INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANT (ITA) TRAINING PROGRAM AT BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY: PUTTING THE NEEDS OF ITAS AND THE EXPECTATIONS OF UNDERGRADUATE NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING STUDENTS IN CONVERSATION

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ABSTRACT

Lee Nickoson, Advisor

Scholars such as Donald L. Rubin, Barbara S. Plakans, Consolata N. Mutua, and Monika Shehi reminded the English Language Teaching (ELT) field that a stigmatic pattern exists against International Teaching Assistants (ITAs), especially by their undergraduate native English-speaking students (NESSs). My dissertation examines this notion of stigma against ITAs at Bowling Green State University (BGSU): Does it exist? Does it occur pre-contact or post-contact? How does the existing ITA preparation course (ESOL 5050) at BGSU meet ITAs’ academic and professional needs, undergraduate NESSs’ expectations, and ITA program administrators’ expectations? How do program administrators utilize end-of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professionalization? To answer these questions, I conducted a qualitative, mixed-methods study in which I:

- Surveyed two sections of ESOL 5050 I taught during fall 2016 and spring 2017
- Interviewed ITAs enrolled in the fall 2016 section
- Surveyed and interviewed a select random sample of undergraduate NESSs on the BGSU campus
- Surveyed and interviewed nation-wide (writing) program administrators involved in ITA preparation
- Interviewed BGSU’s English for Speakers of Other Languages Director, and
- Had a peer scholar facilitate two focus group sessions with ITAs enrolled in the spring 2017 section of ESOL 5050.

Feminist methodologies and Burke’s Pentad informed my data collection and understanding of meaning-negotiation practices between ITAs and undergraduate NESSs. After employing grounded theory analysis of the data, I found out that stigma *primarily* takes place post-contact with ITAs. Moreover, the study provides implications that take the shape of hands-on activities, assignments, unit plans, and potential cross-programmatic collaborations with the goal of addressing ITAs’ needs, undergraduate NESSs’ expectations, and program administrators’ expectations.
To Scott and Teebah
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I. INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE STEM COLLEGE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background Information</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of International Students in the U.S. Classroom</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existing Stigma against ITAs</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITAs’ Utilization of End-of-Semester Course Evaluations</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Effects of ITAs on Undergraduate NESSs’ Academic Performance</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs in the STEM classroom</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs in the composition classroom</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITA Training/ Preparation Programs and Strategies</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socialization training/ preparation for domestic TAs and ITAs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A balanced approach to ITA training/ preparation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring as modeling for ITA preparation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Study</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining Chapter Abstracts</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER II. METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES                                      | 34   |
CHAPTER III. ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS: PERCEPTIONS ON ITAS-NESS’ EXPERIENCES
Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) ........................................... 66
Survey for Undergraduate Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs) .............. 74
   The Hypotheticals ......................................................................................... 81
   The Hypotheticals ......................................................................................... 82
   The Hypotheticals ......................................................................................... 85
   The Hypotheticals ......................................................................................... 88
Survey for (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs) ....................................... 88
   The Hypothetical ............................................................................................ 91
   The Hypothetical ............................................................................................ 93
   The Hypothetical ............................................................................................ 95
   The Hypothetical ............................................................................................ 97
   The Hypothetical ............................................................................................ 99
Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 99

CHAPTER IV. CODES FROM SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, AND FOCUS GROUPS ...... 100

Codes that Emerged from Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups .................. 101
   Ways ESOL 5050 Meets ITAs’ Needs (8 codes) ......................................... 101
      Ohio state law requires ITAs to be orally proficient ............................ 102
   Ways mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ needs (and
      undergraduate NESSs’ expectations) ....................................................... 103
      Compensation strategies .......................................................................... 104
      More interactions, better interactive skills ............................................ 106
      Self-reflection and peer-instructor feedback ......................................... 108
      Strategies to increase comprehensibility ............................................... 109
Raising awareness of linguistic terminology......................... 111
Learning classroom culture through observation................... 112
U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy.......... 116

Ways ITA Coaches/ Instructors Perform to Prepare ITAs (2 codes)...... 117

ITA coaches performing as observers........................................ 117
ITA coaches performing as mentors......................................... 118

Ways to Improve ESOL 5050 and Suggestions for ITA Preparation

Programs (9 codes)........................................................................ 122

Contact with native English speakers........................................ 122
Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback............................ 125
Meaning negotiation strategies.................................................. 126
Asking questions in class across cultures................................... 129
Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but
when?)......................................................................................... 131
Creating rapport with disruptive students................................. 134
Undergraduate NESSs expect ITAs to create rapport................. 135
ITAs creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs by showing
vulnerability................................................................................ 136
Undergraduate NESSs expect scaffolding as an instructional
strategy......................................................................................... 138

How Culture Informs our Understanding of the Distribution of Labor in the

Classroom (1 code)...................................................................... 141
Instructor-student division of labor in the U.S......................... 141
What Departments can Offer ITAs (2 codes)……………………………………….. 144
   ITAs’ need for peer mentoring and observations………………………………… 144
   STEM ITAs enrolling in practica through departments………………………….. 145
How ITA Preparation Programs can be (Re)Designed based on ITAs’ Instructional Duties (2 codes)……………………………………………………………………... 146
   STEM ITAs are expected to provide formative feedback on lab reports……………………………………………………………………………………………….. 146
   Assignments in ITA preparation courses should be informed by ITAs’ duties…………………………………………………………………………………………………… 148
Prior Experiences and External Resources that Help ITAs (2 codes)……… 149
   ITAs’ need for additional English language practice…………………………… 149
   Prior experience explaining concepts and teaching…………………………….. 150
Institutional Limitations (4 codes)……………………………………………… 151
   Institutions offering pre-semester orientations for ITAs………………………… 151
   ITAs’ time limitation informs enrollment………………………………………… 154
   Institutional budgetary limitations………………………………………………. 155
   Problematics of non-centralized ITA preparation……………………………… 156
Conclusion………………………………………………………………………………… 158

CHAPTER V. FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ITA PREPARATION……….. 160
First Research Question……………………………………………………………… 161
Second Research Question…………………………………………………………… 163
Third Research Question……………………………………………………………… 167
Fourth Research Question……………………………………………………………… 179
Implications…………………………………………………………………………… 181

Programmatic Collaborations…………………………………………………… 181

Unit on Meaning Negotiation………………………………………………… 183

Session one: Strategies to tackle students’ questions……………… 183

Using what you know to ask about what you do not know…. 183

Requesting paraphrase………………………………………………………… 184

Requesting repetition………………………………………………………….. 184

Using fillers to buy time…………………………………………………… 184

Commenting on the quality of the question………… 184

Paraphrasing the question……………………………………………….. 184

Requesting a moment……………………………………………………… 184

Making sure you answered the question……………… 184

Session two: Strategies to make oneself clear……………… 185

Providing an outline or agenda of each lesson……………… 185

Paying close attention to students’ reactions and body language…………………………………………………… 185

Using illustrations…………………………………………………………… 185

Using compensation strategies……………………………………….. 186

Using comprehension checks……………………………………….. 186

Providing examples……………………………………………………… 186

Verbally quizzing students on the information……………… 186

Paraphrasing oneself when students express difficulties… 186

Session three: An activity for practicing the strategies……… 187
Slang Component…………………………………………………………… 188
Modeling to Explore Language Resources…………………………………… 188
Beginning-of-the-Semester Needs Analysis…………………………………… 189
First-Day Activity for ITAs to Show Vulnerability and Establish Rapport… 190
Unit on Student Feedback…………………………………………………… 191
  First session……………………………………………………………….. 191
  Second session……………………………………………………………… 191
  Third session………………………………………………………………… 192
  Fourth session……………………………………………………………… 192
  Fifth session………………………………………………………………… 192
  Unit assignment…………………………………………………………….. 192
Conclusion……………………………………………………………………… 193
REFERENCES…………………………………………………………………… 195
APPENDIX A. SURVEY FOR INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS (ITAS)… 199
APPENDIX B. SURVEY FOR UNDERGRADUATE NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING
STUDENTS (NESSSS)………………………………………………………… 201
APPENDIX C. SURVEY FOR (WRITING) PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS ((W)PAS).. 203
APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW WITH YAHAMPATH……………………………………….. 204
APPENDIX E. INTERVIEW WITH SUTHAKARAN………………………………….. 213
APPENDIX F. INTERVIEW WITH ALEXANDER……………………………………… 222
APPENDIX G. INTERVIEW WITH MARINA……………………………………….. 228
APPENDIX H. INTERVIEW WITH REBECCA ORETO FROM CARNEGIE MELLON… 235
APPENDIX I. INTERVIEW WITH OLIVIA FROM SOUTHERN PUBLIC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>INTERVIEW WITH NANCY BARR FROM MICHIGAN TECH UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K</td>
<td>INTERVIEW WITH KIMBERLY SPALLINGER FROM BOWLING GREEN STATE UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L</td>
<td>FOCUS GROUP FACILITATED BY ADAM KUCHTA (SESSION ONE)</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>FOCUS GROUP FACILITATED BY ADAM KUCHTA (SESSION TWO)</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>A TABLE ILLUSTRATION OF ALL EIGHT THEMES AND THE THIRTY CORRESPONDING CODES</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O</td>
<td>MINI LESSONS AND OBSERVATIONS ASSIGNMENT SHEETS</td>
<td>291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>HUMAN SUBJECT REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL DOCUMENTS</td>
<td>303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>International student presence in the U.S.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Growth of international students in selected fields of study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Student mediation model</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Institutional mapping to represent participants’ relationship</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frequency of ITAs experiencing communication difficulty with undergraduate</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>NESSs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Number of ITAs who have/have not received end-of-semester course evaluations</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>ITAs’ reported teaching skills as reflected in student feedback on end-of-semester evaluations</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Percentages of undergraduate NESSs who reported having/not having friends,</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>colleagues, or family members who do not speak English as a first language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(post-contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(pre-contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(pre-contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(post-contact)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Research questions and methods of data collection and analysis</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Interviewed international teaching assistants’ names, countries of origin, and academic degrees</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Interviewed native English-speaking students’ names, ranks, and academic majors</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>(Writing) program administrators’ names and institutional affiliations</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Names, countries of origin, and academic degrees of international teaching assistants who participated in focus groups</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>ITAs’ perceptions of their experiences with undergraduate NESSs</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of their experiences with ITAs</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The code “Ohio state law requires ITAs to be orally proficient,” my interpretation, and example response</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The code “Mini lessons &amp; observations address ITAs’ needs for compensation strategies,” my interpretation, and example responses</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>The code “Mini lessons &amp; observations address ITAs’ need for student interactions,” my interpretation, and example responses</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>The code “Mini lessons &amp; observations address ITAs’ need for self-reflection and peer/instructor feedback,” my interpretation, and example responses</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>The code “Mini lessons and observations address ITAs’ need for strategies to increase comprehensibility,” my interpretation, and example responses</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The code “Mini lessons &amp; observations address ITAs’ need for knowledge of linguistic terminology,” my interpretation, and example responses</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for learning classroom culture through observation,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for learning about U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “ITA coaches performing as observers,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “ITA coaches performing as mentors,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Contact with NESSs,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Meaning negotiation strategies,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Asking questions in class across cultures,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but when?),” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Creating rapport with disruptive students,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Undergraduate NESSs expect ITAs to create rapport,” my interpretation, and example responses

The code “Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs by showing vulnerability,”
my interpretation, and example responses............................................................. 139
26 The code “Undergraduate NESSs expect scaffolding as an instructional strategy,”
my interpretation, and example responses............................................................. 142
27 The code “Instructor-student division of labor in the U.S.,” my interpretation, and
example responses............................................................................................... 144
28 The code “ITAs’ need for peer mentoring and observations,” my interpretation, and
example responses............................................................................................... 146
29 The code “STEM ITAs enrolling in practica through departments,” my interpretation,
and example response.......................................................................................... 147
30 The code “STEM ITAs are expected to provide formative feedback on lab reports,”
my interpretation, and example responses............................................................. 148
31 The code “Assignments in ITA preparation courses should be informed by ITAs’
duties,” my interpretation, and example responses................................................. 149
32 The code “ITAs’ need for additional English language practice,” my interpretation,
and example responses.......................................................................................... 151
33 The code “Prior experiences explaining concepts and teaching,” my interpretation,
and example responses.......................................................................................... 152
34 The code “Institutions offering pre-semester orientations for ITAs,” my interpretation,
and example responses.......................................................................................... 154
35 The code “ITAs’ time limitation informs enrollment,” my interpretation, and example
responses.................................................................................................................. 155
36 The code “Institutional budgetary limitations,” my interpretation, and example
responses.................................................................................................................. 156
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>The code “Problematics of non-centralized ITA preparation,” my interpretation, and example responses ................................................................. 158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>ITAs’ needs from a preparation program ................................................................. 162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Skills and abilities gained through mini lessons and observations ......................... 165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs ......................................................... 167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Definitions of “Perceived comprehensibility,” “Actual intelligibility,” and “Accentedness” from Munro and Derwing’s (1995a) ................................................................. 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs’ responses to question seven on the survey in light of Munro and Derwing’s definitions of the terms “Perceived comprehensibility,” “Actual intelligibility,” and “Accentedness” ................................................................. 170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>ITAs’ responses to question eight on the survey which reveal their perceptions on end-of-semester evaluation forms ................................................................. 175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>W)PAs’ responses to question seven on the survey in which they explain ways they utilize end-of-semester evaluations for ITAs’ professionalization ......................................... 178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I.

INTERNATIONAL TEACHING ASSISTANTS IN THE UNDERGRADUATE STEM COLLEGE CLASSROOM

“THERE SHOULD BE NO FOREIGNERS TEACHING AT (BLANK) UNIVERSITY!” Mutua (2014)

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides background information that was the impetus for this study. In the second section, and in order to situate the study historically, I provide the most recently available statistical representation of international students’ presence in the American academy, highlighting differences between the 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years in terms of international students’ enrollment in each academic degree. In the third section, I draw from existing English Language Teaching (ELT) scholarship on four main areas: undergraduate native English-speaking students’ (NESSs’) stigmatic perceptions of and attitudes towards International Teaching Assistants (ITAs), ITAs’ utilization of end-of-semester evaluations, the effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs’ academic performance in the STEM as well as the Composition classroom, and ITA training/preparation programs and strategies. The fourth section briefly addresses the methods and methodologies I implemented in my study. In the fifth and last section, I provide an overview of the subsequent chapters.

Background Information

Since I could spell my name, I experienced literacy through Arabic and English simultaneously. I cannot recall or even imagine how to think in one language and not the other. Around the age of seven, I discovered my passion for languages, particularly English. It was no surprise when I chose to pursue my graduate education in the United States that English studies was my chosen major. Throughout my academic career, I have always gravitated toward the
fields of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Writing Studies, with the goal of examining ways the two fields complement one another. But my passion for teaching writing to both native and nonnative speakers of English did not mitigate my anxiety when I first arrived to the U.S. in 2009. As a nonnative speaker of English, I had concerns about effectively communicating with my undergraduate students and/or not being familiar enough with the American classroom culture or pop culture references. Three years later, during my Master’s degree in Composition and Rhetoric, and after passing a practicum course required of domestic Teaching Assistants (TAs) and International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) alike, I was assigned to teach a section of first-year composition that was entirely populated with native English-speakers. Despite the training I received along with domestic TAs and my high language proficiency, I was still terrified. But the course went smoothly.

It was not until I received my first end-of-semester course evaluation form that my concerns started to reemerge. The first question on that form was a yes/no question: “The instructor speaks the English language clearly,” to which almost half of my students responded negatively. But their negative attitudes toward my English language proficiency was the least of my concerns. I was particularly appalled at the format of the question, which, first of all, perpetuates an unrealistic binary of one’s clarity of speech instead of providing a continuum of options on a Likert scale. In addition, the question is not merely inquiring about instructors’ clarity of speech, for the emphasis on “the English language” denotes otherwise. The chosen phrasing of the question carries ethnocentric and xenophobic implications that could guide students’ responses to the linguistic otherness of their instructors. In other words, the phrasing of the question targets a particular population of instructors: those who do not speak English as a first language or International Teaching Assistants (ITAs). It is not only the vague or leading
rhetoric that I find problematic about end-of-semester evaluations, but also the lack of opportunities where ITAs would learn how to utilize or interpret the data we receive via those forms. As a result, end-of-semester evaluations may fail to fulfill one of their main purposes: helping instructors improve their future pedagogical practices.

Because of my academic credentials (a Master’s in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and Linguistics), I am regularly assigned to teach classes for the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at Bowling Green State University (BGSU). During the fall 2016 and spring 2017 semesters, I taught two sections of ESOL 5050 (English for International Graduate Assistants II): a course the ESOL program offers ITAs who lead labs or instruct classes but score between 18-24 on the Spoken English Test (SET) or 21-23 on the speaking section of the TOEFL iBT test. For the SET test, ITAs give a mini-lesson on any chosen topic from their major, and they are assessed based on both their linguistic and teaching performance. Those ITAs who score between 18 and 24 are allowed to teach while simultaneously being enrolled in ESOL 5050. Once they pass the course, they retake the SET test with the goal of scoring 25 or higher in order to be released to teach. ITAs who do not meet the cut score are usually enrolled in CDIS 6000 (Speech for Graduate Students). This is a course offered through the Communication Sciences and Disorders program and is commonly referred to in the ESOL program as an accent reduction course. In addition, because of my aforementioned credentials and interest in ESOL studies, I thrice served on the Spoken English Test (SET) evaluation committee. During the second and third times I served on the committee, Benjamin Ellis Katz (M.A. student and graduate assistant in the ESOL program) was the only other graduate student representative; no other graduate student expressed interest in serving the ESOL program at the time. In her capacity as the program director, Kimberly Spallinger always
ensures that the SET evaluation committees consist of full-time ESOL instructors, faculty members, and two or three undergraduate native English-speaking volunteers. In addition, because of the value of the perspectives of full-time faculty members from the majors of the ITAs being examined, Spallinger makes sure to invite them to the committee. Serving on the committee, I—alongside other committee members—admittedly had to recommend CDIS 6000 (Speech for Graduate Students) to a few ITAs who were not comprehensible enough for us to follow their instruction. Because of the negative connotation associated with CDIS 6000 being commonly known as an accent reduction course, I often hesitated to make a decision that could impact ITAs’ self-efficacy and self-esteem, or give the implication that those ITAs’ accents are perceived as a deficiency. But the fact that CDIS 6000—an accent reduction course—was the only option available for ITAs who score 18-24 on the SET test left me simultaneously helpless, disappointed, and frustrated.

Serving on SET committees, I came to realize I was being pulled in two directions: Should I perceive and assess ITAs’ performances from my own perspective as an ITA or from an artificial hypothetical perspective of an undergraduate native English-speaking student (NESS)? On one hand, despite being comprehensible and capable of effectively communicating with native and nonnative speakers of English, I speak with a marked accent like most ITAs. In addition, my identity as an ITA helps me empathize with the ITAs I test and/or teach in terms of the struggles we might face adjusting to the U.S. classroom culture and meeting students’ expectations. On the other hand, my own experience in the U.S. classroom, both as a graduate student and as an instructor, informs my observation that some undergraduate NESSs are more familiar with nonnative accents than others.
My own experience with the Fall 2013 end-of-semester course evaluations speaks to this observation. The fact that half of my NESSs responded negatively to the yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” is an indication that to those students it was either me who was/is incomprehensible or it was them who were not familiar with my accent—depending on how they interpreted the question. However, it should not be overlooked that the other half of that section as well as the entire section I taught in Spring 2014 responded positively to that specific question. Despite such affirmation, I cannot disregard the possibility—even if it is slight—that some of my students might have struggled to understand me or communicate with me. In my role as an SET committee member, I had to occupy the subject positionalities of an evaluator as well as of a hypothetical future undergraduate student. I had to remain mindful of undergraduate NESSs’ potential expectations of ITAs, while being cognizant of the level of preparedness each ITA carries with them as they arrive to the U.S.

**Presence of International Students in the U.S. Classroom**

The continuous influx of international students—at both graduate and undergraduate levels—to American universities is evident and is a strong indicator of the increasingly diverse make-up of the U.S. classroom (Figure 1, Institute of International Education, 2016).
Figure 1. International student presence in the U.S. (Institute of International Education, 2016)
The total number of international graduate students (including those at the Master’s and Doctoral levels) enrolled in U.S. universities during the 2015/16 academic year is 383,935—a 6% increase from the 362,228 reported during the 2014/15 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2016). And the increase is not limited to graduate students. During the same time span, the total numbers of undergraduate international students have risen by 7.1% from 398,824 to 427,313 (Institute of International Education, 2016). The growth of the general international student population is particularly evident in the following fields: Math and Computer Science (25% increase), Engineering (10% increase), and Education (10% increase). However, the top three fields that attract the international population are: Engineering, Business and Management, and Math and Computer Science (Figure 2, Institute of International Education, 2016).
These data reflect a growing interest of international students in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors. If the numbers of international graduate students are on the rise and if we continue to primarily populate STEM classes, then the percentages of ITAs who perform an instructional role, whether primary or secondary, must also be rising. Therefore, there is a need to ensure that ITAs are receiving proper preparation before or as we assume our teaching responsibilities.

**Literature Review**

In order to situate my study within existing literature, I pull from a few bodies of scholarship, with the goal of exploring the following: Existing stigma against ITAs—a stigma often expressed by undergraduate NESSs particularly on ITAs’ end of semester course evaluations or during instructor-student conferences, utilization of end-of-semester course evaluations, the effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs’ academic performance, the effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs in the composition classroom, and ITA training/preparation programs and strategies.
Existing Stigma against ITAs

Scholarship on English Language Teaching (ELT) and Applied Linguistics (AL) reports a stigmatic pattern against ITAs, especially by their undergraduate native English-speaking students (NESSs) (Liu, 2005; Mutua, 2014; Plakans, 1997; Rubin, 1992). Studies show NESSs’ attitudes toward ITA’s ethnicity, in a way that, sadly, reflects ethnocentricity and xenophobia. For example, Plakans (1997) found out that the population with the most negative attitude towards ITAs is “traditional-aged males majoring in agriculture or business with an expected GPA in the C range who had not traveled outside the country and who lived in a rural area or small town in the north central part of the U.S.” (p. 112). Moreover, Mutua (2014) related her experiences as a Kenyan female instructor at a midsize state university in the eastern U.S. and a large public research university in the southwestern U.S. She contended that undergraduate students, their parents, and alumni typically raise complaints against ITAs—complaints that have been reduced to the ITAs’ linguistic proficiency and how it affects undergraduates’ perceptions of ITAs and their success in the course. Undergraduates’ perceptions are often negative “with students reposting that their foreign instructors’ accents are hard to understand and subsequently evaluating them as not as knowledgeable or skilled as US born TAs” (cited in Mutua, 2014, p. 51). Growing up in Kenya, the former British colony, Mutua simultaneously learned British English and Kiswahili; hence, she does not regard herself as an English language learner. Despite being a native speaker of English, Mutua usually received one or two student evaluations that say she was “hard to understand.” Because the majority of her students do not usually comment on her accent, she deduced that it had to do with her students’ ethnocentrism and their attitudes regarding them “either adjusting their ears and/or their prejudices toward foreigners they automatically perceive as non-English speaking” (p. 55). Some students’ end-of-semester
feedback was blatantly xenophobic, such as this all caps comment: “THERE SHOULD BE NO FOREIGNERS TEACHING AT (BLANK) UNIVERSITY!” Mutua elaborated saying she receives many menacing, condescending comments on evaluations “implying that [she] would turn out to be a better teacher and be more understandable with a dash of “Americanism”” (p. 56). Mutua realized that her English competency was negated by her foreignness (p. 54). Though this above student commentary is an exceptional example of student comments, it should not be considered representative of all student comments on end-of-semester evaluation forms. The comment, however, reflects xenophobic student tendencies.

Liu (2005) found similar xenophobic student reactions when he conducted an ethnographic case study in which he focused on four Chinese ITAs teaching FYC in a Southwestern university in the U.S. During interviews, one ITA burst into tears as she recalled one of her male students demanding her to raise his grade on a paper. And, when she refused to do so, he walked away saying, “I spent money for the course and I deserve an English teacher, not someone from China to teach me English writing” (p. 161). These student comments reflect ethnocentric mindsets and underscore the negative reactions undergraduate NESSs tend to have towards ITAs who belong to a different ethnic group.

Not only does scholarship depict negative reactions NESSs have toward ITAs’ ethnicities, but it also reflects NESSs’ perceptions of ITAs’ language competency. Numerous studies addressed language competency-related issues such as ITAs’ fluency, accents, and communicative skills. To determine the factors that contribute to undergraduate NESSs’ ratings of ITAs and the former’s comprehension of the latter’s speech, Rubin (1992) conducted a study in which he collected data from 148 undergraduate students. Each of those students listened to speakers giving a lecture on either science or the humanities. They each listened to either high or
moderate Chinese accent, or to standard American English accent. About half of the participating listeners listened to the lecture in conjunction with a photo of an Asian TA; a third with a photo of a Caucasian TA; and a sixth without any photo stimulus. Participants were given a questionnaire to respond to with items concerned with accent, ethnicity, and teaching quality. In addition, they had to respond to a background questionnaire that inquired about the number of classes instructed by ITAs, number of weeks spent outside the U.S., attitudes towards nonnative speakers in general such as their willingness to have nonnative speakers as roommates and their perceptions of the benefits of having nonnative speakers on campus. Also, listening comprehension was tested using cloze test. The results of this study proved that the degree to which undergraduates’ perceptions of ITAs’ accents to be foreign undermined the former’s evaluations of the latter. In addition, when students regarded instructors to be sharing their attitudes, they gave them higher rating on their teaching skills. In other words, “attitude homophily was positively related to teacher ratings” (Rubin, 1992, p. 521). However, listening comprehension was not affected by any attitudinal variables, but was slightly related to their experience sitting in a class taught by an ITA. Students who were willing to be taught by ITAs in the classroom learned how to listen more effectively.

Familiarity with the accent, the speaker of that accent, and stereotypes of that accent are all factors that can affect listening comprehension (Major et. al, 2002, p. 174-6). One study that explored how ITAs’ nonnative English accents affect student comprehension is Major et. al (2002) in which the researchers examined the effect of native versus nonnative accents on listening comprehension of both native and nonnative speakers of English. More specifically, this study examined the degree to which sharing the accent of the speaker affects comprehension during listening comprehension tests. Four groups of 100 listeners whose first languages are
Chinese, Japanese, Spanish, and Standard American English participated in the study. The results of the study indicated that both native and nonnative speakers of English gave lower scores when listening to lectures by nonnative speakers of English.

Because attitudes play a primary part in listeners’ perception of what they actually comprehend, linguists Munro and Derwing (1995a) contended that a distinction between “perceived comprehensibility,” “actual intelligibility,” and “accentedness” should be drawn. Perceived comprehensibility refers to “listeners’ perception of a speaker’s comprehensibility;” whereas, actual intelligibility has to do with “how well listeners actually understand the stimulus.” Accentedness, on the other hand, refers to one’s “degree of foreign accent.” In addition, Derwing and Munro (1997) found out that intelligibility scores are usually higher than comprehensibility scores, which are sequentially higher than accentedness scores (as cited in Major et. al, 2002, p. 177).

The distinction between these three terms—perceived comprehensibility, actual intelligibility, and accentedness—however, is hardly pronounced in end-of-semester course evaluations, which can undermine the efficiency of such high-stake and consequential forms on which tenure, promotion, rehiring, and merit are determined. If questions on end-of-semester course evaluations blur these three notions, undergraduate students might not agree on a single interpretation of such questions, resulting in ITAs receiving misleading information and, hence, being unable to use the information for professional development.

**ITAs’ Utilization of End-of-Semester Course Evaluations**

Because end-of-semester course evaluation forms are essential for ITAs’ professional development, scholars examined ways ITAs could utilize their undergraduate students’ comments to improve their pedagogy and, hence, their performance on end-of-semester course
evaluations. For example, Hsu (2014) argued that in order for ITAs to receive better teaching evaluations and for their students to perceive them in a less negative light, ITAs need to keep an open and positive attitude toward their students and toward their students’ criticisms. Like many ITAs in the U.S., Hsu experienced disrespect from students because of her accent and teaching style. She received negative student evaluations that reflect both language-related and classroom management problems. Hsu usually teaches research methods courses and nonverbal communication courses. Overall, she noticed that students’ negative attitudes towards her accent and teaching style tend to occur more frequently in lecture-oriented courses (i.e. teacher-centered classrooms) rather than in courses in which she promoted group activities and student presentations (i.e. student-centered classrooms). Consequently, Hsu started incorporating more student-centered activities in her lecture-oriented courses (p. 41).

In addition, Hsu (2014) listed many benefits of confirmation behaviors in the American classroom—behaviors which could result in higher student motivation, and, hence, improved learning quality and student evaluations (p. 43). Hsu cited Ellis’s (2000 and 2004) research on confirmation behavior practices, such as “responding to students’ questions and comments, demonstrating interest in students, and using interactive teaching styles,” all of which result in a decrease in student apprehension and an increase in student cognition (p. 43), hence, a better learning experience. Such confirmation behaviors, I believe, might be lacking in other cultures where teacher-centered style is regarded as more prevalent and practiced more widely.

The Effects of ITAs on Undergraduate NESSs’ Academic Performance

The effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs in the STEM classroom. One angle ELT scholarship has taken to understand undergraduate NESSs’ learning experiences is by comparing their academic performance when taught by ITAs to their experiences when taught by
domestic TAs. For instance, Oppenheim (1996) examined the Student Mediation Model (in comparison to an information transmission model) with the goal of realizing whether it is helpful for understanding how undergraduates enrolled in beginning and more advanced calculus and computer science courses learn from nonnative English-speaking instructors (i.e. ITAs). The study was conducted at a large research university, where 33% of TAs are ITAs. The goal of the study was to measure student achievement as they are being taught by ITAs and to compare it to when students are being taught by their native English-speaking (NES) counterparts. The study also examined student evaluations of both groups of teachers in order to gain an understanding of student satisfaction with ITAs. By looking at both student achievements and evaluations, the study clarified which contexts students perceive as beneficial from ITA instruction.

Oppenheim proposed a Student Mediation Model to understand how students learn in an intercultural context. The model is grounded on Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the distance between what a learner is able of doing on his/her own and what he/she are able to do with the help of a more capable person. By internalizing the instructor’s ways of thinking, the learner then adds them to his/her ways of thinking, and, thus, advances in their ZPD (p. 10). In other words, learners play a voluntary role in their education. And that is why student achievement and their evaluation of ITAs should be better understood if students’ prior knowledge, “self-regulation skills, self-efficacy beliefs, motivation, pre-existing attitudes towards ITAs and the first language of the student and the student’s family” are considered (p. 11). Oppenheim (1996) illustrated Student Mediation Model as follows (p. 12):
The Student Mediation Model basically acknowledges that students come to the classroom with their own background knowledge, skills, and objectives, which in combination “will have an effect on the students’ achievement and his/her joint construction of meaning with his/her ITA” (p. 13). This model implies a joint meaning construction between each student and their ITA. Thus, based on this model, students’ readiness variables (listed above) play a major role not only
in students’ evaluation of their ITAs’ teaching effectiveness, but also in their own academic achievement in class. The two-way arrows in this model symbolize the joint meaning-making and, hence, a shared responsibility between students and their ITAs. This shared responsibility is evident in ITA training/preparation programs and strategies, such as Halleck’s (2008) constructed simulation and Kang and Rubin’s (2012) structured contact approach (See below).

Oppenheim’s (1996) study examined more than 8300 students enrolled in beginning and more advanced calculus and computer science courses. In those courses, students interacted extensively with ITAs and NES instructors for two hours a week during discussion sessions, however, grades were assigned by the supervising professor with whom students met for three hours per week (p. 18). In addition, ITAs and NES instructors were assigned discussion sections based on their schedules, and students also enrolled in those sections based on their schedules. This meant that students enrolled in sections without prior knowledge of whether their instructor is an ITA or a NES instructor (p. 19). Variables such as instructors’ content area expertise and years of teaching experience were not examined in the study. Students’ prior knowledge of the subject area, though, was tested, for students had to either achieve minimum score on math placement tests or successfully complete prerequisite courses (p. 18). A quantitative method was used to analyze the distribution of student grades and instructor evaluations in order to measure student achievement and satisfaction with ITAs and compare those results to when the same courses were taught by their NES instructor counterparts. The study treated teaching effectiveness as a “relational attribute” instead of a teacher attribute, (p. 13) which implies that it is not the sole responsibility of the instructor for the teaching to be effective.

The findings of the study proved that there was no difference between the mean grades of students who were taught by ITAs and those taught by NES instructors, both in beginning and
more advanced courses. In advanced courses, student evaluations of the communication and effectiveness of their ITAs were not significantly different from those of their NES instructors. On the other hand, in beginning courses, student evaluations of the communication and effectiveness of their ITAs were starkly different from those of their NES instructors, with the latter ranking much higher. Student achievement, however, was not significantly higher in those sections taught by NES instructors. As for communication and overall ratings in advanced courses, there was no difference between the ratings of ITAs and those of NES instructors (p. 23-24).

The findings of Oppenheim’s (1996) study suggested that students in more advanced courses adapt to ITAs as compared to those in beginning courses. That was evident in both student grades and evaluations of their instructors. Conversely, students in beginning courses had lower grades and poorer instructor evaluations, which might imply that they lack the readiness to negotiate meaning with ITAs. This study implied that ITAs should not be assigned beginning courses and be assigned advanced courses instead, in which students have more prior knowledge of the subject matter and of domain discourse patterns. Such knowledge of the subject matter and of domain discourse patterns enables students to construct knowledge and negotiate meaning with their ITAs. Thus, because students in beginning courses might have limited knowledge of the subject matter and/or of the domain discourse patterns, they might lack “the cognitive capacity” to communicate effectively with ITAs and, as a result, evaluate ITAs’ communicative skills poorly. Conversely, students in more advanced courses might have sufficient knowledge of the domain that allows them to communicate effectively with ITAs and, consequently, evaluate ITAs’ communicative skills positively (p. 39). In other words, undergraduate students play a role in their learning that should not be overlooked; however, I find a problematic implication that
undergraduate students are not expected to carry any responsibility when it comes to exerting effort to successfully communicate with their ITAs. One significant aspect of this study, however, was that it did not prematurely associate student-ITA communication breakdowns with some linguistic deficiency on ITAs’ part. Because the study treated teaching effectiveness as “relational attribute” instead of a teacher attribute (p. 13), it examined the correlation between communication breakdowns and students’ knowledge of the subject and of domain discourse patterns. The results, however, had implications for ITAs’ course placement but did not offer suggestions for ways that students could improve their maturity level or domain knowledge in order to succeed in their chosen fields.

Another scholar who studied the effects of ITAs on undergraduate students’ academic performance is Borjas. Specifically, Borjas (2000) examined whether the influx of ITAs has a negative effect on the American university specifically regarding the academic achievements of American undergraduates (both native-born and foreign born). He surveyed economics students enrolled in Intermediate Microeconomics class at a large public American university. The questionnaire asked students about their experience with the TAs, who typically assist professors with grading and teaching a weekly section during which they go over professors’ lectures. The surveys inquired whether the assigned TA was foreign-born, and they also asked students about their final grades in all economics classes, their overall GPA, and other background information. 309 questionnaires were collected, and 75 percent of those questionnaires had complete data. Students reported on their experiences with the TAs regarding two aspects: their communication skills and preparedness. Eighty percent of the students reported native-born TAs to be having better communication skills than their foreign-born counterparts; however, the results regarding preparedness came slightly in favor of foreign-born TAs with almost no difference between
native-born and foreign-born TAs. Students with foreign-born TAs received lower final grades than those taught by native-born TAs, which reduced their overall GPA, hence their scholastic achievements, by 0.2 grade points. Moreover, this decrease in student scholastic achievement was observed more in students who negatively assessed the communicative skills of foreign-born TAs. In addition, this adverse academic achievement was found only in native-born undergraduates, but not in their foreign-born counterparts, which suggests the existence of language barriers between foreign-born TAs and native-born undergraduates, but not between foreign-born TAs and foreign-born undergraduates. It is worth mentioning that at that specific institution only TAs with better-than-average communicative skills are assigned teaching duties, a factor that can undermine native-born undergraduates’ adverse reactions to the communicative skills of ITAs.

In addition, Marvasti (2007) conducted a study to test the common perception that ITAs have an adverse effect on undergraduate NESSs’ academic performance. In this study, academic performance was measured in relation to students’ grades. The findings of the study suggest an adverse effect of ITAs on the academic performance of undergraduate NESSs; however, that negative effect was not a result of ITAs’ lack of language proficiency. Such conclusion is based on the fact that the negative effect was not uniform among students with various performance levels and was not detected in more rigorous courses.

The effects of ITAs on undergraduate NESSs in the composition classroom. Though my study primarily focused on ITAs in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) majors, it is worth-mentioning that ITAs have a significant presence in composition classrooms in U.S. four-year colleges and in the English language learning classroom worldwide. In fact, the population of speakers of English as a second or foreign language is larger than that
of those who speak it as a first language. George Braine, one of the most prominent scholars in English Language Teaching (ELT) and Second Language Writing (L2 Writing), argued in his 2010 book *Nonnative Speaker English Teachers: Research, Pedagogy, and Professional Growth* that the majority of English instructors must be nonnative speakers of English. The rationale for his argument is grounded in the vast numbers of speakers of English as a second language as well as a foreign language: 375 million and 750 million, respectively (p. 2). Despite such large presence of nonnative English speaking instructors—including ITAs—scholarship on issues that pertain to such population did not gain momentum until very late in the 20th century. This shift in scholarship is referred to as the nonnative speaker (NNS) movement. The movement started in 1996, with Braine’s invitation to nonnative English speaking professionals to the colloquium entitled “In Their Own Voices: Nonnative Speaker Professionals in TESOL.” Braine organized that colloquium at the 30th Annual TESOL Convention and invited renowned NNS scholars as well as novices in the field of Applied Linguistics to address issues that concerned them. Braine attested to the success of the colloquium, as it generated a discussion on initiating a TESOL Caucus for NNSs. Only two years later, in 1998, The Nonnative English Speakers in TESOL (NNEST) Caucus was founded, with Braine as the chair (Braine, 2010, p. 3-5). The goal of the NNS movement is to “fight[ ] discrimination faced by nonnative speaker English teachers and empower[ ] them in the workplace” (Braine, 2014).

Braine (2010) associated the roots of the nonnative speaker (NNS) movement with the notion of World Englishes initiated by Braj Kachru and Larry Smith around the 1970s (p. 2). Kachru envisioned the spread of English into three concentric circles: Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle (cited in Braine, 2010, p. 2). The Inner Circle represents countries where English is learned as a first language in linguistically homogenous communities, Outer Circle is
where English is learned as an “additional institutionalized” language, and Expanding Circle is where English is learned as a foreign language. Kachru discovered that nonnative speakers of English in the Outer and Expanding Circles “far outnumbered” native speakers of English in the Inner Circle (Kachru, 1986, p. 12-13; Braine, 2010, p. 2; Shehi, 2017, p. 264).

Though Kachru’s theory about the spread of English and Braine’s NNS movement were groundbreaking and definitely were forces that shifted the stigmatic conversation against nonnative speaking instruction, it is important to point out where that stigma took root. Noam Chomsky’s (1965) *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* was one of the earliest scholarship that planted seeds of the native/nonnative speaker divide. One core concept that Chomsky argued in that text was the “construct of the native speaker as the one who possesses knowledge of a language within a homogenous speech community” (Cited in Shehi, 2017, p. 264). Chomsky’s construct led to the marginalization of World Englishes and nonnative speakers and teachers of English. Challenging Chomsky’s construct, Robert Phillipson’s (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism* argued against the “native speaker fallacy,” which advocates for native speakers of English as the ideal instructors of that language. Phillipson (1992) argued that:

> NS abilities could be instilled in NNS through teacher training, that NNS of a language have undergone the process of learning a (second) language and are therefore better qualified to teach the language, and that language teaching is no longer synonymous with the teaching of culture, and thus could be taught by teachers who did not share the same culture as the language they taught (Braine, 2010, p. 3).

Similarly, Canagarajah (1999) made a case for “speakers with multilingual competence” as successful language instructors because our multilingualism “develops a deep metalinguistic knowledge of and complex language awareness” (p. 80).
Despite such advancements in scholarship that challenged the Chomskyan native/nonnative speaker divide, the consequences of that divide still echo in writing classrooms where ITAs are instructors. Monika Shehi (2017) reflected on the challenges she faced in the American writing classroom as an international composition instructor who was born and raised in Albania and is now teaching composition at the University of South Carolina Upstate. In her article, Shehi highlighted the challenges international composition instructors face due to social prejudices that immigrants typically face. Though Shehi make it a point to introduce herself to her students as a naturalized American citizen, her interactions with the students reflected their perception of her as “an unknowing newcomer” who must lack the simplest cultural knowledge about local restaurants or basic government units (p. 263). Not only that, but her students seemed to underestimate her knowledge about American academic institutions’ code of conduct. For instance, one of Shehi’s students not only “unapologetically admitted to submitting a classmate’s paper as his own,” but also defended his act saying “You have to understand this is quite common here; everybody in my dorm does it” (p. 236). This example underscores the social and cultural prejudices ITAs may face in the composition classroom—or any classroom for that matter.

Shehi (2017) placed “students’ perceptions” at the center of the challenges international instructors of composition need to overcome. To do so, she offered a reauthoring of the immigrant narrative—a narrative that often challenges the linguistic competency of international instructors of composition (p. 265-6). Following a semester-long struggle of “trying to pass for a New Yorker” (after being told by one of her professors that she sounds like one), Shehi not only experienced a sense of loneliness and distancing from her Albanian identity, she also realized that in order to dismantle students’ “received immigrant narratives,” she had to come to terms
with and embrace her immigrant identity. Shehi realized that her authority in the composition classroom should stem from “her professional competence” rather than from her students’ “received cultural script” (p. 266). Instead of relying on our competence in Standard American English (SAE) dialect—a dialect that marginalizes those who speak different dialects or languages at home—ITAs in the composition classroom should rather shift the focus to the fact that SAE is “neither uniform, not fixed,” Shehi argued (p. 267). She elaborated, “This requires helping students develop the language awareness and critical perspective they need in order to defend their right to their language as well as to make shrewd rhetorical choices” (p. 268). What renders ITAs in the composition classroom as more equipped to do so than our domestic counterparts are our unique “linguistic backgrounds” that help us navigate language differences in the composition classroom (p. 268). Shehi stated that she often employs her language awareness to help her NESSs “plow the possibilities of language, expanding their stylistic registers to do so” (p. 273). She proposed that ITAs should draw from our own “backgrounds to highlight how sociopolitical forces contribute to the privileging of certain forms of discourse and the marginalization of others” (p. 268). In her own composition classroom, Shehi stated that she often shares the discursive privileges that exist in Albania due to dialectical differences, with the goal of raising students’ critical consciousness about language practices in the U.S. context. In other words, ITAs have a lot to offer both international undergraduate students as well as their domestic counterparts in the composition classroom.

**ITA Training/Preparation Programs and Strategies**

**Socialization training/preparation for domestic TAs and ITAs.** In addition to ELT scholars examining the effects of ITAs on undergraduate students’ academic success—whether in STEM or in the Composition classroom—instructional communication scholars looked at
means to gain student compliance among native English-speakers in the U.S. college classroom. To exemplify, Liu, Sellnow, and Venette (2006) tested which of the five compliance gaining strategies (i.e. reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, referent power, and expert power) would be most effective in gaining compliance from students, especially that it is students who provide power to their instructors based on the level of trustworthiness they perceive in their instructors. So, trust and compliance correlate positively, in a way that can help instructors control student resistance and positively affect learning (Cited in Liu, Sellnow, and Venette, 2006, p. 210-11).

For teachers to gain compliance in the classroom, behavior alteration techniques (BATs) and behavior alteration messages (BAMs) can be used. For instance, a prosocial BAT that focuses on “reward from behavior,” corresponds to BAMs such as, “You will enjoy it” and “You will get a reward if you do.” Contrastingly, an example of antisocial BAT that focuses on “punishment from source,” corresponds to BAMs such as, “I will punish you if you don’t” or “I will make it miserable for you if you don’t” (Liu, Sellnow, and Venette, 2006, p. 212-213). Prosocial BATs (reward-oriented) have a positive impact and antisocial BATs (punishment-oriented) have a negative impact on students’ affect, motivation, and cognition. And teachers who use antisocial BATs tend to get more resistance from their students (p. 211). The authors examined former studies, which agreed that American instructors tend to use more reward-based BATs than their Chinese counterparts.

Liu, Sellnow, and Venette (2006) wanted to examine undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions on instructors’ (both native English speakers and ITAs) frequency using BAMs while making comments in class. This study consisted of 404 undergraduate students from 24 classes in a medium-sized Midwestern university: 11 Chinese instructors and their classes, and 13 American
instructors and their classes. The results of the study came to indicate that Chinese instructors were using BATs as frequently as their American counterparts. In addition, there were no significant differences between the frequency of Chinese and American instructors using antisocial BATs. On the other hand, there was statistical significance when comparing the nationality of the instructor and their use of prosocial BATs; however, the actual difference and the effect size were too small for a meaningful difference to be inferred. Overall, there was no difference between compliance-gaining strategies used by new American instructors and their Chinese counterparts, as both used a similar variety of BATs in their instruction. This result implies that there is no need for an extended socialization period (i.e. more than a year) for ITAs, which also applies to American instructors. Thus, the socialization training/preparation offered for ITAs should not be different from that offered for their native-speaking counterparts. What the results also imply is that both groups can equally benefit from training/preparation to reduce their use of antisocial BATs, as those techniques may negatively affect student learning.

This study might have implications for ITA training/preparation programs, as it proved that socialization training should not be different or special for ITAs than they are for their domestic counterparts.

**A balanced approach to ITA training/preparation.** The TESOL and Applied Linguistics scholar, Lisya Seloni (2012, p. 134) astutely pointed out the existing imbalance in ITA training/preparation programs when it comes to placing responsibilities. She stated:

> It is essentially disheartening to see studies recommending training curricula that cast NNES teachers as a “remedial” population. This approach includes making one-sided recommendations, such as creating accent-reduction classes or providing handbooks for assisting in the cultural adjustment of ITAs in class and for enhancing NNES instructors’
communication proficiency and confidence in the classroom (Athen, 1991; Gareis &
Williams, 2004).

The criticism directed towards such training/preparation programs has to do with the
ethnocentric views they are grounded in and their goal being “Americanizing ITAs’ foreign
accents” (Zhou, 2009, p. 21). Such Americanization, as noted by Mutua (2014) above, might
foster ITAs’ potential insecurities and vulnerabilities they/we may experience as a minority
population. It might also underscore their/our feeling of otherness and emphasize their/our
perceived linguistic deficiency. Not only this, but Seloni brought up aspects of ITA
training/preparation programs, such as “creating accent-reduction classes or providing
handbooks for assisting in the cultural adjustment of ITAs in class,” which could underscore
ITAs’ insecurities and linguistic vulnerabilities.

As a reaction to undergraduate NESSs’ common negative perceptions on ITAs, Kang and
Rubin (2012) proposed a structured contact approach that prompts interaction between the two
groups. Following such activities, undergraduate NESSs perceived ITAs to be “more
comprehensible and instructionally competent” (p. 157). The authors emphasized that “the
responsibility for effective communication between native English-speakers (NESs) and
nonnative English-speakers (NNESs) should lie not only with the latter as speakers, but also with
the former as active, responsive, and empathetic listeners” (p. 158). Thus, the authors believed in
a shared responsibility between NNESs and NESs when it comes to effective communication
taking place. In order for the intergroup contact exercises proposed to reduce undergraduates’
prejudices, specific conditions need to be followed. For instance, groups need to be
“interdependent in ways that require or encourage frequent communication across cultural
boundaries” (p. 159). Equal status of all participants, no prior interactions, and casual settings are
a few of the conditions for the exercise to work. The intergroup contact exercise was “a mystery puzzle-solving activity,” in which each member is given 8 clues and is supposed to use only verbal communications to communicate with the rest of the members in order to solve the given crime mystery. After completing two exercises and rotating among groups, group members debriefed by sharing their differences in nonverbal communication and common cross-cultural misunderstandings (p. 160).

In order to measure undergraduates’ attitudes towards ITAs before conducting the activities, 63 undergraduates rated 11 audio recordings of ITAs’ 5-minute mini lessons. They rated them based on “comprehensibility, overall oral proficiency, degree of accentedness, and teaching competence” (p. 161). After the contact exercises, the same group of undergraduates who were randomly chosen to participate in the contact activities re-rated the same mini lessons. The entire process was repeated but with entirely native English-speaking participants. In other words, those participants did not get a chance to interact with ITAs. Overall, the results showed positive improvement in undergraduate NESSs’ ratings of ITAs’ comprehensibility and teaching competence. Despite the situatedness of the study and the possibility that the improved ratings may be fleeting in the sense that the positive perceptions may be short lived, I believe the study still offered suggestions for implementing such contact activities in on-campus intercultural training/preparation, especially on campuses where more prejudice is noticed and reported. In addition, the study emphasized a shared responsibility between ITAs and their undergraduate NESSs, which, I believe, is key to effective communication.

Another study that suggested a shared responsibility between ITAs and NESSs is Halleck’s (2008) constructed simulation. The author, in her capacity as the director of the ITA Orientation and Training Program at Oklahoma State University, constructed a simulation to
orient new ITAs and undergraduate NESSs in that training program. The objective of the simulation is for both groups to “become familiar with the issues related to the use of international teaching assistants (ITAs) as instructors in undergraduate courses” (p. 137). The various roles laid out in the simulation raises the awareness of both ITAs and undergraduate students about the “problem:” ITAs might become aware of the problem they may not have known existed and undergraduates might realize the role they play in the problem. The end goal is for the simulation to “probe[ ] the cross-cultural competence of all the stakeholders involved” (p. 137).

**Mentoring as modeling for ITA preparation.** In addition to what ELT scholarship offers in terms of ITA preparation programs and strategies, scholarship also has suggestions in terms of mentorship, which is an essential catalyst to shaping instructors’ professionalization. In their literature review, Luciana C. de Oliveira and Shu-Wen Lan cited scholarship that emphasized the various skills NNES graduate students (GAs) need before they acquire “advanced academic literacy” in a U.S. university. For example, Braine (2002) argued that advanced academic literacy skills could not be achieved by just “reading and writing effectively using English academic texts assigned.” In addition, NNES GAs need to establish interactive relationships with their professors, advisors, and peers. Moreover, they need to be enculturated into the U.S. linguistic, academic, and social communities (p. 60). In his book, *Nonnative Speaker English Teachers: Research, Pedagogy, and Professional Growth*, Braine (2010) particularly stressed mentoring relationships with advisors as the most important aspect NNES GAs need to foster in order to acquire advanced academic literacy (p. 61). De Oliveira and Lan expanded Braine’s argument with the addition of a focus on mentoring for NNES doctoral students as a means to “build their knowledge base for teaching in higher education” (p. 61).
Lan (a doctoral student) and De Oliveira (Lan’s advisor) coauthored an article where they shared their experiences navigating a mentor-mentee relationship. De Oliveira played a major role in preparing Lan, first, to acquire advanced academic literacy needed for her Ph.D degree in the U.S. and, second, to teach in higher education. In other words, the authors offered their personal accounts of how their mentor-mentee relationship played a role in Lan’s professional development. Because Lan faced challenges as an unprepared international doctoral student, given the academic expectations in a U.S. university, De Oliveira provided her with professional development opportunities, and, as a result, their relationship grew as they worked together on a few projects (p. 64).

