## ABSTRACT

WHITLOW, STACEY MATAXIS. Integrating Theoretical and Practical Foundations in Training Programs for Composition TAs

During the last twenty years, there has been a shift in the academy's philosophy regarding Teaching Assistants (TAs). Consequently, TAs are no longer rated and trained by how useful they are to the university, but rather by their usefulness to the future professoriate. In order to successfully launch a training program that satisfies this philosophical shift, several different aspects of the issue need further research. This review of TA training literature focuses on different categories of pre-existing training research throughout the academy. These focuses include the:

- history of TA training in the academy and the different points of view regarding the system itself;
- needs of the institution and the constraints of individual TA systems;
- contradictory roles demanded of TAs and the developmental stages of individual TAs;
- successful national TA training programs and their methods; and
- several weaknesses of the common workshop approach.

By closely examining the research, this project shows that, although there has been a shift in the academy's philosophy regarding TA training, training practices have not changed much over the last twenty years.

In order to create a more cohesive practicum that evolves with the developmental stages of individual TAs and allows for the integration of developmentally appropriate training methods, this study argues that five specific principles should be adopted within current TA training

programs. These solutions can be implemented quite successfully in institutionally effective ways. As an example, this study applies these five principles to a departmentally based composition TA training program at North Carolina State University. The example incorporates the following guiding principles that call for composition-based TA training programs to:

- unify training with the university system in order to create attainable goals and objectives for TA training programs;
- consider the developmental stages of individual TAs to target effective TA training practices at developmentally appropriate stages;
- vary their training approaches to meet the needs of the various individual developmental stages;
- directly link the theoretical to the practical aspects of teaching, in order to create more reflective practitioners; and
- evaluate their practices more effectively in order to help substantiate which training practices offer the greatest returns.

Accordingly, TA training programs within English departments should consider integrating these principles to create and justify a program that considers more than the skills-based aspects of teaching, but rather one that integrates the theoretical and the pedagogical aspects as well.

# INTEGRATING THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL FOUNDATIONS IN TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR COMPOSITION TAS

By

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## Personal Biography

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# CHAPTER ONE:

# INTRODUCTION

Nationally, universities are struggling to redefine their philosophy about effective teaching assistant (TA) training. A majority of the articles reviewed within this study show that there has been a shift in the research on TAs during the last twenty-years. The academy no longer rates their TAs by how useful they are to the university, but rather by their usefulness to the academy as future professoriate. Universities are no longer charged simply with preparing TAs to survive their initial teaching experiences; they must now try to assure that TAs have a rewarding professional experience during their assistantships.

To successfully train a future professoriate, new and innovative TA training programs are required. Training programs need to consider more than the skills-based, technical aspects of teaching; they should consider the theoretical and the pedagogical aspects as well. A relationship between theory, practice and experience is vital for a training program's success. In order to successfully launch training programs that satisfy this philosophical shift, the needs of the institution, the constraints of individual TA systems, and the developmental stages of individual TAs must all be considered.

This project reviews and critiques national TA practices. According to the literature reviewed in this study, TA training programs within English departments need to:

- unify training with the university system;
- consider the developmental stages of individual TAs;
- vary their training approaches to meet the needs of the various individual developmental stages;

- directly link the theoretical to the practical aspects of teaching, in order to create more reflective practitioners; and
- evaluate their practices more effectively in order to help substantiate which training practices offer the greatest returns.

By implementing these five practices in contemporary training programs, the focus of the programs shifts from the technical skill-based aspects of one-way-fits-all training to that of a more cohesive and balanced practicum. The word practicum is traditionally used to indicate a single course. However, for this project the single course definition has been extended to include all of the elements of a TA training program. This use of the term means to formalize the relationship among all of the different elements within pre-existing TA training programs. By formalizing these relationships, this study hopes to create a more cohesive picture of TA training practices, and to develop a training practicum that will meet the academy's training needs. Using this research this study suggests and then applies these findings on a local level.

Chapter Two of this study explores these various TA practices. In order to create successful training practicums, it is important not only to understand the history of TA training within the academy, but also to understand the different points of view regarding the system itself. Within this chapter, the complexity of the TA system is acknowledged. Within this research, successful TA training programs attempt to address the needs of everyone concerned, including faculty, department heads, financial aid officers, advisors, directors, presidents, commissioners, legislators, governors, undergraduates and graduates.

In order to implement and evaluate programs that adequately meet TAs' needs, the developmental needs of individual TAs need to be researched. TAs need a proper amount of

time in order to process all of the information presented to them throughout their training. Once the contradictory roles TAs serve (students and teachers, consumers and employees) are better defined by clearer training program expectations, then those expectations can be more easily communicated to each individual TA.

As research about composition and the academy has shown, too little distinction is made between traditional TAs, those who assist a lead teacher, and composition graduate instructors, those who have sole responsibility for their own classes. Throughout the literature, both options are referenced by the arbitrary and somewhat unbalanced designation of "TA." More importantly, the expectations about the two different kinds of teaching are contradictory. Much of the research reviewed within this project is relevant to graduate instructors despite the use of "teaching assistants" as their titles.

Chapter Two also reviews successful national training programs and their methods to develop principles can be integrated in different programs. There is no universal program that will adequately meet the needs of every English department, but it is possible to apply basic principles used by successful TA training programs throughout the nation. By implementing only those aspects of training that most efficiently meet the program and individual needs of each specific department, TA training can be drastically improved.

Chapter Three analyses the common workshop approach to TA training. This study shows that both universities and English departments have traditionally depended heavily on the workshop model for their training needs. Researchers, however, point out that the traditional pre-service, skills-based workshop is not an effective training method. There is a real need for continuous in-service training throughout the TA's training experiences where

connections can be drawn between theory, practice and experience over a developmentally appropriate period of time.

Within the field of composition itself, updated research about TA training programs is difficult to find. As a result, this study uses an interdisciplinary approach throughout. In its review of current research on TA training programs and their implementation across the academy, this study gives consideration to several different disciplines (educational psychology, communications, composition, foreign language studies, state and local regulations, and everyday university communications). By incorporating research from other disciplines into the field of composition, a more comprehensive view of TA training develops, which in turn allows for a more substantial integration of interdepartmental successes on a local level.

The following chart classifies the literature used within this review into three distinct categories: the national conversation; language-specific research; and local considerations. The national conversation and language-specific research are reviewed thoroughly in Chapter Two and the local pieces are integrated throughout Chapter Three. The dates are also included so that consideration can be given to particular cases where the passage of time might have altered the practices discussed within each piece. However, if the research itself functioned as a foundational piece or was referenced by several other articles, exceptions were made and older articles were incorporated.

| Table 1. The Classification of the Literature Reviewed and Critiqued in this Study | | |
|---|---|---|
| **The National Conversation***<br>(Includes a variety of national programs and different disciplines) | **The Language Specific***<br><br>(Includes English, Composition and Communication Departments) | **The Local Conversation**<br>(Includes NCSU and North Carolina regulations) |
| Angelo, Thomas A. and K. Patricia Cross. "Classroom Research for Teaching Assistants." 1989<br><br>Cashell, J. G. Survey Results from Graduate Assistants 1996-1972. 1997<br><br>Diamond, Robert M. and Peter J. Gray. "A National Study of Teaching Assistants." 1987<br><br>Jaros, Dean. "The Teaching Assistant and the University." 1987<br><br>Nyquist, Jody, Robert D. Abbott and Donald H. Wulff. "The Challenge of TA Training in the 1990's." 1989<br><br>Nyquist, Jody D. and Donald H. Wulff. *Working Effectively with Graduate Students*. 1996<br><br>Parrett, Joan. "A Ten-Year Review of TA Training Programs: Trends, Patterns, and Common Practices." 1987<br><br>Powell, Robert E. "Effectively Utilizing TAs in the University." 1989<br><br>Sprague, Jo and Jody D. Nyquist. "TA Supervision." 1989<br><br>Staton, Ann Q. and Ann L. Darling. "Socialization of Teaching Assistants."1989<br><br>Weimer, Maryellen, Marilla D. Suinicki, Gabriele Bauer. "Designing Programs to Prepare TA's to Teach." 1989<br><br>Wright, Delivee L. "A Seminar on College Teaching." 1987 | Curtin, E. "Writing Program Issues: English 514." Syllabus. No Date<br><br>Eble, Kenneth. "Defending the Indefensible." 1987<br><br>Friedrich, Gustav W. "Techniques for Monitoring TA Effectiveness." 1992<br><br>Hartzog, Carol P. *Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration.*1986<br><br>Latterell, Catherine. "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula." 1996<br><br>Liggett, Sara. "After the Practicum: Assessing Teacher Preparation Programs." 1999<br><br>Qualley, Donna. "English 513." Syllabus Online. 2001<br><br>Rankin, Elizabeth. *Seeing Yourself as a Teacher: Conversation with Five New Teachers in a University Writing Program.*1994<br><br>Roemer, Marjorie, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russel K. Durst. "Reframing the Great Debate on First-Year Writing." 1999<br><br>Ruiz, Hildebrando. "The Role of Technique in Teacher Training." 1987 | Lee, Virginia. "Re: Fall 2001 College Teaching Course" 2001<br><br>*North Carolina State University Graduate Catalogue.* 2001<br><br>Penrose, Nancy. "ENG 685 Supervised Teaching: College Composition." Syllabus. 2000<br><br>Penrose, Nancy. "English 685:Teaching College Composition (Supervised Teaching for Master's Students) Fall 2000: A Program Overview." 2000<br><br>Penrose, Nancy. "North Carolina State University Course Action Form: English 696." 2000<br><br>Penrose, Nancy. "Plan for Training and Mentoring Composition TA's, Fall 2000." 2000<br><br>Pramaggiore, Maria. "Graduate Student Evaluations of TA Workshop, August 2000." 2001<br><br>Reynolds, Greg. *1998 Criteria of Accreditation.* Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. 2001 |

*None of these sources specify whether or not they are discussing doctoral-level teaching assistants or masters-level teaching assistants

The results of this review of literature suggest specific changes to TA training. Using the conclusions from Chapter Two, the later half of Chapter Three presents an analysis of a local context and a proposal for change. The case-in-point presented in the second half of Chapter Three models how such a practicum can be developed within a pre-existing, departmentally based program. Using concepts such as those developed in this study, North Carolina State University (NCSU) could successfully transform their TA training program into a professional development practicum. Two options presently exist for graduate teaching assistants at NCSU: graduate students can work as literature teaching assistants throughout all of their years of masters study or they can work as literature TAs during their first year of study and as composition graduate instructors during their second. If literature TAs choose to work as composition graduate instructors, they receive extra training during their first year of study, and they also participate in a one-week workshop and semester-long mentoring program at the beginning of their second year.

The TA training program at NCSU has been effective, but there is still room for improvement. By altering three different practices within the present training program, NCSU can create a sound practicum that integrates the different institutional concerns and the different developmental stages of individual TAs. NCSU can train graduate teachers who are developmentally equipped to handle their new roles as university faculty by simply:

- refocusing the two-hour departmental orientation session;
- adding an English course that focuses on the connection between theoretical research and pedagogical practices with a required assistantship in composition; and
- requiring an evaluative portfolio that focuses on self-reflective practices.

By showing how one local program can be transformed in Chapter Three, this study hopes to show how pre-existing TA training workshops, can be transformed into developmentally appropriate training practica.

Chapter Four summarizes the major findings of this study and relates them to national TA training programs throughout the academy. Training programs should consider integrating five major principles within their TA training programs by:

- unifying training within their university system;
- exploring the developmental stages of their individual TAs;
- varying their training approaches to meet the needs of these various individual developmental stages;
- directly linking the theoretical to the practical aspects of teaching in their programs; and evaluating their practices more effectively.

If we are going to continue to use TAs as professionals within our programs, it is imperative that we give them the skills they need to be such.

# CHAPTER TWO:

# THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Over the last 125 years, the use of TAs has presented its own set of unique problems for the academy. According to Kenneth Elbe in "Defending the Indefensible," the first TAs at John Hopkins "took to moonlighting by 'lecturing to undergraduates,' and thus the TA system began incidentally" (7). As Elbe explains, not much has changed throughout the years and little has been done to rectify the haphazard way TA programs are implemented across the nation.

At a 1930 meeting of the Administrative Officers of Higher Institutions in Chicago, G. J. Laing, the dean of the Graduate School at the University of Chicago, asked a series of questions that still plague general TA training programs everywhere: Who is responsible for TA training? What training is appropriate? What training can be taught at the university level? What training strategies must be left up to separate departments? What are the goals and objectives of TA training? What is the purpose of the TA within the University? What sorts of teachers are being produced by the present system? Despite growing TA and undergraduate needs, these questions still remain unanswered.

Following World War II, the GI Bill caused the academy's enrollment figures to nearly quadruple. As a result, the relevance of these original questions intensified as the use of TAs within the academy increased. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s, while trying to answer these questions, conferences continued to call for reform, but they resulted in very little real change (Elbe 7). The 1980s saw an increased call for action and, as a result, campus-wide orientation programs became the norm (Elbe 8). The Council of Graduate

Schools and the American Association of Higher Education both held national conferences, which focused on TA training programs throughout the country. Despite all of these conferences, "the emphasis on the graduate school experience [in the late eighties was] still focused on graduate study and research" and, as a result, TAs only received minimal training for their teaching responsibilities (Nyquist, Abbott and Wulff 9). Proof of this neglect is the fact that, although 50 years after they were originally asked, a majority of Laing's questions are still unanswered.

## Finding Answers: The First Interdisciplinary Conference

These unanswered questions led to the very first interdisciplinary national conference on teaching assistants held during the fall of 1987 and sponsored by the Center for Teaching Excellence at Ohio State University. At this conference scholars, TAs, Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), and various other university officials gathered to focus on the use of TAs within the Academy. According to Kenneth Elbe, in one of the conference's presentations "Defending the Indefensible," teaching assistantships are the academy's significant way of supporting both the economic needs of a financially strapped graduate class and the ever-increasing teaching demand of a growing undergraduate class. These demands, according to Elbe, have only increased as the years have progressed and, as a result, the teaching assistant system is indefensible because the training of TAs is haphazard at best.

Elbe believes that the traditional TA system, as it is practiced nationally, fosters a system of exploitation, creates a temporary underclass, supports faculty self-interest, but

more importantly "fosters a cautious and conforming scholarship and pedagogy of pooled inexperience, reverse modeling ('not doing what my professors have done'), or no pedagogy at all" (9). According to Elbe's research, these negative effects are best seen within the nation's English departments. By allowing TAs to teach a majority of the university's required courses, the university supports tenured faculty's removal from the undergraduate class. He believes the TA system over burdens teaching assistants while demeaning the profession itself.

