.

"As a chemist, most of the time, I'm very busy mixing chemicals in my lab." said G3 Brett McGarrett in an interview with HSP. "The teaching conferences come at a great time in the year because it is pretty much the only time when I can afford to do something totally useless like listening to specious and superfluous reflections on abstract topics such as confusion, intelligence, success, failure, you name it...Its such an exciting change of pace."

"For me, it really is the interdisciplinary aspect," enthused Amanda Manda of the Department of Physics. "As a scientist teaching to fellow graduate students, I really love attending this conference about how to simultaneously teach to undergrads in the humanities and social sciences and not have sex with them."

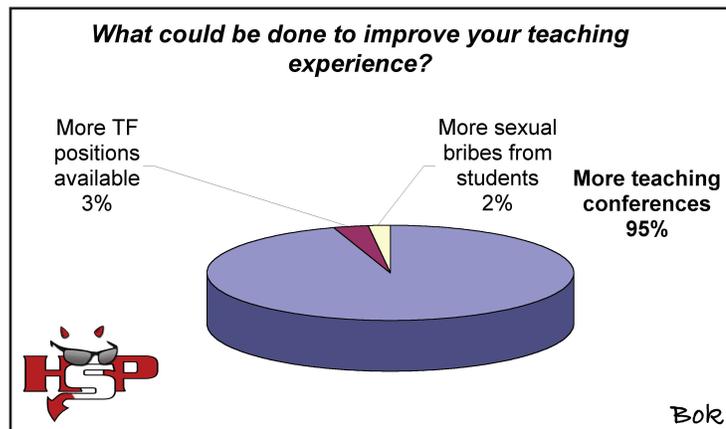
"Having only been a student for about 19 years now, I've had very few opportunities to actually sit in a class, so it was very useful to have two days of seminars to tell me what it would look like," added Nicole McNicoll of the Division of Medical Sciences.

The response was just as strong on the side of non-scientists. The professional conduct seminar seems to be of particular interest. "It is vital that all students have this repeated several times a year: 'you have to be friendly with your students but you cannot be their friends; as a matter of fact, you cannot be friends with any undergrad as they may end up in your section one day', because students here

seem to forget that they are superior to the undergrads both mentally and hierarchically," points out Deidra Müller of comparative literature. "There is a reason why there is a fence around the freshman houses, and why the other houses lie in secluded areas."

"My thesis is about the futility of existence, but I still enjoy the conference because they don't take attendance, so I can go hit on chicks at the nearby Lamont library between free meals", chuckles Neil O'Neil of the philosophy department.

More specifically, students found the advice given in the talks invaluable. Indeed, for Geraldine Fitzgerald of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations: "I had been teaching Coptic, Ancient Greek and biblical Hebrew, but it was not until attending the teaching conference that I learned about the idea of using recent newspapers, magazines and TV programs in those languages instead of old texts to make my teaching more interesting."



Wang W. Wong is "... very impressed. I have been studying irony in English literature, but I never saw such dense irony as in most of those seminars... They are ostensibly about how to teach well, but they all pretend to be such bad teachers! And they are so good at it that they never let even the slightest hint that they are acting and being ironic. And they put a lot of effort in it : in spite of my vast knowledge and literary background, I would have difficulties coming up with such vast collections of obvious statements myself."

In addition to the teaching conferences, the Bok Center offers many different programs of formation and follow-up for TFs throughout the year. As explained by Sarah O'Hara of the Music Department : "The follow-up offered by the Bok Center is vital, because as professors do not have to respect any standards in their teaching, especially the tenured ones, how could we guaranty quality if not through the TFs?"

Rumor has it that the Bok Center will organize monthly teaching conferences starting next year in view of this unanimous response. HSP staff will attend all future conferences forever.