One of the first obstacles Lan faced is that classroom cultural expectations in the U.S. were different from those in Taiwanese classrooms, especially regarding participation in class discussions. In the Taiwanese classroom, Lan was expected to remain silent and listen attentively to her professors. In fact, Taiwanese students’ silence in the classroom is “necessary to show their full attention and respect for teachers’ professional knowledge. Speaking, except in response to teacher’s question, is considered an interruption or even a challenge to teacher authority” (p. 56). Despite the fact that Lan managed to complete what she perceived to be a “lengthy list of assigned reading and writing tasks,” she had trouble formulating her thoughts in English fast enough to participate in classroom discussions (p. 65). Lan elaborated, “By the time [I] finished [my] translation and felt ready to talk, the discussion had shifted to other topics. Very often, [I] was so overwhelmed by the professors’ and peers’ eloquence as well as [my] own anxiety of speaking up in class that [I] could hardly get a word out” (p. 66).

De Oliveira was not only Lan’s advisor and professor in one of her graduate seminar classes, but she had been once an international student herself. Because of that shared identity,
De Oliveira was more prepared than her domestic counterparts to share her experiences with Lan and give her tips and strategies on how to be more prepared for classroom discussions—an act that showed De Oliveira’s empathy and created a psychological bond between her and Lan. In addition, De Oliveira offered a research assistantship position to Lan, who immediately accepted it (p. 66). Together with two other graduate students, Lan conducted classroom observations and interviews with elementary teachers of ELLs, then she collaborated on analyzing and coding qualitative research data for a case study, which prepared her for her own dissertation research (p. 67). The notion of research collaboration was also new to Lan. After gaining research experience with ELL issues, Lan was qualified to teach a course designed for undergraduate ELLs. De Oliveira, again, shared with Lan her experience teaching that course and recommended Lan to the course coordinator. Together, De Oliveira and Lan went through the composing and revision processes of the manuscript (that represents the academic article at hand) in which they reflected on their evolving mentor-mentee relationship. Collaborating on that project allowed Lan to gain experience with publication.

De Oliveira and Lan’s evolving mentor-mentee relationship shows the vital role mentorship plays in ITAs’ professional development, especially when the mentor shares an international identity with the mentee. Such shared identity and lived experience allow the mentor to not only provide strategies and tips for ITAs to navigate our lives as graduate students, but also as instructors and professionals. In addition to mentorship, ITAs typically receive training/preparation through special preparation programs that vary in structure from one school to the other.
Overview of Study

Familiarizing myself with current ELT scholarship on ITA training/preparation programs and strategies as well as undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of ITAs, I came to realize the need to examine the current ITA training/preparation program at BGSU (ESOL 5050) in relationship to ITAs’ needs and the expectations of undergraduate NESSs and (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs). My situatedness in the study as the primary investigator, ITA trainer/coach/mentor, and as an ITA myself adds to the complexity of the study.

My research takes the shape of a mixed-methods study, in which I examine the existing ITA training/preparation program at BGSU, namely ESOL 5050. In this study, I create a space where ITAs’ voices could be heard and are put in conversation with voices of undergraduate NESSs and of (Writing) Program Administrators (W)PAs.

Research Questions

This dissertation study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the academic (i.e. as students) and professional needs (i.e. as instructors) of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?
2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?
3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?
4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?
The following table is a visual representation of each of my research questions, the data I collected in order to investigate each of those questions, and the method of data analysis I employed:

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<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Method of Data Analysis</th>
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**Table 1.** Research questions and methods of data collection and analysis

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Collected</th>
<th>Method of Data Collection &amp; Analysis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the academic (i.e. as students) and professional needs (i.e. as instructors) of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?</td>
<td>I heard from ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 during the Fall 2016 and the Spring 2017 semesters with the goal of learning about novice ITAs’ academic and professional needs to be effective instructors in U.S. classrooms.</td>
<td>Surveys and interviews of ITAs enrolled during the Fall 2016 semester and surveys and focus groups of ITAs enrolled during Spring 2017. I used grounded theory to code and analyze surveys, interviews, and focus groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs’ professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?</td>
<td>I conducted data analysis of responses to my first research question and responses of undergraduate NESSs and (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs). The results led to theory regarding the effectiveness of the existing ITA training/preparation program at BGSU. In addition, I compared my findings to what is offered through the ESOL 5050 curriculum. Theory, consequently, emerged as to ways the BGSU’s current ITA training program could be reenvisioned.</td>
<td>Data analysis of surveys and interviews of undergraduate NESSs and (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs). I used grounded theory to code and analyze surveys and interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?</td>
<td>I collected data that helped me examine ITAs’ understanding of end-of-semester course evaluations and how they utilize the data offered in such forms. In addition, I collected data from (W)PAs in order to understand how they utilize end-of-semester evaluation forms for ITAs’ professional development.</td>
<td>Data analysis of surveys, interviews, and focus groups of ITAs and surveys and interviews of (W)PAs. I used grounded theory to code and analyze surveys, interviews, and focus groups.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?</td>
<td>I compared the responses of undergraduate NESSs who reported having had experiences with ITAs to the responses of those who reported not having had experiences with ITAs. The comparison showed what informs the stigma against ITAs.</td>
<td>Data analysis of surveys of undergraduate NESSs.</td>
</tr>
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Remaining Chapter Abstracts

Chapter Two: Methods and Methodologies

In this chapter, I explain the methods I used for collecting data and the methodology that shaped and informed my research practices. I also explain how I utilized grounded theory for the analysis of my data.

Chapter Three: Analysis of Surveys

This is the chapter that houses the results and findings of my surveys. In other words, this is where I lay out the findings of the survey taken by each of the three groups of participants.

Chapter Four: Codes from Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups

In this chapter, I offer a detailed exploration of the codes that emerged from data analysis of surveys, interviews, and focus groups. I also consolidate those emerging codes thematically.

Chapter five: Findings and Implications for ITA Preparation

This is the chapter where I use the emerging codes to answer my research questions, while speaking back to and continuing the conversation in existing scholarship. I also provide elaborate activities, complete unit lesson plans, programmatic suggestions, and classroom practices by way of exploring and reifying the implications of my study for the ITA training/preparation program at BGSU (ESOL 5050). Finally, I wrap up the entire conversation and point out potential next steps for future studies and for the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in general.
CHAPTER II.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

I came to this research study with biases and assumptions. Researching a topic that concerns me personally and academically brought to the study my own assumptions about ITAs’ experiences in the U.S. classroom and potential biases toward the ITA participants in the study—a group of participants with whom I identify. Those assumptions and biases might have informed my research questions’ formation process. I believe that research questions do not exist in a vacuum, waiting for scholars to explore them; research questions emerge from scholars’ own experiences and research interests.

In this chapter, I list my research questions and explain the epistemological and ideological assumptions that informed such curiosities. Then, I describe the goals of this study and the three groups of participants, whose perspectives allowed me to achieve those goals. Afterwards, I explain data collection methods: surveys, interviews, and focus groups; and the three research methodologies that informed my research practices: feminist methodologies, grounded theory, and Kenneth Burke’s pentad. I, then, describe my data coding and memoing practices as well as explain how my research methods supplied data. Finally, I address my biases, research limitations, and researcher positioning.

Research Questions

Following the advice of Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo (2012) and Smagorinsky (2008), I hereby explicitly explain the research questions formation process because:

[i]t is important to understand how these invisible processes of knowledge-making and knowledge-shaping can influence our research practice, and thus the types of conclusions we reach, in our research. Reflecting explicitly and articulating the choices we make as
researchers is one way of being more in control of those influences (Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo, 2012, p. 101).

Being transparent about the often oblique research process allows me to acknowledge and address my biases and assumptions. Transparency also allows me to “develop rigorous practices of accountability” (p. 101) and promotes knowledge-making through research replicability. In the same vein, in her *Ethical Dilemmas in Feminist Research: The Politics of Location, Interpretation, and Publication*, Gesa Kirsch emphasized that researchers “cannot help but be influenced by our own experiences, training, and ideological allegiances” (1999, p. 18).

As I mentioned in chapter one, the following were my research questions:

1. What are the academic (i.e. as students) and professional needs (i.e. as instructors) of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?
2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?
3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?
4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?

Deciding to research these questions was not a coincidence, and my curiosities did not evolve overnight. In fact, these questions took several years in the making, for they reflect my collective experiences and expertise as an ITA in American academia. It was when my ideology as an ITA as well as “personal beliefs, epistemologies, experiences, and knowledge” (Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo, 2012, p. 100) was put into conversation with existing scholarship that I realized a cognitive dissonance that needed to be addressed. Serving as an ITA in three different
U.S. academic institutions, I soon recognized that TA preparation programs that address the needs of ITAs are rare and, in some cases, nonexistent. And when implemented, placement in ITA preparation programs is solely decided based on ITAs’ language proficiency rather than factoring in ITAs’ pedagogical experience or awareness of U.S. classroom culture. I also noticed that mentorship is not always provided to ITAs who may or may not be aware of professional development aspects of academia, such as academic publishing, presenting and networking at conferences, and conducting research.

I soon realized the existing gaps in the scholarship on ITA preparation. Scholarship has long been focusing on linguistic stigma (Rubin, 1992; Major et. al 2002) and xenophobic tendencies (Liu, 2005) against ITAs; however, little research examines what informs such stigma and whether it is based on undergraduate NESSs’ preconceived notions of ITAs or whether it evolves after actual interactions with ITAs. In addition, scholarship has often examined undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs, but little research has listened to ITAs’ needs from a preparation program. Thus, the four research questions above have been informed by my experiences as an ITA, expertise as an ITA coach, and familiarity with the existing gap in scholarship related to ITAs.

**Goals of this Study**

This study examined the academic needs of novice ITAs at Bowling Green State University and put those needs in conversation with undergraduate native English-speaking students' (NESSs) expectations of ITAs as well as (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs)’ expectations of and experiences with ITAs. As a Rhetoric and Writing scholar and as an ITA

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1 I use “novice” as a marker for ITAs who have little or no experience teaching in U.S. classroom settings
myself, I examined how effective BGSU’s existing ITA preparation course (ESOL 5050) is in, first, fulfilling the academic and professional needs of novice ITAs, and, second, meeting the expectations of both undergraduate NESSs and (W)PAs in terms of ITAs’ effectiveness of instruction. In addition, because current scholarship reflects an existing stigma against ITAs in terms of their/our ethnicity, accentedness, and language proficiency, I investigated the existence of stigma against ITAs at BGSU and, if it exists, what informs it. In other words, in this study I examined whether there is a stigma against ITAs at BGSU and whether that stigma is rooted in preconceived assumptions or if it evolves over time. Furthermore, I looked at how ITA preparation programs at four-year colleges utilize end-of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development.

**Institutional and Programmatic Setting**

The ITA preparation program I examined is housed in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, which is affiliated with BGSU’s English Department. BGSU was established in 1910 as a teacher-training school or a normal school, and it is currently ranked as a tier-one institution. As of 2017, 71 countries were represented in its international student population.

The ESOL program consists of four full-time and one adjunct faculty members. As a graduate associate who fulfills her assistantship by teaching for the ESOL program, I have witnessed and experienced a sense of collegiality and an emphasis on professional development among the program members.

As for the history of the ITA preparation program, in 1986 and in compliance with Ohio State law and to meet the legislative requirement, Bowling Green State University came to the resolution that “all graduate assistants/fellows who provide classroom-related services must be
orally proficient in the English language prior to providing these activities” (Proposed Oral Proficiency Program, 1986). Then, it was the responsibility of each department “to determine the appropriate level of oral proficiency for each type of activity and to insure that graduate assistants/fellows possess the requisite proficiency prior to assignment to those activities” (Proposed Oral Proficiency Program, 1986). ITAs who did not possess such appropriate level of proficiency had to be “referred to the Speech and Hearing Clinic for assessment and treatment” (Proposed Oral Proficiency Program, 1986). The most recent update to this policy occurred in 2013, when ITAs who serve in any instructional capacity were allowed to demonstrate their English language proficiency either by providing an appropriate TOEFL iBT score or by completing the Spoken English Test (SET). Moreover, it is still the responsibility of each department to ensure that all nonnative English speaking graduate students who serve in any instructional capacity are cleared to teach before the beginning of their assistantship duties. It is also each department's responsibility to ensure that all graduate assistants who are required to enroll in ESOL courses do so in the appropriate semesters. An understanding of the Ohio State law, the evolvement of the ITA preparation program, and how it has taken its current shape is important to historically set the stage for this study.

In abidance with Ohio State Law, at BGSU, international graduate students who wish to take on any instructional role (teaching, tutoring, or running labs) are expected to, first, take the TOEFL iBT test or the SET, with the goal of identifying the appropriate course in which they should enroll. Those who score 25 or higher on the SET (i.e. 24 or higher on the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT) are cleared to work with students in any capacity, without any help from the ESOL program. Those who score 18-24 on the SET (i.e. 21-23 on the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT) are allowed to teach/tutor on a probationary status, while simultaneously
being enrolled in either ESOL 5050: English for International Assistants II (if instructing classes or leading labs) or ESOL 5040: English for International Assistants I (if providing support in labs). Those who score less than 18 on the SET (i.e. less than 21 on the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT) are not cleared to teach or tutor or run labs and must enroll in ESOL 5030: Intermediate Listening and Speaking.

**Participants**

This study involved three groups of participants: ITAs, undergraduate NESSs, and (W)PAs. Hearing from three different groups of participants helped me triangulate the data, as it allowed me to perceive the topic from three different angles.

**International Teaching Assistants (ITAs).** The first group of participants, ITAs, was comprised only of students enrolled in ESOL 5050 during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. The Fall 2016 cohort was comprised of ten ITAs: four Doctoral students from Photochemical Sciences, two Master’s students from Physics, one Master’s from Mathematics, one Master’s student from Geology, one Doctoral student from Statistics, and one Master’s student from American Culture Studies. In other words, the majority of this cohort members were from STEM. It is also worth noting that most of these ITAs were from Sri Lanka and India; only one was from China and one from Japan.

The Spring 2017 cohort consisted of seven ITAs: four Doctoral students from Photochemical Sciences, one Master’s student from Mathematics, one Master’s student from Pop Culture Studies, and one Master’s student from Art. Similar to the Fall 2016 cohort members, the majority of this cohort was from STEM. What was unique about this cohort was its heterogeneity in terms of ITAs’ countries of origin: two from China, two from Serbia, one from Bangladesh, one from Italy, and one from South Korea.
My choice of ITAs from that specific course rather than experienced ITAs across campus or ITAs enrolled in the lower level ITA training course, ESOL 5040 (English for International Graduate Assistants I), is grounded in three reasons. First, ESOL 5050 is the course that focuses on both English language proficiency and pedagogy, as opposed to ESOL 5040 which focuses only on pronunciation and language issues. Second, ITAs enrolled in this course have lead roles in labs or in the classroom rather than partial roles. Third, ITAs who are enrolled in that course are a better choice than their experienced ITAs on campus, as their recollection of and awareness of their needs is more present and current than their experienced counterparts. Moreover, ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 are typically considered novice, for they usually have little to no experience teaching in U.S. classrooms. As a result, their perspective on the topic is typically fresh and innovative.

Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs). The NESSs group consisted of undergraduates (regardless of rank) who were enrolled at BGSU during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. One of the goals of this study was to gain an understanding of undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs as well as their perceptions of their experiences being taught by ITAs. Additionally, I wanted to compare the frequency of reported challenges of undergraduate NESSs who have had ITAs as instructors (in the classroom or the lab) to the frequency of reported challenges of those who have not had any experiences with ITAs. This comparison allowed me to learn whether the stigma against ITAs occurs before (pre-contact) or after (post-contact) interactions with ITAs. Moreover, I chose not to collect demographic information of the NESSs participants, as my sole focus was to learn about the nature of their experiences with as well as expectations of ITAs.
(Writing) Program Administrators (W)PAs. My third group of participants was Program Administrators (W)PAs who participate in preparing and/or coaching ITAs in four-year institutions. Those (W)PAs were not limited to Writing Program Administrators, though program administrators from writing programs were also welcome to take the survey and be interviewed. I did not limit participation to WPAs because my study focused on ITA preparation programs that are preparing ITAs primarily from STEM majors (not preparing them for composition/writing instructor positions). In fact, none of the ITAs I prepared in ESOL 5050 was affiliated with the Rhetoric and Writing (R&W) program or the English Department for that matter, as the cut-off score for admission to the R&W program is 100 on the TOEFL iBT test. With the ESOL program requiring a score of 24+ on the speaking portion of the TOEFL iBT for ITAs to be cleared to teach without assistance from the ESOL program, it becomes mathematically unlikely for ITAs with a lower score on the speaking portion to be admitted to the R&W program or the English Department.

Hearing from (W)PAs from four-year institutions allowed me to learn about other ITA training programs. Though BGSU is a PhD-granting institution, the types of ITA preparation programs (W)PAs run were comparable to the one in place at BGSU. In order to draw a fair comparison across programs, I interviewed the ESOL Director, Kimberly Spallinger, at the time of the study (See Appendix K for interview transcripts). Kimberly has been involved in the ESOL program and the ITA preparation program since the early 2000s. Her broad knowledge about the program was helpful to me in situating BGSU’s ITA preparation program historically, understanding how it evolved over the years, and seeing the program from an administrative point of view.
Data Collection Methods

Upon receiving approval for my study (project number 922705-3) from BGSU’s Institutional Review Board Approval on September 13th 2016, I started collecting data (See IRB Approval letter in Appendix). Data collection took place during Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. Collecting my data, I did not limit myself to one method. Instead, I chose a mixed methods approach to data collection. Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo (2012) insisted that “very few studies can actually only be accomplished using one method” because of the myriad “ways of knowing and many types of data [scholars] collect to create narratives of understanding” (p. 111). Like most researchers, my choice of methods was grounded in “different epistemologies, ideologies, and political commitments” as well as the methods’ “fit with the research questions” (p. 111). Thus, my ideology as an ITA who coaches and researches issues related to ITA preparation shaped my construction of mixed methods. The desire to create a space where ITAs’ voices are heard guided my choice of surveys, interviews, and focus groups as research methods.

Surveys

During the eighth week of Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters, all ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 were emailed a link to the Qualtrics survey following the explanation of the script in class (See Appendix A for survey). In that digital survey, ITAs were asked about their teaching experience and whether they had any in their home countries prior to coming to the U.S. ITAs were also asked to describe the nature of their experiences teaching undergraduate NESSs in the U.S. To respond to this question, ITAs were given five choices: positive, negative, both, neither, and something else. In the same question, a space was also provided for them to explain the reasoning for their choice. Question four offered ITAs a ten-point continuum on which they
would rate how often they experience difficulty communicating with their students: zero symbolized “never;” ten symbolized “very frequently.” Question five asked about ITAs’ needs from an ITA preparation program, such as ESOL 5050, in order to teach effectively. The next and last three questions are dedicated to end-of-semester course evaluations: their familiarity with the form itself, a ten-point scale for them to report their former students’ ranking of their own teaching skills, and how ITAs tend to utilize those forms.

The corresponding consent form was embedded at the bottom of the first page of the online survey. Because I was the primary investigator of this study and the course instructor, I did not collect ITA-identifying information on the surveys. Only ITAs who were interested in the study took the survey. ITAs signaled consent by ticking the “next” button at the bottom of the page. Complete anonymity was granted to participants, and I have no idea who chose to participate in the survey. At the end of the survey consent form, ITAs were reminded to print out the consent form for their record.

As for NESSs, they were recruited during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. I used BGSU's email listserv to reach out to a 1000 randomly-chosen students. The student email list was communicated to me by the office of Institutional Research Data upon my request. However, because I received only a few responses, I decided to use a different strategy. I reached out to students in person by visiting several Graduate Associates’ sections of General Studies Writing courses (GSW 1110 and GSW 1120) during Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. These GSW courses are the equivalent to introductory writing courses in other four-year institutions. At the end of each class visit, I requested of students to demonstrate interest in my study by providing their email contacts, which I subsequently used to contact them with a link to the Qualtrics survey (See Appendix B for Survey). The survey asked NESSs questions about their
familiarity with nonnative speakers of the English language—whether those are friends, colleagues, or family members. Question two asked NESSs whether they have been taught by ITAs. The following question asked them to describe the nature of those experiences with ITAs. Five options were provided: positive, negative, both, neither, and something else. They were also provided with a space to explain their response. Question four offered NESSs a ten-point continuum on which they would rate how often they experience difficulty communicating with their ITAs: zero symbolized “never;” ten symbolized “very frequently.” In order to compare the perspective of NESSs to that of ITAs in terms of the frequency in which each group experiences communication difficulties while interacting with the other group, I posed the same question to both group participants (See Appendix A and B). Question five was an open-ended question that asked NESSs about their expectations from ITAs for an effective learning experience. The last question on the survey was informed by my own experience as an ITA in a previous institutional context. The question asked NESSs about their interpretation of an actual question that appeared on an end-of-semester course evaluation form I received in the past: “The instructor speaks the English language clearly”—a question I found to be problematic. I asked that question to start a discussion on the dangerous consequences of asking questions that carry an ambiguous or leading nature on end-of-semester evaluations, especially that those evaluations can impact ITAs’ academic careers. This last question on the NESSs survey was intended to complement the last three questions on the ITAs survey by continuing the conversation on end-of-semester evaluations in terms of how ITAs are being prepared to interpret those forms and how undergraduate NESSs interpret the questions on those forms.

Consent forms were embedded in the online survey. If NESSs chose to, they signaled consent by ticking the "next" button at the bottom of the first survey page. Students were also
reminded to print out survey consent forms for their record. Participants were allowed to provide their email contacts in the last question on the survey in order for me to contact them should they be interested in the interview portion of the study. I used those emails to contact interested students to set a convenient time to conduct the interviews.

(W)PAs were recruited during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters. They were recruited through the Writing Program Administrators email listserv, for I am a recipient of those emails and a member of the community. A link to the study Qualtrics survey (See Appendix C for Survey) was hyperlinked in the body of the email. However, this data collection strategy only yielded a few responses. So, I came up with an additional strategy. During the spring semester and following a presentation I gave at the yearly ITA Symposium, I emailed a link to my survey to all ITA specialists and coaches who were listed on the symposium’s contact list. The survey asked (W)PAs questions about their experience preparing ITAs and whether they would describe those experiences as positive, negative, both, neither, or something else. (W)PAs were also provided with a space where they could explain their responses. Question three asked (W)PAs about their perceptions on ITAs’ needs from a preparation program in order to teach effectively. Then, question four asked (W)PAs to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the ITA preparation programs offered at their institutions. The last two questions on the (W)PA survey asked about end-of-semester evaluation forms in terms of the most frequent comments ITAs tend to receive on those forms as well as how their particular ITA preparation program utilizes those forms for ITAs’ professional development. Again, these last two questions on the survey complements the conversation on end-of-semester course evaluations—this time from administrators’ perspectives.
The survey consent forms were embedded at the bottom of the first survey page for (W)PAs to read. (W)PAs signaled consent by ticking the "next" button at the bottom of the page. They were also reminded to print out a copy for their record. (W)PAs were allowed to provide their email contacts at the end of the survey should they be interested in participating in the interview portion of the study.

**Interviews**

ITAs who participated in this study were enrolled in ESOL 5050 during the Fall 2016 and Spring 2017 semesters; however, only those enrolled in the former participated in interviews. This decision to not interview ITAs from the Spring 2017 semester was due to ethical reasons, for participants should not be put in a compromising position. In addition, waiting until grades were posted would have limited ITAs’ chances of participation, as international students tend to spend summers in their home countries. Moreover, because I was the primary investigator of the study and the course instructor, I did not interview ITAs during the fall semester. Interviews of ITAs who were enrolled in the Fall 2016 semester took place during spring 2017 and after course grades were released. Only then, I sent an interview recruitment email to my entire class list with the goal of inquiring about potential interest in the interview portion.

Two ITAs emailed me back to express interest in being interviewed, and I conducted the interviews separately in my office. Both ITAs chose to reveal their true identities throughout the published study. Below is a table to demonstrate ITAs’ names, countries of origin, and academic degrees:
Table 2. Interviewed international teaching assistants’ names, countries of origin, and academic degrees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITAs’ Names</th>
<th>Countries of Origin</th>
<th>Academic Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yahampath</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Master’s in Geology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suthakaran</td>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>Doctorate in Statistics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview consent forms were handed out for ITAs to review and sign in the beginning of the face-to-face interviews, and another copy was provided for their records. My questions for both ITAs inquired about their perceived needs in a training program, their experiences with NESSs, how they perceived professional development, and whether they utilized end-of-semester course evaluations. Both interviews were audio recorded (See Appendix D and E for interview transcripts with Yahampath and Suthakaran, respectively).

As for NESSs, two students expressed interest in the study, and I interviewed them separately in my office during the Spring 2017 semester. One chose to be referred to by their real name; the other chose a pseudonym. One was a Computer Science sophomore; the other was a fourth-year Middle Childhood Education. Below is a table, representing NESSs’ names/pseudonyms, ranks, and academic majors:

Table 3. Interviewed native English-speaking students’ names, ranks, and academic majors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NESSs’ Names/Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Ranks</th>
<th>Academic Majors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alexander</td>
<td>Sophomore, first-year (due to earned credit from high school)</td>
<td>Computer Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marina</td>
<td>Fourth-year student</td>
<td>Middle Childhood Education, Science and English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview consent forms were physically provided in the beginning of the face-to-face interviews for them to read and sign, and another copy was provided for their records. The interview
questions revolved around their expectations of ITAs, their familiarity with nonnative speakers of English and whether they have any in their social circles, and the nature of their experiences with ITAs. Interviews were audio recorded (See Appendix F and G for interview transcripts with Alexander and Marina, respectively).

During the spring 2017 semester, three (W)PA participants showed interest in taking part in the interview portion of the study. Consequently, they were emailed the interview consent form, which they were reminded to print out for their record. Through email, I set up a convenient time for a Skype/Google Hangout/phone interview. Only one of the three (W)PAs chose to be referred to by a pseudonym of her choice. She also chose a pseudonym for her academic institution. Below is a table, representing (W)PA participants’ names/pseudonyms and institutional affiliations:

Table 4. (Writing) program administrators’ names and institutional affiliations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(W)PA Names/Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Institutional Affiliations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Carnegie Melon University (Private)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>Southern Public University (Public)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Michigan Technological University (Public)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the interviews, I inquired about the different ITA preparation programs in place at the academic institutions with which (W)PAs are affiliated, as well as the perceived strengths and weaknesses of those programs. Because typically instructors' professional development and future pedagogical practices rely significantly on end-of-semester course evaluation forms, I requested (W)PA personnel to furnish their opinions and common practices regarding the use of such forms to foster further professional development of ITAs in particular. All three interviews
were audio recorded (See Appendix H, I, and J for interview transcripts with Rebecca, Olivia, and Nancy, respectively).

**Focus Groups**

Because I was the primary investigator of this study and the course instructor, I did not conduct the Spring 2017 focus group sessions myself. Understanding the limitations my subject positionality imposed on the study, I was motivated to request a colleague and fellow scholar, Adam Kuchta, to facilitate two focus group sessions with the ESOL 5050 Spring 2017 cohort. Adam generously accepted my request, especially that he was one of the colleagues with whom I had been informally discussing my study long before I made that request. Before the focus group sessions took place, I had informed ITAs in the ESOL 5050 Spring 2017 section about my study and made it clear that participation in those sessions were not mandatory and that not showing up for those sessions was nonconsequential and would not affect their grades in any way. Well ahead of time, I provided Adam with the focus group questions, which were the same questions asked during the interview phase of the study. Six ITAs enrolled in the course participated in the first session; one ITA in the second. All ITAs chose pseudonyms to be referred by throughout the study and in published work. Below is a table, demonstrating ITAs’ pseudonyms, countries of origin, and academic degrees:
Table 5. Names, countries of origin, and academic degrees of international teaching assistants who participate in focus groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITAs’ Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Countries of Origin</th>
<th>Academic Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rick</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Serbia</td>
<td>Doctorate in Photochemical Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>Master’s in Pop Culture Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>Master’s in Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gu</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>Master’s in Mathematics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Adam provided all ITAs with the focus group consent forms to read and sign and another copy to keep for their record. Both interviews were audio recorded. Both focus group sessions took place in the classroom and were audio recorded. For ethical reasons, I requested Adam to keep signed consent forms and the audio recorder in his possession until I posted the grades. That way I ensured that I had no idea who chose to participate in the study and that their perspectives on the topic did not affect their academic standing (See Appendix L and M for Focus Group Transcripts of Session 1 and 2, respectively).

**Visual Representation of Participant Groups**

I realize that my study has various moving pieces. Because of that and in order to demonstrate how all the pieces speak to one another and interact, I implemented institutional mapping to represent those relationships:

*Figure 4. Institutional mapping to represent participants' relationship*
Research Methodologies

My research practices were informed by feminist methodologies, grounded theory, and Kenneth Burke’s pentad. In order to negotiate my subject positionality as an ITA and the primary research investigator, I used feminist methodologies as a theoretical framework to inform my research practices. The transparency, accountability, and self-reflexivity feminist methodologies offer allowed me to acknowledge and negotiate my subjectivities as an ITA as I wrote myself into the research and shaped my research investigation with the goal of avoiding a reproduction of my biases.

Though I was concerned that my identity and biases as an ITA might color my investigation of the topic of ITA preparation and/or weaken my research validity, I was constantly reminded by scholars in the research design field to perceive my personal goals as a strength rather than a weakness. For example, Joseph A. Maxwell (2005) cautioned scholars from excluding “personal goals and concerns” and emphasized the necessity of being aware of personal goals and how they might shape our studies. In addition, Maxwell encouraged researchers who have personal goals “to think about how best to achieve them and to deal with their influence” (2005, p. 19). Similarly, Nancy Naples (2003) warned scholars that if they “fail to explore how their personal, professional, and structural positions frame social scientific investigations, researchers inevitably reproduce dominant gender, race, and class biases” (p. 3).

It is true that my ideology as an ITA informed not only my choice of research topic, but also research questions, data collection, and data analysis. However, feminist methodologies raised my awareness of my biases and guided me to acknowledge them instead of disregarding them or considering them as factors that might weaken my research validity.
A continuous examination of my assumptions and biases allowed me to comprehend the potentials and limitations of my study. In “The construction of research problems and methods,” Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo (2012) reminded scholars that “[a]n (ongoing, continual) examination of our assumptions as researchers, as scholars, and as people enacting relationships through our research practices is important for understanding the potentials and limits of our research” (p. 99). Feminist research practices and methodologies insist on “a more explicit understanding and acknowledgement of how subjectivity, subject position, and sociocultural position shape our research processes and the knowledge that results from those practices” (p. 113). Moreover, Kirsch also urged feminist researchers “to take responsibility for…recognizing that…data are always shaped, to a large extent, by researchers’ values, theoretical perspectives, and personal histories” (1999, p. 195). Thus, feminist research methodologies allowed me to understand, acknowledge, and question my assumptions and subject positionality as an ITA, ITA coach, and scholar.

Another methodology (and method for that matter) that permitted me to mitigate my subjectivities is grounded theory. That is because “grounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories from the data themselves” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 1). As I went through the research process, I considered and accounted for my “position, privileges, perspective, and interactions” (p. 13). Therefore, grounded theory allowed me to be reflexive “about [my] actions and decisions” as I coded, memoed, and constructed theory based on my data.

Since one of the main goals of this study is to understand whether there is a stigma against ITAs and whether that stigma is rooted in preconceived assumptions or if it evolves over time, I employed Kenneth Burke’s pentad (or the five key terms of dramatism)—namely, the act,
scene, agent, agency, and purpose—as a framework through which I interpreted the data.

Burke’s pentad illuminates the motivations behind people’s acts through examining how the five components interact in different ratios in a given situation or context. Understanding these ratios in my analysis of the experiences of ITAs and undergraduate NESSs in the classroom and in the lab allowed me to figure out the motivations of the agents involved in such meaning negotiation acts. In addition, not only did I examine the dramatistic terms, but also the terministic directions the terms tend to take during ITAs-undergraduate NESSs meaning negotiation acts. These examinations allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of agents’ motivations and, hence, of stigma against ITAs.

Though I used Burke’s pentad as a theoretical framework for my analysis, I was cautious not to apply the pentad’s theoretical framework to my data analysis and coding. Instead, I allowed it to emerge as I analyzed the data. What motivated my cautious application of the theory is the fear of allowing preexisting theories to take over my analysis. After all, I intended for this study to be data-driven and for my findings to emerge from the data rather than to be imposed by prior, extant theories. Because of my intentions of having a data-driven study, I did not force Burke’s theoretical terminology on my analysis. Instead, I allowed the theoretical coding to emerge from the data and breathe through it rather than be applied to the data.

Data Coding

Throughout the data coding process, I kept an open mind to all the possibilities that the data might lead me to discover. Though this study was data-driven rather than researcher-driven, it would be naïve of me to deny that it was through my own “interpretive lens” that I made observations about my data. Takayoshi, Tomlinson, and Castillo, reminded me about “the importance of articulating the role our subject positions have on what we notice, what we
understand, and what we find interesting in our research practices” (2012, p. 107). Thus, my
subject positions might have guided my reading and interpretation of the data. However, in order
to bring participants’ views and perspectives to the forefront, I used grounded theory coding.
Grounded theory coding enabled me to “define what constitutes the data and to make implicit
views, actions, and processes more visible” and to “begin to conceptualize what is happening in
the data” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 113). To avoid falling into the slippery slope of my preconceived
notions and assumptions taking over my codes, I coded using action words and gerunds rather
than words that invoke themes, topics, or preexisting categories. Such mindset allowed my
participants’ perceptions and viewpoints to emerge as multidimensional rather than static,
unidimensional views. In addition, following Charmaz’s advice, I maintained an open mind
while coding and made effort to examine and acknowledge how my past could have informed
the way I saw the world and my data (Charmaz, p. 117). Instead of imposing my assumptions on
the codes I assigned the data or considering those perspectives as truths, I viewed my perceptions
as merely one way of seeing the data and attempted to understand my participants’ situations and
contexts (Charmaz, p. 132-3).

I used grounded theory as a method for data analysis, for it allowed for a deeper
exploration of the topic and a clearly established connection between my data and results.
Because grounded theory is a data-driven approach, it allowed me to attentively listen to my
participants’ thoughts, expectations, needs, and concerns. Instead of having my preformed
hypotheses shape the data, and hence the results, I stepped back and used grounded theory as a
beacon that guided me toward emerging codes. Grounded theory allowed me “to approach [my]
data with a radically open mind” (Broad, 2017, p. 4). I implemented grounded theory in the data
coding process “in a series of passes” (open/initial and selective/focused). Through open coding,
I was able to “discover the hidden truths the data hold” (Broad, p. 4). Open or initial coding was followed with focused coding which “reveal[ed] points of interest, insight, and discovery that [were] not evident just from the name (or definition) of a given code” (Broad, p. 5). Eventually, super codes and theory emerged from the flexible yet rigorous process grounded theory offers.

During initial coding phases, I examined “fragments of data—words, lines, segments, and incidents—closely for their analytic import” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 109). Following initial coding, I applied focused coding which allowed me to “use[ ] the most significant or frequent initial codes to sort, synthesize, integrate, and organize large amounts of data” (p. 113). Yet, because focused coding is not merely selecting the codes that interests the researcher, I concentrated on the meaning of the initial codes, my perspective of their definitions, and the comparisons I made between and among the codes that have potential for “analytic power.” Making such comparisons sharpened my sense of the analytic direction the data are taking and elucidated “the theoretical centrality of certain ideas” (p. 140).

In order to avoid forcing my data into preconceived codes, I engaged in reflexivity about any preconceptions I might have. As I conducted focused coding, I reminded myself of Kathy Charmaz’s warning words about the importance of being aware of preconceptions during research processes, such as coding and memoing (p. 156). Furthermore, Charmaz (2014) defined coding as:

[N]aming segments of data with a label that simultaneously categorizes, summarizes, and accounts for each piece of data. With grounded theory coding, you move beyond concrete statements in the data to making analytic sense of stories, statements, and observations. [Grounded theorists] aim to make an interpretive rendering that begins with coding and illuminates studies life (2014, p. 111).
During the coding process and whenever analytic ideas occurred to me, I followed Charmaz’s and Joseph A. Maxwell’s advice in terms of memoing those emerging ideas as well as the empirical observations that spawned them. Maxwell (2005) defined memos as “any writing that a researcher does in relationship to the research other than actual field notes, transcription, or coding…they are ways of getting ideas down on paper (or in a computer), and of using this writing as a way to facilitate reflection and analytic insight” (p. 12). Memoing helped me slow down to break up and group codes, as I constantly compared codes and came to recognize connections among them. This process helped me “[s]top and catch meanings and actions” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 164). Not only this, but memoing allowed me to “dig into implicit, unstated, and condensed meanings,” for it was those condensed codes that gave me “analytic mileage,” “conceptual weight,” and “increasing theoretical centrality and direction” (p. 180). Moreover, through careful coding, I managed to weave together grounded theory’s two major threads: “generalizable theoretical statements that transcend specific times and places, and contextual analyses of actions and events” (Charmaz, p. 113). A provisional theory emerged from this coding process and was further tested “through theoretical sampling” (Neff, 1998, p. 124-5). Because grounded theory “forces researchers to remain aware of their situatedness within the methodological paradigm,” (Neff, p. 126) it helped me navigate my situatedness as a researcher, instructor and coach of my research participants, and an ITA myself.

**Aligning Research Questions to Methods**

In chapter one, I explained what research methods were used to answer my research questions. In this section, I examine how my chosen methods supplied data. Below, I list the research questions and explain what methods were used to answer each question.
1. What are the academic (i.e. as students) and professional needs (i.e. as instructors) of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?

To answer this question, I conducted a survey, an interview, and two focus group sessions with two cohorts of ITAs I coached/taught. One question on the survey was constructed to directly inquire about ITAs’ needs from a preparation program such as ESOL 5050. I directed this question to ITAs because I noticed a scarcity in scholarship that creates a space where ITAs’ voices are heard or where their perspectives are considered in terms of their own needs from ITA preparation programs.

2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?

To understand the effectiveness of BGSU’s ITA preparation program (ESOL 5050), I conducted an interview with the ESOL program director. In addition, I conducted a survey for undergraduate NESSs and an interview with two undergraduate NESS participants in order to understand their expectations from ITAs. I also conducted a survey for (W)PAs and interviewed three (W)PAs in different four-year institutions to gain their perspectives about their expectations from ITAs. I compared ITAs’ needs to what the curriculum perceives ITAs’ needs to be.

3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?

I conducted a survey, an interview, and two focus group sessions to gain ITAs’ perspectives on the topic of professional development and whether ITAs utilize end-of-semester course evaluations to that end. In addition, I conducted a survey for (W)PAs and and interviewed three (W)PAs in different four-year institutions to gain their perspectives about how they utilize end-of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development in each of their institutions.
4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?

I conducted a survey for NESSs in order to gain their perspectives of the nature of their experiences with ITAs and the frequency in which they experience difficulties communicating with ITAs. Then, I compared the responses of the undergraduate NESSs who have been taught by ITAs (post-contact) to the responses of those who have not (pre-contact). This comparison illuminated whether NESSs had a stigma against ITAs and whether such stigma is rooted in preconceived notions (pre-contact) or evolves over the semester (post-contact).

Limitations of the Study and my Own Biases

Researcher Positioning

This study, like any other study, did not come without limitations. Being the primary investigator of the study as well as the instructor of the ITA preparation course (ESOL 5050), from which all ITA participants were recruited, might have put me in a position of authority that could have resulted in the typical researcher-participant binary. To mitigate such assumed authority, I had a neutral party (i.e. Adam Kuchta) conduct two focus group sessions on my behalf with ITAs from the Spring 2016 semester. Additionally, I fostered a sense of community in my two ESOL 5050 classrooms—a sense that might have allowed my students (i.e. ITA participants) to consider me as a member of the community who just has more experience in the U.S. classroom and is there to guide them through the process. The constant reminder in the classroom about my own positionality as an ITA myself was intentional and might have mitigated the unneeded sense of authority that could have made my ITA participants uneasy opening up about their vulnerabilities whether in surveys or during interviews or focus group
sessions. But sharing my own vulnerabilities with them should have, again, sent a reminder that I am one of the members of the community.

On the other hand, some might argue that positioning myself as an ITA could have been problematic in the sense that my biases might have influenced not only the data analysis process, but also the data collection. For one, my positionality and obvious identity as an ITA could have made NESSs who participated in my study uncomfortable to share their perspectives about ITAs—especially if they were having or have had negative experiences with ITAs or if they had concerns or criticisms. In other words, some might argue that my identity as an ITA might have resulted in silencing NESSs’ voices. This concern applies particularly to the interview phase of the study, as NESSs met me in person and came to realize I am an ITA myself. This concern might be valid. However, I believe that “the goal in a qualitative study is not to eliminate [the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals (i.e. reactivity)], but to understand it and to use it productively” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108-9). For instance, during the process of data analysis, reflexivity (i.e. “the fact that the researcher is part of the world he or she studies” (Maxwell, p. 109)) was a vital practice. After all, qualitative research is not about eradicating researchers’ biases or the “values and expectations they bring to the study, but [ ] understanding how a particular researcher’s values and expectations influence the conduct and conclusions of the study (which may be either positive or negative) and avoiding the negative consequences” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 108). I was aware of my own biases as an ITA and negotiated them by being transparent about my assumptions and preconceived notions before and during the memoing and data coding phase. Writing down my assumptions early on was a constant reminder that it is data that should guide my findings—not my own assumptions and biases. In addition, I used
grounded theory as my data analysis method. The recursive nature of grounded theory allowed codes to emerge throughout the data analysis process even if they did not during initial coding.

My perceived biases as an ITA might have also made NESSs reticent to share their perspectives with me. To encourage NESSs to share their perspectives and experiences with me during interviews, I emphasized the goal of my study to them and the importance of their perspectives in shaping the future of the ITA preparation program at BGSU—a change that may improve their or their colleagues’ future academic experiences with ITAs.

**Adapting Grounded Theory**

In this study, it is fair to mention that I did not strictly adopt grounded theory as outlined by scholars such as Kathy Charmaz. Instead, I adapted grounded theory to fit my particular research situation and context. For instance, time constraints did not allow me to go back and collect more data as I started coding. So, initial coding did not inform the interview process. Rather, it was informal reading of survey responses that shaped my interviews. In addition, due to time limitations, I was not able to conduct follow-up interviews with my participants to gain more in-depth perspective on their opinions. Although I do not perceive my data to be exhaustive, conducting this study sharpened my analytical skills and illuminated gaps and flows in my data gathering methods that would guide future studies and enrich my prospective scholarly agenda.

**Conclusion**

Because one of the goals of this study was to create a space for ITAs’ and NESSs’ voices to be heard in terms of each group’s needs from an ITA preparation program, implementing mixed methods was vital. Conducting online surveys, interviews, and focus groups helped me delve deeper into the topic of ITA preparation and allowed me to listen to my research
participants—their needs, expectation, and concerns. In addition, not being able to facilitate the focus group sessions in person—though I initially perceived it as a downfall—added balance to the study. Inviting Adam, an outsider to the research site and a native speaker of English, might have provided ITA participants a safe space where they could explicitly reflect on their perspectives, needs, and expectations.

Explicit reflections were not exclusive to the study participants. As a researcher, ITA coach, and an ITA, I practiced explicit reflections, too, throughout this study. In explicitly reflecting on the research process, I follow Pamela Takayoshi, Elizabeth Tomlinson, and Jennifer Castillo (2012)’s call in “The construction of research problems and methods” for researchers to do so with the goal of making the knowledge-making process as transparent as can be. In their words:

Understanding the assumptions informing our research questions can help us be vigilant about how our subject positions shape what we see as researchable questions, appropriate methods, and significant data. In the final writing of our results, articulating these assumptions gives readers a fuller, more complex context for understanding our analysis (2012, p. 116)

From this chapter onward, these words of wisdom guided my writing and explicit reflections on the knowledge-making process.

In this chapter, I have explicitly reflected on my research process (Smagorinsky, 2008) from composing research questions to constructing methods appropriate to those research questions to selecting methodological lenses through which I analyzed the data to explaining how data became results. And, finally, I have addressed my researcher positioning in relationship to research participants and how I mitigated the biases and assumptions with which I approached
this study. In the next chapter, I dive into the data analysis process of the three surveys: Survey for ITAs, Survey for undergraduate NESSs, and Survey for (W)PAs.
CHAPTER III.

ANALYSIS OF SURVEYS: PERCEPTIONS ON ITAS-NESSS’ EXPERIENCES

In chapter two, I stated that my subject positionality in this study is three-fold: ITA researcher, ITA coach, and an ITA. And I concluded that chapter with a promise of transparency throughout my knowledge-making process. Because of such complex positionality, I find transparency about my assumptions to be particularly important before embarking on data analysis. By explicitly reflecting on my assumptions prior to data analysis, I ensure that the coding and memoing processes would not be driven by my own assumptions and biases but rather by the data themselves. Explicitly reflecting on my assumption and biases prior to data analysis, I am constantly reminded about my blind spots while I am making sense of the data. In other words, I am reminded that there is more than one way of understanding the data.

In this chapter, I first explicitly reflect on the assumptions and biases with which I approached this study. Forefronting and reflecting on such assumptions and biases, I broaden the scope through which I make sense of the data and provide a space where perspectives beyond my own are invited and welcome. After creating a space where the perspectives of undergraduate NESSs and those of (W)PAs are as welcome to the conversation as those of ITAs, I describe findings from all three surveys: Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs), survey for undergraduate Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs), and survey for (writing) program administrators ((W)PAs).

Assumptions and Biases

An assumption that might have informed my motivation to conduct this study is my own experiences as an ITA in the American academy. Though my experiences with undergraduate NESSs in First-Year composition classrooms and in writing centers have never been anything
but positive, I have come to realize that the rhetoric of end-of-semester course evaluation forms sometimes explicitly targets instructors who do not speak English as a first language. As I mentioned in chapter one, Yes/No questions such as, “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” carry xenophobic implications that single out nonnative English-speaking instructors in ways that may guide undergraduates to interpret speaking English clearly as speaking with a native accent. Finding this question on one of the end-of-semester course evaluations I received in the past, I recognized how institutional bias and stigma could impact ITAs’ academic careers. What further fueled my interest in examining whether ITAs receive preparation that allows them to interpret and utilize end-of-semester course evaluation data was that throughout my academic career I never received any preparation to help me do so. Hence, I admit to the biases and assumptions with which I approached this study. Planning my study, I assumed that none of the three ITA preparation programs I examine would have plans in place to prepare ITAs to utilize evaluation forms for professional development. In addition, I expected that most ITAs would not be familiar with the forms altogether, especially if they had not taught in their home countries or if their home academic institutions do not use such forms.

I also approached this study with the preconception of an existing imbalance between the effort or labor expected of ITAs in comparison to that expected of undergraduate NESSs in order for effective communication to take place. In other words, the target student population of preparation/training programs is solely ITAs, with no orientation of undergraduate NESSs in term of meaning negotiation or means of effective communication with others—especially those who speak a different dialect or to whom English is not a first language. Hence, the onus for effective communication to take place is entirely on ITAs, with little expectation of undergraduate NESSs to understand the rhetorical means for asking for clarification, requesting
repetition or paraphrase, and/or testing the accuracy of received meaning. These rhetorical skills are often taught to ITAs in ITA preparation classes, but not to undergraduate NESSs during orientations, for example. In addition, it is not safe to assume that those rhetorical skills are part of undergraduate NESSs’ rhetorical repertoire.

These aforementioned biases and assumptions might have informed and shaped the focus of this study. Additionally, there is a possibility that the survey, interview, and focus group questions were driven by my biases and assumptions. My involvement with ITAs for two semesters and my subject positionality as an ITA were motivations for me to examine the effectiveness of the existing ITA preparation program at BGSU in terms of addressing ITAs’ needs and undergraduate NESSs’ expectations. Moreover, my experiences with end-of-semester course evaluations, though in a previous institution, have fed my curiosities about the ways program administrators from other institutions prepare ITAs to interpret and make sense of end-of-semester course evaluations. My existing knowledge that ITAs are introduced to and practice meaning-negotiation skills in BGSU’s ITA preparation course motivated me to examine whether undergraduate NESSs are rhetorically prepared to negotiate meaning with interlocutors. These meaning negotiation skills are particularly crucial, as they shape instructor-student communications at the college level. Such effective communications are key for academic success and knowledge making.

With my assumptions and biases explicitly stated, I embarked on data analysis. For my study, I constructed one survey for each of my research group participants: ITAs, NESSs, and (W)PAs. All three surveys were created on Qualtrics and distributed via email. Question one in all three surveys asks participants to choose how they identify (i.e. ITAs, NESSs, or (W)PAs), directing them to the corresponding survey. Below, I report on responses to all survey questions,
examining each of the three surveys separately. I chose to provide a detailed report of all responses for a few reasons: to ensure transparency of my data analysis process, to guide the reader through my thinking process, to clarify how I arrived to the codes, and—most importantly—to mitigate my subjectivities and biases.

**Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)**

A total of 16 ITAs participated in the survey portion of the study (See Appendix A). Question two asked ITAs if they have had any teaching experience before coming to the U.S. If they chose a “yes,” they were provided with space to type in the number of years. In response to question two, 11 ITAs (Average≈ 68.8%) noted that they had no teaching experience before arriving to the U.S., and the remaining 5 (Average≈ 31.2%) noted that they did. Those five ITAs identified the range of such experience, with a maximum of 4 years and a minimum of 2 years (Average≈ 2.8 years).

Question three asked ITAs to describe their experience teaching undergraduate native English-speaking students. To provide ITAs with some guidance, the question provided five options: positive, negative, both, neither, or something else. The options were followed by “Please, explain” to encourage ITA respondents to elaborate on their answers. One respondent has not had teaching experiences at the time the survey was taken. Seven ITAs (Average≈ 43.8%) responded “Positive.” One of the seven did not elaborate. Two elaborated by commenting on the pedagogical experience and teaching skills they gain through those experiences with undergraduate NESSs. Similarly, one elaborated on the positive experience of undergraduate NESSs understanding what s/he teaches and, as a result, providing positive feedback. One ITA described the experience to be primarily positive, with some difficulties, saying, “Till now I have a good time teaching undergraduate native English-speaking students.
Sometimes it is difficult for me to make them understand because they do not catch what I am saying to them.” The last two of the seven commented on the positive experience of undergraduate NESSs feeling comfortable to ask them questions during instruction or when undergraduates “do not understand our pronunciation.” In one of the ITAs’ opinion, undergraduate NESSs ask questions without being irritated with ITAs, which “gives [ITAs] more flexibility to make [undergraduate NESSs] understand.” The other commented on the rapport s/he is developing with her/his undergraduate NESSs, which manifests itself in the number of questions s/he receives during teaching.

One ITA described his/her experience with undergraduate NESSs as “very exciting” because the benefit is mutual, with the ITA improving his/her “conversation skills” and students engaging in lab activities and doing well on tests.

One ITA’s comment on her/his positive experience came in a few short words: “[undergraduate NESSs] are sincere.” On the other hand, two ITAs chose “both” to describe their experiences with students. One did not elaborate on his/her response. The other elaborated saying “[undergraduate NESSs] help me with my question but it would be nice for them to actually know what we were doing in lab prior to that day of lab!” This comment was the only one that expressed frustration with undergraduates’ amount of exerted effort, particularly in term of preparing for the lab session beforehand. Finally, one ITA used the space provided in this response to describe his/her anxiety communicating with undergraduate NESSs, as s/he often do not understand what undergraduates say. Despite that sense of anxiety, that ITA perceived the experience as a “great opportunity to check my English skill as well as teaching skill.” It is worth noting that none of the ITAs described the experience as “negative.”
Two ITAs’ responses (Average= 12.5%) did not address the question and, hence, were excluded from the coding process: “Positive. Because I am an international student I'm able to find more ways to help other international students. Some incidents occurred but it's part of the job” and “My prof is native speaking so it can be difficult sometimes.” These responses did not address the question at hand. While the question asks about the nature of ITAs’ experiences with undergraduate NESSs in particular, these responses addressed experiences with international students and native English-speaking professors.

