PREPARATION OF GRADUATE ASSISTANTS TEACHING FIRST-YEAR WRITING AT OHIO UNIVERSITIES

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2009

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ABSTRACT

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This pilot study examines the new teaching assistant (TA) preparation programs used by Ohio universities, both public and private, that graduate students to staff first-year composition (FYC) classrooms. I collected information about the preparation programs and the components of preparation from in-house materials from each of the schools, including university and departmental websites as well as a survey that was sent to the Writing Program Administrators (WPA) at each institution. My main research questions were: (RQ #1) How are graduate students enrolled in English programs being prepared to teach writing? and (RQ #2) Is the preparation of new TAs in line with the available literature? I examined each of the fourteen Ohio universities that use graduate students as TAs to staff FYC classes based on all available data (RQ #1). Although there are many components that may be used in TA preparation programs, I chose to focus on are balance of theory and practice, standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans, preservice orientation, preparatory seminars, observations, mentoring, and reflection. This includes looking at the in-house materials that were given as part of the survey response and in-house materials that are available online. It also includes general information about each university that was available on the university websites as well as the department homepages. Additionally, survey responses and answers to survey questions that were determined by researching each school are included. Some schools have much more in-depth materials available; therefore, those universities are discussed in much more detail. I compiled the information about each of the school by component and compared it to the recent literature and suggestions about TA preparation programs in English (RQ #2). The findings indicate that universities, programs, and
individual researchers do not agree on the best practices for preparing graduate students to teach in FYC programs, but that Ohio schools are making an effort to make sure our first-year composition students are receiving the best education possible by preparing new TAs to the best of their ability. This can be seen clearly with the difference of what is being written about and what is actually in practice. This pilot study concludes by offering conclusions as well as suggestions for further research.
In memory of Florence Caroline Waugh and J. F. Buckley
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Drs. Kristine Blair, Amy Morgan, and Donna Nelson-Beene for their guidance throughout this project. I would especially like to thank Dr. Richard Gebhardt for insight, his great revisions suggestions, and his patience with me.

I would like to thank my good friends and former BGSU classmates. Drs. Lanette Cadle, Christopher Harris, and Elizabeth Monske. Thank you for your constant encouragement. The support, encouragement, and advice helped give me the drive to complete this more than you will know. I could not have completed this project without the three of you. I would especially like to thank Sheila Bennett for reading this project and offering wonderful editing suggestions.

I would like to thank my colleagues from The Ohio State University. Dr. Kay Halasek and Ms. Martha Sims, for their support, their availability for discussing this project, and helping to keep me focused. You encouragement has meant the world to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. I would like to thank my grandparents, Dr. Frank MarLett and Joan MarLett. You have always taught me to believe in myself and reach for my dreams. The encouraging emails helped give me the strength to finish this project. You have always been proud of my accomplishments and understood me like nobody else could. I would like to thank my mother, Sue Bauer. Your guarding of my time gave me the mental state to get this finished. I would like to thank my in-laws, Dick and Paulette Wolf. You have both shown me so much love and support regardless of whether or not you understood what I was going after. I would like to thank my beautiful daughter, Elizabeth. Your sweetness and snuggles gave me much needed breaks and filled me with happiness when I needed it. I would especially like to thank my wonderful husband whose constant faith in my abilities and willingness to put up with me over the past several years have made this possible. Thank you all for your love and patience.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. TRAINING VS. PREPARING TEACHING ASSISTANTS</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey of Research</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Overview</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. Project Overview and Research Methods</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Pilot Study</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sample</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER III. THE UNIVERSITIES</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha University</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta University</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma University</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta University</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon University</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta University</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theta University</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa University</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambda University</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu University</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma University</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Title</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tau University</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi University</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omega University</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. COMPONENTS OF PREPARATION</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory and Practice</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized Syllabi and Day-to-Day Plans</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Service Orientation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seminars</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions for Future Research</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A. CONSENT LETTER</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B. THE SURVEY</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C. SURVEY RESPONSES</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF FIGURES/TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Programs in English in Ohio: A Brief Look</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of Preparation Components</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE: TRAINING VS. PREPARING TEACHING ASSISTANTS

First-year composition (FYC) is an integral part of most higher education institutions today. This teaching may be done by part-time faculty, full-time non-tenure-line faculty, or in some departments tenure-line faculty, but at universities with graduate programs a significant amount of FYC teaching is done by English department graduate teaching assistants (TAs). Many of these TAs will, during their careers as faculty members, teach writing, if not FYC then creative writing, technical writing, or writing-intensive literature courses. The administrators of first-year writing programs (WPAs) play an important role in the preparation of these students by developing and leading programs to orient and prepare new TAs to teach FYC. Further research is needed about how best to prepare English graduate students for teaching writing, and even about the narrower matter of effective FYC preparation. This dissertation addresses this need in a small way by exploring TA preparation for first-year writing at fourteen Ohio universities.

In the forward to Betty P. Pytlik and Sarah Ligget’s 2002 Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices, Richard Fulkerson states, “My father, ever precise in usage and diction, said ‘One trains animals. One educates people’” (xi). This distinction is a good one when considering programs for teaching assistants. Are they being prepared to teach a certain way in a particular program? Are they being prepared to teach writing in various contexts at various universities, colleges, etc? Fulkerson continues,

The story of how TAs used to be (not) “prepared” has achieved mythic status. New TAs, often fresh from an undergraduate literature curriculum the previous spring, were given in the fall one or more textbooks (and maybe a syllabus), then shoved into a classroom full of unruly and more or less baffled first-year students,
and told to teach them to write. The story’s mythic status shouldn’t detract from its essential truth. (xi)

However, after the boom in publications on preparation programs, we know that this is not the case today and was not always the case in the past. Fulkerson continues to explain that according to Betty P. Pylik’s “How Graduate Students were prepared to Teach Writing---1850-1970,” “until around the 1970’s, few graduate English students received much of any preparation for the classrooms they were put into” (xi). Clearly, this is no longer the case. In 1993, Fulkerson edited an annotated bibliography of articles about TA preparation. Fulkerson discusses the findings in his forward to Pytlik and Ligget’s *Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices*:

The introduction summed up the features of the programs represented: (1) A pre-service workshop to introduce the new teaching assistants to the goals and structure of a course they will teach and to help them with immediate problems. Textbooks and syllabus have been given out ahead of time or are distributed at the workshop. (2) Class visitation by an experienced writing teacher, often the Director of Composition. (3) Regular meetings with the Director, sometimes in new teacher staff meetings, sometimes in for-credit graduate courses. And (4) at least one graduate seminar with a name such as “Theory and Practice of Composition.” (xiii)

Of the approximately 120 articles compiled in the annotated bibliography Fulkerson discusses, most of the articles mention these four components (xiii). If these were the best or most common practices for TA preparation in English programs in 1993, what are the most common and best practices in the new millennium?
Over the past three decades an enormous amount has changed, such as the types of students enrolling in universities, the types of students enrolling in graduate programs, and technology and the way we use it in/outside our classrooms. Because of these changes, there has been a lot of research into the preparation of TAs in recent years. Specifically of interest to this dissertation is the preparation of TAs to teach writing. However, even with the explosion in publications on the subject, only the surface has been scratched. In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay,” Wilhoit writes,

Additional longitudinal studies of TA development would help determine which instructional techniques have lasting value for TAs. Are some methods of instruction most helpful to TAs early in their teaching and some most helpful near graduation? What is the best way to sequence instruction throughout the years of a TA’s service? Research that examines the relationship between TA instructional techniques and gender, rage, age, and teaching style is also needed . . . . Much more attention needs to be paid to TA preparation at comprehensive universities. How does the experience of TAs working in MA programs differ from those working in doctoral programs? Additional research might help develop more effective ways to prepare TAs for increasingly diverse student populations and an increasingly technological workplace. We also need more research on preparing TAs to work in a variety of instructional settings, . . . Although educators have made great advances in TA preparation over the past three decades, much work remains. (23-24)

Wilhoit’s concluding remarks offer numerous ideas for further research as well as indicate that there continues to be a great need for research in the area.
This dissertation reports on a pilot study that explored TA preparation for first-year writing at universities in Ohio and whether or not TA preparation programs reflected practices being discussed in current publications in the field. The pilot study involved data from fourteen Ohio universities that use graduate students to staff first-year composition courses. This pilot study investigated how these new teachers of college writing were prepared to teach writing by looking at the balance of theory and practice received overall as well as pre-service workshops, observations, mentoring, graduate seminars, and reflection. The Survey of Literature annotates the most critical of recent texts on preparation programs. Finally, the chapter concludes with a Chapter Overview.

Survey of Research

In 1968 the American Council on Education published *The Graduate Student as Teacher* by Vincent Nowlis, Kenneth E. Clark, and Miriam Rock. The Forward reads,

To account for classroom anomalies, it is sometimes wryly noted that college teaching is the only profession requiring no formal training of its practitioners. Strictly speaking, this is true, but in fact most persons who make careers of college and university teaching have undergone some kind of apprenticeship. This apprenticeship, at least in recent years, is typically a teaching assistantship undertaken while the participant is getting his terminal degree in graduate school.

The publication details issues associated with graduate student teachers by looking at perspectives and programs at the University of Rochester. Teaching assistantships are apprenticeships. Graduate students are compensated for teaching in many cases by having some
or all of their tuition expenses covered, and perhaps a small stipend. But, more importantly, TAs receive preparation for their careers. The teaching assistantship is a form of on-the-job training.

In Maxine C. Hairston’s 1974 *College Composition and Communication* article, “Training Teaching Assistants in English,” she writes,

One of the facts of the life in English departments at large universities today is that Teaching Assistants teach from fifty to ninety percent of our freshman composition courses. Although the system is frequently criticized—and with good reason—I see no prospect of its withering away in the next few years; nor would I want to see it abandoned altogether. In many ways, Teaching Assistants may do a better job of teaching freshman than some of our senior colleagues. They will do a good job, however, only if we have effective ways to train them and to supervise them during the first years of their apprenticeship in the profession. (52)

Hairston continues to detail the preparation program she helped to create at the University of Texas at Austin beginning in 1970 (52-55). Although this article was written thirty-four years ago, it continues to apply today. TAs teaching a large number of FYC courses is still quite prevalent in 2008.

In “Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers,” which appeared in the May 1977 issue of *College Composition and Communication*, Richard C. Gebhardt writes, “no writing program can do everything, and it seems to me that four kinds of knowledge are especially important for future teachers of writing.” (134). Gebhardt posits, “Besides knowledge of the history of the English language, of rhetoric, and of some theoretical framework with which to understand the wide range of approaches and materials available to them, future writing teachers need a broad awareness of *reliable, productive methods* to help students learn to write”
When discussing the balance of preparation, Gebhardt writes of future writing teachers, “They need to know the ‘what’ of composition teaching; but they also need to know the ‘how’ and the ‘why’” (138). The article explains the features, readings, materials, and assignments of a Writing for Teachers of Writing course (138-140). The debate on the balance of theory and practice in preparation programs continues today as seen in even the most recent literature.

In 1978, Change Magazine published How to Succeed as a New Teacher: A Handbook for Teaching Assistants. The preparation of TAs was under consideration; much of the issue is a reproduction and adaptation from the Handbook for Teaching Assistants at Stanford University, edited by Patricia O’Connell Killen and Carrie Walker. The text also includes descriptions of seven TA Training Programs written by David Halliburton. The University of Michigan developed a TA preparation program for the humanities, as well as social and natural sciences with grant money: “Participants concluded that supervised preparation is nearly always beneficial to a teaching assistant” (53). Each of the seven universities focused on TA preparation in varying degrees and for varying departments:

At Stanford University a 1976 report by a subcommittee on evaluation of teaching revealed that departments deal with their TAs in strikingly different ways. In the Department of English, for example, the TA prepares by taking a course in teaching composition and a two-quarter pedagogical course. The director of freshman English or the teaching administrator (an advanced TA) visits each section once per quarter. Very often the TA is also visited once or more by a faculty member who gives a critique of the TA’s classroom effectiveness and inspects representative papers he has graded. (57)
Clearly, these are the same components of TA Preparation that we see suggested and in use in many programs today.

In the second edition of *Rhetoric and Composition: A Sourcebook for Teachers* by Richard Graves, Anne Ruggles Gere’s “Teaching Writing Teachers” states, “Any course using the Graves book (or one of its competitors) is a relatively new one because composition instructors have had to rely, until recently, on an informal curriculum for their training” (58). Of course there were exceptions, but “Most instructors of writing have, however, learned through the informal curriculum of ideas gleaned from self-sponsored reading, orientation sessions, and conversations with other instructors, rather than in graduate classes” (Gere 58). According to Gere, “Within the informal curriculum the most pressing concerns have been practical and pedagogical” (59). Gere attributes part of this to the “traditional disdain” faculty members in English departments have for teaching FYC. Gere’s review details the shift for literature faculty to graduate students teaching FYC and the necessity for some preparation that occurred:

With the burgeoning of research in composition over the past two decades, and with the increasing need for skilled composition instructors, a significant number of these training programs have moved from an informal curriculum and become credit-bearing graduate courses…But it is clear that the course (frequently required for all new teaching assistants) in teaching composition often introduces graduate students to composition studies. At the same time the course or program provides survival strategies for new instructors and serves (to varying degrees) the needs of secondary English teachers, specialists in English as a Second Language, students in creative writing programs, and faculty seeking retraining. (60)
This diversity within the population of graduate students is growing and requires these types of graduate courses to attempt to have many different objectives.

Hartzog’s *Composition and the Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration*, published in 1986, is a survey of writing Programs and includes case studies of The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and The University of Pennsylvania. Hartzog writes, “My report of writing programs is based on questionnaires mailed to 52 AAU campuses and returned by 44 program directors or department chairs, on in-person or telephone interviews with 35 respondents, and finally on three campus visits” (ix). In the 1984-85 study, “In addition to altering graduate student courses, often extensively, many programs have begun focusing on graduate instruction. They have created or modified their training programs for teaching assistants, and some have also created degree programs in writing and rhetoric…The greatest expansion has been in advanced and graduate courses: writing programs are spreading across campus, and the training of TAs and writing specialist is gaining attention” (6-8). Hartzog notes that according to respondents, most of those faculty members and TAs teaching writing possess degrees or are pursuing degrees in English, however, an increasing number of programs are using faculty and TAs from various disciplines to staff FYC courses (44-46). Additionally, Hartzog notes that there is a wide spectrum in the rank the teachers of writing hold. Some programs are staffed entirely by TAs and some use only full-time faculty (45-46). Regarding TA preparation programs, Hartzog notes, “Discussing TAs, some directors explained the difficulty and importance of managing training programs for such large groups, perhaps as many as one-third of them new each year” (48). According to Hartzog, 35 of the 42 respondents required some sort of faculty development for TAs (49). Hartzog specifically looks at mentoring programs, apprenticeships, orientations, courses, and workshops.
Training the New Teacher of College Composition is a collection of essays edited by Charles W. Bridges. In the preface, Bridges discusses The Current State of Teaching Apprentice Activities in Language and Literature. Joseph Gibaldi and James Mirollo prepared the text for the Modern Language Association and “call for TAs, no matter what their institutions, to be part of well-designed training programs that are an important and rewarded part of a given department’s activities” (viii). The collection offers descriptions and suggestions for TA preparation from departments and individuals around the country.

Paul Connolly and Teresa Vilardi edited a collection for Joseph Gibaldi’s series Options for Teaching titled New Methods in College Writing Programs Theories in Practice. The collection described the composition programs and sometimes including the preparation of teaching assistants in twenty-eight colleges and universities. The schools represented are Bard College, Beaver College, Brooklyn College, City University of New York, Brown University, Carnegie-Mellon University, Cornell University, Eastern Oregon State University, George Mason University, Georgetown University, Grinnell College, Illinois State University, Jackson State University, La Salle University, Miami University, Michigan Technological University, New York University, St. Edward’s University, State University of New York, Stony Brook, University of Maryland, College Park, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, University of Montevallo, University of New Hampshire, University of Pittsburg, University of Utah, University of Washington, Western Kentucky University, and Whittier College.

In “A Retrospective on Training Teaching Assistants,” Janet Marting argues, “Responsible to students, the department, the college, and the university, and in some people’s estimation, to the fostering of a literate society, teaching assistants cannot be overlooked. Nor can their training be taken for granted” (35). Marting notes the recurring interest in the
preparation of teachers. Paraphrasing Albert R. Kitzhaber’s 1963 remarks, Marting writes, “Kitzhaber cited the English curriculum’s reliance on the study of literature (and not on writing and its teacher) as the culprit. Despite the interest and care that prospective college teachers bring to their own classes, such qualities, according to Kitzhaber, do not take the place of training or preparatory programs” (40). Further, Marting argues that for the most part it was not until the middle of the century that “more talk than action had been given to training programs” (40). However, Marting claims that this is not the case in English departments:

Increased interest in and knowledge of writing theory and pedagogy have determined the ways in which to best prepare prospective writing teachers. From the 1930 Institute’s focus on teaching methods and educational history to the 1949 conference which debated the scholar versus the practitioner to the 1956 conference on mastery of course work and methods of teaching to the 1960’s point to the culprits of inadequate teacher preparation, we now discover that newfound understandings and appreciation of the composing process dictate the content of training programs in composition for teaching assistants. (41-42)

Marting claims that it appears that some preparation programs have adopted the suggestions Gebhardt made in “Balancing Theory with Practice in the Training of Writing Teachers.” Marting argues that because of this some TA preparation programs are succeeding (42).

*Institutional Responsibilities and Responses in the Employment and Education of Teaching Assistants: Readings from a National Conference*, edited by Nancy Van Note Chism, is based on the participants of the 1986 conference. It includes the papers of many of the presenters. The proceedings are broken down into six main sections including; “The Teaching Assistantship: An Overview,” “Conditions of TA Employment,” “Considerations for TA
Development,” “Approaches to TA Development,” “International Teaching Assistants,” and “Task Force Reports and Reflections on the Conference.” Various articles and papers throughout the proceedings offer in-depth looks at preparation programs for graduate students in a variety of disciplines all over the country.