Although his tone can be pessimistic when he discusses these flaws and his research is over a decade old, Elbe does an excellent job of distinguishing the different purposes of teaching assistantships in the national academy. According to Elbe, TA training programs provide economic support for graduates, a corps of basic education teachers, a community of untapped scholars, an opportunity for apprenticeships in teaching, and an efficient use of human resources. He defends the system reluctantly because he knows that the university's benefit from TAs is so great the TA system will never go away. Elbe believes that it is hopeless to try to eliminate the system or to rid it of its less admirable qualities.

There are others within the academy who believe that the TA system can be reformed. Robert Powell, in "Effectively Utilizing TAs in the University," acknowledges that the university benefits from the teaching assistantship system, but he views it as a symbiotic relationship in which all partners benefit. According to Powell, these benefits include "direct support value to the graduate student, instructional value to the university (especially when compared to having large numbers of part-time faculty), fiscal value to the university, and active conduct of scholarly and creative work" (30). Powell believes this creates a system that benefits the academy—a utopia of advancement. Unfortunately,

Powell's definition is a little too simplistic. Powell does not consider who benefits most. Although he explains some of the benefits he treats them all as if they were equal and never compares the value of those benefits to each other. For example, he does not examine the relative values of benefits such as tenured teachers being released from the burdens of teaching undergraduate classes or the value of the financial aid offered to TAs. Treating both compensations as equal belies the inequity of the system described earlier by Elbe.

Jody Nyquist, Robert Abbott and Donald Wulff are a little more optimistic than Elbe, but unlike Powell, they acknowledge that there are problems within traditional TA programs. In their essay, "The Challenge of TA Training in the 1990s," their more amicable approach acknowledges that the development of an adequate TA training program produces challenges. They admit that the "issues are complicated," and they claim that in order to create the perfect symbiotic relationship, the academy must closely examine both the good and the bad of the system (8). They agree that for the most part the graduate school experience is "focused on graduate study and research, and that graduate students are provided only limited preparation for the teaching duties they assume" (8). Yet, they also acknowledge that instructional knowledge is indeed important.

Recently these instructional duties have become more and more important because instructional experiences have become more important to universities. Only three percent of the nation's institutions are looking to hire researchers. A majority of the nation's institutions are looking to hire reflective practitioners with concrete teaching experiences (Lee). As a result, sound instructional knowledge backed by legitimate credentials is imperative to a TA's competitiveness in today's job market. If universities want to produce

marketable graduates, this instructional focus must be integrated into their advanced programs.

Most of the research that tries to address the negatives as well as the positives produces a call to action: "We must do the research that will allow us to identify important dimensions of the TA experience, determine how those dimensions are interrelated, prepare TAs for issues that arise from those interrelationships, and assess the effects of the resulting training" (Nyquist, Abbott, and Wulff 13). As do a number of researchers, Nyquist, Abbott, and Wulff promote embracing the traditional system, researching it, and finding ways to manipulate that system in order to produce a more effective TA training program.

As Elbe, Powell, and Nyquist, Abbott and Wulff's essays demonstrate, the academy's treatment and discussion of how institutions employ teaching assistants has not always been agreeable, and as a result three different points of view emerge. There are those, like Elbe, who believe that the system is completely indefensible, but at the same time a necessary evil. There are those who believe, like Powell, that the relationship is completely symbiotic and that all the benefits are equal. However, there are those, like Nyquist, Abbott and Wulff, who believe that the system is both good and bad and that there is room for improvement.

## Unifying the TA System: Considering All the Constituents

Nationally, universities are still trying to answer Laing's original questions. Universities are struggling to answer the needs of their institutions and their students, both graduates and undergraduates. Ironically, the more questions they ask about the different aspects of the teaching assistant system the more painfully obvious the underlying

complexity of the program becomes. Designing a training program that helps TAs meet the various roles required of them by their specific universities demands a cooperative effort between university administrators, graduate school deans, department chairs, college deans, instructional and faculty developers, faculty, teaching assistants and their supervisors. In order to design and implement a successful training program, which meets the needs of everyone concerned, all of these various constituents must work together to try and answer the questions proposed by Laing.

Dean Jaros discusses how different parts of the university, all directly affected by TA programs, can work together to create a unified system. He believes that interdepartmental tension caused by this relationship can be alleviated through better communication between all of the different constituents. In “The Teaching Assistant and the University,” Jaros argues that the teaching assistant system directly affects at least three different primary institutional goals: “efficient undergraduate teaching, efficient graduate instruction and efficient conduct of scholarship” (369). He then goes on to argue that the teaching assistantship system is supported throughout the academy primarily because it addresses the concerns of several different university constraints: "low cost, release of faculty from undergraduate teaching responsibilities, and provision of financial support for graduate students” (369). Jaros believes that these individual benefits should be balanced by different institutional requirements.

When considered together, these goals and constraints create a more detailed picture of the TA system. The combination of the three institutional goals and the three university constraints actually creates a nine-celled matrix that Jaros believes regulates and influences

the academy's treatment of graduate teaching assistants. The chart presented by Jaros is as follows:[1]

| **Table 2. The Teaching Assistant System** | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Institutional Benefits* | **Instrumental Features** | | |
| | **Low Cost** | **Faculty Release** | **Financial Support (TA)** |
| *Efficient Undergraduate Instruction* | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| *Efficient Graduate Instruction* | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| *Efficient Conduct of Scholarship* | 7 | 8 | 9 |

Jaros believes that most universities and a majority of the scholarship in the field are concerned with the effects of the third cell, which balances the institutional benefit of efficient undergraduate instruction with the instrumental feature of financial support for graduate students. He believes that this narrow scope causes tensions. If graduate students do not perform adequately as graduate instructors, then the whole TA system comes into question, because the university demands a return on their initial financial investment in graduate TAs (370). However, Jaros believes this cell is only one of many concerns that demand the academy's attention. He explains how important the consequences of the other cells within the teaching assistant system are to different constituents who are often ignored when the institution focuses only on the third cell.

Typically, Jaros explains, the university tends to concentrate most heavily on three particular constituents: "undergraduate students, the graduate assistants and the institution" (370). By focusing on only three of the several constituents, communication is halted between the TA system and the university system in which it operates. By focusing on a few aspects rather than the entire picture, the TA system inadvertently separates itself from the constraints in which the system must operate. Jaros believes that this is an egregious error that reduces the effectiveness of the overall system.

He believes that this inaccurate focus should be expanded to include those other constituents who are affected daily by the system: "faculty in general, department heads, line deans, the graduate school, the financial aid office, foreign student advisors, provosts, presidents, boards and commissions, legislatures, and governors" (370). These constituents, in order to continue their participation in the program, must perceive that they derive some benefit directly from the pre-existing system. Moreover, when they share program expectations, they are more likely to provide the resources needed to meet these goals.

Ideally when all of the constituents work together, Jaros explains, TA training programs can address most of the concerns shared by different members of the matrix. Under a unified system, graduate students receive better training, and they profit from their exposure to a more energized faculty that is relieved from teaching too many undergraduate classes. The undergraduates receive instructional assistance from TAs whom they are more comfortable asking for help. The university benefits because it is less expensive to pay TAs to teach than it is to hire an extensive adjunct faculty to cover the growing admission numbers. For deans and department heads, the TA system provides effective instruction that generates budgetary flexibility. For researchers, the flexibility of tenured professors'

teaching schedules allows for more research time. All the while, state officials' concerns regarding the quality of both undergraduate and graduate education are enhanced by this low cost system. According to Jaros, if implemented effectively and utilized appropriately, the relationships formed in the matrix can perpetuate the TA system by supplying the university connections it needs to successfully meet most of its constituents' concerns.

Jaros concedes that broadening the program's original focus to include such a diverse body of constituents "may at times be a frustration to those with a small number of passionately held goals" (371). But at the same time he champions the ideal that "the large number of potential beneficiaries indicates potential support to keep [the teaching assistant system] viable" (371). By working as a coalition and accommodating everyone's needs, Jaros acknowledges that the TA system will survive indefinitely and that ultimately everyone will benefit.

## Considering Individual TAs as both Teachers and Students

Jaros's unification of the different constituents focuses very little on the needs of individual teaching assistants under such a complicated system. According to Jaros, there are several different roles that the teaching assistant serves within the university. These roles are diverse, and each one caters to a different aspect of an extremely complex system. Jaros's lists of institutional goals, constraints and constituents are rather comprehensive and in some places quite contradictory. For example, under his system, TAs serve in the dual roles of apprentice and mentor. They are not only responsible for their own education, but also the education of those they are hired to teach. They are students of the university, but they are

also its instructors.  This dichotomized approach leads to conflicting responses throughout the academy and somewhat vague program guidelines for individual TAs.

A majority of the research, both from the national conversation and the composition specific conversation, agrees that TA program guidelines need to be clearer (Abbott; Wulff; Sprague; Nyquist; Jaros; Elbe; Ruiz; Rankin; Hartzog).  Teaching assistants are responsible for a large percentage of undergraduate instruction. No up-to-date composition surveys have been done to provide concrete figures of the percentage of national introductory composition courses taught by TAs, but according to Carol Hartzog in *Composition and the Academy:  A Study of Writing Program Administration*, "in today's environment of tighter budgets, TAs are accounting for a larger percentage of undergraduate and freshman instruction in basic composition classes" (47).  She then breaks down the figures through specific university departments showing just how dependent the academy's English departments are on TA instruction.

Hartzog finds that there is a range of instructional duties for TAs.  Their classroom responsibilities can include assisting other professors and teaching their own classes. Hartzog focuses on those TAs who are appointed to teach their own writing courses.  She finds that many universities depend heavily upon their TAs.  The following Universities use a large percentage of TAs within their writing programs to teach their basic writing courses: University of South Carolina, Minnesota, Iowa State, Oregon, UCLA, Michigan, St. Paul, Maryland, Pittsburgh, Purdue, Indiana, Catholic University, Washington University, Virginia, Tulane, and Brown (45-47).  The responsibilities for these TAs ranged from one to three classes a year (47).

As a result of such heavy teaching loads, Hartzog notes a shift in graduate instruction during the last five years. She claims that many of the graduate courses in composition, during the late eighties and early nineties, have been developed in association with TA-training programs (48). Out of the 42 colleges she surveyed 33 of the universities used TAs as freshman writing instructors (45). According to those same 42 universities, 35 required TA training and four considered the training optional for their graduate instructors (49).

Perhaps English departments' dependence on TAs is so high because TAs perform a wide variety of different instructional tasks. As a result, TAs' roles are sometimes conflicting. TAs were asked to learn how to:

> conduct quiz sections or laboratories for lecture courses provide tutorial sessions, grade exams, review tests and answer questions, and hold office hours. In less frequent cases, TAs are given total responsibility for courses, including text selection, assignment of students' work, testing students' achievement, and final grading of students. (Nyquist, Abbott and Wulff 7)

These duty assignments vary from university to university, and most programs vary from department to department. These requirement variations lead to even more questions for confused TAs, questions that are not traditionally addressed in TA training programs. They are questions that range in complexity and importance: How do I grade these papers? What is expected of me? Am I doing this right? Do my students like me? Am I teaching what I am supposed to be teaching? Who can I ask for help? How am I going to get all of my work done? Does my lead teacher think I am doing a good job? More importantly, they are left wondering what their roles are in the academy, as well as what they should be doing in order to successfully meet their department's expectations. Without an effective TA training

program which explains the department's goals and objectives, TAs are overwhelmed by their own questions and their assistantships are unpleasant experiences.

Consequently, Nyquist, Abbott and Wulff show that "an interesting question of cause and effect arises: Is the professional development of graduate TAs only minimally addressed because they are not choosing academic careers, or are graduate students not choosing academic careers because their experiences as TAs do not adequately prepare them for and entice them into the professoriate?" (9). The research below seems to suggest that the support systems offered to TAs during their initial assistantships directly affect their perceptions of their own success. When TAs feel they have been well-prepared with clear and definable departmental goals and objectives, their comfort levels increase and they feel more successful.

Ann Staton and Ann Darling support Jaros's research when they claim, "the role of the teaching assistant (TA) in American colleges and universities is a complex and multi-faceted one" (15). In "Socialization of Teaching Assistants," Staton and Darling explain how these somewhat contradictory roles can be overwhelming and demanding. Staton and Darling are concerned that the graduate student must embrace two diametrically opposing roles: that of a teacher and that of a student. Yet, the academy requires TAs to perform both roles without offering them any substantial support (15).

According to Staton and Darling, traditional programs (pre-service workshops) common in the late eighties and early nineties, opted for a dialectic (conversational) approach to training. Traditionally a department-led seminar/ workshop emphasized skill-based training. Under this system, TAs were expected to develop their own roles within the academy. Unfortunately, this laissez-faire training approach inadequately prepares graduate

teachers for the challenges they will encounter in their own classrooms. Staton and Darling believe that if an adequate training program is not offered to TAs, TAs will form their own training rituals amongst each other through their own group communication. As a result, they argue, TAs must be taught the skills that they need in order to survive, because the "behavior and attitudes" they develop while they are TAs will be "important determinants" of their future roles as faculty members (16). Their roles as TAs are used as a "means of socialization to the professoriate" (16). The habits that TAs create during their assistantships will remain with them for the rest of their professional careers.

According to Darling's earlier studies, which are frequently cited throughout this essay, communication between TAs (and to a certain extent TAs and their departments) is the key. Staton and Darling believe that "communication during TA socialization serves four distinct functions: to help the TA to develop a social support system, obtain information, adjust to rules and policies, and generate new ideas about teaching and research" (20). As a result, they suggest that program directors consider these four specific functions when designing TA training programs. They argue that it takes a substantial amount of time for these necessary communication networks to develop amongst TAs and, consequently, "newcomers cannot assimilate large bodies of critical information in a brief period . . . but [these bodies of information] must be learned over time by newcomers as they interact with others " (21). TAs need to fully assimilate the information they must learn in order to succeed as instructors within the academy.

## Allowing the Individual TA Time to Develop

Staton and Darling do not specifically suggest a timetable for this assimilation within their research, but the picture becomes clearer when this research is juxtaposed with Jo Sprague and Jody Nyquist's research on the developmental stages of graduate teaching assistants. Sprague and Nyquist, in their article entitled "TA Supervision," successfully identify and justify three different stages through which TAs develop: "senior learner, colleague-in-training and finally junior colleagues" (43-44). On the basis of Joe Stolenberg's Model, developed in 1981 to explain the developmental stages of college faculty and counselors, Sprague and Nyquist "suggest that TAs undergo similar development along the same dimensions" (43). According to Sprague and Nyquist, it is imperative to understand the basic transformations teaching assistants experience while pursuing their graduate training. These three different developmental stages require three very different training programs:

- The Senior Learner requires a more nurturing training program.
- The Colleague-in-Training requires a more skills-based training program.
- The Junior Colleague requires a more self-reflective training experience.

