

MENTORSHIP FOR HDFS GRADUATE INSTRUCTORS:
A MODEL FOR “TEACHING THE TEACHERS”

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ABSTRACT. The article provides an overview of a graduate teaching assistant/instructor (GI) program in a Human Development and Family Studies department. The program occurs over an academic year (Summer, Fall, Spring) in an effort to transition graduate students into their teaching responsibilities as instructors. The program contains both individual and group training components. The program is designed to integrate the best practices from the ‘sink or swim’, individualized mentorship, and manual approaches to graduate instructor teaching preparation. More specifically, the program utilizes: (a) a manual and syllabus template to increase consistency in adherence to department/university policy and state/federal law; (b) supervised practicums in which graduate students receive small-group or individual training in teaching skills (e.g., lectures, exam preparation, classroom management) prior to independent teaching; and (c) independent teaching, supplemented with observation from faculty mentors and consultation with the departments’ Associate Chair. The program is reviewed and refined annually by the Associate Chair and Department Chair, using a continuous improvement perspective to guide the GI program.

Graduate instructors (GIs) make a significant contribution to undergraduate education in many departments (e.g., Davis & Kring, 2001; Lowman & Mathie, 1993). GIs should not be viewed as simply substitutes for faculty members who are unwilling or unavailable to teach undergraduate courses. Rather, Park (2004) argued that the GI is not merely an advanced student that teaches, but “a recognized post, with a respected and clearly understood niche within the academic hierarchy” (p. 356). In order to function effectively in the hierarchy, graduate instructors need adequate training/preparation for teaching tasks. The training program needs to provide structure, but also adapt to the changing contexts (e.g., increased technology use) in the

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university classroom. The present paper outlines a teaching practicum program developed in a Human Development and Family Studies department.

Teaching Preparation: Common Approaches

According to Prieto and Meyers (1999), there is little consistency across programs of instruction in teaching skills. Three approaches have been identified, but the rationale for approach selection in specific programs does not appear to be articulated. The approaches are ‘sink or swim’, manual, and individualized mentorship.

‘Sink or Swim’

In a ‘sink or swim’ approach, graduate instructors are given teaching responsibilities with no formal training or advance notice (e.g., Kuther, 2003). The underlying philosophy seems to be that the undergraduate classroom is a living laboratory and instructors will develop skills as they face each day’s challenges. This approach gives GIs maximum flexibility to develop their teaching styles, but minimum guidance through the development process. In this approach, GIs might rely on peer instructors or their own judgment (Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000; Myers, 1998) to navigate the teaching challenges. This co-peer mentorship approach can work effectively with faculty peers (e.g., Norell & Ingoldsby, 1991), but it can be a questionable assumption that graduate peers are adequately experienced to provide sufficient or accurate advice. There is also a risk that peer advice, however well-intentioned, might be inconsistent with university policy and/or federal law (e.g., accommodations for students with disabilities). While some students thrive (‘swim’) under such conditions, those who struggle (‘sink’) have a most unpleasant experience [an experience shared by their undergraduate students]. Indeed, a poor teaching experience can have a long-term impact on graduate instructors’ professional pursuits (Lowman & Mathie, 1993), including their motivation to want to teach again. In his

description of teaching experiences in early career development, McKeachie (1987) stated that the experiences can “blight a promising teaching career or can start one on a path of continued growth and development” (p. 87). Thus, while the rewards of ‘swimming’ can be high, the dangers of ‘sinking’ can be equally high.

Manual

An alternative approach focuses on the use of manuals as the primary instructive tools. The manuals provide basic information about state/federal law (e.g., student privacy and information acts), department/university policy (e.g., textbook selection, excused absences), and general guidelines about teaching tasks (e.g., exam construction). Manuals can sometimes be supplemented with articles on specific content areas (e.g., Bogenschneider, 2006), strategies (e.g., Umaña-Taylor & Wiley, 2004) or theoretical perspectives (e.g., Blaisure & Koivunen, 2003).