At the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition (CCCC) in March of 1992, Pytlik presented a paper titled “Teaching the Teachers of Writing: Evolving Theory.” Pytlik details the use of graduate students to teach or aid in the teaching of writing from 1894-1916. She argues that although many things had changed between 1920 and 1990, many of the issues were never resolved (9). However, of specific interest to Pytlik was exposing a “list of assumptions about teaching writing that we can infer from Greenough’s first graduate methods course at Harvard” that were still present in the 1990s. (9). These assumptions include “Students in methods classes need to write”; “The impulse to write needs to be genuine”; “Peer discussion of drafts and finished products are useful”; “Revising peers’ work will help new teachers find ways to explain the revision process to their students”; “Observing the teaching of others helps new teachers discover and develop their own teaching styles”; “New teachers need practice correcting manuscripts”; and “Role playing can help new teachers anticipate classroom problems” (9-11).

In November 1992, Pytlik presented “A Short History of Graduate Preparation of Writing Teachers” at the 82nd Annual Meeting of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). Pytlik recaps the history from 1894-1916 that she presented at the spring 1992 CCCCs presentation and touches on the twenties, thirties, and forties. However, Pytlik’s main focus in this paper is the 1950s. Pytlik writes, “The graduate course that may be the model for the 1960s and 70s courses in which current rhetorical and pedagogical theories were introduced was Albert
Kitzhaber’s ‘Rhetorical Background of Written English” (10). Pytlik offers a few details of the course structure and requirements and then ends briefly with “themes that run through our history of TA preparation” (11):

First, TA training is bound to the attitude of the academy toward freshman composition. Second, teacher preparation programs lag behind current knowledge of the discipline. Third, knowing the theoretical assumptions about writing and the teaching of writing is as important as knowing the methods of teaching. Finally, through the decades, faculty have complained about graduate students’ writing, recommending that they receive more practice. (11)

In her 1993 presentation at CCCCs presentation, “Teaching the Teacher of Writing: Whence and Whither?,” Pytlik discusses the impact of WWII on FYC and TA preparation. She discusses the “administrative and academic changes brought on by the war”; “the freshman composition programs into which the veterans were placed”; “the veterans, undergraduate and graduate”; and “how new TAs were trained when, as veterans returning to graduate programs, they taught freshman composition” (1-2).

Latterll’s 1996 dissertation The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education in Rhetoric and Composition Studies gives a detailed glimpse at the TA preparation programs of thirty-six institutions offering degrees in rhetoric and composition and in-depth information about five.

In “The Next Generation of WPAs: A Study of Graduate Students in Composition/Rhetoric,” Sally Barr Ebest details several facets of her 1996 survey of “600 members of the Council of Writing Program Administrators” (66). Ebest had a response rate of 23%, having 137 responses out of 600 surveys. She argues that this is a valid sample (66-67). Although the focus of the article is on preparing students for roles as WPAs, for this study our
interest is in her discussion of results in the teaching category. Ebest claims, “Whether graduate
students are majoring or minoring in composition/rhetoric, or merely fulfilling the requirements
of a teaching assistantship, they are being prepared to teach” (67). These assumptions are based
on the fact that of the respondents, “77.4% of the WPAs observe their TAs’ teaching, 61.3%
provide students with a mentor, and 57.5% hold a summer workshop.” (67). Further, she states,
“33% prepare new TAs by having them take two semesters of pedagogy courses, 35.8% tutor in
the Writing Lab, and 47.2% observe others’ classes” (67-68). However, “When no training is
required, only 37.5% of all graduate students choose to take it; among doctoral students, only
6.4% do so” (68).

In the 2002 article, “The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: a Heuristic
for Curriculum Design,” Kathleen Blake Yancey writes,

Instead of working from a common understanding, we tend, I suspect, to think
principally in terms of local needs. Local needs will of course continue to focus
our attention; context, as we know is critical. But practice suggests that when
local needs determine rather than influence a TA development program, it’s all to
easy to find one’s program is rich with technique but absent theory, or sensitive to
experience but unable to reframe it. (63-64)

WPAs responsibilities are not only to the TAs they are preparing. WPAs have responsibilities to
maintain FYC programs that provide a quality education to the undergraduate students in the
classroom.

In 2002 Robert Tremmel and William Broz edited a collection titled Teaching Writing
Teachers of High School English and First-Year Composition. According to Gebhardt’s
Foreword,
Teaching Writing Teachers seeks to address […] lack awareness, patterns of university organization, competing scholarly emphases, professional egos—to unity and greater effectiveness in preparation of writing teachers. It does this by giving twenty informed writing educators space to present specific course- and program-related ideas about preparing teachers for first-year composition and secondary English classes. It also reflects on connections (or the lack of them) in the education of these teachers. (vi)

Also in 2002, the collection Preparing College Teachers of Writing: Histories, Theories, Programs, Practices edited by Pytlik and Liggett was published. The twenty-four chapters are broken in to four main parts; “Histories,” “Theories,” “Programs,” and “Practices.” Although TA preparation programs have come a long way, as seen in Pytlik’s “How Graduate Students Were Prepared to Teach Writing—1850-1970,” the collection shows how far we need to go as well as how far we have come. Liggett and Pytlik write, “especially for beginning instructors, learning to teach by teaching can be an inefficient and frustrating method of professional development . . . well-designed teacher preparation programs have much to offer novice teachers by way of theories and practices for teaching writing” (xv). In addition to seeing how far TA preparation has come, the collection gives a clearer picture of where TA preparation programs are in the new millennium and where research still needs to be done.

Irene Ward and William J. Carpenter’s edited collection The Allyn and Bacon Sourcebook for Writing Program Administrators was published in 2002. The collection is divided into five parts: “Who Are You As Administrator?,” “Administering, Managing, Leading,” “Teaching Assistant Training and Staff Development,” “Curriculum Design and Assessment,” “Promotion and Professional Issues for WPAs,” and “Appendices.”
In the 2002 article “A Selection of Strategies for Training Teaching Assistants,” Irene Ward and Merry Perry begin,

What are the most current theories about effective teaching assistant (TA) training? What are some of the best TA training practices? How can I train TAs with limited financial and faculty support? What topics should I include in a TA training program? What do TAs need to know before they enter the classroom? How will enhancing TA training alleviate my job stress? These and similar questions continue to challenge writing program administrators (WPAs) who supervise graduate TAs. (117)

These questions still require answers today. Although more research is being done in TA preparation programs in English, each time a new project is finished there are more questions than when it started.

In the 2002 article, “Training the Workforce: Overview of GTA Curricula,” Catherine G. Latterell argues that despite advancements in the preparation of graduate teaching assistants over the last several decades,

by relying primarily on practicum that are skills-based, we are encouraging a notion that writing courses are contentless and that teaching writing requires minimal expertise. . . this type of teacher preparation perpetuates traditional administrative power structures that may neutralize the discipline’s efforts to redefine teaching and administrative activities for tenure and promotion cases as well as for the professionalizing of the discipline. . . the emphasis on skills training in the majority of GTA education programs may encourage a perception
compositionists have long battled: Teaching of writing is not valued, even by the rhetoric and composition field. (151)

According to Latterell,

GTA education curricula should strike a balance between providing GTAs with practical skills and advice and helping them understand the writing theory and pedagogy grounding those skills. It would be a serious mistake to completely discontinue providing first-year GTAs with concrete and practical advice for teaching writing. What we need, then, is to find ways to balance the “whats” with “whys”: We need to contextualize that advice by providing GTAs with the theoretical frameworks shaping them. (152)

Latterell’s article gives [provides?] some of the information reported in her 1996 dissertation, although here her claims seem a bit more forceful. Again, we see the request for a balance between theory and practice.

In the 2002 article, “TA Education as Dialogic Response: Furthering the Intellectual Work of the Profession through WPA,” Darin Payne and Theresa Enos write,

Even knowledge seemingly taken for granted, like process pedagogy, often gets reduced to universalized boiler-plate steps that new teachers can follow. The complexity of elements of the writing process, such as recursion, for example, or social-epistemic collaboration, can be lost in untheorized TA discussions that attempt to instill the linear logistics of freewriting, drafting, revising, and editing. TA education is particularly susceptible to this kind of reductionism because of the need to provide new instructors with concrete working plans, something
immediate to guide them through the day, week, or unit, and to give shape to their syllabi. (54)

Clearly, there is a need for practical information prior to walking into a classroom for the first time or the first time at a specific institution. But, what is enough? How much practical information is necessary? How much composition theory is necessary? How much needs to come before teaching?

In her 2003 article, “Learning to learn: New TA preparation in computer pedagogy,” Barb Blakely Duffelmyer writes, “For the new TA, the new teaching role is both enriched and problematized by the integration of computers in our composition pedagogy” (296).

Additionally, technology is becoming part of the TA preparation; “We have a class listserv for the seminar and the new TAs are invited to share ideas there” (307). The article argues, “Fostering communities of practice and being explicit about their operation and their value assists new TAs and all of us to learn” (310). One of the best ways to practice might be for preparation programs to use some of the same technologies the TAs may be using in the FYC classroom.

Sidney I. Dobrin edited a collection titled Don’t Call it That: The Composition Practicum that was published in 2005. The collection offers seventeen articles from authors all over the country. According to Dobrin, “This collection explores not only the various approaches taken in teaching the introductory graduate course in composition studies for new teachers of writing, but also the debate regarding the role such a course plays in graduate-level (and in some cases, undergraduate) curricula in general” (2). In “The New Media Instructor: Cultural Capital and Writing Instruction,” Jeff Rice discusses the need for TAs to study new media; “What I mean by ‘new media’ is the application of new communicative technologies for the purpose of writing.
These technologies include, but are not limited to, hypertext, MOO, Flash, Weblogs, Quick Time, and e-mail” (266). As we prepare to move into 2009, many changes have taken place in how FYC is being taught and information is being disseminated to FYC students as well as to TAs. Many universities are now using online course management systems like WebCT, Blackboard, and other created by Desire2Learn to aid instructors in disseminating information to undergraduate students. It is only natural that it would follow that these same technologies are being used to disseminate information to and prepare graduate students who are TAs. These technological advances require a fresh look at what strategies should be used to most effectively provide information and training components.

In his 2006 article, “Communicative Strategies for Administrative Practices: Evaluating Weblogs, Their Benefits, and Uses,” William Endres discusses the use of technology, specifically blogs, for disseminating information and reflection. Endres writes, “If a WPA decides to use a blog to disseminate writing program information, a listserv can continue to operate along with a blog, with the benefits of each communicative means complementing each other” (90). Further, Endres discusses the possibilities of blogs used to encourage reflective practices in new TAs as well as other FYC instructors;

Blogs used for reflection by WPAs, then, can make explicit certain reflective practices that in all likelihood are already in play as WPAs go about their work, whether those practices involve teaching their own composition classes, working on curriculum revision, instructing new graduate students, interacting with instructors, dealing with issues from students, articulating curriculum, writing instruction practices and program policies, or the like. This modeling of reflective practice by a WPA encourages the habit of reflection in instructors who read
perhaps comment on those blog postings, particularly instructors new to the field of composition and to teaching, and those postings become aids in their professional development. (92)

Modeling and having new TAs use the technology and new media will help them to become more comfortable with it and adds to the possibilities of them using it in their FYC classrooms. As blogs and networking sites become more widely used by the FYC students, it becomes a media that many new instructors will want to incorporate into their classroom. However, technologies and new media are not without their difficulties and disadvantages. Endres concludes, “The current strengths and weaknesses within a particular writing program will determine how blogs might best benefit, or not, the writing program’s culture and communicative needs” (101).

In the 2007 article, “The Stakes of Not Staking Our Claim: Academic Freedom and the Subject of Composition,” Mary R. Boland writes,

I do not think it coincidental that as our scholarship has moved us more firmly toward social understandings of writing and literacy and toward more intellectually oriented classrooms, university administrations and colleagues from other disciplines have, quite literally, begun to run us out of town—by dismantling programs, relocating them to control curricula, and replacing savvy, tenured writing program administrators (WPAs) with new, insecure, and often non-tenure-line faculty (34).

Of her graduate students, who are or will most likely be TAs, Boland writes, “As apprentices in the field, my students have lots of reading and thinking yet to do. But their struggle for a subject
of composition is one that established professionals also have” (33). Boland’s students are
students focusing on composition studies.

In the 2007 article, “Teaching without License: Outsider Perspectives on First-Year
Writing,” Janet C. Myers and Cassandra Kircher expose “the challenges faced by professors of
first-year writing who lack formal graduate training in composition and rhetoric” (396).
Although hired to teach Victorian literature and creative writing, both Myers and Kircher find
themselves teaching FYC on a regular basis:

Although we obviously share a common discipline, our graduate training in
literature and creative writing, respectively, had not adequately prepared us for
the challenges and conflicts we were to encounter as faculty members within a
diverse English department…These shortcomings in our case stem from the fact
that neither one of us has ever had a graduate course in rhetoric, composition, or
professional writing, and our preparation to teach first-year writing consisted of
brief training sessions—at the very most lasting a week and scheduled preparation
to begin teaching at a particular institution¹—coupled with on-the-job trial and
error. (398)

New teachers, TAs who are beginning their studies and freshly minted PhDs, are coming into
FYC classrooms from many different kinds of backgrounds and many different experiences. Is it
possible for one program to deal with everyone’s needs?

Michael Stancliff and Maureen Daly Goggin’s 2007 article, “What’s Theorizing Got to
Do With It? Teaching Theory as Resourceful Conflict and Reflection in TA Preparation,” claims,
“TA preparation is a hotly contested intellectual arena of diverse practices and philosophical
positions” (13). The teacher preparation program at Arizona State is built upon four principles that Stancliff and Goggin refer to as reflective conflict (12). Stancliff and Goggin write,

First, encouraging teachers-in-training to draw on their own conceptual resources and experiences and to write curricula that engages those often wide-ranging differences models the learner-centered principles that so many of us want new teachers to take with them into their own undergraduate classrooms. Second, allowing teaching assistants the opportunity to make their own theoretical links between composition theory and their home fields (like not to be composition studies in most training situations) broadens our service to these teachers, in many cases addressing more directly the teaching ambitions of those outside composition studies. Third, building this theoretical dialogue into our training curricula presents composition studies as a viable field of inquiry and thus inspires the graduate-student teachers to commit intellectually to the work of teaching writing. Finally, this pedagogy encourages the kind of teaching habits that can sustain careers, offering not formulae but conceptual resources for approaching the complexity of bridging intellectual paradigms,… (12)

In 2007, Stancliff and Goggin describe the program in place at Arizona State University, “Our TA-preparation program consists of three parts. The first is a three-week intensive orientation that meets daily for the equivalent of a semester’s worth of student contact hours before fall classes begin. The second is a three-credit graduate seminar that meets during the fall semester; and the third is a weekly practicum that meets during the spring semester” (16). This is strikingly similar to the features of TA preparation Richard Fulkerson found in his 1993 research (see p.2). Stancliff and Goggin say that the Arizona State program contains at least three of
Fulkerson’s four characteristics of TA Preparation. There is a pre-service orientation. There is a weekly meeting for practical issues. And, there is a for-credit graduate seminar. There very well may be a required observation, but that information was not included in the essay. Between Fulkerson’s research in 1993 and what Arizona State University reports in 2007, there is little change. Is that the case across universities across the country or is this an anomaly?

Chapter Overview

Chapter Two provides insight into how the project came into existence and how it changed. It includes a more detailed look at the pilot study itself. A discussion of the participants and how and why they were chosen will provide some insight into study flaws. The sample will be explained in detail. The specific research questions will be discussed, including discussion of survey results and other data collection.

Chapter Three examines each of the fourteen Ohio universities that use graduate students as TAs to staff first-year composition classes. This includes looking at the in-house materials that were given as part of the survey response and in-house materials that are available online. It also includes general information about each university that was available on the university websites as well as the department homepages. Additionally, survey responses and answers to survey questions that were determined by researching each school are included. Some schools have much more in-depth materials available; therefore; those universities are discussed in much more detail.

Chapter Four looks at the balance of theory and practice, the use of pre-service workshops, observations, mentoring, graduate seminars, and reflection evident in each of the fourteen universities programs. The chapter also specifically looks at recent literature in the field in terms of these components.
Chapter Five gives an overview of previous chapters, followed by summary and conclusions for research question one. This is followed by suggestions for future research and a couple final thoughts.
CHAPTER TWO: PROJECT OVERVIEW AND RESEARCH METHODS

Chapter One gives an overall discussion of the purpose and importance of the pilot study. Data collection for the study took place from TA preparation programs, both inside and outside of English. This chapter discusses the pilot study and why the participants were chosen. The specific research questions will be discussed, including discussion of survey results and other data collection.

The Pilot Study

The study ended up lasting fifteen months, from May 2004 to August 2005. During that time, the department websites, and the wealth of information they included in many cases, were available to study, quote, and analyze. My online research focused on mandatory prep classes, what other courses in composition theory or pedagogy were offered, what textbooks were used in the mandatory prep classes and optional theory classes. Copies of the web pages and their content were printed during that time, giving copies of the sources in case of server failure or in the event the web pages were unavailable due to construction or major changes. Documentation and materials produced by the various universities were acquired. In addition to studying the materials produced by a few of the fourteen universities and the information available online, I sent a survey to the WPAs at each of the universities by email and email attachment. I did extensive online research to find answers to as many of the survey questions as possible for each of the universities whose WPAs chose not to complete the survey or make in-house materials available to me.

Participants

I first contacted the fourteen WPAs electronically requesting that they participate in the study on May 20, 2004. This contact included the informed consent letter (See Appendix A) and
the survey (See Appendix B). Items were in the emails themselves as well as attached as Microsoft Word documents. On July 5, 2004, I contacted the WPAs electronically. This email thanked those who had participated and gave a friendly reminder to those who wanted to participate, but had not. This communication also included the letter of informed consent and the survey, both in the body of the email and as attached Microsoft Word documents. A final plea for participation was sent out on November 5, 2004. This communication, also electronic, included the original solicitation for participation, the informed consent letter, and the survey. Again, the informed consent and survey were both in the body of the email as well as attached Microsoft Word documents.

