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GTA Preparation as a Model for Cross-Tier Collaboration at North Carolina State University: A Program Profile

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Abstract: This program profile describes recent changes to the process for preparing graduate teaching instructors (GTAs) in North Carolina State University's first-year writing program. The authors—one a non-tenure-track faculty member and the other a tenure-track faculty member—describe the philosophical, ethical, and practical concerns in scaling teacher preparation to accommodate rapidly growing cohorts of MA and MFA GTAs. By providing an example of cross-tier collaboration, the authors propose an approach to GTA preparation that takes into account that many of these novice teachers will begin their teaching careers as contingent faculty colleagues.

As Writing Program Administrators (WPAs), we are charged with the immediate and often complex task of quickly equipping new writing teachers with foundational knowledge of both disciplinary content and pedagogical practices. We find ourselves racing against the academic calendar to mentor graduate teaching assistants (GTAs), review course documents, and support in-the-moment teaching needs. Amid these practices, those of us responsible for GTA preparation may also find ourselves in a troubling ethical bind: On one hand, we have the opportunity to raise important pedagogical questions with large cohorts of novice teachers who are preparing to teach first-year writing. On the other hand, we also implicitly support ever-deepening pools of contingent academic labor.

WPAs are thus responsible for preparing GTAs for both their current and future students, since many of these graduate teaching assistants will, if they choose to remain in academia, continue to teach first-year writing as doctoral candidates or non-tenured faculty. For WPAs who work with master's-seeking students as we do, this ethical conundrum provides the exigency for a myriad of difficult discussions with GTAs: to address the reality of contingent employment; to encourage them to consider alternative-academic opportunities in the public sector; to challenge them to think strategically about enrolling in doctoral programs that will likely not provide secure employment and that may level many costs (psychological, financial, professional, and emotional); and, finally—yet most urgently—to prepare them to teach in our classrooms and the classrooms they may lead in the future.

Compounding this situation in our program at North Carolina State University is the reality of growing graduate student cohorts, declining first-year student enrollments, and slowly decreasing numbers of full-time, non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty mentors. In 2015, our cohort of GTAs numbered 22, while our NTT faculty numbered 29. In our program, GTAs historically worked one-on-one with an NTT faculty mentor as they prepared to teach, but as these population numbers grew closer, we had to revise our mentoring program to one based on mentoring cohorts where each faculty mentor works with two or three GTAs. Otherwise, we faced the possibility that every NTT faculty member would be expected to serve as a GTA mentor, a situation that contradicts our program's philosophical emphasis on faculty autonomy.

What started as a logistical conundrum—too many GTAs and not enough mentors—led us to consider the ethical implications of our work in GTA preparation in our program. We reframed necessary program changes as a valuable opportunity to reconsider how we present teaching preparation to GTAs and how we might leverage the mentoring and preparation program to work against future exploitation on the academic job market. With these goals in mind, we began a cross-tier collaboration between the program's tenure-track (TT) associate director, Casie, and its NTT assistant director, Megan.

We also saw these changes as an opportunity to improve the visibility of the pedagogical expertise of our NTT

faculty, using the mentoring relationship as a frame. As our GTAs prepare to teach, they work intensively with a faculty mentor, and it is these relationships that can become the most influential in their course of study, regardless of students' academic foci. GTAs at North Carolina State University attend upwards of 3,000 minutes of their mentors' first-year writing class, meet outside of class time, and keep close contact with mentors in their first semester as teachers of record. This intensive mentoring prefaces the teaching practicum, taught by the Associate Director (Casie), which includes a one-week intensive pedagogy workshop and weekly meetings in the fall of their second year in the program.

As “developing faculty members,” to use Kathleen Blake Yancey’s term, GTAs are not only struggling to learn the processes of teaching college composition but also to acclimate to a culture where their research interests are often secondary to their teaching (65). Because the master’s-level GTAs in our practica may soon become our non-tenured colleagues, the relationships they forge with writing program faculty members (and administrators, by extension) may be the most salient relationships they develop during their courses of study.

We use these important relationships and difficult discussions as generative frames as we revise the GTA preparation program at North Carolina State University. This program profile explores recent and ongoing programmatic changes in the face of growing cohort numbers and the academic job market. We have focused on two locations of revision—our mentoring program and the teaching practicum—to propose an approach to GTA preparation that is explicitly aware of our graduates’ employment prospects and our own ethical imperatives as WPAs working on and off the tenure track. Further, this collaboration has also laid out a process for a cross-tier partnership that works to address Nancy Penrose’s tripartite rubric for supporting professional identity negotiations among non-tenure-track faculty. By looking for opportunities to support community, autonomy, and expertise in our GTA preparation program, we have developed a method for working across tenure lines to promote a “collaborative vision of professionalism” (Penrose 121).

In our program at North Carolina State University, both the mentoring relationships and the teaching practicum provide sites for these interactions. First, we will describe our program and its institutional context in detail, before moving to describe the administrative structure of the first-year writing program. This context is important because it is our vision of distributed administration that makes our cross-tier collaboration visible to stakeholders outside first-year writing. We then detail the mentoring program pre-revision before describing some of the changes we have made over the last year. We conclude by situating these changes within an ethical landscape that considers the conundrum of relying on NTT faculty to prepare future NTT faculty in the form of graduate teaching assistants by raising questions for WPAs who are facing similar shifts or who feel conflicted about contributing to growing contingent labor pools.

Institutional and Program Context

North Carolina State University is a large, state-funded, land-grant university that serves approximately 25,000 undergraduate students, with 88% in-state enrollment. Graduation data reflects North Carolina State University’s nationally recognized engineering program—about one quarter of graduates are in this major—with the next highest population of graduates concentrated in business and management fields. North Carolina State University’s first-year writing program’s (FYWP) focus on a writing in the disciplines (WID) curriculum recognizes that many of our first-year students will eventually join STEM fields. The WID curriculum challenges novice and experienced teachers alike, as few have experience with academic genres outside the humanities.

While the English department does offer a doctoral program in conjunction with the communication department, with six teaching assistantships assigned to first-year writing, the students we prepare to teach are seeking either an MA or MFA. Most of our MA graduate teaching assistants are pursuing concentrations in literature (American, British, and world). About a third of the remaining GTA seats are held for students in rhetoric and composition, linguistics, and film.^{1}

Like many large, state-funded programs, we are experiencing changes in the cohorts we support with teaching assistantships. Administration is seeking to grow graduate enrollments at the same time that department budgets have been cut due to reduced state funding. All programs in the department can support graduate teaching assistants, though numbers in literature, linguistics, and film are much smaller (1 or 2 GTAs) than those in first-year writing (20 or more GTAs).^{2} Approximately 10 years ago, FYWP GTA cohorts averaged 12 students. Now, we prepare and support upwards of 22 students to teach our one-course, four-credit-hour first-year writing requirement.

As we accommodated these rapidly growing GTA cohorts, we also had to contend with decreased first-year student enrollments and reduced numbers of NTT faculty. Between 2009 and 2014, we lost 1,100 seats in first-

year writing. In the same 10 years, our NTT faculty numbers dropped from 39 to 29, primarily through natural attrition. That is to say that we saw a loss of seats in first-year writing at the same time that NTT faculty decided to leave our program. Fortunately, while we haven't been able to hire many new faculty, we have not terminated faculty due to decreased enrollments or increased GTA cohorts.

