

## **Graduate Student Teacher Training at The University of Georgia**

Katherine Kipp, Tracy Lambert, and Carrie Rosengart, The University of Georgia

The University of Georgia (UGA) is the flagship university in the University System of Georgia. It is classified as a “Research University” among the system’s Regional Universities, State Universities, State Colleges, and Two-Year Colleges and as a Doctoral Research Institution—extensive according to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions. The University is housed on one central campus in Athens, Georgia. Approximately 25,000 traditional undergraduate students and 8,000 doctoral and professional program students are enrolled.

The Psychology Department serves approximately 1,100 undergraduate majors and 130 graduate students. The Psychology Department is organized into six programs for graduate study: Clinical, Cognitive/Experimental, Industrial/Applied, Life-Span Developmental, Neuroscience and Behavior, and Social Psychology. Research is the Psychology Department’s primary mission. However, there are opportunities for graduate students to explore training in teaching. The primary mechanism for teacher training is the award of Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) to post-Master’s degree students and Teaching Assistantships (TAs) to pre-Master’s degree graduate students. Approximately 60% of graduate students are funded by GTA or TA positions each semester (other students are supported by research and administrative assistantships).

### **Teaching Assistantships**

GTAs most often serve as the instructor of record or as lab instructor for lower-level undergraduate courses, such as Research Methods, Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences, and the Psychology of Adjustment. Occasionally, based on departmental needs and GTA interests, advanced GTAs may teach sections of upper-level undergraduate courses, such as Abnormal Psychology, Anxiety Disorders, Psychology of Parenting, and Careers in Psychology. TAs

usually assist in large lecture sections of Introductory Psychology courses, teach laboratory sections of lower-level undergraduate courses like those listed above, or teach laboratory sections associated with upper-level core psychology courses (e.g., Cognitive, Developmental, Workplace, Social, and Physiological and Comparative Psychology).

#### Graduate Teaching Seminars

The University of Georgia requires that all graduate students receive training for their roles in the classroom. The Psychology Department offers a teaching seminar that meets this University-level requirement and is usually taught by an advanced GTA. In this course, students gain practical experience with preparing course syllabi, designing lectures, stimulating active learning, creating and grading assignments, and public speaking. Other issues addressed include educational ethics, academic dishonesty, disability services, and institutional policies related to teaching.

#### Faculty Mentoring of TAs and GTAs

Some faculty members in the Psychology Department serve either formally or informally as mentors to graduate student teachers. Faculty course mentors advise graduate students teaching the Research Methods, Statistics, and Psychology of Adjustment courses. These formal mentors possess expertise in the specific course content. They are awarded a one-course reduction in teaching load for their duties. Faculty course mentors may hold informational meetings with TAs prior to the start of each semester, clarify policies regarding the objectives for the course within the broader undergraduate psychology curriculum, review syllabi from each GTA and TA, evaluate teaching with classroom observations, and provide formal and informal performance feedback. Laboratory instructors are mentored by the faculty member and the GTA who teaches the lecture portion of the course. Additionally, graduate assistants may seek informal mentoring from other faculty and experienced GTAs in the department, typically choosing a faculty member by reputation or through the mentors' involvement in student-initiated teacher development programs in the Department.

## Student-Initiated Teacher Development

UGA Psychology graduate students initiated several resources for teacher development. First, graduate students maintain a Teaching Resource Room that houses sample teaching materials developed by previous graduate instructors. This room is open for all graduate students to borrow or contribute materials. Second, graduate students developed the GTA/TA Online Mentor-Resource Program, an online teaching resource program that uses the WebCT online interface. The program has four main components: (a) downloadable samples of teaching materials (e.g., lectures, handouts, assignments, quizzes, and exams) for the courses and labs most commonly taught by graduate students, (b) a “Tools and Tips for Teaching” section of the site that includes links to helpful Web sites and articles related to effective teaching, (c) short narratives about the teaching experience written by experienced GTAs including general advice and tips about teaching, and (d) an informal mentoring element that occurs through ongoing discussion postings on the WebCT discussion board. Finally, graduate students organized a graduate teaching forum to increase collegiality and conversations about teaching. Student-organized monthly meetings allow GTAs and TAs to discuss and share teaching philosophies, classroom experiences, and teaching techniques.

## University-Level Training Opportunities

At the University level, the Office of Instructional Support and Development (OISD) helps GTAs and TAs find resources and prepare for careers in higher education. Prior to each fall semester, OISD hosts an orientation to provide TAs from across the University with guidance regarding their teaching responsibilities. This office also maintains a teaching resource Web site and publishes a Teaching Assistant Newsletter twice per year.

The Dean of the Graduate School sponsors a Teaching Assistant Mentor program that is coordinated by OISD. This program brings together a select group of graduate students from across the University, all whom have been recognized for outstanding teaching, to participate in a year-long mentoring program. The program emphasizes the development of teaching philosophies and using them to shape the classroom environment. Other topics, such

as online learning and the use of technology in the classroom, are also explored. Participants are expected to become teaching mentors to the graduate students in their respective departments, which typically means they teach the graduate teaching seminar discussed previously. Participants are also expected to develop teaching resources that will serve their specific departmental needs. The Psychology Department has been fortunate to have one GTA participate in this program nearly every year.

#### Monitoring and Rewarding Teaching Effectiveness

Two Psychology Department committees monitor and reward graduate students' teaching effectiveness. A Committee for the Assessment of Teaching Assistants reviews graduate student teachers' course evaluations and the evaluations provided by faculty mentors. TAs experiencing problems in their teaching effectiveness are directed to UGA and Department resources for teaching improvement.

A Teaching Awards Committee reviews graduate student teachers' teaching experiences and course evaluations, and makes several departmental awards for teaching each year. Outstanding teachers' credentials are forwarded to the OISD for consideration for several University teaching awards. Outstanding teachers are also encouraged to apply for discipline-wide awards from the Society for the Teaching of Psychology.

#### Conclusion

Although UGA is known primarily as a research institution, there are clearly many valuable training experiences available for graduate students who are interested in teaching. Indeed, many of our graduates pursue academic careers with a primary teaching mission. As the Psychology Department and UGA continue to work toward greater levels of scholarship in research and teaching, we hope to make even greater strides in the support and encouragement of our graduate student teachers.