The Sample

As part of this pilot study, I conducted extensive research in looking at the history of how compositionists have been prepared, the arguments being made in various journal articles and book chapters that detail what the authors think we should be doing, and the guides for new teachers that are being published. Additionally, I felt that a survey of what was actually taking place in teacher preparation was an important piece. As I felt daunted by the thought of attempting to replicate the informative works like Carol P Hartzog’s Composition and The Academy: A Study of Writing Program Administration or Catherine G. Latterell’s dissertation The Politics of Teaching Assistant Education in Rhetoric and Composition Studies, I concentrated on finding out how English graduate students in Ohio’s universities were being prepared to be teachers of writing.

For this project, I collected information from the fourteen universities in Ohio that use TAs to staff first-year composition classes in some capacity. I sent each WPA or others in charge of TA preparation at each of the fourteen universities a survey through email. I had two main
reasons for keeping the scope of the project narrowed to Ohio. First, of the more than ninety institutions of higher education in Ohio, fourteen offer graduate degrees in English and use graduate teaching assistants. Because half the fourteen schools in the sample offer doctorate degrees and half only master’s degrees, Ohio offers a fairly balanced look at varying programs and universities. Additionally, each of the universities offers varied programs; not all graduate students are within Rhetoric and Composition or Rhetoric and Writing. Third, the institutions are varied in type, public versus private, size, and rank, giving responses from a fairly broad range of perspectives.

The fourteen universities in Table 1(see p. 27) will be henceforth referred to by letters of the Greek alphabet, Alpha University, Beta University, Gamma University, Delta University, Epsilon University, Zeta University, Theta University, Kappa University, Lambda University, Nu University, Sigma University, Tau University, PSI University, and Omega University in order to protect the anonymity of the WPAs who requested that their names, as well as the names of the universities, remain anonymous. Of the fourteen universities contacted, I received responses of some sort from five. Beta University, Sigma University, and Epsilon University sent indications that the surveys would be completed and coming shortly, but were unable to complete the project. Delta University and Omega University completed and returned the complete survey.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
<th>M.A.</th>
<th>M.F.A.</th>
<th>Ph.D.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpha University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature and Writing, English for Teachers, Teaching English as a Second Language, and Comparative Literature</td>
<td>Rhetoric and Composition and English</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beta University</td>
<td>English Studies with concentrations in Literature, Critical Theory, Cultural Studies, Disability Studies, Film, Folklore, Queer Theory, Rhetoric and Composition</td>
<td>Creative Writing with concentrations in Fiction, Poetry, Non-Fiction</td>
<td>English Studies with concentrations in Literature, Critical Theory, Cultural Studies, Disability Studies, Film, Folklore, Queer Theory, Rhetoric and Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamma University</td>
<td>English with a concentration in literature, Comparative Literature</td>
<td>English with a concentration in Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta University</td>
<td>Composition and Rhetoric, Creative Writing, Literature, K-12 Teaching, Technical and Scientific Communication</td>
<td>Literature and Rhetoric and Composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsilon University</td>
<td>English with a concentration in Literature</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zeta University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature, Creative Writing, Professional Writing and Editing.</td>
<td>English with a concentration in Literature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theta University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature and English as a Second Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kappa University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature and Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lambda University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature, Composition and Rhetoric, and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nu University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Professional Writing and Editing, Linguistics, Literature, Composition/Rhetoric, TESOL, Children’s/Young Adult Literature, Popular Culture, Creative Writing, and Multicultural Studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sigma University</td>
<td>English, Scientific and Technical Communications, Teaching English as a Second Language</td>
<td>Creative Writing with concentrations in Fiction and Poetry</td>
<td>Rhetoric and Composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tau University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literary History, Creative Writing, Literary Criticism, Women’s Studies, Rhetoric and Composition</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature, Creative Writing, Rhetoric and Composition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psi University</td>
<td>English: Composition-Track, English: Literature Track</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omega University</td>
<td>English with concentrations in Literature or Creative Writing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Of the fourteen universities contacted, the WPAs from Delta and Omega completed the survey and sent electronic documents and/or links that contained syllabi, assignments, and
prompts. Additionally, I was also able to obtain some of the in-house materials created by two of the other universities, Beta and Sigma. These included syllabi for the required seminar and teaching assistant handbooks from one and the teaching assistant handbook of the other.

Research Questions

This dissertation is a pilot study exploring the state of preparation programs for TAs in English, which prepare students to teach writing, usually FYC, within the state of Ohio, and a discovery of areas that need improvements so that new TA preparation programs can be developed to benefit the new TAs, the WPAs, the departments, and the FYC students. My main research questions were: (RQ #1) How are graduate students enrolled in English programs being prepared to teach writing? and (RQ #2) Is the preparation of new TAs in line with the available literature or lagging behind? Studying the fourteen Ohio universities in light of this leads to other questions. To find answers to these questions, I looked at:

1) What components of preparation are the various universities using? Although there are many components that may be used in TA preparation programs, I chose:
   a) Balance of theory and practice--Is there a balance of theory and practice overall?
   b) Standardized Syllabi and Day-to-Day Plans--Are new TAs given standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans? If so, is it mandatory to follow them? If so, how long are they required to follow?
   c) Pre-Service Orientation--Is there a pre-service orientation or seminar? If so, how long does it last? What does it cover?
   d) Preparatory Seminars--Is there a pedagogy and/or theory seminar required? Which? How long does it last? What are the objectives?
e) Observations--Are new TAs observed? Who observes them? How often? Do new TAs observe anyone? If so, who and how often?
f) Mentoring--Do new TAs have formal mentors assigned to them? Who are the mentors? How long are they mentored? What does the relationship consist of?
g) Reflection--Do new TAs do any type of formal reflection? If so what?

2) Who do WPAs in the various universities in Ohio believe their clientele to be and how does that influence the purposes of the preparation programs they administer?

Data Collection

I collected data from three sources, university and departmental websites, in-house materials, and surveys. I went through each university and department website in-depth on multiple occasions from May 2004 to May 2005. This allowed me the opportunity of looking at information about more than one TA preparation class for each school. These screen shots were printed and retained by me in case of server failure or modifications and for the purpose of comparison. The in-house materials were extensively studied and mined for the research questions. The results from the survey were tallied as they came in. Because of the low number of respondents, contact from 36% and responses from only 14%, I went back to university websites, department websites, and in-house materials to locate answers to survey questions. For some informational survey questions this allowed for 100%, while for others it allowed for less. The questions for the WPAs specifically, were not easily located.
CHAPTER THREE: THE UNIVERSITIES

This chapter presents details on the TA preparation for FYC teaching at each of the fourteen Ohio universities that use graduate assistants as part of the teaching staff in first-year writing. This chapter focuses on the in-house materials obtained as well as the information obtained from the university and departmental websites. Specifically, this chapter focuses on the first research question mentioned in Chapter Two: 1) What components of preparation are the various universities using? Although there are many components that may be used in TA preparation programs, I chose to focus on balance of theory and practice, standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans, pre-service orientation, preparatory seminars, observations, mentoring, and reflection.

a) What specific components are in use at each university?

b) Is there a balance of theory and practice overall?

c) Are new TAs given standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans? If so, is it mandatory to follow them? If so, how long are they required to follow?

d) Is there a pre-service orientation or seminar? If so, how long does it last? What does it cover?

e) Is there a pedagogy and/or theory seminar required? Which? How long does it last? What are the objectives?

f) Are new TAs observed? Who observes them? How often? Do new TAs observe anyone? If so, who and how often?

g) Do new TAs have formal mentors assigned to them? Who are the mentors? How long are they mentored? What does the relationship consist of?

h) Do new TAs do any type of formal reflection? If so what?
Alpha University

Alpha University offers both MA and PhD programs in English. New graduate students teach one course their second term and two courses fall and spring terms of their second year.

The program offers a pre-service orientation in a sense because new graduate students do not teach their first term. They complete a term’s worth of coursework prior to beginning to teach. Graduate Assistants are required to complete two courses, both a practicum and a composition theory/pedagogy course.

Teaching assistants do not choose their own textbook the first term they teach. However, it appears that they are free to make their own choice afterward. There was no information available about standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, or assignments.

According to the description of the graduate courses, the composition theory/pedagogy course used their own first-year writing program as an example to focus on the teaching of writing in a variety of classroom settings. Fall 2005, the course was scheduled to meet for two and a half hours once a week. The required textbooks were Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition by Russel K. Durst and Practice in Context: Situating the Work of Writing Teachers by editors Cindy Moore and Peggy O’Neill.

The practicum course description states, “Practical training and experience in teaching beginning composition courses,” according to the description of graduate courses at Alpha University. Fall 2005, the course was scheduled to meet for one and one-quarter hour twice each week. The textbook required for the course was Practice in Context: Situating the Work of Writing Teachers.
Teaching assistants are observed in the classroom as part of university policies. New teaching assistants are observed by a combination of faculty members, staff members, and experienced graduate teaching assistants.

The preparation program does contain a mentoring component. The mentors are a combination of faculty members, staff members, and experienced graduate teaching assistants.

No information about reflection was available on the department website or in the other in-house materials obtained.

The only in-house materials that were readily available were a section of the university website that was created by teaching assistants for teaching assistants and an informal Graduate Student Handbook.

The English department website was created in Spring 2002 with promises that it would be updated by future graduate students. However, there is no evidence that this has taken place. This website has a lot of useful information for the novice teaching assistant. The pertinent links cover assignment creation, observations, choosing textbooks, peer editing, grammar, how to grade, what to do the first day, etc. Each of the main links leads the browser to more links with a variety of information. For the most part, the information is solid and would be quite useful to someone who is new to teaching, however, it does only deal with giving some ideas of what to do and does not really go into why to do it or how to connect it to the rest of the class. On the other hand, the purpose of the website is to simply be a resource of information for teaching assistants.

The other in-house document that was obtained was the informal Graduate Student Handbook. The handbook reads, “This Handbook is intended as an informative guide to the policies and practices regarding matters pertaining to graduate students in the Department of
English. While it is consistent with the Department of English Handbook and the University Policy Register, it should not be mistaken for these official publications containing policies of the Department and University.” The Graduate Student Handbook lists lots of useful information such as, who the program administrators are and what they do, degrees and general requirements, concentrations and major requirements, financial issues such as cost and graduate assistantships, and professional development.

Beta University

Beta University offers MFA, MA, and PhD degrees in English. According to the Department’s “Graduate Studies Handbook,” “most GTAs [graduate teaching assistants] in English hold a 50% appointment, which means that they invest approximately twenty hours per week in teaching one five-credit-hour course”.

The program offers a pre-service orientation that lasts for approximately two weeks before fall term begins. The pre-service orientation is required of “Every new GTA without substantial experience teaching college-level composition...”. This orientation moves into the required course, which appears to be a combined theory and/or pedagogy and practicum seminar.

During fall 2005, the seminar met twice each week for one and three-quarter hours. There was not a required text for the course, but there was an extensive list of readings including, but not limited to, Brenda Brueggemann’s “Becoming Visible,” Sharon Crowley’s “Kairos and the Rhetorical Situation,” and Chris Anson’s “Writing and Response.” While the reading list includes the articles just mentioned, the course appeared to spend a majority of the time assimilating the new graduate teaching assistants to the first-year writing program at Beta University.
New graduate students are provided with sample syllabi and day-to-day plans through their course work in the pre-service orientation and seminar, and also via the department’s website. New graduate students are required to follow a specific assignment sequence, and they are provided with required day-to-day plans that cover the first two weeks of class. After the first two weeks, GTAs are encouraged to develop their own day-to-day plans. Initially, graduate teaching assistants do not choose their own textbooks. For their first term of teaching, all of the new graduate teaching assistants use the textbooks prescribed in the required graduate practicum. GTAs may choose their own texts after some experience is gained.

The graduate teaching assistant preparation program additionally requires an observation component. Peer mentors conduct observations.

The preparation program does contain a mentoring component. Mentors are a combination of faculty, staff, and experienced GTAs.

No information about reflection was available on the department website or in the other in-house materials obtained.

The in-house materials readily available are the teaching assistant handbook, the department’s graduate studies handbook, and the first-year writing program website which contains an area that houses resources for teachers.

The website contains various resources to aid first-year writing instructors. Once on the “Teacher Resources” page there are several main headings including: Teaching Resources, Teaching Materials, University Links, ### Texts, Forms, Awards, Offsite Resources, and Thematic Links.

The Teaching Resources heading contains descriptions of the first-year writing courses, a link to the “Handbook for GTAs,” a plagiarism statement, a visual archive, and an overview of a
new course design. The Teaching Materials heading contains sample syllabi, sample assignments, class activities, workshop materials, and handouts. There is a wealth of information in the Teaching Resources section of the website. There are fifteen sample syllabi with a great variety of themes. There are class activities to aid new teachers getting students to compare texts, analyze text, conduct research, and think more about word choice. There are handouts for rhetorical appeals and PowerPoint presentations introducing the “evolving thesis.”

The “Handbook for GTAs” is an extensive document. Chapter One contains information about how students are placed into the various writing courses and the statements of purpose for those courses. It introduces the required assignment sequence. There is a directory of first-year writing program staff, peer mentors, as well as the department heads and select faculty.

Chapter Two of the handbook is designed to aid new teaching assistants, as they get ready for their classes. This chapter discusses course goals and introduces the mandatory textbooks for the first-year writing class. It also addresses the required number of office hours and what that time should be used for. One of the most important aspects of this chapter is its coverage of how to respond to student writing. This response section covers written comments, conferences, peer groups, and peer workshops.

This chapter also addresses issues that are very threatening to many first time teachers. The “Handbook for GTAs” has an extensive section on what to expect from and how to deal with students whose first language is not English. This chapter also covers grammar instruction and what its place is in the first-year writing program at Beta University.

Chapter Three discusses the required sequence of assignments. It contains assignments, criteria for evaluation, activities, etc. Each assignment in the sequence is described and given a
rationale. The criteria for evaluation are clearly spelled out. Each assignment in the sequence has several example prompts and activities to go with it.

Chapter Four deals with variations of the course that can be individualized after the graduate teaching assistant has proven that they are capable of teaching independently.

Chapter Five contains policies and procedures that must be followed. It contains information on photocopies and supplies as well as what GTAs should do if they need to miss classes. This chapter contains a breakdown of what is required of the GTAs each week of the term, absence reports, required observations, etc. The requirements of syllabi are also clearly indicated. The chapter also includes information on university wide grading policies and gives listings of resources, like the Writing Center and Office of Disability Services. Finally, the chapter detailed the required attendance policy for the first-year writing program at Beta University.

The appendices offer some of the material available on the program website. Specifically included: syllabus checklist, handouts on rhetorical appeals, rhetorical commonplaces, reading still images, and reading moving images. Additionally, the appendices include a Teaching Grammar Error Log and two sample syllabi.

Gamma University

Gamma University offers a MA and a PhD in English.

The program requires a pre-service seminar class within the Department of English as well as a university-wide, required course for graduate teaching assistants. The university-wide course begins during orientation and has several sessions throughout fall term. The seminar does not appear to have a required outside text; however, there are two in-house documents that are used and available as well as a website that is devoted to TA preparation.
The pre-service seminar required by the English Department meets during fall term. In fall 2005, the course met twice each week for one and one quarter hour. According to the department course description “This course provides an intensive training for graduate students interested in teaching in the English department and/or through…. University Seminars.”

Thus, the major goals of the course are: 1) To gain an understanding of major trends in composition scholarship and pedagogy; 2) To explore and assess a variety of pedagogical strategies for writing classes, including assignment sequencing, assessment techniques, and student conferencing; 3) To develop a research project proposal that demonstrates engagement with current issues in composition and rhetoric; and 4) To construct a syllabus and assignment sequence to be used in a future writing course.

The required texts for the course were Joseph Harris’s *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966* and Irene L. Clark’s *Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*.

No information about the use of standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, or common textbooks could be obtained from the available materials.

No information about required observations could be obtained from the available materials.

All new TAs are assigned to experienced TAs for mentoring. Additionally, even after the first term, TAs are assigned a faculty member as a supervisor/mentor. These faculty mentors must approve the TAs course text, syllabi, and assignments. The TAs must submit sets of graded essays for approval as well as be observed by the faculty mentors.
There is also an English department guide for graduate students that provides a great deal of information about applying, admission, program requirements, etc. Additionally, in one of the later sections, it focuses on TA Training. TAs are required to attend colloquia each term as part of their professional development and preparation. In addition to the documents mentioned previously, there is not only a department website, but also a website dedicated to writing and writing instruction. The site provides links to nearly fifty handouts that cover everything from confusing words to the rhetorical choice of using first person. The site contains another fifty or so links to other resources that had been developed in-house and resources at other universities. There are helpful hints that cover everything from what type of first impression the TA wants to make to what to do if a student develops a crush on the TA. Additionally, there are links to sample lesson plans and syllabi.

Delta University

Delta University offers both a MA and a PhD in English.

The program requires a pre-service seminar that takes place during the three weeks before classes begin. According to the course description, “Examination and evaluation of current methods and strategies for teaching college writing with emphasis on classroom application of composition theory and research. Major topics include composing process, invention, argumentation, the sentence and the paragraph, testing and evaluation, recent research in composition, reading and writing, and composition and literature.” The required text for the 2005 seminar was Clark’s Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing.

According to the syllabus, “All new instructors are required to use the English department’s standard syllabus and are encouraged to use it in subsequent years. The standard
syllabus is like a template; you may create, modify, and adapt it as long as you honor its approaches, theme, number of assignments, etc. A major goal of this course is that you create your own syllabus from the standard syllabus guidelines.” Therefore, new TAs are provided with a sample syllabi, which they are required to follow with some modifications. Additionally, according to the response on the survey, TAs are provided with sample day-to-day plans, which they are not required to follow. TAs are required to use a standard textbook. The program also requires a practicum seminar, which TAs take during the fall and spring of the first year they teach. This seminar is required of all new graduate teaching assistants. There are two sections; one focuses on composition and one on technical communication. The course “Deals with practical problems involved in teaching freshman or professional writing.” For the Fall 2005 term, the class met for fifty minutes once per week. There does not appear to be a required text for this course.