By paying attention to these very distinct developmental stages, Sprague and Nyquist believe that TA training supervisors can more effectively target the individual instructional needs of their teaching assistants. By explaining the three different stages in great detail and suggesting the most effective means of training, Sprague and Nyquist hope to promote adaptive programs that consider the development stages of the graduate student first. These developmental stages are instrumental in revising any pre-existing practicum, so they will be discussed in some detail.

***The Senior Learner***

Sprague and Nyquist describe the Senior Learner as the most awkward of the three stages. Senior learners are originally selected because they are good students; they would not have made it this far in their academic careers if they were not comfortable being students. As a result, they have a tendency to relate too closely with their students on a personal level. Senior learners want to be liked, and they fear rejection. They want to be socially accepted by their students and, as a result, TAs evaluate all of their interactions with their students on a very personal level. This is a very insecure period for the graduate student. They doubt themselves both as teachers and as academics. Contradictory departmental roles (students and teachers, employees and clients, independent and dependent, beginners and experts) only help to increase this initial anxiety. TA training at this level needs to explain TAs roles as assistants and students clearly. This clarification is needed in order for TAs to adjust to their many and various roles within the university.

Academically, the senior learners have yet to be socialized within their respective fields. As a result, they will oversimplify their classroom examples all the while using the jargon of their discipline in an "imprecise and unsophisticated" manner (Sprague and Nyquist 44). Teaching overwhelms senior learners, and they feel like outsiders both behind and in front of the classroom desk. It is in this stage of their development that graduate students simply mimic the successful teaching strategies they have previously seen their professors use. They become very dependent upon the advice and guidance of the programs director or any perceived authority figure. Senior Learners also have a tendency to adopt a "one-size fits all" approach to teaching. They will pick one strategy that works for them and then rely on it for the rest of their teaching experiences throughout the semester.

***The Colleague-in-Training***

As the teaching assistants develop and become more comfortable with their somewhat paradoxical roles within the academy, they begin to focus more on their teaching. During this stage, colleagues-in-training experience an "openness to exploring alternative instructional approaches" and begin to "adapt their teaching methods to their own personal styles" (44). Despite these transformations within their newfound comfort levels, TAs' teaching can be adversely affected by their desire to be accepted as an academic within their field. Colleagues-in-training no longer worry about being liked by their students. Instead they begin to use their classes as a captive audience for their newly acquired knowledge. Their ability to effectively communicate with their undergraduates is overshadowed by their desire to effectively use the complex ideas and vocabulary they are learning within their own classes, often at the expense of their students' comprehension. It is during this second stage that the teaching assistants' dependency upon authority diminishes and, as a result, the program director's role shifts from that of a manager to that of an instructional model.

***The Junior Colleague***

Eventually the teaching assistant will evolve one last time. As graduate students become more comfortable with their academic and instructional duties, they become junior colleagues. Junior colleagues learn to treat their students more like respected clients: "Finally, the TA develops a way of being very engaged with the students while not taking all student behavior personally" (25). Junior colleagues are confident enough to make their own decisions and to evaluate the effectiveness of their own teaching strategies. They understand their discipline, yet they now possess the ability to simplify its complex concepts for their students without sacrificing the nuances of the theoretical complexities. They no longer

depend on their supervisors as models, but rather as mentors to whom they can turn when they need advice. It is within this final stage of development that teaching assistants are ready to take full responsibility for courses of their own. It is here, within this third and final stage that the teaching assistant evolves into the graduate teacher.

Composition programs that require graduate students to teach their own sections of basic composition classes must address the needs of these junior colleagues. The TAs' growth cannot be stunted by a lack of departmental support at this very important transitional period. An effective mentoring system must be in place that can help guide TAs through their first experiences as classroom practitioners. TAs must be supported during their classroom experiences. They must also be given the opportunity to mentor other beginning teachers. By explaining their roles within the classroom, they are allowed to refine their own practices and methodologies.

## The Implications of These Developmental Stages for TA Training Programs

When charted, the implications of these three different stages on the development of instructional programs are obvious. Sprague and Nyquist were the first to chart these differences in their table entitled "Program Design Implications of the Three Phrases of TA Development"(47). Nyquist, in close collaboration with Donald Wulff, pursues these foundations and their effects on designing and implementing effective TA training programs. They report the efforts of this collaboration in their work entitled *Working Effectively with Graduate Assistants.* Within this text, they acknowledge that in order to successfully

implement effective training programs it is imperative that the TA supervisors be able to accurately identify which developmental stages their own graduate students are experiencing.

The role of the TA supervisor is to "assign roles appropriately, according to the TAs development, in a continuous progression that will assist graduate students to develop as fully as possible" (Nyquist and Wulff 26). Sprague, Nyquist and Wulff all acknowledge that the teaching assistants will at various times through their development need the support of a manager, educational role model and a professional mentor, but they also claim that "the relative emphasis on these roles changes and reconfigures as the TA advances" (Sprague 45).

They claim that when teaching assistants first start their assistantships they need close supervision, task orientation and a lot of personal support. As TAs "develop skills and confidence, good leadership becomes less and less directive" (Sprague 45). By the time they are fully matured, TAs "can be granted a wide range of autonomy," and "the leader's role recedes to that of consultant and resource" (45). With this progression in mind Sprague and Nyquist propose that the best strategy for TA program development should follow a process of progressive delegation. Training is not, according to Sprague and Nyquist, an all or nothing process, but rather a gradual development that takes time. Nyquist and Wulff's chart appears below.[2]

| Table 3. Implications of the Three Phases of TA and RA Development for Supervision | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **Senior Learner** | **Colleague-in-Training** | **Junior Colleague** |
| **Relative Emphasis on Supervisor's Role** | **Manager**<br><br>"Do the task my way and check back with me." | **Educational Model**<br><br>"Think about the problem, generate options, and let's discuss potential outcomes." | **Mentor**<br><br>"You make the decision. Let me know if I can be of help to you. I'm interested in the outcome." |
| **Teaching Assignments for TAs** | Assist professors<br><br>Grade papers<br><br>Hold office hours<br><br>Conduct carefully planned quiz sections<br><br>Collect feedback on course | Assume larger role in course<br><br>Develop writing assignments<br><br>Generate test questions<br><br>Do some Lecturing | Design and teach a basic course<br><br>Assist with an advanced course |
| **Teacher Training Activity for TAs** | Orientation<br><br>Scheduled Meetings<br><br>Observation by Supervisor<br><br>Frequent Feedback | Proseminar designed to build repertoire of teaching skills<br><br>Observation and feedback from supervisor | Reflective practicum over curricular and pedagogical development and potential approaches to students |
| **Function of Evaluation** | Frequently assess performance in teaching | Provide systematic feedback on the development of individual instructional skills | Provide feedback as a colleague on developing a personal teaching style and approach |

Understanding the developmental needs of individual TAs is necessary in order to implement and evaluate programs that adequately meet those needs. A well-designed program can assure that the teaching assistants develop as they should; a poorly designed program can actually stunt the growth of teaching assistants, trapping them in one of the stages for an indefinite period of time (Sprague and Nyquist 45). TAs must be given the

developmental support they need by their training programs in order to assure that they do indeed fully develop into junior colleagues who are capable of sufficiently instructing their own classes.  If supervisors understand these different stages, they will be better prepared to adapt their class requirements and training programs to meet the specific needs of their students.

***Teaching the Senior Learner***

According to Nyquist and Wulff, the initial teaching assignments of new TAs should build on the TAs' strengths.  In the beginning, TAs are more comfortable being students.  As a result, they should be given more opportunities to learn about teaching, as well as opportunities to safely experiment within the educational discourse.  During this initial stage of development, two-way dialogue about the pedagogical and theoretical foundations of teaching is essential.  It is essential that teaching assistants be helped to see why certain things are done within the classroom.  The feedback from the supervisor should clearly define what is expected from TAs in their new roles.  If their new roles, as students and teachers, are clearly defined, the senior learners' anxiety is greatly reduced.  Collaborative peer interactions are also vital during this initial stage of development. When the teaching assistants are ready to move on to the second stage of their development, "the sessions change in tone, from briefing to staff meetings" (46).  Once the teaching assistants have immersed themselves within the dialogue of the teaching profession, they are free to move on to the next stage of their professional development.

***Training the Colleague-in-Training***

It is during this second stage that teaching assistants are mentally prepared to handle the practice of teaching.  During this developmental stage, TAs begin "to see themselves as

an important part of the educational process," and most of their learning can now be introduced (48). During this stage, TAs' teaching experiences motivate them to develop new skills and strategies for any future teaching. During this stage of development, the supervisor's role includes "offering a variety of instructional models, increasing TAs' exposure to educational frameworks for their own individualized analysis, and most important, giving TAs the opportunity to build a repertoire of teaching skills through direct practice" (48). It normally takes one semester for TAs to adapt, but after this period, TAs are ready for more responsibility. However, during this stage TAs are still not yet ready for their own classes. Their development is not yet to the point where they can actively transform the theory they are learning into sound practical applications.

Nyquist and Wulff suggest that if TAs are assigned quiz sections during this stage of their development, they should under no circumstances be held responsible for major course decisions or design. They maintain that during this stage of development TAs "are not yet sufficiently aware of the implications of various choices, the possible contradictions among course elements, or even the norms for students' work in certain departments" (48). At this stage, mastery of the basic teaching skills is all that should be expected: "In a large class, the TA can be asked to present a few lectures, make more sophisticated evaluations, or design test items and assignments with the approval of the supervisors" (48). It is here that being a teaching assistant provides invaluable experience for the beginning teacher, as long as the course is relevant to the courses that the assistant will eventually be responsible for teaching during the third stage of their development (48-49). Here they maintain that TA should assist with classes, but that they should by no means be responsible for any of the courses'

development.  Developmentally, an assistantship within a composition course lead by a more experienced mentor or an expert teacher is ideal during this stage.

TAs should be able to observe and practice in a very structured environment.  They should be able to grade papers, lead discussions sections reviewing material that has already been introduced by the lead teacher, grade and distribute tests, and give one or two lectures using the lead teachers materials.  During this stage, TAs need time to experiment with the act of teaching itself; however, they are not ready to make any decisions regarding how the class should be run.  They should simply be given the time they need to experience the dynamics of a classroom.

During the second phase of the TA's development, "training activities typically emphasize building a repertoire of teaching skills and developing a set of principles to guide the selection of strategies" (49), and it becomes the duty of the supervisor to show how different pedagogical models can be utilized for different types of instructional needs.  According to Sprague and Nyquist, this intermediate phase is the "ideal time for a professional seminar (given for academic credit if possible) that explores issues of teaching and learning in one's own discipline" (49).  The seminar's main responsibility is to focus on the act of teaching itself.  It should offer TAs "well-chosen frameworks to apply to their teaching" (49), but it should also offer specific training in various instructional skills such as "lecturing, leading discussions, writing test items, and responding to students' work" (49).  Ideally this seminar would also offer a component of hands-on training that would accompany all of the pedagogical frameworks.

### *Supporting the Junior Colleague*

Once TAs develop into junior colleagues, they can expand on what they have learned during the last two stages of their development. At this point graduate students should be encouraged to see themselves as professionals, and their supervisors should respect this growth. During this stage "teaching assignments may include opportunities to be involved in course design and make professional judgments" (50). According to Sprague and Nyquist, "with basic skills well in hand and a personal teaching style emerging, the TA is now in a position to discuss matters of professional judgment, overall instructional strategy, and educational priorities" (50). It is during this third stage of development that these advanced TAs should be asked to help mentor the beginning TAs. This mentoring process also allows senior TAs a chance to re-envision their roles as teachers and learners. If there is not an opportunity to mentor, regular meetings are suggested. These meetings should be centered on issues that the TAs initiate, and they should encourage reflective practices that the TAs will utilize throughout the rest of their instructional careers. Now that these patterns have been developed, studied and classified, programs can be tailored to meet those developmental needs. By targeting each particular developmental stage individual programs can help to assure that TAs develop into graduate instructors within a reasonable amount of time.

## Reviewing National TA Training Programs

Sprague, Nyquist, and Wulff believe that preparing teaching assistants for their future roles as college professors should be a training program's ultimate goal. By making the professional preparation of TAs the academy's goal rather than the preparation for their roles

as researchers, Sprague, Nyquist and Wulff demand that TAs be adequately trained as instructors. There is a growing conviction that assistantships should work as an apprenticeship to a lifelong career rather than as a convenient form of financial aid.

Researchers are also working to shift the focus of TA training programs away from the third cell, as it is presented within Jaros's research, which balances the institutional benefit of efficient undergraduate instruction with the instrumental feature of financial support for graduate students. More and more universities are hiring instructors based on their instructional experiences rather than their research abilities. It is important for both Masters students and Doctoral students to obtain concrete credentials in the field of instruction (Lee). Teaching is a viable career option for those students who pursue advanced degrees, and as a result universities need to work on supplying these marketable credentials to their graduates. With this realization, new research claims that current training programs within the academy do not adequately prepare TAs for these instructional positions. Nationally, TA training programs are being challenged to produce reflective instructors. Consequently, more universities are working to create clearer guidelines and better communication systems between the institution and individual TAs. Some universities have implemented pedagogically sound training courses that have been very successful. By studying these successful programs, more effective training procedures can be adapted and implemented throughout other universities.

In "Designing Programs to Prepare TAs to Teach," Mary Ellen Weimer, Marilla D. Suinicki and Gabriele Bauer review the practices of 14 different TA training programs throughout the nation[3] that they define as successful based on their knowledge and experience within the field. They interviewed persons closely associated with TA training

programs at these 14 universities. Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer organize their interviews around what they perceive as five prevalent questions within the field:

- Who should provide TA training within the academy?
- If there are different providers, what should be the relationship among them?
- What should be the programs requirements and curricula?
- How long should the program be, and when should it occur?
- How should the effectiveness of training be evaluated? (57).

Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer are adamant that their answers to these questions provide no concrete solutions, but rather a guide for how to implement programs with the understanding that the specific needs of each university will vary. With this in mind, their suggestions are quite effective.

***Who should provide TA training within the academy?***

The authors acknowledge four different sources of training: the faculty development unit of the university, the department to which a TA is assigned, the graduate school, and the college itself. Out of all of the 14 programs interviewed, all of them utilize more than one provider for training. The most common method of instruction includes an initial training orientation provided by the faculty development unit of the university followed by specific departmental training. These findings reiterate Joan Parrett's earlier research published in "A Ten-Year Review of TA Training Programs: Trends, Patterns, and Common Practices." Parrett reviews different national programs and discovers that most TA training programs throughout the country (41.6%) offer a combination of pre-service training with continuing courses/seminars throughout the semester. Catherine Lattrell's study, done almost fifteen years later, indicates that not much has changed. According to Lattrell, a department-led

seminar/workshop that emphasizes skill-based training is still the most common model used by composition departments throughout the nation (20).