Overall, responses to question three reflected a general sense among ITAs that experiences with undergraduate NESSs are positive because they help ITAs grow either in terms of their teaching or communicative skills. In their interactions with undergraduate NESSs, most ITAs placed the agency or responsibility on themselves for an effective communication to take place. The exception was with two ITAs, whose perceptions of a positive experience with undergraduate NESSs translate to the latter asking them questions for clarification or repetition due to the rapport already established between the two parties. The act of undergraduate NESSs asking questions to ITAs is perceived by the latter as a denotation of a sense of comfort or ease that undergraduate NESSs feel toward ITAs. Thus, a positive experience for ITAs results from a sensed rapport with their undergraduate NESSs. Below is a table that illustrates ITAs’ responses to question three:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Nature of ITAs’ Experiences with Undergraduate NESSs</th>
<th>Percentage of ITAs</th>
<th>Reason(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very positive</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>▪ ITAs’ pedagogical and communicative growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Positive                                               | 37.5%              | ▪ ITAs learn new teaching methods  
▪ Undergraduate NESSs understand the material and provide positive feedback  
▪ Undergraduate NESSs ask ITAs for clarification or repetition  
▪ [Undergraduate NESSs] show rapport by asking ITAs questions  
▪ “[Undergraduate NESSs] are sincere.” |
| Positive with some difficulties                         | 6.3%               | ▪ When undergraduate NESSs do not understand what ITAs are saying |
| Getting better                                          | 6.3%               | ▪ “It was harder at early months. But it is getting more comfortable with the time.” |
| Negative                                               | 0%                 |          |
| Both                                                   | 12.5%              | ▪ [Undergraduate NESSs] respond to ITA’s questions, but do not prepare for lab beforehand |
| Very Exciting                                          | 6.3%               | ▪ Mutual benefits: ITAs improve “conversation skills” and undergraduate NESSs succeed academically |
Anxiety-inducing, but opportunities for Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Despite ITAs’ anxiety about not understanding undergraduate NESSs, ITAs find it as a “great opportunity” to improve their pedagogical and communicative skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No comment</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>Have not taught yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question four asked ITAs to identify the frequency of them experiencing difficulty while communicating with their students. The question offered a ten-point continuum, with 0 being “never” and 10 being “very frequently.” Five ITAs ranked the frequency of their communication difficulty at 3; another five ITAs ranked at 4; two ITAs ranked at 7; two ITAs ranked at 5; one ITA ranked at 2; and one ITA ranked at six. In other words, about 31.2% ranked the frequency at 3; 31.2% at 4; 12.5% at 7; 12.5% at 5; 6.2% at 6; and 6.2% at 2. No one ranked their communication difficulty at 0 or 1 (which represent never and almost never) or at 8 or 9 or 10 (which represent the highest three frequencies). Below is a graph representation of ITAs’ responses to question number four:

![Figure 5. Frequency of ITAs experiencing communication difficulty with undergraduate NESSs](image-url)
Question five asked ITAs about their needs from a training/preparation program, such as the English for International Graduate Assistants II course (ESOL 5050), in order to effectively teach their students. Three ITAs expressed satisfaction with the components on the current ESOL 5050 syllabus in improving their communicative skills. One of the three listed “pronunciation” and “teaching method[s]” as needs from the preparation program—needs already addressed in ESOL 5050. Additionally, two ITAs were more specific about the activities that helped them improve. Both ITAs mentioned Mini Lessons (i.e. an interactive 10-minute lesson about any chosen topic from their field of study) in particular as “very helpful” in making them “more confident” and in exploring “strategies to use with students.” In addition, one ITA described “self-reflection” on her/his performance on each Mini Lesson as “very valuable and helpful because we are becoming consciousness [sic] about our improvement and development.” Audio self-reflections on each video-recorded Mini Lesson was a requirement for the assignment to be considered complete. Contrastingly, three ITAs expressed dissatisfaction with the course, with one of the three stating “this program should have training for ITAs like us who need[] to run labs.” Similarly, another ITA said s/he needs “training related to subject matter.” It is fair to say, though, that such course is offered by the ESOL program under the title English for International Graduate Assistants I (ESOL 5040). However, offering a section of ESOL 5040 depends on enrollment numbers. Thus, with only a few ITAs whose responsibility is to run labs, it is untenable for the program to offer a section of ESOL 5040.

Two ITAs were specific about needing “communication with native English speaking [sic] students” and “more exposure to native speakers or other persons [who] have similar fluency level like native [speakers],” as that should help improve their “aural comprehension” especially that the English they find in textbooks is different from “‘real’ daily English among
students.” Three ITAs were more concerned about their “pronunciation skills” and their fluency. One of the three stated s/he needs someone to “correct” her/his individual sounds. Another ITA said, “I need to learn how to make natural pauses, to [expand my] vocabulary[,] and become more [comprehensible].” These last two comments seem to place the agency of improving their communicative skills on different entities: the former on someone other than the self; the latter on her/himself. Similar to the nature of the latter comment, one ITA responded to this question by simply saying, “Keep practic[ing] teaching to students.” Again, this last comment places the agency on the self and implies that confidence is a natural result of practical classroom or lab experience.

Question six was a Yes/No question, asking whether ITAs have received any end-of-semester course evaluation form while teaching in the U.S. 13 ITAs (81.2%) responded negatively; 2 ITAs (12.5%) responded positively; and one skipped the question. Below is a graph representation of ITAs’ responses to question number six:
Figure 6. Number of ITAs who have/have not received end-of-semester course evaluations in the U.S.

Question seven asked ITAs to rank their own teaching skills as reflected through their students’ feedback on end-of-semester course evaluations. The question offered a ten-point continuum, with 0 being “Excellent” and 10 being “Very poor.” 11 ITAs responded to this question (68.75%); 5 skipped it. Two ITAs ranked their skill at 0, hence, excellent. Another two ranked their skills at 2; three ITAs ranked at 3; one at 4; two at 5; and one at 6. No ITA ranked their teaching skills higher than 6 or at 1. Below is a graph representation of ITAs’ responses to question number seven:

Figure 7. ITAs’ reported teaching skills as reflected in student feedback on end-of-semester evaluations

Question eight asked ITAs to explain how they utilize end-of-semester course evaluation forms. Only nine ITAs (56.25%) responded to this question. Two ITAs stated that they have not received an end-of-semester course evaluation yet: one elaborated saying “I really don’t know what is end-of-semester course evaluation form,” whereas the other understood that s/he would use the form to learn about students’ expectations, “what teaching qualities they liked, what they
Another ITA said s/he had “no idea.” Contrastingly, two ITAs thought end-of-semester course evaluations would raise their awareness about their “teaching skills,” be used “to prepare for next semester,” and help them identify areas they need more help with by way of “striv[ing] to achieve perfection.” While these two ITAs found evaluation forms as a tool to guide their future teaching, three ITAs saw the forms to merely identify weaknesses. For example, they mentioned that evaluation forms would help them “focus on my weakness,” “pay attention [to] negative points,” and “improve the areas where I have difficulties.” This discrepancy in perspectives could be related to either misinformation about the nature of evaluation forms or mere differences in ITAs’ characters, with some ITAs being more confident than others.

It is worth noting that only one ITA stated that s/he will seek advice from her/his dissertation chair or advisor on how to improve her/his teaching “following students’ suggestions.” Thus, this ITA showed willingness to seek mentorship from her/his academic advisor in terms of making sense of end-of-semester course evaluation results. The fact that the majority of ITAs did not perceive their relationships with their advisors to expand to professional development areas, such as making meaning of end-of-semester course evaluations, might mean that ITAs find those mentor/mentee relationships to be limited to research. Consequently, ITAs feel reticent to seek out their advisors for guidance on topics related to professional development.

**Survey for Undergraduate Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs)**

A total of 67 undergraduate NESSs completed the survey (See Appendix B). Question two was a Yes/No question, asking NESSs whether they have any friends, colleagues, or family members who do not speak English as a first language. 35 NESSs (≈52.2%) responded
positively; 32 (≈47.8%) negatively. Below is a pie chart that represents undergraduate NESSs’ responses to question number two:

![Pie Chart](image)

**Figure 8.** Percentages of undergraduate NESSs who reported having/not having friends, colleagues, or family members who do not speak English as a first language

Question three asked NESSs whether they are/have been taught by an ITA. The question also provides a definition of ITA as “an instructor or professor who does not speak English as a first language.” 44 NESSs (≈65.7%) responded positively; 23 (≈34.3%) negatively. Those who responded positively were further prompted to provide a total number of ITAs they have had. Responses came with a maximum number of 5 ITAs and a minimum of 1 ITA each. However, only a minority of two NESSs had 5 ITAs; a majority of twenty-five NESSs had only 1 ITA. Four NESSs had 4 ITAs each. Six NESSs had 3 ITAs each. Five NESSs had 2 ITAs each. One NESS did not provide a number; another responded “none,” which may imply the latter misunderstood or misread the question. Because 23 NESSs responded negatively to this question, meaning they have never experienced ITAs as instructors, I separated their responses from the rest. Thus, for each question from this point onward, I, first, discuss the responses of the
44 NESSs who had experiences with ITAs, then, I follow that with a subsection entitled “The Hypotheticals” for the responses of the 23 NESSs who provided their hypothetical opinions on the topic. These hypothetical opinions of undergraduate NESSs might allow me to compare NESSs’ opinions before interacting with ITAs (i.e. pre-contact) to those opinions that are informed by actual interactions with ITAs (post-contact). Though I would not be comparing the opinions of the same group of NESSs before and after contact with ITAs, drawing comparisons between the two groups might start a conversation that could be pursued in a future study.

Question four asked undergraduate NESSs to describe their experience being taught by ITAs. To provide NESSs with some guidance, the question provided five options: positive, negative, both, neither, or something else. The options were followed by “Please, explain” to encourage NESSs respondents to elaborate on their answers. Ten NESSs described their experiences with ITAs as being positive. Three of those ten referred to the cultural richness ITAs bring to the classroom when they establish connections between their own experiences in their home cultures and class materials. In addition, two NESSs commented on how well their ITAs spoke the English language. Another NESS described ITAs as being “very helpful,” with accents that are not hard to understand. One NESS argued that one’s native language should not even be considered as a factor that might affect their teaching ability by stating, “[a] person’s native language does not affect their ability to teach.”

Some NESSs’ comments came to be generally positive with a bit of reservation, nonetheless. For instance, one NESS commented on ITAs’ speech speed saying, “Pretty positive! They were all very nice and helpful, the only thing that was sometimes difficult was trying to understand what they were saying when they talked through material very quickly.” Another three commented on the challenges they sometimes face with ITAs in terms of clarity explaining
concepts, however, all three made a point to emphasize that those challenges were “not enough to be a burden. It was a good experience for all involved I believe,” that “not everyone was kind or patient but I think it was a positive experience overall,” and that “It wasn’t terrible but it could’ve been better.”

Three NESSs were content overall and acknowledged the labor or effort ITAs exert. For example, one said “I understand that they do their best when teaching.” Another stated that every experience with an ITA had its positives and negatives, however, ITAs “have certainly done their best to appropriately teach us the material.” The third mentioned that despite the occasional difficulty understanding concepts, the ITA “tried her best to get us to understand.” Contrastingly, another three undergraduate NESSs perceived ITAs’ effort or labor to be insufficient for their experiences to be positive. For instance, one commented “Although I could see he was trying, his accent was very thick and he struggled with finding the correct word in English to express his thoughts. It made it very difficult to learn Stats when I couldn't understand what he was saying.” Another stated, “My ITA is not bad. He genuinely tries his best, but he’s from China and it’s hard to understand him a lot.” The third, again, applauded ITAs’ efforts in the classroom, but emphasized that such efforts “never worked” because “ITAs were extremely hard to understand and seemed confused a majority of the time.” But when it came to exerting effort, from undergraduate NESSs’ perspectives, ITAs were not the only party trying hard to communicate. Four NESSs listed the skills they gained while communicating with ITAs. For instance, despite the “language barrier,” one NESS learned to “listen better during class.” Another learned to “piece together what [ITAs] were trying to say” by following along in the course materials. One NESS learned “how to communicate and better understand [ITAs].” The fourth learned to cope with her/his ITA’s speech speed by paying attention and following along in the book.
On the other hand, twelve undergraduate NESSs focused solely on the challenges they faced with ITAs in terms of incomprehensibility, thick accents, different way of explaining concepts, lexical incompetence, and inability to understand or answer questions or comment on student writing. Ten NESSs commented on ITAs’ incomprehensibility, and two of which connected the issue to thick accents (Chinese and Columbian). Two of the ten comments related ITAs’ incomprehensibility to academic failure, saying “I couldn’t understand them, so I had to go to other sources and teach myself the information,” and the other connected failing statistics to ITA’s incomprehensibility. One of the ten connected incomprehensibility to ITAs explaining concepts “in ways that don’t make sense to people.” The rest of the ten comments were not elaborative. One NESS commented exclusively on his/her ITA’s “different” pedagogy saying, “things were not taught well. The teachings were different to me so I could not comprehend.” Three NESSs commented on ITAs’ lexical incompetence saying that ITAs “struggled with finding the correct word in English to express his thoughts,” the second commented on ITAs’ struggle “to think of words or phrases sometimes,” and the third elaborated that her/his ITA used rising intonation “because he wasn’t sure if he was using the right words.” In addition, NESSs brought up ITAs’ inability to either understand the questions being asked (three NESSs) or understand students’ written sentence structures that they “took off points.” (one NESS). Two NESSs had positive experiences with some ITAs and negative with others. The negative experiences were due to ITAs being “nervous,” “shy,” “very rude when I asked for help,” and seemingly being coerced to take on teaching responsibilities. Below is a table illustrating undergraduate NESSs’ experiences with ITAs (post-contact):
Table 7. Undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of their experiences with ITAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Nature of Undergraduate NESSs’ Experiences with ITAs (post-contact)</th>
<th>Percentage of NESSs</th>
<th>Reason(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Positive | 22.7% | ▪ Cultural richness  
▪ ITAs’ advanced language competency  
▪ ITAs are “very helpful,” with accents that are not hard to understand.  
▪ “[a] person’s native language does not affect their ability to teach.” |
| Positive, with reservations | 9% | ▪ ITAs are “all very nice and helpful,” but “talked through material very quickly.”  
▪ ITAs sometimes do not explain concepts clearly, but not to an extent when it would be a burden |
| Satisfied overall, acknowledged the effort ITAs exert | 6.8% | ▪ ITAs did their best to make NESSs understand the material |
| ITAs’ efforts are insufficient for the experience to be positive | 6.8% | ▪ ITAs have thick accents  
▪ ITAs struggled to find the correct word in English  
▪ ITAs are incomprehensible |
| Gained skills while communicating with ITAs | 9% | ▪ NESSs learned to be better listeners |
NESSs learned to piece information together by following along in course materials
NESSs gained communicative skills

| Negative, challenging | 27.3% | ITAs’ incomprehensibility
ITAs’ thick accents
ITAs’ different way of explaining concepts
ITAs’ lexical incompetence
ITAs’ inability to understand or answer questions or comment on student writing
ITAs being “nervous,” “shy,” “very rude when I asked for help,” and seemingly being coerced to take on teaching responsibilities |

**The Hypotheticals**

One of the 23 NESSs who responded negatively to having had ITAs as instructors commented positively with one reservation about ITAs’ lack of self-confidence. The comment said, “Positive, but they should be more comfortable with the class like they are the teacher.” Another’s comment was absolutely positive saying, “Positive. Always very helpful.” One NESS’s comment was “Both because there were times that they wouldn't know what exactly I was talking about when I brought something up.” The remaining twenty NESSs responded to question four by either skipping the question, saying they have never had ITAs as instructors, or simply typing “neither” or “N/A” without elaboration.
Question five asked NESSs to identify the frequency of their experiencing difficulty while communicating with their ITAs. The question offered a ten-point continuum, with 0 being “never” and 10 being “very frequently.” Again, only responses of the 44 NESSs who responded positively to question three were considered. In other words, the responses of only those who indicated having experiences with ITAs in the classroom were considered valid, as indicating a lack of experiences with ITAs disqualifies them from the ability to rank the frequency of communication difficulties with ITAs. Eight NESSs ranked the frequency of their communication difficulty with ITAs at 5; another eight NESSs ranked it at 2; five ranked it at 7; four ranked it at 1; another four ranked it at 3; another four ranked it at 6; three ranked it at 0; another 3 ranked it at 4; another 3 ranked it at 10; one ranked it at 8; and one ranked it at 9.

Below is a graph representation of NESSs’ responses (post-contact) to question number five:

![Graph](image)

*Figure 9. Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs (post-contact)*

**The Hypotheticals**

Three out of the 23 NESSs who responded negatively to question three skipped this question. Fourteen ranked the frequency of communication difficulties with ITAs at 0. This is a reasonable response, as 0 in this case may mean they never had difficulties due to the lack of
communications altogether. What was surprising, though, is that six of the 23 NESSs who responded negatively to question three ranked their difficulty communicating with ITAs at 1, 1, 1, 3, 4, and 7. One way to interpret these six responses is to assume they have been informed by these undergraduate NESSs’ interactions with nonnative speakers of English—either on or off campus—who do not hold the position of nonnative English-speaking instructors or faculty. Another way to look at these six responses is to consider them to be informed by others NESSs’ interactions that have been related to or shared with these six participants in a way or another. Regardless of what informed these responses, I consider them to be a mere hypothetical imagination of what interactions with ITAs would look like. Below is a graph representation of NESSs’ responses (pre-contact) to question number five:

![Graph](image)

*Figure 10. Frequency of NESSs experiencing communication difficulty with ITAs (pre-contact)*

Question six asked undergraduate NESSs about their expectations from ITAs, whether in the classroom or the lab, in order for them to learn effectively. Three NESSs addressed their expectations of ITAs to be able to teach, saying “I expect ITAs to be able to teach me well enough that I understand and retain the information” and to be able to “teach to multiple learning
styles.” Closely related to the concept of teaching, three NESSs discussed ITAs’ ability to explain concepts. For example, they stated, “I expect them to be able to explain the material coherently,” and “to help [me] understand what the professor is saying.” The third NESS’s suggested that ITAs should “read instead of explain[]” the assigned pages as a way for ITAs to “feel comfortable” explaining the material. Four NESSs addressed their expectations of ITAs to be knowledgeable about the content area, material, and subject matter of the class.

Three NESSs expected of ITAs to “be able to communicate with [students]” clearly in terms of articulating course requirements, teaching effectively, helping students “better understand the material [they are] trying to learn,” and “making sure [ITAs] help me until I understand.” Effective communication in those three NESSs’ comments, however, did not carry a sense of mutual labor. In other words, the responsibility of clear communication lied solely on ITAs.

Ten NESSs focused on their expectations from ITAs to speak the English language fluently, clearly, and slowly. For example, NESSs expect ITAs to “[h]ave clear English,” be “fluent in English and can confidently speak it,” to “effectively speak the language spoken in the classroom,” and to “know the proper English to be able to teach the material.” One NESS addressed the pace of ITAs’ speech by setting her/his expectations from ITAs to “[t]alk slow [sic] and pronounce things more clearly,” as “some times [sic] they just talk to [sic] fast, and it sounds like their first language.” The fact that ten out of 44 (≈22.72%) NESSs brought up language expectations reflects the urgency of the issue for them.

Another expectation that nine (≈20.5%) NESSs brought up was ITAs’ ability to understand and respond to their questions. For example, one NESS stated that s/he expects from ITAs “[t]o be able to understand and answer questions effectively.” Another said, “[t]o be able to
assist us with questions from lectures.” Two of these nine NESSs perceived such question/answer interaction as “a joint effort” in terms of “stay[ing] on the same page and avoid[ing] miss communication [sic].” The second comment went a bit further adding, “Or if they do not understand what the student is asking to be polite enough to address that so maybe the student can reword their question so that the ITA can understand it and give the proper response.” Thus, NESSs expect ITAs not only to be able to understand and respond to questions, but also to negotiate meaning with students by asking for repetition or paraphrase in a way the ensures that both interlocutors are on the same page, avoiding miscommunications.

Contrastingly, two NESSs did not see themselves taking part in communications with ITAs. They expected ITAs to be able to paraphrase themselves “[i]f they cannot think of the word(s)” and “be able to efficiently bypass language barriers in order to convey their messages in an understandable way.” These comments reflect NESSs’ expectations from ITAs to deliver their intended message by overcoming language barriers and being able to “explain what they mean” if they cannot find the exact word they need in a specific context.

Seven NESSs (≈16%) have no different expectations from ITAs than from any other instructor. In other words, they have the same expectations from ITAs as they would from domestic TAs, such as “[p]rovid[ing] an environment for [students] to learn and understand clearly,” being “able to teach the material,” and “effectively communicat[ing] any misunderstandings in directions for lab, anything to help understand that material that they are wanting [students] to know for the course/lab.” One NESS elaborated saying:

I expect them to be as prepared as native North American teacher assistants. There should be a standard which the University sets, and if people can't reach [sic] that they shouldn't be allowed to be in the classroom. That goes for any TA, foreign or "American."
If one overlooks the inaccuracies in this student’s use of the word “American” as synonymous with “native English-speaker,” this comment calls on the institution to have set equal standards for TA and ITAs in terms of their pedagogical abilities.

The rest of the 44 responses were eclectic, addressing NESSs’ expectations from ITAs to be “understanding and patient,” be “willing to help,” “adapt to the class eventually,” and use “real life examples of the material that is easy to relate to.” Only one of the 44 NESSs skipped the question.

**The Hypotheticals**

Seven of the 23 NESSs who responded negatively to question three skipped the question. Five stated their expectations from ITAs to “be able to communicate with students” in terms of “teach[ing] the material at hand,” answering students’ questions, and “understand[ing] what [the student is] talking about.” In addition, one NESS expect to “be able to understand the ITA.” Another expects ITAs to, “make a lot of effort to get to know and to communicate with their students.” Three NESSs addressed their expectations from ITAs to “know the language” and “enunciate words.” One elaborated saying, “Language barriers can be broken, as long as ITAs know the information well to get their point across…no problem.” Two said ITAs should be able to help students when they need help. One stated the expectation from ITAs “to understand the material they’re teaching me.” Another added that ITAs are expected to be “[i]nterested in the subject they teach. Much more interactive and easier to learn from.” Only one NESS perceived no difference between her/his expectations of an ITA and a domestic TA, saying, “[f]ulfill the duties of a regular TA.”

Question seven was inspired by an experience I had with the end-of-semester course evaluation form at a former institution. One of the questions on the form was a yes/no question
that asks undergraduate students whether “The instructor speaks the English language clearly.” I spoke in length to the problematics of the rhetoric used in this question in chapter one. Because I was intrigued—and appalled—by the xenophobic rhetoric of that question, I decided to explore how undergraduate NESSs would interpret the question. To do so, question seven provided NESSs with a hypothetical situation where they find the yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” on their end-of-semester evaluations. The hypothetical situation was followed by an inquiry of how they would interpret such question.

Twenty NESSs of the 44 who responded positively to question three (≈45.45%) either misread or misunderstood question seven. Instead of providing their interpretation of the hypothetical question, all twenty NESSs answered the question with a “yes” or “no,” some providing explanation for their choice. Because their responses did not respond to the intended question, I decided to focus only on the twenty-four responses that did.

Fifteen of the twenty-four NESSs who addressed the intended question (62.5%) interpreted the yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” in terms of their own comprehension level of ITAs’ speech. In other words, they interpreted the question in terms of ITAs’ perceived comprehensibility. For instance, sample responses to the question were “[ITAs] have the ability to clearly articulate what they are thinking in a manner that the majority of the class will understand,” “The instructor is able to speak English and be understood clearly,” and “the instructor can speak English fluently enough that all students can understand.” It is worth noting that only two NESSs (≈8.3%) interpreted the question to be about ITAs’ accents, without any elaboration.

Five NESSs interpreted the question in relation to the amount of effort or labor required of them for effective communication with ITAs to take place. For example, for four of the five
NESSs, ITAs speaking the English language clearly meant that they (undergraduate NESSs) do not have to “think hard about what [ITAs] might have said,” or “find [themselves] guessing what [ITAs] have said or asking others for clarification.” Moreover, ITAs speaking the English language clearly meant that NESSs are “able to make out the words as [ITAs] talk,” “without questioning what was said.” These comments speak to NESSs’ perceptions of clarity of speech in terms of it not requiring meaning negotiation on their part. Two of the five comments, in fact two of all twenty-four comments, referred to asking for clarification: for one NESS, asking for clarification did not mean addressing questions to ITAs, but to their peer undergraduate students; for the other NESS, clarity of speech meant whether s/he can “easily communicate in English with the instructor.” In other words, those two comments imply an exerted effort on undergraduate NESSs’ parts. However, it could be that the nature or language of the question guided NESSs to think of clarity of speech in terms of ITAs’ proficiency level instead of perceiving themselves as active participants in the meaning negotiation process.

Two NESSs commented on the ambiguity of the hypothetical question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” and/or proposed revisions of the question. One remarked that the word “‘clearly’ ‘needs to be defined.’ The other was not comfortable with the question’s implied binary and, accordingly, proposed “a maybe column.”
The Hypotheticals

Five of the twenty-three NESSs who responded negatively to question three (≈ 21.75%) interpreted the yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” in terms of their own comprehension level of ITAs’ speech or in terms of ITAs’ comprehensibility levels. Sample responses were “If the points that are trying to be made are coming across, then accents are easier to pick up on,” “Being able to understand [ITAs] enough to interpret their words,” and “If the student could understand the teacher.”

Three of the twenty-three NESSs referred to communicative abilities: Two referred to ITAs’ communicative abilities; one referred to their own abilities. Examples of these comments were “That [ITAs] know how to communicate effectively with little or no difficulty” and “That I would have no problem communicating with that instructor,” respectively.

The rest of the twenty-three NESSs interpreted the question in terms of ITAs’ English language proficiency and fluency. Sample responses were “[ITAs] have a main understanding of the language” and “Someone who is fluent in the English language and can pronounce everything clearly.”

Survey for (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs)

A total of fourteen (W)PAs took the survey, though two of which did not complete it (See Appendix C). One of the two answered only till question two; the other till question three. Seven out of eight questions on the (W)PA survey were open-ended, text-based questions. Question two was the exception, requiring numerical input from (W)PAs. The question inquired about the total number of ITAs that (W)PAs train/prepare in their capacity as Program Administrators. Responses to this question varied widely from preparing 1-2 to 200-250 ITAs per academic year. In between these two extremes, the responses came as follows: 4-5; 5-7; 6-7; 14; 15; 20-40; 25-
35; 10-60 depending on different departmental needs; 40-60; and 60-72 in addition to 100 during orientations. One (W)PA skipped this question; another responded “none,” as there is no ITA training program in their institution. In my data analysis, I considered the responses of the (W)PA who responded “none” to question two. However, I created separate sections for his/her responses titled “The Hypothetical,” for such responses are considered to be based on hypothetical conditions rather than actual experiences preparing ITAs.

Question three asked (W)PAs to describe their experience preparing/training ITAs. To provide (W)PAs with some guidance, the question provided five options: positive, negative, both, neither, or something else. The options were followed by “Please, explain” to encourage (W)PA respondents to elaborate on their answers. Six out of the total 13 (W)PAs (≈46.15%) who had actual experiences preparing ITAs responded positively to this question. One (W)PA related the positive nature of her/his experience preparing ITAs to ITAs’ labor. S/he stated “Although [ITAs] are busy, they are smart and directed and do well in classes.” One (W)PA expressed the “dissatisfaction” that “a few” ITAs express when they are “compelled by their department to take [the course];” however, overall, this (W)PA’s described the experience as “fun” and “[e]xtremely positive most of the time, since it’s a voluntary program.” Thus, the voluntary nature of the program plays an important factor in this (W)PA’s positive perspective of her/his experience preparing ITAs. One (W)PA commented on the effectiveness of the preparation program s/he “crafted” with a focus on “communication skills,” which are skills of value for ITAs “who are seeking an industry career.” Her/his preparation program is also received positively by ITAs who “are interested in an academic career,” as they are “eager to learn effective teaching practices.” Therefore, her/his preparation program is perceived positively due to it satisfying either career choices of ITAs. One of the six emphasized the mutually beneficial nature of their experiences
with ITAs, describing it as being “[i]nformative for me and rewarding for [ITAs].”

Contrastingly, one (W)PA connected the positive nature of the experience to her/his own ability to assist ITAs by “shar[ing] with them information about teaching as a whole and US culture and classroom expectations.”

One (W)PA saw the question as an opportunity to reflect on her/his experience teaching the ITA preparation course once back in fall 2015. S/he stated that ITAs reacted “very positively” to the “content portion of the course,” which comprised half of the course. S/he added that ITAs had a mixed reaction to the pronunciation-focused half of the course. However, s/he did not associate those mixed reactions with ITAs’ characters or labor in any way, but rather associated those mixed reactions with her/his self-perceived pedagogical or situational shortcomings (i.e. her/his first time teaching the course, phonetics/phonology not being her/his area of expertise, and not receiving materials/activities from the previous instructor of the course). This (W)PA concluded her/his response on a positive note, saying “I learned a lot in the process and believe I would be very successful if I taught it again.” Though this response might not be directly commenting on (W)PAs’ experience preparing ITAs, it sheds light on the issue of the institutional preparation, professional development, and/or support (W)PAs receive as they prepare/train ITAs. In other words, the real issue lies in institutional—rather than individual—shortcomings.

Similarly, one (W)PA’s comment revealed another institutional shortcoming. S/he commented on the labor involved—not in preparing ITAs to teach, but—in having ITAs in her/his program. At this (W)PA’s institution, ITAs are not allowed to teach the same number of hours as their domestic counterparts because of visa regulations. Despite the fact that this (W)PA
“appreciate[s] the perspectives [ITAs] bring as teachers,” s/he commented on the amount of labor involved in supervising ITAs’ “special projects:”

WPAs have to supervise ITAs doing special projects, which has increased my workload substantially without any change to my position. Working with individual ITAs is great; administering multiple projects has significantly increased my stress.

This response sheds light on another institutional shortcoming that pertains to (W)PAs’ labor being assigned additional administrative assignments—a factor that increases their overall workload and, by extension, their level of stress.

Three (W)PAs’ responses reflect experiences that were both positive and negative. One of the three (W)PAs “had excellent experiences with some [ITAs] and very poor experiences with others. It was never middle of the road.” Another (W)PA’s experience was “positive,” but “challenging.” The third (W)PA made a distinction between ITAs who are motivated to “improve their communicative ability” and those who are fixated on merely passing the ITA test without trying to improve their abilities.

One (W)PA does not perceive a difference between preparing ITAs and preparing domestic TAs. Her/his commented saying, “It’s no more positive or negative than training domestic TAs. As with any training, some groups are more engaged than others.”

**The Hypothetical**

One out of the total 14 (W)PA’s responded with a disclaimer stating that s/he does not have “any experience training ITAs.” For the sake of comparing this one (W)PA’s responses to the 13 (W)PAs who have had experience preparing ITAs, I chose to include this (W)PA’s responses under the subtitle “The Hypothetical” from this point onward.
Question four asked (W)PAs to reflect on their experiences with ITAs and discuss what they think are ITAs’ needs in a training program in order for them to effectively teach undergraduate NESSs. Seven of the 13 (W)PAs (≈53.85%) expressed a need for ITAs to go through social and academic “cultural training,” which included ITAs understanding “student-teacher expectations,” “US classroom expectations and practices,” students’ values and expectations, cross-cultural pedagogical skills, “the American k-12 system” in terms of student mindset, and “how to access student support services on campus” by way of handling the “stress” in becoming teachers.

Five (W)PAs (≈38.46%) addressed ITAs’ need “to improve and feel confident” about their English speaking and listening skills. Two of the five specified those skills as “suprasegmental” features (i.e. stress, intonation, and thought groups). One (w)PA added that ITAs need “self-monitoring training” in suprasegmental pronunciation features. The rest of the five (W)PAs broadly explained speaking skills as “clear and comprehensible speech” and “fluency.”

Five (W)PAs (≈38.46%) stressed ITAs’ need for plenty of opportunities to “practice,” whether practice the use of the English language or practice their growing pedagogical skills. For example, one mentioned ITAs’ need for “hands-on examples of activities” to use in the classroom. The other stated that pedagogical practice has to be followed by them receiving “constructive feedback.” Another argued that learning how to teach is not limited to ITAs: domestic TAs equally need to know “how students learn, how to offer effective formative and summative feedback, how to work appropriately and effectively with the professor for their course, etc.”
Two (W)PAs (≈15.38%) addressed ITAs’ needs for communicative and meaning negotiation skills. Those communicative skills could be verbal or nonverbal. One elaborated that ITAs “need to understand that it's better to say they don't know the answer to something and that they'll come back with a response than to give an incorrect answer.” The other called such skills “conversation management strategies,” such as one’s ability to ask for repetition or paraphrase in instances when one cannot understand the interlocutor and/or strategies for when one cannot recall a specific word while talking.

Two (W)PAs (≈15.38%) stressed ITAs’ need to build rapport with their undergraduate NESSs. One (W)PA’s response was specific to ITAs in the writing classroom who have shared with her/him their need for “additional space to reflect on and discuss questions of teacher identity, authority, language, and negotiating cultural difference in the writing classroom.”

**The Hypothetical**

This one (W)PA’s response perceived ITAs’ needs to be “quite similar to domestic TAs.” Such needs would include “a combination of practical activities to conduct in class and a course or mentoring program that supports them as they begin to examine their beliefs about literacy.” S/he elaborated that this mentoring program should focus on “how and why ITA whose first language is not English can actually be quite adept at giving guidance to first-year students.” It is worth noting that this response was the only one that addressed ITAs’ need for a “mentoring program” that assists ITAs during their journey exploring their pedagogical beliefs, identities, and practices.

Question five asked (W)PAs to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the ITA preparation program that is offered in their institution. Strengths revolved around the nature and structure of ITA preparation programs. For instance, one (W)PA boasted about the semester-long
program that covers culture and teaching and is offered in three levels, though the levels “are too similar and need to be varied based on student needs.” Another said her/his institution offers “a variety of courses and a very strong pre-semester teaching orientation as well as a mid-semester evaluation program for new ITAs.”

In terms of weaknesses, three (W)PAs (≈23.1%) stated that they do not have an ITA preparation program in their institution. One of the three explained that her/his institution does not offer “a separate training program for ITAs within our Writing Program,” hence, the particular needs of ITAs, who are being prepared to teach in the Writing Program, are not being addressed. Another (W)PA stated that there is “no training unique to ITAs at my institution,” and any special preparation of ITAs is “up to the program directors.” Though this (W)PA did not frame the response as an institutional shortcoming, one can easily see the absence of ITA preparation as a limitation, especially when such absence results in more labor for (W)PAs. For instance, this (W)PA had to assist each ITA individually “to help them manage their responsibilities as well as the typical TA training in pedagogy and classroom management.”

Another (W)PA raised the issue of non-centralized ITA preparation, in terms of the consequences of each department offering preparation “their own way,” describing it as “a strength (because the training is very relevant to what the TA will be doing) and a weakness (because there is no accountability or university-wide statement of deliverables.”

Following along the notion of institutional shortcomings, when asked about what they considered as weaknesses of their programs, three (W)PAS brought up four limitations: non-centralization, the absence of an oral proficiency policy, the ITA preparation course being offered as elective, and institutional budgetary cuts. For example, one (W)PA merely listed deficiencies, saying “Non-centralized, uncoordinated communication, patchwork support
services, deficient tracking and follow-up services.” Another mentioned that “the institution does not have a policy requiring ITAs to demonstrate oral-language proficiency,” and the only ITA preparation course that it offers is “an elective, which limits participation and sometimes draws students who do not need it.” Additionally, the course is “relatively new and needs to be further developed.” One (W)PA lamented the fact that “many of the support services,” such as the variety of workshops they used to offer for ITAs who are teaching or preparing to teach, were cut due to “budget constraints.” Those budgetary cuts did not come without consequences: the program is now perceived by some ITAs and departments as “a compliance/testing unit than a support unit.”

Time constraint was another limitation a few (W)PAs brought up. One (W)PA simply stated, “Just simply not enough time to work with the students. Their time is limited and so is ours.” Another took pride in having an ITA preparation that is considered “one of just a handful nation-wide that focuses entirely on teaching GTAs to evaluate student writing in disciplinary courses,” while lamenting the fact that due to “time constraints” the ITA preparation is done “entirely via Canvas, our learning management system.” Similarly, another (W)PA prided her/himself on a successful program that allows ITAs to meet weekly to “exchange teaching ideas and classroom issues, and share “successful activities.” In that program, the (W)PA observes each ITA teaching a class and meets afterwards to provide feedback; however, with ITAs teaching at the same time, there is no possibility of them observing one another.

The Hypothetical

The one (W)PA who does not have experience preparing ITAs concisely said, “None is offered.”
Question six asked (W)PAs to reflect on student comments on ITAs’ end-of-semester evaluation forms, mentioning the most frequent comments ITAs tend to receive. Two (W)PAs stated that undergraduate NESSs comment on ITAs not being intelligible or on themselves (undergraduates) having difficulty understanding ITAs’ accents.

Three (W)PAs remarked that undergraduate NESSs leave comments on end-of-semester evaluations that are related to ITAs’ classroom management skills and pedagogical practices. For example, one comment raises issues about ITAs’ “overly authoritarian classroom management.” Other comments raise issues about ITAs not providing their students enough “opportunities to practice what they have learned through workshops, conversation, activities, etc,” not having “enough knowledge about how the lab was supposed to unfold or how the lab equipment should function,” not providing “enough feedback on reports,” and not offering a variety of office hours or not being “available during posted office hours.” These comments might reflect ITAs’ lack of knowledge about lab content and U.S. classroom/lab/institutional culture. One wonders if these issues occur due to discrepancies between ITAs’ home classroom cultures and that of the U.S.—discrepancies that perhaps are not addressed in the (W)PAs’ ITA preparation courses—or if these issues occur in institutions where ITAs are not receiving mentoring or preparation.

Two (W)PAs stated that student comments on ITAs’ end-of-semester course evaluation are positive. One (W)PA added that positive student feedback is often surprising for ITAs. The other (W)PA elaborated by relating a “complicated moment” that an ITA shared with her/him:

I spoke with one ITA recently who told [me] a student had "complimented" her by telling her that while he usually couldn't understand TAs from her country, she sounded "almost American." The ITA identified this as a difficult teaching moment, and I think incidents like this are fairly common.
This “complicated moment” sheds light on ITAs’ identity issues—being torn between two cultures—that sounding “almost American” would be self-perceived as a compliment. With the undergraduate student contrasting this ITA’s accent to other ITAs’ accents “from her country,” one can safely assume that such remark was intended as a compliment as well. It is problematic that Americanization of ITAs’ identities would be (self-)perceived as complimentary.

Four (W)PAs stated that they do not have access to end-of-semester course evaluations. The fact that some (W)PAs have access to those forms while others do not could point to institutional inconsistencies when it comes to accessing forms that might be vital for mentoring ITAs—and domestic TAs for that matter. If (W)PAs do not have access to those forms, then it falls on ITAs’ shoulders to initiate a conversation with their supervisors on ways to interpret the data provided on the forms and/or develop their pedagogy based on student comments and remarks. Without proper guidance, ITAs may be reticent or not comfortable sharing such information with their (W)PAs, hence, many kairotic moments for ITAs’ professional development are lost.

The Hypothetical

Again, and expectedly so, the (W)PA who does not have experiences preparing ITAs chose to simply respond to this question by stating that there are no ITAs in her/his institution.

Question seven asked (W)PAs about their common practices utilizing end-of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development purposes. Four (W)PAs stated they do not have access to those forms. One remarked that “academic departments” are the ones who have access to such forms; however, s/he was not sure how departments use end-of-semester evaluation forms.
Three (W)PAs indicated they utilize end-of-semester evaluation forms to “coach the GTAs.” Two of the three were more specific about their processes. They create a report, examining “patterns” in student comments. Then, they invite ITAs to reflect on those patterns, identifying areas of strength as well as areas for growth in their own pedagogy. Additionally, ITAs are invited to discuss “reasons to disregard feedback that is uncritically negative or overly idiosyncratic.” It is worth noting that these evaluations are “not used for hiring/rehiring,” but are rather framed as “a place to think about professional growth and development.”

Two (W)PAs indicated that they use end-of-semester evaluation forms for their own individual professional development and for the development of their programs. One (W)PA specified that s/he uses the forms to improve “our training as well as the university-wide training course.”

Two (W)PAs did not comment on end-of-semester evaluations. Instead, they focused on professional development opportunities they provide ITAs. Those opportunities are limited to either the “beginning of the term and focus[ ] on responding to and assessing student writing,” or “pre-semester teaching orientation.” One could find evidence of institutional shortcomings in these comments, for one envisions professional development to ideally take place throughout the semester—not merely in the beginning, when, to quote this (W)PA, ITAs are required to attend other “orientations and department meetings.” A sense of institutional shortcoming is especially true with “many” ITAs requesting those pre-semester orientation sessions to “be longer and not so rushed.” In other words, ITAs voice their need for more professional development opportunities, but are faced with institutional limitations.
The Hypothetical

As expected, the one (W)PA with no experience preparing ITAs responded saying “No ITAs in our program.”

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined findings from all three surveys: Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs), survey for undergraduate Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs), and survey for (writing) program administrators ((W)PAs). Findings reflect what is perceived as a positive experience from the perception of ITAs while communicating with undergraduate NESSs, and from the perception of undergraduate NESSs while communicating with ITAs. Additionally, findings examine meaning-negotiation practices from the perceptions of ITAs and undergraduate NESSs. Notions such as the amount of exerted labor in terms of initiating meaning negotiations and asking questions emerged from analyzing survey responses. Institutional shortcomings was another notion that emerged from data analysis of surveys. In the next chapter, I explore the codes that emerged from memoing of surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
CHAPTER IV.

CODES FROM SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, AND FOCUS GROUPS

In chapter three, I provided a detailed examination of responses on all three surveys: Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs), survey for undergraduate Native English-Speaking Students (NESSs), and survey for (writing) program administrators ((W)PAs). Results showed ITAs’ perceptions of their experiences with undergraduate NESSs as being primarily positive; whereas undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of their experiences with ITAs as being primarily negative. The latter associated their negative experiences with ITAs’ incomprehensibility, thick accents, different way of explaining concepts, lexical incompetence, and inability to understand or answer questions or comment on student writing. For a visual comparison, please see tables 1 and 2. Additionally, I compared undergraduate NESSs’ hypothetical (pre-contact) responses to question five (i.e. How often do you experience difficulty communicating with your ITA(s)?) to their post-contact counterparts. Results of such comparison indicated that undergraduate NESSs’ stigma against ITAs occurs primarily after interactions, with only six undergraduates (pre-contact) reporting some difficulty communicating with ITAs. Three ranked the difficulty at “almost never (1),” one at “rarely (3),” one at “often (4),” and one at “frequently (7).” For a visual comparison, please see figures 8 and 9. When asked about their perceptions on ITAs’ needs from a preparation program, the majority of (W)PAs reported a need for ITAs to go through social and academic “cultural training,” which included ITAs understanding students’ expectations, U.S. classroom culture, crosscultural pedagogical skills, and ways to access resources on campus—expectations that are also reflected in the codes I investigate below.

In this chapter, I explore the thirty codes that emerged from the memoing process of analyzing the surveys, interviews, and focus groups. These codes reflect ITAs’ needs from a
preparation program, ways English for International Graduate Assistants II (ESOL 5050) addresses and does not address ITAs’ needs as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations, existing on-campus ITA support services and professional development opportunities, undergraduate NESSs’ expectations from ITAs, and institutional limitations that shape ITA preparation programs. The thirty codes I detail in this chapter emerged in response to four research questions:

1. What are the academic and professional needs of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?
2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors and scholars as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?
3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?
4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?

**Codes that emerged from Surveys, Interviews, and Focus Groups**

Because of the richness of the themes that emerged from data analysis (8 themes) and to make sense of the codes (30 codes), I chose to cluster them thematically. Following my examination of each of the thirty codes, I provide an illustration of each of the codes, my interpretation of the code, and participants’ responses that represent the code at work. See Appendix N for an elaborate table illustration of all eight themes.

**Ways ESOL 5050 Meets ITAs’ Needs (8 codes)**
Ohio state law requires ITAs to be orally proficient. Though Ohio State Law is not particularly exact on what “orally proficient” could mean for ITA preparation, the ITA preparation program at Bowling Green State University finds it important to work on pronunciation with ITAs. Kimberly explained what oral proficiency means in ESOL 5050:

So how we’ve taken “orally proficient” to be if we talk about 5050 where I think half of the focus should be pronunciation and language development, especially knowing how to pronounce the words in their field, like making sure about word stress and things like that are correct. But the other 50% I feel that proficiency is also understanding kind of the pedagogical communication skills like knowing that kind of language. So we’re not necessarily teaching them how to teach, but we’re teaching them pedagogical communication, responding to students, understanding the culture… It is the way to interact with students, answer student questions, provide proper responses, typical things that happen.

Thus, for ITAs in ESOL 5050 to meet the Ohio State law and be orally proficient, they need to equally divide their attention between two aspects: pronunciation and pedagogical communication skills. The former has to do with understanding how to correctly pronounce field-specific terms as well as practicing suprasegmental linguistic features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. Pedagogical communication, on the other hand, has to do with understanding the U.S. classroom culture, means of asking questions, responding to students’ questions, and negotiating meaning with their undergraduate NESSs. Kimberly added that ITAs also get to practice “listening comprehension” by “focusing on the reduced speech and idiomatic language so that they can understand their students better.”
Table 8: The code “Ohio state law requires ITAs to be orally proficient,” my interpretation, and example response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio State Law Requires ITAs to be Orally Proficient</td>
<td>For ITAs in ESOL 5050 to meet the Ohio State law (i.e. be “orally proficient”), they need to equally divide their attention between two aspects: pronunciation and pedagogical communication skills. The former has to do with understanding how to correctly pronounce field-specific terms as well as practicing suprasegmental linguistic features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. Pedagogical communication, on the other hand, has to do with understanding the U.S. classroom culture, means of asking questions, responding to students’ questions, and negotiating meaning with their undergraduate NESSs.</td>
<td>Kimberly: “So we’re not necessarily teaching them how to teach, but we’re teaching them pedagogical communication, responding to students, understanding the culture… It is the way to interact with students, answer student questions, provide proper responses, typical things that happen.”</td>
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Ways mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ needs (and undergraduate NESSs’ expectations). While coding surveys, interviews, and focus groups, I noticed two activities/assignments that were frequently brought up were Mini Lessons and Observations.

Listening to ITAs’ perspectives on ESOL 5050—and Mini Lessons and Observations in particular—I realized the various strategies and skills ITAs gain through those assignments. Not only that, but some of those strategies or skills were also valued by undergraduate NESSs.

Below, I address those strategies and skills individually:
**Compensation strategies.** When asked to imagine an ITA preparation class they would teach novice ITAs who have just arrived to the U.S., Yahampath and Suthakaran agreed on “listening,” and “Mini Lessons” as necessary components of the course. Suthakaran pointed out that with ITAs’ typical knowledge about the subject matter of the courses they teach, presentation skills are what they need to improve. And, he found Mini Lessons to help in developing ITAs’ “presentation skills” and “body language,” which are vital in the classroom. He explained saying:

> Like teaching skills. To speak in front of others. Mostly the people, because as an international student, I have to speak in front of native English speakers, then I get some nervous, like I have said correctly or not. So the Mini Lessons helped with that.

Therefore, Mini Lessons seem to offer ITAs a safe space where they can practice teaching in front of a crowd. In other words, during Mini Lessons, ITAs practice ways they can use their body language and voices effectively as teaching tools. Understanding how to use their bodies and voices effectively, ITAs often come to the realization that their bodies and voices can compensate for undesirable emotions and language potentials. However, because it is unsafe to assume that all ITAs will come to such realization during Mini Lessons, ITAs should be explicitly made conscious how to effectively use their bodies to conceal possible nervousness or to make up for linguistic potentials, hence, using their bodies as affective and linguistic shields or as compensation tools.

During focus groups, Fred expressed difficulties communicating with students. Specifically, Fred had difficulties while facilitating recitations in the beginning of the semester. However, the strategies he learned during ESOL 5050, particularly through Mini Lessons, acted as compensation strategies for when he struggled explaining concepts. Fred admitted:
So at the beginning it was really hard for me. I admit. Yes. But somehow it is much easier for me to explain someone in my field of study, in my major. So I know how to use the chemical names. I use hand drawings on paper. So but right now, I think that’s like this course [ESOL 5050] is helping me a lot to be more comprehensible in those recitation sessions and specifically as I told Soha in this class that Mini Lessons are really helpful.

Thus, compensation strategies gained through Mini Lessons—such as providing illustrations, realizing how to use chemical names to explain a concept, and understanding that comprehensibility is a priority—not only helped Fred get the message across, but were strategies that Fred managed to transfer to his own instructional toolbox and utilize during recitations.

Alice added that what she found particularly helpful is the instructor explicitly pointing out aspects that factor in the success of Mini Lessons or any lesson for that matter. She stated:

I mean, the preparation that Soha does before the Mini Lesson is very good for us.

Because she talks about how to organize the lesson, how to use the board, she has a word to say this, I don’t, when we talk we can write on the board, so people understand what we are saying.

Though Alice did not recall the terminology “compensation strategies,” she managed to provide examples when the effective use of the board—such as spelling out words that ITAs realize they might not be pronouncing clearly, using visuals, or outlining the lesson on the board—acts as a compensation strategy. Such compensation strategies make up for ITAs’ linguistic incomprehensibilities or pedagogical struggles.
Table 9. The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ needs for compensation strategies,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ needs for compensation strategies</td>
<td>ITAs should be explicitly made conscious how to effectively use their bodies to conceal possible nervousness or to make up for linguistic potentials, hence, using their bodies as affective and linguistic shields or as compensation tools.</td>
<td>Alice: “[the instructor] talks about how to organize the lesson, how to use the board, she has a word to say this, I don’t, when we talk we can write on the board, so people understand what we are saying.”</td>
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More interactions, better interactive skills. During the focus group sessions, ITAs’ satisfaction with Mini Lessons was brought up. For instance, when asked about their experiences with undergraduate NESSs, both Jim and Fred stated that they had difficulties explaining concepts to students in the beginning of the semester. Though Jim and Fred had different TA assignments: Jim ran an Organic Chemistry lab; Fred facilitated recitations in a General Chemistry course, they both struggled to explain concepts to students in the beginning of the semester. Jim had one difficult experience during office hours early on in the semester. He explained how interactions with students improved with more practice and as the semester progressed:

And I realized I’m struggling to explain him something in that field. Because. I don’t know. Maybe because it is the first time I need to explain to someone something in English. So that was my struggle and after that everything is becoming better and better. So I’m improving myself and now I don’t have a struggle to explain to anyone anything from my field.

In other words, the more interactions ITAs have with undergraduates NESSs, the smoother those interactions become. Another possible explanation for ITAs’ improved interactions with undergraduate NESSs is the former’s growing familiarity with the latter’s experiences and
subject positionalities. Fred added that the ability to interact with undergraduate students was one skill he improved during the semester, thanks to Mini Lessons, as one component of the assignment was to interact with class members during instruction under the pretense that their peers and instructor are undergraduate NESSs. Thus, ESOL 5050 raised ITAs’ awareness of the vitality of instructor-student interactions and provided a safe space where ITAs practiced meaning negotiation—though simulated—with undergraduate NESSs.

But ITAs were not the only group of participants who noted that more crosscultural interactive opportunities improve the quality of interactions overall. When I asked Alexander about the conditions for an effective communication in the classroom, he stated that “there is no set way to completely make sure everybody understands you exactly the way you wanna be understood, but I think using, like having experience with a lotta different people I guess will be the best way to make sure that you [do].” He elaborated saying, “It’s like one of those things like talking with more people would like help you talk with more people.” In other words, ITAs and undergraduate NESSs perceived benefits in intercultural interactive opportunities. The more, the better. Alexander’s perception on crosscultural interactive opportunities might have been informed by his own upbringing. He grew up in a neighborhood close to Cleveland, which allowed him to interact with nonnative English speakers in the city. Additionally, his recent employment at Cedar Point provided extensive contact with nonnative English speakers.