The manual approach sets maximum consistency in providing the same information to all GIs, which can help reduce some instructor anxiety (Temple, Isaac, Adams, Haughland, Englestoft, & Garcia, 2003). However, this approach provides minimal guidance in how to enact the information (e.g., how to select appropriate media materials or manage classroom disruptions). In addition, manuals cannot provide the relational skills or individualized feedback that so many instructors require (e.g., Buskist, 2000; Davis & Kring, 2001). Given the interactive and sensitive nature of family courses, there should be a particular emphasis on relational skills among HDFS instructors. Thus, Lowman and Mathie (1993) concluded that such manuals are inadequate preparation for teaching responsibilities.

Individualized mentorship

A third approach is individualized mentorship from faculty members. In this approach, graduate students are paired with faculty members (often via assistantships) who move them into the teaching process. The individualized mentorship provides less consistency than the manual approach, but more guidance than the 'sink or swim' approach. In addition, the mentors can provide instruction in the interpersonal skills that are critical to successful classroom interactions (e.g., Blaisure & Koivunen, 2003). No matter how detailed, no manual can fully convey the enactment of such skills.

It is important to note, however, that assistantship skills are not inherently sufficient for independent teaching. If the students were research assistants (e.g., McWey, Henderson, & Piercy, 2006), then the skill set that they developed in the lab might not be relevant or transferable to the classroom. If the students were teaching assistants, then they could have had high exposure to teaching skills (e.g., watching the faculty member conduct daily lectures), but have no applied experience in doing the tasks by themselves (e.g., writing and delivering lectures, creating group activities, determining grading standards). In addition, DeCesare (2003) noted that graduate teaching assistants commonly experience problems (exploitation by faculty, inadequate discussion [with faculty] about teaching skills). Such problems might be due to miscommunication/lack of communication during the transition process.

Another consideration is potential lack of consistency in training. If the teaching assistants' activities vary with faculty members, then the preparation for independent teaching will also vary. In addition, the faculty might differ in their individual styles, such that GIs receive conflicting guidance if mentors change over time. Given the power differentials between faculty and graduate students, these conflicts can be difficult for graduate instructors to reconcile (e.g., Rastogi, Fitzpatrick, Feng, & Shi, 1999).

In consideration of the limitations/risks of the three previously discussed approaches, systematic programs are recommended (e.g., Buskist, 2000; Davis & Kring, 2001). Systematic programs take a multi-tiered approach to GI preparation (Burk, 2001). In addition to the obvious instruction in teaching skills (e.g., lecture preparation, exam construction), instructors are typically taught university/department policy compliance, role conflict management, ethical decision-making processes and support service utilization (Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000; Kuther, 2003). Despite extensive orientation, teaching assistants are likely to make common mistakes when they teach independently (Buskist, 2000). Thus, ongoing supervision and discussion is warranted.

Current Program

Lowman and Mathie (1993) stated that the quality of GI training reflects the value of teaching, and promotes (or detracts from) the educational merits of the department. In an effort to promote positive experiences for HDFS graduate instructors, this program is designed to transition GIs into their teaching responsibilities. This program was developed over a four-year period (2001-2005) in the Human Development and Family Studies Department at Texas Tech University.

The university has approximately 22,000 undergraduate students. The HDFS department has one of the largest undergraduate programs in the country. Over the four years of the program development, the department averaged 1500 undergraduate majors, 12 part-time instructors (post-degreed professionals), 17 graduate instructors and 20 full-time faculty (undergraduate:faculty ratio=75:1). Although there are a few course sections restricted to HDFS majors, most courses are open to students from other departments. Thus, the department teaching demands are extensive. For example, there were 84 separate sections of undergraduate courses

during the Spring 2005 semester. The total enrollment for the 84 sections was 3,347 undergraduate students. GIs taught 36 sections of the 84 sections. Given the size of the program, it is essential that (a) GIs teach some sections and (b) GIs are well-prepared to teach independently.