***If there are different providers, what should be the relationship among them?***

The second question Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer ask is: How do these various providers work together to provide the most effective training? They reach the conclusion that national training programs prefer to implement their own department-based training programs after some brief form of university-based training has been provided. Parrett and Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer agree that the different departments, by making their own training decisions and discouraging one universal training program, feel as if they have more control over their own training initiatives. This "decentralized" program allows the departments to make major decisions about the content of training, but also allows them to receive much needed input and advice from the faculty development units.

According to Parrett's findings, these programs are indeed decentralized, departmentally dependent, and usually conducted by a program director (19.4%) or by a faculty member of the department responsible for specific training (11%). In some cases, the faculty development unit provides general pedagogy-based effective teacher training sessions. The faculty development unit can also be responsible for making presentations during departmental training. They can help "departments with instructional design, to ensure the proper balance of content and method in the departmental curriculum" (Weimer, Suinicki, Bauer 59). This last role is the most significant given the fact that "there has been a history of needing to persuade departments that preparation to teach ought to include more than knowledge of content" (60). The interaction between the department and the faculty development unit can create a balance between pedagogy and content.

Composition departments traditionally include a large degree of pedagogy as its traditional subject matter; however, literature courses do not. As a result, many of the literature and creative writing graduate students who teach composition classes do not receive the pedagogical training necessary to be effective practitioners. As a result, the relationship between content and pedagogy once formalized seems as if it would improve TA training programs within the nation's English departments.

***What should be the programs' requirements and curricula?***

The third question regards the ultimate design of the training program itself: What should be the program requirements and curricula? Of the 14 institutions interviewed, the majority of the university-based programs do not require their TAs to attend training, but they also believe that no graduate student should be exempt from decentralized training. According to Parrett's research, TAs are normally required to attend (36.1%) and are given academic credit for departmentally-based seminars. Overall, 11 percent of the university programs surveyed offer one hour of academic credit for departmentally-based programs, and 13.9 percent offer three hours of course credit for departmentally-based seminars (71). The remuneration offered to TAs differs from university to university. Nationally, there is no consistent set of standards. However, most of the universities surveyed offer modest stipends or academic credit for participation.

Although there is no set standard for attendance or remuneration, there seems to be agreement among the universities as to what should be taught during these training sessions. All 14 universities interviewed by Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer believe that "new college instructors need help in two areas: content and method" (63). These specific training programs are seen as an introduction to college teaching, and this is why they are so

successful. The article explains, "there are differences in degree of coverage, length of training, and methods used to deliver instruction" (63). Often method is sacrificed for content when the resources begin to dwindle. The universities tend to conduct their training in both general areas, but there is always room for improvement. Rather than finding alternative ways to fund elaborate training programs, most universities offer shorter, more intensified, pre-service training sessions. These pre-service sessions become dumping grounds for great quantities of information during a developmental period in which individual TAs cannot see a connection between the information they are being taught and the application of this theory to their roles as instructors. TAs are traditionally still senior learners when they attend these workshop, and with no follow-up later on in their development the usefulness of these ideas, philosophies and practices are lost. TAs are not developmentally mature enough to make direct connection between what they are being taught in pre-service workshops and what they are experiencing in their own classrooms. Connections must be drawn for TAs through proper training. If those connections are not drawn, the TAs' development is slowed.

The seminar/workshop combination is offered as a substitution for what most would regard as a course's worth of information and concepts. It is developmentally impossible for TAs to absorb all of the concepts taught to them in the pre-service seminar. Unfortunately due to time and resource restraints, the teaching assistant's role within the academy is still left undefined, and the role of the university's training programs is vague at best. Without offering some sort of assistantship in their training, programs have a difficult time providing the practical opportunities TAs need to learn and incorporate effective teaching behaviors. Over one-third of the national programs Parrett surveys neglect the practical and none of the

universities she surveys report that they teach TAs how to develop a daily lesson. TA training offers very few hands-on grading or planning activities (Parrett 77). Only one university reported any type of actual practice implementing departmental grading procedures. These practices have evolved over the last ten years, but there is still a need for more progress.

According to Parrett's survey, for a majority of the nation's TAs, their first day in an undergraduate classroom is also their first day as a practitioner. The implications of this training gap are astronomical. When considered in such blunt terms, the need for a more sufficient in-service training program becomes obvious. Beginning teachers are unsure of themselves, their teaching abilities, their ability to plan daily activities, their grading procedures and their roles as instructors. Beginning teachers should understand the basics before they enter their own classrooms. Training must fill in these gaps by showing beginning teachers how they teach, and increasing their comfort levels as instructors.

***How long should the program be, and when should it occur?***

A majority of these pre-service programs' length and depth is usually driven by the availability of resources rather than the desired outcome (Weimer, Suinicki, and Bauer 64). All 14 programs reviewed appear to "devote considerably different lengths of time to training activities, particularly in the orientation phase" (64). These orientations, led by those who were interviewed in this study and closely associated with the various universities' training programs, range in length from half a day to one week. Most of the training for these 14 universities occurs during or before the TA's first semester or at the beginning of the semester during which the TA is scheduled to teach. Most of the programs start with a general orientation provided by the university.

The department then plans a training of their own, normally a mini-workshop with follow-up activities scheduled throughout the first term or semester (64). These follow-up programs are of vital importance to a successful training program, and they should continue well into the TA's assistantship. All too often, the theoretical scholarship and pedagogical practices are completely disjointed at this point. Therefore, follow-up exercises must be integrated into the TAs' training in order to reconnect the theory they have learned within the pre-service workshop with the practice they are experiencing in their own classrooms.

All 14 universities acknowledge the necessity of these follow-up experiences, especially if instructional training occurs before any actual teaching experiences. They suggest seminars, peer observations, microteaching (videotaping), in-class observations, student evaluations, individual consultations, small group instructional diagnostics, handbooks and newsletters. Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer discover that "when training is highly decentralized, with most (if not all) training occurring at the departmental level, there is often no follow-up at that level" (65). Instead they found that most follow-up activities are offered by the staff development centers interviewed in this study. The staff development centers lead videotaping sessions and mini skills workshops that offer brown bag luncheons and an abundance of resources. Occasionally a department will have an experienced faculty member on staff that TAs can approach with their questions, but according to this study, there are very few follow-up activities offered by decentralized training programs.

This finding shows that few departmentally-based TA training programs offer real connections between the theory TAs learn in the traditional pre-service workshop and the practical experiences TAs have within the actual classroom environment. Without the continuous support of a director or a mentor, TAs have few skills and little leadership to help

them associate the theoretical with the practical, yet they are not developmentally mature enough to make these connections themselves. This absence of continuous support must be addressed in any effective TA training program, and it should be an integral part of the training program's evaluation.

***How should the effectiveness of training be evaluated?***

According to Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer, there are many different ways to evaluate the effectiveness of different TA programs across the nation. The most obvious seems to be tracking the effectiveness of trained TAs in the classroom via course evaluations from undergraduates and observations done by program directors. These methods of evaluating the success of trained TAs, however, have proven inadequate when used separately. Many different types of evaluative methods need to be integrated and used in order to create validity. TA training programs across the nation seem to depend on inconsistent evaluations at best. Several researchers within the field acknowledge that a lack of an effective evaluation system undermines the training programs overall effectiveness, and the authors of this article are no exception. None of the 14 universities Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer interviewed implemented effective evaluation programs. They admit that due to resource constraints the evaluation of even the nation's most successful teaching programs is sacrificed (66).

They state that there are indeed some evaluation mechanisms in place that are useful. The most common of such devices includes participant surveys. Other programs conduct interviews that normally include the departments themselves, the teaching assistants and sometimes the undergraduate students who take the TAs' classes. However, when there is no quantitative data to support what is being reported, these personal reflections can be

questionable.  Qualitative data and quantitative data when balanced together provide a reasonable foundation for pilot programs, but the qualitative data has not been supported by many other evaluative techniques, and this is indeed a weakness that needs to be addressed. More and more researchers are trying to categorize and classify different training techniques and methodologies; an effective means of program evaluation is vital to this effort.

## The Four Pedagogical Approaches Used in These National Programs

Thomas Angelo and Patricia Cross draw on extensive classroom research and their own experiences in order to break down and categorize common practices within the nation's teaching assistant training programs into four different pedagogical approaches.  By distinguishing between the different methods, they hope to one day be able to quantitatively test their general effectiveness.  In "Classroom Research for Teaching Assistants," they discuss the similarities and differences between different national programs:  "the inspirational/informal approach, specific skills training, clinical/technical consultation, and coaching/mentorship" (104). The following chart, provided by Angelo and Cross, explains the techniques and effects of all four of the different training programs.[4]

| Table 4. Characteristics of Four Common Approaches to TA Development | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Approach** | ***Commonly Used Techniques*** | ***Characteristic Role of TA Developer or Faculty Member*** | ***Characteristic Role of Participating TA*** |
| **Informational/ Inspirational** | Speeches, lectures, teaching demonstrations | Organizer/speaker/presenter | Audience |
| **Specific Skills Training** | Workshops and Seminars | Organizer/ trainer | Trainee |
| **Clinical/ Technical Consultation** | Observation, videotaping, one-to-one consulting | Consultant/therapist/adviser | Client or advisee |
| **Coaching/ Mentorship** | Observation, informal and structured observations | Coach/mentor | Apprentice |

The first type of program traditionally offered at the university is what Angelo and Cross call the information/inspirational approach. This approach relies heavily on one-shot presentations or seminars that try to inform TAs about how to teach effectively. Normally national experts or training officials are brought in through the university's teacher training centers to present one-day workshops. There is an inspirational tone to these brief meetings that is meant to motivate TAs to tackle the challenges ahead. Rather than finding the resources for an extensive training workshop, the university normally uses this approach as a substitution for a centralized program. These speeches, lectures, and demonstrations require minimal participation from TAs, limiting them to a passive role (105). TAs must simply listen to and ask questions of the presenter. However, these programs do introduce TAs to both the university and their peers in a non-confrontational way. According to Angelo and

Cross, this type of approach can be effectively integrated into a more substantial training program, but it is rarely ever successful as the only means of training. An example would be the university-based training workshop that brings in an expert presenter who speaks directly to all of the university's TAs. This training session allows each TAs to find connections with the university, their department, and other individual TAs. This type of training can be integrated to help TAs find an initial comfort level, but it will not suffice as the only means of training future graduate teachers.

After the first approach, many universities then implement their own decentralized form of training on a departmental level. This second form of training normally dominates these decentralized programs and is referred to as specific skills training by Angelo and Cross. During this training the TA's role switches from that of the passive audience member to a more active role as a trainee (105). A departmental coordinator or director traditionally leads these programs. These workshops and seminars extend over a brief period of time. The purpose of this training is to help TAs develop skills and techniques that will allow them to become more effective teachers. The agenda of such a workshop, according to Angelo and Cross, is usually set by the departmental needs at the time, and very little consideration is given to the TA's needs (105). These seminars are used to indoctrinate the TA into the department and its respective teaching traditions. These workshops normally focus on the basics of pedagogical practices: grading papers, leading discussions, taking attendance, questioning students, office hours, and student conferences. This is the second most prevalent approach attempted by most university training programs. Specific skills training normally occurs during a weeklong pre-service workshop hosted by the department.

The third type of approach varies from university to university. Clinical/technical consultation is perhaps the most problematic approach of the four discussed by Angelo and Cross because it tends to focus on the failures of individual TAs (106). Traditionally the clinical/technical consultations involve one-on-one communications between the advisor and the advisee. The TA primarily sets the agenda, but it tends to focus on the negative: what the TA has not gotten or why the TA is having troubles with a certain aspect of his/her teaching. In the worst-case scenario this stage is only implemented within training programs when another faculty member has reported the TA as deficient (106). TA programs traditionally use this third approach as remediation. However, this one-on-one consultation, if successfully integrated into a training program, can focus on both the skills and the self-reflection needed by beginning teachers to help them become well-equipped practitioners.

The fourth approach utilizes the one-on-one attention offered by the third approach but replaces the director with a mentor. This coaching/mentor approach removes the structural tension placed on the TA by the hierarchical relationship with their supervisor. According to Angelo and Cross, TAs serve in "an apprenticeship" where they can "learn by watching, working with, and talking with" the master teacher or a more experienced TA (106). This allows TAs to learn from another while actively relating the skills that they have learned in class to a real instructional environment.

It is common for training programs to utilize several of these different approaches within their professional development, but it is extremely rare for them to effectively implement all four different strategies (104). According to Angelo and Cross, successful TA training needs to implement all four approaches within their training courses (104). They believe that TAs must participate in their training as audience members, trainees, clients, and

as apprentices. By concentrating on the benefits offered by each of the four program types, the academy can avoid producing unprepared teaching assistants. Unfortunately, most training programs have a tendency to focus on the first two strategies while neglecting the last two. Angelo and Cross see this as a major problem.

These different training methods, when utilized effectively, will walk TAs through four developmental stages that mirror Sprague and Nyquist's research discussed earlier. By moving the graduate students gradually through all four of these different approaches within their programs, teaching assistants are allowed to "develop both the skills and the knowledge they need for becoming effective, learner-centered teachers" (Sprague and Nyquist 107). Introducing TAs to the practice of teaching through the inspirational lecture allows them to passively participate in the discourse community. This is a perfect developmental activity for a senior learner and an appropriate approach for a beginning graduate student who is still more comfortable participating as a student. However, this training is not adequate preparation for their future roles as teaching assistants. This is why an element of skills training is needed. This skills training needs to be integrated with the third approach, both of which provide substantial developmental activities for the colleague-in-training. These two approaches allow graduate students to experience what it means to implement these skills in a real setting. The fourth approach is vital, especially when TAs, once they have developed into junior colleagues, are expected to teach classes of their own.

New teachers, within any field, need a mentor. Research shows that teachers' comfort levels are dramatically increased when they have the opportunity to share with others in a nonthreatening environment (Sprague and Nyquist 106). They need a nonjudgmental party that they feel safe asking questions. When they first become

practitioners, even with the most elaborate training, new teachers always have questions that they are afraid to ask their superiors. They must have someone that they can ask these questions, and the fourth approach offers TAs a non-threatening solution to this problem.