And Alexander was not the only undergraduate NESS who perceived value in exposure to or interactions with people who are different from oneself. For instance, Marina—one of the two undergraduate NESSs who volunteered to be interviewed—associated her advanced comprehension of ITAs to her increasing interactions with peers who did not speak English as a first language when she was at the young age of fifteen. She related,
But I think like with my prior experience with students who are English language learners, like as peers, I got used to like how they might use different words like what we wouldn’t commonly say the way they say it. Previously that was distracting, but like now I am like okay you know I’m just talking to someone who’s speaking English.

At the age of fifteen, Marina moved from an “all-white town” in Pennsylvania to enroll in an “extremely diverse” high school in Ohio. She interacted with nonnative English-speakers on a daily basis—a factor that shaped her perception of ITAs and understanding that there is a pattern to every dialect. Her heavy interactions with nonnative English-speakers made her have “a lot of patience.” Again, Marina’s increasing interactions with nonnative English-speakers improved the quality of her interactions with ITAs altogether.

Table 10. The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for student interactions,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ need for student interactions (More interactions, better interactive skills)</td>
<td>ESOL 5050 raised ITAs’ awareness of the vitality of instructor-student interactions and provided a safe space where ITAs practiced meaning negotiation—though simulated—with undergraduate NESSs. Similarly, the more interactions undergraduate NESSs have with people who do not speak English as a first language, the more familiar they become of those linguistic patterns, and the easier the communication turns out.</td>
<td>Alexander: “It’s like one of those things like talking with more people would like help you talk with more people.” Jim: “And I realized I’m struggling to explain him something in that field. Because. I don’t know. Maybe because it is the first time I need to explain to someone something in English. So that was my struggle and after that everything is becoming better and better.”</td>
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**Self-reflection and peer/instructor feedback.** Fred specifically stated that the “self-reflections” that were required after each of the three assigned Mini Lessons were particularly helpful, as he got to monitor his own improvements and struggles as well as learn his peers’
opinions and that of his instructor. He said that those self-reflections and peer/instructor feedback helped him evaluate his own comprehensibility, manner of speech, and grammatical accuracy—skills that Fred found quite important for ITAs to be able to communicate effectively with students. Rick articulated how self-reflections raised his self-consciousness:

You have to go home and send a self-reflection audio on how you did. I mean it’s very effective because not everyone every day watches themselves on a video and see how they move, how they talk. So the first time, you get conscious about yourself, what you actually do there. So I think it’s actually very helpful.

In other words, ITAs not only found Mini Lessons helpful, but also recognized the value of self-consciousness that they gain as they watch video recordings of their teaching performance and audio-record their observations accordingly.

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<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ need for self-reflection and peer/instructor feedback</td>
<td>ITAs not only found Mini Lessons helpful, but also recognized the value of self-consciousness that they gain as they listen to feedback from peers and instructor, watch video recordings of their teaching performance, and audio-record their observations accordingly.</td>
<td>Rick: “You have to go home and send a self-reflection audio on how you did. I mean it’s very effective because not everyone every day watches themselves on a video and see how they move, how they talk. So the first time, you get conscious about yourself, what you actually do there. So I think it’s actually very helpful.”</td>
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*Strategies to increase comprehensibility.* Like Jim and Fred, Rick chimed in by listing the strategies he acquired in ESOL 5050 that helped him become more comprehensible. He explained that after a few sessions in ESOL 5050, he came to a realization:

I think I understood that issue that actually what I was trying to do, trying to say everything at once, in the lab. So I was a little bit incomprehensible in the beginning.
Then I found out and tried to just slow down and just explain in simple English, using simple terms. So that’s something.

The strategies that seemed to have helped Rick become more comprehensible were slowing down and simplifying complex scientific concepts for students. Similarly, undergraduate NESSs needed ITAs to slow down when speaking. For instance, Alexander found ITAs’ fast speech—especially when paired with “a pretty thick accent”—to impede comprehension and get in the way of effective notetaking in class. Furthermore, during the second focus group session, Rick added a few tips that he learned in ESOL 5050 that have helped him interact with students effectively. He stated:

One thing that I can say, like, compensation of your pronunciation. That sometimes I could be incomprehensible because of my trouble of pronouncing some specific syllables or something. So in this class, we learned that we can compensate those kind of lackings in pronunciation by explaining it or paraphrasing it, by explaining more elaborately, using different words, maybe.

Thus, strategies such as paraphrasing, using synonyms, or adding elaboration were tips that Rick found useful in making himself more comprehensible and in avoiding communication breakdowns with his students due to pronunciation struggles.

Similarly, Alexander—one of the two undergraduate NESSs who volunteered to be interviewed—stated that he expects ITAs to be able to paraphrase themselves. Thus, if ITAs struggled to explain themselves clearly in one way, they need to figure out another way to do so. He elaborated, “if [ITAs] can’t directly explain one way, find another way to try to explain it. And realize that like maybe the first, maybe the second time [undergraduate NESSs] may not get it, but keep trying you know, completely make yourself clear.” In other words, for Alexander,
ITAs are expected to be able to use compensation strategies, such as paraphrasing and re-
paraphrasing ourselves, with the goal of achieving clear communications with our undergraduate
NESSs.

Table 12. The code “Mini lessons and observations address ITAs’ need for strategies to increase
comprehensibility,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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</table>
| Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ need for strategies to increase comprehensibility | Strategies such as paraphrasing, using synonyms, slowing down, simplifying complex scientific concepts, or adding elaboration were tips that ITAs learned in ESOL 5050—tips that ITAs found useful in making themselves more comprehensible and in avoiding communication breakdowns with students due to pronunciation struggles. Similarly, for undergraduate NESSs, ITAs are expected to be able to use compensation strategies, such as paraphrasing and re-paraphrasing ourselves, with the goal of achieving clear communications. | Rick: “sometimes I could be incomprehensible because of my trouble of pronouncing some specific syllables or something. So in this class, we learned that we can compensate those kind of lackings in pronunciation by explaining it or paraphrasing it, by explaining more elaborately, using different words, maybe.”
Alexander: “if [ITAs] can’t directly explain one way, find another way to try to explain it. And realize that like maybe the first, maybe the second time [undergraduate NESSs] may not get it, but keep trying you know, completely make yourself clear.” |

**Raising awareness of linguistic terminology.** Jim stated that it was in ESOL 5050 that he got introduced to linguistic terminology, such as “thought groups” and “natural pauses.” He added, “And maybe I still cannot learn and use natural pauses, but I know it’s there. So it will come. And I’ll feel when I hear it and use it and I know that it exists.” In other words, Jim perceived value in being aware of linguistic terminology that he was not familiar with before ESOL 5050, even though he has not mastered those linguistic features yet. One can argue that this linguistic awareness might facilitate self-education or self-monitoring beyond the course. This idea speaks back to some (W)PAs’ perceptions on ITAs’ needs. On the (W)PA survey,
when asked about their perspectives on ITAs’ needs from a preparation program, five (W)PAs narrowed down ITAs’ needs to “suprasegmental” features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. One (W)PA pointed out that ITAs need “self-monitoring training” in suprasegmental pronunciation features. One can argue that an awareness of suprasegmental features of language and the terminology associated with those features would be a first step toward ITAs’ future linguistic self-monitoring efforts. Thus, if ITAs are to continue advancing their linguistic proficiencies beyond ITA preparation courses, they should be provided the right tools to do so. More specifically, raising ITAs’ awareness about suprasegmental features of language and, perhaps, providing them with the proper tools for linguistic self-monitoring practices are necessary components of an effective ITA preparation course.

Table 13. The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for knowledge of linguistic terminology,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ need for knowledge of linguistic terminology (Raising awareness of linguistic terminology)</td>
<td>Raising ITAs’ awareness about suprasegmental features of language and providing them with the proper tools for linguistic self-monitoring practices are necessary components of an effective ITA preparation course.</td>
<td>Jim: “And maybe I still cannot learn and use natural pauses, but I know it’s there. So it will come. And I’ll feel when I hear it and use it and I know that it exists.” On the (W)PA survey, five (W)PAs narrowed down ITAs’ needs to “suprasegmental” features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. One (W)PA pointed out that ITAs need “self-monitoring training” in suprasegmental pronunciation features.</td>
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**Learning classroom culture through observation.** During focus group sessions, Rick expressed a bit of frustration not only with the English language, but also with “etiquette.” He elaborated, “Sometimes it’s just language… So I think it’s a lot of struggle for me to work with
[undergraduate NESSs]. I mean everything is different. Etiquette is different here.” What Rick was referring to by “etiquette” is U.S. classroom culture. He explained:

I try to get those things like “am I being rude by my language or something?” and I quickly follow what others do, like what other native speakers do. Like you know as I said in my country it’s okay to say “Just do it. Just follow the rules.” But here it’s more to say “If I were you, I’d do that.” So I learned those things.

Rick’s response shows that he recognizes the differences between his home culture and that of the U.S. classroom. He understands that some questions or remarks could be considered “rude” by U.S. students. This issue of ITAs’ questions and remarks coming across as being “rude” by undergraduate NESSs was also evident in the interview I had with Marina. In fact, she described the issue as “probably the biggest issue I’ve ever had” with ITAs. She elaborated saying

[ITAs]’re like sometimes when you’d ask them a question, they seem to like be annoyed or upset with you for not knowing the answer. And they say things to relay that when they’re like “How do you not know this?” And then I get like, like I get really nervous because I’m like “Oh my god! I’m stupid!” Um and I get upset.

Marina’s anecdote reflects a sense of vulnerability. She often is chastised or verbally shamed by ITAs for not knowing an answer to a question or for asking a question that an ITA believes she should know the answer of. Though the above phrasing of ITAs’ remarks or questions would definitely be perceived as “rude” in the American classroom, it is not safe to assume that such rudeness is intentional. Rick’s experience, for one, reflects a sense of awareness or consciousness about the way his speech is perceived by an undergraduate native English-speaking audience. He is aware that such remarks or questions could be hurtful for students, deflating to their self-
esteem, and, consequently, hindering to their academic success. Needless to say, this classroom cultural awareness is a vital component in any ITA preparation program.

Olivia explained how teaching ITAs about mitigation and framing could prevent tension with their undergraduate NESSs due to cultural differences. Olivia related that one of the ITAs she prepared noticed her undergraduate students recoiling upon hearing her responses and questions in class. When the ITA approached Olivia with her concerns, Olivia explained to her how mitigating her responses and questions could help. She provided the ITA with example phrases that could help frame her responses, such as “That’s a great question. I can answer by saying…” Olivia assured the ITA that framing her responses and questions would help her sound less “direct” and prevent that sensed tension in her communications with undergraduate NESSs.

But some ITAs, like Rick, seem to have learned about U.S. classroom culture the hard way. He admitted to making the mistake of unintentionally embarrassing a disruptive student by calling him out in front of his peers in the beginning of the semester. Rick experienced a kairotic moment, though, to arrive to the realization that he could learn about U.S. classroom culture through observations. That kairotic moment occurred while he was observing a domestic TA by way of fulfilling an assignment requirement for ESOL 5050. The assignment consisted of two parts: Observing an experienced TA in their field and submitting an audio reflection based on the observation. In the audio reflection, ITAs had to describe the context of the class, discuss any classroom language or terminology, and state the takeaway from the observation in terms of what practices they would apply and what they would never apply in their own classroom. ITAs had to fulfill two observations during the semester: One of a domestic TA and another of a fellow ITA. While observing a domestic TA, Rick arrived to an important realization. He stated, “So I think that was, that triggered something to me. Okay. So that’s another way to learn. Okay.
So maybe I’ll apply that.” He added, “I always try to learn about [U.S. classroom culture]. To know how native speakers handle things here. I mean that’s good to know. To learn.” In other words, Rick realized that one way of learning about the U.S. classroom is through observing domestic TAs.

Rick was not the only one who could find benefits in assigned observations in ESOL 5050. When asked about the strengths of ESOL 5050, Kimberly remarked that it is student-centered, with ITAs self-educating through observations. She stated:

we try to have students focus on the language of their field, we try to have them do class observations in their own fields, so it’s not us telling them this is how you teach, but it’s helping push the students to be kind of self-learning and going and seeing what does it mean to be a teacher in my field, in my department. And I really like that part of the program. I do think it’s pretty student-centered.

In other words, observations create a space where ITAs explore successful pedagogical practices in their own fields, learn the language typically used in their fields, as well as understand U.S. classroom culture.

Table 14. The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for learning classroom culture through observation,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ need for learning classroom culture through observation</td>
<td>Observations, like those assigned in ESOL 5050, create a space where ITAs explore and reflect on successful pedagogical practices in their own fields, learn the language typically used in their fields, as well as understand U.S. classroom culture. Additionally, explicitly teaching ITAs about mitigation and framing could prevent tension with students</td>
<td>Kimberly: “we try to have students focus on the language of their field, we try to have them do class observations in their own fields, so it’s not us telling them this is how you teach, but it’s helping push the students to be kind of self-learning and going and seeing what does it mean to be a teacher in my field, in my department.”</td>
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their undergraduate NESSs due to cultural differences or due to ITAs’ unawareness of what would be considered “rude” in the U.S. classroom.

Rick: “So I think that was, that triggered something to me. Okay. So that’s another way to learn…I always try to learn about [U.S. classroom culture]. To know how native speakers handle things here.”

**U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy.** Jim summed up nicely how Mini Lessons helped him improve in more than one way. He stated:

I want to say why mini lessons are great and I think it’s because mini lessons include all of these things. So classroom culture, how to behave in classroom, how to teach, how to behave as teacher, pronunciation because we need to speak about the topic and vocabulary, and, I don’t know, we need to interact with the students, I don’t know, we need to know how to tackle their questions.

In essence, Jim’s comment represents the three main components in which the course, ESOL 5050, is grounded: U.S. classroom culture, Pronunciation, and Pedagogy. Jim, however, found one assignment (i.e. Mini Lessons) to encapsulate the three components. Jim’s comment reiterates many of his peers’ remarks about Mini Lessons and adds the cultural aspect to the list of benefits.

Table 15. The code “Mini lessons & observations address ITAs’ need for learning about U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy,” my interpretation, and example responses

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| Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ need for learning about U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy | ITAs appreciated the Mini Lesson assignment as it encapsulates the three main components in which ESOL 5050 is grounded: U.S. classroom culture, Pronunciation, and Pedagogy. | Jim: “I want to say why mini lessons are great and I think it’s because mini lessons include all of these things. So classroom culture, how to behave in classroom, how to teach, how to behave as teacher, pronunciation because we need to speak about the topic and vocabulary, and, I don’t know, we need to interact
ITA coaches performing as observers. Similar to the Statistics department’s “peer mentoring” program, the old version of ESOL 5050 used to offer each ITA the opportunity of being observed—by the instructor, not a peer, however. When ESOL 5050 was first offered, each ITA was observed by the instructor/coach “at least three times in the class they’re teaching.” One main difference between the departmental peer and the ITA coach is the practical and epistemic knowledge of the peer—knowledge that the coach might not possess. Because of the departmental peer’s previous practical experience teaching the course and her/his knowledge of the material being taught, departmental peers have an advantage over ITA coaches/instructors when observing novice ITAs. Kimberly explained the previous structure of ESOL 5050:

Back when I first started teaching the class, there were a lot more observations of the ITAs in the classroom. And so I think I observed all of my ITAs the first several times I taught the class, I observed every single ITA at least three times in their classroom, but also as you can imagine, that is also time consuming. That’s a lot of time for the instructor.

In her capacity as ESOL 5050 instructor/coach, Kimberly observed every ITA at least three times in their classrooms throughout the semester. What made those observations possible back then is the fact that ESOL 5040 was offered in addition to ESOL 5050. ESOL 5040 was specifically designed for ITAs whose responsibility is to run labs—not teach a class. Kimberly noted, “[observing ITAs] worked better when we had the 5040 and the 5050 split because now it’s also tricky: half of them are leading, half of them are just assisting. When you have a whole class of people who are actually leading, the classroom is a lot easier to observe.” Though
observing each ITA was more doable for the instructor with an entire class of ITAs who are assigned leading roles in the classroom, the task was time consuming for the instructor. Not only that, but those observations were often inconveniencing for “a fulltime instructor who has a 4/4 teaching load on his or her own, going to observe ten students in their classrooms,” many of whom teach late at night.

Because of the extra labor ITA coaches/instructors take upon themselves to observe ITAs and because of departmental peers’ practical and epistemic knowledge of the content being taught, it might be less taxing for ITA coaches and more beneficial for novice ITAs if departmental peers performed the observations. In addition, peer mentoring/observing could create a sense of community between domestic TAs and ITAs.

*Table 16. The code “ITA coaches performing as observers,” my interpretation, and example responses*

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<td>Kimberly: “Back when I first started teaching the class, there were a lot more observations of the ITAs in the classroom. And so I think I observed all of my ITAs the first several times I taught the class, I observed every single ITA at least three times in their classroom, but also as you can imagine, that is also time consuming. That’s a lot of time for the instructor.”</td>
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**ITA coaches performing as mentors.** Because of Olivia’s awareness of the limited ITA-specific support services on the Southern Public University’s campus, she made a conscious decision of closely mentoring the ITAs she prepares. In addition to the two-credit hour ITA preparation course, Olivia offers one-on-one weekly tutorials for her ITAs. Though Olivia’s ITA
preparation course caps at the low number of 16, she provides each ITA with two thirty-minute weekly tutorials on top of class time. She commented, “So it’s a pretty big undertaking, but I find that that’s what it takes to get them the support that they need.” ITAs get to customize those tutorials based on their individual needs. Thus, tutorials are ITA-centered, where each ITA tailors their tutorials the way they want/need. Olivia explained:

I like to give them a complete open opportunity to ask anything from class. Maybe they have a question that they didn’t get to answer or something that’s very personal that they might did not want to share with the class, but really it’s a pressing question. Or something I presented in class that they want to know more. I even say it can be anything, especially if you’re a current TA, that wasn’t covered in class. It doesn’t have to do with the presentation, but you just have a burning question. It’s something topical for you for that week in your current TA context or practice, and I’m happy to go over it. It could even be, they’re gonna present something, even at a conference. It’s got nothing to do with the class, nothing to do with the TA practice, but it’s just something that they want.

But it has to have something to do with English.

It is also worth noting that those tutorials are not mandatory and do not affect ITAs’ grades in any way. Despite the fact that tutorials are optional, 90% of ITAs utilize that option, with the 10% either being dropouts or are unable to attend due to a scheduling overlap. In other words, ITAs’ positive reaction to these tutorials is evidence of the value of coach-ITA mentorship for them, especially when tutorials are individually customized and ITA-centered.

An evidence of the success of Olivia’s self-designed course that centers around cultural differences and individual mentorship is the sustained relationships she creates with ITAs. She related the proud moments she experiences with ITAs beyond the course:
What is best about [the ITA preparation course] is that I think it works. The success of the students who stay and really do the work, are motivated, and stay in it, and attend and do all the microteachings, they come back and say the work I did here had a direct impact on the quality of my teaching… and I’m thankful for that and I find that a lot of those students would continue to use me past the course. So I had a lot of students, a year later who would say, “Oh, I’m doing X presentation, and I enjoyed your class so much. Would it be possible to come by and just do a quick tutorial, and I always take them.

For Olivia, the sustainability of her mentoring relationships with ITAs is evidence not only of the success of the course, but also of the “long-term value” that ITAs gain. ITAs voluntarily seek her out as a mentor well after the course is over.

Like Olivia, Kimberly had one-on-one tutorials with ITAs when she first started teaching ESOL 5050 in the early 2000s at Bowling Green State University. However, back then, the course was “designed as a support class,” without an assessment for ITAs to exit the course and be released to teach, such as the current Spoken English Test. Additionally, “at that time, the assignments were very much just kinda supporting [ITAs] having some sense of community.”

The idea of one-on-one tutorials started off with the intention of ITAs spending an hour at the Language Learning Center, during which they would work on pronunciation, and after which they would conference with the class instructor. However, many ITAs did not abide by the task of going to the Language Learning Center, so the instructor met with ITAs individually to work on pronunciation. Thus, half the class time was spent in class, and the other half on individual pronunciation tutorials with ITAs. Kimberly explained, “So [ITAs] would have one week in class and then the next week there wouldn’t be class. The students would come and meet with the instructor for like 30 minutes or something like that in individual pronunciation tutorial.” The
focus on pronunciation was to fulfill the Ohio State mandate of ITAs being orally proficient. Like Olivia, Kimberly dedicated a large amount of time individually working with ITAs. Though the focus of those tutorials is not the same, one could argue that the amount of labor involved shows the level of dedication and care Olivia and Kimberly have for the ITAs they prepare.

But not all institutions have mentorship as a priority. For instance, Nancy lamented that at Michigan Tech University, ITAs have a need for “supervision” and “mentoring” that faculty do not have the time to provide. She explained:

And it’s hard for faculty to provide that. We’re a research university. So our faculty have a lot of demand on their time. And many of them are a little bit reluctant to try to provide that mentoring. And there is not heck of a lot I can do about that. But you know, I don’t wanna make this sound like it’s not working because it is working. But it comes down to we’re cramped for time. That’s a big problem.

In other words, there is “no formal mentoring program” at Michigan Tech University. However, like Olivia, some faculty would voluntarily fill the role of mentors for ITAs who express interest in academic teaching. So mentoring takes on an informal shape. She commented, “[faculty] will have that student almost as an instructor in the class. And they will sit in on the lectures and provide pretty routine feedback. But that’s on a case-by-case basis. Mostly our faculty are more interested in having their TAs do research and publish.” One can argue that institutional focus (i.e. research-focused or teaching-focused) informs the shape that ITA mentorship takes or does not take.

Table 17. The code “ITA coaches performing as mentors,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ITA Coaches Performing as Mentors</td>
<td>Though mentoring ITAs is not mandated in their institutions, Olivia and Kimberly: “So [ITAs] would have one week in class and then the next week there</td>
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</table>
Kimberly volunteered to provide one-on-one weekly and biweekly mentorship for ITAs, respectively. Though Olivia left it to ITAs to decide on the focus of the sessions based on their needs, Kimberly focused on pronunciation to satisfy to Ohio State mandate of ITAs being orally proficient. At research-focused institutions, though, mentorship tends to take an informal shape and is provided only for ITAs who express interest in teaching.

Ways to Improve ESOL 5050 and Suggestions for ITA Preparation Programs (9 codes)

**Contact with native English speakers.** Though Yahampath expressed a sense of satisfaction with the English for International Graduate Assistants II course (ESOL 5050) in terms of practicing suprasegmental features, he identified a need to spend more time with peers who are native English speakers. He stated, “I think we need more friends from [the U.S.] to [practice English with]. We don’t automatically come to that accent.” He added that because the affordance of practicing English with native English speakers is not available for him, he enjoys practicing English with the professor of the lab he is running. And the fact that she, the professor, is also a nonnative English speaker makes her more comprehensible for him. He stressed, “She’s the person which I understand mostly in our department because [she] speak[s] slowly and she mainly stress[es] words so I can listen (laugh).” Thus, from an ITA’s point of view, it is important to have opportunities to interact with undergraduate NESSs during the semester or to practice their communicative skills with their advisors/mentors. When I asked Yahampath about the components he found necessary in an ITA preparation course, he reiterated his need for interactions with undergraduate NESSs. Yahampath stated that in addition to Mini Lessons and
listening activities, “arrang[ing] some time [for ITAs] to meet with native [English speaking] students” would be a necessary component in an ITA preparation course. Again, Yahampath reiterated ITAs’ need for interactions with NESSs—a need that is not addressed in the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum.

During focus group sessions, Rick expressed the same need for more opportunities to interact with native speakers. Like Yahampath, Rick found such interactions to be a pressing need that ESOL 5050 does not address. He clarified:

So I think the course structure is okay, but what I found very much helpful here is just I mean, we learn pretty much everything about English before coming here like grammar, pronunciation, intonation, everything, but what we lack was that some native speakers in my country, for myself. I say that I didn’t meet any native speaker before coming here.

So I mean just speaking with native speakers helps a lot.

Thus, one can hear a need for ITAs to be provided with opportunities to interact with “native speakers” by way of practicing speaking the English language and listening to it being spoken. Though practicing English with nonnative English speakers or fellow ITAs would be as beneficial for their language development, ITAs seem to express a preference for native speakers of English. This tendency of ELLs to prefer native English speakers is not unheard of. What I find surprising, though, is hearing such need from ITAs whom I have witnessed enjoying a sense of community that allowed them to practice the English language in a low-stakes environment. This observation, however, must not deviate the attention from ITAs’ expressed need for opportunities to interact with NESSs.

In the second focus group session, Adam asked Rick’s opinion on whether he envisions those interactions with NESSs to be taking place in ESOL 5050, to which Rick responded
immediately in the affirmative. Rick explained, “it’s because of improving your pronunciation like native speakers. Sometimes language is more easy to learn by just mimicking. Not by following rules or something.” More specifically, Rick suggested that NESSs could be invited to class on a volunteer basis and participate in “Maybe some kind of discussion, or [ITAs] explaining some topics to them. Also having something interesting, just discussing with them.” Due to the busy lifestyles most graduate students lead, Rick had little opportunities to interact with native English-speakers outside the classroom setting. With his native English-speaking colleagues/friends in the department, Rick characterized his interactions to be limited to “academic materials and those kind of things.” Even when Rick added that he had a couple of native English-speaking “friends,” he elaborated saying, “sometimes I share with them, just everyday stuff, nothing else.” Rick’s brevity in describing those friendships might reflect the quotidian nature of such friendships, possibly, due to the heavy workload of graduate school. Rick commented, “You know how things go in the grad school.” Another reason for the quotidian nature of those friendships could be related to cultural differences, which may demand time and effort to navigate and negotiate, reaching a compromise. With these present challenges outside the ITA preparation classroom, ITAs might find ESOL 5050 a safe space where those desired interactions with native English-speakers could take place. Therefore, incorporating in-class activities in ESOL 5050 where ITAs would get a chance to interact with NESSs would be invaluable for ITAs, as such interactions might create an authentic environment that bears close resemblance to their everyday experiences in the lab or the classroom. Additionally, inviting undergraduate NESSs to ESOL 5050 could create opportunities where ITA coaches/instructors would be able to facilitate and guide any meaning negotiation practices that might emerge, hence, expanding rhetorical knowledge to benefit not only ITAs, but undergraduates as well.
And based on Rick’s suggestion, those interactions could take the shape of either small-group discussions, engaging activities, or having undergraduate NESSs as potential audience during Mini Lessons.

*Table 18. The code “Contact with NESSs,” my interpretation, and example responses*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contact with NESSs</td>
<td>Experiencing a need to interact with undergraduate NESSs in ESOL 5050, ITAs suggested those interactions to take the shape of either small-group discussions, engaging activities, or having undergraduate NESS as potential audience during Mini Lessons.</td>
<td>Rick: “Sometimes language is more easy to learn by just mimicking. Not by following rules or something.”</td>
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**Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback.** Another component that is not addressed in ESOL 5050 is student feedback and ways to interpret such feedback. In her ITA preparation course, Olivia dedicates an entire unit to student feedback. She perceives value in addressing student feedback for ITAs, whether they are assigned to teach a course, tutor students, run a laboratory, or hold office hours. She emphasized the value of “walk[ing] them through the process,” “talk[ing] about the cultural value of feedback,” and the “language around feedback.” She assigns ITAs to construct their own feedback survey, hand it out to students they serve in any capacity, collect the surveys, analyze the results, and write a report representing their findings. Those feedback surveys could be as simple as one question about their teaching effectiveness. Though ITAs do not have to report on the details of the data collected, they are required to look for themes and patterns, interpret the numbers, and point out data outliers. They, then, submit everything as well as their reflections in a PDF file. Designing feedback surveys, analyzing the data, and reflecting on themes/patterns are not skills ITAs learn in ESOL 5050, but they are indeed skills that ITAs need—at least from a (W)PA’s perspective. Adding a unit on the
importance of student feedback to the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum challenges the typical understanding of professional development as extracurricular experiences and creates a space for those experiences inside the ITA preparation classroom.

Table 19. The code “Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback</td>
<td>Designing feedback surveys, analyzing the data, and reflecting on themes/patterns are not skills ITAs learn in ESOL 5050, but they are indeed skills that ITAs need.</td>
<td>Olivia emphasized the value of “walk[ing] [ITAs] through the process [of constructing and analyzing feedback surveys],” “talk[ing] about the cultural value of feedback,” and the “language around feedback.”</td>
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**Meaning negotiation strategies.** A few ITAs during focus groups expressed some communicative struggles with undergraduates. Tom, for example, pointed out that his communicative struggles with undergraduate NESSs are rooted in “two problems:” first, “aural comprehension” due to students’ use of “different pronunciation and slang;” second, meaning negotiation strategies particularly when it comes to handling student questions. Tom elaborated:

Since English is not my first language, I need to some time to speak because as Rick mentioned, we need time. First sentence in our mother tongue then translate to English. But at times, yea, I think I didn’t handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time. Okay, so? (laugh)

Tom, like Yahampath, struggled with aural comprehension. They both had trouble understanding their students’ speech and needed to improve their listening skills. Fred and Jim chimed in, expressing similar struggles in terms of needing more time to respond to students’ questions. In my perspective as an ITA coach, what Tom, Fred, and Jim were actually expressing is a need for meaning negotiation strategies that would help them navigate such situations and buy themselves some time before they are able to formulate complete responses to student questions. Such
meaning negotiation need was evident in undergraduate NESSs’ survey responses as well. Tom’s struggle with handling student questions speaks back to undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs’ in terms of understanding and responding to undergraduates’ questions as well as negotiating meaning with them if repetition or paraphrasing is needed.

Alexander—one of the two undergraduate NESSs who volunteered to be interviewed—had his own experiences negotiating meaning with ITAs. Being a Computer Science major, Alexander had experiences interacting with ITAs in the lab and classroom. When I asked him if he faced trouble during those interactions, he stated, “Yea. Sometimes you have to ask [the Geology ITA] to repeat herself or to speak up.” Alexander affirmed that often times he took initiatives to negotiate meaning with his Geology ITA by asking her for repetition or requesting that she would raise her voice. Alexander did not, however, express any frustration about having to negotiate meaning with ITAs. In fact, he expressed his willingness to exert effort or labor to reach full comprehension. In addition to initiating meaning negotiation with ITAs, Alexander explained, “as long as I can pretty much piece together what [ITAs]’re saying, I’m usually not too picky about how they say it.” One can even infer a sense of empathy in Alexander’s responses, especially when he explained:

She wasn’t bad. She was actually a really good teacher. She reiterated things very well. Pronunciation was like the thing and like volume. So I feel like she was a lot more quiet. But I feel like it wasn’t necessarily her fault. I feel like it might have been a cultural thing. But other than that I’ve never had any problems or anything like that. No.

Hypothesizing that the ITA spoke quietly due to cultural norms that are not “necessarily her fault,” Alexander showed a sense of empathy toward his ITA. Instead of expecting the ITA to quickly adapt to the U.S. classroom culture, he expressed willingness to compromise. Even when
I asked Alexander whether the ITA initiated meaning negotiation as frequently as he did, he stated that the ITA’s aural proficiency was quite high that she easily understood American speech, so she did not need meaning negotiation strategies *per se*.

But Alexander was not an exception in his willingness to negotiate meaning with ITAs. Marina expressed not only willingness to negotiate meaning with nonnative English speakers, but also a sense of intellectual stimulation she gains through those practices. Marina perceives nonnative English speakers’ linguistic struggles to be informing her own speech production. For instance, because she knows that nonnative English speakers often struggle with slang, she tries to paraphrase herself. She explained:

It’s usually like helping me to take a step back and be like, “How am I speaking when I’m speaking to somebody who doesn’t speak English as a first language?” cause obviously like I use a lot of slang, I grew up here. So like a lot of the times I have to like stop myself and be like, “No [Marina]! Use real words!”

Marina does not express any frustration during meaning negotiation practices. In fact, she perceives them as intellectual stimulants or brain games. She elaborated:

I know that one friend. He’s from Turkey, and a lot of the times we’ll be having conversations, and you know like deep conversation going on for hours. Super intelligent man, but sometimes he couldn’t get the right word. So he would sit there and try to describe it. And I almost feel like we’re playing Charades sometimes because he’d be like, “ah, ah, when there is steam coming,” and I’m like, “Smoking?” and he’ll be like, “Yes” (laugh). So I think that like I feel like that helps my brain sometimes because of like I don’t know it makes me think a little bit more.
Her perception of meaning negotiation practices is quite unique. One could hypothesize that interacting with nonnative English speakers on a daily basis at the young age of fifteen might have informed Marina’s perception of meaning negotiation practices as not only normalized, but also intellectually stimulating. However, Alexander and Marina are not an accurate representation of the undergraduate NESS population—particularly those who have had little or no prior interactions with nonnative English speakers.

Table 20. The code “Meaning negotiation strategies,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning Negotiation Strategies</td>
<td>Explicitly teaching ITAs meaning negotiation strategies could help them navigate situations where they are unsure what undergraduate NESSs are asking and/or saying, could buy them some time before they are able to formulate complete responses to student questions, and would address undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs’ properly addressing their questions.</td>
<td>Tom: “Since English is not my first language, I need to some time to speak because as Rick mentioned, we need time. First sentence in our mother tongue then translate to English. But at times, yea, I think I didn’t handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time. Okay, so? (laugh)” Alexander: “Yea. Sometimes you have to ask [the Geology ITA] to repeat herself or to speak up.” Marina: “I think that like I feel like [negotiating meaning with nonnative English speakers] helps my brain sometimes because of like I don’t know it makes me think a little bit more.”</td>
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Asking questions in class across cultures. Though approximately 20.5% of surveyed NESSs expect ITAs to be able to “understand and answer questions effectively,” Olivia noted that some ITAs in her preparation program at Southern Public University find the act of students asking questions in class to be disruptive. In other words, the act of students asking questions during class is perceived differently across cultures. In her ITA preparation classroom, Olivia
places culture “as a backdrop of everything we’re looking at in terms of language, culture, and pedagogy.” So when she teaches pedagogy to ITAs, she encourages them to view pedagogy through a cultural lens. For instance, one mini project she assigns asks ITAs to choose one pedagogical aspect and draw a comparison/contrast between their home classroom culture and that of the U.S. in terms of that specific aspect. Through this assignment, Olivia discovered that asking questions in class is perceived differently across cultures. She referenced one of the ITAs’ presentations:

So in her country, asking questions in class is always considered a waste of time and very selfish, whereas Q & A and that sort of exchange in the U.S. is almost a bedrock of any in-class instruction.

Thus, in Olivia’s experience, examining pedagogical differences through a cultural lens proved useful for ITAs to reflect, learn, and think consciously about ways teaching in U.S. classrooms could be different from their own home classrooms. This metacognitive activity could help ITAs prepare for the challenges they may face due to cultural differences and perspectives—including undergraduate NESSs’ expectations from ITAs to be able to understand and answer their questions in class.

Table 21. The code “Asking questions in class across cultures,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asking Questions in Class across Cultures</td>
<td>Because in some cultures, asking questions in class is “considered a waste of time and very selfish,” Olivia found that examining pedagogical differences through a cultural lens proved useful for ITAs to reflect, learn, and think consciously about ways teaching in U.S. classrooms could be different</td>
<td>Olivia: “So in her country, asking questions in class is always considered a waste of time and very selfish, whereas Q &amp; A and that sort of exchange in the U.S. is almost a bedrock of any in-class instruction.”</td>
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</table>
Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but when?). During focus group sessions, Tom, Fred, and Jim expressed some struggle understanding undergraduate NESSs’ speech due to the latter’s use of slang and idiomatic expressions that the former might not be familiar with. One ITA—Rick—had a different experience, though. He expressed confidence understanding the idiomatic expressions that his students use, but he struggled to produce such idioms. He elaborated:

I understand idioms very well. I mean my aural comprehension is good, my academic language is also good, but the thing is, the problem is with everyday English. In every language, common people use the language in a slightly different way than the standard way. So I understand that. But the problem is I work in labs, so it just sound weird when you always use academic language with the students, I mean I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to sound academic all the time.

Rick seemed to be at a stage in second language acquisition where his aural proficiency is improving faster than his oral proficiency, which is a natural stage of language development. In other words, he is consuming the language until he is ready to start producing it. Rick’s struggle seems to stem from this inability to produce the idiomatic expressions that he could fully understand. Academic language use with undergraduate NESSs, in Rick’s opinion, stands in the way of his creating a rapport with students. He added:
[Academic language] creates a bit of a distance between students and the instructor, I think. It seems like you’re not connecting with them, you know. I mean that some language makes you more closer to your students than other language. If you use standard academic language all the time, students sometimes don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions. In lab they have so many questions that they feel maybe stupid, I don’t know. I don’t need to ask them to the instructor. That’s not true. They should approach and ask those questions. So I think when you can get more close to your students in the way that they use the language, they feel more connected to you.

The impetus for Rick’s frustration is his need to connect with students through the use of slang and idiomatic expressions, which he is unable to produce yet. The production of slang, for Rick, would have a powerful effect on the rapport he desires to develop with his students. It would gain him membership into undergraduate NESSs’ world. It would change his status from being an outsider to being an insider. Using the same language creates a sense of belonging and relatability among community members. Consequently, students would trust him and feel comfortable asking him questions.

Alice, on the other hand, perceived the production of slang to be problematic if/when ITAs were not fully comprehensible. In Alice’s opinion, comprehensibility should take precedence for novice ITAs—those who have been in the U.S. for just a few months. She explained to Adam, “[Rick]’s an instructor, so he has to speak in an academic way. And the slang will come in later, you know.” She directed her advice to Rick, saying, “I just feel that right now you have to worry about being comprehensible. And to give the class the information, the information that you give to them. This is important.” In other words, Alice knew that the production of slang usually takes time, and what is more important for novice ITAs is clearly
delivering the information or content to students. Trying to produce slang at that stage of language development might impede comprehensibility altogether. Overall, there seemed to be an agreement among ITAs that producing slang would create rapport with undergraduate NESSs. What they seemed to disagree on is when such production would be deemed appropriate.

But ITAs’ desire to learn slang was echoed in undergraduate NESSs’ perspectives on the necessary components of an ITA preparation course such as ESOL 5050. Alexander approved of the three existing components of the course: Pronunciation, Pedagogy, and U.S. Classroom Culture. However, he added that ITAs need to learn slang or idiomatic expressions. He elaborated, “I think those are all crucial, but another thing that would be good for [ITAs] to learn is slang…[understanding slang] would completely help them understand their students a lot better.” Though Alexander did not mention an expectation from ITAs to produce slang, he viewed their understanding of slang to be important for ITAs’ comprehension skills and aural proficiency.
Table 22. The code “Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang (but when?), my interpretation, and example responses

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<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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</table>
| Creating Rapport with Undergraduate NESSs through Slang (but When?)                | During focus groups, ITAs agreed that producing slang would create rapport with undergraduate NESSs. What they seemed to disagree on is when such production would be deemed appropriate: in early stages while they are working on their comprehensibility, or in later stages after they achieve comprehensibility. Similarly, undergraduate NESSs expressed an expectation from ITAs to understand the slang that undergraduates tend to employ heavily in their speech. | Rick: “so it just sound weird when you always use academic language with the students, I mean I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to sound academic all the time…[Academic language] creates a bit of a distance between students and the instructor, I think. It seems like you’re not connecting with them, you know… If you use standard academic language all the time, students sometimes don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions.”
Alice: “I just feel that right now you have to worry about being comprehensible. And to give the class the information, the information that you give to them. This is important.”
Alexander: “another thing that would be good for [ITAs] to learn I guess lingo and like slang…like the extremely crucial thing is obviously the classroom, but I feel like [understanding slang] would completely help them understand their students a lot better.” |

Creating rapport with disruptive students. When ITAs were asked to relate one of the worst experiences they have had communicating with a student, Rick recounted an experience he had with one disruptive undergraduate NESS in the lab he was running. The student demonstrated a laidback attitude and consistently showed resistance when Rick asked him to follow the laboratory safety procedures. Rick was unsure about the reason for such resistance.
and hypothesized that “some students are not enough mature to understand,” or, perhaps, the student was “nervous to ask questions because he thought that a lot of stuff he should know, he doesn’t know.” In addition to the student’s resistance to follow the lab safety procedures, he complained about his inability to understand Rick, saying, “I don’t get anything of what you’re saying.” To Rick, this complaint was shocking, as he was “doing pretty good” in both laboratories he was running. Because Rick thought that the student may have felt “alienated,” he decided to build rapport with him through small talk, conversations about his sport interests, and inquiring about his opinion about the lab (i.e. what he likes and does not like). He added that even the simple act of calling students by their names shows that ITAs care about them. He stated, “If you call their names, they’d feel more connected.” Showing care for and interest in that disruptive student, Rick admitted, proved to be a successful strategy. He commented, “I think after that he was curious about this lab, and he was asking questions about the experiment and how to do it.” Needless to say, the student started following the lab safety procedures.

Through Rick’s difficult experience with that student, one can infer the importance of ITAs’ creating rapport with their undergraduate NESSs.

Table 23. The code “Creating rapport with disruptive students,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creating Rapport with Disruptive Students</td>
<td>ITAs see value in creating rapport with undergraduates, especially those who appear alienated, resistant, and/or disruptive. Rick, for example, created rapport with a disruptive student through small talk, conversations about his sport interests, calling him by his name, and inquiring about his opinion about the lab (i.e. what he likes and does not like).</td>
<td>Rick: “If you call their names, they’d feel more connected.”</td>
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</table>
Undergraduate NESSs expect ITAs to create rapport. Marina had dramatically more positive experiences with ITAs who tried to connect with undergraduate students than those who did not. Though she “wasn’t super fond of” the first ITA she had at BGSU due to his initial nervousness in class, she realized that in time he started feeling more comfortable with students and even being “silly” with them, which completely changed her perception of him. Similarly, she had quite a positive experience with a nonnative English-speaking professor because “[h]e’s like trying to interact, trying to get to know us, cares about us, and trying to connect with us.” Contrastingly, ITAs who do not try to create rapport with undergraduate students are perceived negatively by Marina, who also noticed a pattern that the majority of these ITAs are from sciences. She explained:

A lot of the ones that I’ve had in science um like definitely sometimes they’re still trying to connect, but I would say not as much in my experience. But the ones I’ve had for chemistry and right now biology, they’re very science-focused, like they’re like I am only here to like grade your papers and you know give you the information.

It is evident through Marina’s reflections on the experiences she had with ITAs that she preferred the ones that create rapport with undergraduate students and try to connect with them. Marina’s observation might have implications on the preparation of STEM ITAs in particular in terms of addressing undergraduate students’ needs for rapport and a sense of care from their instructors.

Table 24. The code “Undergraduate NESSs expect ITAs to create rapport,” my interpretation, and example responses

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| Undergraduate NESSs Expect ITAs to Create Rapport | Undergraduate NESSs reported dramatically more positive experiences with ITAs who tried to connect with undergraduate students | Marina had quite a positive experience with a nonnative English-speaking professor because “[h]e’s like trying to interact, trying to get to know us, cares about us, and trying
and show care for them than those who did not.

to connect with us... But the ones I’ve had for chemistry and right now biology, they’re very science-focused, like they’re like I am only here to like grade your papers and you know give you the information.”

ITAs creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs by showing vulnerability. During the interview with Olivia, she brought up an observation that often times undergraduate NESSs presume they would not understand someone upon hearing a foreign accent and/or realizing their interlocutor does not speak English as a first language. These presumptions tend to act as an affective filter, preventing undergraduate NESSs from comprehending their ITAs. She explained:

What I found a lot of the TAs, their language is not so incomprehensible. I think with students sometimes when they hear there is an accent, they immediately kind of have this, “Oh okay. I’m not gonna understand.” This person is speaking English as a second language.

To prevent undergraduate NESSs’ affective filter from rising, Olivia teaches ITAs the value of transparency and vulnerability. Specifically, she encourages ITAs to address the fact that they have a foreign accent with their undergraduates on the first day of class. She believes that ITAs should be held responsible for opening up a channel of conversation with their undergraduate students in a way that would create a rapport and facilitate meaning negotiation practices. She elaborated:

Let’s all say, I have this accent. And sometimes you are not gonna understand me, but if you don’t, please, by all means raise your hand, interrupt me, I’m happy to answer any question about anything I’ve said. But you know now let’s communicate. So everybody could relax about that and just really try to communicate.
Thus, raising ITAs’ awareness about the value of being vulnerable and transparent with their undergraduate students should be an aspect of ITA preparation. One could argue that ITAs’ initiation of a conversation with their undergraduate NESSs about accents and effective communicative strategies could not only break the communicative barrier, but also raise undergraduate NESSs’ awareness about their own responsibilities as students. Such conversations could have at least two potentials: ITAs creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs, and undergraduate NESSs recognizing their own role in meaning negotiation practices in the classroom.
Olivia: “Let’s all say, I have this accent. And sometimes you are not gonna understand me, but if you don’t, please, by all means raise your hand, interrupt me, I’m happy to answer any question about anything I’ve said. But you know now let’s communicate. So everybody could relax about that and just really try to communicate.”

Undergraduate NESSs expect scaffolding as an instructional strategy. When I asked Marina about the components she envisions an ITA preparation course to consist of, she listed “pedagogy skills” as an important component. Understanding cultural differences, such as U.S. students’ need for quick responses and fast information, came second on the list. Though she described those needs as “immature,” I believe that ITAs still ought to understand that a fast-paced classroom is an expectation of young U.S. generations. However, the one cultural difference that had the worst impact on Marina’s learning experience is undergraduate NESSs’ unmet need for detailed instruction and scaffolding of information. In Marina’s point of view, ITAs often forget that undergraduate NESSs do not necessarily have the same amount of knowledge that they themselves have or the level of knowledge that they would expect of
undergraduates in their home countries. Marina shared an experience with an ITA that could clarify this specific need of undergraduate NESSs. She related:

So one of my issues right now is that my TA doesn’t, like he will lecture on the concepts real quick, but then he doesn’t really tell us like what we’re doing. Like he’ll read the title. So he’ll be like, “This is your diffusion lab,” and then he’ll be like, “Okay, start.” And we’re like, “Okay. I read the lab, (laugh) but I don’t know what this thing is that they’re talking about. Can you just like point it out real quick?” And then I know he definitely gets frustrated because we’re asking him so many questions, but um I wish that he would just lay everything out before, so we know where we’re going, what we’re doing.

One can infer from Marina’s experience that the ITA does not provide much details to transition from the theoretical part of the lab to the practical part. In other words, scaffolding as an instruction strategy is a component that might prove beneficial for ITAs in a preparation course. Marina hypothesized that the ITA wrongly assumes that undergraduate students would know how to make that transition on their own or possess the knowledge that helps them to do so.

Another thing that one can infer from this experience is that students are made to feel inadequate when they ask questions to clarify their confusion. This sense of inadequacy is evident in the ITA’s expressed “frustration” with students’ questions. The ITA-undergraduate NESS tension here may occur as a result of multiple layers of crosscultural misconceptions: ITAs’ misconceptions about the amount of knowledge undergraduate U.S. students possess, undergraduate NESSs’ need for informational scaffolding, undergraduate NESSs’ expectation of instructors’ willingness to address their questions, and ITAs’ unawareness of the cultural cues that are construed as rudeness by undergraduate NESSs. I find the complexity of these layers of
crosscultural misconceptions to manifest themselves as a vicious cycle in which ITAs and undergraduate NESSs are not seeing eye to eye. I also envision crosscultural preparation to involve both parties: ITAs and undergraduate NESSs.

An additional factor that may induce ITA-NESS tension is the fact that ITAs are typically assigned to teach introductory-level courses—courses that are usually anxiety-ridden for undergraduates. Kimberly reminded me that ITAs’ incomprehensibility in those classes could raise undergraduate students’ existing anxiety levels:

And sometimes when I go into the classroom I see problems. I feel it’s a lot like the cultural part, but there are some ITAs who I think are difficult to understand. So you have to remember often that ITAs are teaching classes that are anxiety-ridden for students. So they are not teaching the 4000-level math classes; they are teaching the 1000-level, even remedial math classes. Students are placed in those classes because they have difficulty with math. And so if it’s not a subject that you feel you’re very strong in and you do feel like you’re having a bit of trouble understanding your professor, you could see how anxiety would rise, like that would make it stressful for you.

Marina could have been experiencing this feeling of anxiety that Kimberly is referring to, especially that she is not a science major and was taking many science classes to fulfill the requirements for her major in Middle Childhood Education, Science and English. However, Marina’s struggle was not with the ITA’s level of comprehensibility. Rather, Marina’s struggle stems from cultural differences in terms of the unreasonably high academic expectations ITAs have of undergraduates, lack of proper pedagogical preparedness for the American classroom, little or no scaffolding of information, no needs analysis to understand students’ level of
knowledge, and, perhaps, Marina’s own anxiety about the course content. All these factors need to play in the prospective crosscultural preparation for ITAs and undergraduate NESSs.

Table 26. The code “Undergraduate NESSs expect scaffolding as an instructional strategy,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs Expect Scaffolding as an Instructional Strategy</td>
<td>ITAs often forget that undergraduate NESSs do not necessarily have the same amount of knowledge that they themselves have or the level of knowledge that they would expect of undergraduates in their home countries. As a result, ITAs tend to not provide much details to transition from the theoretical part of the lab to the practical part. In other words, scaffolding as an instruction strategy is an expectation of undergraduates and, hence, a component that might prove beneficial for ITAs in a preparation course.</td>
<td>Marina: “So one of my issues right now is that my TA doesn’t, like he will lecture on the concepts real quick, but then he doesn’t really tell us like what we’re doing. Like he’ll read the title. So he’ll be like, “This is your diffusion lab,” and then he’ll be like, “Okay, start.” And we’re like, “Okay. I read the lab, (laugh) but I don’t know what this thing is that they’re talking about. Can you just like point it out real quick?” And then I know he definitely gets frustrated because we’re asking him so many questions, but um I wish that he would just lay everything out before, so we know where we’re going, what we’re doing.”</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

How Culture Informs our Understanding of the Distribution of Labor in the Classroom (1 code)

Instructor-student division of labor in the U.S. During his experience in the American classroom, Yahampath noticed differences between the Sri Lankan and the American approaches to teaching. In contrast to the “strict” Sri Lankan system where students are held responsible for their education, he recognized a pattern in the U.S. classroom where instructors are being held responsible for student learning or poor grades. He added, “I don’t think that teacher always should take that responsibility. Maybe a student has faults if they are not studying.” He clarified
that he does not see a difference between U.S. and Sri Lankan students; it is the classroom cultural expectations that are different in terms of educational responsibility. Thus, in Yahampath’s point of view, the U.S. classroom tends to hold the instructor accountable for her/his students’ learning and academic success, with little responsibility put on students’ shoulders. In other words, there is an imbalance in instructor-student division of labor when it comes to instructors usually being held more responsible for student academic success than students are. Though Yahampath recognized more responsibility being placed on instructors’ shoulders in the U.S. classroom, Marina’s reaction to ITAs’ “rude” remarks in terms of her knowledge of the material makes an excellent counterargument. As a reaction to ITAs’ remarks, Marina decided to work harder, be more prepared for the lab, and find a study partner to help her with the material that she might not be familiar with. She explained:

But after a while I just learned to like find my peers that like know things more than I do, so I like ask them and I would try to study a lot more harder before I go to lab. So like obviously we should be reading the prelab before we go or like read through the whole procedure. So I definitely tried to do that and make sure I understand everything before I get there. And even look at the postlab questions, so that I didn’t like have to ask as much.

Marina took responsibility over her education and worked hard. Though the impetus for her labor might be to avoid being embarrassed or shamed by ITAs, her effort shows that she took an initiative. Instead of throwing the blame on her ITA, she acted based on her existing knowledge about ITAs’ classroom cultural expectations and standards. She accommodated ITAs’ expectations and chose proactivity over reactivity.
The “strict” nature of Eastern higher education systems is also evident in Marina’s responses. In fact, she first learned about Eastern classroom cultural expectations through her high school Chinese instructor who “would tell [students] about how like classrooms are in China. She was like it’s so different from here, like you guys get away with so much and like they are serious and all these things.” Marina’s early awareness of classroom cultural differences was a constant reminder for her whenever she had a difficult experience with ITAs’ “rude” remarks or questions. She often reminded herself saying, “okay maybe in their culture they have higher expectations for like knowledge and coursework at this point. So like maybe if they were with somebody my age back in their home country, that person would know that because it’s commonsense to them.” Marina confirmed that “language barrier” never caused an issue for her, however, “there’s definitely some cultural differences that don’t always mesh together sometimes.” Though Marina is fully aware of the classroom cultural differences between Eastern and Western education systems, it is not safe to assume that every undergraduate NESS would have the same level of awareness, especially that Marina had encountered nonnative English speakers at the young age of fifteen—an experience that not every undergraduate NESS has.