Full-time faculty have dictated responsibilities in teaching, research, outreach and administration. Given these multiple responsibilities, most faculty cannot teach more than five courses per year (two courses in Fall, two courses in Spring, one course in Summer). Graduate instructors are an important part of the teaching program, but they do not carry heavier teaching loads. GIs are paid to teach four courses (two courses in Fall, two courses in Spring). GIs have the option of teaching during Summer sessions (for which they are paid).

Prior to the development of the current program, the department had experimented with all three of the previously mentioned approaches. There were some successes and failures with each approach, but the overall quality of graduate instruction was uneven. Over the years, there were instances of various problems (e.g., skewed (high and low) grades, selection of lecture material based on ease of access rather than course relevance, use of lecture time as a platform for personal/religious beliefs, frequency of undergraduate complaints/class withdrawals). Most problems did not appear to be problems of GI capacity or talent. Rather, the problems were created by ignorance, poor judgment/classroom management, unrealistic expectations, and lack of supervision. These issues made it apparent that a different approach was necessary.

Philosophically, the department's new teacher training program was similar to elementary/secondary school teacher and clinician training programs. These training programs expose students gradually to the real experiences that will be required of them when they begin working independently. They are supervised throughout the training program, but given

opportunities to take more responsibility for their own teaching/clinical work as time passes and their skills develop. We assumed that most graduate students, with adequate training and supervision, could develop teaching styles that would fit their personalities, help undergraduates learn, and minimize common teaching errors. The transitional nature of this teaching program would also allow faculty supervisors to assess skill development and determine which (if any) graduate students are not well-suited to independent teaching.

Pragmatically, this teaching program has a specific infrastructure. The Department Chair was responsible for the vision and supervision of faculty mentors. The Associate Chair was responsible for the development of materials (teaching manual, syllabus template), daily management of the program, and supervision of graduate instructors. In addition, both administrators served as faculty mentors to graduate instructors, so that they could have experiential knowledge of the program. The teaching transition is split into a three-semester (Summer/Fall/Spring) format.

Summer

After new doctoral students have been accepted into the graduate program, a subset of students is assigned to practicum teaching assistantships. In contrast to traditional teaching assistants, the practicum GIs do not simply serve as supplemental support to faculty members. Conversely, they do not begin their teaching careers by assuming full responsibility for a course. Rather, the practicum GIs are focused on gaining specific skills (under faculty mentorship) to transition them into independent teaching. These students are trained during the Summer/Fall semesters and (typically) teach independently in the Spring semester.

After students are selected for the practicum assistantship, the Department Chair and Associate Chair select faculty mentors (FMs) who will work with the practicum students during

the academic year. Faculty are assigned no more than four practicum students in a single year. Mentors typically work with all graduate students in a single undergraduate course (e.g., all students receive tutelage from a faculty mentor who teaches a course on early marriage). During the Summer, the Department Chair meets individually with faculty mentors to describe their responsibilities [to the graduate practicum students]. They discuss the undergraduate courses which the mentors will be teaching in the Fall semester, and the ways in which the practicum students will fit into the FMs' plans for the courses (e.g., writing intensive assignments, small group projects, didactic lectures). Thus, the plans for the practicum students are integrated into the faculty members' teaching goals.

One long-term goal for the practicum program is that students will be able to teach more than one course during their time in graduate school. In support of this goal, the Department Chair conveys that the FMs are not to simply show the graduate students how to teach a specific course, but teach them about teaching. Thus, the mentors are given a list of common teaching skills (e.g., lecture, exam preparation, selection of media materials) and encouraged to give each practicum student some experience/exposure in each skill. Obviously, the FMs should not create some conditions to require skill enactment (e.g., create a crisis in which undergraduates are unable to complete important assignments). However, they should allow the practicum students to observe how the FMs manage such conditions and discuss the ways in which the practicum students will handle the conditions when they teach independently.

In addition to the FM orientation, the Department Chair and Associate Chair (AC) conduct an orientation session for the GIs (Appendix 1). They describe the transition process for the academic year. GIs are given an overview of the undergraduate program and typical courses that they might teach in the Spring (e.g., Basic Interpersonal Skills).