Still, this increase in GTAs has strained our resources, including office space, travel funding, and seats in our required composition theory course and practicum. Our most valuable human resource—our NTT faculty mentors—was close to becoming overwhelmed by the growing numbers of GTAs paired in individual mentoring relationships.

In 2014, we had this logistical problem to solve: How could we adequately prepare ever-increasing numbers of novice teachers while also managing declining numbers of NTT faculty who serve as both programmatic historians and graduate teaching assistant mentors? That logistical problem led to an ethical reframing of the entire process to explicitly include discussions of the academic job market and contingency.

Administrative Structure and Philosophy

Currently, our first-year writing program supports 29 lecturers and 45 GTAs (inclusive of 39 first- and second-year MA/MFA GTAs and 6 doctoral GTAs). We teach, on average, 4,000 students per academic year; very few undergraduate students are granted exemptions from English 101, usually through transfer credit, high test scores, or an intensive portfolio-based exemption process.^{3}

Our first-year writing program relies on a distributed administrative model. In this model, the director oversees all other positions, though in practice, the program is organized laterally, with support provided by two associate directors (one each for graduate and undergraduate student support, the former TT, the latter NTT) and two assistant directors (both rotating positions, one occupied by an NTT faculty member overseeing professional development and one by an advanced graduate student who primarily assists the director). The associate director of first-year writing and graduate student support (Casie's position) oversees the GTA preparation process, from organizing mentoring relationships to teaching the practicum and being available to answer in-the-moment teaching questions. In 2014, we negotiated a course release and stipend for a Mentoring Co-coordinator (Megan). Megan currently serves as both the Assistant Director overseeing professional development and the co-coordinator of the mentoring program, though these positions may be filled by two different administrators. Our rationale in having her serve in both positions underpins our ethical commitment to revising the mentoring program, as we feel that NTT faculty and graduate teaching assistants who may soon serve as non-tenure-track faculty benefit from a coherent vision of professional development.

Further, the program operates with the support of the First-Year Writing Program Council, comprised of between 9 and 11 members with at least half of the seats held by NTT faculty and graduate students.^{4} The purpose of the First-Year Writing Council, as noted in our FYWP faculty handbook, is to “develop curriculum for courses in the First-Year Writing Program (FYWP), set policy for those courses, and coordinate professional development support for faculty teaching in the program.” Every council member is afforded a vote and, as a further measure of shared decision making, any curricular changes requiring approval from our Undergraduate Studies Committee must be approved by a majority of senior NTT lecturers in the program.

Our administrative model is important to note here, as it hedges against any one person becoming solely responsible for the direction of the teacher preparation sequence—or any other facet of the program. Heeding Carole Peterson Haviland and Ed White's assurances that “separating the functions allows more faculty members to be invested directly in writing programs” (219), our version of distributed administration allows each administrator to focus closely on the unique demands of his or her position while accessing multiple perspectives on programmatic change. In this way, we use distributed administration to mean collaborative administration, a model that is as well rounded as it is inefficient. While programmatic changes may take longer to enact because of multiple perspectives, these multiple perspectives help avoid the trap of WPA replication, what Sidney Dobrin cites as the impulse for WPAs to organize the GTA teaching practicum, in particular, to align with their own preparatory experiences (27).

Input from our NTT writing program administrators is especially important to the mentoring program revision process. Most of these faculty members are working in academia with master's degrees and have served as GTA mentors. They provide invaluable and otherwise inaccessible insight into better preparing teaching assistants for the academic job market.

GTA Preparation Program Structure and Philosophy

For many of the GTAs in our program, their first experience in first-year writing will be in the context of their mentoring relationships. It is often the case that the students who choose to pursue an advanced degree in English do not complete first-year writing, typically by using waiver and exemption methods like AP credit and test scores.

Their preparation to teach, then, considers not only the pedagogical and theoretical demands of composition but also the day-to-day reality of the first-year writing course as a collegiate experience. For many of our GTAs, writing has been a taken-for-granted practice at which they have excelled, so much so that they have chosen to pursue writing-intensive advanced degrees.

North Carolina State University's FYWP was awarded the CCCC's Certificate of Excellence in 2009, in part due to its robust teacher preparation program. The intensive preparation sequence extends over two semesters, from the spring of the students' first year through the end of the following fall semester, their second and third semesters in the program. The process includes two graduate courses, English 511: Theory and Research in Composition and English 624: Teaching College Composition; a two-semester mentoring relationship; an intensive one-week pedagogy seminar; and a host of required professional development activities. Unlike many larger programs where graduate students teach in their first semester, GTAs at North Carolina State University do not teach as instructors of record until their third semester. Their first year is invested in acclimating to the pace of graduate study, completing English 511, and, in the spring of their first year, mentoring with a senior faculty member—an NTT lecturer with experience in the program. GTAs serve as instructors of record in the fall of their second year, with the mentoring relationship extending into this third semester. We describe this process chronologically, detailing the GTAs' preparation requirements across the four semesters of their assistantship.

GTA Preparation: A Semester-by-Semester Description

In their first semester, requirements for teaching preparation are light. GTAs are funded through the department, but they are expected to focus their time on establishing good habits for success. Though formal obligations outside of coursework are few, all GTAs are charged with designing and leading North Carolina State University's annual National Day on Writing (NDOW) celebration, an initiative Casie began in 2011 and one that will stay with the associate director title.⁽⁵⁾

This early foray into professional development makes visible our program's values of collegial collaboration and program visibility. Recognizing that graduate study can become an isolating experience for many students, Casie instituted the NDOW participation requirement in 2012, since creative collaboration allows teaching assistants to establish early peer relationships that will support them through their teaching experience. NTT faculty also typically help staff and support NDOW. Participation provides a way to fulfill their programmatic service expectation in a visible, creative, and interactive way. These early professional connections help usher GTAs into our community of teachers, as they practice communicating with peers and with experienced instructors who will soon become colleagues.

Susan Miller-Cochran, Rochelle Rodrigo, Veronica Pantoja, and Duane Roen argue that GTA preparation must be "conceptualized more broadly as an early foundation for professional development" if it is to be contextualized as useful to novice teachers (82). By planning and staffing NDOW in tandem with our FYWP faculty, GTAs are invited to learn more about the culture of our program while also making important connections their first semester on campus. Further, these interactions help the associate director (Casie) make informed decisions about mentoring pairs.

During this first semester, some GTAs will also complete English 511: Theory and Research in Composition. With graduate courses capped at 15, English 511 must be taught every semester, and so it is offered on rotation by tenured and tenure-track faculty. There is neither a standard syllabus nor shared textbook for this course, though faculty attempt to make the learning experience consistent across fall and spring sections. The course objectives for English 511 include guiding students through predominant theories in composition, trends in research in the field, and foundational texts, including disciplinary journals and monographs. (See [Appendix 1](#) for the official course description and objectives for English 511.) Because few GTAs come to us with training in rhetoric and composition, English 511 becomes a touchstone course where they can interrogate their assumptions about writing—who teaches it and what can be taught—before entering the classroom as instructors of record.