The required practicum seminars also function as pairs for mentors and mentees. Faculty mentors do observations of the TAs while teaching and completing evaluations, according to the Handbook for Graduate Students. In addition to observing, faculty members serve as mentors to experienced TAs.

TAs are required to keep teaching journals. The TAs are not required to work on teaching portfolios, but they are encouraged to do so.

The department handbook covers a lot of materials such as degrees available and degree requirements. Additionally, it does cover some of the logistics of the teaching assistantships such as “Renewal of Appointments,” “Review of Procedure for G.A.s & T.A.s,” “The Faculty Mentor Plan,” and the required pre-service orientation.
Epsilon University

Epsilon University offers a MA in English, American and Anglophone literatures with the option of including writing tracks in Creative Writing or Composition and Rhetorical Studies. New graduate teaching assistants assist a seasoned faculty member their first term and independently teach one course their second term. They teach one or two courses per term their second year.

According to the university’s Graduate School Bulletin, “First-year graduate assistants are required to take” ENG XXX “as preparation for teaching composition classes.” The course description reads, “Study of rhetoric, composition theory, and composition pedagogy, including a practicum.” The fall 2005 seminar met twice each week for one and one quarter hour. The texts that will be used in the course are Anne E. Berthoff’s Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models, and Maxims for Writing Teachers, Paul Heilker and Peter Vandenberg’s Keywords in Composition Studies, Gary Tate, Amy Rupiper, and Kurt Schick’s A Guide to Composition Pedagogies, and Victor Villanueva’s Cross-Talk in Comp Theory: A Reader.

The required course above is a pre-service course. According to the departments website, Graduate Assistants provide crucial professional services in the Department of English, and their position carries a high level of responsibility and independence. Graduate Assistants are full time students, but their workload typically includes assisting a faculty member in a composition course during the first semester of study, and then teaching on composition course during the second semester of their first year.

During their second year of study at Epsilon University, graduate teaching assistants teach one or two composition courses per term.
No information about standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, assignments, or textbooks could be obtained from the available materials.

No information about required seminars, except for the pre-service seminar discussed above, could be obtained from the available materials.

No information about required observations could be obtained from the available materials.

No information about required mentoring could be obtained from the available materials.

No information about required reflection could be obtained from the available materials.

The Composition Program at Epsilon University is in the process of creating a program website. Although currently under construction, the page will offer links including Instructor Resources, Student Resources, Faculty Resources, University Contacts, and a link to the Director of the Composition Program. Currently, the link to the Program Handbook is available, although unfinished.

The Program Handbook offers a link to “Standard Course Offerings.” This link offers brief descriptions of each of the composition courses offered as first-year composition courses. The next link is “Placement.” It describes how students place into and out of the first-year composition courses offered at Epsilon University.

The third link in the Program Handbook is “Student Rights and Responsibilities.” The topics covered in the section are “Class Attendance,” “Can I Keep My Papers?” and “Students with Disabilities.” Another link from the Program Handbook is “Penalties for Plagiarism.” This section describes the process that takes place when plagiarism occurs.

The next link is “Teacher Responsibilities.” This is one of the more detailed links from the site. It covers “Specific practices and policies” including office hours, syllabi, teacher
absences, and teacher evaluation. The following link is “Evaluation of Student.” The link describes writing evaluation and gives an overview of the grading process including “Definitions of Letter Grades.” The link that follows, “Syllabus and Course Policies,” is empty.

The last four links are links to specific courses. Only one of these is currently operational. It contains a course philosophy and detailed description including course objectives and goals.

Zeta University

Zeta University offers both a MA and a PhD in English.

The department offers support in the form of teaching assistantships. According to the “Department of English Graduate Handbook 2004-2005,”

A significant proportion of financial aid offered by the English Department is in the form of the Graduate Assistantship (GA). Availability varies each year, as do the amounts for both the master’s and the doctoral stipends. These awards include University Graduate Scholarships (UGS) that provide for 100% remission of tuition and the General Fee.

Graduate Assistants are required to teach one section of English Composition per quarter, with three classes each week. Teaching, preparation, conferences, grading, and related activities require approximately twenty hours per week (8).

The teacher preparation program has several components. There is a required three-day pre-service orientation. According to the department website, “this three-day session is coordinated and implemented by the three English Composition administrators, the Director of Composition, the Associate Director of Composition, and the Assistant to the Directors.” The orientation highlights include:
An introduction by the English department chair, An overview of the scholarly field of Composition, A comprehensive tour, A panel session and lunch with returning TAs/instructors, Brief introductory sessions with the directors of the Writing Center and the Writing Program and the other Composition faculty, Exercises that demonstrate the Writing Process, A teaching folder that includes various [Zeta University] and English department information, A norming session using the summer placement tests, A comprehensive review of the [Zeta University] English Composition program, A brief history of [Zeta University] and a demographic review of the student population, an overview of planning strategies for the term and the first week, [and] A computer-based introduction to Blackboard.

According to this department website, “Orientation is not just for new Teaching Assistants. All new English Composition instructors participate in orientation.” This “Teaching Assistant Training Program is a seven month process that begins in September with Orientation and continues through both the Fall (when new assistants teach English Composition XXX) and Winter (English Composition XXX) quarters with a Teaching Practicum.” In addition to the practicum, new teaching assistants are also required to take a course in the teaching of college writing. According to the “English Department Graduate Handbook 2004-2005,” each of the two practicum courses carries two credits and the course in the teaching of college writing carries four credit hours (21).

From the information about the required seminars it appears, at least at first, that new TAs are required to follow a standardized syllabus, assignment sequence, and presumably, textbooks. According to the department website, new TAs “teaching tips” for upcoming lessons
and assignments in the first required seminar and in the second seminar, “The goal of the course is to help new instructors evolve to a point at which they are ready to create their own syllabi and work more independently.”

For Fall 2005 the required texts for the first practicum, the only of the three required courses being offered, are *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition* by Durst and *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition* edited by Duane Roen, Veronica Pantoja, Lauren Yena, Susan K. Miller, and Eric Waggoner. The course meets one time each week for one hour and fifty minutes. According to the department website, “This program is set up as an actual graduate course, and students receive two credit hours for participation. Because this is a graduate-level seminar, critical work, in addition to practical information, is a central focus.” Further, according to the department website the highlights of the course include:

- Students present two “teaching tips” which outline ways in which instructors can facilitate upcoming lessons and assignments.
- Students participate in a discussion about scholarly work and teaching issues through weekly online journals.
- **Students are observed** by either the Director or the Associate Director of Composition and complete a post-observation debriefing memo, which is discussed in a one-on-one meeting with the observer.
- Students complete a minimum of two observations: one observation of an experienced English instructor and another observation of one of their peers who is also a first-year instructor.
• Students “norm” sample student essays for each of the required Composition essays and the final portfolio.

• Students turn in, workshop, and discuss sample papers that they have evaluated in order to improve upon both the way they give feedback and how they evaluate.

• Students work closely with the Student Guide for English [XXX], which includes everything from the syllabus to sample student essays from previous years.

The second of the required practicum is typically taught during winter term. According to the department website, “This class builds on the previous one and is set up in a similar fashion. The goal of the course is to help new instructors evolve to a point at which they are ready to create their own syllabi and work more independently. The major focus in the class is the teaching portfolio which students put together as a final project.” The website indicates that the highlights of the course include:

• Students write “reading previews” which summarize and discuss the articles from the required English [XXX] texts.

• Students are observed a second time by either the Director or Associate Director of Composition, whomever did not observed the student the previous quarter, and complete a post-observation debriefing memo which is discussed in a one-on-one meeting with the observer. After this observation, students are also presented with an evaluation letter that details their performance in the classroom.

• Students complete additional observations of faculty and colleagues.
• Students compile a comprehensive teaching portfolio, which is designed to help them if they decide to continue teaching after completion of their degrees. Among other things, portfolios include a teaching philosophy, sample evaluations, sample student papers, and observation memos.

• As in [the first practicum], students work closely with the Student Guide for English [XXX].

The other required course appears to be offered on a rotating basis, as it is not currently being offered and appears only to be offered during fall terms. According to the department website, “This class is taught by one of the members of the English Composition faculty and meets for three hours each week. The focus of this class is on the scholarly and critical aspects of composition theory.” According to the department website, highlights include:

  • A collaborative research paper in which students deal with a contemporary issue in composition theory.

  • A comprehensive final exam covering a range of research and professional writing within the field.

  • Reading and discussion of a number of historical and contemporary composition texts.

  • Weekly reading responses that summarize and engage issues addressed in these texts.

  • A small-group presentation that enacts one of the several pedagogical theories.

According to the department website, new TAs are observed at least twice during their first year, once by the Director of Composition and once by the Assistant Director of Composition. The department website makes a point of indicating that these are formal
observations that include “a post-observation debriefing memo, which is discussed in a one-on-one meeting with the observer.” Additionally, new TAs observe each other as well as experienced TAs.

A mentoring component is present. Although, there is not clear information available concerning what it involves. According to the department website, “All teaching assistants continue to work with a faculty supervisor.”

Reflection seems to be a fairly large part of the curriculum. According to the department website, new TAs are required to reflect and take part in discussion about teaching issues online each week. And, during the second seminar, they complete a “comprehensive teaching portfolio, which includes a teaching philosophy.

There is continued support or “Post Training Support” according to the department website. The site states,

After students complete the teacher training program, many instructors continue teaching English Composition classes. During the spring quarter, most new instructors teach [XXX]. After their first year, there are a variety of opportunities available to experienced instructors. All teaching assistants continue to work with a faculty supervisor and attend departmental policy and norming meetings. All instructors are also required to have students complete instructor evaluations, which are reviewed by departmental administrators.

Theta University

Theta University offers a MA in ESL and Literature as well as a Certificate in the Teaching of Writing. According to Theta University’s Graduate School website, “The graduate assistantship is designed to provide support for full-time graduate study. The assistantship
provides an opportunity for a graduate student to serve in a professional role and to establish a professional relationship with faculty and administrators.” It is expected that graduate students who have been awarded Graduate Teaching Assistantships:

participate directly in the teaching of a course or be assigned specific teaching support or related activities. It is expected that the assistantship will be a learning experience that facilitates completion of degree requirements and helps the student prepare for a professional career...The Graduate Teaching Assistantship provides a stipend and a fee waiver for up to 12 hours of graduate level coursework...In return the student is required to work for approximately 20 hours per week.

According to the Theta University’s English Department website, “Teaching assistantships are available, which consist of paid tuition and an academic year’s stipend of $8,200. Assistantships are renewable for a second year.”

No information about a required pre-service seminar was available.

No information about required use of standardized syllabi, assignments sequence, or textbooks was available. However, the goal of the required seminar course to have students make a “revised” syllabus indicates that some type of required syllabi, assignments, and/or textbooks is present during the first teaching term.

Theta University has a required seminar course. The department’s website states, “Graduate students who are accepted into the program as Teaching Assistants are further required to take ENG [XXX]; Seminar in English Instruction; Composition.” The seminar met twice each week for one hour and fifteen minutes each meeting during Fall 2005. The first-year writing programs website states,
This course travels through three moments. We begin with an inquiry into the theoretical underpinnings of the teaching of writing, extending those theories to consider our own classroom practices. We then turn to a consideration of key pedagogical strategies, working collaboratively to examine and model best teaching practices. Our third turn is to current scholarship in the field, where students take up a critical debate, research it, and enter into it. The class culminates in the production of a statement of teaching philosophy, a revised syllabus, and a paper which argues for how the syllabus enacts the philosophy.

According to the current course descriptions for Fall 2005 courses,

James Zebroski argues that “Theory is practice, and practice is always theoretical.” This course will focus on this connection. Using keywords from the field of writing studies, we will look at how theory and practice is interconnected in areas such as process theory, the classroom environment, curriculum development, and methods of assessing and responding to student writing. Students will be asked to read literature and research studies in the field of composition, participate in both in-class and online discussions of the readings, and develop a pedagogical assignment that could be used in the classroom. The class culminates in the production of a statement of teaching philosophy, a revised syllabus, and a paper which argues for how the syllabus enacts the philosophy.

The required texts for the course are *Strategies for Teaching First-Year Composition* edited by Roen, Pantoja, Yena, Miller, and Waggoner and *Teaching Composition: Background Readings*, 2nd edition, by T. R. Johnson.

No information about required observations was available.
No information about required mentoring was available.

There appears to be some required reflection. According to the department’s website and the course description of the required seminar, new TAs create a teaching philosophy at the end of the seminar course.

There is very little information available on the department’s web page. There is some information, such as course descriptions on the first-year writing program’s web page and there is a link “For Faculty.” However, as such, it had a required password and was not available for public viewing.

Kappa University

Kappa University offers a MA in English. Graduate students enrolled in the MA program are eligible to teach in the first-year writing program. According to Kappa University’s Department of English website,

Graduate assistantships are offered to qualified students in the M.A. program. The assistantship is essentially an apprenticeship in teaching, and assistants gain experience in a traditional freshman composition curriculum using the writing process for basic expository, argumentative, and research essays. Competent assistants making satisfactory progress toward the degree normally renew their assistantships for a second year.

No information concerning a required pre-service orientation was available.

No information about required use of standardized syllabi, assignments sequence, or textbooks was available.

Although there is not a lot of information available about what type of preparation is offered to graduate students teaching composition, the department’s website indicates that
“Graduate assistants are required to take a one-credit course, ENG [XXX], Teaching of College English, during each year of their assistantship.” The required course met once per week for one hour and fifteen minutes for the Fall 2005 term. Description for the course is as follows, “Discussion, instruction, and practice in the methods of teaching composition and literature. Required of and open only to graduate assistant” according to the departments website. The required texts for the course are Wilhoit’s The Allyn and Bacon Teaching Assistant’s Handbook: A Guide for Graduate Instructors of Writing and Literature published in 2003 and Concepts in Composition: Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing by Clark.

No information concerning required observations was available.

No information concerning required mentoring was available.

No information concerning required reflection was available.

Lambda University

Lambda University offers a MA in English as well as certificate programs in Technical and Professional Writing, and TESOL and TEFL. The departmental website describes Teaching Assistantship:

As many as twenty-eight teaching assistantships in English are awarded annually to superior students judged capable of effective teaching. Assistants are assigned teaching duties -- three or four sections of freshman English (ENG [XXX] and [XXX]) during the three quarters of the regular academic year...Teaching assistants receive a monthly stipend...[and] receive full tuition waivers for fall, winter, and spring.

No information concerning a required pre-service orientation was available.
No information concerning required use of standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, assignment sequences, or textbooks was available.

According to the website, “As part of their regular course load, graduate teaching assistants are required to take ENG [XXX-1] and [XXX-2], a seminar on teaching college composition, during the fall and winter quarters of their first year.”

ENG [XXX-1] met twice each week for one hour and twenty-five minutes. According to the department website, the course is an “Introduction to the theory and pedagogy of college-level writing courses. Requires concurrent teaching or tutorial experience. Required of all first-year English teaching assistants.” The course carries four credits. The required texts for the course were *A Writer Teaches Writing*, 2nd revised edition, by Donald M. Murray and *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear* by Ralph Keyes.

The second of the required seminars is ENG [XXX-2]. The departmental website describes this course as “Introduction to the theory and pedagogy of college-level writing courses. Requires concurrent teaching or tutorial experience. Required of all first-year English teaching assistants.” The description is exactly the same, but the course carries only two credits and lists ENG [XXX-1] as a prerequisite.

No information concerning required observations was available.

No information concerning required mentoring was available.

No information concerning required reflection was available.

Nu University

Nu University offers a MA in English as well as Certificates in Professional Writing and Editing and TESOL.

No information concerning a required pre-service orientation was available.
No information concerning required use of standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, assignment sequences, or textbooks was available.

According to the departmental website, “graduate Teaching Assistants must take English [XXX].” The Graduate Catalog of Nu University gives the following course description, “Problems, issues, practices, and research which affect the teaching of writing at various grade levels and in college course.” The course met twice a week for one hour and fifteen minutes. The required books for the course are *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* by Peter Elbow, *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*, 4th edition, by Edward P. J. Corbett, Myers, and Tate, and *Cross-Talk in Comp-Theory: A Reader*, 2nd edition, edited by Villanueva.

No information concerning required observations was available.

No information concerning required mentoring was available.

No information concerning required reflection was available.

Sigma University

Sigma University offers a MA, a MFA, and a PhD in English. The 2004-2005 “Instructors’ Handbook” for the first-year writing program at Sigma University states, [ABC] provides training and mentoring for incoming graduate assistants and instructors in order to prepare them to teach in the composition program at [Sigma University]. The training and mentoring program is designed to ensure a positive learning environment for students and an equally positive teaching environment for instructors. The program has three components: comprehensive orientation, thorough in-service training, and extended mentoring (14).

The manual then breaks down each these components.
New graduate teaching assistants and instructors attend a pre-service orientation for the [ABC] program at the same time they attend one through the Graduate College at Sigma University (14). The orientation is held during the week or so prior to the start of school.

New graduate students teach from a common textbook and use a common assignment sequence. They are provided with sample syllabi and day-to-day plans.

Sigma University has a required practicum seminar. All new graduate teaching assistants and instructors continue preparation via a workshop course, required portion of both fall and spring terms of the first year (14).

Sigma University requires ENG [XXX]: Composition Instructor’s Workshop of all new graduate teaching assistants and new instructors. The course description for the department website reads, “Classroom experience, observation visitation, preparation of teaching materials evaluation, reading in teaching of writing. In-service preparation require of graduate assistants and teaching fellows prior to and concurrent with teaching ENG [AAA], ENG [BBB], and ENG [CCC]. Continues through two consecutive semesters.” The required materials for the courses are the texts that will be used in the classrooms as well as instructor’s manuals for them, according to the 2004-2005 syllabus for ENG [XXX]. Further, the course required a course-pack as well as seven instructor manuals that were produced in-house.

Very little information concerning required observations was available. The course description above mentions observation visitations, but gives no specifics.

According to the “Instructor’s Handbook,” the mentoring component requires “one-on-one conferences with a member of the [ABC] staff. During weekly conferences, instructors and their mentors discuss assignment plans, evaluation, and interaction with students, as well as any other student-instructor matters that may arise. Individual conferences are held throughout both the fall and spring semesters to support instructors...” (15).