All four of these programs, when implemented correctly, successfully train teaching assistants to meet the demands of their new roles by adequately preparing them developmentally. They all offer strategically different skills that help the TA adapt and develop within the classroom. By creating a program that effectively utilizes all four approaches, TAs are given the developmental time they need to evolve into effective graduate teachers. Integrating all four of these methods into a training program requires more than the traditional pre-service workshop.

# CHAPTER THREE

## APPLYING RESEARCH TO A LOCAL PROGRAM

According to Catherine Latterell in "Training the Workforce: An Overview of GTA Education Curricula," the common model for introducing TAs to composition instruction is a teaching workshop. Traditionally a department-led seminar/workshop emphasizing skill-based training has been considered a sufficient mechanism for the training of new teaching assistants. These workshops attempt to teach TAs the skills they will need to survive in the classroom. They normally occur during the TAs' first semester or the semester before they are scheduled to teach and range in length from one day to sporadic meetings throughout two terms.

Latterell warns that such methods of training do the profession a disservice because, "the emphasis on skill training in the majority of GTA education programs may encourage a perception composition has long battled: Teaching writing is not valued, even by the rhetoric and composition field" (20). Latterell warns against TA training programs that occur in the traditional one- to two-hour sessions led by the department. According to Latterell, "this model encourages the passing out of class activities and other quick fixes" that do not teach TAs how to reason, but simply how to survive (20). She believes that these workshops indoctrinate TAs into a pre-existing structure of belief that is detrimental to composition departments everywhere, because it destroys the field's philosophy.

This type of workshop training leads to a "skill-based practicum devoid of philosophy, theory and reflective practice" (Liggett 66). In order to successfully train composition TAs, Latterell believes that these three characteristics need to be reintegrated.

Unfortunately, the workshop does not allow for this integration. The time normally allotted for workshop training does not allow TAs the time they need to transform themselves into effective teachers. In order to create a future professoriate of better instructors, training programs must be implemented that allow for the adequate development of their graduate teachers.

This traditional training format separates the pedagogical theory taught in the seminars and the actual practice of teaching experienced later. When these connections are weak, the teaching assistant's growth is stifled. Accreditation regulations throughout the Southeast require in-service, follow-up activities throughout the TAs teaching experiences. The traditional workshop needs to be replaced with a more cohesive practicum that evolves with the TA's developmental stages and allows for the integration of developmentally appropriate training methods.

Under the traditional workshop, new teaching assistants are predominately trained as audience members and as trainees. English TAs, at various universities across the academy, are asked to sit through large lectures on effective training (Angelo and Cross 105). Then they are asked to attend a one-week training course that is usually led by the specific departments in which the TAs will teach. The university-based training is meant to inspire and the department-based training is meant to indoctrinate. As is demonstrated by the Lattrell, Parrett and Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer studies, this multi-level workshop is common across the academy.

***Why The Traditional Workshop Does Not Work Developmentally***

If one juxtaposes this predominate form of workshop training with the developmental stages that Jo Sprague and Jody Nyquist classify, one can clearly see that the workshop

mentality stifles the developmental progress of teaching assistants in the academy. The workshop system, if no follow-up is provided, asks TAs to fully develop into reflective practitioners before they have even taught a class. Developmentally this is not possible. If the academy is going to produce worthwhile TAs, they need to invest the time for TAs to progress through all three developmental stages in order to facilitate their transition from senior learners to graduate teachers.

Teaching assistants need to experience informational sessions, skills-based workshops, technical consultations and mentoring methodologies within their training. All four of Angelo and Cross's methodologies need to be utilized within an effective training program because each training method supports a different and necessary developmental stage. As a result, each method is vital to a well-rounded, theoretically sound, training program. In the traditional workshop some of these methods are sacrificed and, as a result, the development of the TA suffers.

***Why the Traditional Workshop Does Not Work Legally in the Southeast***

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) agrees that a traditional workshop is not enough. In their *1998 Criteria for Accreditation* under Section 4.8.3 dealing with part-time faculty, SACS specifies, "each institution must establish and publish comprehensive policies concerning the employment of part-time faculty members. It must also provide for appropriate orientation, supervision and evaluation." SACS believes that the teaching assistantship is a well-established practice in higher education, but that it should never be used as a substitution for finding appropriate full- or part-time staff. According to SACS, graduate students are considered part-time faculty members, but more importantly they are first and foremost students.

In order to avoid a university's over dependence upon teaching assistants, SACS insists on even stricter regulations for teaching assistants. SACS has some very stringent and detailed stipulations that all TA programs must abide by: a full-time member of the faculty must provide direct supervision of all TAs; TAs must receive regular in-service training throughout their teaching experiences; and there must be an effective means of evaluation. According to SACS's eighteen-hour rule, English departments cannot place unsupervised graduate students in the classroom until they have successfully finished eighteen hours of graduate coursework. In section IV, SACS requires that:

> Graduate teaching assistants who have primary responsibility for teaching a course for credit and/or for assigning final grades for such a course, and whose professional and scholarly preparation does not satisfy the provisions of section 4.8.2 must have earned at least 18 graduate semester hours in their teaching discipline, be under direct supervision of a faculty member experienced in the teaching discipline, receive regular in-service training and be evaluated regularly.

As a result, NCSU's TAs are not allowed to teach their own courses until their second year of study. In addition to any pre-service training that occurs during a TA's first year, SACS's regulations require integrated training throughout the rest of the TA's teaching experiences. These are not criteria that a one-time or even a semester-based workshop can fulfill.

***Why the Traditional Workshop Does Not Create Reflective Practitioners***

In order to become reflective practitioners, TAs must be given the time they need to develop. Training programs need to show TAs the relevance of their own classroom behaviors, not just a set of unrelated skills as relayed by the traditional seminar/workshop.

TA must be taught to understand pedagogical theory and how it relates to their experiences within the classroom. In order to be effective, TA training programs must permit TAs to associate theory with experience by allowing them to teach while they are being trained. By training TAs to teach in a pre-service workshop, before they have had any in-service experience, the training program is less effective.

Hildebrando Ruiz indicates just this in "The Role of Technique in Teacher Training." In his research, Ruiz argues that the process of learning to teach is rooted in the actual experience of teaching and that it involves ongoing reflection. He claims that training courses must raise a TA's consciousness. Ruiz believes that by taking the time necessary to implement a comprehensive training program, the academy is supplying TAs with the "mechanisms" they need "to make informed decisions" (101). Ruiz's belief is that the development of these self-reflective evaluation strategies is as important, if not more important, than the development of immediate cognitive skills that traditional workshops teach. Traditionally a department-led seminar/workshop emphasized skill-based training and Ruiz maintains that this is not significant training. According to Ruiz, traditional training does not allow TAs the time they need to develop the reflective skills they need in order to become effective teachers.

A vital part of becoming a reflective practitioner, according to Ruiz, appears to be dependent upon one's ability to evaluate one's own teaching. As we have seen earlier, evaluation is a major problem within the academy's training programs, and its absence has been a topic of conversation for the last twenty years. Within the last ten years of that conversation, the teaching portfolio has gained a lot of support. According to Gustav W. Friedrich in "Techniques for Monitoring TA Effectiveness," the teaching portfolio is one of

the most effective and malleable evaluation and self-reflection methods available for the TA training system. According to Freidrich, a teaching portfolio is "a personalized summary of an individual's teaching goals, teaching experiences, and teaching accomplishments that can be utilized both for improvement and evaluation" (141). The teaching portfolio is also an extremely flexible and adaptable method of evaluation. It allows for a more effective system of evaluation that monitors instructional quality, assesses and improves instructional skills, and ultimately creates a reflective teacher.

Friedrich suggests six different criteria for the evaluation of an effective portfolio: the course's instructional goals, student evaluations, student learning data, administrative data, peer opinion, and self-evaluation. A more comprehensive view of the teacher's overall performance can be seen when multiple evaluations are used. By asking the TA to reflect upon these different evaluations, the process works to create a more reflective practitioner. For a TA training program to be effective, it must contain an aspect of self-reflection and a form of evaluation for both the individual TA and the program itself. The teaching portfolio addresses all three program needs in a very malleable and cost efficient manner.

The traditional workshop mentality prohibits complete development of the TA, and it denies the use of the four methods discussed earlier. The traditional workshop does not legally satisfy the accreditation requirements proposed by SACS, and it does not successfully implement integrated training and evaluation measures that last throughout the duration of the TA's teaching experience. These reasons are sufficient enough for a change.

**Present Restrictions of NCSU's Training Program**

Freshman composition itself is entrenched in a long history full of divisive conversation. NCSU's English department has felt this tension as well. *College Composition and Communication* recently published a literature review entitled "Reframing the Great Debate on First-Year Writing" written by Marjorie Roemer, Lucille M. Schultz, and Russel Durst. This review explains how the academy's writing courses have been plagued by skill and drill activities, originally proposed by Harvard administrators at the end of the 19th century. It is only during the 1970s through the works of Peter Elbow, Donald Murray, and Elizabeth Cowan that modeling became the practice of choice, softening the hard edge of composition classes as were originally proposed by the Harvard guidelines. However, the original stigma of composition as the academy's "gatekeeper" has been hard to erase from the academy's English departments. This mentality frequently results in an "oppressive arrangement in which grudging, uninterested students struggle through a curriculum focused on low-level skills in classes taught by poorly-supported faculty, typically adjuncts and graduate students" (Roemer, Schultz, and Durst 377). This arrangement has led to a discussion that questions the ultimate use of teaching assistants in the composition classroom and the de facto hierarchical system that seems to burden non-tenure-track faculty and graduate teaching assistants with these lower-level classes that no one else in the academy is willing to teach. This discussion has prompted further conversation about the training and initiation of TAs into the academy. Researchers are trying to find a way to transform the drudgery of first year introductory composition courses into a prime training ground for future composition scholars.

According to Roemer, Schultz, and Durst's review, "the training of TAs is one of the most significant roles that composition has played in English Departments" (386). For all intents and purposes this training transforms graduate students into active graduate teachers while teaching them patterns that they will rely upon for the rest of their instructional careers. Roemer, Schultz and Durst paint a very optimistic picture of the training graduate students receive, but the reality is quite different.

Teaching assistantships have the potential to create a new system or to perpetuate an old one; most of the research seems to suggest that the academy perpetuates the old system due to a lack of university resources, professional training and substantiated research. This same research also acknowledges the fact that effective teaching assistant training programs can have a significant impact on the academy and individual TAs, and therefore must be taken seriously. By relying predominately on pre-service training, NCSU limits their TAs access to theoretically sound training programs that depend on in-service training as well.

According to NCSU's Graduate Catalogue, the University annually employs approximately 2,100 assistants. NCSU's English department supports about forty TAs a year. Of those forty TAs, the Rhetoric and Composition program trains about ten graduate teachers a year. In order to be competitive, NCSU must offer a stipend package to its graduate students. This package includes several different benefits: full payment of in-state tuition, health insurance, and a stipend of $8,000 a year. In order to receive these benefits, graduate students must register for a minimum of nine credit hours, and they must remain in good academic standing (3.0 GPA). These requirements and benefits allow NCSU to attract and sustain a qualified and talented body of graduate students.

Robert Diamond and Peter Gray interviewed such a body in their 1986 national study that surveyed over 1,000 teaching assistants across the nation. Their study verified that a sound structural support system within the university does indeed improve the overall experience of the TA. Over seventy-four percent of the TAs report that they participate in some form of a graduate support program; however, over sixty percent desire more sufficient training in specific areas (self-evaluation, course evaluation, development of instructional technology and lecturing techniques). These statistics show a remarkable improvement over the results of a study done at Syracuse University ten years before which indicated that two-thirds of all TAs lacked any formal preparation in lecturing, test preparation, and discussion management.

When surveyed by their workshop leaders here at NCSU, teaching assistants' responses were remarkably consistent with those of Diamond and Gray's research. In a memorandum distributed to the English department and teaching assistants on March 23, 2001, several responses from the composition TAs reflected a desire for more detailed orientation information. Time constraints are a major concern for NCSU's TAs. They feel the time constraints of the traditional workshop and suggest lengthier training sessions to alleviate some of the pressure. Some TAs even suggested adding another week to the training session. The TAs asked for more specific training on how to deal with discipline problems. They also asked for more specific lessons that focus on time management and school policies. They enjoyed working with many different faculty members and asked for more opportunities to work with various professors. TAs suggested the inclusion of more senior TAs within their initial training sessions. Many TAs also mentioned that they would like to have a chance to experience teaching before their assistantships began.

According to Diamond and Gray's research, over 96 percent of TAs feel that their academic background adequately prepares them for the content of the classes they teach. TAs are comfortable with what they know. They are not comfortable teaching that knowledge to others. This survey implies that TAs are more comfortable with their roles as students in the academy. However, despite their present preparation, these TAs are still very uncomfortable with their roles as graduate instructors. These findings in Diamond and Gray's research highlight the importance of an effective and comprehensive TA training program. An effective training program is one of the easiest ways to help new graduate students move between the different roles they must play within the academy.

However, the contradictory roles the TA must play are most often forgotten in the planning stages of these general training programs. Most of the academy's TA training programs teach general pedagogical theories, discipline-specific instruction and cognitive theory (Diamond and Gray 80-82). These goals and strategies are developed to address the academic concerns of the program, when they should be considering TAs' needs. TAs desire to learn both skill-based practices and the theoretical implications that drive them. NCSU's English TAs desire to learn the basics: how to grade based on concrete samples; how to present a lesson; how different faculty teach; how experienced TAs survive; how to manage classroom time and plan daily lessons; how to deal with discipline problems; what college and departmental policies are; and what they need to do in order to be effective teachers (Pramaggiore 2). These concerns must be considered within a program's development in order to assure the program's success.

The English department at NCSU acknowledges the importance of effective teaching assistant training and, as a result, the department has extensively revised its training program.

The program is still in transition and, consequently, some of the practices described here are under revision and some of the course titles are being changed. This openness to change is one of the reasons why NCSU works so well for this project. Their program is constantly under revision.

Teaching assistantship training at NCSU starts immediately during the first semester of study. TAs are introduced to NCSU's English department during a very brief, very informal, departmental-based orientation. During the first week before classes start, every teaching assistant at NCSU is required to successfully complete a two-day, university-based seminar on effective teaching strategies. After this initial training is complete the departmental requirements then vary among all of the colleges.