English 511 provides GTAs with the theoretical and philosophical foundations of teaching composition. Their mentoring relationships introduce a space to raise more pragmatic pedagogical questions. From about 2007 until

2014, we paired GTAs and mentors one-to-one at the end of the GTAs' first semester in the program.⁽⁶⁾ One-to-one mentoring assumed that teaching assistants could receive maximal time with individual faculty mentors. In the spring of their second semester in the program, GTAs attended each class meeting of one section of their mentor's course and were offered opportunities to design assignments, lead class meetings, hold student conferences, and provide assessment on low and high-stakes assignments.

Before the current revisions to the mentoring program, the associate director, in conference with the program director, chose mentors from interested NTT faculty members based on informal email solicitations. Senior lecturers were given priority, since they have been teaching full time at the institution for more than five years and have been promoted by committee vote. Before 2015, we could typically place every interested NTT faculty member as a mentor, and because of the growing GTA cohorts, we often had to solicit additional mentors from faculty who had not expressed interest.

Some faculty actively resisted mentoring GTAs, an understandable position given the time commitment and relational intricacies of the process. We attempted to incentivize mentoring by offering small stipends to each mentor. In 2011, mentors received a \$250 stipend for mentoring one GTA. In 2012, the stipend was increased to \$500, an improvement but still not reflective of the significant time commitment involved in preparing a novice teacher. In 2013, the associate director (Casie) argued for an increased stipend of \$1,000 per GTA, grounded in the argument that each mentor invests approximately 100 hours working with his or her teaching assistant outside of the first-year writing class.

A second problem with individual mentoring arose when we had to solicit mentors from faculty who were not interested in serving but who felt compelled to serve because they were asked. Faculty declined to mentor for numerous personal reasons, including relational preferences, limited teaching experience, and discomfort with taking on the role of mentor. Mentoring relationships can become more intimate than other teaching-related relationships. Inviting another instructor, even a novice one, to observe for a semester can feel like a method of surveillance, and mentors must often make themselves accessible to GTAs in ways that may include discussing teaching failures. Understandably, some of our faculty members expressed discomfort at engaging in these intimate relationships. Further, some of our faculty are newer to the discipline—with only a year or two of teaching experience themselves—and were hesitant in guiding another novice through the complex negotiations of teaching writing.

Further, while mentoring is a professional activity that holds the potential to improve a faculty member's personnel dossier, a troubled mentoring relationship may create tense relationships between lecturers and administrators. It is reasonable that a lecturer who feels protective of his or her teaching identity may choose to not serve as a mentor. Mandating—or even strongly advising—reluctant faculty to serve as mentors worked against our program's goal of increasing NTT faculty autonomy as detailed in the program's administrative philosophy and against the associate director's (Casie) personal administrative philosophy that considers GTA mentoring a reciprocal relationship between mentors and administrators.

In the pre-2014 model of individual mentoring, the mentoring process itself was largely guided by the GTAs and mentors in collaboration, though in 2012 we did standardize two elements across all mentoring pairs: maintenance of a reflective teaching journal by all GTAs and their required attendance at two program-sponsored professional development workshops. We have chosen to keep these two elements intact in the revised mentoring program.

The inclusion of reflective journals is influenced by scholarship in reflective teaching (Anson; McKinney and Chiseri-Strater) and in particular Jim Henry and Holly Bruland's idea of "positional reflexivity," a practice that brings together GTAs' multiple identities as students and teachers to help them better prepare to teach. In "Educating Reflective Practitioners: Teaching Assistants as Mentors in First-Year Classrooms," Henry and Bruland write, "the positionally-reflexive TA has had an experience that could well inform those moments later when, despite careful conceptualization or planning, the actual course falls short of expectations for teaching and learning" (316). Using prompts that draw on these multiple identities, the reflective journals form the groundwork not only for GTAs' discussions with their mentors, but also for much of the work they complete in English 624, the teaching practicum, in the summer and fall.

The requirement to attend two programmatic workshops during the mentoring semester serves multiple functions: GTAs meet teaching faculty outside of their mentoring relationship; they form tighter interpersonal relationships, as many choose to attend workshops in groups; and they are introduced to relevant conversations in our first-year writing classes, since these workshops always address current programmatic questions. Given the many difficult identity negotiations teaching assistants must navigate, this requirement to attend professional development workshops and interact with faculty is a gentle encouragement that these students begin to think of themselves as colleagues with first-year writing faculty, all working toward a shared goal.

Beyond workshop attendance and journaling, many of the details of the mentoring relationships happened inductively, as a collaboration between GTAs and mentors. It was expected that each GTA would receive experience in the following four areas: classroom instruction, formal assessment (as with final products), informal assessment (as with in-class activities and drafts), and individual student conferences. How and to what extent GTAs fulfilled these expectations was left up to each mentoring pair to decide. At the end of the mentoring semester, mentors filed “Readiness to Teach” assessments for each GTA with the associate director.

The mentoring relationship, both pre- and post-revision, continues through the end of the GTAs’ first semester teaching—that is, their third semester on campus, concurrent with their enrollment in English 624. During this semester, mentors review one full set of their GTAs’ formally assessed projects and conduct one classroom observation. Mentors file a final GTA assessment at the end of the semester, equivalent in content to a personnel review, signaling an end to the formal mentoring process.

In the context of this intensive mentoring relationship that extends through their second and third semesters in the program, the GTAs begin their instruction through the teaching practicum, English 624. Just after GTAs complete their spring mentoring, in the week lull between commencement and summer classes, they attend an intensive one-week pedagogy seminar. (See [Appendix 2](#) for an example of the schedule for this seminar.) This series of workshops gives nuts-and-bolts body to the theories of composing taught in English 511. Discussions and activities rely on reflection and collaboration, and the focus is on engaging in processes and scripts the GTAs will have to enact as independent teachers. Instead of focusing solely on program policies, these workshops are intended to develop holistic teaching processes. Facilitators are careful to place local policies within national standards (as outlined by NCTE and CCCC) so GTAs gain a better sense for how WPAs make curricular decisions. We also devote large blocks of time during this week for syllabus and assignment generation, with peer reviewing opportunities included. We practice generating assignments to meet the program’s seven shared learning objectives, including the cornerstone of our Writing in the Disciplines curriculum, that students will “examine similarities and differences in forms of inquiry and writing across academic disciplines.”^[7] Because we do not require a shared syllabus, we spend approximately 15 hours of our 40-hour workshop week generating course materials in a collaborative setting.

English 624 meets every fall, concurrent with the GTAs’ first teaching semester, their third semester in the program. Prior to 2014, the associate director for graduate student support acted as the sole instructor for this course, which is assessed pass/fail. Every GTA is enrolled in the single section of 624, which means that the class size has grown alongside funded teaching assistantships. Historically, English 624 has attended to the day-to-day processes of teaching, scaffolded teaching practices like assignment design and evaluation, and introduced primary documents like teaching observations and secondary documents like teaching philosophies and reflective portfolios. (See [Appendix 3](#) for English 624’s official course description and objectives.)

In the spring of their second year—the GTAs’ fourth and final funded semester in the program—they teach one section of first-year writing without any additional preparation requirements or oversight. Mentors and administrators have invested ample time in guiding these new teachers, and the department has invested \$1,000 per TA in mentor stipends.