No information concerning required reflection was available.

The 2004-2005 “Instructors’ Handbook” for the first-year writing program at Sigma University begins with a letter of explanation and welcome from the program’s director and is followed by the program’s learning outcomes and lists of important dates for the terms. The table of contents outlines eight sections and three appendices. The sections are “Overview of the [ABC] Program,” “Policies and Requirements for Instructors,” “Policies Concerning Students,” “The Placement Process,” “[ABC] Courses,” “Guidelines for Evaluating Student Writing: A
Holistic/Rubric Approach,” “Grading System/Portfolio Assessment,” “The Writers Lab,” and the “Appendices.”

The 2004-2005 “Guide to Portfolio Assessment” manual from the first-year writing program at Sigma University begins with a listing of important dates for the academic year, followed by the table of contents. The table of contents indicates that the manual includes eleven sections including “Introduction to Portfolio Assessment,” “Rationale for Portfolio Assessment,” “Introducing the Portfolio to Students,” “Portfolios as Pedagogical Tools,” “Determination of Eligibility,” “Final Preparation of the Portfolio,” “Completion of Results Sheets,” “Submitting Portfolios for Assessment,” “The Portfolio Evaluation Process,” “Returning Portfolios and Notifying Students of Results,” and “Appeal Procedures.”

The 2004-2005 “[AAA]/[BBB] Sample Assignment Manual” for the first-year writing program at Sigma University offers instructors and graduate students a supply of “tried and true” assignments that correlate to the writing guide used in the courses. The manual contains twelve sections and appendices including “[AAA] & [BBB] Assignment Guidelines,” “Creating Effective Assignment Sheets,” “The ‘Remembering Events’ Essay,” “The ‘Writing Profiles’ Essay,” “The ‘Arguing a Position/Making Arguments’ (without sources) Essay,” “The ‘Arguing a Position/Making Arguments’ (with sources) Essay,” “The ‘Explaining a Concept’ Essay,” “The ‘Speculating About Causes’ Essay,” “The ‘Proposing Solutions’ Essay,” “The ‘Justifying an Evaluation’ Essay,” “The ‘Observing’ Essay,” and “The ‘Responding to Arguments’ Essay.” The first two sections offer descriptions of the program requirements and what is required on an “Assignment Sheet” for each essay. The sections on each essay “type” contain descriptions of the essays as well as example assignment sheets that have been created for each essay “type.”
Following are the appendices, which include general handouts and “support materials” for the different essays.

The 2004-2005 “[AAA]/[BBB] Sample Evaluated Essays Manual” is designed for “instructors, novice and veteran...” (2). The guide offers sample essays for the assignments above that have been evaluated and contain teacher commentary. There are a variety of essays for each assignment, including at least one from each grade category.

Additionally, there is an “Assignment Manual” and a “Sample Evaluated Essays Manual” for the other required English course at the university. They follow the same format as the two manuals described above.

**Tau University**

Tau University offers both a MA and a PhD in English. Tau University did not return the completed survey as requested.

Although unable to locate any specifics, there is a pre-service preparation of some sort as the website states, “In their first year, new instructors must teach the required reader and rhetoric used during orientation.” This tells us that there is a pre-service orientation, but it does not tell us the duration or extent of this preparation. It also tells us that graduate students do not pick their own textbooks their first year.

This also explains that there is a required rhetoric and reader. It would stand to reason then, that the new TAs are required to follow at least a common assignment sequence.

According to the available information, the department requires that graduate student teaching assistants take two required seminars, Teaching College English I and Teaching College English II. According to the departmental website, for the 2004-2005 academic year, Teaching
College English I met twice each week for one hour and fifty minutes. The course description reads,

This course is required of all entering graduate students who will be teaching. It is designed to accomplish several goals: 1) to introduce graduate students to the theories and practices related to the first-year writing program at [Tau University]; 2) to support writing teachers as they learn to teach composition; 3) to allow teachers to develop their own theoretically-based strategies for teaching writing; 4) to engage students in the ongoing issues animating the conversation in composition studies; 5) to provide an overview of the theory and research shaping practices in composition teaching.

The second required course met once each week for two hours and fifty minutes. The course description reads,

This course continues the theoretical, pedagogical, rhetorical, and practical training that English teaching associates begin in [XXX] in Fall 2004. In addition to providing further training, pedagogical assistance, examinations of theory and pedagogy, the course also introduces the TAs to teaching writing courses other than [XXX], and offers one-on-one observations, evaluations, and assistance in improving their teaching.

The course description for Teaching College English II tells readers that the course “offers one-on-one observations.” Therefore, it appears that there is some sort of required observation component.

No information concerning required mentoring was available.

No information concerning required reflection was available.
PSI University

PSI University offers a MA and MFA in English as well as Certificates in Linguistic Studies, Professional Communication, Teaching English as a Second Language, and Graduate Certificates in Composition and Literature.

According to the “Graduate Assistantship Handbook” by the PSI University Graduate School,

The Graduate School sponsors an annual graduate assistant orientation. Many departments offer orientation programs of their own for students entering their programs; these are designed to provide specific information about programs and graduate assistantship assignments. All graduate assistants must be available to attend any orientations required by the college, department/school, Graduate School, Institute for Teaching and Learning, or International Programs.

Orientations are generally held two weeks prior to the start of fall term.

The graduate assistants are required to attend orientation through the graduate school and the course description mentions “orientation and weekly analysis.” Thus, one may assume that there is an orientation for graduate teaching assistants in the Department of English at PSI University; however, there is no concrete way to determine the length or depth from this information.

No information about required use of standardized syllabi, assignments, textbooks, or day-to-day plans was available.

According to the PSI University website, English XXX, Teaching College Composition, a three credit practicum, is required of graduate teaching assistants. The class met once each week for two hours and thirty minutes. The course description reads, “Prerequisite: teaching assistantship. Orientation and weekly analysis of teaching rationale and practice, limited to
teaching assistants in the Department of English.” The books required for the course are *In Our Own Voice: Graduate Students Teach Writing* by Tina Lavonne Good and Leanne B. Warshauer, *The Writing Teacher’s Sourcebook*, 4th edition, by Corbett, Myers, and Tate, and *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* by Ira Shor.

No information about required observations was available.

No information about required mentoring was available.

No information about required reflection was available.

Omega University

Omega University offers a MA in English as well as a Certificate in Professional Writing.

Omega University was one of the few universities to respond to the survey request. The respondent indicated that there is no pre-service orientation for graduate teaching assistants. However, in a very real sense there is. There is no pre-service orientation for students their first year of graduate school, but students do not teach their first year. They assist faculty and work in the writing center. Additionally, during this first year, graduate assistants are required to take a course in composition theory and a teaching workshop course. Essentially, these graduate students have an academic year long pre-service preparation during which time they take course work as well as spend time tutoring composition students one-on-one.

According to survey response, new TAs choose their own textbooks and assignments. They are given sample assignments, syllabi, and day-to-day plans, but they are not required to use them.

The ENG [XXX], Composition Theory, course description reads, “Advanced study in expository writing: writing processes, reading and writing, rhetoric, evaluation, and pedagogy. Offered fall term. Required of all beginning teaching assistants, except for those who took ENG
Composition Theory as undergraduates.” The course met twice each week for one hour and fifty minutes. The texts that are required for the course are (Re) Visioning Composition Textbooks: Conflicts of Culture, Ideology and Pedagogy by Xin Liu Gale and Fredric C. Gale, Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985 by James A. Berlin, and Cross-Talk in Comp-Theory: A Reader, 2nd edition, edited by Villanueva.

The ENG [XXX-2], Workshop in Teaching, course description reads, “Relation of composition theory to the practice of tutoring and teaching. Required for teaching assistants, except for those who took ENG [UUU] Writing Center Practicum as undergraduates. Meets once a week during fall and spring semesters.” According to the Registrar, the course met once each week for one hour. The required texts for the class are Preparing to Teach Writing: Research, Theory, and Practice, second edition, by James D. Williams, and The St. Martin’s Guide to Teaching Writing, fifth edition, by Cheryl Glenn, Melissa A. Goldthwaite, and Robert Connors.

According to survey responses, graduate teaching assistants are observed in the classroom by a combination of faculty members, staff members, and experienced TAs.

According to survey responses, graduate teaching assistants are paired with mentors in the classroom. These mentors are a combination of faculty and staff members, as well as experienced TAs.

No information about required reflection was available.
CHAPTER FOUR: COMPONENTS OF PREPARATION

Chapter Three presented information available from websites and in-house materials about the FYC preparation programs of fourteen Ohio universities. Chapter Four analyzes and discusses this information in light of TA preparation components associated with my study’s research questions (see pp. 28-29). Each section in this chapter draws on available research to give an introduction to a specific component of graduate assistant preparation: the balance of theory and practice, the use of pre-service workshops, observations, mentoring, graduate seminars, and reflection. Each section then comments on evidence of that component evident in materials already presented in Chapter Three and, finally, concludes by considering the study results in light of available literature. Table 2 (p. 85) summarizes my overall judgment about the presences of each component in the graduate assistant preparation programs of the fourteen Ohio universities.

Theory and Practice

The balance between theory and practice in the preparation of graduate teaching assistants has been discussed for many years. It is a call that has been made over and over again. In “Training the Workforce: Overview of GTA Education Curricula,” Latterell writes:

GTA education curricula should strike a balance between providing GTAs with practical skills and advice and helping them understand the writing theory and pedagogy grounding those skills. It would be a serious mistake to completely discontinue providing first-year GTAs with concrete practical advice for teaching writing. What we need, then, is to find ways to balance the “whats” with “whys”: We need to contextualize the advice by providing GTAs with the theoretical frameworks shaping them. (152)
WPAs and programs must find a way to explain why they are doing something so that they can completely understand what it is they are doing. This will aid them in the classroom and while devising assignments, and day-to-day plans.

It is significant to note that only two of the fourteen universities offer practicum courses separate from the composition theory and composition pedagogy course. Twelve of the schools combine the practicum and composition theory and pedagogy into one seminar. This can become problematic because it is easy to simply give over to the practicum because many items that come up are urgent to some new TAs. However, the texts selected for all of the courses appear to indicate a trend in which the WPAs are acknowledging the need to introduce new TAs to composition studies by way of the theory and pedagogy presented in the texts. Unfortunately, the pilot study did not provide data to indicate whether or not these texts were used or used effectively.

It is difficult to strike a balance between theory and practice because often WPAs and programs are answering the calls of what the new TAs want to learn. Much like FYC writers, new TAs want a formula. If Sally writes her composition by doing x, y, and z, then she will get an A. If Susan teaches FYC by doing x, y, and z, she will be a good teacher and not take too much time away from the courses she is taking to complete her MA. According to Bridges article, “The Basics and the New Teacher in the College Composition Class,”

All too often, teachers, whether new or seasoned professionals, ask for gimmicks that work—surefire writing assignments, fail-safe ways to ensure their success in the writing class from one day to the next. They ask for a bag of tricks. But when a trick fails, or when a particular situation calls for a trick the bag doesn’t hold, those teachers may be at a loss because they are unable to analyze and remedy the
problem. With grounding in writing theory and research, instructors would be better prepared to solve the problems they are likely to confront in their classes.

(15)

When a program offers a pre-service orientation that is less than a week and/or a combined pedagogy/theory seminar that meets twice a week for an hour or an hour and a half, often there are more practical issues on the minds of new TAs. “What do I do on the first day of class?” “How do I deal with a disruptive student?” “How do I comment on a paper that seems like a good paper?” These questions cannot be put off for long. In a combined pedagogy/theory seminar, time can quickly slip away by answering the pressing practical questions of a new TA.

One of the problems in trying to achieve a balance of theory and practice in a preparation program is local needs. WPAs are serving the FYC students first. The needs of those students need to be put first. However, that can lead to an imbalanced program. In “The Professionalization of TA Development Programs: A Heuristic for Curriculum Design,” Yancey writes,

Instead of working from a common understanding, we tend, I suspect, to think principally in terms of local needs. Local needs will of course continue to focus our attention; context, as we know, is critical. But practice suggests that when local needs determine rather than influence a TA development program, it’s all too easy to find that one’s program is rich with technique but absent theory, or sensitive to experience but unable to reframe it. (63-64)

Programs that combine pedagogy and theory into one seminar need to pay careful attention not to forget to work on keeping the seminar, and the preparation program, balanced. The textbooks that made up the required reading of most of these seminars are grounded in theory. It would
then appear that the attempt to maintain a balance is there. However, because it is not clear how
the textbooks were used in the classrooms, we cannot determine whether or not a balance is
achieved.

Standardized Syllabi and Day-to-Day Plans

Some instructors, new and old, enjoy having standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans.
These apparatus eliminate a certain amount of planning for the instructors and can calm the
nerves of a first-time teacher. Shane Borrowman agrees; in his 1998 CCCC’s presentation,
“First-Year Training for First-Year Composition: TA Training from the Inside,” Borrowman
discusses the fact that although he was resistant at first to the standardized syllabus and the plan
of day-to-day activities, it made him a better teacher (2). However, this does not always happen.
There are TAs who continue to resent being “forced” to use standardized syllabi. Others use
these apparatus as crutches, which could possibly hinder their growth and exploration.

One of the problems with standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans is that they can pose
an ethical dilemma for those new instructors who had no hand in preparing them. In her
presentation at CCCC in 1995, Risa P. Gorelick discussed the ethics behind forcing instructors to
stick to a standardized syllabus. The results of a qualitative study she performed indicate that
many of the TAs that participated felt that it was unethical to require them to stick to a
standardized syllabus and that doing so caused stress in the classroom (6). A standardized
syllabus can be considered unethical because the instructors are not the ones to develop the
assignments and their own morals, values and political stances may be in opposition to those of
the individuals who did. Subsequently, there can be increased stress in the classroom for the
instructor as well as the students.
Beyond the questionable ethics that may be involved in standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans, there is an issue as to whether or not individuals are being fully prepared if they are dependent on them. If standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans for the entire term are distributed each term, instructors, including new teachers like graduate student teaching assistants, will not be forced to develop their own materials. Preparing syllabi and the day-to-day plans that support it are a crucial part of instructor preparation; if new instructors cannot or choose not to develop their own materials, they will be continually dependent on such materials and at some point they may not be there. These apparatus and preparations give instructors the how, but it is up to them to reflect and understand the why, according to Borrowman (2).

However, this does not always happen. When left to the new graduate teaching assistant, it may at times be very difficult to figure out the why of an assignment or activity as many of them do not have a theoretical or pedagogical background that would aid in such a knowledge transformation.

Sean P. Murphy discusses that many individuals graduate without having a full teaching experience in his article, “Improving Two-Year College Teacher Preparation: Graduate Student Internships” (262). Many institutions, which provide these approaches to preparation and development, do not require strict adherence to the apparatus. However, many new instructors are not confident in their abilities and they therefore stick closely to them, or are not aware that strict adherence is not required. Developing and implementing a syllabus and day-to-day plans are a crucial aspect of growing as an instructor. If TAs are continually given standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans to teach from, they are missing out on that experience.

Research and survey results presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85) provide at least partial data about syllabi, daily plans, and textbooks of ten of the fourteen
Ohio universities. Seven of the schools required new TAs to follow a standard assignment sequence. Some schools allowed the TAs to construct their own prompts from examples and some required TAs to use standard prompts. Eight of the schools provided new TAs with sample syllabi to use as guidelines or templates. None of the schools required students to follow a standard syllabus without modification. Eight schools provided new TAs with day-to-day plans. Beta University requires new TAs to follow these plans for the first two weeks of class and then provides samples for the rest of the term. At least five of the schools require new TAs to use a common textbook.

At least fifty percent of the fourteen Ohio universities represented in the study require new instructors to follow a standardized assignment sequence. Using a standard assignment sequence allows for greater congruity among the sometimes hundreds of classes taught each term. As has been mentioned several times throughout the dissertation, WPAs have a responsibility to the undergraduate students in the FYC classrooms.

More than half of the universities in the study provide sample syllabi and day-to-day plans for the new instructors. It is desirable to provide samples that cover part of the term. Receiving partial syllabi and day-to-day plans calms the nerves of new instructors and graduate teaching assistants, but they are also encouraged to begin developing materials of their own. Toni Cowan, Joyce Traver and Thomas H. Riddle’s article, “A TA Perspective of a Community College Faculty-in-Training Pilot Program,” supports the idea of distributing only a partial syllabi and day-to-day plans. The three authors discovered that they could “plan a basic overview of the semester based on the syllabus and the requirements for the course, and we knew we could plan the first day of classes, which would be an introduction of the course and a review of the syllabus. Beyond that planning, we had many questions” (252). Although Cowan, Traver and
Riddle were given some sample lesson plans for the first few weeks, they soon discovered that
they no longer needed them (252). Being provided with apparatus and the syllabus stilled some
of their fears and enabled them to understand what teaching first-year composition required, at
least at the two-year college they were involved with. After a few weeks, they were able to begin
planning their own assignments and activities. By taking a risk and planning their own
assignments and day-to-day activities, new graduate teaching assistants grow as teachers and
with each failure they learn and with each success they gain more confidence.

Although there are instructors, new and old, that enjoy the crutch of having full-term
standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans distributed each term, it can cause a lot of harm to the
development of instructors. Standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans calm nerves; however,
they are ethically questionable, instructors become dependent upon them, and they fail to teach
the “why.” By giving instructors only partial syllabi and day-to-day plans, WPAs are calming the
nerves of the new teacher, but are also encouraging growth and an exploration of the “why.” If
samples of complete terms are going to be given out, perhaps they could be given for only the
first year. This would give new instructors the help they need or desire, but force them to
abandon the crutch early in their careers.

Pre-Service Orientations

Orientation sessions or pre-service seminars seem to vary widely in both what they cover
and the length of the pre-service preparation. In “A Selection of Strategies for Training Teaching
Assistants,” Ward and Perry suggest that prior to teaching, new TAs should:

- Receive course assignment(s), textbook(s), a sample departmental course
  syllabus, and a TA handbook (with both instructional and departmental
information necessary for effective teaching) at least one month prior to
the first day of classes.