All entering English graduate teaching assistants are expected to take a one-hour, pass/fail, bibliography and methods course (Eng 669) along with a one-hour, pass/fail, supervised teaching seminar (Eng 685). The bibliography course is required during the first semester to familiarize teaching assistants with MLA and research guidelines that are commonly used throughout the department. The department requires this course in the hopes that all TAs will be able to adequately grade MLA-formatted research papers during their second semester assistantships. The supervised teaching seminar focuses on the specific skills that are required of the teaching assistants during their second semester assistantship to two different literature classes (this requirement has since been reduced to one assistantship). Within English 685, literature papers are graded and evaluated, common pieces that the TAs might have to teach are used as classroom examples on how to lead class discussion, and different techniques on how to organize mini-lectures are discussed. The course meets for an hour and a half every week. This approach is consistent with the need to provide in-service

training; however, the experiences the TAs gather in these literature assistantships are not directly linked to the experiences they will encounter in English 111. Most of the assistantships are in upper-level literature courses where very little argumentative writing occurs, and very few freshmen are taught. The experiences TAs have in their assistantships are rarely directly linked to the experiences they will have in their own classrooms, and as a result little transference of the necessary skills is likely to occur.

At this point all TAs are treated as equals. Everyone is trained to be a literature TA and very little focus is placed on the second option, being a composition graduate instructor. Occasionally there are brief reminders that all TAs who would like to teach English 111 must be sure to take English 511 before the end of the second semester of their first year. Beyond that, however, graduate students at NCSU are expected to track themselves as literature or composition TAs with very little guidance or explanation of the two different appointments from the English department.

The inequity between the two appointments is rarely formally addressed within the practicum as it is currently implemented. Rarely does anyone explain the difference between being a literature teaching assistant and a composition graduate teacher. To pretend that the two options are the same does a disservice to the general program. Graduate teaching assistants traditionally teach their own courses within NCSU's composition department. Composition graduate teachers are fully responsible for the courses that they teach; they do not merely assist with a larger lecture section. The inequities between what is required of the literature TA and the composition graduate teacher are normally ignored on the university level. As a result, both teaching assistants and graduate teachers are lumped together under the heading of TA. The program needs to consider addressing this inequity of role

requirements during the very first department-based orientation session. By explaining the differences of the two options initial confusion is alleviated, and the program guidelines can be clearly presented.

During the first year those graduate students who know that they have a desire to teach their own self-contained classes of rhetoric and composition elect to take the three-hour Theory and Research in Composition Studies course (Eng 511) that fulfills either an elective or a required course depending on their concentrations. Under the present system, these teaching assistants, despite having already been identified as those who desire to teach composition courses, are still required to assist literature professors (by leading a lab section once a week and assisting with the course's general grading duties) during their second semester to successfully fulfill the department's need for working TAs. This is how the department attempts to satisfy simultaneously the university's financial demands and the SACS's eighteen-hour rule.

The department's compromise identifies the graduate students who want to teach composition classes early on in their graduate careers and requires that they successfully complete English 511 before the end of their second semester, yet still requires that they assist with two literature courses. After they have successfully completed English 511, TAs apply to become composition graduate teachers. This is why a majority of composition TAs opt to take English 511 during their first semester. By electing to take Eng 511 during their first semester, composition TAs are attempting to lighten their workloads during their second semesters when they are required to TA in literature classes.

Once the graduate assistants are selected to teach composition, they are then required to attend a summer training session. During this second-year summer seminar, graduate

students wishing to teach composition must read assigned textbooks and course materials over the summer. This past year students read the assigned workshop text (*St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing)*, their assigned English 111 textbook, and the handbook for the NCSU writing program. The week before fall classes begin, composition teaching assistants participate in a one-week training workshop in which they learn to set course goals, design writing assignments, develop instructional activities and evaluate student writing. They are also familiarized with the goals and policies of the writing program, the department, and the university. During the summer workshop, composition TAs are assigned mentors with whom they work to develop their syllabi for their fall classes. Once the week is over, the TAs are responsible for getting their syllabi and their sequencing of assignments approved. The graduate students are then allowed to enter the college classroom as graduate teachers.

These graduate teachers are required to teach one composition class during the first semester of their second year. Throughout this semester, they are required to attend regular bi-weekly staff meetings designed by the program director. This second-year seminar focuses specifically on the practice of teaching composition within the college classroom: how to sequence assignments, create syllabi, implement writing workshops, facilitate peer editing, detect plagiarism, integrate different student learning styles, effectively grade papers, work with troubled students, and many other composition-specific topics. These staff meetings focus on the TAs' current problems and questions, but the agenda is set by the program director and normally has a focused topic.

Under the present system, the supervisor is given very little time to prepare the graduate students for their classroom duties. As a result, intensive training must occur during a one-week summer seminar and the bi-weekly seminars are meant to fill in any remaining

instructional gaps. TAs are required to observe several different classes and to produce many different informal write-ups for several of the staff meetings. The TAs also have to produce a five-page self-reflective analysis of an assignment they have given as their midterm. The mentors and the program's director observe three of the TAs' classes and review one set of graded papers.

For this semester of work and continuing obligation, the TA receives "3 hours of academic credit for attending the summer workshop and the fall-spring training activities. These three hours count towards their nine-hour minimum enrollment for the fall semester but are not included in the 31 hours of coursework required for the MA degree" (Penrose "Plan"). They receive a pass/fail grade for their completed work. Despite the rigorous demands of this professional development and its unique content, the required seminar still possesses the title of the previous supervised teaching seminar (Eng 685). No distinction is made between the skills learned in this intensive training workshop and the skills learned in the earlier grading workshop. TAs' transcripts only reflect a three-hour repetition of a previous semester's seminar class. Both the literature TAs and the composition TAs get the same credit for the same course entitled English 685, yet the composition TAs are doing a much more substantial amount of work. This inequity is currently being addressed by the department and should be fixed by fall of 2001.

During the second semester of their second year, composition TAs are required to teach two composition courses in the computer classroom. Returning senior TAs are expected to attend and assist with subsequent summer workshops. The TAs are then asked by the English department to produce a teaching portfolio for the university by compiling folders of information that include but are not limited to: a copy of an updated syllabus, a

copy of the assignments for a present course with assignment sheets, a set of graded papers, a formal observation, a copy of the TAs teaching philosophy, and a copy of the TAs grading philosophy. Only recently has an attempt been made within the department to integrate the work required by English 685 and the portfolio requirements of the university; a more formal relationship between the two will be enacted over the next year. This change is one of several that are being enacted within the revised TA training program at NCSU.

Presently, NCSU English Department's TA training program is a good system that attempts to compensate everyone involved, but with a few minor adjustments it could be a very effective teaching training program. When charted the program's weaknesses become clearer. These identified areas are addressed in the practicum revisions that are discussed later in this project. As it stands now, there are only a few issues that need to be addressed.

**Table 5. The TA Training Practicum as it Exists for Composition TAs at NCSU**

| ***Time Placement*** | ***Requirement & Training Unit*** | ***Approach Utilized*** | ***Developmental Stage of TA*** | ***Problems Focused on in Proposal*** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Summer One | 2 hour department orientation | Informational/ Inspirational | Senior Learner | This is basically an introduction session; the program goals and objectives could be laid out more clearly. |
| Summer One | 2 day effective teacher training lead by the university | Informational/ Inspirational | Senior Learner | |
| Semester One | Weekly seminar lead by the literature department (Eng 685) | Specific Skills Training | Senior Learner | Led by literature teacher for TAs in literature classes, pre-service training with no adaptability between theory and practice. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Semester One | Bibliography and Methods Course (Eng 669) | Required Departmental Course | Senior Learner | |
| Semester One (optional) or Semester Two (required) | Theory and Research in Composition (Eng 511) | Required Departmental Course (TAs who want to teach Eng 111) | Senior Learner | The fact that the theoretical ideas presented in this class are not based in actual experience stunts the TAs' development. Leap to Jr. Colleague is lost because there is no application of theory to practice. |
| Semester Two | Teaching assistantship in a literature course | Specific Skills Practice | Sr. Learner with some Colleague-in-training | TAs have now been tracked, yet the practice they learn in their literature TAs doesn't transfer well to the theory they are learning in Eng 511. |
| Semester Two | Two hour orientation with composition department | Informational/ Inspirational | Senior Learner | Summer assignments given during this period are meant to guide the TA through the second developmental stage, but once again there isn't the support structure needed to produce this development. |
| Summer Two | One week intensive workshop with writing director (Eng 685) | Specific Skills Training with aspects of Mentorship | Colleague-in-training & Junior Colleague | Developmental stages are rushed due to departmental time constraints and requirements for third semester preparation. |
| Semester Three | Bi-weekly staff meetings (Eng 685) | Coaching/ Mentorship | Colleague-in-training | Department predetermines agendas and assignments are given |
| Semester Three | Teach one Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition Course (Eng 111) | Coaching/ Mentorship | Colleague-in-training | This is an awkward transition for the TAs because they cannot develop in a one-week seminar. |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Semester Four | Teach Two Sections of Eng 111 in Computer Labs | Clinical/Technical Consultations (only if problems arise) | Junior Colleagues | No support unless asked for, one midterm survey from director. |
| Semester Four+ | Continued teaching assignments | Clinical/Technical Consultations (only if problems arise) | Junior Colleagues | Rarely utilized under present system, very few applicable cases. |

These areas suggest that in order to improve NCSU's pre-existing program the connections between theoretical research and pedagogical practices need to be reinforced for composition TAs; a better system of evaluation needs to be implemented; and the program itself needs to allow adequate developmental time for its graduate students to become better teachers. NCSU also needs to address the inequity between the literature assistantship and the composition teaching assignment by implementing a way to distinguish between the work of the two different programs. This distinction would help composition TAs receive some sort of formal recognition for their extra training.

## A Revised System of Teacher Training Within NCSU's English Department

Recently several campuses across the nation, including NCSU, have allotted additional resources for the development of refined teaching programs. By addressing the weakness highlighted in the chart above, a much stronger practicum than the one offered by present system could be developed. This new practicum should attempt to meet the requirements of all concerned parties and build on the structure already in place here at

NCSU. NCSU can create reflective graduate teachers who are developmentally ready to handle the responsibilities of their roles as university faculty by:

- refocusing the two-hour department orientation session;
- adding "Teaching College Composition" (Appendix A) with a required composition assistantship rather than an unrelated literature assistantship; and
- providing an evaluative portfolio.

By altering selected practices within the present training program, NCSU can create a sound practicum that utilizes the developmental stages and the different training approaches discussed earlier in the literature review.

This practicum requires a contractual agreement in a relatively early stage of the TA's academic career. During the first orientation, TAs would be asked to pick a track. As a result, it is absolutely imperative that a portion of the orientation be used to clearly outline both programs' goals, objectives, requirements, benefits and costs. The traditional literature TA maybe most appropriate for those TAs who want to focus on their academic and research requirements, and for those who know that they do not want to teach within a university environment. The composition graduate teaching positions can be utilized by those graduate students who want to pursue a teaching position within higher education, and by those who need substantial experience and credentials to further their instructional careers. TAs looking for permanent teaching positions will need to justify at least two years worth of classroom experience in basic level composition courses in order to be marketable.

Under the current model, TAs at NCSU receive concrete experiences in two very different areas, rather than in one. However, a two-year MA program simply does not allow the amount of time necessary for training in two areas. The addition of a composition track

will provide the teaching credentials that are needed by graduate students who would like to pursue teaching careers after the completion of their masters programs. As adjunct faculty at most major universities, graduates are commonly expected to teach basic level introductory writing courses.

The two-hour orientation session must make these differences clear by explaining the different timelines of each path. Once the practicums are adequately explained, it must then be emphasized that the TAs are making a two to three year commitment. This contractual agreement does not allow for the flexibility of the present program, but by adequately explaining the differences between the two programs, the choice will be relatively easy for those students with a clearly defined set of goals. By denying the present inequities of the two different programs, the present system promotes confusion amongst its TAs. This confusion creates a greater need for adaptability than a well-defined system where the goals, objectives and expectations are clearly defined. This revised system provides a much more concise and straightforward presentation of the two programs, and this should eliminate a majority of the transferring between practicums that occurs. This clarification also helps to alleviate any confusion TAs might have about the roles they will play in each program.

The second change is needed because the program as it presently stands (represented in table five) stunts the TAs' development for a semester while stalling them in an awkward senior learning stage, all the while denying them access to the junior colleague stage. If sequenced properly, the second semester can capitalize on the growth potential Nyquist and Sprague attribute to the second stage of development. By creating a methods course that runs consecutively with a composition teaching assistantship, TAs will be able to reflect on the theory (Eng 511), the practice (assistantship in composition classes) and their own methods

("Teaching College Composition") all at the same time. It is during this second semester of their first year, during the second stage of their development as colleagues-in-training, that the TA is most likely to develop as a professional, and to use that TA within an unaligned assistantship program only stunts their overall development as a graduate student. This crucial period requires a well thought out, pedagogically sound course that clearly connects theory, practice and experience together.

One unsound training practice within the pre-existing practicum at NCSU occurs during the second semester, when composition assistants are asked to assist with one literature section. This focus on literature assistantships, within such a restricted time, shifts the TAs' concentration away from composition instruction and in order to be effective the teaching assistantship needs to be reintegrated into the training program placing more emphasis on the skills TAs will need both as graduate instructors and professionals.

These literature-based assistantships do not align with some TAs' future teaching goals; yet, by allowing the TAs to assist with one English 111 section of their mentors' teaching load (the same class all TAs will be required to teach in the fall), this problem is alleviated. By assisting with a composition class, while they are taking a methods course in composition ("Teaching College Composition"), the TAs will be able to associate what they are doing in their assistantship to what they are learning in their methods class and, as a result, they will be better prepared to reflect on the practices they will use again in their own classes next fall.

The third change involves the creation of a required departmental teaching portfolio. Portfolio-based assessment offers an effective method of evaluation because portfolios are extremely versatile, and both the individual TA and the training program itself can utilize the

portfolios as a means of evaluation. Each TA's final grade in "Teaching College Composition" will be based on their teaching portfolio's completion. For example, in the proposal the portfolio includes required written sections with reflections in a bound container of the student's choosing. More detailed descriptions of these required parts can be found in Appendix A, but a general list includes: a final reflective letter, a vita, teaching and assessment philosophies, textbook reviews of assigned text, syllabi, sequenced sets of assignments with assignment sheets, assignment critiques, grade distributions with commentaries, observations of introductory composition and rhetoric classes, microteaching reflections, and teaching journals. Each paper receives a letter grade based on focus, development, organization, style, creativity, reflection, and grammar/mechanics. Because the process approach to writing is based on revising and reflection, each paper after it is reviewed requires a responsive evaluation by the TA before it is placed in their final portfolio.

