Balancing Academic Freedom, Professional Development for TAs, and a Uniform Experience for the Students

Fardad Firooznia

City College of New York, Department of Biology, 160 Convent Ave., New York NY 10031 USA (ffirooznia@ccny.cuny.edu)

One of the problems with teaching large lecture classrooms with multiple lab sections that are taught by several TAs is the disconnect between the experience with the lecturer versus that with the lab instructor. The more intimate setting in the lab means closer connections and perhaps easier monitoring of the progress and the learning of individual students. Each TA deserves the opportunity to explore his/her interest in pedagogy and develop his/her teaching skills and if interested develop and participate in pedagogical research. It is incumbent upon us as course coordinators and instructors to provide some level of professional development for our TAs and to allow them to experiment with their teaching and exercise their academic freedom while at the same time ensuring some uniformity in the experience of the students in different lab sections of a multi-section class. In this mini workshop we will discuss steps the course coordinators/instructors can take that involve TAs to ensure some kind of uniform experience for the students in the different lab sections. Examples which I will provide to jump start the discussion are: weekly lab prep sessions, guide timelines for lab instruction, practice lab reports, grading rubrics, and lab exam question pools. We will also discuss ways that the course coordinator/instructor and the department or the university can help to ensure opportunities for professional development and growth for the TAs. Examples for discussion are video-tape recall microteaching, teaching observations/feedback, exam writing practice, and pilot lab tests.

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