As we planned revisions to the mentoring program and teaching practicum, we had to consider sustainability, scalability, and cost. We sought to preserve what past GTAs and mentors have reported as beneficial while also working within the material conditions we have been given to create a program that could accommodate upwards of 30 GTAs.^[8] It is easy to consider growing incoming cohorts and shrinking NTT faculty numbers as forcing our administrative hand; however, we have chosen to view the situation as an opportunity to revise our mentoring practices to better “listen” to GTAs’ needs (Rupiper Taggart and Lowry), to help these novice teachers think through their post-graduation plans in the practicum, and to provide new opportunities to support NTT faculty development.

Current Context and Programmatic Demands

The 2013 cohort numbered 18 GTAs. The 2014 cohort increased to 22, and we expect a similar cohort in the fall of 2015. This growth is due to a number of factors, including initiatives to increase graduate seats, per the university’s strategic plan, and declining enrollments in both literature and creative writing classes historically led by teaching assistants. Students who would otherwise prepare to lead these classes are being shuttled to first-year writing, since upper-administrators know that those classes generally always fill. This abrupt 20% increase has created a number of immediate concerns for our teacher preparation program:

1. Since English 511 is capped at 15, only 8 seats remain annually to accommodate students outside of FYW. We must either add an additional section or expect those who teach it to accommodate overloads.
2. The role of associate director for graduate student support becomes more complicated, given the increased workload with answering teaching questions, conducting observations, writing letters of recommendation, generating teaching materials for English 624, planning the summer workshops, and coordinating mentor relationships.
3. Individual mentoring becomes impossible, as graduate teaching assistants outnumber interested and appropriate faculty mentors.
4. The expectations of English 624, the teaching practicum, will have to adjust to favor smaller and less frequent projects and assignments, since all GTAs in their third semester are enrolled in the same section. The week-long intensive workshop will have to accommodate additional time needed for individual teaching “practice runs,” since this is an exercise most GTAs find helpful. Further, WPAs felt an ethical commitment to increase attention to post-graduation plans in the teaching practicum.

The first point, seats in English 511, must be addressed as a disciplinary group, since it affects the teaching practices of our tenured and tenure-tracked colleagues outside the first-year writing program. We dispatched the second concern by gaining a placement for a mentoring co-coordinator, Megan, who also oversees NTT faculty development. By recruiting the co-coordinator from within the existing administrative team—and specifically the person also responsible for NTT professional development—we hope to better support both populations by integrating more explicit professional development into the mentoring process and by creating more opportunities for GTAs to feel invested in programmatic development.

The most influential and substantive changes concern the third and fourth points, as we move the mentoring relationships from individual to a mentoring group model while also revising the content for the teaching practicum to include more explicit treatment of contingency, alternative-academic (“alt-ac”) jobs, and doctoral applications. To this end, we are influenced by Kathleen Blake Yancey’s 12-point “Heuristic in Designing and Reviewing TA Development Programs” (65). Specifically, Yancey’s definition of a “good program” helps us rethink our goals for GTA and faculty mentoring relationships, as well as the content of the practicum: “A good program is one that first, serves the needs of the students; second, prepares graduate students to teach both curriculum and individual students; and third, encourages the developing faculty member to reflect upon and learn from practice” (65). We particularly take to heart her assertion to explore the ethics of our program by interrogating the kinds of support we provide (72).

Mentoring Models: From One-Offs to Collaboration in Groups

The most fundamental change to our process involves moving GTAs from individual mentoring back to a cohort model. The program utilized a cohort model in the past, but it operated differently than our current model, as it relied on a number of grounding documents, including shared syllabi and textbooks. Both mentors and GTAs used the same materials in the mentoring semester and the semester when the GTAs taught their own sections. In this way, cohort groups could share experiences with specific classroom activities and assignments, an allowance that may have contributed to reflective teaching. However, and as Jessica Restaino points out in her study with first-semester GTAs, it is difficult for novice teachers to navigate learning to teach writing while also being held accountable for assignments they did not create. Restaino writes, “At some point in the semester, [the GTAs] may find themselves trying to explain or justify a paper assignment they did not come up with and may not fully understand” (32). Instead of returning to shared syllabi, both the mentors and GTAs in our cohort model are free to design their courses in whatever way they choose, as long as they meet program expectations. Mentors may choose to require GTAs to teach pre-designed assignments during their mentoring semester, but they may also require GTAs to create their own materials that meet specific learning objectives. We do not require any faculty to use a program-issued syllabus, though we do provide examples of syllabi as models.

A return to the cohort model means that a single mentor will influence at least two novice teachers, each teaching sections of approximately 20 students. Nine mentors will impact the teaching of upwards of 500 students. With this exponential relationship in mind, we have intentionally refused the requirement of shared syllabi or assignments when GTAs teach their own classes. GTA autonomy in practices like course design will not only help novice teacher practice creating materials, but will also encourage GTAs to feel invested in the teaching and development of their course materials. This decision recognizes the creation of course artifacts as a method of professional development.

Instead of grounding the mentoring relationships in common teaching materials, we have chosen to standardize the process through a more clearly articulated progression, including shared support modules, guided journaling,

and elements of “flipped” instruction. We have divided the semester into quarters, with explicit expectations set for each quarter. (See [Appendix 4](#) for the full-semester preparation guidelines.) While program administrators value mentor autonomy, these guidelines are beneficial in two ways: first, they release mentors from the obligation of devising and implementing individual mentoring plans for each GTA, a time-consuming process itself; and, second, the guidelines help administrators (Casie and Megan) plan appropriate second-tier support, especially in the practicum, as students will come to the course with similar experiences.

Still, each mentor guides two or three novice teachers through a semester of teacher preparation, a hefty task. Administrators were able to argue for a significant increase in mentor stipends, from \$1,000 per GTA to \$5,000, to mentor a cohort of three GTAs. This increase has made mentoring a financially attractive position, so we then had to revise the way we select and support mentors.

The selection and preparation of mentors was not codified until we revised the program from individual to cohort mentoring and increased the stipend, since the new cohort model meant that we needed fewer mentors and typically would have more mentors apply than we needed. Prior to revisions, mentors were solicited informally by email. We codified the process of mentor selection in three ways: by establishing a committee for selection (comprised of the associate director, the director, and a rotating NTT faculty member who has served as a mentor in the past); by providing a rubric for selection to all interested faculty; and by holding optional follow-up conferences for faculty not chosen as mentors. The goal with these three additions was to provide a measure of transparency, so that faculty felt supported during the mentor selection process. (See [Appendix 5](#) for the mentor solicitation email, including a rubric for selection.)

Prior to current revisions, mentor support was limited to a one-hour workshop at the end of the fall semester before mentoring began. We still orient mentors in the fall, but we have added monthly professional development workshops for both mentors and GTAs during the mentoring semester. Just as “TAs’ professional development continues until they graduate,” our mentors’ teaching praxes may develop as they guide GTAs through interconnected and complex practical and theoretical classroom concerns (Rupiper Taggart and Lowry 106). In past iterations of our mentoring program, our approach has been specific to individual mentors; that is, concerns with GTAs’ preparation could be seen as one-offs or a consequence of personality conflicts. By including opportunities for mentors to work within a cohort of their own—to ask questions about the mentoring process, to offer guided support on specific practices like assessment, and to develop curriculum for the teaching practicum—we hope to increase mentor feedback in the development of the mentoring program while also providing opportunities for these expert teachers to practice their own peer-mentoring.