The Fall semester practicum with mentors is described. GIs are informed that they will begin with very few responsibilities (e.g., attend class, observe faculty lectures), but will be given increasing responsibilities over time (e.g., prepare/give lectures, conduct class exercises, write exam questions, grade assignments). GIs are given the same list of teaching skills that is distributed to FMs.

The GIs (and new mentors) are given a teaching manual. The manual contains information about university/department policies (e.g., sexual harassment, academic integrity). The manual helps promote consistency in knowledge and compliance with policies/procedures, but it also gives the GIs guidance for making certain decisions (e.g., under what conditions students can be given an extension to complete a course, what activities are appropriate for extra credit). GIs are informed that they can consult with a mentor or the AC if they have questions about the manual. Thus, the manual serves as a supplement, but not a substitute, for more active mentorship.

Fall

GIs begin to work with faculty. The GIs are given desk copies of the textbooks for the course and expected to read the material prior to each class meeting. Some practicum students begin in a reflective mode, as they observe the FMs teach the undergraduate classes. They can learn about the ways in which faculty use Powerpoint to effectively present lecture, or use media (e.g., film, music) as a means to stimulate class discussion. Alternatively, other mentors begin by engaging GIs in small teaching activities (e.g., participate in group discussions) within the first week.

From either approach, the FMs work to increase the breadth and depth of GIs' involvement over time. For example, GIs might conduct a 15-minute presentation as part of a

lecture during the first month, but then conduct the entire class period (e.g., 80 minutes) during the last month. Alternatively, they might begin by simply reading exams, but add an increasing number of questions to exams as the semester progresses.

Graduate students learn not only about the importance of content (e.g., lecture, group activities), but the delivery process (e.g., Powerpoint) as well. In the few short years of this teaching program, we have seen a shift in the technological sophistication of both undergraduate and graduate students. Indeed, some students complained about the lack of technology use in the classroom. Much has been written about the ‘digital generation’, so we will not reiterate the point. We will simply note that we became aware of this issue and mentors provided opportunities for GIs to integrate technology skills in the development of their teaching skills. For example, GIs used PowerPoint or other computer-based programs to create their lectures. Although there is inconsistent empirical evidence about the effectiveness of such instruction, there is an increased student expectation of technology-based presentation formats (Ricer, Filak, & Short, 2005). Some critics have noted that there are risks of such approaches, and these risks could be amplified for novice instructors. For example, Tufte (2003) argued that PowerPoint is more focused on the presenter’s perspective than the viewers’ perspective, and it is easy for presentations to become overly-produced (e.g., too many graphics, too little organization). Given their inexperience in lecture preparation/presentation, GIs could be more likely to get lost in stylistic options and create documents that actually inhibit comprehension.

In contrast, Moreno (2006) noted that some colleagues maintain that “state of the art technologies are more effective learning tools than older technologies” (p. 63). Such technologies facilitate multi-modal information processing and deep learning. Technologies should not replace instructors, but simply help them to convey information in compelling ways.

Thus, when used effectively, technology-based teaching enhances the quality of both the presenter and receivers' experiences (Atkinson, 2005). Moreover, some universities are encouraging/demanding that instructors integrate technology into all teaching activities (Davidson-Shivers, Salazar, & Hamilton, 2005). In this environment, then, it is not a question of whether mentors should allow GIs to use technology, but how well mentors guide them in technology choices.

As GIs engage in teaching activities, mentors observe/evaluate their performance and provide constructive feedback for skill development (e.g., Nilson, 2003). Graduate students are expected to respond to the feedback and demonstrate the ways in which they work to improve their skills. GIs are encouraged to track their progress on the skill list (Appendix 1) and discuss their exposure/experience to skills with the FMs. For example, if GIs have not written lectures, then they should initiate discussion with the mentors about opportunities to engage in this activity.