- Attend an intensive TA training course…
- Receive or have access to a first-year composition resource folder or
  bound packet that contains materials from experienced TAs. This material
  should contain sample exercises, class assignments, essay assignments
  sheets, quizzes on required readings, library exercise sheets, descriptions
  of successful activities, and other materials compiled from former first-
  year writing instructors (124).

When walking into a classroom full of FYC students, new TAs, who are often not much older
than the students themselves, need to have at least a little confidence if they are not to be
swallowed by the class. Being prepared to walk into that room would seem to be the most crucial
aspect because it would ease a bit of the tension for the TA and would allow them to have a
concept of what is to follow. However, not all universities and programs offer pre-service
preparation and those that do offer it for times varying from one day to two terms.

According to information presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85),
in some cases universities require new graduate teaching assistants to take courses the year, or
term prior to teaching a first-year writing course. However, it is often the case that these graduate
teaching assistants are required only to attend a pre-service orientation during the few days or
few weeks prior to beginning to teach. Of the fourteen Ohio universities, information was
obtained about the pre-service orientations of ten. All ten schools required some work prior to
going into a classroom. One university doesn’t allow students to teach until their second year and
requires two seminars in the teaching of writing the first year. Two schools require students to
take coursework preparing them to teach for one term prior to teaching. One school offers a three-week orientation. One university offers a two-week orientation. One school offers a one-week orientation. One university offers a three-day orientation. Three schools offer orientations, but the length did not become clear in the research.

Pre-service preparation for new TAs is something that universities cannot do without. Although the preparation varies from one day to a full academic year, at least ten of the schools agree that it is a best practice to have an orientation or a seminar, or two, prior to walking into a classroom. According to William F. Irmscher’s “TA Training: A Period of Discovery,”

“Anxious” is the exact word to describe first-year TAs as they approach teaching, even if they have had experience teaching things other than writing. We are asking them to do something they know very little about. Most of them are able and experienced writers, although they may have had no formal writing instruction at the college level, many having been exempted from the college writing requirement. They draw on their intuitive resources for writing and on their critical judgment derived from reading, but they have seldom had to verbalize how they do what they do or why they respond to writing as they do.

The first thing a director must do is assure TAs that they know much more about writing than they think they do. Orientation should bring to a level of conscious awareness many of the assumptions on which they operate. It should also provide a coherent scheme for thinking about teaching. (28-29)

New TAs are anxious, as Irmscher points out. Some may hold undergraduate degrees in a variety of fields that do not relate to English or the teaching of writing. They need a pre-service preparation component to prepare them for the journey they are preparing to take. There is
practical information, like what to do on the first day or how to break the ice, which needs to be discussed. However, TAs also need to know what they are going to be teaching. A brief overview of the entire term is very helpful. A process-oriented program needs to discuss process before the TA makes a syllabus or walks into the classroom. As Irmscher points out above, some new TAs may have been exempt from FYC and may not have ever discussed these issues. Although they all have process, they may not understand how to teach process or what it is. Preparation allows them to think these things over so they can walk into the classroom as an expert despite some remaining feelings of inadequacy. Pre-service preparation allows new TAs to have access to information about the local program as well as touch on theories of writing instruction, and it also allows them to have their questions answered before they walk into the classroom, which calms their nerves and makes them less anxious.

Stancliff and Goggin present a “dizzying array of goals for orientation” (17). Arizona State University’s pre-service orientation meets for three-weeks to equal the same contact hours as a semester’s worth of preparation (12). The orientation goals are

- to introduce you to our writing programs (missions, goals, and policies)
- to introduce you to available services for faculty and students
- to introduce you to professional issues that surround being a college teacher
- to introduce you to classroom management and record keeping
- to provide an overview of rhetorically- and culturally-based writing instruction
- to familiarize you with the 101 textbook (George and Trimbur’s Reading Culture)
• to help you begin to develop and understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in teaching writing
• to help you develop four units that will lead to your developing your own syllabus for the ENG 101 course
• to help you reflect on your own goals for the TA orientation and for teaching writing
• to establish a community of teachers who will support one another (TA Orientation Description) (17)

Is this type of preparation something any new TA or instructor can do without? At least one of the Ohio universities in the study required pre-service preparation from only those who did not have “substantial” teaching experience. What is substantial experience? Who determines how many courses or years is enough? Perhaps investigating a comprehensive teaching portfolio would be the best way to determine if an individual has had substantial experience. On the other hand, because every writing program is different and has its own idiosyncrasies it would be desirable to have all new TAs and instructors attend the pre-service orientation to learn about a particular school and a particular program. Pre-service programs need to be provided and need to be more than a day or three days. These programs should be of sufficient length to complete the items Stancliff and Goggin indicate in their own pre-service course description. By completing an intensive three-week pre-service orientation, students are receiving a term’s worth of training prior to stepping foot in a classroom for the first time, or at least the first time at that particular university. Of the ten schools about which pre-service information was obtained, at least six provide orientations that last approximately one full week. Four schools provide pre-service components that last at least the equivalent of a term in contact hours. This demonstrates that
while not every school is realizing the benefits of in-depth pre-service, many have realized that it is a best practice to prepare new instructors prior to sending them into the classroom.

Seminars

Seminars are often a big part of the initiation of new graduate teaching assistants. Many graduate programs require that graduate students take an additional class if they will be teaching at the university. Many times, these classes cover the pedagogy and theory of the department. In his presentation at CCCC in 1986, Michael Hennessy describes the preparation that many graduate teaching assistants receive as “often ‘survival training,’ basic preparation to enter the war zone of freshman composition armed with a B. A. in English, a few informal ‘training sessions,’ and a great deal of enthusiasm and good will” (2). The type of preparation described here is still happening today, although thankfully not quite as often. Spooner and O’Donnell briefly discuss the preparation classes of Douglas Trank in their article “ERIC/RCS Report: From Cheap Labor to Junior Colleague: Training TAs in Composition.” Douglas Trank’s “professional development” program involves a four-day seminar before classes begin and a weekly seminar during the term (123). These classes can be used to reemphasize the how or they can go into the why of particular pedagogical practices. Spooner and O’Donnell also briefly discuss the work of T. Haring-Smith in their article. Haring-Smith has TAs read composition theory and the class discusses the merits of these theories and receives demonstrations on how they can be used in the classroom (125). This type of preparation class seems to be the most effective because it gives the new graduate teaching assistants the why as well as the how. Hennessy agrees stating “to have a more lasting value is a foundation in the growing body of theoretical knowledge that underpins our discipline” (5). It also forces them to reflect upon their
own developing pedagogies and practices. It is this reflection that allows them to become effective teachers of composition.

Some of the seminars are required before teaching begins, as presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85). However, most of the seminars are taken at the same time new TAs are teaching their first courses for the university. Of the fourteen schools, three universities require separate practicum and composition theory/pedagogy courses. The other eleven universities require a seminar that is in some sense both a practicum and an introduction to composition theory and composition pedagogy. Unfortunately, as the descriptions of these seminars indicate above and in Chapter Three, these combination courses more often than not lean heavily towards practicum.

In the 2004 *Responses to Reform: Composition and Professionalization of Teaching* by Margaret J. Marshall, she writes, “teaching seminars are now quite common in English departments that employ graduate students to teaching the introductory composition courses, yet those courses are neither equally rigorous nor sufficient to alter practices or conceptions that devalue teaching in those departments” (89). As seen in the descriptions of the courses about and the texts they require, or don’t require, each has a different agenda. Marshall continues,

The difficulty, of course, is that a single seminar cannot begin to provide the intellectual foundation necessary for making fully informed curricular or pedagogical choices required of those who would purport to be “professional” teachers at the university level. Most of these pedagogical seminars are required as a condition of employment rather than as a part of the degree requirements, and this condition further compounds their lack of status. (89)
Often the seminar courses are concerned more with practicum issues than composition theory and pedagogy. Marshall writes, “many of these institutionalized efforts to prepare teachers take a decidedly practical perspective, emphasizing not the intellectual issues underlying teaching but tips of classroom management, bureaucratic record keeping, or program conformity” (126). There is no getting away from the practical issues that must be dealt with. Especially when dealing with new TAs who are in the process of teaching the first time, practical issues are going to be a bulk of seminar even if the instructor intends otherwise. Many practical issues need immediate attention. From course descriptions and textbook selections, it appears that the twelve universities using a combined pedagogy/theory seminar are thinking about theory.

Stancliff and Goggin provide the goals of the seminar course required of new TAs teaching FYC at Arizona State University:

- to engage a broad range of pedagogical positions in composition studies and thus give you a strong introduction to the field
- to help you establish reflective teaching practices within the dynamic and contentious critical conversation
- to help you develop an understanding of the relationship between theory and practice and between theory and pedagogical choices
- to extend and maintain a community of teachers and scholars who will support one another
- to professionalize you as academics in general and as teachers of writing specifically, and
- to provide a space for collaborative problem solving as you go through your first semester of teaching writing (TA Seminar Description) (19)
This description provides a look at the goals of one particular seminar class. However, these goals are noteworthy. The goal of the seminar should be to provide a history of composition studies as well as a discussion of the debates in the field today as well as a balance of theory and practice and a discussion of their relationship to one another. Additionally, this description shows value for reflection, mentoring, professionalization and continued growth, as well as collaboration. These goals are built from the best practices of recent literature in the field. Information that was obtained from the fourteen Ohio universities indicated that some of these goals are in practice, but not all of them. However, it is clear that at least twelve of the fourteen schools are using the approach of having a combined theory/practicum seminar. If kept in balance by using in-depth goals, like Stancliff and Goggin offer here, a combination course could be quite successful in providing a good, broad introduction to composition studies and preparation for new instructors of FYC.

Observations

In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay,” Wilhoit writes,

Since the 1970s, many educators have advocated classroom observation as a central TA instructional practice. Some educators suggest that faculty observe TAs in class and evaluate their performance (Flanigan; Diogenes, Roen, and Swearingen; Haring-Smith; Svinicki). Others advocate peer observation, either alone or in combination with faculty observation (Cooper and Kehl; Hairston; Weiser). Some argue that TAs should watch other teachers conduct class (Back et al.; Reagan). Although these educators advocate a range of classroom observation programs, they agree that TAs benefit when feedback from observations are detailed, descriptive, and supportive rather than general, judgmental, and critical.
All also agree on the importance of pre-observation conversations in which TAs can explain their course goals and class plans and post-observation discussions where TAs can ask questions and get advice. (20)

As Wilhoit points out, there are many different types of observation that goes on in the universities. Some new TAs observe and others are observed. Some new TAs do both. However, the most important aspect, as Wilhoit points out, is the feedback after the observation that is most useful to a new TA.

Of the fourteen universities in the pilot study, information about observations from nine were presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85). One school mentions observations, but gives no indication if the TAs are being observed or are observing. Two schools require new TAs to do observations of faculty members, experienced TAs, and/or other new TAs. Seven universities require new TAs to be observed by faculty, staff, experienced TAs, program directors, or some combination.

Observing new TAs is an important part of many of the programs in Ohio. However, the product of the observation seems as important, or more important, than the observation itself. In Professing & Pedagogy: Learning the Teaching of English, Shari J. Stenberg places observations or classroom visits not as evaluative intrusions, but as learning encounters (110-114). Stenberg writes, “key to making visits true learning encounters is establishing shared goals for and conceptions of the visit” (112). This dialogue prior to the observation sets up clear expectations of the observer’s role in the classroom, which can calm the nerves of the teacher. It also can be a useful way for the teacher to get specific feedback on an aspect of teaching that is of concern to the teacher. The feedback or “observer responses” need not be evaluative (113). Stenberg
suggests that these responses “position the visiting teacher as a learner, not an evaluator” (113). The feedback is the most significant part of the dialogue.

Observations are an essential part of becoming a good teacher of FYC. I believe that it is important for new TAs to complete both types of observation discussed here. It is important for new TAs, especially those who are timid and nervous, to observe experienced instructors to see how they handle a classroom. More importantly, I think it is crucial for new TAs to be observed, whether by the Director of Composition or an experienced instructor. At least half of the schools in the study use a variety of individuals to do observations. This group can include WPAs, experienced instructors, experienced TAs, and peers or other new TAs. Whether the evaluation is evaluative or not, it is a means of providing feedback and starting a dialogue. Zeta University’s approach of using a memo that is followed by a face-to-face discussion seems to be an excellent way of keeping the dialogue going and making the observation seem less evaluative. This dialogue is very important because it is how the new TA discovers how they come across to students and it is a way to learn about new techniques and increase their repertoire or add tricks to their bag.

**Mentoring**

Mentors can be a big part of the preparing of new instructors. It is through mentors that graduate teaching assistants can learn the most information. A mentor knows the ropes of a particular department and university and can share this knowledge. A mentor in most cases has much more teaching experience than the graduate teaching assistant and can therefore offer that experience. Cowan, Traver and Riddle state, “An essential element of our development as teachers was the commitment and concern of GRCC’s English faculty” (253). The experienced faculty can be wonderful mentors. The contact allows new instructors to find answers that the
standardized syllabi cannot answer. In the same pilot program discussed by Buck and MacGregor, mentors played a large role. Buck and MacGregor write, “Each of the mentors serves a fundamental supporting role for his or her assigned teaching assistant, providing advice, teaching materials, and strategies” (246). These faculty members served as models as well (247). New instructors can learn a lot about a program from faculty members. These faculty members also have a vested interest in the success of new instructors because it involves the success of the students, the program and the institution.

Of the fourteen schools in the pilot study, information about mentoring was evident for eight of the schools, presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85). These eight schools provided mentors for new TAs for at least their first year of teaching. Several provide mentoring throughout the graduate program. Mentors are a combination of faculty, staff, experienced TAs, and program directors.

A large part of many preparation programs for new instructors and graduate teaching assistants of first-year composition is being paired with a mentor. Depending on the university, these individuals may be senior graduate assistants or faculty members. Senior graduate assistants are many times the individuals in these mentoring positions. There are problems with this, however. The “senior” graduate assistant to some universities may be a graduate student who has as little as a year of teaching, one or two classes per term, under them. Even in universities where these graduate student mentors are fourth year doctoral candidates, their teaching experience is often limited. In “Plug and Play: Technology and Mentoring Teachers of Writing” Samantha Blackmon and Shirley K. Rose discuss the mentoring program at Purdue University. Blackmon and Rose write,
Over the years, mentors have been drawn primarily from the full-time faculty. Before the department officially offered a graduate program in rhetoric and composition, the mentors were faculty from a variety of areas in English studies. After the establishment of the PhD program in rhetoric and composition in 1981 and the subsequent increase over time in the number of R&C specialists among the department faculty, however, mentoring assignments were given almost exclusively to R&C faculty. In the last few years, some mentoring positions in the department’s undergraduate programs (first-year composition, ESL writing, professional writing) have been filled by advanced PhD students (ABDs) in rhetoric and composition when faculty were unavailable due to leaves, retirements, or assignment to graduate courses.

Although mentors are definitely something that can aid a new graduate teaching assistant, being mentored by someone who has only a little more experience than the novice does not seem the most effective approach. However, depending totally on faculty would be very difficult for some smaller universities.

More than half of the fourteen schools in this pilot study use mentors as a preparation component for new TAs and new instructors. Unlike Blackman and Rose’s implication that only the most advanced graduate students, individuals who are ABD, should be used as mentors and only when a faculty member is unavailable, these schools use a combination of experienced TAs and faculty to mentor. Indeed, some programs use only experienced TAs as mentors. What is an experienced TA? It could be someone working on an MA or at the beginning of a PhD program. The experience they have to offer does not only come from the length of time in graduate school. In addition to providing advice, teaching materials, and strategies as Buck and MacGregor argue
for above, newer experienced TAs can give advice on attempting to balance a full load of
graduate classes with teaching a section or two of FYC for the first time. The slightly
experienced TA is much closer to the panic that fills many when they begin a graduate program
and teaching for the first time, and they can offer support that a full professor who has been
withdrawn from the situation for the past twenty years cannot. Additionally, providing a wide
range of possible mentors allows WPAs the option of having mentoring relationship grow more
organically or by being able to assign people that may have more in common or may work better
together. Many graduate programs are very diverse. They are made up of men and women who
obtained their graduate degrees only months before beginning the graduate program as well as
individuals who are coming back to switch careers or for more education after being in the
workforce for an extended period of time. There can be a huge range of ages and life
experiences. Having a wide array of possible mentors increases the likelihood of providing new
TAs with mentors with whom they can build lasting and helpful relationships.

Reflection

According to Gail Stygall in her 2002 article, “Bridging Levels: Composition Theory and
Practice for Preservice Teachers and TAs,” “in keeping with the idea that change means
disengaging old models of teaching, I not only introduce the seminar students to the field of
composition pedagogy but invite them to begin thoughtful, reflective pedagogy, apply what we
read to actual experiences in the classroom” (46). According to some, the best way to do so is to
reflect on teaching and readings in reading journals, teaching journals, teaching philosophies,
teaching portfolios, class discussions, etc. In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic
Essay,” Wilhoit writes,
In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of writers began recommending that TAs keep teaching journals and portfolios as part of their education. For example, Nancy Comley maintained that composing informal journal entries helps TAs to connect composition theory with their own teaching practices and lessens their anxieties, a position endorsed by Gebhardt and Bishop (“Teachers”). In fact, several writers, including Mary Kay Tirrell and Geraldine McBroom, suggest that keeping a teaching journal is central to a TA’s growth as a teacher because it promotes critical reflection. Recently, writers have recommended that TAs maintain teaching portfolios as well, collections of classroom materials, course evaluations, and self-reflective essays. John Webster argues that TAS and administrators can use teaching portfolios to improve instruction, assess and review TAs progress in a program, and help TAs get jobs when they graduate (See also Hutchings). Documenting their experiences as instructors through teaching journals and portfolios enables TAs to reflect on their growth, express their anxieties, formulate their educational philosophies, and critique their classroom performance. (21)

Reflective practices and reflective teaching can have a huge impact on the novice TA and can really help them focus on being a good teacher of writing.