To provide adequate pedagogical support for mentors, we built a shared course management space that details the semester’s preparation activities, including short videos explaining programmatic details and articles about teaching preparation. Mentoring cohorts interact in private groups within this shared space.

The move from individual to group mentoring not only better supports mentors; GTAs may also feel like they are developing rich and meaningful peer-mentoring relationships. The move from an individual to a group-mentoring model considers Amy Rupiper Taggart and Margaret Lowry’s research findings that suggest that “peer feedback is invaluable” and that point out WPAs’ commitments to “strengthen and maintain camaraderie and contact among TAs” (100). Rupiper Taggart and Lowry’s cross-institutional findings support our anecdotal hunch that the underlife of GTAs dramatically influences both their teaching preparation and their graduate study, specifically in that they form tight bonds that help them “support each other as teachers and scholars” (Rupiper Taggart and Lowry 97).

Practicum Revisions

The shift from individual to cohort mentoring represents the most visible change to our preparation process. However, we are also making important changes in the way we approach the teaching practicum. In the past, this pass/fail course—consisting of a one-week intensive pedagogy workshop and once-a-week meetings in the fall of the GTAs’ second year—has been typically structured like a traditional graduate course, with a supporting text (for example, Roen et al.’s *Strategies for Teaching First-year Writing*) and a focus on practical, day-to-day teaching questions. Because seats in the practicum grow alongside cohort numbers, it was important to make changes that were both scalable and sustainable with upwards of 25 or 30 students.

In the fall of 2014, the practicum was team taught by the associate director (Casie) and the assistant director of professional development and mentoring co-coordinator (Megan). GTAs’ many in-the-moment inquiries were thus divided between these two experienced teachers, ensuring that all GTAs felt supported as they entered the classroom.

Further, team-teaching the practicum with two teachers representing different academic tiers offers GTAs different perspectives on teaching post-MA or MFA. As cohorts have grown, administrators have been forced to face their role in graduating ever-growing numbers of students into a stagnant academic job market. While writing program administrators cannot stem the tide of growing cohorts, we can incorporate discussions of contingency and alternative-academic careers into the teaching practicum and balance day-to-day teaching questions against long-term planning. With this emphasis, the focus of the practicum has shifted slightly from mediating the GTAs' present teacher selves to helping them envision their future selves. The current bloom of visible scholarship and informal communiqué about contingency helps us achieve this goal.

Course materials include features from *Inside Higher Ed's* Career Advice section and sites like *The Adjunct Project*; readings from publications like *Forum* and sites such as *The New Faculty Majority* and the *Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor* (COCAL); self-studies focusing on GTAs' prior work experience in order to generate ideas for post-graduation plans; and samples of job dossier materials like teaching philosophies and CVs. We invite NTT faculty as guest speakers, paying particular attention to providing support for our growing numbers of MFAs who are looking to balance their creative writing with teaching.

GTAs produce a range of artifacts including peer teaching observations, teaching philosophies (both alphabetic and multimodal), statements of intellectual purpose, assessment and assignment reflections, and teaching dossiers. These artifacts are common assignments in teaching practica across institutions; however, we seek to frame them in terms of the GTAs' developing professional identities, as new teachers entering a community of praxis where they may labor under precarious circumstances. Per Penrose, we encourage students to think about the ways in which they have already joined the composition community and charted a professional path. We use the following 12 questions to encourage our GTAs to think about their post-graduation choices:

1. What is it you like about academia? Specifically, what practices make you happy?
2. What parts of academia stress you out or make you upset?
3. Is it important that you live in a specific city, state, or region?
4. What kind of financial compensation do you need to be happy?
5. What sort of daily or weekly schedule do you envision as your ideal?
6. Is teaching/research/administration a practice that you could envision yourself engaging with over time?
7. What feelings do you experience when you think about not working in academia?
8. What kind of job could you imagine yourself doing and being happy?
9. Do you like to research and write?
10. How do you deal with timelines and independent goal setting?
11. If you had to describe your ideal day at work—from waking up to going to bed—what would that day look like? What challenges might you encounter? What high points might you experience?
12. What identities do you call on when you consider your self-worth? Your values? How do you prioritize these identities?

We situate these responses as indicative of the complex interactions among personal, professional, and pedagogical desires and seek to achieve an unwritten course objective in the teaching practicum: To, as Joe Marshall Hardin writes, “invite [GTAs] to become equal stakeholders in the process of developing and maintaining a cohesive program that is responsive to the needs of students, the teachers, the department, and the university” Furthermore, we invite GTAs to query the values and practices of our program in order to better prepare them to evaluate and participate in other programs if they choose to teach after graduation. Together, we practice reading curricula for value statements and explore the ways in which other writing programs frame students, writing, and instructors (as well as other elements like technology use and research). In short, we hope to prepare them not only to teach their students at North Carolina State University but also to navigate future professional situations, as a teacher, as a contributing member of a program, as a professional invested in pedagogical growth, and as a good colleague to other teachers.

The Bubble Pops: Talking to GTAs about the Job Market

Our GTAs colloquially refer to the practicum unit on the job market as “bubble popping classes.” They narrate consistent experiences about not understanding how to use their master’s degrees in support of any path besides doctoral study. Given that these students are already more than halfway through their two-year program, we find that we must make up a great deal of ground in a few months.

While professional development for the academic job market isn’t a new topic, it is the case that extant scholarship has dealt with doctoral graduates and not those who seek employment with an MA or MFA. Since the

mid-1970s scholars have been arguing for greater attention to GTA professional development as a way to make their candidates more competitive. Kristi Sandy's review of the last 40 years of job market lament is one that tracks a gradual decline of the specialist degree in favor of generalists slated for teaching first-year courses. Though Sandy focuses on preparing doctoral students for tenure-eligible positions, her encouragement that "we must be sure that preparation for the job search is a part of the broad conversation of our discipline" still applies (38). The transitions we have to consider at North Carolina State University do not concern preparing doctoral candidates for the professoriate, with its attendant demands on publishing, but instead must consider professionalizing GTAs for contingent, teaching-heavy positions.

Marc Bousquet further notes that the most inhumane hiring practices in the academic marketplace exploit those who "cashed out with an MA or ABD" because "the system especially prefers those who consider themselves failures or less qualified and therefore 'deserving' of low wages and systematic degradation" (34). Few master's-level students understand the academic job market when they accept their teaching assistantships, cosigning themselves to at least two years out of the wage-earning market, many accumulating debt and delaying other important life decisions. They graduate into a market where most of the very few teaching positions available to them are tenuous and underpaid. We cannot control hiring trends, but we can provide GTAs with a variety of viewpoints about teaching off and on the tenure track and some perspective on what teaching in a contingent position might look like.

Further, because our institutional and programmatic context relies on contingent faculty preparing future potential contingent faculty, we must, as administrators, be aware of the political and professional consequences of the preparation we provide. We use the mentor-only cohort meetings as one venue to gauge attitudes about this practice, and we try to be as transparent as the process allows.