By altering these three aspects in future training programs, a drastic improvement should be seen in the developmental progression of the TA. Table Six below explains these changes in more detail.

| Table 6. TA Training Practicum as Suggested in this "Ideal" Proposal | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Time Placement*** | ***Requirement & Training Unit*** | ***Approach Utilized*** | ***Developmental Stage of TA*** | ***Problems Focused on in Proposal*** |
| Summer One | 2 hour department orientation | Informational/ Inspirational | Senior Learner | Here the two very different practicums could be laid out and explained for all entering TAs so they can make a contractual agreement to either be a literature TA or a composition graduate instructor. |
| Summer One | 2 day effective teacher training lead by the university | Informational/ Inspirational | Senior Learner | |
| Semester One | Bibliography and Methods Course (Eng 669) | Required Departmental Course | Senior Learner | |
| Semester One (required) | Theory and Research in Composition (Eng 511) | Required Departmental Course (Theoretical background to composition theory) | Senior Learner | Transition to Jr. Colleague facilitated by second semester activities. Theoretical ideas are presented in a class format that introduces TAs to the discourse community as students first. Class will be integrated into proposed course second semester creating a unit that ties the theoretical to the practical fostering smoother developmental transitions. |
| Semester Two | Teaching College Composition (Eng 696) | Required Departmental Course integrating Specific Skills Training with Coaching/Mentor and Technical/Consultation | Senior Learner transforms into a Colleague-in-training | Addition of this course provides a vital transformation period in which the TA is allowed to develop from a senior learner into a colleague-in-training through an integrated practicum that relates the theoretical with the practical. |

| Semester Two | Teaching assistantship in a composition course with assigned mentor in conjunction with Eng 696 | Specific Skills Practice<br>_________________<br>Mentor/Coaching | Colleague-in-training | This assistantship allows for the practical application of the theory and the skills TAs are learning in the practicum by directly relating to the courses TAs will be teaching. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Summer Two | Two hour orientation with composition department | Informational/ Inspirational | Colleague-in-training | Information given during this period is meant to guide the TA through the practical aspects of getting ready to teach a course (copy machines, overheads, projectors, etc). |
| Semester Three | Teach one Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition Course (Eng 111) | Coaching/ Mentorship | Colleague-in-training | |
| Semester Three | Bi-weekly staff meetings | Coaching/ Mentorship | Colleague-in-training transforming into Junior Colleague | No assignments and session's topics should be determined by TAs (3 observations). |
| Semester Four | Teach Two Sections of Eng 111 in Computer Labs | Clinical/Technical Consultations (only if problems arise) | Junior Colleagues | No support unless asked for, one midterm survey from director. |
| Semester Four | Small role in TA training of first year TAs | Mentorship reversed | Junior Colleagues | By helping other beginning TAs, seniors TAs can define and refine their own teaching practices. |

Little has to change to make this training practicum a reality; the previous program has already laid the foundation. Mentors can still be compensated with one course release during the fall semester and the university's most strained teachers get a break during the spring semester by receiving the aid of a teaching assistant. The changes suggested in this practicum are not drastic. Rather than losing additional resources, pre-existing resources will

be utilized more effectively. The literature TA program can stay as it is because not all of the TAs will elect to teach composition classes. The program director can delegate the extra teaching responsibilities required by a full credit course over the traditional workshop quite effectively to a senior teaching assistant. Senior TAs can be responsible for arranging speakers, aligning schedules, contacting TAs, keeping office hours for beginning TAs who might have questions and even for offering professional feedback on some of the classroom assignments. The university's training units could provide lectures on effective teaching practices during some of the regularly scheduled class meetings, alleviating more preparation time from the director's schedule. Undergraduates benefit because they will be taught by well-prepared teaching assistants whose first day in an undergraduate classroom will not be their first day as reflective practitioners.

The graduate teaching assistants receive the time they need to effectively create and reflect on their practice without having to sacrifice their own studies or delay their graduation by taking lightened course loads throughout their training and teaching experiences. By giving TAs three hours worth of degree-oriented (elective) credit, the TAs are given what they want. Parrett discusses the fact that "TAs want credit" (72). Those hoping to enter collegiate teaching, over 75% according to Robert Diamond and Peter Gray's survey of over 1,000 TAs, "request and appreciate transcripts, certificates of special training completion, written evaluations from supervisors, and copies of undergraduate or peer evaluations. These provide a definite hiring edge" (72). TAs want transcripts that show that they have indeed received specific training in college instruction. This official documentation helps to alleviate the inequities between the literature TAs and the composition graduate teachers by formally

addressing the difference between the workloads of English 685 and "Teaching College Composition."

According to an email sent by Dr. Virginia Lee, the associate director of NCSU's Faculty Center for Teaching and Learning, NCSU is acknowledging that experience and expertise in teaching is becoming more important for students who hope to pursue full-time positions after they complete their advanced programs. According to the email, only three percent of the nation's institutions are hiring for research positions. A majority of the openings for new faculty are in teaching-oriented institutions that want instructors who are comfortable using a range of instructional activities to promote student learning, while being able to actively reflect on their own practices. Teaching experiences provide the competitive edge for new faculty. This structural support not only increases employment opportunities but it also has a definite effect on the graduates' teaching abilities throughout their careers as teaching assistants. By offering a continuous support system, effective training programs dramatically increase graduate teachers' comfort levels.

## Creating a New Practicum with "Teaching College Composition"

Perhaps the most labor intensive change made to NCSU's pre-existing TA training program is the addition of the three-hour methods course. "Teaching College Composition" as proposed by this project is designed to prepare TAs for their teaching experiences within traditional composition classes. "Teaching College Composition" offers a substantial period of time where the TA training program can successfully facilitate the TAs' transition between their role as a senior learner and their next role as a colleague-in-training. This

project accommodates and utilizes changes in the English department's use of teaching assistants as required by SACS. There is presently no self-contained composition-training program that successfully meets all of SACS's requirements at NCSU. The program now offers composition assistantships only during the second year. "Teaching College Composition" would therefore be piloted to meet the needs of TAs who plan on teaching composition courses during their second and third years, by groundings TAs observations and teaching assistantships within the field of composition studies during a methods course rather than in the one unrelated literary assistantship as has been NCSU's practice for the last couple of years.

The structure of this revised practicum, through the sequencing of English 511, "Teaching College Composition," and one English 111 teaching assistantship, combines several different kinds of mentored teaching opportunities during TAs' first years that will help to prepare them for their fall teaching assignments in English 111 classes. The required assistantship in one spring English 111 class, the relationship with English 511, and the creation of a required departmental teaching portfolio, all compliment TAs' first year of training in other areas. The combination of all three requirements creates a developmental practicum for first year TAs in which they are given the proper amount of developmental time needed to create more successful graduate teachers.

The English Department requires TAs to take English 511, "Theory and Research in Composition," before applying for an assistantship in Composition. This course is taken as a part of the "18 hours in field" that SACS requires of all TAs before they can serve as instructors of record for their own classes. English 511 provides the theoretical context and grounding that students need for their work in "Teaching College Composition," where the

focus shifts from theory to its practical application within the classroom. The TAs will also learn the technique of reflective evaluation. This practicum formalizes the de facto relationship between the two courses, and as a result, both courses when taken together can fulfill the two electives required for all graduate MA students within the English Department.

"Teaching College Composition" should be taken during the second semester of the TA's first year as a graduate student. A sample syllabus is provided in Appendix A. This course builds on the theoretical foundations established in English 511 and continues the development of a required departmental teaching portfolio while exploring the practical in composition pedagogy as well as the policies of the NCSU freshman writing program. This course explores the practical issues and methodology behind teaching, while TAs work in directed assistantships with assigned faculty mentors who also teach English 111, "Rhetoric and Composition." The TA is placed in a group with four peers who all have the same mentor and English 111 textbook.

This peer group will continue to work with the same mentor and textbook throughout its fall teaching assignment. During the fall semester, each TA will teach one section of English 111 in which they will use the materials they developed in "Teaching College Composition." The TA will be required to attend follow-up bi-weekly staff meetings. They will work with their original mentors who will in turn be responsible for two formalized and announced observations. The Director of the TA training program will be responsible for holding one announced formal observation. Both the mentors and the director will be responsible for holding a pre- and post-conference with the each teaching assistant. A write-up reviewing these observations will be added to the TA's ongoing teaching portfolio. During the following spring semester the TA will be required to teach two English 111

computer-based courses for which they will have already developed a web syllabus in "Teaching College Composition."

This practicum is a viable option for NCSU. It fits smoothly into NCSU's English department's pre-existing structure and it can easily be implemented at a local level. After the new program is implemented, it will need to be evaluated carefully in order to gather the data needed to justify its continuation.

# CHAPTER FOUR:

# CONCLUSION

There are no quick fixes to the problems posed by TA training programs; each university must develop its own specialized programs that meet the specific needs of each of its departments. There are too many variables prohibiting the implementation of any one universal training program. There are, however, sound practices and theoretically supported principles that can enhance departmentally specific TA training programs. These principles have been discussed in the literature review and their implementation is crucial for any composition-based training program.

The first principle to consider is that all interested parties must plan the TA training program, not just one department within each individual university. Successful training serves the various facets of the institution, not just one. Dean Jaros's research successfully explains how these different elements interact within the nine-celled matrix he calls the TA system. It is vital that a training program consider the needs of all nine cells before beginning to implement any training program within their university. As a result, TA training needs to occur at various levels of the university. The case-in-point utilizes several different aspects of the university, thus allowing for TAs to experience a variety of NCSU's practices and procedures by utilizing the teaching center's centralized training opportunities and other disciplines' research. By bringing different presenters and speakers into the training seminar, TAs are exposed to various aspects of the university in which they work, not simply the department in which they are trained. As a result, a more comprehensive picture of the composition program and its place within the university arises. Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer's research shows that all of the successful programs they interviewed used more than

one method of training. This combination of different training methods helps support the diversity of a training program's approaches. The most predominate training combination includes a centralized training orientation with a departmentalized follow-up special skills training session. No matter the combination it is imperative that individual TA needs be considered.

This brings us to the second principle, which involves the consideration of the different developmental stages of individual teaching assistants. According to Sprague, Nyquist and Wulff's research, every TA progresses through three very different developmental stages: the senior learner, the colleague-in-training and the junior colleague. Each individual TA needs time to develop, and training programs should allow this development to occur by enhancing the transitional periods with targeted activities that promote smooth transitions. The traditional workshop does not provide enough time for adequate development and as a result inadequate training programs stunt the TAs' growth. Training programs need to target these different developmental stages, utilizing TAs' strengths in each stage, to further develop TAs as reflective practitioners.

In order to create reflective practitioners, a third principal needs to be considered: TA training must directly link the theoretical with the practical aspects of teaching. By implementing a practicum that includes pre-service, in-service, and post-service training, TA programs can successfully link the theoretical and the practical. TAs' experiences within their own classrooms are necessary to their comprehension of both theory and method. This relationship between theory, practice and experience is vital for success. SACS requires these different components in training programs within the southeast, but on a national level research justifies the need for such integrated training programs. Ruiz advocates that the

process of learning to teach is deeply rooted in the actual experience of teaching, and consequently, he believes that it is necessary to implement a comprehensive training program that elevates the TA's consciousness.

The fourth principal suggests that in order to successfully implement effective training programs, the academy must adequately evaluate the training programs that already exist. A substantial system of evaluation is needed for every program implemented within the academy. Weimer, Suinicki and Bauer's research finds a lack of concrete evaluation within the TA programs they reviewed. They claim that resources are so sparse that evaluation is normally the first aspect of a training program to be sacrificed. Freidrich offers a solution to this problem. Friedrich maintains that portfolio based assessment offers an inexpensive and effective method of evaluation. He believes that both the individual TA and the training program itself can utilize the portfolio's flexibility. The portfolio allows TAs to focus on their own individual practices, while at the same time the university can reflect on the effectiveness of its training program.

The most surprising discovery of all has nothing to due with these guiding principles, but rather a lack of conclusive research in the field of TA training regarding composition programs. The research is indeed inconclusive and more research data is needed to justify which elements of existing TA programs are most successful. There are multiple qualitative studies in print based on anecdotal evidence, interviews and case studies, but very few quantitative studies have been done. We need additional research to substantiate which training practices offer the greatest returns. An up-to-date survey of the training practices utilized by the nation's composition departments would be extremely beneficial for future research. A survey of TAs within composition programs across the nation would help to

identify the discipline-specific needs and practices that TAs benefit from the most. Pilot programs that gather data about the effectiveness of different training techniques would help programs decide which techniques offer the best return. An interdisciplinary report on the effectiveness of different training methods, although extremely time consuming, would be an extremely valuable piece of research. All of these different research suggestions would help future researchers and trainers determine which practices would be most beneficial for their program's and individual TAs' needs.

Locally, the piloting of this course could supply some of that much needed data. Perhaps there is a window of opportunity for NCSU to implement a pilot TA training program for which they could gather the data needed. As it stands now, this program survives in an ideal world in which TAs acknowledge the importance of their own training and, despite their typical resistance, they internalize the importance of their teaching. By elevating the magnitude of the TA as a reflective practitioner, North Carolina State University can embrace its role not only as a Research I University, but also its tradition as a land grant institution.

## APPENDIX A:

## COURSE SYLLABUS [5]

**"Teaching College Composition"-000**
**Course Description and Syllabus**
**Spring Semester**

**Professor:** Tenure-Track Faculty (Teaching Excellence Award)
**Office:** Departmentally Based
**Office Phone:** 515-XXXX
**E-mail:** good_teacher@ncsu.unity.edu (anytime day or night)
**Office Hours:** T/Th and by appointment only

### TEXTS

❖ Connors, Robert and Cheryl Glenn. *The New St. Martin's Guide to Teaching Writing*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.

❖ McKeachie, Wilbert J. *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory For College and University Teachers*. Lexington: DC Heath and Company, 1994.

❖ Lindemann, Erika. *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1987.

❖ *Handbook for Teachers of Freshman Composition*. Online at <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/fhand/>

❖ English 111 Textbook Assigned by Mentor

### COURSE PURPOSE

This course is designed to help you prepare to teach English 111, an introductory college composition and rhetoric course. Teaching College Composition should be taken during your second semester. It will build on the theoretical foundations established in the English 511 and continue the development of a required departmental teaching portfolio. We will connect the theoretical with the practical in composition pedagogy. By focusing on the larger theoretical foundations within composition and education, we will be better prepared to handle the specific issues of English 111 here at State.

In this course we will practice setting course goals, designing writing sequences and assignments, developing instructional activities, and evaluating student writing. You will work with an assigned mentor to plan your first semester courses. This course will meet two times a week and will require a teaching assistantship with your mentor for one English 111 course. You will maintain and evaluate your own departmental teaching portfolio.

**THE MANDATORY TEACHING ASSISTANTSHIP**

All TAs in this course are assigned a directed assistantship with a faculty mentor who teaches English 111(Introduction to Rhetoric and Composition). Because experience is such an important teacher, we will be working with mentors who will model teaching practices for you while allowing you to assist with their composition classes. This assistantship will require that you help with basic instructional duties including but not limited to grading papers, taking attendance, teaching classes, meeting with students, keeping office hours. You should expect to spend 20 hours a week helping your mentor teacher.

