

To: Dr. Misty Anderson, Department Head (English)
 From: The Composition Office (Sean Morey, Melinda Backer, and Madeline Crozier)
 RE: Report on Results of the "Real Hours" Project
 Date: October 12, 2023

Context of the Project

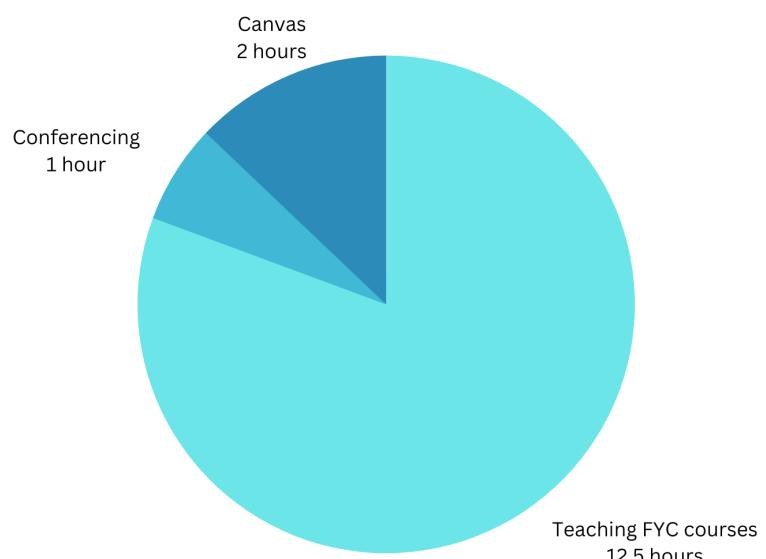
The Composition Office was asked to help calculate the number of hours that English GTAs invest into FYC courses, including all teaching-related labor that often goes unseen, like lesson planning, grading/giving feedback, and conferencing. Of the 34 GTAs teaching FYC courses, 11 GTAs (32.4% response rate) tracked their labor over a two-week period (Weeks 5/6 of the Fall semester). GTAs also indicated how much time they spent conferencing, the total number of hours recorded by their Canvas courses, and their commentary on their stipends and workload.

Major Findings

- The average weekly GTA workload measures approximately 17 hours per FYC course
- 8 out of 11 respondents (72.73%) logged more than 10 hours per week per FYC course
- GTAs who spend more than 10 hours per week per FYC course invest an average of 12.5 hours per week per course—25% more time than they are compensated to work—for all teaching-related activities, including teaching classes, lesson planning, and grading
- *In addition to their weekly teaching labor*, GTAs allocate an average of 16 hours/semester (which averages to one hour/week) conferencing with students in two units of English 10
- *In addition to their weekly teaching labor*, GTAs, by week 6 of the semester, logged an average of 52 hours *per Canvas course*. This number reflects some of the time GTAs spend grading, responding to student work, and doing course prep, but it also includes the unrecognized labor of setting up Canvas courses before the semester begins and creating pages, Modules, and activities. Estimating ~30 hours for Canvas prep *before the semester begins*, along with overlapping time with other teaching activities, GTAs average 2 hours/week developing their courses on Canvas

Average Weekly GTA Workload

Total: 15.5 hours



GTA Stipend Inadequacy In Their Own Words

- “I truly did not realize the amount of time, effort, emotional energy, and labor would go into FYC courses . . . it is wildly underappreciated.”
- “I feel that, though I could certainly devote more time and labor, I could not devote even a moment less of my time to my FYC courses without failing my students. Teaching is one of my top priorities.”
- “I feel like too much is expected of me as a grad student because I put a lot of time and effort into the FYC classes to ensure students are successful in the course, but my first priority is being a grad student which actually becomes less of a priority for me because I'm so consumed by FYC. It's hard to balance because if I don't put the amount of effort I'm putting into FYC right now, then the classes wouldn't be successful; however; I am neglecting myself and my graduate studies in order for FYC to be successful.”
- “I feel like I'm drowning. No matter how much time I spend on the courses, there is still infinitely more work to do, even when using practices like labor-based grading, leaving minimum comments on student work, using Canvas FYC resources, etc. I feel behind on all fronts, because it is not possible to provide the level of course design and instruction UT expects, take multiple graduate-level classes, and make the sort of research progress we are expected to on our theses/dissertations. I am trying to give my students the level of education they deserve, and it's at the expense of my own education and health.”
- “I feel I am putting in far more labor than I am being paid for.”

Supplemental Evidence & Quick Facts

- Across higher education in the U.S., “about 46% of undergraduate students at four-year colleges take courses that have graduate students as their primary instructors” ([Bettinger et al., 2016, p. 64](#)). GTAs have been reported to make up 41% of instructional staff at public, doctoral-granting institutions across the U.S. ([Cicchino, 2020](#)).
- Undergraduate students have been found more likely to major in a discipline when a GTA teaches their first course in the subject (Bettinger et al., 2016).
- The first two years of undergraduate education are often called the "critical period" ([Alarcon & Edwards, 2013](#)). Undergraduates are most likely to drop out in their first two years, and GTAs are by far most responsible for teaching students in their "critical period," which directly impacts student retention and academic achievement (with significant financial consequences for the university).
- In one national survey of GTAs in English programs, the overwhelming majority (71.6%) reported that their stipends were “inadequate” for covering cost-of-living expenses including rent, utilities, and groceries ([Osorio et al., 2021, p. 138](#)). At the same time, **65.4% of GTAs report working more hours than they are paid to work** (Osorio et al.,

2021 p. 140). Any unexpected expenses like emergencies and healthcare often put graduate student instructors (GSIs) into “crisis mode” (Osorio et al., 2021, p. 139).

- “Even though the pay for the labor that they have been contracted to do fails to cover the living needs of 71.6% of GSIs, the majority of GSIs (65.4%) still do more work than they are actually contracted for. As for course load and credit hours, there is a clear disconnect between how many hours GSI employers think it takes to properly and ethically deliver quality instruction and how many hours GSIs feel obligated to work in order to do that work properly” (Osorio et al., 2021 p. 140).
- From the [2022-2023 UTK Fact Book](#): In 2022, there was a combined total of 1,455 graduate teaching associates/assistants compared to 1,749 full-time faculty. Since GTAs almost exclusively teach lower-level courses (100/200 level) which are typically larger than upper-level courses, GTAs teach a disproportionately large number of students compared to full-time instructors.