Cross-Tier Collaboration: Presenting a Model to Future NTT Faculty

Taking heed of Sidney Dobrin's critique of the practicum, in particular, as "one of the most powerful policing tools in English" (25), this profile presents GTA preparation as both a symptom of the corporate university and also a potential galvanizing force to address unethical hiring practices. Dobrin recognizes that cultural reproduction in composition may happen in these important spaces, that WPAs create teacher preparation in the image of their own GTA training. We agree with Dobrin's assertion that the practicum can provide one "of the most powerful and most important spaces of occupation in composition studies" (21), and take heed of it as we restructure our preparation sequence in light of the adjunctification of first-year writing and growing GTA cohorts. While WPAs may not be able to address the systemic problems with contingency, we may, in our own programs, begin local conversations that work outward to influence the discipline by influencing the future members of the adjunct majority and providing more opportunities to support our current faculty.

In this way, graduate teacher preparation has the potential to profoundly shape our disciplinary discussions. Juan Guerra and Anis Bawarshi assert that the teaching practicum in particular "functions as a key site for the articulation of composition studies" (44) as WPAs and GTAs engage in a "process of disciplinary production and reproduction" (55).

We hope that both the group-mentoring model and our cross-tier collaboration provide examples for "the kind of relationships we value as a profession ... those in which faculty do not operate as independent contractors but develop expertise and judgment in collaboration with others and apply these talents to common goals" (Penrose 120). By working laterally to support GTAs with collaborations between NTT faculty and tenure-eligible and tenured administrators, we hope to provide a diversity in experience and vision to encourage our teachers of first-year writing to participate in shaping our local conversations. Further, we intend to disrupt assumptions about academic hierarchies while also preparing novice teachers to enter the academic marketplace as contingent faculty.

Lessons Learned: Preparing for Future Cohorts

As with any program initiative, these revisions have not been unilaterally successful. Some elements need further attention before their next iteration in 2016. We frame these challenges through three main stakeholders: GTAs, NTT faculty, and administrators outside our program, such as our department head.

GTAs have received the cohort model well. They informally report a sense of community and cohesion that supports their developing professional identities. However, we have struggled a bit with changing the culture of

both the practicum and teaching writing in general. GTAs define the practicum as an intervention, a resource to be used in times of crisis as they teach their own classes. Asking them to think about their future plans—even if those plans will become relevant in about 10 months—feels like a distraction from their immediate classroom needs, which they perceive as emergencies. In fall 2015, we have worked to address those attitudes by scheduling individual office hours specifically for English 624 teaching questions. That way, we don't risk being involved in other administrative work when a GTA needs to quickly find someone to talk through a teaching moment. Having two leaders for the practicum helps us increase this individual contact with GTAs.

Many GTAs also perceive our discussions of contingency as purposefully deflating, the “bubble popping classes” where we discuss insecure employment, pay, health care, and other material concerns for many NTT faculty. Our discussion of the realities of academic hiring is often the first time GTAs have considered what it means to work in academia, not only what it means to study. Our advice to explore options beyond academia and prepare for contingencies often goes against the advice and assumptions of their advisors, parents, and friends. GTAs project their disappointment and anxiety onto us, the instructors in the practicum, and the program itself. There is no remedy for this experience. Instead, we try to keep dialogue open both in the class and individually so that GTAs in their second semester teaching, as those graduation deadlines loom, feel comfortable approaching us for advice.

Program revisions have also affected the way NTT faculty see the mentoring program and its administrators. Since the stipend has increased to \$5,000 for working with a full cohort of three GTAs, serving as a mentor has become more desirable. We tried to address concerns with the aforementioned revisions to the selection process, including the addition of a committee and a clearly defined selection rubric. Despite our attempts to improve transparency in mentor selection, we are still concerned with making the process as clear and equitable as possible, including establishing some policies for how often faculty may serve and establishing formal criteria, including number of years teaching in the program.

Additionally, filling the dual roles of assistant director and mentoring co-coordinator has placed Megan in an awkward relational position. Other NTT faculty perceive her to be close enough to program administrators to influence material benefits like travel funding and appointment to summer classes. They assume she can discuss confidential program information like personnel reviews, to which she has no access. She has also found herself in an uncomfortable liminal space where she must serve as a mentor, in order to revise the program, and help choose other mentors from her colleagues.

Finally, we have found ourselves in the position of continually justifying the increase in expenses incurred by raising mentor stipends and awarding a course release and stipend to the mentoring co-coordinator. While we are lucky to have a supportive department head who sees the value in preparing our teachers well, we do have to continue to prove efficacy through a number of metrics, including a mixed-methods end-of-program survey distributed to GTAs, better tracking of graduates post-graduation, and in-depth debriefing interviews with mentors. The goal is to show that our mentoring program creates a cycle of benefits that is energized by our foundation—GTAs and NTT faculty—to ultimately influence our program's national status.

Even considering these challenges, and the challenges we'll face in the upcoming semester, we feel confident that the program revisions we were compelled to make because of outside forces are changes that will render a better experience for our novice teachers and experienced faculty alike. Working with master's-level GTAs who may soon become NTT colleagues provides us an opportunity to work collaboratively, across tiers, to address the long-term connections between GTA preparation and contingency.

Appendices

1. [Appendix 1: English 511: Theory and Research in Composition](#)
2. [Appendix 2: GTA Workshop Week](#)
3. [Appendix 3: English 624: Teaching College Composition](#)
4. [Appendix 4: Guidelines for Mentoring Cohorts](#)
5. [Appendix 5: Mentor Solicitation and Selection Email](#)

Appendix 1: English 511: Theory and Research in Composition

Course description

Research and scholarship in composition and the teaching of writing. Major theoretical perspectives (such as

expressive, social, cognitive, feminist), current issues (such as audience, invention, revision, evaluation) and various research methods.

Objectives

Students will familiarize themselves with the range of voices and theoretical assumptions underlying the teaching of writing; understand various histories of the field of composition studies; become acquainted with major journals and resources in the field of composition, sufficient for conducting independent explorations of research and theory on topics of interest; develop a reading knowledge of research methods in composition, sufficient for interpreting and evaluating the results of published research in the field; and apply knowledge of the field's history, theory, and research in analyzing new contexts, developing new pedagogical insights, and raising new questions for research.

Appendix 2: GTA Workshop Week

11-15 May 2015

North Carolina State University
First-Year Writing Program

Dr. Casie Fedukovich, Associate Director
cjfeduko@ncsu.edu

Megan Hall, Assistant Director, Program Development
mnhall2@ncsu.edu

All workshops are held in T126 unless otherwise noted.

This week-long workshop is considered a part of English 624: Teaching College Composition, so attendance at all workshop events is required. Please note the start time each morning. Active participation and preparation are expected, both face-to-face and in digital spaces.

Note in advance the days when we have time blocked for syllabus preparation. You may choose to bring a laptop on these days. You may check out laptops from DH Hill library in four-hour blocks (renewable online).

Academic Integrity

It is assumed that all students will adhere to the standards of academic integrity outlined in the NCSU Code of Student Conduct (http://www.ncsu.edu/student_affairs/osc/code_conduct/).

Accommodations

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with verifiable disabilities. In order to take advantage of available accommodations, students must register with the Disability Services Office (<http://www.ncsu.edu/dso/>).

Monday, May 11

Broader Context

9:30-10:00	Registration and light refreshments
10:00-10:30	Welcome
	Introductions and announcements Schedule Connection between workshop and English 624 in the fall
10:30-12:00	Teaching in Context
	Review of English 101 learning objectives How are the ENG 100/101 learning objectives enacted? Approaches to teaching English 101: genre-based, rhetoric-based, Writing about Writing What do students read and write in 101?