You will be placed in a group with peers who all have the same mentor and English 111 textbook. You will continue to work with the same mentor and textbook throughout your fall teaching assignment. The materials you developed in this course will be the basis of your classroom instruction next semester.

**MAINTAINING A BALANCE**

Just a quick note of caution: Some of the requirements for this course will overlap with what is required of you in order to fulfill your English 111 assistantship, but you must keep the difference in mind. The assistantship in English 111 is your job; English 000 is a course you are taking this semester. They are related AND English 000 is designed to increase the likelihood of a successful teaching experience BUT it is possible that your success in this seminar may or may not mirror your success level in the classroom. Hopefully by the end of this course, you will be comfortable with your role as a reflective practitioner.

**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:**

By the end of this course, the student will:

- be able to relate theoretical concepts from composition and education to the practical strategies for teaching college composition.
- explore the purpose, rationale, and practical constraints of a range of strategies' implementation into writing courses.
- explore the institutional context for their teaching and establish meaningful course goals and objectives.
- create a logical and challenging sequence of assignments designed specifically to meet the goals of their established course.
- create a variety of instructional activities that will help different students learn to write.
- prepare professional syllabi and teaching materials.

- learn what it means to be a reflective practitioner.
- base their philosophical statements for teaching and grading in sound theoretical frameworks.
- choose and exercise appropriate criteria for both formative and summative evaluation of student writings.
- be able to explain the instructional implications of different rhetorical and theoretical practices.
- be able to choose and evaluate different teaching strategies for specific purposes.

## ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Regular attendance is required. Your punctual attendance and contribution to section discussions is essential and will be counted as part of your final grade. It is particularly important because we will rely on each other for feedback on various assignments. Students who miss more than three classes should not expect to pass the course.

## READING

You will be expected to have completed the reading assignments for each day BEFORE the class meets. You will also be required to hand in periodic reflections based on that day's reading.

## EVALUATION

Your final grade will be based on your teaching portfolio's completion. Your portfolio must include the following artifacts with reflections in a bound container of your choosing. Choose a container that captures your own sense of yourself as a composition teacher. More detailed descriptions of the activities will follow, but a general introduction is included for each item on this syllabus.

**A Final Reflective Letter:** This reflection will work as the introduction and guide to your growth as a reflective practitioner. It will analyze your portfolio and all of its contents, including your explanations of your title and container as they relate to your journey this semester.

**A Vita:** You will create a professional vita to assist you on future job searches. This should be the second item in your portfolio.

**Your Teaching and Assessment Philosophies:** You will take what you produced in English 511 and you will revise both statements to include the theoretical rationale learned in English 511with the practical applications you have learned based on our reading, discussions, and practical experiences in this classroom.

**A Textbook Review of Your Assigned Text:** Using the format you learned in English 511, you will review the textbook you have been assigned by your mentor. You must ask yourself

a series of questions:  What teaching philosophies are prevalent?  What do you find helpful? What missing resources will you need to supplement with?

**Syllabus:** You will construct your own course for English 111 including a description, goals and objectives, classroom policies, daily readings, and assignments for fall semester.  Your syllabus must reflect the program's overall goals and policies, but you must justify in a separate reflective piece how your syllabus reflects your philosophical beliefs as stated in your teaching statement.  There must also be an active online syllabus to accompany this reflection.

**A Sequenced Set of Assignments with Assignment Sheets**:  This sequenced set will also need a reflection that explains how each assignment is connected to an builds upon the others.  The reflection should also relate how these assignments reflect your own teaching philosophy.

**An Assignment Critique:** During your assistantship you will be allowed to teach a lesson as a part of a unit.  For this assignment you must set up the unit and then explain the purpose of your one daily lesson within that broader scheme.  You will then explain what worked and what did not.

**Grade Distribution and Commentary:** In your assistantship you will be required to grade several student papers.  You will need to photocopy three of those papers from one set.  You will need an A paper, a C paper and an F paper.  Here you will analyze how you graded in comparison to your general assessment philosophy.  You will also evaluate the criteria you used to determine what distinguished these papers from each other.

**Observations of English 111 Classes:** These observations will focus on specific issues that are relevant to our class.  You will get to see and reflect on the different practices used throughout the department.  You will do these observations in pair groups.  You will need to visit a different class for each observation and they must be English 111 classes.  You will meet with the instructors before their classes to discuss their goals and objectives; you will record what you see during class; and you will meet with the instructors briefly after class to discuss their perceptions of the class.  You are not there to criticize; you are there to learn.  You will be responsible for turning in all of your field notes, and a one to two page reflection.  We will share these observations as a class.

**A Microteaching Reflection:** This will be a reflection written about your microteaching experience.  What you saw in the videotape of yourself teaching, what you liked and what you would like to change.  You will also include excerpts from your peers' reviews that you found most helpful.

**Teaching Journals:** The teaching journal is yours to do with as you please.  You must respond at least once a week and you must produce enough material to produce a five-page reflection that includes whole entries dealing with your experience as a TA and your apprehension and excitement about having your own class.  Both the five-page journal reflection and the journal itself will be included in your portfolio.

**You must turn in a portfolio to pass this course!** Each paper will receive a letter grade based on focus, development, organization, style, creativity, reflection, and grammar/mechanics. You will receive a rubric for each assignment, as well as, an assignment sheet. **Unsatisfactory work will be rewritten to meet specific requirements for the assignment.** Because the process approach to writing is based on revising and reflection, each paper after it is reviewed will need a reflexive evaluation by you before it is placed in your final portfolio. It is imperative that we as teachers learn to evaluate our own work and that we work to reach a higher level in all that we do.

## PAPER FORMATING

All essays and drafts should be typewritten (or word-processed) in 10 or 12-point font, double-spaced, and each must have 1-inch margins on the top, right and bottom. All papers must include your name, the course name, my name, the assignment and the date at the top of the first page. It is not necessary to include a title page. Be certain to number your pages and put your name at the top of each page. You will be responsible for retaining one copy for yourself (either photocopied or on disk).

## PEER REVIEW AND RESPONSE

Peer review is critical to successful participation in this class. Your improvement as a writer, an editor, AND a teacher depends on your careful and consistent participation in all peer review and response sessions. Therefore, on the day that we schedule peer presentations, you must come fully prepared to comment. Responses must be substantive, not merely cosmetic, and should reflect serious consideration of your peers' abilities. It is important both for your own benefit and that of your classmates that you attend this workshop, and the penalty for missing any of them, or for not being prepared for the peer editing process, will be an additional assignment.

## DISABILITY SERVICES

NCSU provides confidential counseling and assistance to students with physical, psychological, and learning disabilities. The DSS website is:
www2.ncsu.edu/stud_affairs/counseling_center/dss/

## WEEKLY SYLLABUS

The syllabus outlines class activities, assignments, and due-dates for the semester. I reserve the right to make changes in the syllabus for the benefit of the class and will inform you

AHEAD of time if any changes need to be made.  You will be given a monthly calendar that explains the daily activities and homework you will need to complete in order to be completely prepared for classroom activities.

In the hopes of drawing clear connections between composition and educational theories, our class will follow a predetermined format in which the theoretical will be discussed on Tuesdays and the practical application will be presented on Thursdays.  On Tuesdays we will introduce and discuss theoretical scholarship within both educational and composition studies and on Thursdays we will apply this theory to practical issues within English 111 and our classrooms.

C: Connors and Glen
H: NCSU's *Handbook for Teachers of Freshman Composition*
M: McKeachie
L: Lindemann
A:  Formal assignment that is due for comment that week.

| THE WEEK | THE THEORETICAL BACKGROUND | THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION |
|---|---|---|
| ***WEEK ONE*** | ***The Different Teaching Philosophies in the Academy*** | ***Your Definitions and Philosophies about Teaching*** |
| **A:** One page definition of teaching<br>**A:** Your teaching philosophy from ENG 511 | Course Introductions<br>Review of ENG 511, the English 111 teaching assistantship and how ENG 696 plays a role in the bigger picture.<br><br>Begin discussion about teaching. | Share different teaching philosophies of academy and class in an informal discussion. |
| ***WEEK TWO*** | ***Characteristics of College Students (NCSU Demographics)*** | ***An Ethnography of Your Assistantship*** |
| **A:** Ethnography of an ENG 111 Classroom. | **M:** Chapter One: College or University Culture and Chapter 22: Taking Student Diversity into Account | Classroom discussion of your observations and a comparison of what you found in relation to the specific demographics of NCSU. |
| ***WEEK THREE*** | ***Psychological Principles for Effective Teaching in Composition*** | ***Tricks of the Trade "Making a List"*** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **A:** List of your favorite ideas collected thus far | **L:** Chapter Five<br>**C:** Chapter Seven<br>**H:** Skim the entire document noting the most helpful suggestions<br>**A:** Observe another Eng 111 Class and note all of the ideas that you would use on your list. | Senior TAs will present on how they survived. They will share the practices they picked up along the way. As a class, new TAs will add their newly discovered practices to the ongoing list. |
| ***WEEK FOUR*** | **Different Learning Styles** | ***Different Styles: A Classroom Activity*** |
| **A:** Personal reflection on individual learning styles | **Presentation by Faculty Learning Center**<br><br>**C:** Kenneth Bruffee "Collaborative Leaning" pg. 482 | Develop a class portrait and compare that to the learning style demographics collected by NCSU. Reflect on the implications of these findings to our classroom and our individual teaching practices. |
| ***WEEK FIVE*** | ***The Traditional Approaches: Lecture and Discussion*** | ***Developing Discussion Questions & Class Lectures*** |
| **A:** Microteach on Thursday | **M:** Chapter Four: Organizing Effective Discussion and Chapter Five: Lecturing<br><br>**M:** Chapter 17: Role Playing and Microteaching | **Videotaped microteaching with student feedback on selected topics.**<br><br>**A:** Reflection on video and student feedback for Tuesday |
| ***WEEK SIX*** | ***Alternative Presentation Approaches: Accommodating Everyone*** | ***How Do You Use this Thing?*** |
| **A:** Video reflection due on Tuesday | **M:** Chapter 13: Peer Learning, Collaborative Learning, Cooperative Learning | Technical workshop in computer lab to review how to use all of the equipment offered for presentations. |
| ***WEEK SEVEN*** | ***The Textbook as a Philosophical Statement*** | ***Reading Between the Lines: Eng 111 Textbook Reviews*** |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **A:** Textbook review due of assigned English 111 text | **M:** Chapter Ten: Teaching Students How to Learn From Textbooks<br>**C:** Chapter One: Choosing a Textbook pg. 9 | Group presentations of individual textbook reviews for the assigned English 111 textbooks used by all of the mentors. |
| ***WEEK EIGHT*** | ***Developing Instructional Objectives: A Departmental Overview*** | ***Producing a Syllabus with Correct Front Matter*** |
| **A:** Finalized Syllabus for Review | **H:** Sections on Departmental Goals and Objectives for 110, 111, and 112<br>**L:** Chapter 14: Designing Writing Courses | **H:** Review Sample Syllabi and Syllabus Requirements<br>**C:** Chapter One: Creating A Syllabus pg. 14 |
| ***WEEK NINE*** | ***Sequencing Assignments to Make Sense*** | ***Creating a Cohesive Set of Paper Assignments for ENG 111*** |
| **A:** Finish a set of paper assignments for English 111 | **L:** Chapter 13: Making and Evaluating Writing Assignments<br>**C:** Chapter Four: Successful Writing Assignments<br>**H:** Sections on Sample Paper Units | Classroom discussion of your assignment sequences and the justification for them in alignment with your course's finalized objectives and goals. |
| ***WEEK TEN*** | ***Cognitive Learning Styles and Bloom's Taxonomy*** | ***Planning and Developing Daily Lessons*** |
| **A:** An Assignment Critique | **C:** Chapter Two: Planning the 1st Two Weeks pg. 10<br>**M:** Chapter 27: Learning and Cognition in the College Classroom | **H:** Daily Sample Lessons<br>**C:** Chapter 3: Everyday Activities |
| ***WEEK ELEVEN*** | ***Assessment Techniques within the Academy*** | ***Testing and Grading Workshop*** |
| **A:** Assessment philosophy from Eng 511 with a grade distribution and justification | **M:** Chapter 8: The ABC's of Grading<br>**C:** Chapter Six: Responding to and Evaluating Student Essays<br>**H:** The Department's Writing Rubric | In-class Modeling and Grading Workshop Activity. |

| ***WEEK TWELVE*** | ***Computers and Composition*** | ***Putting Your Course Online: Developing a Web syllabi*** |
|---|---|---|
| **A:** Develop an Online Syllabus | **A:** Observation in a Computer Lab is Due<br>**C:** Cynthia Selfe's "Technology and Literacy: A Story about the Perils of Not Paying Attention" pg. 511<br>**M:** Chapter 19: Teaching in the Age of Electronic Information | In-class workshop on creating online web syllabi using Wolfware. |
| ***WEEK THIRTEEN*** | ***Becoming a Practitioner*** | ***Portfolio Requirements and Design*** |
| **A:** Work on Portfolio's Container and Opening Letter | **M:** Chapter 23: The Teaching Assistantship: A Preparation for Multiple Roles and Chapter 28: Improving your Teaching | Class Discussion based on journey letters and experiences so far. |
| ***WEEK FOURTEEN*** | ***Academic Freedom and Tenure: Professional Principles*** | ***Designing Your Vita and Hints for the Job Search*** |
| **A:** Produce a Vita and Gather References | **M:** Chapter 26: Ethics in College Teaching<br><br>Several professors will visit to share their experiences with us today. | Career Center Presentation and In-class Workshop on Developing Vitas and Conducting a Job Search. |
| ***WEEK FIFTEEN*** | ***Surviving the First Day of Class*** | ***Course Summary and Evaluations*** |
| **Portfolios Are Due!** | **C:** Chapter 2: The First Few Days of Classes<br>**M:** Chapter 3: Meeting a Class for the First Time | **C:** Appendix to Chapter Six: The End of the Term<br><br>Discuss expectations for next year and any other concerns. |

## Notes

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[3] These universities include Brown University, University of California at Davis, University of California at Los Angeles, University of California at San Diego, University of Colorado, Cornell University, Harvard University, University of Illinois, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, University of Missouri, Ohio State University, Syracuse University, University of Washington, and the University of Wyoming.

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[5] When developing Appendix A many ideas and concepts were adapted from E. Curtin's English 514 Syllabus and Donna Qualley's English 513 Online Syllabus.

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