In addition to classroom teaching activities, GIs are encouraged to discuss teaching-related issues with the mentors (e.g., appropriate communication with students/colleagues [Morgan, 2006]; time management, role clarity [McKeachie, 1987]). Faculty can describe their general teaching philosophy (e.g., degree of undergraduate student involvement in course decisions, didactic vs. applied approaches, relevance of media to learning, responsibility of instructors as classroom leaders). Mentors can also provide information about specific course choices on technology integration (e.g., online vs. traditional grading [Weeks, 2006], selection of media, use of course websites, email vs. in-person communication with students). By sharing their own decision processes, the FMs model the process skills for the graduate protégés.

Sometimes protégés know more about teaching technology than the mentors (e.g., Schaffer & Richardson, 2004). Given that graduate students are more likely to be part of (or nearer to) the undergraduates' generational cohort, they might have a better understanding of the types/content of technology in which they are engaged (e.g., music downloads, text messages). Thus, the GIs are closer to the undergraduates' zone of proximal development, a premise consistent with research on adolescent and young children's engagement in pre-college education (e.g., Gray & Feldman, 2004). Of course, not all technology should be integrated into teaching simply because it is popular. However, mentors can collaborate with graduate students to selectively include appropriate material (and formats). In such situations, the faculty can expand their own teaching skills by learning from GIs. This also gives mentors an opportunity to model that being a good teacher is a process of ongoing development and that they are willing to expand their own skills. In essence, as faculty, we must "practice what we preach" (Davidson-Shivers, et al., 2005).

It is understood that the mentorship process requires more effort than simply utilizing the services of a traditional graduate teaching assistant. Faculty have some reduced workload from GIs' involvement in the course (e.g., faculty conduct fewer lectures), but this reduction is compensated by the mentorship activities (e.g., observation, feedback). Also, faculty are informed that they retain ultimate responsibility for the undergraduate courses and they should not abdicate their responsibility to the GIs. In order for faculty to receive teaching credit for their mentorship work, GIs are required to register for a course credit with the mentors.

Preparation for Spring

After approximately two-thirds of the Fall semester has been completed, the mentors provide feedback about their evaluations of the GIs' skill development. Based on the skill list (Appendix 1), the FMs can assess the graduate students' proficiency in each skill. Some FMs

also use a Teaching Effectiveness Committee evaluation form as a source of assessment criteria. The form is simply used as a list of important teaching behaviors (e.g., instructor demonstrates knowledge of lecture topic), but the GIs are not expected to perform at the same level as faculty. This information is added to the Department Chair and Associate Chair's knowledge about the GIs' progress. Graduate students who show good skill development and have a high likelihood of success in the classroom are scheduled to teach independently in the Spring semester. GIs who have not shown adequate skill development (e.g., disorganized lectures, poor interactions with students) are continued in the practicum in the Spring semester.

Prior to the preparation of their course syllabi for the Spring semester, the GIs attend a syllabus training session. The AC reviews the requirements for every syllabus section (e.g., course description, objectives, assignments, policies, textbook/readings, schedule). In addition, the instructors are given a template that outlines sample assignment descriptions and required policy statements. If GIs teach certain courses (e.g., core required courses), then they are required to use specific assignments as described in the template. They are informed that specific assignments are necessary to assure that all undergraduates have consistency in their educational experiences.

Finally, GIs submit syllabus drafts (for their Spring semester courses) to the AC. The syllabus process is similar to a manuscript review process (although not as rigorous). The AC evaluates the syllabus on template consistency, course relevance, program relevance, and writing quality. More specifically, the AC provides feedback about the syllabus and the graduate instructor resubmits a revised draft. The syllabus communication occurs primarily through email. While verbal communication might be a workable means to provide feedback and compare revisions, it is not time-efficient to set individual meetings for 25-35 syllabus reviews. In

addition, the email communication allows a written record of communication between the AC and GI, which reduces the likelihood of miscommunication or forgotten information. This system also makes it easier for the AC to compare drafts (e.g., draft #1 vs. draft #3 of the same syllabus) to track GI progress. The revise/resubmit process is repeated until the AC approves the final draft.