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<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Instructor-Student Division of Labor in the U.S.</td>
<td>ITAs realized that the U.S. classroom tends to hold the instructor accountable for her/his students’ learning and academic success, with little responsibility put on students’ shoulders, which creates an imbalance in instructor-student division of labor. However, there are exceptions to this observation, such as Marina who, based on her existing</td>
<td>Yahampath: “I don’t think that teacher always should take that responsibility. Maybe a student has faults if they are not studying.”</td>
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</table>
knowledge about ITAs’ classroom cultural expectations and standards, decided to work harder, be more prepared for the lab, and find a study partner to help her with the material that she might not be familiar with.

What Departments can Offer ITAs (2 codes)

**ITAs’ need for peer mentoring & observations.** When I learned that Suthakaran was assigned the duties of a lead instructor for Math 1150 (Introduction to Statistics), I asked about his current experiences with undergraduate students in the classroom. He immediately responded, “It’s going very well,” and associated his success with a “peer mentoring” program that is implemented in the Statistics department. That program pairs “experienced TAs” with new ones, where experienced TAs observe and video-record inexperienced TAs’ classes three times per semester, for two semesters. Following the observation, experienced TAs provide new TAs feedback in terms of what is working in the classroom, what is not working, and areas for improvement. Peer mentors also meet biweekly. Suthakaran added that the program is nonconsequential for those being observed. In other words, it is done on a friendly basis and does not affect hiring or rehiring decisions. The peer mentoring program is part of one of the faculty members’ research whose goal is to improve the learning experience for undergraduate students in their department. Later in the interview, I asked Suthakaran about the on-campus resources that might be beneficial for ITAs specifically, and, again, he mentioned the need for ITAs to be consistently observed by “someone who taught [the course] before” and to be provided feedback afterwards. Thus, the success of the peer mentoring program is evident in Suthakaran’s responses. When asked whether it matters if his peer mentor is a native English speaking TA or a
nonnative English speaking TA, he preferred the former because “they can clearly diagnose teaching skills” and help with pronunciation issues, too. Similarly, during focus group sessions, Fred briefly stated that receiving “help from my instructor and from another assistant who is American” assisted him in overcoming the initial difficulties he had while explaining concepts during recitation sessions.

Table 28. The code “ITAs’ need for peer mentoring and observations,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ITAs’ Need for Peer Mentoring &amp; Observations</td>
<td>Suthakaran associated his success in the classroom with the Statistics department’s “peer mentoring” program that pairs “experienced TAs” with new ones, where experienced TAs observe and video-record inexperienced TAs’ classes three times per semester, for two semesters. Following the observation, experienced TAs provide new TAs feedback in terms of what is working in the classroom, what is not working, and areas for improvement. Peer mentors also meet biweekly.</td>
<td>Fred stated that receiving “help from my instructor and from another assistant who is American” assisted him in overcoming the initial difficulties he had while explaining concepts during recitation sessions.</td>
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</table>

**STEM ITAs enrolling in practica through departments.** Suthakaran expressed his satisfaction with TA practica offered through the Statistics department. He mentioned that the Statistics department offers teaching assistants three practica that address different TA needs: “how to handle disruptive behavior of students,” “how to use technology to improve graduate teaching,” and curriculum design. Those courses, he added, offer TAs professional development opportunities. TA practica, similar to educating ITAs about student feedback, challenges the typical understanding of professional development as extracurricular experiences and creates yet an additional space for those experiences inside the classroom. Enrolling in practica, ITAs
develop professionally. They learn about classroom culture, pedagogy, behavioral issues that might arise and ways to address them—topics equally fundamental for domestic and international TAs. One wonders about the factors that inform a department’s decision to design and offer TA practica. Contextual factors such as the nature of the institution (i.e. whether it is research-focused or teaching-focused), labor division within departments (i.e. the ratio of fulltime faculty to that of TAs/ITAs and adjunct faculty), and departmental budgetary availability might play a role in such decisions.

Table 29. The code “STEM ITAs enrolling in practica through departments,” my interpretation, and example response

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM ITAs Enrolling in Practica through Departments</td>
<td>Enrolling in departmentally-designed practica, ITAs develop professionally. They learn about classroom culture, pedagogy, behavioral issues that might arise and ways to address them—topics equally fundamental for domestic and international TAs.</td>
<td>Suthakaran raved about the three practica the Statistics department offers teaching assistants: “how to handle disruptive behavior of students,” “how to use technology to improve graduate teaching,” and curriculum design.</td>
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</table>

How ITA Preparation Programs can be (Re)Designed based on ITAs’ Instructional Duties

(2 codes)

**STEM ITAs are expected to provide formative feedback on lab reports.** At Michigan Tech University, Nancy Barr realized that Mechanical Engineering graduate assistants—both domestic and international—do not receive technical communication preparation during their undergraduate Mechanical Engineering degrees. So the department designed a preparation program only for TAs who are assigned to classes where there is a lot of writing. The TA preparation centers on technical communication, evaluating student writing, and providing effective written feedback on lab reports and essays. Nancy explained how the preparation program was designed, saying:
In the past, our GAs have pretty much focused on in the lab report: Did you follow the instructions correctly? Did you get results that were sort of in line with what you were supposed to get?, a lot of checking numbers and equations, but not really focusing on how well the students had communicated their efforts and their results, and that’s how this training program came about. It’s thinking about okay so how can we, how can I train them to provide more effective feedback… we have them think about what are the aspects of good communication, and then we do not have them focus on things like grammar and punctuation.

Nancy designed this technical communication preparation program based on undergraduate students’ responses to surveys about their needs from ITAs. She discovered that ITAs had irrational fears to receive negative student evaluations, lest they should lose their TA-ships. As a result, ITAs often “grade[d] very lightly, not providing much feedback.” That is why the technical communication preparation program focused on providing effective formative written feedback. Thus, ITAs who are assigned courses that demand a large amount of writing from undergraduates need to receive technical communication preparation, so that they would be able to provide the effective feedback undergraduate students need.

Table 30. The code “STEM ITAs are expected to provide formative feedback on lab reports,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEM ITAs are Expected to Provide Formative Feedback on Lab Reports</td>
<td>Nancy discovered that ITAs had irrational fears to receive negative student evaluations, lest they should lose their TA-ships. As a result, ITAs often “grade[d] very lightly, not providing much feedback.” That is why the technical communication preparation program focused on preparing ITAs to provide more effective feedback…</td>
<td>Nancy: “It’s thinking about okay so how can we, how can I train them to provide more effective feedback… we have them think about what are the aspects of good communication, and then we do not have them focus on things like grammar and punctuation.”</td>
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</table>
Assignments in ITA preparation courses should be informed by ITAs’ duties. At Bowling Green State, though English for International Graduate Assistants I course (ESOL 5040) is designed specifically for ITAs who run labs, low enrollment often results in those ITAs being placed in the English for International Graduate Assistants II course (ESOL 5050) instead. In other words, the ITA population in ESOL 5050 ends up being a combination of those who are assigned lead teaching roles and those who are assigned assisting lab duties. Consequently, ITAs who are assigned lab duties often complain that the Mini Lessons assignment does not reflect their non-instructional duties in the labs. To solve this issue, Kimberly suggested fewer Mini Lesson assignments and more explicit mention of the strategies ITAs who run labs could learn from conducting Mini Lessons. Kimberly stated, for example, ITA coaches/instructors could tell those complaining ITAs “You might be going around and answering student questions, but you still might need to explain this visual and use these words, like kind of use these cues, things like that. Like it would still be helpful.” In other words, ITA coaches/instructors should make the strategies and cues learned through Mini Lessons more explicit for ITAs who run labs. One could infer from Kimberly’s suggestion the importance of designing ITA preparation courses in a way that is relevant to the ITA population at hand.

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<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assignments in ITA Preparation Courses should be Informed by ITAs’ Duties</td>
<td>ITA coaches/instructors should design ITA preparation courses in a way that is relevant to the ITA population at hand (i.e. teaching duties versus lab)</td>
<td>Kimberly suggested that ITA coaches/instructors should tell complaining ITAs “You might be going around and answering student questions, but you still might need to...”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior Experiences and External Resources that Help ITAs (2 codes)

**ITAs’ need for additional English language practice.** Both ITAs who volunteered to be interviewed for the study (namely, Yahampath and Suthakaran) happened to have been placed in CDIS 6000. Because I wrongly assumed that their choice to participate in the interview was informed by a feeling of bitterness or anger about the placement decision, I asked each of them to reflect on their reactions to being enrolled in CDIS 6000. To my surprise, neither of them expressed any bitterness or anger. In fact, Yahampath admitted that four months of English language practice is not sufficient. He remarked, “Actually [CDIS 6000], I think, it’s good because we cannot get into the accent, proper accent in, maybe, four months, in one semester.” Later in the interview, when asked whether ESOL 5050 should focus more on pronunciation or pedagogy, he reiterated that “[practicing language] takes time” and “in-class practice doesn’t help much…we cannot practice English like that.” He explained that practicing language, any language, takes time. Similarly, Suthakaran was placed in CDIS 6000 and did not express any bitterness about the placement decision. Like Yahampath, Suthakaran directed his focus to improving his English skills. He clarified that it was his low score on the pronunciation section—not the teaching section—of the ITA placement test that placed him in CDIS 6000. To be placed in CDIS 6000, both Suthakaran and Yahampath must have scored between 18 and 24 on the Spoken English Test. This score is equivalent to 21-23 on the TOEFL iBT Speaking section. Perceiving CDIS 6000 as an opportunity to improve his English pronunciation skills, Suthakaran
commented, “It’s okay because as far as I entered [CDIS 6000], I can improve myself. And I’m okay with that.”

Table 32. The code “ITAs’ need for additional English language practice,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ITAs’ need for additional English language</td>
<td>ITAs’ linguistic potentials cannot be met through practicing the English language only inside the ESOL 5050 classroom.</td>
<td>Yahampath: “[practicing language] takes time” and “in-class practice doesn’t help much…we cannot practice English like that.”</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Prior experience explaining concepts and teaching. During focus group sessions, Rick, whose TA assignment was to run two labs, stated that his prior experience as an undergraduate tutor in Bangladesh helped him avoid the difficult experiences that his peers (Jim and Fred) had with undergraduate NESSs in the U.S. Although Rick’s prior experience was in explaining concepts in Bangladeshi—not English—that tutoring experience helped ease his way into the American academy. He said:

I also came to the United States in January. I was also a TA when I was studying in my undergraduates. So I have some experience explaining things to the students, mostly. So here what I’m doing in the lab is first time, in a sense, is a bit tricky. To try to explain something it’s really more than just English.

Though undergraduates sometimes still have trouble understanding Rick because of his “pronunciation,” his past tutoring experience gave him some confidence explaining complex concepts in Photochemistry to his current students. One could infer from Rick’s experience that ITAs’ pedagogical skills improve with more practice: the more often ITAs are put in situations where they have to explain a concept from their majors to students, the more confident they become as instructors.
Table 33. The code “Prior experiences explaining concepts and teaching,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prior experience explaining concepts and teaching</td>
<td>ITAs’ pedagogical skills and confidence improve with more practice explaining concepts from their majors.</td>
<td>Rick: “To try to explain something it’s really more than just English.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Institutional Limitations (4 codes)

Institutions offering pre-semester orientations for ITAs. In her capacity as Campus Coordinator, Olivia partners with the Center for Teaching and Learning at Southern Public University to run an ITA orientation at the beginning of Fall and Spring semesters. These pre-semester orientation sessions take the form of 45-minute break-out sessions/workshops, following the general teaching assistant orientation. In these workshops, Olivia guides ITAs through activities where they learn about “the cultural expectations” of the average U.S. undergraduate student at their institution and what those expectations would translate to in ITAs’ future classrooms. In addition, ITAs draw a “cross-cultural comparison,” where they compare/contrast pedagogical values such as collaboration, means of communication with their professors, and what good teaching means across cultures. Similarly, Rebecca Oreto runs 45-minute pre-semester orientation sessions at Carnegie Mellon, where she publicizes for the Intercultural Communication Center (ICC) to incoming ITAs and have them enroll in voluntary classes according to their needs—this, on top of the only mandatory three-hour seminar (Foundations of Fluency for ITAs). Additionally, through departmental outreach, the ICC staff incorporate the same 45-minute pre-semester orientation session in departmental orientations by way of enrolling ITAs in classes with the goal of meeting each department’s particular language requirements for ITAs to be released to perform the assigned task.

Such pre-semester ITA orientations were also brought up in survey responses as well, with one (W)PA stating that her/his institution offers “a variety of courses and a very strong pre-
semester teaching orientation as well as a mid-semester evaluation program for new ITAs.” Similarly, two (W)PAs related that their institutions offer professional development opportunities for ITAs either during the “beginning of the term and focus[ ] on responding to and assessing student writing,” or “pre-semester teaching orientation.” Through these (W)PA responses, one can see the variety of orientations offered for ITAs’ professional development. The goals of these ITA orientations range from raising ITAs’ U.S. classroom cultural awareness, helping them enroll in voluntary ITA preparation courses that address their specific needs, and addressing ways to respond to and assess student writing. This varied range of orientation goals only reflects the richness of professional development opportunities available for ITAs. It also shows that, depending on the institution, ITA orientations take place before, in the beginning of, and in the middle of the semester.

What is problematic is that in some institutions, such as Southern Public University, the professional development resources available for ITAs are limited to pre-semester orientations. These pre-semester orientation sessions do not take place throughout the semester—only in the beginning of the semester when, to quote one (W)PA, ITAs are busy attending other “orientations and department meetings.” Limiting ITA orientations to the beginning of the semester bounds the wealth of information provided through the sessions to a time when most ITAs are overwhelmed with departmental orientations, getting settled in a new country, and getting acclimated to a new culture. Expanding orientations throughout the semester might be beneficial for ITAs, ideally after they have spent some time in U.S. classrooms and at a time when questions might have arisen to them. This proposition comes in response to ITAs’ need for “longer and not so rushed” orientation sessions. In other words, though ITAs voice their need for more professional development opportunities, such as orientations and workshops, they are faced
with institutional limitations that some (W)PAs—such as Olivia—feel obliged to make up for the deficiency by offering their own time and effort for ITAs’ development. Though Olivia is not institutionally obligated to offer one-on-one tutorials for the ITAs she prepares, she voluntarily and willingly does it for the sake of ITAs’ academic and professional success. But not all institutions face such limitations of resources for ITAs. This is indeed not the case at Carnegie Mellon, where about thirty different voluntary workshops and seminars are being offered. It is worth noting that none of the classes the ICC offers expand throughout the semester. The only class they offer (Language and Culture for Teaching) is a 7-week mini-course that meets twice a week, 90 minutes per session. The rest of the resources are offered in the form of elective workshops and seminars. Comparing Southern Public University to Carnegie Mellon, one can easily see how institutions vary widely in their ITA preparation programs as well as the professional development resources available for ITAs.

Table 34. The code “Institutions offering pre-semester orientations for ITAs,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<tr>
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<th>My interpretation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions offering Pre-Semester Orientations for ITAs</td>
<td>Spreading out orientations throughout the semester (instead of limiting orientations to prior or at the beginning of the semester) might be beneficial for ITAs, ideally after they have spent some time in U.S. classrooms and at a time when questions might have arisen to them. This proposition comes in response to ITAs’ need for “longer and not so rushed” orientation sessions.</td>
<td>In survey responses, one (W)PA stating that her/his institution offers “a variety of courses and a very strong pre-semester teaching orientation as well as a mid-semester evaluation program for new ITAs.” Similarly, two (W)PAs related that their institutions offer professional development opportunities for ITAs either during the “beginning of the term and focus[ ] on responding to and assessing student writing,” or “pre-semester teaching orientation.”</td>
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</table>
ITAs’ time limitation informs enrollment. Both Olivia and Rebecca reported on perceived frustration from ITAs due to time limitations that prevent them from enrolling in the ITA preparation course and professional development workshops, respectively. This is especially true since the ITA preparation course at Southern Public University and the professional development workshops at Carnegie Mellon are offered as electives. Rebecca reported, “I wouldn’t say resistance. I would say a sense of maybe a little bit of frustration or just feeling like oh I wanna do it, but I can’t. I know that your classes are good, but I have to do that thing. And I mean I get it.” Similarly, Olivia stated, “[ITAs] are so darn busy, you know. And I had at least every semester, a handful of students, three to four students come up and say “I really want to take your course, but it just doesn’t fit my schedule.” ITAs’ busy schedules and the fact that the ITA preparation course is offered as an elective result in decreasing enrollment which caused Southern Public University to offer the course only in the Spring semester. Contrastingly, at Carnegie Mellon the ITA preparation course is a mandatory three-hour seminar (Foundations of Fluency for ITAs). ITAs who wish to perform TA-ship duties, such as conducting recitations, assisting in labs, holding office hours, running studios, and providing one-on-one tutoring, must enroll in the three-hour seminar given they did not receive a Pass on the ITA test. The fact that the ITA preparation course at Carnegie Mellon is mandatory means that ITAs’ busy schedules would not affect enrollment. Additionally, the required level of commitment—three-hour seminar at Carnegie Mellon versus a semester-long course at Southern Public University—might affect ITA enrollment in the latter.

Table 35. The code “ITAs’ time limitation informs enrollment,” my interpretation, and example responses

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<tr>
<td>ITAs’ Time Limitation Informs Enrollment</td>
<td>Both Olivia and Rebecca reported on perceived frustration from ITAs due to</td>
<td>Rebecca: “I wouldn’t say resistance. I would say a sense of maybe a little bit of</td>
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time limitations that prevent them from enrolling in the ITA preparation course and professional development workshops, respectively. This is especially true when ITA preparation courses are offered as electives or when they demand a semester-long commitment (compared to a 3-hour seminar).

frustration or just feeling like oh I wanna do it, but I can’t. I know that your classes are good, but I have to do that thing. And I mean I get it.” Olivia: “[ITAs] are so darn busy, you know. And I had at least every semester, a handful of students, three to four students come up and say “I really want to take your course, but it just doesn’t fit my schedule.”

**Institutional budgetary limitations.** Olivia lamented the limited time and budget at Southern Public University that does not allow her to run the ITA-specific workshops she developed. She explained, “It’s a very, very tight budget and it’s never reliable. But when our time and finances allow, I try to run as many of those support services as possible. I’ve done like a brownbag luncheon, you know, just whatever I sense that people could use.” But institutional tight budgets do not only result in a scarcity of resources for ITAs, it also shapes the perception of ITA preparation programs. One (W)PA mentioned on the survey that her/his program is now perceived by some ITAs and departments as “a compliance/testing unit than a support unit.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Budgetary Limitations</td>
<td>Institutional tight budgets do not only result in a scarcity of resources for ITAs, it also shapes the perception of ITA preparation programs. One (W)PA mentioned on the survey that her/his program is now perceived by some ITAs and departments as “a compliance/testing unit than a support unit.”</td>
<td>Olivia: “It’s a very, very tight budget and it’s never reliable. But when our time and finances allow, I try to run as many of those support services as possible. I’ve done like a brownbag luncheon, you know, just whatever I sense that people could use.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Problematics of non-centralized ITA preparation.** Olivia pointed out the non-centralized nature of ITA preparation on the Southern Public University campus. Though Olivia is the only ITA coach liaising with the Center for Teaching and Learning, she is not the only one preparing ITAs on campus. She explained:

*I offer [the ITA preparation course] to the whole school, to the whole university, but some departments and some units and some schools have their own in-house ITA classes. So I say that to say that some departments don’t really need me.*

Despite the fact that Olivia advertises for her course through the Center for Teaching and Learning, some departments opt out and, instead, have their own ESL expert who conducts ITA screening, orientation, and preparation. In other words, ITA preparation is non-centralized. On the survey, one (W)PA raised the same issue, highlighting the positive and negative consequences of a non-centralized ITA preparation: “the training is very relevant to what the TA will be doing” and “there is no accountability or university-wide statement of deliverables,” respectively. Additionally, another (W)PA listed the deficiencies of the ITA preparation on her/his campus, saying “Non-centralized, uncoordinated communication, patchwork support services, deficient tracking and follow-up services”—all deficiencies directly related to the non-centralized nature of programs.

Though the non-centralization of ITA preparation programs might be perceived by many (W)PAs as problematic, Olivia perceives it as inescapable in large programs. She admitted that non-centralized ITA preparation programs could be a challenge for (W)PAs, but she also perceived it as inevitable in large-sized institutions. She commented:

*At this point, everybody has that. You know it’s not unique to us. Um I think it’s just the way it is, and when you’re operating on a big university, you know with tens of*
thousands of people literally it’s just hard to do that. To get that coordinated into some centralized, streamlined system.

Though non-centralization is a challenge at Southern Public University, it is not the case at Carnegie Mellon. Rebecca from Carnegie Mellon pointed out the departmental outreach work the ICC does to streamline the ITA preparation process and maintain transparency with ITAs and departments. That work includes reaching out to departments, understanding departmental requirements for ITAs’ proficiency, visiting departments during orientation week, sending reminders to departments to have them direct ITAs to the ICC, and ensuring the relevancy of the ITA preparation in a way that addresses ITAs’ needs.

Table 37. The code “Problematics of non-centralized ITA preparation,” my interpretation, and example responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Problematics of Non-Centralized ITA Preparation</td>
<td>Though the non-centralization of ITA preparation programs might be perceived by many (W)PAs as problematic, Olivia perceives it as inescapable in large programs. Centralized ITA preparation such as the Carnegie Mellon model, however, requires (W)PAs’ labor in the form of reaching out to departments, understanding departmental requirements for ITAs’ proficiency, visiting departments during orientation week, sending reminders to departments to have them direct ITAs to the ICC, and ensuring the relevancy of the ITA preparation in a way that addresses ITAs’ needs.</td>
<td>Olivia: “when you’re operating on a big university, you know with tens of thousands of people literally it’s just hard to do that. To get that coordinated into some centralized, streamlined system.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

In this chapter, I explored the thirty codes that emerged from the data analysis process. Those codes revolved around the following themes: Ways ESOL 5050 meets ITAs’ needs (8 codes), ways ITA coaches/instructors perform to prepare ITAs (2 codes), ways to improve ESOL 5050 and suggestions for ITA preparation programs (9 codes), how culture informs our understanding of the distribution of labor in the classroom (1 code), what departments can offer ITAs (2 codes), how ITA preparation programs can be (re)designed based on ITAs’ instructional duties (2 codes), prior experiences and external resources that help ITAs (2 codes), and institutional limitations (4 codes). See Appendix N for an elaborate illustration of those eight themes and the thirty corresponding codes.

Reflecting on the eight themes above and the thirty codes they represent, I realize the many ways English for International Graduate Assistants II (ESOL 5050) meets ITAs’ needs, but I also recognize ways the course can address ITAs’, undergraduate NESSs’, and (W)PAs unmet needs and expectations. I see issues of labor arise as I listen to ITAs’ observations of student-instructor division of labor in the American classroom, as I listen to undergraduate NESSs’ willingness to practice meaning negotiation with ITAs, as I listen to (W)PAs and ITA coaches/instructors reflecting on the time and care they voluntarily provide to rising ITAs through mentorship, one-on-one conferencing, and classroom observations. I also arrive at an expansive definition of professional development—one that inhabits space inside the classroom, such as departmentally designed Teaching Assistant Practica and departmental peer-mentorship programs.

Next chapter, I look back and look forward; I make theory by figuring out how this study’s findings respond to my research questions, while speaking back to and building on
existing scholarship on ITA preparation. Then, I propose a reenvisioning of the ITA preparation program at Bowling Green State University (i.e. ESOL 5050) in particular, in a way that addresses ITAs’ needs and undergraduate NESSs’ as well as (W)PAs’ expectations. I, then, offer implications for ITA preparation programs, regardless of context. Finally, I explore potential future studies in a way that builds on this study and expands the English Language Teaching field in general.
CHAPTER V.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ITA PREPARATION

In chapter four, I examined all thirty codes that emerged from the data analysis process, combining them under the eight themes that they revolved around. Those eight themes were as follows: Ways ESOL 5050 meets ITAs’ needs (8 codes), ways ITA coaches/instructors perform to prepare ITAs (2 codes), ways to improve ESOL 5050 and suggestions for ITA preparation programs (9 codes), how culture informs our understanding of the distribution of labor in the classroom (1 code), what departments can offer ITAs (2 codes), how ITA preparation programs can be (re)designed based on ITAs’ instructional duties (2 codes), prior experiences and external resources that help ITAs (2 codes), and institutional limitations (4 codes).

In this final chapter, I make theory by figuring out how these thirty codes and this study’s findings respond to my research questions, while speaking back to and building on existing scholarship on ITA preparation. I follow that with implications for ITA preparation programs. In that section, I provide elaborate activities, complete unit lesson plans, programmatic suggestions, and classroom practices—all should map how ESOL 5050 curriculum could be informed by my findings. Finally, I explore how future studies could build on this study and expand the English Language Teaching field in general.

By way of reminder, below are the four research questions I sought to answer as I embarked on this research:

1. What are the academic (i.e. as students) and professional needs (i.e. as instructors) of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?

2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?
3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?

4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?

In the following section, I tackle each of the four questions by engaging the corresponding codes as well as related scholarship. Doing so, I make theory. I speak back and build on existing scholarship, with the goal of answering each of my research questions.

**First Research Question**

1. What are the academic and professional needs of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050 at BGSU?

When asked about their needs from a preparation program, ITAs expressed needs in four areas. Below is a table illustration of those expressed needs:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITAs’ Needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interactions with NESSs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning negotiation strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional English language practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the survey and during interviews and focus groups, ITAs unanimously expressed a need for interactive opportunities with undergraduate NESSs. Though in their capacity as the classroom instructor or lab facilitator, ITAs interact with undergraduate NESSs, ITAs lamented the fact that time limitations and graduate school responsibilities prevent them from taking part in extracurricular activities where such needed interactions abound. To address ITAs’ need for more interactions with undergraduate NESSs, and following Rick’s suggestion that ITA
coaches/instructors should invite NESSs to ESOL 5050, I propose programmatic collaborations as an addition to ESOL 5050 (See Programmatic Collaborations in Implications section).

Another need ITAs expressed was for meaning negotiation practices, particularly methods that would buy them time to process students’ questions and phrase appropriate responses accordingly. Though meaning negotiation was addressed in the two ESOL 5050 sections I taught, ITAs’ expressed need for meaning negotiation practices is a cause for concern and an implication that additional exercises are necessary. Listening to ITAs’ needs, I became aware that one lesson on meaning negotiation is insufficient. Even though each ITA was required to apply what they learned from that lesson while interacting with the audience (i.e. peer ITAs and instructor) during the three Mini Lesson presentations, it is evident that additional meaning negotiation practice is needed. In order to address ITAs’ need for additional meaning negotiation practice, I propose a unit that revolves around such practices (See Unit on Meaning Negotiation in Implications section).

Another need ITAs unanimously expressed is an addition of a slang component to the ESOL 5050 curriculum. Not only this, but undergraduate NESSs, such as Alexander, perceived a slang component to be essential in ITA preparation. However, because language constantly changes, teaching slang could present a challenge for instructors. Additionally, teaching slang has to always be contextualized and ITAs should be encouraged to use the terms, otherwise slang terms might remain in their inactive vocabulary instead of moving to their active vocabulary. Moreover, ITAs should be reminded that comprehensibility comes first and that it is a natural stage of second language acquisition to be able to understand slang before being able to produce it. With ITAs’ need for a slang component in ESOL 5050, I propose an assignment that could be added to the existing curriculum (See Slang Component in Implications section).
Because any language practice, including English, demands time, ITAs expressed a need for additional spaces or opportunities that allow them to practice their English communicative skills. Yahampath, for example, pointed out that the one semester ITAs spend practicing their communicative skills in ESOL 5050 is insufficient for a significant improvement to take place. It is worth noting that most ITAs who enroll in ESOL 5050 are new to America and to interacting with native English-speakers. Since those experiences could be initially intimidating, ITAs’ need for additional resources or spaces where they could practice their communicative skills is quite understandable. Moreover, because of the novelty of the U.S. academic culture for ITAs, they might not be familiar navigating on-campus resources. To address ITAs’ need for additional language practice, I propose a modeling practice for ITA coaches/instructors to incorporate into their lesson plans (See Modeling to Explore Language Resources in Implications section).

**Second Research Question**

2. How does the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meet ITAs' professional needs as instructors as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations?

In response to my first research question about the academic and professional needs of ITAs enrolled in ESOL 5050, ITAs expressed needs that fall into four areas: Interactions with NESSs, meaning negotiation strategies, creating rapport with undergraduate NESSs through slang, and additional English language practice. Despite the fact that those needs are not fully met through the current ITA preparation program (i.e. ESOL 5050), ITAs expressed satisfaction with several aspects of the existing program. More specifically, ITAs were satisfied with two assignments, namely, Mini Lessons and Observations, and elaborated on the variety of skills and abilities these two assignments help them gain. Below is a table illustration of those skills and abilities:
Table 39. Skills and abilities gained through mini lessons and observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills and abilities gained through Mini Lessons and Observations</th>
<th>Skills and abilities gained through Mini Lessons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>▪ Compensation strategies</td>
<td>▪ Peer and instructor feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Student interactions</td>
<td>▪ Strategies to increase comprehensibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ Self-reflection</td>
<td>▪ Knowledge of linguistic terminology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>▪ U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Examining the repertoire of skills and abilities ITAs gain through working on Mini Lessons and Observations, one could confidently infer that both assignments were quite successful and, hence, should retain their status on the syllabus (See Appendix O for assignment sheets).

When surveyed about their expectations of ITAs, the majority of undergraduate NESS participants expressed expectations of ITAs that fell into two main categories: English language proficiency and meaning negotiation skills (See table illustration below). More specifically, 22.72% of NESSs focused on their expectations from ITAs to speak the English language fluently, clearly, and slowly; and 20.45% focused on ITAs’ ability to negotiate meaning in terms of understanding and responding to students’ questions. Those two expectations, however, either are already addressed or are expected to be addressed, given the proposals I am suggesting in the Implications section in this chapter. More specifically, in terms of English language proficiency, pronunciation practices make up 50% of the ESOL 5050 curriculum (Additionally, see Modeling to Explore Language Resources in Implications section). Moreover, meaning negotiation
practices are proposed as an addition to existing ESOL 5050 materials (See Unit on Meaning Negotiation in Implications section). Therefore, those two NESSs’ expectations of ITAs are addressed in the existing curriculum and would be additionally explored in future curricula.

But English language proficiency and meaning negotiation skills were not the only expectations undergraduate NESSs have of ITAs. During interviews, undergraduate NESSs voiced expectations of ITAs to create rapport with them and to be able to use scaffolding as an instructional strategy (See table illustration below). And undergraduate NESSs were not the only group of participants who saw value in instructor-student rapport in the classroom or lab; ITAs identified creating rapport through the use of slang as one of their needs (See Slang Component in Implications section) and (W)PAs perceived value in ITAs creating rapport with their students by showing vulnerability (See First-day activity for ITAs to show vulnerability and establish rapport in Implications section).

Another expectation that was underscored by undergraduate NESSs, particularly Marina, was of ITAs to be able to use scaffolding as an instructional strategy. In fact, ITAs’ failure to recognize undergraduate students’ level of existing content knowledge was one of the main challenges Marina had with ITAs. As a result of ITAs’ unrealistic expectations of undergraduates’ level of existing content knowledge, ITAs often uttered what would be perceived in the American classroom as rude remarks to comment on students’ knowledge and moved from theory to practice without enough scaffolding of information. To address undergraduate NESSs’ challenge with ITAs’ unawareness of informational scaffolding, I propose a needs analysis exercise that could help raise ITAs’ consciousness of their undergraduate students’ level of content knowledge (See Beginning-of-the-semester Needs Analysis in Implications section).
Table 40. Undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate NESSs’ Expectations of ITAs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English language proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning negotiation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating rapport</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding as an instructional strategy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order to understand ways the existing ESOL 5050 curriculum meets (W)PAs’ expectations of ITAs, it is important to consider the larger context. In the Ohioan context, the Ohio State Law requires ITAs to be “orally proficient” in order to properly and fully perform their roles in the classroom or the lab. Because the phrase “orally proficient” leaves room for interpretation, the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program at Bowling Green State University found it essential to define “orally proficient” in a way that would serve ITAs and meet their needs. This interpretation equally divides ITAs’ attention between two tasks: field-specific pronunciation and pedagogical communication. As per Kimberly, the former translates to preparing ITAs to be able to intelligibly pronounce field-specific terms, paying special attention to suprasegmental features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. Pedagogical communication, on the other hand, translates to properly interacting with students, understanding their questions, responding to students’ questions, and understanding the U.S. classroom culture. The ITA preparation program’s interpretation of the Ohio State Law speaks to ITAs’ needs from a programmatic and administrative point of view. However, when ITAs were asked to share their perspectives on their needs from a preparation program, their expressed needs did not fall far away from the programmatic expectations represented in the Ohio State law. ITAs expressed a need for additional English language practice (See Modeling to Explore Language Resources in Implications section) and meaning negotiation strategies (See Unit on
Meaning Negotiation in Implications section). The fact that ITAs’ expressed needs mirror the ESOL program’s interpretation of the Ohio State Law implies that such interpretation could expand beyond the Ohio context. In other words, field-specific pronunciation and pedagogical communication are components that in fact address ITAs’ needs and, hence, could benefit any ITA preparation program.

When examining (W)PAs’ expectations of ITAs, it became clear that those expectations are heavily informed by each institutional context. Olivia, for example, perceived value in creating ITA-student rapport (See First-day activity for ITAs to show vulnerability and establish rapport in Implications section) and designing student feedback surveys (See Unit on Student Feedback in Implications section). Nancy, on the other hand, perceived value in preparing ITAs to provide formative feedback on lab reports. Nancy’s institutional context, though, is quite different from Olivia’s or from the ESOL 5050 context for that matter. In Nancy’s institution, ITAs are often assigned to teach writing-heavy courses, which underscores the importance of preparing ITAs to provide formative feedback. It is true that preparing ITAs to provide formative feedback on reports is extremely important for student success, however, there is no implication for the local context of ESOL 5050.

**Third Research Question**

3. In what ways do (W)PAs prepare ITAs to interpret end-of-semester course evaluations?

Because listeners’ attitudes play a primary role in their perceptions of what they actually comprehend and how they consequently evaluate ITAs, linguists Munro and Derwing (1995a) contended that a distinction between “perceived comprehensibility,” “actual intelligibility,” and “accentedness” should be drawn. The following table illustrates Munro and Derwing’s definitions of the three terms:
Table 41. Definitions of “Perceived comprehensibility,” “Actual intelligibility,” and “Accenteness” from Munro and Derwing’s (1995a)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The term</th>
<th>Perceived comprehensibility</th>
<th>Actual intelligibility</th>
<th>Accenteness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Munro and Derwing (1995a)’s definition</td>
<td>“listeners’ perception of a speaker’s comprehensibility”</td>
<td>“how well listeners actually understand the stimulus”</td>
<td>One’s “degree of foreign accent”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In my study, I decided to explore if and how those three terms would emerge through undergraduate NESSs’ interpretations of the hypothetical yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly”—an actual question that appeared on one of my own end-of-semester evaluation forms in a previous institution (See chapter one for a detailed examination of the problematics of this question). To explore undergraduate NESSs’ interpretations of the question, question seven of the survey provided them with a hypothetical situation where they find the yes/no question “The instructor speaks the English language clearly” on their end-of-semester evaluations. The hypothetical situation was followed by an inquiry of how they would interpret such question. Below is a table that illustrates undergraduate NESSs’ responses/interpretations in light of Munro and Derwing’s definitions of the terms “Perceived comprehensibility,” “Actual intelligibility,” and “Accenteness:”
Table 42. Undergraduate NESSs’ responses to question seven on the survey in light of Munro and Derwing’s definitions of the terms “Perceived comprehensibility,” “Actual intelligibility,” and “Accentedness”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduate NESSs’ percentage</th>
<th>Undergraduate NESSs’ interpretations</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td>Perceived comprehensibility (i.e. ways undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of an ITA’s clarity or fluency inform their comprehension of the ITA’s speech)</td>
<td>▪ “[ITAs] have the ability to clearly articulate what they are thinking in a manner that the majority of the class will understand” ▪ “The instructor is able to speak English and be understood clearly” ▪ “the instructor can speak English fluently enough that all students can understand”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>Accentedness (i.e. an ITA’s accent)</td>
<td>No elaboration provided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>No amount of effort or labor required of undergraduate NESSs for effective communication with ITAs to take place (i.e. no meaning negotiation on undergraduate NESSs’ parts)</td>
<td>▪ They (undergraduate NESSs) do not have to “think hard about what [ITAs] might have said,” ▪ Undergraduate NESSs are “able to make out the words”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Undergraduate NESSs exert effort or labor through asking for clarification from their peer undergraduate students or from the ITA.

- Undergraduate NESSs do not “find [themselves] guessing what [ITAs] have said or asking others for clarification”
- whether [undergraduate NESSs] can “easily communicate in English with the instructor.”

To summarize, the majority of undergraduate NESSs (62.5%) interpreted ITAs’ clarity of speech in relation to their perceived comprehensibility of ITAs’ speech; 12.5% perceived ITAs’ clarity of speech to mean that no labor or meaning negotiation practices is required on their parts for communication with ITAs to occur; 8.3% perceived ITAs’ clarity of speech to mean they as [ITAs] talk,” “without questioning what was said”
would exert some labor or practice meaning negotiation for communication with ITAs to take place; 8.3% perceived ITAs’ clarity of speech to be related to accentedness; and 8.3% perceived some lacking in the proposed question that they proposed revisions or modifications of the question itself. These results mean that one question on an end-of-semester course evaluation form was interpreted in four different ways by undergraduate NESSs, who represent the majority of student population that fills out these forms. If one group of undergraduate NESSs cannot agree on an interpretation of one question, then that question must be vaguely-phrased and, like two students astutely stated, should be revised or rephrased.

Reflecting on these results, one can infer the importance of clear phrasing of questions on end-of-semester course evaluations—forms that are typically used for instructors’ professional and pedagogical development, rehiring, promotion, tenure, and merit. In addition, perceived comprehensibility was prominently evident in undergraduate NESSs’ perceptions of what it means for ITAs to “speak the English language clearly.”

The prominence of perceived comprehensibility reiterates the weight of students’ attitudes and perceptions, in ways that inform how comprehensible they find ITAs. More importantly, I am reminded of Olivia’s remark on how undergraduate NESSs tend to presume they would not understand someone upon hearing a foreign accent and/or realizing their interlocutor does not speak English as a first language. Because these presumptions tend to act as an affective filter, preventing undergraduate NESSs from comprehending their ITAs.

To address the issue of undergraduate NESSs’ presumptions about ITAs’ comprehensibility level, Olivia proposed teaching ITAs the value of transparency and vulnerability in the U.S. classroom (See First-day activity for ITAs to show vulnerability and establish rapport in Implications section).
With ITAs directly and explicitly addressing with their students the fact that they themselves have accents and might be incomprehensible at times, ITAs have more control over students’ perceived comprehensibility factor—a factor that can affect how undergraduate students evaluate ITAs on end-of-semester course evaluations. And the benefits are not limited to ITAs. If ITAs start this channel of conversation with students about accents, students would be more willing to negotiate meaning with ITAs, increasing their own chances of academic achievement and success. Thus, creating such channels of conversation offers a mutual benefit to undergraduates and ITAs.

To complicate the issue of end-of-semester course evaluations even more, I was curious to learn whether ITAs are familiar with the form itself. Additionally, because I know ESOL 5050 does not prepare ITAs to understand the culture of student feedback or end-of-semester evaluations, I was curious as to whether (W)PAs in other institutions offer such preparation for ITAs.

In order to examine whether ITAs are familiar with the end-of-semester evaluation form, question eight on the survey asked ITAs to explain how they utilize end-of-semester course evaluation forms. I anticipated the majority of ITA participants would not have received end-of-semester evaluations yet at the time of the study, as it was the first semester in the classroom for most of them. Because of such knowledge, I phrased the question to inquire about ITAs’ present or future—not past—plans for utilizing the forms.

Only 56.25% of ITA participants responded to the question, which might mean that the remaining 43.75% of ITAs were not quite sure how they would utilize end-of-semester course evaluations and, consequently, skipped the question altogether. These percentages might point to the importance of en culturating ITAs about student feedback, its value in the American
classroom, how to design informal student feedback surveys, and how to interpret data on end-of-semester course evaluations and, hence, understand the implications of such data on their teaching.

Paying a closer look at the 56.25% of ITAs who responded to the question, I realized a discrepancy in ITAs’ perceptions on end-of-semester course evaluation forms. Below is a table illustration of ITAs’ perceptions:
Table 43. ITAs’ responses to question eight on the survey which reveal their perceptions on end-of-semester evaluation forms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of ITAs</th>
<th>Perception on end-of-semester course evaluations</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 22.22%            | Have not received the form yet, providing elaboration | ▪ “I really don’t know what is end-of-semester course evaluation form”  
▪ Learn “what teaching qualities [students] liked, what they didn’t. So I am sure that I will improve myself more effectively after getting [student] evaluation.” |
| 11.11%            | Are not familiar with the form, without elaboration | ▪ “no idea” |
| 22.22%            | To be used as a tool to guide their future teaching | ▪ be used “to prepare for next semester” by way of “striv[ing] to achieve perfection”  
▪ raise their awareness about their “teaching skills” |
| 33.33%            | To identify weaknesses only | ▪ “focus on my weakness”  
▪ “pay attention [to] negative points” |
Examining the results presented above, I was proud to realize that despite the fact that most ITA participants might not have received end-of-semester evaluations yet at the time the study was conducted, 33.33% of ITAs possessed knowledge about the form and plans of how they would use it. However, I also recognized another 33.33% of ITAs perceive end-of-semester forms to solely focus on their weaknesses—a misconception of the true essence of a form that is meant to guide instructors to both strengths and weaknesses and inform their future pedagogy. Additionally, on top of the 43.75% of ITAs who skipped the question, 22.22% expressed a lack of knowledge of the nature of the form or how they might use it in the future. This lack of knowledge, again, points to the importance of enculturating ITAs about end-of-semester course evaluation form in particular and student feedback in general.

One response that stood out to me, however, was the one that pointed out a connection between end-of-semester course evaluations and the nature of mentorship he/she receives from his/her advisor. Because an end-of-semester course evaluation is an essential document for any instructor’s professional development, this one ITA probably perceives professional development to be part of their relationship with their advisor. The fact that only one ITA saw such connection might have implications on ITAs’ common definition of professional
development, the nature of their mentor/mentee relationships, and ITAs’ common expectations of their advisors. More specifically, most ITAs might perceive their relationship with their advisors to be limited to research. Of course, this result might be informed by the fact that Bowling Green State is primarily research-focused. However, the implication remains that ITA preparation programs could explicitly expand ITAs’ perceptions on the potential of mentorship and the vital roles their academic advisors could play in their own professional development.

To understand whether (W)PAs play a role in ITAs’ professional development, question seven asked (W)PAs about their common practices utilizing end-of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development purposes. Below is a table illustration of (W)PAs’ responses:
Table 44. (W)PAs’ responses to question seven on the survey in which they explain ways they utilize end-of-semester evaluations for ITAs’ professionalization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of (W)PAs</th>
<th>Ways (W)PAs utilize evaluations for ITAs’ professional development</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28.57%</td>
<td>Have no access to end-of-semester evaluations</td>
<td>▪ “academic departments” are the ones who have access to such forms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.42%</td>
<td>Use the forms for ITAs’ professional development</td>
<td>▪ Create a report, examining “patterns” and outliers in undergraduates’ comments and invite ITAs to reflect on those patterns, with the goal of ITAs identifying strengths and areas for growth in their own pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>Use the forms for their own professional development and program development</td>
<td>▪ to improve “our training as well as the university-wide training course”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>No mention of end-of-semester course evaluations. Instead, they offer orientations</td>
<td>▪ Either in the beginning of the semester they “focus[ ] on responding to and assessing student writing,” or “pre-semester teaching orientation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>Skipped the question</td>
<td>▪ No response</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Although 21.42% of (W)PAs provided a detailed and solid plan of how they utilize end-of-
semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development, the majority of the responses
point out institutional shortcomings in terms of missed opportunities for ITAs’ professional
development. To illustrate, 28.57% (W)PAs do not have access to end-of-semester evaluations
altogether. Additionally, 14.28% skipped the question, which, again, might mean they do not
have access to end-of-semester evaluations. Not only this, but 14.28% shifted the focus of their
responses to orientations, which might mean they either do not utilize end-of-semester course
evaluations or do not have access to them. And 14.28% skip the step of coaching ITAs or
walking them through the results of their own end-of-semester evaluations and, instead, use the
results for programmatic improvement. Therefore, a total of 71.41% of (W)PAs do not use end-
of-semester course evaluations for ITAs’ professional development—either due to the lack of
access to such forms or due to an alternative use of the forms.

These results imply a need for (W)PAs to initiate a conversation with ITAs in which the
former express willingness to coach ITAs or walk them through the data interpretation process.
This initiation must, of course, be framed in a way that does not obligate ITAs to share the forms
with (W)PAs lest ITAs should feel uncomfortable doing so.

Another implication would be for ITA coaches/instructors to dedicate a course unit to the
topic of student feedback. Because every institutional context is unique, I map the heuristics of
such unit, which, then, could be tailored to each programmatic or institutional context (See Unit
on Student Feedback in Implications section). The inspiration for this unit stemmed not only
from the results above, but also from Olivia’s comment on student feedback (See Appendix for
full interview transcripts).
Fourth Research Question

4. How do undergraduate NESSs’ pre-contact experiences of ITAs compare to their post-contact experiences? Does this comparison reflect a stigma against ITAs? If so, what informs such stigma?

Though existing English Language Teaching (ELT) scholarship has implications on the stigmatized experiences ITAs have in the American classroom (Liu, 2005; Mutua, 2014; Plakans, 1997; Rubin, 1992), little research examines what informs such stigma. My study filled that gap by comparing the experiences of the 44 NESS participants who noted they have had experiences with ITAs in the classroom to the experiences of the 23 NESSs who noted they have not had any experiences with ITAs (i.e. the hypotheticals). More specifically, I compared the reported frequency of communication difficulties experienced by each group when interacting with ITAs. Despite the fact that I did not compare the experiences of the same group of NESSs pre- and post-contact with ITAs, I considered the comparison of the reported frequency of communication difficulties to start a needed conversation on whether interactions with ITAs is what triggers NESSs’ reported communication difficulties or if those difficulties are preconceived. Below I draw a visual comparison between the reported communication difficulties of pre-contact and post-contact groups of NESSs:
Comparing pre-contact to post-contact NESSs’ experiences, I realized that the majority of the pre-contact group reported never (i.e. 0 on the continuum) having difficulties communicating with ITAs, whereas the majority of the post-contact group reported either frequently (i.e. 5 on the continuum) or rarely (i.e. 2 on the continuum) experiencing difficulties. This numerical representation implies that NESSs’ interactions with ITAs do inform reported communicative difficulties and, hence, stigma. In other words, stigma primarily occurs after interactions with
ITAs. Therefore, one can infer the urgency of implementing revisions to the current ITA preparation program (i.e. ESOL 5050) in a way that addresses ITAs’ voiced needs as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations. In other words, the findings of this research question only add to the urgency of implementing the proposed revisions in the findings of the first three research questions.

Though most pre-contact NESSs reported never experiencing difficulties communicating with ITAs, three ranked the difficulty at “almost never (i.e. 1 on the continuum),” one at “rarely (i.e. 3 on the continuum),” one at “often (i.e. 4 on the continuum),” and one at “frequently (i.e. 7 on the continuum).” The fact that 26.08% of the pre-contact NESSs reported communicative difficulties in varying degrees with ITAs begs further examination. More research is needed to explore what informs stigma prior to interactions with ITAs.

**Implications**

In this section, I present a compilation of programmatic changes, curricular suggestions, complete unit lesson plans, and activities. Through this compilation, I map potential changes to ESOL 5050 in a way that is informed by my findings.

**Programmatic Collaborations**

Though programmatic collaborations take time and effort to organize, I find great value and promise in the mutual benefits all parties involved might accrue. Once an ITA coach/instructor decides to collaborate with another on-campus program, it becomes his/her task to research the programs available in the community with the goal of finding a good match (i.e. a collaboration that presents value to both parties involved).
For the BGSU context, for example, one potential collaboration could be organized with the TESOL Certificate program coordinator, Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen. One course whose students could benefit from interacting with ITAs is Applied Phonology (ENG 5180). The focus of the course is gaining an understanding of the English phonetics system as well as the proper pedagogical methods to help English language learners acquire clear pronunciation. Because of the course’s focus, students might benefit from interacting with ITAs and better understanding the pronunciation challenges speakers of various languages might have. The student population of the TESOL Certificate program are either native English-speakers or ELLs whose command of the English language is “sufficient.” The latter are interviewed by the coordinator or the ESOL program director by way of an assessment of their language proficiency. Thus, ITAs would have opportunities to interact with native English-speakers or ELLs whose proficiency is close to native.

With the goal of equally distributing the required labor and aligning agendas, such collaborations should definitely be planned collaboratively between the Applied Phonology (ENG 5180) instructor and the English for International Graduate Assistants (ESOL 5050) instructor. However, one possible assignment for ENG 5180 students is to identify English pronunciation challenges faced by speakers of various languages and assist those speakers (i.e. ITAs) in accordance with the pedagogical methods learned in class. Students could, then, submit to their instructor their reflections on these experiences. On the ESOL 5050 side, NESSs could fill the role of audience for ITAs’ Mini Lesson presentations. This way, ITAs would fulfil the Mini Lesson assignment requirement of interacting with an undergraduate student audience, though, in this case, the audience would be authentic rather than simulated. Using the opportunity of having NESSs in the classroom, ITAs would have a space where they could
practice meaning negotiation with those students in a meaningful way. For instance, ITAs could practice responding to students’ questions, asking for repetition or paraphrase of unclear questions, posing questions to students, and using fillers to buy themselves time while they phrase responses to students’ questions. Overall, NESSs’ presence in ESOL 5050 would offer benefits to ENG 5180 students as well as to ITAs.

**Unit on Meaning Negotiation**

The ITA coach/instructor might use the following activities or an adaptation of them to explain various meaning negotiation strategies and to provide subsequent opportunities for ITAs to practice the strategies.

**Session one: Strategies to tackle students’ questions.** The ITA instructor/coach could start the lesson by eliciting from ITAs the current strategies they implement to respond to undergraduate students’ questions. Encouraging ITAs to share difficult experiences they have had in the classroom or the lab while attempting to answer students’ questions could start a productive discussion. In that discussion ITAs could not only learn from each other’s mishandled situations, but also reflect on their own successes and struggles. As the instructor listens to and responds to ITAs’ shared experiences, he/she should create a list of strategies for handling students’ questions. By the end of the session, the instructor should encourage ITAs to try out the strategies discussed and report back at the beginning of the following session. The list of strategies might include the following:

*Using what you know to ask about what you do not know*

If an ITA managed to discern only parts of a student’s speech, she/he should use the information they know to inquire about the information they do not know.
For example, “I understand you are asking about last assignment, but I am not sure what your question is?”

**Requesting paraphrase**

If an ITA did not manage to discern a student’s speech due to a difficulty understanding his/her accent or to the typically fast pace of NESSs’ speech, an ITA could request a paraphrase.

For example, “I’m sorry. Would you please say this in different words?”

**Requesting repetition**

Another strategy an ITA could use when facing difficulties discerning a student’s speech is to request repetition.

