

Teaching Roles at DRZC

Approved by Dharma Council on 2 April 2009

The label “teacher” has many meanings and connotations. A teacher is usually defined as a person who teaches, instructs, or imparts knowledge to others. In common parlance, “teacher” usually refers to a professional, someone who is paid to teach. “Teacher” also is used to designate a role that one fulfills in specific circumstances (e.g., as parents teach their children), and may also be applied to inanimate objects or abstract concepts that cause or inspire learning (e.g., books, life, experience).

In Buddhism generally, and Zen in particular, the word “teacher” has significant spiritual and personal dimensions. A Teacher is someone who serves as a spiritual mentor and guide for others, someone whose spiritual development and accomplishment is recognized by his/her teacher(s) and seniors, and who is formally authorized to lead others in their spiritual development. In Zen, Teachers are direct spiritual descendants of the Buddha himself. The teacher-student relationship is central to Zen history and literature, and is a significant part of contemporary practice in the West.

At Dharma Rain, there are many circumstances in which members give talks, lead classes or workshops, and in other ways occupy teaching roles, even though they are not Teachers in the formal sense just described. The purpose of this document is to clarify these teaching roles *as they are used at Dharma Rain*. Roles are defined, qualifications for functioning in each role are described, and the party responsible for oversight of each role is indicated.

These roles are meant to be distinct and contextual; a single individual may occupy several roles at different times and places. Although some roles have more stringent qualifications than others, no hierarchy or progression between roles is implied (except for Instructor and Apprentice Instructor).

Individuals occupying any of these roles should be mindful of how they present themselves and the language they use to describe their role, especially when speaking to newer members, visitors, and the community at large. In particular, one should not present oneself as a “Teacher” associated with Dharma Rain unless one has been given explicit permission to do so.

Dharma Teacher

Definition: A Dharma Teacher functions as spiritual mentor, advisor, and guide for individual students/disciples. An individual practitioner initiates this relationship by making a request to a teacher. If the teacher accepts, the relationship is one of mutual commitment: the student commits to practicing in the lineage traditions held by Dharma Rain, and the teacher commits to the student's spiritual development. Teacher-student interactions occur in both formal (e.g., sanzen, sesshin) and informal settings (e.g., conversations, email) at Dharma Rain and elsewhere (for example, when a Dharma Rain event takes place at another location, as with a sesshin at Great Vow Zen Monastery). Both Priests and Lay Teachers (defined below) may be authorized as Dharma Teachers.

Qualifications:

- 1) Formal Dharma Transmission
- 2) Specific authorization to teach from a DRZC Dharma Teacher (who in turn has also received

formal Dharma Transmission and authorization to teach)

3) Ordination as a monastic or lay disciple

Oversight: Dharma Teachers are overseen primarily by their own teachers. The Ethics Council may also have oversight responsibility should a Dharma Teacher be involved in a grievance.

Associated Dharma Teacher

Definition: A Dharma Teacher functioning at locations formally associated with Dharma Rain, in contexts operated under the auspices of Dharma Rain. Examples of such locations include affiliated sitting groups outside the Portland area. As with the Dharma Teacher, an Associated Dharma Teacher may be either a Priest or Lay Teacher. At present, there are no persons in this role.

Qualifications: The same as for a Dharma Teacher.

Oversight: The same as for a Dharma Teacher.

Lay Teacher

Definition: A Lay Teacher serves as an example of mature, developed practice on the layperson's path. A Lay Teacher is authorized to give dharma talks without her/his teacher present, and may also be authorized to conduct sanzen, but is not authorized to take on individual students.

Qualifications:

- 1) Ordination as a lay disciple
- 2) Service as Shuso
- 4) Formal Dharma Transmission

Oversight: The same as for a Dharma Teacher.

Instructor

Definition: An Instructor leads classes and / or workshops on Dharma topics. This broad category includes persons who lead:

- Public classes on Wednesday evenings
- Dharma Studies / Seminary classes
- One-time or occasional classes on specific topics (e.g., death and dying, ethics for Lay Disciples)
- Introductory Workshops (Zen Meditation, Starting a Practice)
- Dharma School
- Dharma School parents' classes

The scope in which an Instructor teaches may be limited; for example, someone qualified and approved for teaching Wednesday evening classes is not automatically qualified and approved for teaching

Dharma School or leading Introductory Workshops. Likewise, a person approved to lead the “Introduction to Zen Meditation” workshop is not automatically approved to lead the “Starting a Practice” workshop.

Qualifications:

- For **Wednesday evening and Dharma Studies / Seminary classes:**

- 1) Graduation from the Seminary program
- 2) Experience as an Apprentice Instructor
- 3) Recommendation by a mentor who is an authorized Instructor
- 4) Approval by the Dharma Council

An Instructor's scope may be limited to either Wednesday evening or Dharma Studies / Seminary classes.

Oversight is provided by the Dharma Council.

- For **one-time or occasional classes on specific topics:**

- 1) Expertise in the subject matter
- 2) Ability to present the subject from a Dharma perspective
- 3) Recommendation by a mentor who is an authorized Instructor
- 5) Approval by the Dharma Council

Oversight is provided by the Dharma Council.

- For **Introductory Workshops:**

- 1) Experience as an Apprentice Instructor
- 2) Approval by the Workshop Team Leader (currently Sosetsu Stauffer)

Oversight is provided by the Workshop Coordinator

- For **Dharma School**, qualifications are under development. Oversight is by the Dharma School Principal (currently Gyokuko Carlson).

Apprentice Instructor

An Apprentice Instructor assists Instructors in leading classes and / or workshops on Dharma topics. An Apprentice Instructor's scope (the contexts in which they work) is similar to an Instructor's. Although Instructors in different categories are generally required to serve as Apprentices first, serving as an Apprentice is not sufficient to qualify someone as an Instructor.

Qualifications:

- For **Wednesday evening and Dharma Studies / Seminary classes:**

- 1) Participation in the class (or its equivalent) as a student

- 2) Recommendation an authorized Instructor or member of the Dharma Council
- 3) Approval by the Dharma Council

An Apprentice Instructor's scope may be limited to either Wednesday evening or Dharma Studies / Seminary classes.

Oversight is provided by the Dharma Council.

- For **one-time or occasional classes on specific topics**:
 - 1) Expertise in the subject matter
 - 2) Ability to present the subject from a Dharma perspective
 - 3) Recommendation by a mentor who is an authorized Instructor
 - 4) Approval by the Dharma Council

Oversight is provided by the Dharma Council.

- For **Introductory Workshops**:
 - 1) A member of Dharma Rain who has taken the Precepts
 - 2) Approval by the Workshop Team Leader

Oversight is provided by the Workshop Team Leader

- For **Dharma School**, TBD as for Instructor.

Group Leader

Group Leaders function in settings less formal than those lead by Instructors. Examples include Sunday morning discussions (in lieu of a dharma talk), affiliated sitting groups when no Dharma Teacher is present, and Gay Tea. Group Leaders may provide some degree of instruction (e.g., in meditation) or present a topic from a Dharma perspective. An individual may find him/herself in this role simply because they're available at the right time and place.

(Suggested) Qualifications vary depending on the event, but perhaps these are a reasonable minimum:

- 1) A member of Dharma Rain who has taken the Precepts
- 2) Recommendation / approval by the party responsible for coordinating the event (e.g., the Shuso for Sunday discussions).

Oversight is provided by the party responsible for coordinating the event.