The AC integrates the important principle that structure is helpful to new instructors, but an imbalance between structure and flexibility can be a hindrance. It is recognized that creativity, diversity and empowerment in pedagogy improve the classroom experience for both undergraduates and instructors (e.g., Cheek, 2003; O'Brian, 2004). Variety in teaching techniques can also allow instructors to be more responsive to the diversity of student learning styles (e.g., Fairhurst & Fairhurst, 1995). However, not all new ideas are good ideas. The AC has to assure that GIs' goals for their individual courses are consistent with the department goals for the undergraduate curriculum (e.g., minimizing course redundancy, complying with accreditation requirements, increasing academic rigor). To balance creativity with department needs, the GIs are permitted to submit new/modified assignments in their syllabi drafts, but the AC makes the final decision about the acceptance/rejection of the assignments.

Similar to syllabus development, GIs are allowed to consider the ways in which they might make changes to specific class activities (e.g., lectures, media use) when they begin teaching in the Spring. Faculty mentors are typically quite generous with course materials (e.g., lecture notes, assignment descriptions) and most GIs use similar materials as they prepare to teach independently for the first time. However, some graduate instructors want to explore the use of other materials/activities that fit with their own emerging academic pursuits and teaching

styles. Parallel to the syllabus process, GIs are given some options in topic/teaching activity selection.

Spring

For GIs who are continued in the practicum, their progress is assessed throughout the semester. If they make adequate progress, then they are scheduled to teach independently in Summer or at the start of the next academic year (Fall). All other GIs teach independently, but not in isolation, during the Spring semester.

With rare exception, the graduate instructors teach the same courses in which they were mentored in the Fall semester. Thus, they have the comfort and structure of teaching a course with which they have content competence. The GIs use the same textbook as used in the Fall semester, so they should have had ample time to read the textbook before they teach their own course. After some period of teaching experience, they are permitted to request changes in textbook selection.

However, GIs are also given some empowerment in the use of their own media materials, group activities, lectures and other teaching tools. Media can be an effective teaching tool and reveals family/cultural experiences to which undergraduates might have little exposure, such as diverse cultures (Gay, 2000) or low-income families (Roberts, 2003). Film/television, online news reports, computerized games, music, stories and photographic essays can all be powerful experiences and provide a means to reach multiple learners (Berke, Hamon, & Smay, 2006; Moreno, 2006). While a valuable form of classroom technology, instructors must also learn to consider media's limitations. For example, they are informed that media should only be used when it is directly relevant to the course content. Media should not be used simply for its recency or entertainment value (e.g., last night's episode of a popular television show). Also, media

should be used as a supplement, not a substitute, for lecture. GIs are instructed that they should provide some context prior to the media display (e.g., general connection to recent lecture or course readings) and discussion/analysis after the media display (specific connections, critique, questions, commentary). GIs can receive sample discussion forms from the FMs.

GIs are also encouraged to utilize active learning techniques that facilitate undergraduate application of course concepts (e.g., Meyers & Jones, 1993, Nilson, 2003). It is possible that GIs want to try teaching techniques that might exceed their classroom management techniques or create undue discomfort for students. So there are some limits placed on the nature of techniques that they can utilize (e.g., experiential activities to demonstrate demeaning events [such as psychological abuse] are prohibited).

During the Spring semester, the mentors or Associate Chair conduct classroom observations and provide feedback about skill development. The observations last for the duration of a typical class meeting (50-80 minutes). Given that progression in skills is an ongoing process, new instructors should receive some feedback after they have begun teaching independently. It is also possible that although some GIs demonstrated potential to be effective teachers, they might not be able to fulfill the multiple demands placed upon them when they are responsible for an entire course. In the latter case, early assessment and feedback is essential. The AC also conducts individual meetings with GIs. These meetings are an opportunity for reflection/assessment of the GIs' experiences in the teaching program. Similar to the reflection process for parent educators (e.g., Settles & Knights, 2006), this process facilitates communication about the GIs' classroom performance as well as metacommunication about the practicum. This also allows the AC and GIs to discuss strengths/weaknesses of the practicum process. In addition, the discussions focus on the GIs' strengths, weaknesses and future goals

(e.g., preferred course assignments, compatibility of teaching and research interests, career aspirations).