For example, “I’m sorry. Would you please repeat yourself?”

**Using fillers to buy time**

If an ITA perfectly understood a student’s speech but was still having challenges formulating his/her own thoughts or phrasing his/herself, an ITA could either comment on the quality of the question, paraphrase the question, or request a moment to put his/her thoughts together.

**Commenting on the quality of the question**

For example, “This is an excellent question. Thanks for bringing this up. My thoughts are…”

**Paraphrasing the question**

For example, “Great! You’re asking about…The answer to your question is…”

**Requesting a moment**

For example, “I see what you’re asking. Let me think [pause]. I believe that…”

**Making sure you answered the question**
For an ITA to make sure he/she actually responded to a student’s question or that the student understood the answer, an ITA could follow his/her response with a comprehension check. For example, “Did I answer your question?” or “Does this make sense?”

Remember to never answer a question when not sure what is being asked. Instead of guessing what the question is asking, request a repetition or paraphrase. If you did not discern what a student was asking, react. Not reacting altogether would only confuse the student even more.

**Session two: Strategies to make oneself clear.** First, the ITA coach/instructor should encourage ITAs to share their experiences applying the strategies from the previous session. After allowing time for ITAs to share their experiences, the ITA coach/instructor could shift the conversation to strategies ITAs could use to make themselves clear during instruction. Again, the ITA coach/instructor could, first, elicit from ITAs the strategies they already use to make themselves clear, while encouraging a discussion on the topic and creating a list of strategies on the board. The list could include the following strategies:

*Providing an outline or agenda of each lesson*

ITAs should be encouraged to make it a habit to provide an outline or agenda of each lesson on the board in the beginning of each session. The outline should represent the main points the ITA plans to cover during each session. This habit makes it easier for students to follow ITAs’ instruction.

*Paying close attention to students’ reactions and body language*

ITAs should be made aware of the importance of paying attention to students’ reactions and body language during instruction. Confused looks, raised hands, and tense sitting postures are all signs an ITA should slow down or use comprehension checks (See below).

*Using illustrations*
ITAs should be made conscious of the value of using board or screen illustrations. Accompanying verbal instruction with illustrations often helps instructors get a point across to their students, especially visually-oriented ones.

**Using compensation strategies**

In addition to using illustrations, ITAs should be encouraged to spell out words and phrases they are still learning how to pronounce or words they recognize they have difficulties pronouncing. Using the board as a compensation strategy tool can be especially useful for novice ITAs or those new to instruction or to the U.S. context.

**Using comprehension checks**

Another habit ITAs should be encouraged to adopt is using comprehension checks throughout their instruction. Comprehension checks should be followed by at least a 10-second pause to provide students time to react.

For example, “Is everyone following?” or “Is this clear so far?”

**Providing examples**

Another useful habit ITAs should be encouraged to adopt is offering examples to illustrate their points.

For example, “An example of this is…” or “For instance, …”

**Verbally quizzing students on the information**

In addition to using comprehension checks to ensure students’ understanding, ITAs could verbally quiz students on the covered content. Because using only comprehension checks might intimidate students, especially shy ones, to raise questions, ITAs should ask specific questions on the content they have covered before moving on to explaining new content.

**Paraphrasing oneself when students express difficulties**
Another strategy ITAs could use when students seem confused is to paraphrase themselves. Because merely repeating oneself might not always work, offering a paraphrase could be an effective alternative.

Remember to always make sure students are following your explanation of one point before moving on to the next.

**Session three: An activity for practicing the strategies.** Because explaining the strategies, discussing them, and listening and responding to ITAs’ shared experiences with the strategies might not be sufficient, I propose an activity for ITAs to practice the strategies among themselves. Print each of the following example student questions on a separate slip of paper.

Q: When are you free?

Q: Is there a make-up test?

Q: Do you give extra credit?

Q: What do I need to know for the test?

Q: What do you want me to say here? (referring to a question on a written quiz)

Q: Say what?

Q: Do I have to show up for every class?

Q: What happens if we come in late?

Q: When you wanna have this by?

Put ITAs in groups of two, with one ITA posing the provided question and the other ITA either responding or asking for clarification. Monitor ITAs as they negotiate meaning and guide them accordingly. Then, have each pair share with the rest of the class how their conversations went and what strategies they implemented. Feel free to add questions to the list, making sure they are informal and vague. Have ITAs switch roles and try different questions.
Slang Component

The ITA coach/instructor could create a daily assignment where ITAs would take turns to share with their peers not only definitions, but the usage of three idioms they have heard on campus, in their own classes, or even on media. The ITA coach/instructor would, then, evaluate the shared knowledge immediately and provide corrections as needed.

This strategy of sharing knowledge could foster a sense of community among ITAs as well as feed that need of ITAs to learn idioms in a meaningful way. Additionally, ITAs would be actively involved in the learning process due to the fact that they would be the ones attentively listening for new idioms and researching each idiom’s meaning(s) and common usage(s). For an additional benefit, ITAs could be encouraged to start a conversation with whomever they heard using the idiom with the goal of learning about that specific expression.

Remember that it is true that ITAs’ knowledge and use of slang with undergraduate students could help in creating student-instructor rapport. However, ITAs should be made aware of a variety of cultural practices that have an additional value. For example, showing care for undergraduate students, learning and calling students by their names, and getting to know students through small talk in the beginning or by the end of each session are all practices that could create additional student-instructor rapport in the classroom or the lab.

Modeling to Explore Language Resources

Since ITAs might not be familiar with on-campus resources they could use to practice their communicative abilities, ITA coaches/instructors could use a few minutes of class time to introduce ITAs to on-campus resources or guide them as to how and where they can find resources on campus.
For example, the ITA coach/instructor could, first, elicit, from ITAs the resources they are already familiar with and typically use to improve their language skills. Then, the ITA coach/instructor could model a think-aloud process for navigating the institution’s website. To illustrate, in the Bowling Green State context, the ITA coach/instructor could navigate through the English department tab, while guiding ITAs to the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program tab, where they would find an abundance of resources. Examples of such resources are the ITA resources tab, where language and teaching resources for ITAs are housed; Cross-Cultural Conversation Connections (CCCC), an extracurricular program that connects nonnative English speakers with native English speakers in an informal setting; and Community English Class, a free class for students and their families where they work on their conversation skills and learn about the American culture.

Walking ITAs through these available resources could open up opportunities for ITAs they might not be aware of otherwise.

**Beginning-of-the-Semester Needs Analysis**

ITA coaches/instructors might dedicate one lesson to discuss the cultural value of instructors’ verbal remarks and written feedback. Such awareness is essential for ITAs to exercise cultural sensitivity when commenting on students’ knowledge. The instructor could, first, elicit from ITAs comments or remarks they often use to comment on student work and, then, interfere accordingly.

One tool that could help ITAs gauge undergraduate students’ level of existing knowledge is needs analysis. ITA instructors could assign an activity to guide ITAs through the process of designing needs analysis surveys and phrasing its questions. This activity must take place in the very beginning of the semester, so ITAs would be able to collect the surveys and adjust their
instruction according to its results. The needs analysis survey could be as simple as three questions with varying difficulty levels.

Students’ responses and knowledge about the content could, then, inform ITAs’ instruction in a way that incrementally challenges students. An additional benefit is that an ITA designing and conducting a needs analysis survey could reflect his/her sense of care and dedication to their students’ academic success.

**First-Day Activity for ITAs to Show Vulnerability and Establish Rapport**

The goal is for ITAs to initiate a conversation (preferably the first day of class) with their undergraduate NESSs about accents and effective communicative strategies, in a way that raises their awareness about their meaning negotiation responsibilities as college students.

One warm-up activity ITAs can use on the first day of class or lab is to distribute note cards to each student, keeping one for themselves. Then, ask each student to find a partner and find a student to pair up with. The goal is to conduct a short interview with one another using these guiding questions and to take notes:

1. Where do you consider home?
2. Would you share one aspect about you that you feel comfortable sharing with the class?
3. Would you share one goal you have for this academic year?

During the interview, the ITA should consciously share information about their home country, first language, and accent, in addition to responses to the questions above. The activity should take around 10 minutes (5 minutes per interview). Students should take turns introducing one another using the notes they have taken. The group the ITA is in might go last in order to create a segue for the ITA to address communication issues that may arise and ways students should handle them.
The ITA should explicitly point out meaning negotiation practices students are advised to employ, such as asking for repetition, paraphrase, examples, or elaboration, when/if they face comprehension difficulties. The more transparent, sincere, and vulnerable the ITA is, the more appreciative students would be and the faster the ITA would be able to create rapport with them during the semester.

**Unit on Student Feedback**

**First session.** The ITA coach/instructor might start the unit by introducing the notion of student feedback, perhaps, by eliciting what student feedback practices they each have in their home countries. To do that, ITAs could be put in groups of twos or threes to define what student feedback means, compare and contrast the perception of student feedback and course evaluations in each of their countries, and how these perceptions align or depart from the perceptions in the U.S. classroom. If ITAs have not taken the role of instructors before, they can share their understanding of student feedback from a student perspective. Then, each group members could share what they discussed with the rest of the class. This activity should create a productive, informative discussion on student feedback, what it means, and how it is informed by culture.

**Second session.** The ITA coach/instructor could share with ITAs three end-of-semester course evaluation forms of three anonymous instructors. Ideally, those three evaluation forms would represent a range of instructional quality: outstanding, poor, and average. Without identifying which is which, have each ITA read through each evaluation form, with the goal of getting a general sense of the quality of instruction represented in each form. Then, put ITAs in small groups where they would share their thoughts. For classroom discussion, ITAs would share their perspectives on what each evaluation tells them about each instructor, about his/her pedagogy, as well as about that instructor’s relationship with his/her students. ITAs might also
consider thinking about ways these end-of-semester course evaluation forms inform instructors’ professional development. The ITA coach/instructor could, then, gauge ITAs’ knowledge about professional development resources on campus, inform them about available resources, and get a sense of who they typically seek mentorship from.

**Third session.** ITAs would reexamine the three course evaluations from last session, looking for patterns in the data, outliers, idiosyncrasies, and subjectivities. The goal is for ITAs to know how to distinguish patterns from data outliers and what data carry more weight than others. ITAs could also consider what each of the three instructors could learn from students’ suggestions in order to improve their future pedagogy.

**Fourth session.** ITAs would revisit the three end-of-semester evaluation forms, with the goal of understanding what the forms are actually asking and what questions are the forms not asking. ITAs would consider ways the forms are working and ways they are not working. Then, ITAs would propose additional questions that they believe are needed for instructional growth and think of ways they would word those questions.

**Fifth session.** The ITA coach/instructor would introduce the notion of informal feedback, its importance, how ITAs can construct informal surveys, and when during the semester informal feedback is needed. With their duties in mind, each ITA would construct a short feedback survey to hand out to his/her students. The survey could be as short as a few questions the ITA is most curious about. ITAs would use those surveys for the unit assignment (See below).

**Unit assignment.** Each ITA would distribute the feedback survey they constructed in class to their students. ITAs’ students could choose to fill out the survey anonymously. ITAs would, then, collect the surveys, analyze the results, and write reports representing their findings. In those reports, ITAs would look for patterns and data outliers, interpret the numbers the data
present, and reflect on students’ suggestions/comments. They, then, submit to their instructor everything as well as their reflections in a PDF file.

**Conclusion**

Though the implications section provides a detailed reference for ITA instructors/coaches in the ESOL 5050 context, this does not mean that the suggested assignments, activities, and programmatic collaborations are limited to the Bowling Green State University context. In fact, because of possible overlap across national ITA preparation programs in terms of ITAs’ needs as well as undergraduate NESSs’ and (W)PAs’ expectations, these implications could prove successful in other institutional contexts.

My study suggested that stigma against ITAs is informed by student-ITA interactions (i.e. post-contact). Though most stigma happens post-contact, the fact that 26.08% of the pre-contact NESSs reported communicative difficulties in varying degrees with ITAs begs further examination. Because of time limitations associated with this study, I was unable to conduct a longitudinal research. Through a longitudinal study, one would be able compare the experiences of the same group of undergraduate NESSs pre- and post-contact with ITAs. Such research is needed to examine what informs stigma prior to interactions with ITAs.

Finally, throughout my study, I allowed myself to sit, listen, and learn from undergraduate NESSs and (W)PAs. Their perspectives were essential for me to see the ITA preparation program from the student and program administrator points of views. More importantly, this study allowed me to sit, listen, and learn from the ITAs I once coached/taught. I listened carefully to what they need from the ITA preparation program in a way that shone a light on the successes as well as the possibilities of the program. Though the research practice of
listening to ITAs is not widely practiced in the English Language Teaching field, I perceive it to be necessary for ITA preparation program development.
References


Appendix A

Survey for International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)

Q1 Which of the following best describes you?
☐ An International Teaching Assistant (1)
☐ An undergraduate native English-speaking student (2)
☐ A (Writing) Program Administrator (3)

Q2 Have you had any teaching experience before arriving to the U.S.? If yes, how many years?
☐ Yes (1) ________________
☐ No (2)


Q4 How often do you experience difficulty communicating with your students?
☐ 0 (0)
☐ 1 (1)
☐ 2 (2)
☐ 3 (3)
☐ 4 (4)
☐ 5 (5)
☐ 6 (6)
☐ 7 (7)
☐ 8 (8)
☐ 9 (9)
☐ 10 (10)

Q5 What are your needs in an ITA training program, such as the ESOL 5050 course, in order to effectively teach your students?

Q6 Have you received an end-of-semester course evaluation form while teaching in the U.S.?
☐ Yes (1)
☐ No (2)
Q7 In end-of-semester course evaluation forms, how did your students tend to rank your teaching skills?
☐ 0 (0)
☐ 1 (1)
☐ 2 (2)
☐ 3 (3)
☐ 4 (4)
☐ 5 (5)
☐ 6 (6)
☐ 7 (7)
☐ 8 (8)
☐ 9 (9)
☐ 10 (10)

Q8 Please explain how you utilize end-of-semester course evaluation forms.
Appendix B

Survey for undergraduate native English-speaking students (NESSs)

Q1 Which of the following best describes you?
   ○ An International Teaching Assistant (1)
   ○ An undergraduate native English-speaking student (2)
   ○ A (Writing) Program Administrator (3)

Q2 Do you have any friends, colleagues, or family members who do not speak English as a first language?
   ○ Yes (1)
   ○ No (2)

Q3 Are you/Have you ever been taught by an ITA (i.e. an instructor or professor who does not speak English as a first language)? If yes, how many ITAs?
   ○ Yes (1) _________________
   ○ No (2)


Q5 How often do you experience difficulty communicating with your ITA(s)?
   ○ 0 (0)
   ○ 1 (1)
   ○ 2 (2)
   ○ 3 (3)
   ○ 4 (4)
   ○ 5 (5)
   ○ 6 (6)
   ○ 7 (7)
   ○ 8 (8)
   ○ 9 (9)
   ○ 10 (10)

Q6 What are your expectations from ITAs, in the classroom or the lab, in order for you to effectively learn?
Q7 If you receive the following yes/no question on an end-of-semester course evaluation form, how would you interpret it? "The instructor speaks the English language clearly"

Q8 Your perspective matters. If you are interested in being interviewed, please provide your email.
Appendix C

Survey for (Writing) Program Administrators ((W)PAs)

Q1 Which of the following best describes you?
☒ An International Teaching Assistant (1)
☒ An undergraduate native English-speaking student (2)
☒ A (Writing) Program Administrator (3)

Q2 In your capacity as a (W)PA, how many ITAs do you typically train per academic year?


Q4 Reflecting on your experiences with ITAs, what do you think are ITAs’ needs in a training program in order for them to effectively teach undergraduate native English-speaking students?

Q5 What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of the ITA training program offered in your institution?

Q6 Reflecting on student comments on end-of-semester evaluation forms, what are the most frequent comments ITAs tend to receive?

Q7 In your program, how do you utilize end-of-semester evaluation forms for ITAs’ professional development?

Q8 Your perspective matters. If you are interested in being contacted for a Skype or Google hangout interview, please provide your email.
Appendix D

Interview with Yahampath

39 minutes

Me: So basically what we’ll be talking about is— as I mentioned like 15 times to you now— [laugh] So this study is about teaching assistants and the preparation they go through in this program, right? The ultimate goal of the study is to improve the program or think what are the needs of ITAs and how can we improve the program to meet those needs. I’m talking to a couple of you, ITAs, my former students. I’m also talking to undergraduate native English-speaking students to see what are their expectations from you guys. But not your students, like general students. So undergrads native speaking students. And I’m also trying to talk to administrative people. So those who have decisions, who make decisions when they put together a training program for ITAs. So I’m trying basically to figure out, okay, what’s working and what’s not working, what are the needs, how can we meet them, right?
Y: Yea
Me: So that’s like basically the study. Um and that’s my passion. I really wanna perfect, you know, what I’m doing.
Y: hm
Me: So let me, like, talk about you specifically. Just before I start asking you questions. Do you prefer if you go by a different name in the transcript I’m gonna write, like, in the study. Do I refer to you as Yahampath or do I call you a different name?
Y: Yahampath is fine.
Me: Alright. Okay. Good. So, we worked together last semester, and I saw the results of the class, like at the very end cause I was not on the committee, right? So I asked for the results, and I think that I saw you were placed in CDIS 6000, right?
Y: Yea.
Me: So can you, like, tell me a little bit about your thoughts about that class? Have you attended any hours?
Y: Yea.
Me: You have. Okay. If you can tell me a little bit about that class. Because my understanding is that it’s one credit hour, and it’s just to, like, improve your pronunciation, I think.
Y: Yea.
Me: So what are your thoughts about being placed in that class? Are you enjoying it? Do you feel it has been efficient? Any challenges? What’s your experience in that class?
Y: hmm...Actually that class, I think, it’s good because we cannot get into the accent, proper accent in, maybe, four months, in one semester. So maybe have practice in our mother languages is different. There are stresses and everything is different because our language there are no expressions like English. It’s so flat. So they are not express the ideas like in English. So we
have different words, even we have a lot of letters. It’s hard. So language begin therefore we can do many things with the words, but not in stress and intonation and other things
Me: So stress and intonation, basically?
Y: Yea. So that’s the problem when we come to English. So we have to match those. We have a big gap when talking in English. Even we have practice in our mother country, it’s different because our teachers also speak in our mother tongue. So also the accent is different. (laugh)
Me: I see. So it’s an accent. I heard you say like stress and intonation. Do you feel like in ESOL 5050, did we work enough with intonation and stress? Like did you feel like, maybe the course needs more focus on these aspects? Do you feel like maybe if we had worked more on these aspects, you wouldn’t have been placed in CDIS 6000? Or do you feel like it just needs time?
Y: Actually, I think it needs time. Other thing is when I have some times with native people naturally I think for some time and I lose that. When I move with my friends from Sri Lanka, my country. And I think we need more friends from here to do it. We don’t automatically come to that accent.
Me: So you’re saying like hanging out with more Americans or native speakers can help, right?
Y: Yea
Me: Because I would imagine, like, in your spare time you hang out with Sri Lankan people more than…
Y: Yea
Me: Is that correct?
Y: Yea. And actually in my lab I’m the only person sitting there (laugh)
Me: Ah (laugh)
Y: (laugh) when I want to talk with someone I have to go to her to talk and she’s from a European country, Croatia, I don’t know.
Me: So that’s your professor?
Y: Yea
Me: Okay.
Y: But she’s very friendly but her accent is also a bit different.
Me: Aha
Y: But she’s also different. So (laugh) that maybe a problem. It may take some time to uh
Me: Like getting used to her accent too?
Y: Uh. No. She’s the person which I understand mostly in our department because [she’s] speaking slowly and he mainly stress words so I can listen (laugh)
Me: (laugh) That’s right. Like sometimes with nonnative speaking instructors and professors, they slow down, right?
Y: Yea
Me: So maybe that’s why you feel like she enunciates everything. She pronounces like slowly and stresses everything, so you understand her better?
Y: Yea (laugh)
Me: That’s understandable. Cool. So that’s the first question, your experiences in CDIS 6000, and you said, like, you’re enjoying it. Uhm So what are your TA duties this semester? As compared to the fall? Because I remember in the fall you were running a lab or labs? Is it the same kind of labs?
Y: Yea. I got the same thing. Two lab sessions. It’s two lab, and I have instructor in my lab. So he’s going to be leading every lab and only I have to do grading. If students have problems, I have to go to them.
Me: I see. So you walk around in the lab and you answer questions?
Y: Yea.
Me: From what you’re saying, it seems like you’re not doing any instruction. It seems like the professor is doing all the instruction, and you are just walking around to answer questions.
Y: Yea.
Me: Okay. Would that be different if you, you know, had been not placed in CDIS 6000? Like would you be allowed to do more instruction if you were not placed in CDIS 6000? Or is it just the nature of how your department works? You just don’t do instruction?
Y: Uh. Excuse me I (looking confused)
Me: Okay. I’ll explain.
Y: (laugh)
Me: I’m confusing you. So now you are placed in CDIS 6000, right? Do you think that you are not doing instruction because you are placed in that class? Or is it just the nature of your department? That’s how it is. The professor does the instruction, and you just sit and rotate at the end? Is it a departmental thing?
Y: For this course, it happens because you already in this course you...it doesn’t matter. The course is different because our knowledge would not be enough to lead that class
Me: Ah. Too advanced?
Y: Yea. because with the softwares, different kind of problems can be happen, so a single person cannot fix maybe within a short time period. Not like theories and other things. Maybe even we have to take some time maybe two days to fix those things. So single person cannot do that especially students like us.
Me: So what’s the nature of student population in that class? Are they undergrads or graduate students?
Y: All of them undergrads
Me: Okay. Are they, like, freshmen? Or maybe sophomores?
Y: Maybe third year.
Me: Okay. How is the communication? Now that you have been in the U.S. for what two semesters? Or how long?
Y: It’s since last fall.
Me: Last fall. Okay. So you’ve been here for a semester and a little bit, right?
Y: Yea.
Me: Okay. So do you feel like now that you spent here, like, I don’t know four months, five months, do you feel like the communication and interactions with the students, are they getting better? Or are they the same? Or do you feel like running around in the lab and answering students’ questions, do you feel like there is any communication problems? Or is it going smoothly? Like what’s your impression?
Y: Umm..now I have the confidence even without my instructor I can do something in the lab, but in the beginning it was very different. I couldn’t listen to some words. So I struggled to practice to the sound.
Me: So like last semester was more of a struggle, right? With listening.
Y: Yea. It’s getting better.
Me: So in that class you work in the lab. What’s the name of the class? Is it a Geology class?
Y: It’s Geo and Spacious Science
Me: Okay. Alright. So now that we talked about your experiences in the lab this semester as compared to in the fall, so you said that CDIS 6000 is helping you with your current duties, right?
Y: Yes
Me: How about ESOL 5050? Like the class we took together. Do you think like, in all honesty, really no hard feelings, do you consider this class was helpful to you in terms of like preparing you for the U.S. classroom experiences, with pronunciation? Or was it like, what do you think of the class in general? Do you feel like it was helpful? Do you need something more? Or something less? What’s your reaction?
Y: Actually helpful not only in teaching but we had to do lots of presentations and other things when we are in U.S. It’s very ..so it has the academic benefit for us regardless teaching because we’ll have some practice sessions like, mini lessons, so we can get feedbacks from instructor. So it helps I think even maybe some peoples have leading roles in classes may feel differently and my case is different, but in many ways maybe we for the first semester because we’re not used to system. It will automatically lead to know English. So if we attend to ESOL, that class, so we have time to practice English and definitely we had to do some homework. It’s good I think.
Me: Yea. Something that you mentioned is people are busy, and I think, it’s one of the things that I noticed with ITAs that they’re always very busy with their majors and they are new to the country for the most part. So yea.
Y: But if we miss that class, we really miss that part. We try to improve that fast. Because even when you’re not in English, in the university also classes help because maybe [incomprehensible speech] and other things. People using language in academic environment. The outside is a bit different
Me: So like the academic language was important for you, like, the things that we tackled in the class in terms of academic language. Because you said that people talk differently outside the classroom than inside, right? So academic expressions, classroom expressions, these things were helpful? Is that what you’re saying?
Y: Yea.
Me: Do you feel that working on pronunciation is more important in that class or working on pedagogy, which is how to teach? Which one is more important? What do you think?
Y: Actually, in pronunciation case, I think the in-class practice doesn’t help much, I think, like that. Because we cannot practice English like that. Even if you take example in our country, it’s very small. It’s half of Ohio (laugh). Very small. But in our mother language also there are different accent in different part. I have friends in different part. When they come to our part, they cannot practice. Maybe they take a year or two to practice to get used to our accent. So it happens.
Me: So you’re saying like in general even in your first language, like, practicing or perfecting a specific accent..
Y: It takes time
Me: It takes time. Yea. It seems that’s the theme. You feel like time is very important especially when it comes to pronunciation, right?
Y: Yea. Actually in the case of teaching, actually, we think, we feel some difference in teaching because in the U.S. the teacher is responsible if student can’t understand something. Not always, but I can see something like that. But in our part, most of the teachers are very knowledgeable, but the way they react is somewhat different.
Me: How? What do you mean by “the way they react?” Like to students you mean? Or interact with them? Or
Y: Yea. When it come to teaching, maybe they are not seen like they are responsible for the students’ low marks maybe. I don’t think that teacher always should take that responsibility. Maybe a student has faults if they are not studying. It happens but I can see some difference because U.S. teacher is different. They always have some responsible and positive kind of approach to student grading and in our part is very strict and not like this.
Me: So in Sri Lanka, where you come from, teachers are like stricter you said. So instructors are more strict than…Do you feel like students here take more responsibility or less?
Y: uh
Me: As compared to Sri Lankan students
Y: Students, I think they are, there are not difference in students, but the teaching practice is different.
Me: Like the style of teaching is different, right?
Y: Yea. Another thing is in our country teacher is friend of the class. In U.S.A., it’s backwards I think. Maybe student-focused system. I can see that.
Me: Yea. Yea. Absolutely. So like if you were to put together a course for international teaching assistants’ preparation, what would that course look like? From your experience now that you’ve been for a while in the U.S. You are in a classroom or in a lab, what will be the major components of that classroom if you wanna train someone who just came to the U.S., how would you, as an experienced ITA, how would you train them? What are the aspects you wanna cover with them?
Y: Uh, the first thing is listening. We have to have good listening ability to start anything. And other thing is mini lessons is the best one in this course because it helps in a lot of ways. The case of pronunciation, it’s good when some instructor direct us to some direction, but it need more practice and time. So if I pay more attention to mini lessons and listening. And maybe if we can arrange some time to meet with native students. Something it will be…
Me: So more interactions with native speakers, native-speaking students?
Y: Yea
Me: Okay. Excellent. Alright. So moving to a different topic. Have you ever heard the expression “professional development?”
Y: Yea.
Me: Okay. I thought that would be the case. So I know you’re familiar with that term “professional development,” but for you as an evolving and promising ITA, how would you define that term? Or how do you practice professional development in your academic life in the U.S.? Like are there resources that you use? Are there chances that you take? How do you improve as a professional basically? What do you think?
Y: Uh. It should be. Uh Actually, is it about professional development or about the profession that we are going, planning to go?
Me: It can be either way. I mean, I’m not assuming necessarily that you want to stay in academia, right? Like what do you want for your future? Do you want to stay in academia and do a PhD or do you wanna like get a job right away?
Y: Get a job.
Me: Get a job. And what kind of job will you be looking at?
Y: [incomprehensible speech] Analyst or something like that.
Me: Okay. So you’ll be working with those programs that you introduced in class? Or something like that?
Y: That will be part of it.
Me: A part of it. So you’ll work at a company or a lab? What’s the nature of the job usually? I’m not familiar.
Y: Most of the time, it can be companies or some kind of organization. If we’re going to research a lab, then it will be automatically back to academics.
Me: So you’re open to any of these options, right?
Y: Yea.
Me: Okay. So in order to get to that point, how do you feel or what are the opportunities that you think you Yahampath will seize those opportunities or grab those opportunities to better yourself and get to that point where you will be ready for that job? What are the things you can do to get from the point where you are now till you graduate? How are you making yourself ready for the job market?
Y: The one thing I always see CVs of people where I’m planning to go. We have if you take dream job and dream company, we can find what kind of people they’re hiring by looking at their CVs. If we surf the web, we can go to their profile.
Me: Oh, so on the company’s website, right?
Y: Yea.
Me: Okay. So you see what qualifications that dream job requires and you try to like fulfill those Y: So I can use this software to have some qualifications that they have like when I came I didn’t have any computer language knowledge about computer languages. My instructor push me into that. At the beginning I didn’t like it because it was difficult, but I came to know that many people in the industry have that background. Anybody can operate softwares if they read manuals. It can be done. But when you come to skills like programming, it’s difficult… (laugh) So if you can do that, we can open up more opportunities. So I’m looking for CVs.
Me: And how are you learning computer languages? Are you doing it on your own? Or are you taking classes?
Y: I tried to take a class, but they are not offering introductory classes for graduate students. So I learn on my own.
Me: Oh, so you learn on your own and then maybe you’ll take advanced classes later?
Y: No. I think if I confidently work with these languages I can simply put that in my CV.
Me: Like have some knowledge about it. I see. So when you say “computer languages” because I’m not quite competent in that area, do you mean like coding?
Y: Coding.
Me: Oh my god. I tried coding before; it wasn’t that pleasant of an experience. (laugh)
Y: Actually we can do something in the software and we have other platform to coding. To do the same thing. The graphic use phases uses any kind of work for the normal people, but not professionals. So we have to practice.
Me: So it seems from what you’re saying you’re leaning more to leaving academia? You don’t wanna be a research assistant. You don’t wanna work in research. You wanna work in a company, right?
Y: Right.
Me: Cool. So basically on BGSU campus there aren’t really opportunities where you can improve to get to that point? It sounds like you’re doing all the work on your own; not on campus? Like nothing that BGSU can offer you or can help you at this point, right?
Y: Sometime in my case, English is some kind of, I don’t see like a problem, but I have to practice. Actually if I want to avoid this one, I can go to Japan or something. Some Asian country. I’m from Asia, so it maybe more comfortable for me, but in Sri Lanka I thought that most of language knowledge is limited to English.

Me: So there is no way out, right? (laugh) You have to learn English?

Y: (Laugh) Like in here, I can more practice. When I back to Sri Lanka, I can’t. It’s maybe I can perform better than others.

Me: So is your dream job, are you imagining yourself here in the U.S.? Or are you imagining going back to Sri Lanka?

Y: Actually I had a job in Sri Lanka.

Me: Wow. You already had a job before you came here?

Y: yea. I had a job for three years.

Me: So they’re waiting for you to go back?

Y: Actually I had that option also, but I left the job because I need to spend some time here. Maybe if I go back, after taking my MSC, I will have knowledge to…No, actually the thing is I want to practice the professionals practicing here. Not the things in Sri Lanka. Because I was in that job for three years. The position is not bad because my performance of the [incomprehensible speech] was somewhat good (laugh). Not that type. But for three years I did most of the things, which I had to do in that job. So I have to go back to do a different thing if I want to because it’s very competitive. All the people go to the job. They are same level. Have same qualifications. In Sri Lanka when they are going to job, they are in training for MSC at the same time because most of the time, Sri Lanka has Master’s part time.

Me: So you do Master’s as a part time while you are on the job?

Y: Yea.

Me: Oh wow.

Y: So anybody can. So it doesn’t make different between people.

Me: So you have to be special. Like you have to add something to your CV that makes you really special, right?

Y: Yea

Me: Sounds so challenging (laugh).

Y: (laugh)

Me: so right now, how often do you feel you interact with native English-speaking students? Or even native speakers in general? Like how often do you do that? Do you do it on a daily basis? Weekly? Only on the weekend? Like how often do you think you interact in English even if you interact with nonnative speakers but in English? How often do you do that you think? Just roughly.

Y: It’s daily basis but not much.

Me: Because you told me sometimes you don’t have someone to interact with when you’re in the lab (laugh)

Y: Yea. The only student in the floor is me (laugh)

Me: So no one to talk to. But outside of BGSU, do you feel like outside campus, like off campus, do you have opportunities? Do you have a social life outside? I know it’s usually tough to have a social life when you’re getting a Master’s or a PhD (laugh). Do you feel like there are opportunities for you to go out and meet people or socialize in English? Even if they are nonnative speakers, you can still practice English with them, right? Do you feel like you have such opportunities? Or not much?
Me: I was going to ask you to describe those interactions. If they go well or smoothly? Or do you feel like there are communication breakdowns that happen. Like you wouldn’t understand what they’re saying? Or they wouldn’t understand you? How do you feel? Even when you’re with your students. Do you feel like it’s smoother? Or sometimes you feel like “what!”
Y: Now I can show, even if I cannot understand, I can show that like I am not get the whole idea. But I am understanding that. So I can do that.
Me: So if you don’t understand, you can ask them a question to tell them that you didn’t understand, right?
Y: Yea. And maybe you know it’s when they’re talking, there are some ideas automatically come even when we don’t fully understand. We can manage.
Me: Like you can get the gist of what they’re trying to say and respond?
Y: Yea.
Me: Do you feel like, with your undergrad students, do you feel like they often ask you for repetition? Or they ask you to clarify? Or you don’t see that that much?
Y: No.
Me: No. Okay. One last question. From my understanding, you were in a lab or in a couple of labs last semester, did you receive end-of-semester evaluation forms? Or do they just, because I’m not sure with labs, do they just evaluate the instructor? Or do they evaluate Gas as well?
Y: Actually for my class, I didn’t get evaluation.
Me: Oh, okay.
Y: It’s maybe instructor. Because I am not leading the lab.
Me: I see. So it’s mostly the instructor or professor, and you don’t get any feedback basically. So to wrap up, if I’m gonna tell you what are your needs from an ITA program? Just in a nutshell. Like concisely. What were your needs when you first came here versus your needs now basically? Now that you have spent a few months in the U.S. Do you feel that those needs are different now? Do you feel like, I know it’s a tough question, but try to tackle it as much as you can. Like your needs as an ITA who came first here to the U.S., you know fresh, versus your needs now that you are more experienced with the culture and in the classroom. Do you feel like the needs are different? What do you think?
Y: Yea. When I came first the listening is the biggest problem. So at first I had to fix that. So now we know the classroom culture in the U.S.A. by running labs and from even our own class, from our instructors. So now it’s the point to I think develop the language, manner of speaking at this point, that’s what I need.
Me: So just the language?
Y: Pronunciation and maybe writing is (not) that important.
Me: Like in your major it is not that important like listening? Is that what you’re saying?
Y: No. Writing is also very important. (laugh)
Me: But mainly you said pronunciation is the main thing that you feel like you still need more of that, right?
Y: Yea
Me: Okay. Excellent. Thank you so much, Yahampath. That’s wonderful. You gave me a lot. I got to know you better actually.
Y: (laugh)
Me: I didn’t know your dreams for the future, for instance, now I know what you want. That helps a lot. I’m glad you shared with me that information. Your perceptions about the program. Do you have any questions for me?
Y: No.
Me: Okay.
Appendix E

Interview with Suthakaran

29 minutes

Me: So, again, thank you for coming in today to talk with me, and, so I’m gonna ask you basically questions about your experience last semester. Um. How do you think the training went? Or how it went for you? And I’m also gonna ask you a little bit about the class CDIS 6000 because it is my assumption that you are placed in it?
S: Yea.
Me: Okay. So let’s talk about that class first because I looked at the grades, and I saw that you were placed in it. So I was like oh my god.
S: Yea because I got 26 out of 30. So then they told me why. I think I got an email a couple of weeks before, so then they asked me to follow the course the CDIS because I think in the pronunciation section my score is below what they expected.
Me: I see. So the teaching section was not the problem (interrupted)
S: Yea. Only the pronunciation.
Me: I see. So I know that they send you a letter that tells you exactly what they thought or did they talk to you in person?
S: They sent an email to me. Because this week only the first class started, so I went.
Me: Okay. It’s a one-credit hour, right?
S: One credit, yea. Face-to-face.
Me: Face-to-face. Okay. And how did it go? Tell me about it?
S: It’s just interview. They asked me to pronounce some words like some one (stutter)
Me: One syllable words?
S: Yea. One syllable words. So then after that she asked about my personal background. And some other past experiences in teaching. And it’s kind of a discussion.
Me: Oh
S: Yea.
Me: Did she tell you what sounds you’re gonna be working on this semester?
S: No. she didn’t say anything. And she asked me what are my preferences, and then I said I want to work on some grammar. And then after that, then we had to work on some syllables, like how to break the sentences. And that’s it.
Me: Ha. Interesting. So she doesn’t like, there is so specific agenda?
S: No specific agenda.
Me: Okay. So you just talk.
S: Yea.
Me: Okay. Does she say things and you repeat after her? Or does she just listen to you talk? Like does she give you guidance?
S: No. There is no guidance yet.
Me: Okay. Not yet.
S: We just started. Probably the next class.
Me: Okay. I see. That makes sense. Okay. So were you like, tell me how you felt being placed in that class [CDIS 6000]? Did you expect it? Were you surprised?
S: No. I didn’t expect that. It’s okay because as far as I entered the class, I can improve myself. And I’m okay with that.

Me: Okay. Cool. So no (interrupted)

S: I’m not worried about that.

Me: Okay. Cool. Let me ask you what are your duties this semester? Cause I remember last semester you were a research assistant, right? Like you weren’t teaching.

S: Right. I’m teaching two sections.

Me: Oh, you are! Yay. So are you in a lab now?

S: No. I’m teaching my personal class

Me: Oh wow! That’s wonderful. So you have the main teaching duties?

S: Yea. I’m the instructor. I give assignments, quizzes, and exams.

Me: Wow. And what class is that?

S: Math 1150 Introduction to Statistics.

Me: Okay. So you can, I mean your department allows you to teach individually or while taking CDIS 6000?

S: Yea.

Me: Okay. So tell me about like how uh I know that you only went to one class in 6000, which is like one hour

S: But she told me if you want, you can do a presentation. Kind of 20-minute presentation. Then she told me she can seek out her colleague and director. So if I am interested.

Me: uha. So you mean like that presentation is to get out of the class? Or to (interrupted)

S: I don’t know. Maybe she’ll arrange a rule. I don’t know about that.

Me: Like she. What were the conditions for that 20-minute presentation?

S: There are no conditions. If I’m presented, I can do a presentation. If that is a requirement for my formal course, so I can present it before I present it in that class.

Me: Oh. I see. So like preparation basically?

S: Yea.

Me: Okay. So I’m seeing this semester you’re having a lot of teaching duties. From your experience, your past experience in ESOL 5050, do you feel like, based on what we did in that class, do you feel it offered you some help in what you’re doing right now? Like tell me honestly, no offense. Like tell me how much is it helping you with your current teaching experience? Or just tell me in general, is it helping you? Is it not helping you? Did you learn things that can transfer to your teaching experience right now or no? anything?

S: Yea. I definitely improved some English speaking skills as well as the teaching skills. So we did three mini lessons, and we got some peer review. The critique from my colleagues. So yea. That improved a lot in my teaching skills. And also we focused on some listening materials, like we did some quizzes in listening. So.

Me: So what skill or what assignment you felt helped you the most? Was it the mini lessons?

S: The mini lessons. Yea, the mini lessons. That helped.

Me: So you felt that was more helpful than for instance the pronunciation journal?

S: Yea.

Me: so if you are, hypothetically speaking, if you are to, because now you are a seasoned ITA, you’re experienced. So if you are to help some evolving ITA, someone who’s novice, what kind of skills do you think are helpful for someone who’s new to being an ITA?
S: Like teaching skills. To speak in front of others. Mostly the people because as an international student, I have to speak in front of native English speakers, then I get some nervous, like I have said correctly or not. So the mini lessons helped with that.

Me: so presentation skills, right?
S: Yea. Presentation skills.

Me: do you think like (interrupted)
S: The ITA, they have technical knowledge, they have good knowledge in their subjects, in terms of their subjects and the content they present. So then they need to improve the presentation skills.

Me: So when you say presentation skills, so you’re talking about like how clear or comprehensible they are?
S: Body language.

Me: Okay. So the whole thing, like what we did in mini lessons basically?
S: Yea.

Me: Alright. So you’re saying mainly it was mini lessons that helped you in 5050 and listening a little bit. And I asked you about if you’re training an ITA, you said you’ll help them with presentation skills, like pronunciation, delivery, body language, all these stuff.
S: Yea.

Me: Okay. So let me ask you about like your experiences right now in the classroom. Am so glad you are in a classroom and you get to actually you know apply whatever you have learned in 5050. So um tell me about your experiences with your current undergrad native speakers? How is it going? Is the communication going well?
S: Yea. It’s going very well. Because and also we have some kind of programs in our department, peer mentoring. So there are experienced TAs, so they will come and observe our teaching. And they will make critiques about our teaching. So I am assigned to one native English speaker, his name is Kevin Stall. So he will come and observe by next week and he’ll give feedback, like positive, negative and in which area I need to make an improvement, he’ll give a feedback after that, his observation.

Me: That’s neat. So you’re paired with him. So he will be your person basically?
S: Yea.

Me: and you said he’s a native speaker, right?
S: He’s a native speaker. So we have a coordinator. It’s a peer mentoring. I think one of our faculty members, she’s doing research in how to improve the undergraduate student teaching. So based on that I’m assigned to one mentor.

Me: Oh. Wow. So the goal of that research is to improve the experience of the undergrads.
S: The undergraduate teaching skills.

Me: Undergrad teaching skills?
S: Undergrad teaching. Because since I’m teaching an undergraduate level, so teaching undergrads.

Me: So they want to improve the experience for undergraduate students? Like he’s part of that research, right?
S: Yea.

Me: That’s neat. So do you know what kind of categories or criteria he’ll be looking for when he observes you?
S: He didn’t say anything. He told me that he’ll observe the positive and negative things. He didn’t say anything about that [assessment criteria].
Me: Yea. So how formal is the observation? Is it on a friendly basis?
S: It is friendly based. He also a PhD student.
Me: same program, right?
S: Yea. same program.
Me: I see. So nothing like that would intimidate you. Nothing like I’m gonna report you to someone?
S: No.
Me: Does he get to also ask your undergrads about their experience or just observing and reporting and that’s all?
S: I think he will be recording it
Me: Oh really!
S: Yea.
Me: So same stuff that we did for the mini lessons! (laugh)
S: Yea (laugh) But we don’t need to write a reflection like we did
Me: He’s gonna watch it for his own purposes (laugh). That’s really neat. It’s really interesting that they’re doing that mentorship because they talk also. Do you meet regularly?
S: Yea. We have a biweekly meeting and he’ll observe three times per semester.
Me: Oh really!
S: A peer mentoring program for two semester period, like one year.
Me: Okay. That’s really cool. So that takes me to professional development as an aspect I wanted to ask you about because I’m curious about professional development that is available for ITAs specifically. So what I mean by professional development is like resources that are available for you to evolve as a professional. So let me ask you maybe a good way to answer this question is what are your goals? Because you’re doing a PhD, right?
S: Yea.
Me: Are you looking for a position in academia? Or are you looking for something outside academia?
S: I want to work in an academic institute because since I already work as a lecturer back in Sri Lanka, a lecturer probationary in the University of Sri Lanka, so after I complete my PhD here I’ll go back and rejoin.
Me: Oh, Okay. So you wanna go back. Do you have a position that’s held for you?
S: Probably they’ll give a position since after a PhD.
Me: So you said you were already a lecturer back in Sri Lanka.
S: Yea.
Me: So in Sri Lanka you were a lecturer. Did you have your own classroom?
S: Yea. I taught two classes. Regression Analysis and Differential Equations at the undergraduate level.
Me: and you said, did you say it was two years? I’m trying to remember from back when I asked you about your duties or teaching experience before you came to the U.S. Was it like two years?
S: Two years. Yea.
Me: So you taught there for two years as a lecturer. That was even before your Master’s, right?
S: Yes. I was a teaching assistant in the University of Nebraska.
Me: That’s right! So you taught in Nebraska as well?
S: Yea. I taught two classes. Math 1220. It’s a business mathematics class. And then 1310, it’s pre-calculus class.
Me: Wow. And you were the main instructor?
S: Yea.
Me: That’s really interesting. So, I’m just curious, when you went to Nebraska, did they give you any similar training?
S: No. because I did a presentation in front of graduate college and the course coordinator. So then I’ve got pass in the class. So I was released to teach. (laugh) So after that, there’s a faculty member. So he used to visit my classroom and he did observations, then after that he gave me feedback. In his feedback, he thought I need to slow down (laugh).
Me: (laugh) Yea. That sounds familiar. (laugh) Yea. I’d imagine that even in your first language you speak fast.
S: (laugh) Yea.
Me: So it’s just as fast. You’re faster, you’re smarter than other people, that’s why. That’s interesting. So you didn’t get through any training here?
S: Yea. Because I got 7 in my IELTS. Since I entered the university, it has expired, so I had to take the exam. Because I didn’t submit any English exam. So that’s the reason they asked me to follow the course and discussions.
Me: Oh. So basically your IELTS score expired before you came here?
S: Yea. I did it in 2013. And it’s valid for two years.
Me: So then when you came here, did you take the Spoken English Test?
S: Yea. They asked me to take that because I didn’t submit my IELTS certificate.
Me: I see. Do you imagine like, hypothetically speaking, had you retaken the IELTS, you think you could have passed?
S: No I didn’t think that. (laugh)
Me: That’s really interesting. Do you know that, I’m not sure if you know the answer, but you said the University of Nebraska, right?
S: Yea.
Me: Do you know that when you were there, there was some existing ITA training program there or no? Cause I’m thinking maybe they don’t have one.
S: No, they don’t have one like that but normally the faculty member, they used to assess our teaching skills like each and every semester. I think they observed my classroom two times in first semester.
Me: You said the professor, right?
S: The professor, right?
Me: A professor in your program would just observe you. How many times?
S: I think two times per semester.
Me: And they give you feedback?
S: Yea.
Me: and on a friendly basis, right?
S: Yea. It’s a friendly basis. I think then he copied the feedback to the graduate coordinator and to me.
Me: Okay. But nothing, like no consequences have ever happened?
S: No
Me: Okay. I had no idea. So you had a lot of teaching experience before coming here. That’s ironic, but okay. So I’m imagining that when you taught in Nebraska or when you taught back home as a lecturer, you received some feedback from students in the shape of like end-of-semester course evaluations?
S: Yes.
Me: so did you, like can you tell me typically how were you rated by your undergrads?
S: I got feedback the …department from the University of Nebraska. So it was like 3.9 out of 5.
Me: wow that’s pretty high.
S: I don’t know.
Me: I think so.
S: I got 3.9 out of 5 in my first semester. I don’t receive the feedback from the last semester because I graduate from the university.
Me: I see. So you didn’t get a chance to get that feedback. Okay. And generally speaking because typically the end of the semester course evals they have sections where they would have undergrads like write what they liked about your teaching, what they didn’t like, you know a free open answer kind of thing. Do you remember any of the comments you received?
S: I don’t remember but I remember one question that they asked would you recommend that instructor, and they said yes. (laugh)
Me: Okay. So they liked you?
S: Yea. But I don’t remember other questions. There were a lot of questions.
Me: Aany other question based on your memory stood out to you? Any question that you thought that’s a weird question or that’s a helpful question?
S: I think I have a scan copy of that. If you want I can email you later?
Me: If you don’t mind.
S: Yea. I can scan.
Me: Yea. Thank you. Yea. That would help. Part of my goal here is to understand like the way I see end of semester evaluations is a way to, for ITAs specifically, to improve their teaching or to improve their pronunciation or you know anything. And I’m also curious how do we use them. How do we use those end-of-semester course evals to improve, right? Because I wonder if anyone sat with you, like your mentor back there in Nebraska, did they sit with you to tell you how to read the end-of-semester course evals or how to interpret the data?
S: No.
Me: It’s just like here’s your end-of-semester [interrupted]
S: Because it was available in my blackboard. So I got a link. So then I got in and checked that link.
Me: And that’s it? No conversation happened after that?
S: No.
Me: I see. I’m also curious, going back to the professional development aspect, so you said there is mentorship here and there was mentorship back in Nebraska. What do you think are the professional needs for someone like you? You want to stay in academia, right? In Sri Lanka, right?
S: Yea.
Me: So what do you think are the professional needs for ITAs? Like how do you, what are the resources you think should be available on campuses to help ITAs specifically professionally improve?
S: Hmm like experience?
Me: Yea.
S: Like experience teaching?
Me: Yea.
S: Get some feedback and training. Technology is more important.
Me: So You’re saying like do you mean by that like observations?
S: Yea.
Me: Like someone experienced being in your classroom observing you and giving you feedback?
S: Someone who taught that section before.
Me: Okay. And technology. What do you mean by that?
S: like, hmm, if you consider mathematics courses, we use some applications. I mean there are different ways to teach the courses.
Me: I see. So like someone to help you through those software programs, right?
S: Yea.
Me: Okay. Anything else that you feel like can be helpful for someone from, are you a Stats & Economics major?
S: Yea.
Me: For your major, anything specific other than that? Other than like observations and apps or technology?
S: Mmm
Me: It’s okay if nothing comes to mind. Do you feel like BGSU campus offers you these kinds of opportunities?
S: Yea.
Me: So you said like the mentorship.
S: Yea.
Me: and do you get some technology assistance?
S: Yea. Because we have in our department, we have a course because if you are a teaching assistant you follow some courses like a teaching undergraduate for using the technology. So kind of information in that courses.
Me: Oh wow. Okay. So you are in that course?
S: Yea.
Me: so it’s a course you take?
S: Yea.
Me: Excellent. You guys seem to have like a very solid you know help, a solid program.
S: We have three different courses for teaching assistants. The first one is similar to how to handle the class and how to handle disruptive behavior of students and something like that. And then the following is kind of how to use the technology to improve graduate teaching. And also I think the summer we have a course to develop curriculum.
Me: Wow. So curriculum development, really? Wow, that’s wonderful. So all these classes you’re being enrolled in to help you professionally improve?
S: Yea
Me: wonderful. Okay. So when you go back home, your rank will be Assistant Professor I imagine, right?
S: I think I’ll be a senior lecturer.
Me: Senior lecturer?
S: Yea.
Me: Okay. Do you think like in any given day, do you think like you would stay here or do you think you [interrupted]?
S: Mostly not (laugh). Because after I completed a Master’s, I go back to Sri Lanka and join as a lecturer. And then I got admitted from this University, so I came (laugh)
Me: so you feel like you wanna go back home? There is no chance you wanna stay here?
S: Yea.
Me: Okay.
S: I don’t know. Maybe I’ll change in the future.
Me: But so far you wanna go back. Okay. So like how many years are you into the program?
S: I’ll complete it in four year.
Me: In four years. So you are a second year right now?
S: No. It’s my first year, my second semester.
Me: Okay. That’s impressive. One, maybe a couple, more questions about your, like the mentorship that you’re getting, I’m gonna ask you again a hypothetical question. Do you think that getting mentorship from a native speaking instructor who taught the class before is more helpful or getting mentorship from someone who speaks your first language? Or who’s international in general who maybe can help you? Which one do you think fits your needs better? Or does it matter?
S: I have to say native English speaker, so they can clearly diagnose teaching skills like my teaching.
Me: You said the teaching not the pronunciation, right?
S: Yea. Everything.
Me: Everything?
S: Yea.
Me: so because they are native speakers you feel like they would be more adept at analyzing the problem?
S: Yes.
Me: Okay. I’m just asking that question because I just read a piece, an article that talked about how helpful mentorship can be if it’s both international people but I value your opinion.
S: on the other hand, there are some advantages and disadvantages if it’s an international TA, so um he can think the situation in that kind of field like since they are coming from intel of incomprehensible speech]. Yea there are some disadvantages and advantages in both point of view.
Me: And you guys also when you did observations, you observed an ITA too, both, right?
S: Yea. I think we observed a native speaker in both cases.
Me: so you didn’t have experience observing an ITA before
S: Yea.
Me: Okay. Um. So you said I asked you about the interactions with native speakers in the classroom, and you said that everything is going well. Like no experiences with like communication breakdowns? Or [interrupted]
S: so far no.
Me: everything is perfect?
S: Yea.
Me: Excellent. Okay. So just to wrap up our meeting or our interview, what were your needs from an ITA training program or course when you first came to the U.S. versus your needs after you have spent I don’t know how many years, probably three years or more in the U.S.? Like remember, try to travel back in time when you first came here before you even entered the University of Nebraska versus your needs now, did your needs evolve? Or are they different? I don’t know. Try to answer that. Do your best. I know it’s hard to travel back and try to remember what were my needs back then, but do you remember?
S: Umm Yea. Because my English speaking skill improved a lot compared to in 2014. So then I’d say the public speaking I got a lot of experience in public speaking in front of a native speaker.