Of the fourteen universities, the available information presented in Chapter Three and summarized in Table 2 (p. 85) indicates that only three schools require new TAs do any type of written reflection. Three schools require new TAs to keep teaching journals that must be completed at least weekly. Two schools require teaching philosophy statements as final seminar projects. One university requires a complete teaching portfolio as the final seminar project.
According to Ebest’s 2005 *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*, “Because the readings are generally unfamiliar (and often times unsettling) to students, I assign a weekly response journal to provide a site where they can reflect on both the theory and the pedagogical applications. Similarly, because the majority of the class is teaching and/or applying these new principles for the first time, I also assign a weekly teaching log” (68). Ebest notes that the ability to reflect on our teaching and scholarship does not come naturally (68). Ebest writes, “These logs provide teachers with the opportunity to function also as students. Instead of berating themselves or coasting along blithely unaware, instead of rigidly adhering to a single approach or rejecting one that initially failed, TAs can use this log to describe their daily teaching, compare it to what they are reading, and raise questions along the way” (68). Although many graduate students compose reading journals, composing journals, reflecting on their teaching or how they are using an aspect of an article or theory in their classroom, is not a natural experience. Encouraging TAs to do so can help them be better teachers of writing and/or help them decide if teaching is something they want to pursue.

Stancliff and Goggin write require reflection of the new TAs in their TA preparation program. The description of their “scholar’s log” reads,

**Scholar’s Log:** Your scholar’s log provides a space for you to respond to each reading (an average of a page per reading, though some of the readings may give rise to more than a page and others to less); make observations on readings and class discussions; draw connections among assigned readings and your experience teaching; pose questions, explore issues, and ponder theoretically informed teaching practices. Thus, your log will serve as a valuable resource for grappling with both the readings and with your teaching. **Bring your scholar’s log to each**
class; you will be reflecting on your responses in class, and we will use these at times as a jumping-off point for discussions and activities. (21)

While the scholar’s log assignment description above is specifically dealing with the required seminar at Arizona State University, it makes a very important distinction. It encourages students to “draw connections among assigned readings and your experience teaching” (21). This is not merely a reading journal. It is a place where new TAs can explore the topics and theories and pedagogy that is being discussed in their seminars and compare them to what they are doing in their own classrooms. They can ask questions and maybe find answers.

Of the fourteen schools investigated, there was evidence that only three required any sort of reflection from new TAs. While we can see that there is literature available that discusses the desirable effects reflection can have for a new teacher and I am of the opinion that more than these four schools should be using this component, that is not the only issue. Technology has never ceased to impact our lives as teachers and graduate students. We are living in a time when blogs are extremely common and many new graduate students are comfortable with that medium. We are also dealing with a time when many universities are purchasing online course management systems like Blackboard, WebCT, or their own concoctions powered by Desire2Learn. These systems offer blogs, discussion boards, and chat room features that are already set up for us. The technology has made this a very simple task. I suspect that there are many programs that are already using this medium as well as individual teachers using this medium on their own.

Table 2: Evidence of Preparation Components
Table 2 summarizes my overall judgments about the role of nine components of TA preparation that Ohio universities are using to prepare new graduate student teaching assistants to teach college level writing. The approaches discussed in this chapter and summarized in Table 2 all have their merit as well as their problems. However, what is known is that the academy, specifically the WPA, needs to do everything possible to provide preparation programs, which will benefit the students in the FYC classes as well as the graduate students as they become the
next generation of professionals. The next chapter offers a discussion of the narrowed research questions and some conclusions as well as suggestions for future practice and for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter One gave a survey of some of the most significant literature about TA preparation. Chapter Two provided insight into how the project came into existence and how it changed as well as a more detailed look at the pilot study itself. Chapter Three examined each of the fourteen Ohio universities that use graduate students as TAs to staff first-year composition classes by looking at the in-house materials, survey responses, and in-house materials that are available online. Chapter Four looked at each of the preparation components: balance of theory and practice, the use of pre-service workshops, observations, mentoring, graduate seminars, and reflection that is evident in each of the fourteen universities programs in conjunction with recent literature on each of these components. Through the survey responses and study of materials about each university from university and program websites, in-house manuals, and sample syllabi, etc. I have been able to explore the TA preparation programs at the fourteen Ohio universities, staffing FYC classes with new TAs, in some capacity. Although this pilot study did not have a large response to the surveys, the information available through other sources helps to provide enough information to allow some tentative answers to some of the research question as well as provide some suggestions for change and future research.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this pilot study stem from three main sources of information: available literature inside and outside of composition studies, survey results, various materials from the universities (in-house manuals, syllabi, handouts, descriptions, university websites, department websites) provided by the universities or available online. Because the number of respondents to the survey was low and the number and detail of available program materials varied from school to school, not all universities are represented equally in the conclusions.
My main research questions were: (RQ #1) How are graduate students enrolled in English programs being prepared to teach writing? and (RQ #2) Is the preparation of new TAs in line with the available literature or lagging behind? My conclusions will emphasize those two questions.

What components of preparation are the various universities using?

Although there are many components that may be used in TA preparation programs, I chose to focus on are balance of theory and practice, standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans, pre-service orientation, preparatory seminars, observations, mentoring, and reflection.

What specific components are in use at each university? From the research gathered, one university or another represents each of the preparation components this pilot study explored. All information about each component was not available from each university; there was enough of a response or available material to make the pilot study information worth considering.

Is there a balance of theory and practice overall? The balance between theory and practice cannot be analyzed at length because of the lack of information concerning this on the departmental websites. Of the two respondents, one felt that the preparation of TAs that the university demonstrated a balance between theory and practice. The other respondent indicated that it was not applicable. However, the institution of the second respondent had students complete a practicum as well as a composition theory and composition pedagogy course prior to beginning to teach. One other university requires separate theory and practice seminars. As is shown on Table 2: “Evidence of Preparation Components” in Chapter Four (see p. 85), the other eleven schools all have a seminar that is a combination practicum, composition theory, and composition pedagogy course. The texts would indicate that a fair amount of theory is covered in
those classes, but the syllabi and assignments available indicate that much more of the time is spent on practicum items like assimilating new TAs to the program, keeping them a step or two ahead of the FYC students, or troubleshooting. The pilot study indicates that a better balance of theory and practice is necessary, but further research needs to be done to prove this.

Are new TAs given standardized syllabi and day-to-day plans? If so, is it mandatory to follow them? If so, how long are they required to follow? Syllabi, day-to-day plans, assignment sequences, and textbooks are the life of many, if not most FYC classes and TA preparation programs. The pilot study obtained information about eight of the fourteen universities and their use of these items in some capacity. All eight of the schools provided new TAs with sample syllabi. Of the eight, seven required the new TAs to follow a specific assignment sequence, but not day-to-day plans. Only one school required the new TAs to follow day-to-day plans and that was only for the first two weeks. At least five of the eight schools required new TAs to use a required text. The pilot study indicates that the majority of the schools in Ohio are providing sample materials.

Is there a pre-service orientation or seminar? If so, how long does it last? What does it cover? Of the fourteen schools in Ohio, the pilot study provided information about pre-service orientations and classes of ten universities. There is a huge range of pre-service preparation in the state of Ohio. Some new TAs have only three days of pre-service preparation, while others do not teach until their second year in a program after taking two composition theory, composition pedagogy, and practicum courses. There is no consistency in how much preparation new TAs obtain before they attempt to walk into a classroom.

As seen in Table 2 (see p.85), information was obtained about the required seminar courses of all fourteen universities. Most TAs are required to take a seminar that combines the
focus on a teaching practicum with some readings in composition pedagogy and composition theory. However, most of these courses seem to lean heavily towards the practicum. This is necessary to an extent when we are sending new TAs into a classroom for the first time with less than a week’s worth of preparation. However, it is hard for them to learn how and why. They only seem to be learning the what. Of the fourteen Ohio universities, twelve require this type of combined seminar. The other two provide the practicum separate from the composition theory and composition pedagogy class. One requires it prior to teaching and the other offers it on a rotating basis. Is there a pedagogy and/or theory seminar required? Which? How long does it last? What are the objectives?

Are new TAs observed? Who observes them? How often? Do new TAs observe anyone? If so, who and how often? Observations are a very important part of TA preparation. Of the fourteen schools, the pilot study provided information about nine. Seven schools require new TAs to be observed. Two universities require new TAs to observe more experienced teachers. One of the schools mentioned observations, but did not indicate who was observing and who was being observed.

Do new TAs have formal mentors assigned to them? Who are the mentors? How long are they mentored? What does the relationship consist of? Of the fourteen schools in the pilot study, information about a formal mentoring program was obtained about eight. All eight of those schools provide some mentoring to new TAs. The mentors could be program directors, faculty members, staff members, or experienced TAs. Some universities provided this only for the first year and others for the entire time a student is serving as a TA.

Do new TAs do any type of formal reflection? If so what? Reflection is a very important part of learning and teaching. To be a better teacher, we must be aware of what works and what
does not. Of the fourteen schools in the pilot study, information about reflection was only found in four. In “Recent Trends in TA Instruction: A Bibliographic Essay,” Wilhoit writes, “If new TAs learn to reflect on their teaching practices, assess the effectiveness of their teaching, and consider alternative pedagogies that might improve the instruction they offer their students, they will continue to grow as teachers throughout their careers” (21).

As shown in Table 2 (see p. 85), the fourteen Ohio schools in the sample all use the seminar for disseminating composition theory, pedagogy, and practice. Therefore, these Ohio schools are making an attempt at balancing theory and practice in their preparation programs. How successful they are, is another question. A majority of the schools offer sample syllabi and day-to-day plans and/or use common texts and assignments. According to Table 2 (see p. 85), ten of the fourteen sample schools offer orientations, eight of the fourteen schools use observations, seven of the fourteen schools use mentoring, and three of the fourteen schools use reflection. While these fourteen universities all seem to be making attempts at balancing theory and practice, there are other areas that need to be addressed.

I suggest that in addition to continuing to work on keeping theory and practice in balance, all programs need to offer some sort of pre-service preparation. The use of common texts and assignments is seen frequently. This practice is something that helps take pressure off TAs and also helps WPAs to maintain a sense of consistency in FYC classes. The use of sample syllabi and day-to-day plans is seen as well. I would caution against requiring common day-to-day plans. However, I see little evidence that this is taking place at the sample universities. A little more than half the schools use observations and mentoring as part of TA preparation. Mentoring programs, whether formal or not, can be a very informative source for new TAs, particularly if the mentoring continues past the first term. The programs not using mentors should look closely
to see if informal relationships have developed. If so, they can nurture those relationships. If not, they can try to find a way to include those relationships in their preparation programs. Observations seem also to be a best practice, but only if there are clear expectations of what will take place and that there is a follow-up dialogue so that everyone can use them as a learning experience. The universities should find ways to incorporate class visits of new TAs by other new TAs, experienced TAs, staff, faculty or a combination to help dialogue about best classroom practices. Finally, as Table 2 indicates, only three of the fourteen sample universities require any reflection. I would suggest that institutions use reflection in the seminars in the form of weekly teaching logs, teaching philosophies, and teaching portfolios.

Who do WPAs in the various universities in Ohio believe their clientele to be and how does that influence the purposes of the preparation programs they administer?

Each of the fourteen schools offers degrees in English. Nine offer degrees in composition, rhetoric, or writing. Seven offer doctoral programs. Of those seven, five offer doctoral programs with emphasis in composition, rhetoric, or writing. Two of the fourteen schools offer MFA degrees in fiction and poetry. Does this impact who WPAs teach toward?

Does having a doctoral program change the program? Of the seven schools that offer doctoral programs, only one offers separate theory and practice seminars. The other six universities combine theory and practice into one required seminar. Of the seven universities, there is evidence that five of the schools offer sample syllabi, day-to-day plans, and may require a standardized assignment sequences. There is evidence that indicates one of the two schools left most likely provides these pieces as well. All seven programs offer pre-service orientations. These orientations vary from three days to a full term before new TAs begin their appointments.
in FYC classrooms. All seven schools have observation components. Six of the seven schools offer mentoring components. Only two of the seven schools require reflection as part of new TA preparations.

Of the seven schools that offer doctoral programs, five offer an emphasis in composition, rhetoric, or writing. All five require a seminar that attempts to balance theory and practice. Four of the five provide standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, or assignment sequences to new TAs. There is evidence that the fifth school most likely does as well. All five universities require a pre-service orientation component. The length of the component varies from one week to one term. All five schools require an observation component. Four of the five schools require a mentoring component. Only one of the five schools requires any reflection.

Does having emphasis in composition, rhetoric, or writing change the program? Of the nine schools, only one offers a separate theory and pedagogy seminar. The other eight institutions combine theory and practice in one required seminar. Four of the nine schools provide standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, or assignment sequences to new TAs. There is evidence that a fifth university in this category most likely does as well. Five of the nine schools require observations. A sixth school most likely requires observations as well. Four of the nine schools have a required mentoring component in TA preparation. Only one of the nine schools has any type of required reflection.

Does having an MFA program change the program? Both schools have a required seminar that combines theory and practice. Both schools provide standardized syllabi, day-to-day plans, or assignment sequences to new TAs. Both schools require a pre-service orientation. One school’s orientation lasts a week and the other school’s lasts two weeks. Both schools require
observations of new TAs. Both schools have a required mentoring component. Neither school requires any sort of reflection.

The largest influence on what preparation components are being used within a particular new TA preparation program at the fourteen Ohio universities appears to stem from whether or not the universities offered a doctoral program. Of the seven schools offering doctoral programs, one school used three of the six main preparation components (standardized apparatus, orientation, seminar, observation, mentoring, reflection) researched in this pilot study. One school used four of the six components. Three schools used five of the six components. And, finally, two of the schools used all six new TA preparation components. This is compared to that fact that there are three programs offering only one of the six components.

When asked, “What is the purpose of the GTA preparation program at your university?” One respondent wrote, “To provide support for GTA’s: to help them discover effective ways of teaching, to mentor them, to answer questions for them as they arise, to help them make fruitful connections between theory they have studied…and practice in their classrooms, to provide emotional support as they deal with difficult situations in class” (See Appendix C). The other responded:

To introduce GTAs to composition pedagogy and theory, especially focusing on those theories/practices that undergird our curriculum. To provide them with knowledge of our standard syllabus, department reader, course materials, etc. and aid them in writing their own versions of that syllabus, and to guide them through producing a detailed syllabus of their own. To model the environment of a rich writing class; GTAs learn by doing and by immersion in a writing class. To arm them with tested activities and practices so that they can feel confident going into
their own classrooms. To make them life-long self-reflective teachers. (See Appendix C)

When TAs graduate and move on to other institutions, whether as graduate students, professors, adjuncts, or instructors, will they be prepared to take what they have learned and transfer into a new writing program, with different books, readers, assignments, and philosophies? Is the purpose of new TA preparation programs to introduce new students to composition studies or to inoculate them with a quick injection before sending them off? Is the purpose to prepare them to teach in one specific institution or to prepare them to be good writing teachers?

Both of the WPAs responding to the survey mentioned several key components when discussing the purpose of the TA preparation programs at their respective universities. Both WPAs mention practice. It is necessary for these preparation programs to provide the mundane day-to-day information that we all need. Information about the institutions specific FYC program, information about record keeping, grading, what to do in a conference. This is all necessary and part of the purpose of the preparation program. Both WPAs mention theory. In part, the purpose of TA preparation in English programs is to introduce TAs to composition theory and composition studies. Additionally, both WPAs mention mentoring. Part of the purpose of TA preparation is to mentor the new TAs as they grow into competent or even great FYC teachers. The purpose of TA preparation does not change with the clientele. However, the preparation components WPAs chose to concentrate on help to determine how successfully the objectives are met.

How are graduate students enrolled in English programs being prepared to teach writing? New TAs in English programs in Ohio are being prepared to teach writing in a wide variety of manners. The only similarity across all fourteen institutions is the fact that all of the new TAs are
required to take some type of seminar course. When they take it, how long it lasts, and what it covers, is something entirely different. Eight of the schools, just over half, used a majority (at least four of six) the new TA preparation components researched in this pilot study. Of those eight schools, five are universities that offer doctoral programs and four of those offer doctoral programs in composition, rhetoric, or writing.

Is the preparation of new TAs in line with the available literature or lagging behind? The graduate programs in Ohio that use TAs to staff FYC classes and offer doctoral programs with an emphasis in composition, rhetoric, or writing are more likely to be using components and methods of new TA preparation that are being discussed in the literature of the day. Universities that offer only masters level degrees are less likely to use all of the components discussed in this report. The components most often missing in these preparation programs are orientation, observations, mentoring, and reflection—aspects of TA preparation that can make the difference between a good and great FYC teacher.

Suggestions for Future Research

This dissertation reports on a pilot study and my hope is that it will lead to a larger study, a more complete study of the Ohio universities or a study comprising of a larger number of universities, perhaps a study encompassing the Midwest. The pilot study was not as productive as I would have liked. My largest concern was that I would have liked to have all fourteen universities represented in the study equally. Whether the universities would have remained anonymous or not, it would have been more effective to have completed surveys from all fourteen universities. Additionally, the request for in-house materials from the universities would have been very helpful if fulfilled by all universities. The two respondents to the survey sent a
few items and I was able to find in-house items and syllabi from quite a few of the schools online.

In a new study, I would change the timing of the surveys. I would begin the study to begin just before the start of pre-service orientations or just after the start of school. While this is a busy time, the questions would be about information that was fresh and current. I would change the format of many of the questions so they were more open-ended in order to gain the most amount of detail from each respondent. I would like to transfer the survey into an online survey form. The WPAs could be sent a link to the survey and easily click and type their answers. With the right design, this could also provide anonymity. And, usability testing could provide time estimates, which may encourage more people to participate. However, I would also like to set up interviews with each of the WPAs. This would allow for open discussion that could potentially answer all of the survey questions and provide new information. Additionally, it would be much easier for people to gather and hand over in-house manuals and guides if one was sitting in their offices.

The pilot study raised more questions than it answered. In addition to the need for data from more WPAs, in many cases it would also have added more to the discussion to have the voice of TAs. A long-term study of TA attitudes about preparation to see how answers differ the first year of graduate school to the first year in a new position would be beneficial. Because there are so many schools in Ohio, it might be good to do a pilot that focuses specifically on the new TAs of one program and following those individuals for several years.