Throughout the semester, the AC also serves as a consultant to address all GI concerns (e.g., course content, exams, university policy, support services, management of difficult students). When complaints/concerns are expressed by undergraduate students, the AC conducts a situational assessment. If undergraduate expectations are inappropriate (e.g., an exam curved by 20%), then the AC serves as an advocate for the GIs to support their positions in the classroom. If undergraduate expectations are appropriate and the instructor has made an error (however unintentional), then the AC guides the GIs in corrective action.

The Department Chair serves in a supportive/consultive capacity to the Associate Chair. The AC has responsibility for the daily management of the graduate instructors, but the Department Chair serves as an advisor for unusual issues (e.g., police intervention with threatening students, conflicts between faculty mentors and GIs). In addition, the Chair monitors the ways in which the teaching program fits into the overall requirements/goals of the department.

In rare cases, there are GIs who either refuse to comply with the demands of teaching (e.g., university policy, department expectations) or clearly fail to fulfill their teaching responsibilities (e.g., hostile interactions with students, inadequate lecture preparation). In these cases, the Department Chair and AC generate an immediate action plan to correct the problems during the semester. If the GIs refuse to follow the action plan, then they are informed that they will be removed from the teaching program. If the GIs attempt to follow the action plan and make reasonable (but not complete) improvements in their teaching skills, then they are removed from the classroom at the end of the semester and re-entered in the practicum. They repeat the

practicum program and their preparation for independent teaching (at a later date) is periodically assessed.

After Spring

At the end of each Spring semester, the Department Chair and AC review the course evaluations by the undergraduate students. The evaluations are not the only source of information about the GIs' performance, but it is another viewpoint worthy of some consideration. The AC utilizes this information in any post-semester feedback given to the graduate instructors. The AC also supervises the GIs that teach courses during the Summer sessions.

In addition to individual GI evaluations, the chair and AC also evaluate input about the teaching practicum from multiple sources (e.g., faculty, graduate students, undergraduates, support staff). They identify the strengths/weaknesses of the practicum for the past academic year. Based on this identification, they make changes (e.g., revise syllabus template, change orientation sessions, alter Spring observations) to the program for the next group of practicum students. Thus, a new year's cycle of the practicum (Summer/Fall/Spring) begins approximately two months after evaluation of the past year's cycle is completed.

Conclusion

Programmatic training of HDFS graduate instructors is time-intensive, but this department has found that the investment is more than compensated. We agree with Myers' (1998) view that graduate instructors are "organizational newcomers" (p. 54), and we have an ethical obligation to provide socialization into the teaching process. If the socialization is successful, then undergraduates, graduate instructors, faculty and administrators gain from the university's enhanced professionalism (Park, 2004).

Bowman, Bairstow, and Edwards (2003) noted that there are limitations to all teaching techniques, and the current program is no exception. We have made a concerted effort to provide a strong foundation to the GIs, but no foundation prepares them for every situation or teaching challenge. Given that there are typically 20 [new plus experienced] graduate instructors in a Spring semester, there is simply not enough time to give every student continuous individualized attention.

Some challenges with this program include: (a) graduate student/faculty resistance; (b) time limitations; and (c) faculty overload. Most graduate students requested and appreciated the opportunity to participate in this more rigorous program, but a few wanted to maintain the previous (less demanding) process. These graduate students were able to recruit a faculty member or two to their cause. While the chances of this happening on any large scale are remote in most programs, it is important to consider how “academic freedom” may be defined by some as giving graduate students as much “freedom” as they want (e.g., to teach however they want without supervision).