	Who are we teaching: First-Year Student surveys
12:00-12:45	Lunch provided by MacMillan (publisher of <i>The Academic Writer</i>)
12:45-1:30	GTA as Faculty Member
	Defining the Job: The "T" part of GTA: Professional Responsibilities Brief review of website and polices (Megan)
1:30-2:00	Acting the Part of Professor (Casie)
	Teaching as public speaking Tips, tricks, troubleshooting
2:30-4:30	Impromptu 3-minute lessons, solo
	10 minutes planning /IAA model (Instruction/Application/Assessment) Reflection and Questions

Reading: Jay Dolmage

Forum post: Sketch out major units for your class

Tuesday, May 12

Designing Your Class

10:00-10:30	Course and assignment design
	Principles and practices of effective design, Dolmage
10:30-12:00	Course Design Workshop (45 minutes)
	Guided Drafting Time (45 minutes) Presenters: Wanda Lloyd and Bridget Kozlow
12:00-12:45	Lunch on your own
12:45-2:00	Teaching Thoughtfully with Technology
	Technology and Universal Design Presenter: Meredith Reed
2:00-3:00	Small working groups with prompts
3:00-4:00	Policy game and discussion (Megan)
4:00-4:30	Discussion, reflection, questions

Reading: *Responding to Student Writing* (Sommers), review plagiarism document on Moodle

Forum post: Recall a time when you felt unfairly graded

Wednesday, May 13

More Design and Assessing Writing

10:00-11:00	Assignment Design Workshop (30 minutes)
	Guided Brainstorming Time (30 minutes) Presenter: Pete Link
11:00-12:00	Plagiarism: Culture, Avoidance, and Management
12:00-12:45	Lunch provided by the First-Year Writing Program
1:00-2:30	Assessing and Responding
	FYWP Evaluative Criteria Principles of Response (Sommers)

	Making criteria assignment-specific Managing the paper load Shared Grading Experience Grade Reflect
3:30-4:30	Discussion, reflection, questions

Reading: Review *The Academic Writer*

Forum post: None. Instead, prepare a 5-minute lesson from the text. Include the following steps: objectives for the lesson, instruction, application, and assessment of application (IAA process)

Thursday, May 14

Using Texts and Campus Resources

10:00-12:00	Short textbook lesson, solo
12:00-12:45	Lunch on your own
1:00-1:45	First-week writing and Project 1 drafting time
2:00-3:30	Integrating Library Research and Crafting Effective Assignment Sheets
	DH Hill Library, ITTC Lab Presenters: Anne Burke and Dre Orphanides
3:30-4:30	Discussion, reflection, questions

Reading: bell hooks, "Engaged Pedagogy," from *Teaching to Transgress*

Forum post: Part 1: Pose an outstanding question, anxiety, or worry about your teaching or preparation. Part 2: Reassure or assist two others.

Friday, May 15

Wrapping Up

10:00-11:00	Roundtable with Previous GTAs
11:00-11:30	Debrief, form syllabus review groups
12:00-12:45	Lunch on your own
1:00-4:30	Guided drafting time

Important dates

- Thursday, August 13th, 10-1: Required meeting to review finished teaching materials
- Monday, August 17th, 9-12: FYWP kickoff meeting
- Wednesday, August 19th: Classes start
- Thursday, August 20th: First 624 meeting
- Friday, August 21st: Submit syllabi and daily schedules to program assistant no later than 5 p.m.

You must have the following materials ready by our meeting on August 13th:

- Syllabus (policies, both program and personal, and general course info)
- Daily schedules (Yes, every single day you are teaching, including topics, readings, homework)
- First-week writing prompts
- Project 1 prompts

Appendix 3: English 624: Teaching College Composition

Course description

Preparation for teaching college composition. Introduction to pedagogical principles and practices. Practice in setting course goals, designing writing assignments to meet those goals, developing instructional activities to support assignments, and evaluating student writing. The course is scheduled as a 5-day workshop before classes begin, followed by weekly meetings and mentoring during the fall semester.

English 624 has seven official course objectives: to explore the purpose, rationale, and practical constraints of a range of strategies for the teaching of writing; to explore the institutional context for their teaching and establish meaningful course goals within that context; to design a logical and challenging sequence of writing assignments to meet those goals; to choose instructional activities to support specific assignments and general writing development; to prepare professional syllabi and teaching materials to implement their instructional agendas; to develop and apply appropriate criteria for both formative and summative evaluation of student writing; and to become reflective practitioners who can assess the progress of individual students, the effectiveness of course design, the success of individual assignments, and the strengths and weaknesses of their own teaching.

Appendix 4: Guidelines for Mentoring Cohorts

Mentor Responsibilities: Fall 2015 Semester (preparation for mentoring semester)

1. To attend the fall semester planning meeting for all mentors.
2. To meet with GTAs (individually or in the cohort) before the end of the fall semester.
3. To be prepared to share course planning materials (these don't have to be the documents used in the spring; current materials are fine).
4. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during the preparation for the mentoring semester.

Mentor Responsibilities: Spring 2016 Semester (the mentoring semester)

1. To conduct a weekly one-hour cohort meeting during the spring semester (we'll provide some materials and topics for discussion that should be covered during the semester).
2. To review and respond (when appropriate) to weekly learning logs from each GTA. Response isn't required, but can be helpful to assess where a GTA is tracking in terms of understanding processes.
3. To attend a monthly mentors' workshop, scheduled during our Wednesday workshop days.
4. To submit midterm evaluations for GTAs who might need additional support.
5. To submit an end-term readiness evaluation for each GTA.
6. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during the mentoring semester.

Mentor Responsibilities: Fall 2016 Semester (the GTAs' first teaching semester)

1. To conduct one observation of each GTA's class.
2. To review one full set of graded papers from each GTA.
3. To submit a "readiness to teach" report for each GTA.
4. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during the GTAs' teaching semester.

GTA Outcomes

At the end of their spring 2016 mentoring semester, GTAs will have:*

1. Taught at least two mini-lessons (approx. 10-15 minutes/lesson).
2. Taught at least two individual (not consecutive) 50-minute classes, one 100-minute full class session, or half of two 100-minute classes.
3. Taught at least one week of consecutive classes (four 50-minute classes, two 100-minute classes; hybrid classes negotiated with instructor). This week is in addition to the teaching listed in #2.
4. Conducted assessments on samples of both formal and informal work.
5. Assessed at least one full section's worth of one formal project.
6. Observed and assisted with individual student conferences.
7. Conducted individual student conferences on their own.

8. Met weekly with mentor and cohort.
9. Met monthly with all mentees, with workshops scheduled during our workshop days.
10. Maintained a weekly learning log.

* Mentors may choose to allow GTAs to teach or assess more than is required.

GTA Responsibilities: Fall 2015 Semester (preparation for mentoring semester)

1. To attend the fall semester planning meeting for all GTAs.
2. To initiate contact and meet with mentors before the end of the fall semester.
3. To review the FYWP policies and procedures, in detail.
4. To read Linton, Madigan, and Johnson's *Introducing Students to Disciplinary Genres* available at <http://wac.colostate.edu/llad/v1n2/linton.pdf>.
5. To review their mentors' textbooks and, when available, teaching materials.
6. To be able to perform basic tasks in Moodle, the course management site.
7. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during preparation for the mentoring semester.