When asked, “Is it your perception that new GTAs feel prepared when they walk into class the first time?”, Omega University responded no and Delta University responded yes (see Appendix C). This is quite curious when one considers that the TAs at Delta University have
three weeks of pre-service preparation before walking into the classroom. As they teach, they take required seminars that cover composition theory and pedagogy along with the practicum. Students from Omega University have two terms of coursework and tutoring before they step into a classroom. This made me curious about perceptions WPAs and program directors hold about the readiness of new TAs to enter the classroom compared to the readiness TAs themselves would report. A study that compares and contrasts TAs perceptions to WPAs perceptions would be effective in this area. As each of the components was discussed, it was clear that the opinions of TAs as to the balance of theory/pedagogy with practice, and the use of pre-service orientations, seminars, syllabi and various materials, mentors, observations, and reflection. Did they find the weekly practicum useful? Was being observed useful? Did it change the way they taught? If so, how? From the point of a researcher, I would recommend a survey of the TAs as well as the WPAs and program administrators.

Reflection is something that is taught as a necessity to many education departments across the country. Not only should we study the effectiveness of reflection in teaching in FYC, but also what types of reflection would be best suited to the new graduate students, who are often so busy. The type of technology that is available for reflection and how it was being used could also provide a lot of information to WPAs. This is a study that would require a lot more preparation and the participation of both TAs and WPAs.

A more in-depth study, with stronger participation from WPAs, would also make it possible to discover more about the required seminar courses. A study such as this would enable us to see if there is a balance of theory and practice and we could determine what pieces seminars had in common across the state. This would also open the door for the possibility of
looking at connections between how the seminar is graded or how much credit it is worth and whether or not that has an impact on course content.

**Final Thoughts**

This pilot study provided a few insights into what type of preparation new TAs, teaching FYC in Ohio universities, are receiving. While there was evidence of each of the major TA preparation components—balance of theory and practice, pre-service preparation, seminars, required textbooks, assignments, syllabi, and day-to-day plans, observation, mentoring, and reflection—several of the components were noticed in only a few schools. As can be seen quite clearly on Table 2: “Evidence of Preparation” (see p. 85), only three universities require some sort of reflection, and just over half require observations or mentoring. The small amount of data here tentatively seems to indicate that some TA preparation programs are lagging behind what some consider to be the best practices. However, TA preparation programs at universities offering doctoral programs with emphasis in composition, rhetoric, or writing are less likely to be lagging behind. In fact, with the exception of a reflection component, these schools are most likely to incorporate all of the components that could be considered “best practices.”

It is not enough to send teaching assistants into a first-year writing classes armed with a book and a syllabus. Rather, FYC preparation programs should help TAs understand the how, what, and why of teaching. Toward that end, we might well heed Latterell’s words about the preparation of teaching assistants for first-year writing; “By introducing GTAs to writing pedagogy and practice from many avenues and many people’s perspectives, they learn to view teaching as a vibrant, constantly evolving, and valued practice. Additionally, GTA education programs that are anchored in such communities promote on-going teacher education which extends well beyond a GTA’s first term or year of teaching” (“Training”153). Also, we should
discover how to balance theory and practice successfully and figure out which components of
TA preparation have the most impact and are the most useful and incorporate those insights in
the TA preparation of first-year writing programs.
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My name is Amie C. Bauer-Wolf. I am a fourth year graduate student in the English Department at Bowling Green State University. I am working on a Ph.D. in Rhetoric and Writing. Please take a few minutes to read over the information below.

I am currently working on my dissertation, which deals with creating effective preparation programs for new graduate teaching assistants teaching writing regardless of discipline. Although there has been a considerable amount of work that has been done in writing program administration and the preparation of teaching assistants in the last decade, there is more work to be done. I am hoping my research will allow me to offer suggestions and assessments to build upon and/or improve upon the preparation graduate teaching assistants are currently receiving.

You have been invited to participate because you are a party that is responsible for the preparation of graduate teaching assistants in English at one of the fourteen Ohio universities who currently employ graduate students to teach freshman composition.
This study will be conducted using a survey that will be provided and returned via email and various preparation materials I ask you to provide. My research and analysis will take place between April 5, 2004-November 15, 2004.

I anticipate the survey will take around one hour to complete. Depending on the time you take to answer the questions, you may take longer than I anticipated.

You will be asked to participate in one email survey and to provide orientation materials, course materials, syllabi, etc. provided to new graduate teaching assistants.

You will not need anything special for participation other than an email account.

The surveys will not be anonymous due to the fact that we will be using email. Through the collection of surveys, names will be blocked out and each participant will be given an alias and a file folder, which will be locked in my filing cabinet. Only my dissertation director and I will have access to them. If you are willing to allow your name to be used, please indicate this on the survey. I am asking for the name of your institution to cross reference survey results with requested materials. Each institution will be coded in the results chapter of my dissertation.

Your participation is completely voluntary. Replying to this email and completing the survey will indicate that you are willing to participate. You are free to withdraw at anytime.
I will use the findings to create my dissertation, which will fulfill my requirements for graduation. I also intend to use this research in future conference proposals and possible publications.

If you have questions or concerns, please contact:

Amie C. Bauer-Wolf, Researcher, 419-468-2230 or amiecb@bgnet.bgsu.edu

Dr. Richard Gebhardt, Dissertation Director, 419-372-7212 or richgeb@bgnet.bgsu.edu

For questions regarding the conduct of the study or your rights as a research participant, please contact Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board, Chair, 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgnet.bgsu.edu

APPROVED – BGSU HSRB – EFFECTIVE APRIL 28, 2004 / EXPIRES MARCH 31, 2009
APPENDIX B: WPA SURVEY

Name (optional):

May I use your name in my dissertation?

May I use your name in future presentations and publications?

Name of institution:

Job title:

Job description:

Would you be willing to be contacted with follow up questions?

Would you be willing to send orientation materials, course materials, syllabi, etc. provided to new GTAs?

If so, please send to:

Amie Bauer-Wolf
Department of English or amiecb@bgnet.bgsu.edu
Bowling Green State University
PART I

A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer

1. Does your GTA preparation program include a required pre-service orientation?
   A. yes    B. no

2. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required practicum seminar?
   A. yes    B. no

3. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required composition theory and/or composition pedagogy seminar?
   A. yes    B. no

4. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required seminar that combines practicum as well as theory and/or composition pedagogy?
   A. yes    B. no

5. Does your GTA preparation program include a required mentoring component?
   A. yes    B. no

6. Are new GTAs observed in the classroom?
7. Are new GTAs provided with standardized syllabi (essays, assignments, etc.), which they are required to follow?
   A. yes   B. no

8. Are new GTAs provided with standardized day-to-day plans, which they are required to follow?
   A. yes   B. no

9. Are new GTAs provided with sample syllabi (essays, assignments, etc.)?
   A. yes   B. no

10. Are new GTAs provided with sample day-to-day plans?
    A. yes   B. no

11. Do new GTAs choose their own textbooks?
    A. yes   B. no

12. Are new GTAs required to keep teaching portfolios?
    A. yes   B. no

13. Does your GTA preparation program contain informal meetings in lieu of formal
class seminars?
A. yes  B. no

**B: Please choose by typing an x next to the best answer**

1. How long is the pre-service orientation?
   A. \( \leq 1 \) week
   B. \( \leq 1 \) month
   C. > 1 month
   D. semester/quarter
   E. not applicable

2. What is the balance of theory/pedagogy and practice in the preparation program?
   A. equal
   B. more practice than theory/pedagogy
   C. more theory/pedagogy than practice
   D. not applicable

3. Who mentors the new GTAs?
   A. faculty members
   B. staff members
   C. experienced GTAs
   D. peers
4. Who observes new GTAs in their classroom?
   A. faculty members
   B. staff members
   C. mentors
   D. combination of A, B, and/or C
   E. not applicable

C: Please type your answer below each question

1. Please list and describe additional components contained in your GTA preparation program

PART II

A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer

1. Did you develop the GTA preparation program currently in use at your institution?
   A. yes   B. no

2. Do you change the program each year?
   A. yes   B. no
3. Does the number of new graduate students in each program vary greatly from year to year?
   
   A. yes  
   B. no

B: Please type your answer below each question

1. How many students do you have from each program? (Please designate MA, PhD, etc. as well as Literature, TESL, Economics etc.)

2. When was the current GTA preparation program developed?

3. How has the GTA preparation program changed since it was developed?
PART III

A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer

1. Is it your perception that new GTAs feel prepared when they walk into class the first time?
   A. overall yes    B. overall no

2. Are GTAs encouraged to develop their own syllabi?
   A. yes    B. no

3. Are GTAs encouraged to develop their own pedagogical and/or theoretical practices?
   A. yes    B. no

4. Are new GTAs encouraged to keep teaching portfolios?
   A. yes    B. no

5. Are new GTAs encouraged to keep teaching journals?
   A. yes    B. no

6. Do GTAs feel free to explore composition theory and pedagogy in their classrooms?
   A. yes    B. no
B: Please type your answer below each question

1. What is the purpose of the GTA preparation program at your university?

2. What are the necessary components of GTA preparation?

3. Does the GTA preparation program at your university contain all of these components? Please explain.

4. What would you like to see added to the program? Why?
5. What do most GTAs from your programs do after graduating?

Please add any additional comments you may have
APPENDIX C: WPA SURVEY RESULTS

Job title:
Omega University--Visiting Professor/Director of Composition
Delta University--Professor and Director of Composition

Job description:
Omega University--
Oversee Freshman English composition courses; supervise 40 instructors teaching in the Freshman English composition program, approximately 35 of whom are part-time; interview potential hires for the composition program; teach courses in the Freshman English program; teach English 506 (Composition Theory); teach English 507 (Workshop in Teaching); perform various other duties associated with Freshman English composition program, such as reading placement exams, conducting periodic staff development workshops, mediating grade disputes/student complaints about instructors, etc.

Delta University--
WPA--overseeing FYC courses--English 111, 112, and 113--serving about 3,000 students per semester. Training and mentoring of new graduate teaching assistants, in three graduate courses taken their first year.

PART I
A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer
1. Does your GTA preparation program include a required pre-service orientation?
   Yes
   1 (50.0%)
   No
   1 (50.0%)

2. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required practicum seminar?
   Yes
   2 (100.0%)
   No
   0 (0.0%)

3. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required composition theory and/or composition pedagogy seminar?
   Yes
   2 (100.0%)
   No
   0 (0.0%)

4. Does your GTA preparation program contain a required seminar that combines practicum as well as theory and/or composition pedagogy?
   Yes
5. Does your GTA preparation program include a required mentoring component?
   Yes
   2 (100.0%)
   No
   0 (0.0%)

6. Are new GTAs observed in the classroom?
   Yes
   2 (100.0%)
   No
   0 (0.0%)

7. Are new GTAs provided with standardized syllabi (essays, assignments, etc.), which they are required to follow?
   Yes
   1 (50.0%)
   No
   1 (50.0%)
8. Are new GTAs provided with standardized day-to-day plans, which they are required to follow?

   Yes
   1 (50.0%)

   No
   1 (50.0%)

9. Are new GTAs provided with sample syllabi (essays, assignments, etc.)

   Yes
   2 (100.0%)

   No
   0 (0.0%)

10. Are new GTAs provided with sample day-to-day plans?

    Yes
    1 (50.0%)

    No
    1 (50.0%)

11. Do new GTAs choose their own textbooks?

    Yes
    1 (50.0%)

    No
12. Are new GTAs required to keep teaching portfolios?

Yes
0 (0.0%)

No
2 (100.0%)

13. Does your GTA preparation program contain informal meetings in lieu of formal class seminars?

Yes
0 (0.0%)

No
2 (100.0%)

B: Please choose by typing an x next to the best answer

1. How long is the pre-service orientation?

≤1 week
0 (0.0%)

≤1 month
1 (50.0%)
2. What is the balance of theory/pedagogy and practice in the preparation program?

   equal
   1 (50.0%)

   more practice than theory/pedagogy
   0 (0.0%)

   more theory/pedagogy than practice
   0 (0.0%)

   not applicable
   1 (50.0%)
3. Who mentors the new GTAs?

Faculty members
0 (0.0%)

staff members
0 (0.0%)

experienced GTAs
0 (0.0%)

peers
0 (0.0%)

combination of A, B,C and/or D
2 (100.0%)

not applicable
0 (0.0%)

4. Who observes new GTAs in their classroom?
C: Please type your answer below each question

1. Please list and describe additional components contained in your GTA preparation program
Omega University--

...many graduate students work in the Writing Center and only a select few actually teach in the classroom each year. In the past, typically two GTA's taught in the Freshman English program each year. This year, four GTA's taught in the Freshman English program; four will have GTA appointments in Fall '04/Spring '05. I think because of the small number of GTA's, the English Department has not developed a large-scale training program that might include a Fall Pre-Semester Workshop...

Delta University--

New GTAs are required to take three seminars during their first year of teaching--a 3-week comp/theory/pedagogy seminar before the semester begins, and a practicum during fall and spring of their first year of teaching.

PART II

A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer

1. Did you develop the GTA preparation program currently in use at your institution?

   yes

   0 (0.0%)

   no

   2 (100.0%)
2. Do you change the program each year?

   yes
   0 (0.0%)

   no
   2 (100.0%)

3. Does the number of new graduate students in each program vary greatly from year to year?

   yes
   0 (0.0%)

   no
   2 (100.0%)

B: Please type your answer below each question

1. How many students do you have from each program? (Please designate MA, PhD, etc. as well as Literature, TESL, Economics etc.)

   Omega University-- 4-MA Literature

   Delta University--New GTAs each year--about 2 comp/rhet MAs, 8 creative writing MAs, 2 literature MAs; 2-4 comp/rhet PhDs; 2-4 literature PhDs.

2. When was the current GTA preparation program developed?
Omega University-- I’m not sure to be honest. >>>really offers a few preparatory courses for GTA’s, rather than a program per se.

Delta University--No sure, at least since 1990, maybe earlier

3. How has the GTA preparation program changed since it was developed?

Omega University--

This year, >>> made a concerted effort to require new GTA's to take Eng 507--Workshop in Teaching during the whole first year that they taught. The English Department felt this one-credit-hour course was necessary to provide hands-on mentoring for new GTA's, rather than trusting that Eng 506--Comp. Theory would be enough preparation for them to succeed in the classroom.

Delta University--

Introduction of more elaborate Teacher’s Guides (created by graduate students with faculty advising) over the years.

PART III

A: Please choose yes or no by typing an x next to your answer

1. Is it your perception that new GTAs feel prepared when they walk into class the first time?
overall yes
1 (50.0%)
overall no
1 (50.0%)

2. Are GTAs encouraged to develop their own syllabi?
   yes
   1 (50.0%)
   no
   1 (50.0%)

3. Are GTAs encouraged to develop their own pedagogical and/or theoretical practices?
   yes
   0 (0.0%)
   no
   2 (100.0%)

4. Are new GTAs encouraged to keep teaching portfolios?
   yes
   0 (0.0%)
   no
   2 (100.0%)
5. Are new GTAs encouraged to keep teaching journals?
   yes
   0 (0.0%)
   no
   2 (100.0%)

6. Do GTAs feel free to explore composition theory and pedagogy in their classrooms?
   yes
   0 (0.0%)
   no
   2 (100.0%)

B: Please type your answer below each question

1. What is the purpose of the GTA preparation program at your university?

   Omega University--
   To provide support for GTA's: to help them discover effective ways of teaching, to mentor them, to answer questions for them as they arise, to help them make fruitful connections between theory they have studied in Eng 506 and practice in their classrooms, to provide emotional support as they deal with difficult situations in class.

   Delta University--
To introduce GTAs to composition pedagogy and theory, especially focusing on those theories/practices that undergird our curriculum. To provide them with knowledge of our standard syllabus, department reader, course materials, etc. and aid them in writing their own versions of that syllabus, and to guide them through producing a detailed syllabus of their own. To model the environment of a rich writing class; GTAs learn by doing and by immersion in a writing class. To arm them with tested activities and practices so that they can feel confident going into their own classrooms. To make them life-long self-reflective teachers.

2. What are the necessary components of GTA preparation?

Omega University--
An introduction to the field of composition (since GTA's typically teach composition courses); thus, some sense of composition theories. Some procedures for informing GTA's about university and departmental policies and procedures. On-going mentoring.

Delta University--
Practices (a usable pedagogy) and practice engaging in it
Guidance
Mentoring

3. Does the GTA preparation program at your university contain all of these components?
Please explain.
Omega University--
Yes. They learn about theories of composition in English 506. We also have an extensive "Freshman English Handbook" for those who teach English 101 and 102: it not only outlines university and department goals and policies, but also includes some sample assignments from experienced teachers. The Eng 507 course is valuable in terms of providing on-going mentoring.

Delta University--yes

4. What would you like to see added to the program? Why?
Omega University--
I'd like to see more GTA's added to the program. If the Freshman English composition program were to rely more on GTA's than on part-time Instructors, I think the stability of the program would eventually increase, since we would have a larger core of teachers who we had trained ourselves, rather than the more transient and idiosyncratic workforce that we employ now. We are lucky to have so many high quality part-time instructors teaching for us, but the nature of that situation is that it's difficult to get them "on the same page"--tough to schedule staff meetings, create dialogue, learn from each other, and truly become a community. All of these processes would happen more naturally with more GTA's in the program, and with a perhaps broader, more systematized training process in place. I don't think at the department or university level, such change is likely due to the nature of programs, the budget, etc.
5. What do most GTAs from your programs do after graduating?

Omega University--

First, party. Second, panic about job prospects. Third, apply vigorously for jobs. Many, I think, do try to continue with teaching at the college level, but opportunities are slim with "only" a Master's degree in English. Colleges will be glad to employ them as part-time instructors, but such work is low-paid relative to the level of education and ability Master's graduates typically possess. I don't have "hard" data about what our GTAs do after graduating, but the GTA's I've worked with this year are starting to apply for jobs and have not yet had interviews.

Delta University--Teach at the university level.