It might be possible to alleviate this potential conflict in other departments by achieving faculty unanimity (as rare as that might be) prior to initiating a training program. It is also useful to have periodic group dialogues with GIs to help them understand: (a) their role in the departmental hierarchy; and (b) necessity for some decisions with which they do not agree. For example, GIs might not realize that they lack the experience to make textbook selections and so they feel slighted when excluded from the selection process. Group dialogues are also helpful to address social comparison issues. Given that GIs will likely know instructors in other departments/universities who are trained via other approaches (e.g., sink or swim, manual), they might find this particular model to be relatively structured/restrictive. It is understandable that

GIs cannot see the relative benefits of this approach without direct communication from program administrators.

The faculty time limitations/overload considerations are real issues in GI training, as this program has substantial upfront costs. In order to provide initial training and ongoing supervision, faculty will need to exert more effort on behalf of graduate students. If a few faculty members serve as mentors for all of the graduate students, then they might make professional sacrifices (e.g., publication/research opportunities) that are not required of their colleagues. Thus, if a program makes a commitment to GI training, then faculty investment in the training process should be recognized as an important professional contribution. Faculty can receive course credit for their mentorship, release time after several semesters of participation, or other incentives/compensation that fit within a particular academic structure.

We have made changes over the years (e.g., modified the Summer orientation session, expanded the syllabus template, increased the number of faculty mentors) as the situations differed from our anticipations. In addition to feedback from GIs and FMs, we also utilized some qualitative/quantitative data in our modification process. For example, the Associate Dean provides a summary of focus group interviews with undergraduates, which reveals satisfactions/concerns about courses. The university provides quantitative data about the changing composition/demographics of the student body. Thus, we engage in a continual process of refinement to improve the program. It is our best hope that the teaching instruction will be a resource as the GIs pursue their post-degree career development.

There has been national attention/initiatives on some aspects of teaching, such as technology integration (e.g., Franklin & Sessoms, 2005; Moreno, 2006) and multicultural education (e.g., Gay, 2000). These issues are important, but some topics (such as graduate

instructor preparation) have received less consideration (DeCesare, 2003). We respectfully offer that this paper might prompt more discussion about the mentorship process for graduate instructors. If we consider high-quality teaching to be an important obligation of the family science profession, then we must evaluate to what extent we are preparing the next generation of scholars to fulfill this obligation.

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Appendix 1

Practicum Summer Orientation Outline/Graduate Instructor Teaching Skills

1. Practicum assistantships are assigned
 - A. They are not transferable or open to personal preference
 - B. If there is conflict or miscommunication between graduate student and faculty mentor, then student should discuss issue with mentor
 1. If issue is unresolved, then TA should discuss issue with Associate Chair
2. Purpose of practicum - develop teaching skills and assess teaching potential
 - A. Determination can be made that a graduate student is not ready to teach independently
 - B. Can either be removed from teaching program or given extended practicum training
 - C. If teach in Spring, then student becomes graduate instructor under Associate Chair's supervision
3. Responsibilities to faculty mentor (similar to Graduate Teaching Assistants [GTAs])
 - A. Library searches
 - B. Assistance to instructor in class preparation (copy requests, equipment reservation, media previews)
 - C. Attend class meetings
 - D. Facilitate group discussion
 - E. Occasional lecture (1-2 during semester)
 - F. Maintenance of student records
4. Skills to be gained during practicum (different from GTAs)
 - A. Syllabus preparation
 1. Syllabus requirements differ for graduate instructors and faculty
 2. Graduate instructors will be required to create syllabus that meets template standards
 3. Mandatory syllabus orientation will be conducted in Fall semester
 - B. Select topics appropriate to course for lecture/learning activities
 - C. Create lectures relevant, but not redundant, to textbook
 - D. Create variety of learning experiences (lecture, group discussion, DVD)
 - E. Conduct/teach class meetings
 - F. Create required course assignments
 - G. Grading (e.g., criteria, rubrics)
 - H. Protect confidentiality/academic integrity in teaching
5. Assistants do not need to complete any tasks requested by faculty that are not directly related to teaching