GTA Responsibilities: Spring 2016 Semester (the mentoring semester)

1. To attend the spring FYWP kickoff meeting in January.
2. To arrive on time and prepared for each meeting of their mentor's class.
3. To collaborate with mentors in scheduling participation in the mentor's class, following the activities schedule outlined on the first page and in detail on Moodle.
4. To maintain weekly learning logs.
5. To attend a weekly one-hour cohort meeting (we'll provide some materials and topics for discussion that should be covered during the semester).
6. To attend a monthly GTA workshop, scheduled during our Wednesday workshop days.
7. To attend at least two additional professional development workshops in the program.
8. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during the mentoring semester.

All GTAs will attend the summer workshops, 9 a.m.-5 p.m., May 9-13, 2016.

GTA Responsibilities: Fall 2016 Semester (the teaching semester)

1. To attend the Fall FYWP Kickoff meeting in August.
2. To teach one section of English 101.
3. To attend English 624 weekly.
4. To contact his or her mentor early in the semester to conduct classroom observation and review graded papers.
5. To meet with mentor to discuss this review.
6. To attend at least two professional development workshops, one of which may be outside of the FYWP.
7. To contact the associate director if there are any problems or concerns during the teaching semester.

Appendix 5: Mentor Solicitation and Selection Email

October 2015

In Spring 2014, the first-year writing program piloted a new model for Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) mentoring. Because our GTA cohorts have steadily grown, we moved from individual, one-on-one mentoring pairs to a small group model, where we place mentors with groups of 2-3 GTAs.

This new model has many benefits for both GTAs and mentors. GTAs in the pilot cohort report that working in small, focused groups provides an additional level of support.

Further, because we support 7-9 mentors (instead of 20+), we have been able to improve our administrative support for these positions: We standardized the GTA preparation process so that GTAs enter the classroom with consistent experiences. We began holding monthly workshops attended by both mentors and GTAs. Finally, because small group mentoring increases a mentor's workload exponentially, we argued for a significant increase to the mentoring stipend. Mentors now receive \$5,000 for a full cohort of three GTAs.

Reducing the number of mentors we need also means that we had to revise our process for selection, since we acknowledge that more faculty will apply than can be placed. This email will detail some of the changes to the process, including information about applying to serve as a mentor for 2016. Our intention is to make the process as clear and transparent as it can be.

Prospective mentors will now need to apply to serve by submitting a letter of intent outlining interest and qualifications. These letters will be reviewed by a committee consisting of the associate director, the director, and one rotating position held by an experienced mentor who will not mentor the following semester. Because serving as a mentor has become competitive, we wish to communicate a list of considerations for applicants:

- Mentoring is considered program service, so we will consider senior lecturers with priority, commensurate with the expectations of their rank.
- However, we will strive to add new mentors to the cohort when possible.
- Because none of our GTAs will be asked to teach in formats other than face-to-face classes, we will prioritize face-to-face sections of English 101 unless need dictates that we place students in hybrid courses. GTAs will not mentor in fully online sections of English 101.
- We will consider three factors as presented in letters of intent: classroom teaching experience, confidence in leading a small group of novice teachers, and flexibility with variable learning styles.
- We will consider class schedules and the logistical demands of placing GTAs in small groups and in sections of English 101. It is sometimes the case that otherwise qualified prospective mentors may not be placed with GTAs because of the difficult task of matching up to four separate schedules.

Mentor selection is holistic, and the committee will take the above areas into consideration when making its decisions.

If you are interested in serving as a mentor, please submit your letter of intent addressing the three areas listed in the fourth bullet no later than November 1, 2015. Letters should be emailed to Associate Director Casie Fedukovich. Mentors will be selected and notified in mid-November and should plan to attend the mentoring orientation session tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, December 2nd.

Notes

1. The 2014 GTA cohort includes 22 students, divided as such: 8 MFAs, 6 in American and British Literature, 4 in Rhetoric and Composition, 2 in Linguistics, 1 in Film, and 1 in World Literature. The incoming 2015 cohort of 21 is as follows: 7 MFAs, 8 in American and British Literature, 3 in Linguistics, 2 in rhetoric and composition, and 1 in Film. ([Return to text.](#))
2. Mentoring processes across programs vary widely, but all programs utilize a shadowing module whereby GTAs attend the class meetings of a faculty mentor and meet with that person outside of class to discuss lesson planning, classroom management, and other pedagogical practices. See the following link for full descriptions of teacher preparation in creative writing, linguistics, literature, and film: http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/graduate/teaching_assistantships.php. ([Return to text.](#))
3. Any one of the following criteria is sufficient for exemption from English 101 at North Carolina State University: an SAT-Critical Reading score between 750 and 800; an ACT-English score of 33 or above; a score of 5 on the AP English Language and Composition test; or a score of 5-7 on the International Baccalaureate English A1/A2 Higher Level, with diploma. Students who do not qualify for exemption may submit a portfolio for waiver review if they meet one of the following criteria: SAT-Critical Reading score between 700 and 740; an ACT-English score between 28 and 32 or 33 or above in ACT-Reading; a score of 4 on the AP English Language and Composition test; or a score of 3-4 on the International Baccalaureate English A1/A2 Higher Level, with diploma. Portfolios include three writing samples from different courses, each sample reflecting writing in different disciplines, and a reflective analysis intended to describe the portfolio as a whole, the contexts for each individual piece, and evidence that the writing samples demonstrate the objectives for English 101 at North Carolina State University. Portfolios are assessed by at least two readers, usually senior lecturers in the first-year writing program. In fall 2014, 130 students submitted portfolios and 30 were granted waivers. Approximately 2,000 students were enrolled in English 101. ([Return to text.](#))
4. The FYWP Council Bylaws outline membership as follows: "The Council includes 2-3 tenure-track composition specialists, 5 lecturers teaching in the program, 1 or 2 TA representatives (if 2, one each from the MA and MFA cohorts), and 1 doctoral-level TA representative who serves as the graduate assistant

- director to the first-year writing program. All members have voting rights.” ([Return to text.](#))
5. For a full description of the NDOW organization and celebration at NC State, see Secrets in the Thirdspace: The National Day on Writing as Campus Engagement. *Composition Studies* 44.2 (fall 2016). Forthcoming. ([Return to text.](#))
 6. Our program used group mentoring in the past, from around 2001 through 2006. Earlier versions of the group-mentoring model assumed that GTAs would use their mentors’ teaching materials when teaching their own classes. The shift to individual mentoring was accompanied by a move to allow GTAs to craft their own syllabi and assignments; thus, the move to individual mentoring was framed by other programmatic revisions intended to give GTAs more autonomy with their teaching materials. Incoming cohorts at the time numbered around 12. ([Return to text.](#))
 7. See the full course description and list of learning objectives for English 101 at: http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/undergraduate/first_year_writing/fy_eng101_course_description.php. ([Return to text.](#))
 8. There was no evidence suggesting that incoming cohorts would rapidly rise to 30 GTAs, only that we could expect growth in cohort numbers; however, we wanted our revisions to be stable even if we saw an immediate influx of funded seats. ([Return to text.](#))

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