Me: cause I imagine when you were in Sri Lanka you were teaching in your first language, right?
S: No I taught in English. I taught the entire class in English.

Me: Oh. Were your students like Americans?
S: No they were from Sri Lanka. But in Sri Lanka university they taught in English.

Me: Are you kidding me? Seriously.
S: Yea.

Me: I had no idea. Okay. So for you, you always taught in English?
S: In English yea. In my degree too, the instruction medium was English.

Me: Okay. That’s interesting. Okay. So basically you’re saying you needed help with like listening and speaking like then when you first came here, and maybe you said something else. Presentation?
S: Yea.

Me: presentation skills. Like speaking in front of like public, right?
S: aha

Me: alright. That’s really cool. Anything else you wanna add? Last thoughts about ESOL 5050? Or your experiences in the classroom? Anything? You’re giving me wonderful ideas. You’re gonna help me a lot to think about ITAs’ needs in American classrooms. Any last thoughts?
S: No, thanks.

Me: You’re good?
S: Yea.

Me: Okay. Would you like me to represent you in the study with your real name or do you want me to give you a fake name? like pseudonym? It doesn’t matter to me.
S: so what do you think?

Me: Well. Typically I have to ask you this question. So if you’re worried about the information you gave me. If it was sensitive information, you can choose for yourself any other name that you can go by instead of revealing your identity in the study. It’s up to you. It doesn’t affect me in any way.
S: So?

Me: (laugh) In my opinion, you didn’t say any sensitive information that can hurt you in any way, but I cannot decide for you.
S: Okay. That’s fine you can keep my name.
Me: alright.
Appendix F

Interview with Alexander

February 13th, 2017
17 minutes

Soha: So before we start, I would like you to just in order for me to contextualize all the information that you’re gonna give me, just tell me a little bit about your major, what year are you, just like in general.
Alexander (A): Okay. I’m a sophomore, first-year student; I got some credits from high school. So, I’m a Computer Science major. Um. I’m at Kreischer Ashley on campus. And if you wanna know how it is here, it’s pretty cordial student campus here. That’s pretty much an overview.
Soha: So Computer Science.
A: aha
Soha: So I would imagine that you interact with international teaching assistants. I mean the population. I see them in the classroom a lot. I teach a class by the way that basically prepares international teaching assistants and I’m an international teaching assistant myself. So basically we prepare them with pronunciation, we prepare them with how to teach like pedagogy, U.S. classroom culture. So all the things that they go through before or sometimes simultaneously while they are with you in the lab or in the classroom. So this is just to give you some background about what I’m doing. So have you been taught by international teaching assistants?
A: Yes, I have.
Soha: You have. Okay. Would you tell me more about those experiences? How many times were you taught by them? Do you remember? Anything that comes to mind would be helpful really.
A: The first time was last semester in a Geology class. And not the actual professor but the S. I. was. I believe she was from mmm [hesitates]
Soha: It’s okay if you don’t know. Is it [interrupted]
A: Definitely somewhere in the Middle East.
A: I don’t remember the exact country.
Soha: It’s okay.
A: She wasn’t bad. She was actually a really good teacher. She reiterated things very well. Pronunciation was like the thing and like volume. So I feel like she was a lot more quiet. But I feel like it wasn’t necessarily her fault. I feel like it might have been a cultural thing. But other than that I’ve never had any problems or anything like that. No.
Soha: So her role in the classroom was just to rotate and address your questions?
A: We did our labs in there. So she would briefly go over what we learned uh in the class previously. So we’d go in there, translate it, and basically like use it you know to connect a lot. And everything went smoothly. I got a pretty good grade in that class.
Soha: Yea. Have you had any, like while you were interacting with her have you had any problems with communication itself?
A: Yea, sometimes you have to ask her to repeat herself or to speak up, but other than that, you know.
Soha: I see. So sometimes you took the initiative of like asking “would you repeat yourself?,” right?
A: aha
Soha: did you feel like she did the same thing too like ask you or try to negotiate meaning with you? When she was trying to communicate with you, did she try to like [interrupted]
A: when she didn’t understand something?
Soha: Yea.
A: For the most part, she was very understanding.
Soha: so her listening skills were good, like she would understand [interrupted]
A: I can tell some people would be intimidated to ask her, but I think she was so nice like I didn’t have a problem with like you know.
Soha: Yea. Do you have like any international friends? Or even those who speak different dialects?
A: Yea. Actually during the last year, I worked at Cedar Point.
Soha: Oh
A: I don’t know if you know it?
Soha: Yea.
A: tons of international students come. So I’m used to working with international people. So it is not different for me.
Soha: I see. So your personal life is filled with international people.
A: aha
Soha: Excellent. Did you feel that those experiences like help you to understand more ITAs in the classroom?
A: Totally, yea. Um I feel like that not everybody has the opportunity to get exposed, which you know what can you do about that. But at the same time, you know I feel like being at a college like BG you know we’re so liberal, you should probably be okay with you know diversity.
Soha: Yea. Yea, that’s true. So basically if I tell you to describe those experiences, interacting with her, what will be the word that you will use to describe those experiences interacting with her?
A: Um. Just one word?
Soha: Just briefly, like concisely. How would you describe them?
A: I think it’s good. I like that just because diversity is obviously a good thing, but I mean I never really think truly if she weren’t from another country, I wouldn’t necessarily wish she was from another country. But at the same time it doesn’t really bother me.
Soha: Yea, yea. Alright. So you spoke about your experiences with her and you said you didn’t ever feel there was a communication breakdown. You never felt that way?
Soha: Okay. Good. That takes me to talking about communication in general. What is your perception about effective communication? Just you Alexander, what do you think?
A: Um I guess I think there are a lot of different ways to say the same thing. So if you can’t necessarily say it the way you wanna say it, find a way to break it down. And I think that is like probably the most key portion of like learning language or something like that or to explain where exactly you’re coming from. If that makes sense?
Soha: Yea. So you’re thinking like maybe try to paraphrase yourself?
A: Yea
Soha: Or resaying something or how we say it in this culture or in this language
A: aha
Soha: so basically you’re saying just paraphrasing. Is there anything else that you feel like is necessary for communication that happens between people to be effective or to be successful?
A: Um I don’t really know. Just find the way to make yourself understood, to be completely clear. Yea.

Soha: I see. Excellent. So how do you see your understanding of effective communication to be pertaining to the domain itself of like teaching and learning? Because you’re a learner, right?

A: aha

Soha: and I don’t know maybe someday you might be a teacher, I don’t know. Who knows. Right. But in terms of your capacity as a learner, how do you see the condition that you just mentioned for effective communication to be applied into this situation?

A: Like uh. [confused]

Soha: In the classroom, how does an effective communication happen? Like what are the conditions?

A: That’s a good question. Like there is no like set way to make sure that you completely you know. Cause I can tell you something and then use the exact same words and explain it to someone else and they will get two completely different meanings out of it.

Soha: True

A: So there is no set way to completely make sure everybody understands you exactly the way you wanna be understood, but I think using, like having experience with a lotta different people I guess will be the best way to make sure that you. You can like, you know what I’m saying?

Soha: You mean like getting interactions with more people, so you’d know how [interrupted]

A: Yea, yea. It’s like one of those things like talking with more people would like help you talk with more people.

Soha: So basically expose yourself to more people.

A: Yea, yea, yea.

Soha: I see. Okay. So that helps in the classroom. So if the instructor is exposed to more different dialects, different races, ethnicities, they will be more open to like understanding [interrupted]

A: Yea, yea, yea

Soha: I see. So if you are to give advice to any international teaching assistant who comes to this country and they are fresh you know, they just came here, they don’t know much about the classroom culture, they don’t know much about you know the country itself, how the classroom works, how to understand native speakers, what would be your advice?

A: Um. Be understanding in and of yourself that a lot of people aren’t gonna understand you. So you have to understand they won’t understand you. If that makes sense. And then be, like understand that some people aren’t always gonna be that favorable of your presence, but you do have the right to be here. If that makes sense.

Soha: Yea. Yea. So basically have confidence in what you’re doing, right?

A: Yea.

Soha: Okay. So if I ask you about your expectations from international teaching assistants, what would those be?

A: Um. Usually a really good grasp of like I guess English itself and just a way to like, like I said before, if you can’t directly explain one way, find another way to try to explain it. And realize that like maybe the first, maybe the second time they may not get it, but keep trying you know, completely make yourself clear.

Soha: I see. So more persistence.

A: aha aha

Soha: Okay. So what would you give me as someone who is in the position to train or prepare those international teaching assistants? What do you think can be an effective I would say
categories that I need to go over with them in the classroom in order to prepare them to help you?
A: I don’t know.
Soha: Like what domains, like for instance as I said earlier, I go over like pronunciation issues so they would be comprehensible, I go over pedagogy like how to teach, right? You know like a mini lesson, just a short lesson. We also talk about U.S. classroom culture. Does any of those items feel like more important than the other? Do you feel there is something we need to add to the preparation program?
A: I think those are all crucial, but another thing that would be good for them to learn I guess lingo and like slang. If that makes sense.
Soha: Yea.
A: I feel like that wouldn’t be terrible, like the extremely crucial thing is obviously the classroom, but I feel like that would completely help them understand their students a lot better.
Soha: Yea. I’d imagine students would use idiomatic expressions or slang with their instructors and maybe that would throw them off a little bit, right?
A: aha
Soha: I see. Um. Do you, I’m trying to like have you dig back like this is the only experience you had with an ITA? Did you have any other experiences with a nonnative speaking professor? Or is this the only person you had?
A: On campus?
Soha: or off campus, but in an academic situation, like it can be in high school.
A: Oh, yea, yea, yea. In high school. I’ve had, one of my teachers was from I think the Dominican.
Soha: Okay.
A: He had a pretty thick accent.
Soha: and how was that experience? Was it different than the one you had here in the lab?
A: Um a little bit different. Um he spoke in sometimes like but not always, I don’t think he meant to do it, but like sometimes he would like add in different Spanish words. Sometimes like it threw me off a little bit, but it wasn’t too bad necessarily, and he would always backtrack like say what he meant to say. But it was good. Um. I think he spoke fast too like that was a little bit different too, but you learn to grasp.
Soha: yea, so like you would advise him to slow down maybe?
Soha: did you have any problem with his speed affecting your comprehension of what he’s trying to say?
A: Yea. Sometimes you just have to ask him to go back, repeat, or say a little slower. Other than that not necessarily I couldn’t write that fast. That was kinda hard, but other than that.
Soha: (laugh) Notetaking, right?
A: Yes.
Soha: That was a problem. Cool. I have one more question. It was in my head. I promise. Oh, course evaluations, end-of-semester course evaluations. I know that students get them electronically I believe now and they fill them out. Have you ever filled one for an international teaching assistant here in BGSU?
A: I think I did.
Soha: You did. And how, I suppose if you can remember of course, what was your overall like reaction on the form, did you give them any specific comments or something for them you know to improve their teaching?
A: I think there were all multiple choice, but I left a pretty good you know summary. Like it was a standing ovation.
Soha: Yea. So overall you describe your experience as positive with international teaching assistants?
A: Very positive.
Soha: Okay. If you are to, this will be my last question to you. Sticking with the idea of end-of-semester course evaluations, what are questions you wish are there that aren’t that can help international teaching assistants specifically to improve themselves?
A: Off the top of my head, I know one would be like whether or not you would recommend this person to maybe continue in some sort of courses like to further their understanding of the language and grasping of certain English concepts I guess.
Me: aha
A: other than that it’s pretty thorough. Like honestly I focus more on what they have to say rather than how they say it you know.
Soha: so like the content more than the way to say it?
A: Yea. I’m not entirely. Like as long as I can pretty much piece together what they’re saying, I’m usually not too picky about how they say it.
Soha: did you feel like your peers have different experiences like you know you’ll be sitting in the lab and maybe someone next to you is huffing and puffing [interrupted]
A: Yea. It happened a little more frequently more than admitted by my peers, but you can tell some of them were a little more intolerant about it.
Soha: Oh yea.
A: Yea. What do you do. Some people are just, you know.
Me: That’s true. I mean it happens, right? Can you give a guess why that happens like why they can be intolerant? You mentioned the word “intolerant,” right?
A: Yea
Soha: so can you tell why? Or what really irks them?
A: I guess lack of exposure. If you’re not familiar with them, then I guess, you know if you’re not interested with that sort of thing then I guess, you know.
Soha: Yea. So how early on did you experience, you said that you worked at Cedar Point and that’s how you experienced different people who talked differently. Have you had that way early in your life? Like how old were you when you were first exposed to someone who speaks differently?
A: Um. Pretty young, like here and there, like some of my mom’s friends would be like you know from different countries and things like that or like I come from Cleveland, not Cleveland, but from near Cleveland. I grew in the city where I see people, I meet people and things like that. But um other than that, not entirely but at that time four or five years ago when I started working at Cedar Point. That’s when I started to really like.
Soha: Yea. Yea. Excellent. Thank you so much, Alexander. I think that really covers all I really wanted to learn from you. Mainly I was curious about your expectations from ITAs and how an effective communication happens basically. And you answered all my questions, so thank you so much. That helps.
A: Yea
Soha: would you like me to use a different name to refer to you in my study? Because my study is a dissertation, so it will be published on Ohio Link at one point, hopefully like in a year, but would you like me to use a different name than Alexander? Like a pseudonym? Or are you comfortable?
A: That’s okay.
Me: Okay. Excellent. Thank you so much.
Appendix G

Interview with Marina

February 15th, 2017
28 minutes

Soha: So you remember a while back when you took the survey that it’s about international teaching assistants, and you’re familiar with who they are, right?

M (Marina): aha

Soha: Okay. So basically our questions today, I want this to be like a conversation, a friendly conversation, just tell me your honest opinion because basically the goal of this study is to improve the existing training program for ITAs specifically. And I want to put the needs of international teaching assistants in conversation with the needs or expectations of native English speaking students because I always feel there isn’t that alignment going on. So I want them to hear each other basically. So as we start in order to contextualize what we’re gonna tell me, would you tell me a bit about yourself, like your major, what year are you?

M: Do I need to say my name?

Soha: You don’t have to. You can choose another name and this is a good point to do that. So what name you wanna go by?

M: I guess Marina.


M: so this is my fourth year at Bowling Green and I’m Middle Childhood Education, Science and English. Anything else?

Soha: Well, maybe we can

M: Background?

Soha: Sure. Sure. If you have more to just give me an idea what kind of person you are in general.

M: Okay. So the high school I graduated from was like extremely diverse. We had like you know all walks of life whether it’s like economic or cultural or religious. Uh. From different countries.

Soha: Is it in Ohio?

M: Yea. Um so I think that kinda gives me my perspective on international TAs.

Soha: Yea.

M: Um.

Soha: so does this mean, like I want to latch on to that. One of the questions on the survey was asking if you have friends or colleagues or acquaintances who do not speak English as a first language. So am I guessing now that it’s a “yes” for you?

M: Yea.

Soha: How old were you when you first started like encountering people who speak English or who do not speak English as a first language?

M: Um. Probably not until I moved to Ohio. When I lived in Pennsylvania, I was in an all-white town. So there was no, like anyone who lived there has been there for generations. So when I was fifteen I moved to Ohio. Probably when I first at least heavily interacted with people that did not speak English as a first language.

Soha: and how often do you feel like you interact with people who do not speak English as a first language? Like is it on a daily basis?
M: definitely daily basis in high school. And for college I guess it depends on the semester. At least once or twice a week at this point. Um Yea.
Soha: Okay. I’m asking these questions because I think like understanding your familiarity with people who do not speak English as a first language is a good, you know, it gives me some perspective of like where you come from, right?
M: aha
Soha: so now that I know a little bit about you, so I heard through what you are saying, I can infer that you have been taught by international teaching assistants before here as well or?
M: Not before here.
Soha: when you said diversity, it’s just the students, right?
M: Actually I realized I had foreign teachers. At least I had a Chinese teacher, Chinese obviously. It was nice that she’s actually from China. It’s hard to learn from an American person how to speak Chinese. I never understand why they do that!
Soha: and you did that here in Bowling Green?
M: That was in high school.
Soha: That was in high school. Okay.
M: I know we definitely had teachers who were from different countries, but I can’t remember exactly how many I personally had. I know at least had her. But I don’t remember how many more I interacted with.
Soha: aha. And how about here at BGSU. Like you said that you had ITAs or you have ITAs here. So how many roughly?
M: ah. I’d probably say close to ten at this point.
Soha: wow
M: well, it’s because I take a lot of sciences, and that’s where everyone is.
Soha: STEM yea. Absolutely. It’s interesting you said that because the majority of the population I teach is from STEM, and the class I’m teaching, just to give you some context, is ESOL 5050, and it’s basically the preparation for ITAs before they teach, or sometimes simultaneously as they teach. So if they score, it depends on their score on some test. So if they score low, they have to take that class that I’m teaching right now. So basically I am preparing them or training them before or simultaneously while they teach those classes. It’s an interesting class and basically one of the things I’m looking at in my study as well is whether we provide them with enough preparation. So you said around ten people, ITAs, cause you take a lot of STEM classes. So if I ask you to describe those experiences. I know that of course each experience is its own animal, right? If you can tell me like, just let yourself reflect on these experiences and tell me whether they were, what’s the nature of those experiences?
M: Ah I think they’ve all definitely been different. There’s been some good ones and not so great ones. I know my first one and a few others. Like obviously I think within all of those experiences, there’s definitely a language barrier. But I think like with my prior experience with students who are English language learners, like as peers, I got used to like how they might use different words like what we wouldn’t commonly say the way they say it. Previously that was distracting, but like now I am like okay you know I’m just talking to someone who’s speaking English. Um and I know sometimes it even slows down that class when they’re like what’s that word um and you know over the years being around those people like I have got a lot of patience. Gosh it’s just another person speaking English. So the first international TA I had I wasn’t super fond of him at first because he was definitely a lot more like shy and introverted. So the things that he was saying like sometimes things wouldn’t make sense cause I think he was
just like nervous. But after a while like he got more comfortable with us, um, it was definitely a lot better, and he was a very understanding person, very understanding teacher, and he would try to be silly with us. So like that was great. Um and like I have another professor right now who is from Spain I believe and again he’s the same way. He’s like trying to interact, trying to get to know us, cares about us, and trying to connect with us. But on the other hand, a lot of the ones that I’ve had in science um like definitely sometimes they’re still trying to connect, but I would say not as much in my experience. But the ones I’ve had for chemistry and right now biology, they’re very science-focused, like they’re like I am only here to like grade your papers and you know give you the information.

Soha: I see. So there isn’t that part where they try to get to know you, is that what you mean?
M: aha, and they might a little bit, but it’s still like, it almost seems like, at least the one I have right now, it almost seems like he was like I was told to do this, so I’m doing this, you know.
Soha: Do you feel like it’s part of the like understanding the American classroom culture? Or is it just how they are? What do you think it’s coming from?
M: I always thought it was like culture, um because I, you know, when I had the Chinese teacher in high school, she would tell us about how like classrooms are in China. She was like it’s so different from here, like you guys get away with so much and like they are serious and all these things. So I think that like when I’ve interacted with the science TAs that I’ve had, I kinda keep that in mind to know like okay. So like one of the issues I have is, actually that was probably the biggest issue I’ve ever had with the TAs is like they’re like sometimes when you’d ask them a question, they seem to like be annoyed or upset with you for not knowing the answer. And they say things to relay that when they’re like “How do you not know this?” And then I get like, like I get really nervous because I’m like “Oh my god! I’m stupid!” Um and I get upset. But later on I’m like okay maybe in their culture they have higher expectations for like knowledge and coursework at this point. So like maybe if they were with somebody my age back in their home country, that person would know that because it’s commonsense to them. But I’m like, for me it’s not, it’s not! (laugh) I don’t know what I’m doing. Um yea, so I don’t think that language barrier ever causes an issue at least for me, but I think there’s definitely some cultural differences that don’t always mesh together sometimes.

Soha: Yea. It’s interesting that you have that level of understanding, you know. I would imagine that not everyone has that like. Have you ever overheard someone you know of your peers like “Oh my god! I cannot understand anything of this person’s words!”
M: [Nods]
Soha: You have?
M: Yea.
Soha: Was it like common? So like you hear disapproval or?
M: I think I wouldn’t say super common. I definitely heard it in my classes um like specifically when I took Weather and Climate a few years ago, our teacher was from Africa I believe. He had a very strong accent and you know like the first day this kid made like an assy comment about it. So I was like I’m not sitting here anymore. Cause I was like how, I don’t know.
Soha: Was it like a public comment?
M: Yea. Well not for the professor. Our two isles and he said something along the lines of how am I supposed to learn when this guy is not even speaking English. But he was. So but I think at BG a lot of people are like very understanding. So I don’t think that people, I don’t hear it as often that people are like “Oh! Why are they teaching us?” They’re like whatever.
Soha: Yea, yea. Interesting. So you emphasize that it’s not a language barrier. You said it’s like a cultural barrier, right?
M: Yea.
Soha: Okay. So you say the way they tackle questions like when you asked that question, they don’t have that breadth of like telling you “Oh yea that’s a very good question!” They kinda like jump into like
M: Like “Why don’t you know this?”
Soha: It’s interesting you say that because last semester I was teaching that section and I’ve heard that from them, from ITAs, that the questions (laugh) I guess they get irritated restating themselves because like they think okay I just explained this, so automatically everyone should understand, when you know I guess it’s a pedagogical part too.
M: aha
Soha: You cannot assume that everyone would understand the first time you say something. And you know you need to like question your own pedagogical skills as well, right? Like your own delivery. It’s not a one-way street, right?
M: aha
Soha: It’s really interesting you brought that up. So you said that the experiences vary: some are good, some are not as good. Do you feel like, have you ever taken a class and even till the end of the class you’re struggling in the class because of that cultural difference? Like it doesn’t get better?
M: I think uh cause I think the hardest one for me was my Chemistry lab where I got a lot of that, but
Soha: You mean “that” as in “How comes you don’t know that?”
M: Yea.
Soha: I see
M: Um but after a while I just learned to like find my peers that like know things more than I do, so I like ask them and I would try to study a lot more harder before I go to lab. So like obviously we should be reading the prelab before we go or like read through the whole procedure. So I definitely tried to do that and make sure I understand everything before I get there. And even look at the postlab questions, so that I didn’t like have to ask as much. And then other than that I never had any cultural or language barriers affecting like my grade throughout. Currently, I’m very concerned about it, and I’m gonna go talk to a coordinator hopefully tomorrow. Yea.
Soha: Oh, so right now there is a situation for you. Is it, do you think it’s a language barrier? Or again a cultural barrier? Or anything else really?
M: I mean part of it is cultural barrier, and the other part is I think that just who he is as a person cause I don’t like (laugh), you know it’s not like nationalities or races are mean (laugh) I feel like it’s kind of mean (laugh), so like I don’t think it has anything to do with his culture. I mean he’s definitely one of the people that is like, “Why don’t you understand this?” So I see that as a cultural barrier, but other than that I don’t think that other things are tied to his culture.
Soha: So you understand him, but the problem is how he acts or how he performs as an instructor in the classroom?
M: aha
Soha: I see. I’m sorry to hear that.
M: No worries (laugh)
Soha: Okay. If I ask you what are your expectations from ITAs in classrooms or labs? If you are like to help me for instance put together a training or preparation program for those ITAs, what
would be in there for them to meet your expectations? I know it’s a big question, but even talk about your expectations first and then maybe we can move to like talking about what should be learned? What should they encounter before or during their instruction?

M: Um I, and obviously I don’t know a lot about the course that you teach, but at least stemming from the things that have held me back a little bit in my experiences um like I said language isn’t even an issue, I don’t think um but definitely like the pedagogy skills and, which I mean it’s a hard thing to teach in one class, right? Um and I guess understanding the cultural differences that we have especially like at this age because we’re really immature, you know (laugh). We’re expecting like fast things. We need to know the answer quickly. We need to get on quickly. Oh gosh! What was I saying? Um Oh my gosh! So cultural differences. I think like back to like that understanding, like you were saying, like um even if we are paying attention and we’re listening and um even if pedagogy is on point, we still not always going to soak everything in and remember everything immediately, especially when like these labs are set up so that there is a virtual lecture, boom boom boom. And then immediately we’re starting the lab. Um and I think just like remembering to be detailed in as they are teaching to remember that we don’t know these things as much as they do and like everything is super, super neutralized. Um especially if it’s your first or second lab, like I’m still lost, and I’ve taken how many labs at this point, you know. Um so one of my issues right now is that my TA doesn’t, like he will lecture on the concepts real quick, but then he doesn’t really tell us like what we’re doing. Like he’ll read the title. So he’ll be like, “This is your diffusion lab,” and then he’ll be like, “Okay, start.” And we’re like, “Okay. I read the lab, (laugh) but I don’t know what this thing is that they’re talking about. Can you just like point it out real quick?” And then I know he definitely gets frustrated because we’re asking him so many questions, but um I wish that he would just lay everything out before, so we know where we’re going, what we’re doing.

Soha: Like preface the [interrupted]

M: Yea

Soha: lab better, like in a more detailed fashion (laugh) Um, okay, so these will be like, you feel like these are areas where they need more preparation in order for them to help you, to better help you basically in the labs, right? Um So if I ask you about the nature of communications in general with people who do not speak English as a first language or ITAs, either or, both, it doesn’t matter. Um how would you describe those communications? Were they like easy? Positive? Hard? I mean what adjective would you use and how would you describe them? Don’t limit yourself to one adjective. Just tell me if you remember the nature of those communications with someone who does not speak English as a first language?

M: Um I think a lot of the times like, again, I still just think. I mean like obviously I’m not saying that I don’t think of them as different people cause obviously they are different people, um, but I don’t sit there and get frustrated. I don’t feel it’s ever difficult. I think more so like I’m not even thinking about it. I’m just kind of like, we’re having a conversation right now. And if I am thinking about it, it’s usually like helping me to take a step back and be like, “How am I speaking when I’m speaking to somebody who doesn’t speak English as a first language?” cause obviously like I use a lot of slang, I grew up here. So like a lot of the times I have to like stop myself and be like, “No [Marina]! Use real words!” And then uh I know that one friend. He’s from Turkey, and a lot of the times we’ll be having conversations, and you know like deep conversation going on for hours. Super intelligent man, but sometimes he couldn’t get the right word. So he would sit there and try to describe it. And I almost feel like we’re playing Charades sometimes because he’d be like, “ah, ah, when there is steam coming,” and I’m like, “Smoking?”
and he’ll be like, “Yes” (laugh). So I think that like I feel like that helps my brain sometimes because of like I don’t know it makes me think a little bit more.

Soha: aha, yea, you challenge yourself basically.

M: Yea.

Soha: to say stuff differently, right? Yea. My students always ask for slang. Teach us idiomatic expressions, teach us slang. Because these are things that challenge them in the classroom when American students or native-speaking students would say expressions that they’re not familiar with. The speed also. They always complain about the speed. It takes practice, I would say. So if I say, just to push you a little bit farther, how would you describe an effective communication? Or how do you perceive or what do you perceive to be an effective communication between two people in order for them to make meaning or to have a good conversation?

M: That’s really hard.

Soha: I know. It’s a trap.

M: (laugh) um I mean, like a know one thing is if I’m speaking to somebody whether their first language is English or whether it’s not, I do get frustrated when it seems like they’re using too many words or like not getting the point or like not speaking concisely especially when like when we’re trying to get through things and I actually I feel like when I’m speaking to, uh, people who do not speak English as a first language, I almost feel like that they do that: they speak concisely. So I give the keywords. That will help them to understand what I’m saying. And then like that communication happens so quickly and we move on to what we need to figure out. Um I work with two GAs right now. They are from China, and they do that where they’re like, their English isn’t super great, but they’re like, “Hey, keywords here!” Like okay, this, this. I’m like, “Okay!” So that’s definitely one thing. And I know people get frustrated with me when I’m not like on the ball, you know.

Soha: I see. And how do you see effective communication to be pertaining to the domain of teaching and learning? Because that’s academic conversations will be either you’re learning or teaching something. So how do you see effective communication to be important or an important factor in teaching and learning? Like basically what I’m asking is how does effective communication play a role in the classroom? Or how do you see it act in the classroom or play out in the classroom?

M: I think it’s definitely a huge part cause obviously if there isn’t effective or thorough communication from the person who’s relaying information, then the people who are trying to get the information aren’t understanding it and then we’re not understanding and we go to ask them. And like that question needs to be effective communication. For them to understand what we’re saying, we need to relay what we’re trying to understand, and I feel like this entire chain of information, like you get to ask a question and when they answer the question, like all those parts, if one of them is not effective, then it’s just a huge issue. And a cluster.

Soha: Yea, yea, very good. So have you ever filled out end-of-semester evaluation forms for international teaching assistants? Do you remember any like comments that you remember putting down on those evaluations in order to, you know, for future students to get better education? or you know or maybe to point out something to that ITA that they are not aware of? Do you remember any of the comments that you may have left on one of those end-of-semester course evaluations?

M: Yea. I definitely remember when I had ITAs for Chemistry, I commented that like I felt I was supposed to magically understand the information before receiving the information. And I definitely commented something about when I would ask questions, and they would be, “Why
don’t you know this?” Uh so I think I mentioned that I felt kind of upset and distressed by those comments because like I said they kind of say I am stupid. Uh but I don’t remember exactly what the wording was.

Soha: Of course!

M: I forget.

Soha: But that’s the nature of what you mentioned. Were there positive comments as well? I mean that’s constructive criticism, of course, but were there any aspects that you felt like, “Oh my god! That was really good!” Or “That was really helpful!”

M: I think like for those TAs specifically I definitely probably commented on how intelligent they were cause they had so much information, they knew everything. And I was like, “You’re so young!” I felt like they had so much knowledge as like people with PhDs in that subject. I was pretty impressed by that. Um and I feel that way about every ITA that I’ve had. Um and then any other ITA that I’ve had, I didn’t have that comment on. Of course I had great comments, especially the one I had that was like, or the few that I’ve had that are like they try to get to know us and help us out and so.

Soha: Just to like wrap this up cause I kinda covered everything I wanted to learn from you today. One last thing is if I ask you to give advice to any rising ITA, they just came to the U.S., they have been here for like ten days. What would you tell them?

M: Um I think a huge one I would say like always be yourself and like you know don’t feel like that you. I mean obviously we need to be professional, right? But like you don’t have to be like so calculated all the time. Like totally be yourselves with or without cultural or language barrier, it definitely helps the students to overlook the barriers and like try harder to learn from them. Um And then the other thing is understanding that this might be the only class on that subject that we’re taking and most of the time they’re intro courses. So like I said before we’re not going to understand everything immediately. Probably I’d say just stay patient (laugh).

Soha: Well, thank you so much.

M: Thank you.
Appendix H

Interview with Rebecca Oreto from Carnegie Mellon

March 9th, 2017
46 minutes

Soha: Can you hear me, Rebecca?
R (Rebecca Oreto): Yes, I can.
Soha: Excellent. Me too (laugh).
R: (laugh)
Soha: Just to get some context, first thank you so much for doing this for me! I appreciate it.
R: It’s my pleasure.
Soha: So before we start talking about the ITA program that you are part of, would you give me some context of how you arrived at ITA training? Your experience with it?
R: Sure. I started teaching English in Poland in the early 90s. I went and I got a certification in teaching English as a second language and I started teaching first at college, a three-year college in Poland and then at a five-year university. So my job was actually teaching the faculty and staff of the university English. This was in the early 90s. Few people had any access to English in 1990-91, so I was working at the university there. So when I came back to Pittsburgh, it was pretty natural for me to start getting involved in that kind of work again. I did that first at the University of Pittsburgh at their English Language Institute. They ran the ITA testing through the English Language Institute and then I moved here to Carnegie Mellon in 2001, and I have been here ever since.
Soha: Wow. That’s wonderful. So you have a lot of experience; that’s a wealth of experience training ITAs.
R: Yea. Yea.
Soha: So if you can talk to me a bit about the program at Carnegie Mellon, how it works, how do you train ITAs?
R: So we have a very broad program because our ITAs are trained with other graduate students for the most part. We have what we call an a la carte menu. We don’t do a semester-length class. What we do is a series of short multi-week workshops, maybe 4 or 5 weeks, or we do some one set sessions that run for about 90 minutes or two hours. There is one class, and it’s a half-semester class. At Carnegie Mellon we have what’s called mini courses, and they are half-semester courses. So we do have one course for ITAs that’s a mini length credit course that is specifically for ITA language. But for the most part when we’re working on fluency building, cross-cultural issues, we have some writing sessions, so grammar sessions, most of the times the ITAs are learning with other graduate students who are there to develop professional skills.
Soha: When you say “other graduate students,” do you mean domestic graduate students?
R: No, no. These are not for TAs. This is for anybody that’s a nonnative speaker of English. So these are language and cross-culture sessions. We don’t work with any native speakers in our regular program. We do have a little bit of training for domestic staff and faculty that we do on campus. Um but we don’t teach that in our center; we don’t teach any domestic students in our center. So we do have one three-hour session that is required for people who do not get the top score on our test. We have four scores; they’re very typical. We have a Pass, which is pass out, you don’t need to do anything with us. We have two Restricted scores that allow you to do different types of jobs, and those people have to take a 3-hour session that is required before they
start their TA job. If they get a Not Qualified, they just cannot do any job. They are not required to do the 3-hour session, but they also cannot do a TA job. So this 3-hour session is kind of, this is our, the way that we are getting students to come in and do some language work, some fluency-building, some pronunciation, and some cross-cultural U.S. classroom work before they actually go and do their jobs. So we have no semester-length classes, and that 3-hour session is the only requirement that we have for the ITAs.

Soha: so it’s only that one 3-hour session, and you said it’s fluency, cross-cultural building, like U.S. classroom culture, right?

R: Yea. So it’s basically roughly divided at the 3 parts: culture, the U.S. classroom, and fluency-building. Like for example, we’re making definitions, we’re looking at rewording. And then the final hour is pronunciation where we slow down and emphasize. We don’t do, in that one-hour session we are certainly not attempting to do anything, any tricky thing, we’re saying here’s the very basics. Slow down and emphasize. Just pausing.

Soha: Do you go through pronunciation like phonetics and phonology and stuff like that?

R: Almost never. We really focus on suprasegmental, what we’re working on more than anything is getting people to slow down and to use pausing, appropriate pausing. We also are working a lot on getting people to emphasize and to, you know, lengthen sounds so that they stand out. We do a lot of work with, for example, I teach two-week sessions, each for two hours. But those sessions use drama technique to kinda bring in your audience, and a lot of it is just focused on making eye contact and slowing down. And they’re very effective sessions. We do a lot of things. They all have a little bit because they are three separate sessions. They all have a little bit of a different focus. One focuses on musculature and pausing; one focuses on nonverbal things like gestures, eye contact, um you know really focuses on behaviors of presence; and then the other one that’s kind of an improv session where we do a lot of work on eye contact again, but also saying things without a lot of preparation. So we’re doing work like that.

Soha: so far you said three sessions. Do you teach all of them? Does someone else help you?

R: so those three sessions, I do on my own. One of the things I would say, if you look at our website, we actually have about 30 different one-time sessions. So I don’t know if you could access our website, but we have, if you go to the ICC at CMU and you look at Across the Domain menu bar, it says Language Training. And then if you swipe down to workshops and seminars, this actually is a description of all our classes. So at the top of that list is the half-semester three-unit class that’s just for teaching, that’s just ITA. After that, we have longer workshops that meet twice a week, they’re at different lengths, but they’re basically working on fluency or learning to hear your grammar, that’s what Advanced Grammar m Monitoring is. ITA Basics is a short version of our credit class that we teach in the summer. It’s just a faster version. Things like presentation strategies, presentation basics, things like that. And then below that, we have all our seminars, and if you scroll through that, you will see that there are about 30 different seminars. So what we’re doing is we’re trying to, we have so many seminars because we have a huge nonnative-speaking Master’s population here. And they cannot come to longer classes. They absolutely cannot. They have no time. And so we’re trying to reach out to the Master’s students and bring them into our program. But these are also open for any of the PhD students that are TAs. We also have a lot of Master’s students that are TAs here, and we have undergraduates that are TAs. Um so we’re trying to reach out to this whole population and give them work that is effective and lets them individualize it a little bit more. I mean frankly no one could go wrong with any of these seminars, any of these 2-hour sessions. They’re good for everybody.
Soha: so it seems that they are placed based on that placement exam in those seminars, is that correct?
R: aha. Well, we don’t have so much of a placement. What we have is, so the way people typically get into our program is this: we try to reach out to all our new incoming graduate students at orientations, and we do, it’s about a 45-minute session, where we talk about our program, we talk about language-learning, we have a chart that shows, you know, people at different levels of Speaking TOEFL scores tend to be able to do these types of things, just being realistic, and then we get them signed up for our classes. And basically what we do is we send email announcements for all of our classes, and we get people to come that way. Some people start our program through the ITA test, but very few do. Most people start our program through one of those orientations.
Soha: I see. So they hear about it in the orientation, and then they enroll voluntarily it seems?
R: Yes. Our whole program, except for that 3-hour sessions, is all voluntary. Now it’s voluntary from my perspective and our policies. There are some departments that have different policies. And there are some departments that say you can’t be a TA until you reach X score, it doesn’t matter what job you’re doing. So our policy is you can do one-on-one work with a Restricted 2 score. The other, the department has a stronger policy. You cannot do it until you’ve reached a higher score. So that’s different, the department policy. But the only thing that’s required from our perspective is the 3-hour session.
Soha: and in that case if it’s a departmental requirement, do they send the ITAs to you?
R: Yea. Yea. Actually one of the things that they do is that they actually bring us to their department during their own department orientation. We do that whole 45-minute session. This orientation, actually at their own department orientation because they want their students to be linked to us, because they have those requirements. So we work a lot with departments. There is no um graduate school, there is no Dean of Graduate Studies. And so everything we do has to be on the department level as far as graduate students go. Of course it’s much more centralized for undergrads. But for the graduate students, every department has its own policy. And every department, we have to be in touch with them to get them to send their ITAs to us. We do a lot of outreach.
Soha: I see. You said that some departments are particular about the scores and when you say scores, do you mean TOEFL Speaking?
R: No. What I was talking about was the scores on the TA test. We actually have, if you’re still on the website, next to the Language Training, we have a whole section about ITA Testing. And on the left, if you look at the Menu bar on the left side there is the one highlight that says Understanding the ITA Test Scoring Guide. If you click on that, you’ll see our scores. Pass is you’re done. You don’t need to come to us. And they ask [incomprehensible speech] with instructors. That’s not common here, but one or two departments require that for graduation. And then we have our two Restricted scores. Restricted 1, you can be a recitation leader, you can do anything that requires group interaction, but a Restricted 2 you’re restricted to one-on-one sessions. So if you’re an instructor assistant for labs, that’s fine, you’re doing well helping people set up their burner or whatever. But you’re not leading the lab, you don’t have that ability. Or you’re doing tutoring, or a grader that talks to students about their grades and stuff like that during office hours. After that, we have Not Qualified. You can see at the bottom, the percentage of students that are in each category. So over the past 10 years. Do you see that? It’s in small type.
Soha: Yea. Yea. I see it.
R: um so we have 47% of people get a Pass. So we’re not, this is not an impossible Pass. The Restricted 1, 16%, the Restricted 2 is 28%. And many, many of our students will never need more than the Restricted 2. They do office hours, they do office hours for several years, and they’re done. Or they work in labs for several years, and they’re done, you know. So and then you can see the numbers of Not Qualified are very low. We’re very careful with who we put in Not Qualified because this may cause problems for the department that we are very careful about going back and watching video tapes to make sure that this person is truly not qualified.

Soha: so it’s like, as I see on that table, there is a classification based on each score and what that ITA can do. I see.

R: we’ve tried. Because we need to do so much average to the department, it’s is really so crucial for us to have every single thing on the website, really parsed out. We have also a rubric for what the different, uh, if you are a student in a Restricted 1, what does that actually mean. We have a rubric that actually shows that you can do these types of tasks. Like you can, of course, now I can’t think of anything. But you can talk at length about topics, you’re not restricted to one of two sentences. I’m looking, trying to see if I can find that. But of course now I can’t remember exactly where it is. (laugh)

Soha: (laugh)

R: But it is on our website (laugh) It is. I can’t remember where we have it.

Soha: It’s a lot of information. I don’t blame you.

R: Yea. So I can find it and send it to you if you’d like to see that. That’s not a problem.

Soha: Yea. Thank you.

R: You know, I think our system is a little bit more complicated than other people’s system, but it is of necessity because we have about 700 tests a year.

Soha: Oh wow.

R: Yea. We have a huge number of people that we’re testing every year, especially when you look at the size of Carnegie Mellon. I know that bigger schools will have that same number. When I was talking to the women who have come from Purdue for the Symposium, they have about the same number, and that’s Purdue.

Soha: wow

R: Yea. So we have a big, big program just for ITAs. But then on top of that we’re supporting people outside of the ITAs. So we have, I’m just looking. Our numbers from the academic year 15/16, we served 1,435 unique students. That means, coming to our classes, taking a test, coming to orientation. And for 15/16, we had 684 tests. And we’re on track to, you know, be around that number of higher.

Soha: and those ITAs, are they specifically STEM majors?

R: well, they are from everywhere. We have [incomprehensible speech] school. We have a lot of TAs from Business school. We don’t have a medical school or nursing school. We don’t have anything like that. We do have, a huge number of them are from say Electrical Computer Engineering and Environmental Engineering. We have a highly technical Architecture program. Almost like, some of the programs you find in our Architecture Program, you would most likely find them in Civil Engineering in other schools. Um we have a very big program, anything that’s Computer Science is a huge program here. So I have to say most of our students are from STEM. Certainly a big proportion are from STEM.

Soha: I see. Makes sense. Alright. Looking at the current program that you just thoroughly explained to me

R: (laugh)
Soha: what do you see as strengths and where do you see like areas for improvement for you know future endeavors?

R: Okay. So the trend is that the numbers are going to keep going up. I don’t know if they’ll go up as quickly as they have. I mean the goals for our Master’s student program has been just astronomical over the last 10 years, and we have, the number of international students at Carnegie Mellon just went up astronomically. I don’t know if the growth will be as quick. I think there will still be some growth; I don’t know how fast it will be. So that means we will definitely continue to have more and more ITAs. We have simplified things for ourselves a little bit by looking at the data we’ve collected since, I guess 2005 is when they started the Speaking section on the TOEFL. So since then, what we do at our Language Support orientation and for anybody coming for the ITA test is we collect their score, their speaking score and we measure it against their eventual success on the ITA test. And we are able to use some of those, and we’ve done presentations at TESOL about those. Those numbers are not secret. We’ve given those to people. I give them out all the time. I wouldn’t be surprised if it’s on our website (laugh), but I don’t know exactly where it is. It might actually be. I can send you those numbers. It’s not a big deal, but we actually have found in all our research that we had never had anybody that’s a 28 or over in anything lower than the Pass category. So we are able to do a very quick assessment with those people. We still keep it under our ethos because we want to keep control over our assessment process. But those people come in and have a very quick conversation with me or a full conversation and then they’re placed in the Pass category. I’ve never had anybody when I thought oh my goodness, this person, you know. It’s been very successful. That’s made things easier for us. But we just actually have to keep finding ways to streamline our process. And so that’s really the challenge. It’s how can we continue to streamline the process.

Soha: But it sounds from what you’re saying that the validity of your placement is very accurate; it aligns with the TOEFL speaking section?

R: Yes. And you know we look at them every year and when we first started doing it the numbers moved a little bit. But it’s been pretty um we haven’t seen a lot of change in the last few years. Our numbers have changed in very minor ways over the last few years. So I feel like we have a really good amount of data for that. Um and so because we have this, we give that chart to students at the beginning of, you know, at this Language Support orientation. When we first meet them when they come in as graduate students. And then they have a realistic sense of oh here is what people at my level can do. And because we have those numbers, what we can say is here’s a very rough estimate of if you have say 22, you are probably will have to do a couple of semesters of work. Some serious, serious work with us before you can take the test and end up in that Restricted 2 where you’re allowed to do office hours. So they can see what other people have had to do to get to where they need to be. So it’s a very useful chart; it’s a rough correlation. You know, it’s language learning. Everybody has their own speed that they learn at. Your environment is gonna make a big difference. But here’s some rough ideas. So that’s very helpful. So that way we tell that to the department, we tell that to the students, we tell the departments if you want somebody that’s gonna get a Pass on the test, do not take a 22. They won’t get there in the amount of time that they have to be a graduate student. So that’s very helpful. I feel like we went through a lot of our challenges in the last 5-6 years. We made a lot of changes, streamlining the test, streamlining our processes for how we do student intake. I mean we used to do individual appointments for every student. No longer. It was fine 10 years ago or 12 years ago, but not now. So that’s when we started doing the group sessions.

Soha: Yea. With the rising numbers, that’s impossible I’d say.
R: Yea. Yea. So I think our biggest challenge, kind of like our area for improvement, and I don’t know how realistic we’ll improve massively here is just the amount of time that our students have for classes. It’s so limited. If they come to one or two sessions a week, that’s a huge sacrifice of time for them. And the continual challenge is keeping everything relevant, is keeping your finger on what do the students need, how can we make sure that this is addressing their needs. You know, keeping up with the departments, making sure that, you know departments have turnover. There’s a lot of turn. And one of our biggest challenges is keeping everybody informed. You know, keeping the students informed, here’s what we’re doing, here’s what somebody like you probably needs, here’s what we’ve seen in the past. And then also with the departments, you get a new Chair that comes in and sometime they’re like well I don’t care if they have an 18 or 27, who cares. And you have to go out and deal with those things kinda over and over again, you know. That’s I think the biggest issue: finding time to really get in touch with the departments, and finding the time, and dealing with our students lack of time. Yea. That’s the biggest issues I see now.

Soha: Do you feel that causes resistance from students because of the lack of time I mean?
R: I wouldn’t say resistance. I would say a sense of maybe a little bit of frustration or just feeling like oh I wanna do it, but I can’t. I know that your classes are good, but I have to do that thing. And I mean I get it. So a lot of what we’re trying to do is help them understand ways in which they could either fit their work into their schedule or here are some things you can do on your own. We have some online videos that are very helpful with some of the cross-cultural issues. So like participating in classes. We have a session for that. But if you absolutely can’t make it, here’s a 10-minute video. So we’re trying to do things like that. Or oh you’re coming in the fall, you’re starting a Master’s program, watch this video. You know to get yourself ready for it. So what we’re trying to do is just help them understand ways that they can come to our classes, that they can take part in activities. You know outside their departments, but also not in our classes, but go out and meet regular people as well. So we spend a lot of time with people trying to help them to figure out how to work all this into their schedule.

Soha: it sounds like, as you speak Rebecca, I feel like it’s very transparent. Like you guys are very transparent with your students, with your departments, like everything is clear.
R: That is the goal. That is the goal. Because you just, especially with no grad school handing down mandates, and where we have to go out and recruit our own students. The departments can say a 1000 times, go work on your English, but unless they see my face, unless they see our Director’s face, they’re gonna be like yea, yea, that’s good, but I have this other thing, which I really agree. Yes, you do have that other thing, it’s true. And so a lot of what I say to departments is your job is to get them to me, your job is to get them to my presence, and I will do the rest. Because I will do my darn best to get those students into my classes you know. So you have to make it transparent, they’re not gonna come otherwise. They would feel like I have no idea what this is (laugh)

Soha: that’s true. Yea. Yea. It’s always hearing from students, because I teach a class where we train ITAs too, not as massive as you guys have, but like [interrupted]
R: How many do you have at Bowling Green?
Soha: (laugh) do you really wanna know? It’s embarrassing.
R: Yea!
Soha: well, the class that I have currently, that’s the only class that is preparing ITAs, I have only 7 students.
R: How many!?
Soha: 7 (laugh)
R: 7! (laugh)
Soha: so yea! (laugh)
R: that’s okay. (laugh) That’s alright.
Soha: so it depends on enrollment. When enrollment goes down, then you know classes don’t make. Like last semester I taught 10 and this semester I’m teaching 7. Next semester, I think there would be more sections, so
R: Yea. Yea. I mean, I don’t find that unusual. I don’t know if you have met any of the participants at the Symposium from [incomprehensible speech], but they have 30 students. They do 30 tests a year. So I don’t find that unusual. It’s just different schools, they just have different things that they’re focused on.
Soha: Yea. Yea. So you spoke a little bit Rebecca about how you’re transparent with the students and how you tell them even you said you make the materials available to them even in a multimodal format. That’s a good segue to speak about professional development and whether you provide professional development for ITAs?
R: well, I would say any of our seminars are certainly professional development. So if you wanna quick back to where we do the Language Training on the workshop seminars, you’ll see that most of our seminars are not built so much around fluency building, but on more things like, so are you seeing where it says Seminars on the list?
Soha: aha
R: so this “communicating data effectively,” it’s discussing graphs and figures in your papers, so in a lot of ways it’s professional development. “Crafting a professional identity,” that’s for your website or your blog. What you’re gonna say about yourself on LinkedIn. There’s the drama techniques session that I talked about before, things like email for academic purposes, how are you going to address your professors, for example. The, if we scroll down, Job Interviewing for International Applicants, we actually design that in conjunction with the Career Services. Cause they just found they didn’t know what to do with international students, they didn’t know the cross-cultural piece, so that’s what our session does. We do things like preparing for Oral Qualifiers and Defenses.
Soha: wow
R: Yea. Just lots of stuff, we have 7 or 8 writing seminars which are focused on that graduate-level writing of doing summaries, well not too much literature reviews per se, but summarizing so you could do literature review, you could do critiques. Things like that. Requesting and refusing, how can you tell your advisor “no.” um and one that is directly aimed at professional development is the Talking the Talk series. This is actually a series of classes that just helps students how to talk about themselves and their work as professionals in the U.S. so to practice an elevator pitch.
Soha: Oh wow
R: you know this PhD talk is for students who are finishing, well not finishing but they’re involved in their dissertation and it’s really about simplifying jargon. If you had two sentences to tell me what your work is about, what would you say? Tell me the what and the why, don’t tell me the how. The professional talk, how to tell your professional story. Small talk is really just small talk. When you walk into an office, what are you supposed to do? You know, if the secretary tells you nice day, why is she saying that to you? You know. So some of these things are linguistic, but they are just as much cross-cultural.
Soha: Yea. The list here that I’m going through is just wonderful. Oh my god.
R: so remember we have the, because we try to reach out to Master’s students as well as PhD students, when we were focused more on simply PhD students, before our classes. Right now I would say there is probably 5 times as many Master’s students, like international Master’s students on campus as there are PhDs. Okay. And so we have a big job of reaching out to them and making sure that they can attend our stuff. And they of course are more interested in professional development cause they’re gonna go get a job right after.
Soha: Exactly.
R: so before we had so many Master’s students, when we had a similar number of Master’s students and PhD students, we did tend to focus more on the longer classes. But that’s just as untenable for most Master’s students. So we developed over the years, we developed all these seminars really to address the issues that they have. These are really relevant to the PhD students as well.
Soha: Yea. Yea. I can totally see that, especially with the elevator pitch for instance or how to defend your dissertation. These are skills that not everyone knows and even domestic students may not be even familiar with that, just broadly speaking.
R: so we work a lot in conjunction with a group on campus called The Global Communication Center. And they do similar sounding workshops, like let’s say about your…workshop, they don’t have nearly as many workshops as we do. And they work intensively with undergraduates. But they are supposed to serve everybody on campus, so when they are doing, they are paraphrasing properly, or they’re avoiding plagiarism session, they can aim it at everybody and it is a much faster pace. So what we often tell our students is “Come in to our session, and then go do theirs because this is gonna give you the background you need.” So when you’re preparing for your oral qualifier, come and find out about the cross-cultural issues from us and do some language stuff with us like question handling, and then go to them because they have different things that they’re gonna tell you.
Soha: especially that you mention that, what did you call it, Global?
R: Global Communication Center. We’re like twinsies.
Soha: (laugh)
R: we’ve been here since the mid 80s and they’ve been here for about 4 years. (laugh) I just get irritated because, I’m like, no, I don’t work for the Global Communication Center. I work for the Intercultural Communication Center. (laugh)
Soha: it sounds like they deal with domestic students, right?
R: Yea. They’re dealing with everybody.
Soha: Okay.
R: They are not slowing down for nonnative speakers.
Soha: Oh wow
R: Yea. What I do in an hour, they maybe cover in half an hour, 45 minutes.
Soha: Oh I see.
R: so we’re really spending a lot more time, we’re answering more questions, we’re getting a lot of the cross-cultural issues, whereas someone might start a session at the Global Communication Center by saying, “what your expectations for a future job gonna be?” and then five minutes later, they’re ready for discussion. I mean that’s not gonna fly with international students.
Soha: (laugh)
R: You know you have to tell them, give them extra questions, why you’re doing this. They might not even understand why you’re doing it. So.
Soha: so I don’t know if you know more about like Global Communication. Do they do an orientation for undergraduates so they would be prepared?
R: No. no. no. They don’t. They might be involved in undergraduate orientation, but I’m not really sure. Probably what they do is say is something like, “this is what we have in our Center. Come over and work with us.”
Soha: But it sounds from what you’re saying that undergraduate native speakers do not get like they do not get any orientation to be prepared to work with ITAs. It sounds like.
R: No, they don’t. okay. So one of the things you have to, cause I know other schools have courses like “how to get the best from your ITA.” Something like that. So you have to understand the context of Carnegie Mellon. We have an enormous, if you look at per head, our campus is enormously international. Not only that, many many of our undergraduate students are international or are like first generation, gen 1.5, and so this is very, I mean, you don’t come to Carnegie Mellon and be like I am so shocked that there are international teaching assistants. I mean, this is not the first time that these students are talking to somebody that is not a native speaker. They are very, I would say that the majority of people on this campus that have come here either they have family living overseas, or they lived overseas, you know. So that is part of it, and that is actually what draws some people to Carnegie Mellon because it does have a reputation for being very international. Now the one thing that I would say that we do have, if you look under special programs, there is something that is called Cross-cultural Understanding on Campus. And this is more for working with faculty and staff, but we can’t do things for students that are related to this. Um we have some workshops, I teach one called, well, this says “more successfully” here, “Communicating successfully in a Global Environment.” And I actually have done that session at this other Global Communication Center. And I do it for staff and faculty all over the campus. I do it several times a semester at their staff meetings, things like that. We also have this video called “The other side of the Equation: A View from three International TAs.” And what this basically is a session and we also have a video. We had a panel discussion that we organized with three of our ITAs for a parents’ weekend. And these students were outstanding. They were amazing. We had an Iranian woman, a Chinese guy, and an Italian guy. And they talked about the changes they went through and how they had to adjust for the U.S. classroom, and how they became successful TAs and all that. And it’s an amazing video, and these students you know when you’re like, “Oh my little heart is so proud.” They were just fantastic, so we try to do things like that. So I don’t know. Does that answer your questions?
Soha: Oh yea, yea, absolutely. So just to wrap things up, my last question is about end-of-semester course evaluations and whether you guys have access to them in order to like basically see what common comments ITAs get or you know?
R: I don’t know that. No. I’m gonna be guessing here. I don’t know if our TAs get course evaluations, unless they’re actually teaching a class as the instructor of record. I recall that that was an issue that students who want to be faculty had a hard time with their job searches because they didn’t have evaluations as TAs, so I think that they might not have those. But anyway, we would not have any access to them. Because if they, the people who would probably be working with that would be our Teaching Center because we are much more language-focused, language and culture focused. And teaching focused. We do do the teaching class and we are the ones that do the testing, but when it comes to how it plays out afterwards, most likely that would be, any of the teaching part would be, our Teaching Center would focus more on that.
Soha: I see. And I would imagine that typically those end-of-semester course evaluations are not available except for I don’t know the Director of the Program or the Head of the Department you know?
R: Yea. Yea. I know that the heads or whoever is running the program, but I don’t have any, I’ve never seen one. I’ve never seen any. Now maybe they do their own evaluations. But there is nothing official.
Soha: When you speak to students about U.S. classroom culture, do you introduce them to the idea of end-of-semester course evaluations and formative assessment, you know, and how they can get some feedback from their students as well?
R: No. You know what, we don’t, we don’t. I mean they know about FCEs because they fill them out, but we don’t focus on that much, at all.
Soha: Okay. These are all the questions I had. You answered them fully. Thank you so much.
R: It’s my pleasure.
Appendix I

Interview with Olivia from Southern Public University

March 1st, 2017
48 minutes

Soha: Thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it. You have no idea.
O (Olivia): I’m so happy to do it.
Soha: So I know you’re from Southern Public University (pseudonym), right?
O: That’s correct.
Soha: Alright. So before we even start the conversation, you can keep your identity absolutely safe, so we can use a pseudonym, we can change the name of your institution, we can not mention your institution, like the name of it at all.
O: Okay. Okay. That’s fine. Yea. If I slip up
Soha: I’ll change that in the transcripts.
Soha: Sure. And what will be your name? your pseudonym?
O: Oh. Let’s see. I don’t even know. Let’s see. (laugh). I never tried to take on some kind of an alternate identity. Let’s just say maybe Olivia.
Soha: Olivia. I love that name actually.
O: (laugh)
Soha: Great. So Olivia, what I’ll be asking you during this interview is basically about the international assistant training or preparation program that you are part of or that you have practiced before in your current institution or even previous institutions, your perception of what works, what doesn’t work with international teaching assistants, and also the strengths and weaknesses of those programs you’ve been in current or prior, it doesn’t matter, um, what do you think is professional development for international teaching assistants, um, basically have you ever used like end-of-semester course evaluations to look at how we can help this specific population. So all the things. These are basically the areas where I will be asking you, and I will let the conversation flow you know more organically.
O: Yes.
Soha: Will that work for you?
O: Yes. Yes. And I’ll try to talk and give you the information you need, but if you feel you need to steer me, I’m totally steerable. (laugh)
Soha: (laugh) absolutely. Okay. Thank you. I’m just opening a Word document here, so I’ll have access to my questions. So I have these general questions, and then we will see how the conversation is going. So my first question is for you to tell me a little bit about your experience preparing or training ITAs. What’s your current position without even having any identifiers?
O: Right. Sure.
Soha: what’s your position? What’s your experience training or preparing international teaching assistants?
O: Okay. So I am a Campus Coordinator and a Lecturer in my institution, and what that means is that I, about 50% of the time, do administrative duties and then I teach.
Soha: Okay
O: and I teach in an IEP sometimes, an Intensive English Program, and that’s for prospective students with some current you know matriculated students, but mostly prospective students who are just trying to get English language skills enough to either pass the TOEFL or something, some standardized test, or to enroll in, apply to and enroll in schools here in the United States, either in the institution I work at or other institutions. I do a little bit of that, although I phased out of that. I’ve been at my institution for seven, almost eight years now. And I started off exclusively in the IEP, however, probably four to five years ago, I transitioned into this current position that I’m in. And what that mostly entailed was as Campus Coordinator, which is really an in-house title. Not an official like HR designation. Um But I work, I just sort of liaise and partner with broader campus and I would say that the sort of the jumping off plan for that was to partner with our Center for Teaching and Learning. And they run graduate courses. Some credit, some non-credit courses. And one of the main things was their international teaching assistants course, and what it really is it’s one course that run, that used to run fall and spring semesters, however in recent years because of the enrollment, we’ve tapered down to just fall semester, which I teach. And I’ve been doing that for at least three years now. And in addition to that, I partner with that same department to do the international teaching assistants’ orientation at the beginning of both fall and spring semesters.

Soha: Wonderful.

O: They have just a teaching assistant orientation, just general, but then I do kind of what would you call it, kind of a break-out session for the international TAs. So I’m involved in that way. Additionally, I work, I have developed my own workshops and short courses and a number of other sort of support services and all things, and I just do that. It’s a very, very tight budget and it’s never reliable. But when our time and finances allow, I try to run as many of those support services as possible. I’ve done like a brownbag luncheon, you know, just whatever I sense that people could use. That’s sort of the broad stroke of all the things that I’m doing. Um so I would say that the bulk of that really centers around that ITA course.

Soha: Of course. Would you tell me more about the course itself? Like how many students you typically have? What do you teach in the courses? And do you teach them all by yourself or are there other equipped faculty that can help you?

O: so I teach the course as a two-credit course, which means that it meets I think three hours a week, one and a half sort of two-days a week, included in that I also offer at least two-half hour private tutorials, so one-on-one private tutorials with them. So it’s a pretty big undertaking, but I find that that’s what it takes to get them the support that they need.

Soha: So when you say two half hour tutorials, that’s for each ITA you train?

O: For each ITA I train.

Soha: Wow.

O: Over the course of a semester. Sometimes if we have time, I might work even maybe a fifteen minute one. So I teach it alone; it is not co-taught. I’m the only one who teaches this course. Actually on the entire campus. However, I say that each department, though, does have the opportunity, so I offer it to the whole school, to the whole university, but some departments and some units and some schools have their own in-house ITA classes. So I say that to say that some departments don’t really need me. You know what I’m saying. So they have their own way of serving their ITAs. So for example, just to give an example, the Math department has their own ESL person who runs their own ITA screening and they do all the orientations. So that’s just really, I offer it to the whole university, and we try to advertise to them and people come to know
it through the Center for Teaching and Learning. But I don’t, I wouldn’t say that the entire university is my audience necessarily.

Soha: Very interesting. So they are not under any obligation to send their ITAs to you for them to be trained; they can do their own thing.

O: Right. So in other words, yea, there is no centralized way for doing that.

Soha: Is there a way they make sure that they are doing it, like correctly by touch basing with you or something? You’re the expert, so like

O: No. The short answer to that. I’m trying, that’s one of the reasons that I have come to the Symposium and the Conference in the last couple of years, just to try to get a sense of what other universities are doing and how I might be able to develop a model around what other universities are doing.

Soha: Yea.

O: That gives you that there is a real demand for that.

Soha: Oh my god!

O: and I’m sure you experience the same thing; we’re all in the same boat. That’s why the Symposium and the Conference are so great. So I, so it’s offered fall semester, it’s a two-credit course, that meets three hours a week. I teach it independently. Um what else did you wanna know? So I focus on in terms of the content itself, the curriculum, I focus on, this is my own brand. There have been people who have taught it before, and I looked at the syllabi and I think that primarily they focused on, I mean it’s all oral communication, but you know pronunciation, looking at sort of aspects of oral communication, um just to be real specific: stress, thought groups, intonation, um which I do cover in my course. However, I expanded mine to also include, what I try to say that there is language, communication, and pedagogy. So language is the English language skills, um so the linguistics, right? And then communication. I sort of put in that a bit of cross-cultural communication, non-verbal, presentation, some of the other aspects of language and communication. And then finally pedagogy. So how to, but I always try to take it from the lens of again the cross-cultural angle, so ideas and concepts and practices of pedagogy, of teaching and learning across cultures. So I let them look at sort of their own home country attitudes just to you know to language itself and to teaching and we kinda dig into that a little bit. We do sort of home country educational, what do I call that, it’s sort of a mini project of kinda, sorry I’m not being very articulate.

Soha: You mean like they reflect on

O: So they get to take an aspect of education and kind of do a comparison. Sort of cultural comparison, compare and contrast. So it could be something as simple as um, one student looked at the use of questions. So what’s the culture. So in her country, asking questions in class is always considered a waste of time and very selfish, whereas Q & A and that sort of exchange in the U.S. is almost a bedrock of any in-class instruction. So kinda looking at the comparison of that. So that’s another sort of overarching major theme that I weave into the curriculum.

Soha: so when it comes to pronunciation, it doesn’t take up like most of your time, right? Like what’s the percentage?

O: Yea. I would say not more than a third. I try to do a third, though I weave the cultural aspect into really everything. Sort of view culture as a backdrop of everything we’re looking at in terms of language, culture, and pedagogy. How does that inform and influence and enhance even the things we’re looking at as a TA.

Soha: so the class is a two-credit course, and it’s offered you said in the fall and the spring as well?
O: It was offered in the spring up until this past year. This past year we did not offer it in the spring because of enrollment. And I can talk a bit about enrollment. So it’s very patchy. To give you a short answer. Sometimes we’ve had, we cap it at, in this particular department, the Center for Teaching and Learning, we cap the classes at 16. So we really offer very intimate instruction and really being able to customize it to the students and provide them with a lot of one-on-one. Like I said I offer tutorials. We’re really focused on deeply and you know in a Quo Vadis way sort of meeting the students, you know, their needs. Providing them lots of feedback they can kinda use. Cause they’re not getting a lot of support services, so they can use this in a way that kinda carries them as far as it can.

Soha: Can you talk to me a little bit about the tutorials? Like what’s the focus of them? Or is it like customized based on their needs?

O: Yea. Yes. It’s highly customized because you know I have the content in the class. I also should mention that the way I design the class is that so, let’s say it’s Tuesday and Thursday, for example. Tuesday, I’ll do a lecture. I’ll do a presentation of sort of a topic for that week. So let’s say, it’s thought groups. I’ll do a whole lecture on that. We might do some in-class kinda participation. They work in pairs, but then typically what would happen is Thursday they’ll have to do some microteaching. And I might focus on their thought groups. But they also simultaneously maybe they have to present a syllabus. So they will be getting a bit of the pedagogy and a chance to kinda interact with some aspect of teaching. So I’m using that as a platform.

Soha: I see. So that’s when the tutorials play in?

O: Yes.

Soha: like you take the focus of the lesson or the week, and you go to the tutorial and you focus more on that, right?

O: Yea. The tutorial is really an opportunity for them. It can be a chance for me to give them detailed feedback. I like to give global feedback in class. So I’d say here are some themes I’ve noticed in all of your presentations, things that I’ve noticed that all of you can stand to work on. But then in a tutorial, I’ll give them, you know, I might have had a rubric or something and I’d go through that rubric specifically for their presentation. But also I like to give them a complete open opportunity to ask anything from class. Maybe they have a question that they didn’t get to answer or something that’s very personal that they might did not want to share with the class, but really it’s a pressing question. Or something I presented in class that they want to know more. I even say it can be anything, especially if you’re a current TA, that wasn’t covered in class. It doesn’t have to do with the presentation, but you just have a burning question. It’s something topical for you for that week in your current TA context or practice, and I’m happy to go over it. It could even be, they’re gonna present something, even at a conference. It’s got nothing to do with the class, nothing to do with the TA practice, but it’s just something that they want. But it has to have something to do with English.

Soha: Of course

O: Then, I’m happy to work with them on that. So it’s really a free-for-all 30-minutes. You get to be in the driver’s seat.

Soha: It sounds to me like you are in a position where you’re mentoring them, closely mentoring them, giving all that care. That’s wonderful, Olivia.

O: Yes. Yes. I try. I try. It’s the intention for sure. (laugh)

Soha: and those tutorials are mandatory or optional?
O: That’s the other thing. Great question. I make it absolutely optional. I like to make them feel like it doesn’t affect their grade. It is an added benefit of them met taking the course. And it is not mandatory, but I would say 90% of the students will use it.
Soha: Wow. So there is a high demand for that?
O: Yes. They really, and actually what I would say is that 10% that doesn’t use it either they decide that they’re not gonna take the class, they’re just a drop-off, or it’s a scheduling issue. It’s rarely that they just think it’s not gonna be useful for them.
Soha: Yea. And when you say like, so what’s the cut score for them to take the class? Is there like a TOEFL score?
O: No. There is no, we do not do screening for the class.
Soha: Really!
O: However, I do an initial assessment the first day of class and an end-of-the-course assessment and that’s just a benchmark. So they can see where they’ve started and look. We set some end-goal setting. I say, so we’ve done this assessment, let’s talk about it. Here are some things I’ve noticed, here are some things we can focus on throughout the course, your personal goals. And then we circle back at the end of that 16 weeks and I use the same assessment tool so they can see how far they’ve come.
Soha: Speaking of that assessment tool, is it like a rubric?
O: So it’s I do, it’s something that we created in-house in my department, and it’s, let’s see I’m trying to think, we focus on um so I have like a short two-paragraph academic excerpt from something and they have to read it. They read it out loud. They have not seen it previously. So I do that for pronunciation, to kind of pinpoint some pronunciation areas. Oh sorry. I start in the very beginning by just asking some general questions, and that’s to look at their language fluency and vocabulary, things like that and some pronunciation. And those are just low stakes, very non-technical questions. Just tell me about your background, that kinda thing. Then I have them read the article excerpt and then I ask them specific questions about the passage and that’s to see their organization and their impromptu kind of abilities.
Soha: Okay. So they don’t get to teach? They basically [interrupted]
O: No! Yes. Exactly, exactly. Yes. Yes.
Soha: But the pedagogical part comes in the class if they are enrolled in the class now, they focus on that?
O: Yes. Yes. Yes. And just to clarify that assessment is used for everybody who’s already enrolled in the class. So I use it on day one of the class, so there is no pre-screening for taking the class. The only thing they have to do is, they don’t pay for it, the department pays for it, or the Center for Teaching and Learning, I’m not even sure. I’m not involved in that. You know, I think they used to have to get just a permission, but now actually it’s open. They don’t need a permission. I think that sometimes departments might highly recommend them to take it and maybe even some departments are requiring, I don’t know. But on my end, I just get a roster and whoever is in there, however they got there, I have no decision making, I don’t weigh in on that.
Soha: so basically any international student who comes to your institution will be guided to you to do that informal assessment, right?
O: Yes. Through their own departments, through their own academic units, yes.
Soha: So it comes from the departments, or from the Center for Teaching and Learning?
O: Yea. It’s a little confusing, so I’ll try to make that make more sense. So the Center for Teaching and Learning is one, they kind of do, their whole purpose and mission or goal is to
serve graduate students. Um on campus. And any academic unit or department, they just offer courses. So it could be they have TA courses, they have leadership courses, they might even have. To be honest, I’m not sure if they have content courses, but they may. A lot of it is just their main, their classes on teaching and learning. So whatever could be embodied in that. Then you have the academic units all across campus of course, and those units are aware that the Center for Teaching and Learning exists. What the Center for Teaching and Learning did with us, which is partner with us and say hey. I come from a STEM school, so you can imagine we have very high, especially at the graduate level. 42% of our graduate students are international. And it’s huge. So they come to us and say, hey, we’re not the experts in, we’re not linguistics experts. So we’re not experts in English language. So what if you guys came and helped us out with that, and of course, we happily agreed. So that’s how I came in to doing that. And actually that all preceded me. So I don’t wanna give the impression that I created that. (laugh). So I inherited that. So under that structure, so I have little to no communication with the individual academic units and departments. And I believe students can just come across, when they are trying to register for classes and looking at the schedule, they can freely see that my course is offered and enroll if they want to.

Soha: so let’s say that an international TA came to your institution and let’s say that they think that their language skills are good and I don’t need this class. They have that resistance thing going on. So are they coerced in any way to take it or encouraged to take it?

O: Not by me and not by the Center of Teaching and Learning, but by their department, yes. They can have a professor who says, look I want you as a TA, but you’ve got to get your language skills at a higher level, so in order to do this, I’m saying you need to take this course. And that is totally possible. The other thing that I think happens is that a department might send out a specific email targeted to their international students and say we highly recommend you take this course because it will help you if you are at all planning to be a TA. You could have a professor that is assigned a TA, and he or she meets that TA, this ITA, and says you know I’m gonna request that you take this course. But those are some possible ways that a student might be directed to my course. You could also have a student who says I really wanna be a TA and not yet, but I see that this course can help me. So I’m gonna sign up. And I’m not gonna say no as long as it works for my schedule. Does that help?

Soha: Of course. Absolutely, yea. You’re totally answering all my questions. So I have a question about, oh how many are STEM majors in the ITAs you work with? What do you think is the percentage of STEM majors versus humanities?

O: 99% because it is a STEM school. I’m trying to think as you ask this question. I think I have one MBA student and I think maybe, and this is in the last two years, and maybe one other student that I can’t even remember what it would have been. It may also have been a business student. So every once in a while I get one, but pretty much it’s engineering, math, architecture, even like chemistry, I’m trying to think what would be if you’re gonna work for NASA, that type of thing. It’s escaping my mind right now, but whatever that is (laugh).

Soha: Do you ever have students who work in labs only? Like just running labs, like they’re not teaching their own class?

O: Yes. Yes. We have, so that’s a really good question. We have people who are lab TA, people who are just graders, all they do is grade. We have people who do recitations. And then there is one, a couple of them, do tutoring, holding office hours. That’s another one. There are some who might do a portion of lectures. Rarely do I get someone doing full lectures. Usually that’s not the students I get. I’ve had some who have done like maybe guest lecturing, only half the class. I had
one where she’d do a small portion of the class like 5 minutes you know every week. I get a wide variety sort of their kind of capacity in which they are a TA, but very rarely do I get any who do full lectures.

Soha: do you ever get the sense while you’re teaching that there is a sort of tension like that’s not what I need, or I don’t use that ever in a lab, so why do I need to do present on a skill that I don’t need in a lab, if I’m just running a lab? You know that resistance.

O: Yes. And then. I mean, my students because it’s self-selecting, although you might get people who were heavily encouraged to come, and I think what my experience has been, we actually did a department-specific class, and that department required 12 students to come take one of my courses. And the most common, at the very end, the most common comment and feedback that I got in the student feedback surveys was “At first I did not wanna take this course. I did not understand why I had to take this course. I resented it. I hated the course.” But they all said, “But in the end, I was able to see its value.” So yes, certainly in the very beginning you kinda get this, and people some people especially if they come by their own volition, they drop out. They feel I don’t need this. But for those who stay in or are forced in, they. Some of them, I’m sure have gone off and said that was a waste of time. The vast majority of them say, “Even though I didn’t see immediately the value in taking the course, in the end it was very helpful. And I saw the value of it.”

Soha: and you also mentioned earlier that you do the assessment in the beginning of first class, and then you do it again at the end. So they would see how much they have grown. Is that the assessment you do in order for them to, like assessment for the class basically, or just for their own sake to see how much they have grown? Like is that how they pass the class?

O: Oh no. It is not an exit exam. It’s just really. It’s for them, for sure, but it’s also for us, institutionally to be able to see okay, are we making gains? what kinds of gains? And what do those gains mean?

Soha: and for a student to pass your class, do they need to get like 70% total?

O: Yes. There is an attendance score; they have to attend at least 80% of the class. And then they get a grade. It’s just a letter grade. And truth be told, it is rare that I would fail anyone on performance. You fail, it is usually attendance. So I mean I feel like if you’re coming and you’re doing the work, it is, in my humble opinion, if you have done the work that I’ve asked you to do, there almost no way you did improve on in some way.

Soha: Exactly. I totally agree. Absolutely. I’m gonna back up a little bit, you mentioned that you did orientations, like break-up sessions, for international students, can you tell me how you do it? Or how you go about it?

O: Yea. So I treat it a little bit like it’s a precursor to the course. Um but I do it in an introductory way. So I kinda talk about, we do an exercise where we talk about what American students, sort of like the cultural expectations of the average student, then we do a profile of your average student at our institution. And we kinda look at that and what that means. I have them look at, again, a cross-cultural comparison look at classroom and classroom expectations in the United States versus wherever you’re from. And what those mean. So how do these add value to like group work or communication with your professor because I find that across-cultures that varies widely. And a lot of times, I get that from a lot of students, they say “You guys. You just love this group work. Everything is group, group, group.” So I talk about that. Why that is culturally [incomprehensible speech]. And it does, and they point out that it does seem almost counter intuitive to the very individualism, Americans are very individualistic. And it kind of is almost contradictory. So I talk about that. And we explore that. So I kind of give them the broad strokes.
Let’s look at some themes. How they’re embedded in our culture and what that means. And I also do that with teaching. What is a good teacher, culturally, individually. And what does that look like in an American classroom with American students. But then also cross-culturally because of course at our school saying that you have a typical American student is really saying nothing because you know we are highly international. At the undergrad level, we’re at about 14% international, which is not insignificant, but not nearly like at the grad school. So that’s what I do. It’s a quick 45 minute. I do it more in a workshop style. I have them so a lot of working in pairs and kind of discussing and that sort of thing. So that’s sort of the focus of the break-out sessions.

Soha: I see. Wonderful! Let me go back to my questions. I know that one of my question is for you to reflect, just take a step back and try to look at the training program and see what are the strengths and weaknesses of that program? Like broadly speaking.

O: Okay. So of the program? You mean my class?

Soha: Yea. The class because basically the program is your class, right?

O: Yes.

Soha: we can’t really tell what the departments do on their own.

O: Exactly. Although I would say that’s like a huge challenge. It’s the decentralization. But I think that that’s nothing new or even all that interesting. At this point, everybody has that. You know it’s not unique to us. Um I think it’s just the way it is, and when you’re operating on a big university, you know with tens of thousands of people literally it’s just hard to do that. To get that coordinated into some centralized, streamlined system. So that I would say is a big thing. In terms of teaching the course and what are the challenges around that. It’s enrollment. It’s so patchy like I said. I think I started to say and didn’t finish. So we had up to 16 which have been moved up. We had up to 16 and 14 and 12, but recently it’s been much more around 10 or 8 or even 6. And that is why we stopped running it in the fall. And there are a couple of reasons for this: number one, I think advertising. I think something about the messaging we’re not quite tapping into in the right way. Secondly, I think that among graduate students, graduate [research] assistantship is more highly prized than a teaching assistantship, and that’s just at our institution. That’s just what it is. So we’re sort of a) not people’s first pick, and when they get us, it’s kind of getting into your second choice school. You see what I’m saying?

Soha: ah

O: so it kinda feels let’s do this. It will get me in the door, but really my eye, so the prize is getting a graduate research assistantship.

Soha: because it’s a STEM school.

O: Very research heavy, research based, that’s sort of the prize. So there’s that. The other thing is that they are so darn busy, you know. And I had at least every semester, a handful of students, three to four students come up and say “I really want to take your course, but it just doesn’t fit my schedule.” And if you move the schedule to accommodate those people, of course you’re inconveniencing others. So you just have to pick the time and hope that it works. So I think those are the three main challenges in our enrollment. What is best about it is that I think it works. The success of the students who stay and really do the work, are motivated, and stay in it, and attend and do all the microteachings, they come back and say the work I did here had a direct impact on the quality of my teaching.

Soha: I see.

O: and I’m thankful for that and I find that a lot of those students would continue to use me past the course. So I had a lot of students, a year later who would say, “Oh, I’m doing X presentation,
and I enjoyed your class so much. Would it be possible to come by and just do a quick tutorial, and I always take them.
Soha: Oh that’s so sweet.
O: That’s real nice.
Soha: That’s evidence that it’s working.
O: To me that’s evidence that they got something that is true value. And a long-term value. Not just an immediate value.
Soha: That’s wonderful. Do any of the students get training on professional development in terms of how they can read their own end-of-semester evaluations, for instance?
O: Yes. I do a whole unit on feedback surveys. Student feedback in general. And I have them go through a process to sort of mock. Even if you’re tutoring, if you do a lab, if you’re holding office hours, to walk them through the process. To talk about the cultural value of feedback. We talk about language around feedback. So I kind of go through the whole gamut of feedback and sort of the practice of it. And so they actually practice and then they look at the feedback. They have to do a report. I kind of don’t make them give me every single bit of data, but there is one question, it’s that question that we are asked as faculty. All things being equal, overall what’s the teaching effectiveness of this professor or whatever. So I have them you know do a feedback survey that they give to their students or whomever they’ve served, and they go through that process that I would as faculty member. And then reflecting upon that, like what does that mean. So let’s say you have ten students, you look at outliers, so there is somebody who says this teacher is horrible and you see one instance of that. You don’t ignore that, but you consider it an outlier. But then you look for patterns and themes. You know did you mostly get 3s or 4s or 5s? what does that mean? And where did you get those 3s and 4s and 5s? so I kinda have them go through that, and then mostly reflecting on that.
Soha: Of course. Do you get to see the evaluations as well or the formative feedback that they get?
O: Yes. So they put it all in a PDF file and they upload that to my course management system. And then I have them submit their reflections on it. Yea.
Soha: so have you noticed by looking at those feedback forms that there is a pattern of some sort that like some comments that keep coming up from undergrads? Like I don’t like this or you need to fix this or something that you feel was pressing from undergrads.
O: Yea. I would say really it’s language. So sometimes I have to kinda tease out if it’s actual pronunciation language or communication.
Soha: ah
O: Sometimes I have to tease that out a little bit. Sometimes they would say “I don’t understand when they speak,” and that could be one of two things, right? You can assume to some degree that that’s a language issue, but sometimes it could be that they understand the words, but maybe somehow they are not connecting. Like their communication style is not getting them connected. Um but a lot of times they do say, I’m trying to think of some specific examples, they might even just say for example, “The TA doesn’t seem confident in his abilities.” And so that may also be language abilities or presentation abilities, communication abilities, teaching abilities, right? But here is what I do find: I think that the students don’t wanna be harsh. So that’s kinda nice, but sometimes it masks maybe some of the feedback that could be useful to us.
O: So yea. But I would say overall it’s mostly, I think language. And a little bit of communication. What I found a lot of the TAs, their language is not so incomprehensible. I think
with students sometimes when they hear there is an accent, they immediately kind of have this, “Oh okay. I’m not gonna understand.” This person is speaking English as a second language. So I try to work with the TAs to try to almost call that out. Okay. Here’s the elephant in the room is that I have an accent. But I feel that if they could, and this is a communication issue, if they could kinda put their students at ease a little bit with that, so that they then can move on to the communication or connecting with their students, that whole kind of affective filter thing, you know. Let’s all say, I have this accent. And sometimes you are not gonna understand me, but if you don’t, please, by all means raise your hand, interrupt me, I’m happy to answer any question about anything I’ve said. But you know now let’s communicate. So everybody could relax about that and just really try to communicate. And I kinda get the TAs, the ITAs, to assume some kind of responsibility for that, if that makes sense. And so that’s a big thing.

Soha: so when you say “communicate,” do you mean like meaning negotiation thing?
O: Yea, yea, yea. I think that’s usually more of the issue than lifting off the S of a plural word. Like I don’t do that. Even if I sort of mispronounce something, but you probably got it more or less and I may have repeated some things, but I also just you know maybe you’re using a gesture that I don’t understand, right?
Soha: Yea. So cultural stuff too?

Soha: Yea. I totally get what you’re saying. Like very subtle cultural stuff, maybe nonverbal but it causes some you know tension or misunderstandings, right?
O: even like for example, the other day I had a student come in the other day and said, you know, and she has beautiful English language skills, but she said, “when I answer students sometimes, they kinda pull back.” And she said “I think it’s because I’m really direct.”
Soha: Ha! Interesting.
O: and I said, “Yes, I can see that.” And I said, “You have great English, but when you are asking me a question, there is.” So we talked about mitigating language, framing. And I said sometimes you might wanna say, “I have a question. I don’t know if you’ve answered it already, but tadada.” I said even just that little preamble and this is something that people don’t teach exactly. And I said that’s not about pronunciation. That language use and communication, that’s something you’re kinda framing and softening something. And you can be then as direct as you want, given your question or providing the answer. And I think that your students maybe they say, “I have a question. What do you think tadada?” and you’re just going right in, but maybe if you say something like, so I gave her all these sort of phrases. I said you know, “That’s a great question, I can answer by saying tadada.” Try that, and I’m betting you’ll get a different response. And I bet your student doesn’t recoil.
Soha: Wow. Olivia. This is wonderful. We have to be friends. You’re my idol.
O: No. no. no. no. (laugh)
Soha: Really like all your perceptions on how things need to be. I’ve learned a lot from you, and I think I was there in the symposium two years ago, so I’m gonna go back and look at my notes cause I took notes when you were presenting.
O: Yea! If you need a follow-up, feel free to email me, and I will give you any materials that I used two years ago. I’ll be happy to give you feedback.
Soha: Thank you. Thank you so much.
O: Thank you. Take care.
Appendix J

Interview with Nancy Barr from Michigan Tech University
March 6th, 2017
34 minutes

Soha: So my first question to you is for you to give me some context of your experience with ITAs, how you got to that, how you came to the idea of training or preparing ITAs?
Nancy Barr (N): Sure. We’re a pretty large program. We have about, currently we are at around 1400 undergrads and not quite, but somewhere around 400 graduate students. And that’s in a small university. So total enrollment at our university is less than 8000. So we’re a huge program in a small university, which means that when we see a problem or an issue we generally have to deal with it ourselves. So we don’t have, I mean we have a graduate school, we have a Center for Teaching and Learning that provide some really good support, but it’s very easy for our department to overwhelm other resources around campus. So I wanted to set the stage with that first.
Soha: Of course.
N: Um I have been with the department now for 10 years and I started getting interested in our students’ writing skills probably around maybe 9 years ago. I started getting involved lecturing in our Senior Design classes. And when I started here in the department, I did not have any sort of administrative role or anything and I just had a Bachelor’s degree. But I had some unique skills because I had been a newspaper reporter and editor and a published novelist before I came here. So I knew a lot about writing. And it kinda became well maybe there’s something I can do here. So I got my Master’s degree and the focus of my Master’s degree was about Writing Across the Curriculum.
Soha: Wow
N: and Writing in the Disciplines. So from that it became okay we know we have some issues with students once they hit Senior Design: They do not present very well, they are not able to understand audience and things like that. So we can’t, we don’t have time to teach them in Senior Design. We’ve already got a lot of stuff crammed into that course. Can we move Writing and well I’d just say Technical Communication instruction, can we move that earlier? And one of the things, we already had three required lab courses and twice where we were requiring students to write lab reports. And in a couple of the classes, even make presentations. Those lab reports were being evaluated by the GTAs, most of whom were international because a huge portion of our graduate student population is international. So the issue I ran into when I would talk to faculty in charge of these courses and say, you know, can we maybe beef up instruction here, you know, their response would be, “Well I’ve got these GTAs who do not speak English as their first language. I don’t see how we’re gonna be able to do this.” I started doing some research on what we could do, and one of the things that came up is students learn communication skills, one of the ways they learn it is, through formative feedback. So formative assessment. Giving them effective feedback on things. In the past, our GAs have pretty much focused on in the lab report: Did you follow the instructions correctly? Did you get results that were sort of in line with what you were supposed to get?, a lot of checking numbers and equations, but not really focusing on how well the students had communicated their efforts and their results, and that’s how this training program came about. It’s thinking about okay so how can we, how can I train them to provide more effective feedback.
Soha: so that formative assessment was like after each session in the lab or at the end of the semester?
N: So this all started, oh gosh, probably about 7 years ago. Um. It evolved to a point where I sat down with faculty the summer of I think 2012 and we came up with a set of guidelines that would apply to all three labs and then a rubric that can be customized for each lab course. But the training would take place at the beginning of the semester. I think we did our first training session, the first series of training sessions, in fall of 2012.
Soha: I see. I’m sorry I interrupted you. I just was curious to know like if that formative assessment happens once a semester, like at the very end?
N: Oh no. That was. So the formative assessment um I was training them to every time they evaluate the lab report, they would go beyond just checking equations and numbers and things like that. So every lab report, the GAs were expected to provide some feedback to the students on whether or not they have effectively communicated the information. So part of the training sessions, the GAs, and it wasn’t just international GAs, all of the GAs involved with the labs go through the training. But we teach them, here we have them think about what are the aspects of good communication, and then we do not have them focus on things like grammar and punctuation. So that eases a lot of people’s fears cause even domestic students are not that great about that kind of stuff. So um yea there is an expectation that every time they are evaluating, they’re providing some sort of feedback on those things.
Soha: So it happens pretty frequently throughout the semester because it’s formative, it’s supposed to guide them through you know their teaching and learning, right?
N: Yea. And one of the things we stressed is provide, spend the time to provide a lot of feedback early on, and as the semester goes on the hope is that the students will start to catch on and you won’t have to provide quite so much feedback toward the end. That’s the idea of constantly learning and getting better.
Soha: aha. So did the training or preparation program feed on those evaluations, like they would basically read through those comments that show, like you look for patterns for instance and you train them based on those patterns or was the teaching related to those comments that come from students?
N: Well, one of the things we did was, first of all, I don’t have access to the teaching evaluations. They are kept private. But one thing we did with two of the lab classes is that at the end of the semester we have the students fill out a survey. And it was a qualitative survey. So they had to answer like 7 different questions. And they start with that feedback from the students. I would go back, and I would tweak the training. And the training improved because we had more feedback from the students and I was able to take that feedback to the next round of TAs and say, “This is what students are saying. This is what they’re looking for.” Which I think took some of the mystery out of things for the TAs. What I find a lot of the time with the international TAs, they would be so afraid of possibly losing their TA positions if they got bad evaluations that they would grade very lightly, not provide much feedback, and we had students getting out of the classes with A’s and B’s who were doing barely B-level work. So that problem I think it kind of abated. I wouldn’t say it went away completely with training.
Soha: And were their fears grounded in something? Was it rational fear? Was it possible that they can lose their TA-ship based on evaluations or no?
N: Um actually it was a fear that was not based in reality because our graduate program director in our department is the one who assigned GTA positions, and he has made it very clear to me on several occasions that he will not remove a TA for harsh grading. In fact, if anything, we think
that’s a positive. So if a TA gets bad, poor teaching evaluations, it usually doesn’t have to do anything with grading. It has much more to do with the students feeling like the TA didn’t know what he or she was doing in the lab and you know not providing feedback in a timely manner. Sometimes we had issues with GAs basically falling off with grading for the last half of the semester and not grading anything until students are done with the class. And then also if the students feel like they can’t understand what the TA is saying. Our TAs have to go through a Speak test, but if they get nervous or whatever might be the case, sometimes the students have a tough time understanding them. It’s not so much a problem anymore, but it used to be a bigger problem.

Soha: Would you tell me a little bit about their placement and what kind of Speak test it is? Just tell me a little bit about how they are placed in that training? Does everyone get placed or do you look at their TOEFL scores first and then test them? How does it work?

N: We do not have nearly enough TA positions to go around, so it is a competitive process. One of the first things we look at are their TOEFL scores. I do not know what the cutoff is, but I know that it is one thing we look at. Another thing we look at is whether their past experience might be a good fit with a particular class. So if we need a TA for say a Thermodynamics course or something like that you know, do they have a good thermo background. So their expertise in that area plays a role and also prior experience. So if we have say a PhD student coming in who has some teaching experience regardless of where that was. If it happened in India or the U.S. you know that person is gonna be in a better position to earn a TA. Once we made that decision, then for all the international students they have to take what I call the Speak test. I’m not familiar with the format of it or anything. I think it might be through the Center for Teaching and Learning, but I don’t even know that.

Soha: So the committee that assess those ITAs on the Speak test are faculty members from uh?

N: No. It’s mechanized. It’s all automated, so they have to speak into a computer system.

Soha: Oh I see. That’s very similar to TOEFL iBT for instance. I would imagine like the speaking section of that.


Soha: And the evaluation. Who administers that test?

N: I’m not sure who administers that. I do know that a graduate director would get the scores from it and then make a final determination as to whether that person gets a TA position or not.

Soha: Okay. Okay. So let’s say that hypothetically an ITA took the Speak test and, you said like based on how they are scored basically whether they get a TA position, do all of them take the training?

N: Only TAs who are assigned to classes where there is a lot of writing get this particular training because the training focuses on evaluating student writing. And there are some classes where TAs are grading exams; they’re not grading lab reports or essays or things like that. So yea, it’s only a subset that go through the training that is offered in my department. Now there’s a seven-week course offered through the Center for Teaching and Learning that all GTAs on campus have to complete, at least all GTAs in our department. I think we’re moving towards it being campus wide. Right now it’s a few departments that require it. That focuses on things like how to design a syllabus, classroom management, and you know the typical, it’s broader, very general.

Soha: and you said earlier that that course is basically for ITAs and domestic TAs.

N: Yes. There is no differentiation between the two. We also have another program called The International GTA Assistance Program. So that program is separate, and that’s voluntary. And
that is something for say a TA, a person might think they wanna be a TA, but you know don’t do well on the Speak test and doesn’t end up being awarded a position. They can volunteer through this program and they will get some instruction over the semester and the domestic U.S. higher education system. They will get a better understanding of American students’ expectations, and they’ll work with some American undergraduate students on improving their communication skills.

Soha: Oh wow. So that’s, you said it’s voluntary.
N : Yes.
Soha: So an ITA would choose to be there. They don’t have to?
N : Right. Right.
Soha: Do you know if the enrollment, does it make?
N : I don’t know. I don’t know. And I don’t know even if it’s a formal class. I think it might be almost like a group meeting session
Soha: Like a seminar
N : Yes, like a seminar or something. And I don’t know the timing of it. I actually don’t know of anyone in the last 5 years in my department who’s gone through it. That doesn’t mean they haven’t. I just am not aware of it.
Soha: so let’s talk about the training that you are part of. You said like it’s only for writing, like those who teach a domain where writing is a big part, right?
N : aha
Soha: So would you tell me a little bit about the nature of that preparation or training and what informed your decision to make it both for domestic TAs as well as ITAs?
N : Sure. Um the reason for it being both is the domestic TAs needed the training just as much as non-domestic TAs. And many cases I saw that especially TAs from India seem to have a much better grasp of, they seem to be pretty decent at evaluating writing. In many cases more so than the domestic TAs because remember that these are all mechanical engineering graduate students. So their undergrad is in mechanical engineering. And for domestic students quite often they’ve been through mechanical engineering undergraduate programs that do not provide any training in technical communication. So their skills aren’t that great. And so that was the reason to include all of them. They all needed this understanding of writing pedagogy and some information about formative assessment. And I use a book um written by Beth Finch Hedengren. Trying to remember the name off the top of my head. Hang on just a sec.
Soha: Sure
N : It’s called A TA’s Guide to Teaching Writing in All Disciplines. And it’s a 10-year old book at this point. But it addresses all the concerns our TAs would have, regardless of their background.
Soha: So basically the class is mainly pedagogy. So teach them how to teach writing or how to give formative assessment on writing, right?
N : Yes.
Soha: and when you say it’s Technical Communication, would you tell me about what exactly is to expect in a Technical Communication class?
N : Sure. So we since done a curriculum revision, and we no longer have those original 3 laboratory classes. We replaced them with 4 mechanical engineering practice courses. Those courses have communication instruction embedded in them. So they start off with pretty basic stuff, like the traditional lab report. But then they move on to writing, they’ll do some tests and they’ll do some test reports. And they write memos to a supervisor making recommendations.
And they’ll make presentations at the end of the semester. And as they move through the mechanical engineering courses, they’ll start doing some smaller design projects. And making presentations, and doing small papers on that. So those are, we’re trying to teach them the types of communication formats they’re going to see out in industry. Cause much of our students go into industry. They don’t often go to graduate school. So we try to train them for that. It’s a rhetorical-based approach. So very much thinking about audience, and how to analyze an audience, think about, you know, the wording of a particular assignment, what does that mean, how to figure out who your audience is and what your audience needs. And you know as part of that the training for TAs, we also kinda inject that in there as well.

Soha: and if you look at the training, I hate to call it training, preparation program, what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of that program in its current shape?

N: In its current shape the biggest weakness is that it’s delivered online through our learning management system, Canvas. And the reason for that is that we have such a large cohort of GTAs that it’s impossible to get, their schedules are so diverse; it’s impossible to get them all in the same room five times a semester. But we had to move it online. Now there are some things I’ve been able to do with that in terms of you know having online discussions. So there’s a little bit of interaction between the two, but by far that’s the biggest weakness. The biggest strength of it is I think the content is good, the book is helpful, and just having them do some preparation for these classes I think has been helpful. Now another issue that we run into is they need supervision. They need mentoring. And it’s hard for faculty to provide that. We’re a research university. So our faculty have a lot of demand on their time. And many of them are a little bit reluctant to try to provide that mentoring. And there is not heck of a lot I can do about that. But you know, I don’t wanna make this sound like it’s not working because it is working. But it comes down to we’re crunched for time. That’s a big problem.

Soha: And have you or how do you regularly measure the success of the program? Do you do a program assessment you know every few years?

N: Yes. So I just finished my dissertation in February of last year.

Soha: Congratulations.

N: and my dissertation focus, thank you, um it focused on this program. So the assessment I did was I took senior design final report from the spring of 2012, so that was before this program was instituted. So the TAs that these students had had zero training in formative assessment. And I compared those to final reports from spring 2015. Those students had, all their lab TAs had been through the training. And I got a group of graduate research assistants who had outstanding English and writing skills and I had them do an assessment. So I wasn’t the one who actually did the assessment. I had third-party people. They did a blind assessment and the numbers showed that, it was a small sample, um I don’t remember the specifics of it, but my dissertation is out there somewhere in Digital Commons. But we did see some improvements in some areas. We used the university learning goal rubric for written communication as our guide. That’s the assessment guide that we were using university-wide. And we saw some improvement in uh I can’t even remember the categories at this point. Let me take a quick look at this. It’s probably easier to go to my ASW paper. Okay. So we saw some minor improvement in organization, and conventions, meaning just following the conventions of the engineering field. We saw major improvement in content development. They did a much better job of explaining themselves and being clear about what they were trying to communicate. It was much. They just did a much better job at following a step-by-step process and explaining themselves. And we saw major improvement in the use of sources as evidence. And this is not just citations, but also they did a
better job of providing evidence for their claim. So if they would make a recommendation, they had the evidence there to back up the recommendation.
Soha: I see. That’s wonderful. So basically all the students are from the same major. Am I understanding this correctly?
N: Yes.
Soha: It sounds like a solid program to me, like it shows that there is an improvement with student performance after the training in comparison to if they don’t get it, right?
N: Yes.
Soha: so now that we have talked about the strengths and weaknesses of that specific program, I wonder about professional development for international teaching assistants in particular. For reasons that are, like I see very often that international teaching assistants because they come to a different culture, they are not familiar with academia here or how the classroom works or you know it’s really a foreign context for them. So I often hear from ITAs that they don’t get enough guidance, you know, outside of the classroom in terms of professional development or mentorship. Is there any services that are offered at Michigan Technological University in terms of mentorship or professional development whether it’s for ITAs only or for ITAs and domestic TAs as well? Is there something in place for that?
N: There is nothing formal other than this class that I mentioned it’s called ED 0510 through the Center for Teaching and Learning. Now, you know what I shouldn’t say that. There is a program that we started by our Cognitive and Learning Sciences Program. They have a certificate you can get in STEM higher education. And it’s a Mechanical Engineering grad student who are really interested in going into academia. I would advise them to get that certificate. Now that’s on top of you know any classes they would take for their ME program, however there is no formal mentoring program. What happens is it runs in informal basis. So as an example we have had faculty take on a grad student who say I really want to be a faculty member someday. And I’m especially interested in teaching and they will have that student almost as an instructor in the class. And they will sit in on the lectures and provide pretty routine feedback. But that’s on a case-by-case basis. Mostly our faculty are more interested in having their TAs do research and publish.
Soha: because I would imagine your school is mainly concerned with scholarship, yea?
N: Yes.
Soha: so it’s not primarily a teaching school, so maybe that informs those decisions as well, I’d imagine?
N: Yes. I know there are programs out there like one that started at Syracuse like preparing future professoriate or something like that. Um we don’t have a program like that. We would, there’s been some talk of trying to do something like that, but it’s at the very early stages, and again a lot of it comes down to resources. Michigan was hit really hard by the recession of 2007/08 and we lost a huge chunk of state funding. We’re just starting to get back to our formal levels. So we’re really struggling with resources.
Soha: I’m sorry. This is like the state of the nation. I hear a lot about funding cuts.
N: aha
Soha: My last question for you, I think you talked a little bit about end-of-semester course evaluations. And I remember you said you do not have access to them, is that correct?
N: I do not personally know. Our graduate program director does, though.
Soha: So you’re not familiar with what kind of comments ITAs specifically get or if there is a pattern?
N: I am simply because the faculty will talk to me about it, and the graduate program director will tell me if you know there’s any red flags or anything we need to address. I would say as far as patterns things have definitely gotten better in the last several years since the university and the department have spent more time at better preparing TAs. The comments generally still fall into one of two categories, and that is feedback is not fast enough, you know there’s not enough of it. We haven’t completely solved that problem. And the other is a sense that the TA is not knowledgeable enough about the lab equipment. So when they have to go in and actually use some equipment and it breaks or it’s not working right, it’s very important that the TA actually knows how this stuff is supposed to work. And we put a lot of effort into solving that issue, so I think that definitely has gotten better. But you know these are the main two areas.

Soha: So it’s never, I understand that the courses are mainly writing, like writing-heavy courses, but there is nothing that stood out to you in terms of their language skills? Like when I say language, I mean like communication skills or them being comprehensible or their accents. Nothing like that?

N: Not nearly as much as it used to be and not nearly as much as in other departments. And in part that gets back to the idea that you know to get a GTA position in our department, that’s a privilege. There’s a lot of competition for them, so we can be really picky. So generally you know it’s the best students who are getting those positions, and we do a pretty decent job of vetting them, so we don’t have the issues that we did maybe 15 years ago. We can be picky. And we do provide the extra training for them.

Soha: That was wonderful. Thank you a lot for your time. We covered all the questions. Thank you for being patient with all my questions and being very elaborate in your answers.

N: Well, good luck with everything. Finishing your PhD research.
Appendix K

Interview with Kimberly Spallinger from Bowling Green State University

November 30th, 2016
49 minutes

Soha: I know you are so experienced with ITA training and you’ve been here like forever, so many years, so I would like to benefit from all this experience and if you can tell me how the ITA program evolved throughout the years and how it started or if you can give me some historical information, yea, some reference?

K: Well, I have been most involved with the ITA program since, uh, well the ESOL program is so small we don’t have an ITA, since 2004 when I came back but I also taught the class 5050 in 2002, I believe. So I have been around it for a long time. I would say the biggest changes that you can see when we first started, when the state law was passed in 1986 we didn’t have a big ESOL program here at BGSU. So all students were just going over to CDIS at that time. And then, we did start to get our own, eh, by the time I got to the university, I would say by the early 2000s we came with the ITA class at BGSU. And I would say when I first taught the class, it was very much designed as a support class. Students were placed into it, but it was very much, uh, anyone who took it basically passed and there wasn’t really an assessment to move on. As long as you passed the class, you’d be able to be in the classroom. And the assignments, at that time, the assignments were very much just kinda supporting the students having some sense of community. I would say, when I first taught it, half the class time was spent with individual tutorials with the students. So they would have one week in class and then the next week there wouldn’t be class. The students would come and meet with the instructor for like 30 minutes or something like that in individual pronunciation tutorial.

Soha: So does this mean there was more focus on pronunciation or pedagogy?
K: It was like one week in class would be kind of the pedagogy and then like the next week will be pronunciation
Soha: I see
K: But they did not do pronunciation as a whole class. Also like every other week. So that was a way the class was run when I first taught it a long time ago. So a lot of one-on-one work with the instructor. That, as you can imagine was very time consuming. But also we thought, when we kind of shifted it, we thought, okay, but the students would benefit from more class time and actually practicing the pronunciation more in class. The idea was that students would go first to the Language Learning Center to complete like an hour like tutorial, then they would come and meet with the instructor. But it ended up being that a lot of the students did not really do the hour work, so it was kind of meeting with the students individually and kind of going over things. But we just didn’t feel like it was enough pronunciation work. So then it kind of shifted, um, there was a time when there were three weeks of the semester when students did individual tutorials with the professor.
Soha: This was like a combination? Meeting in the class and then?
K: Yes. So we did that, but yea, it wasn’t really until 2013 when we met the Associate Graduate Dean and the University Council to discuss the ITA. We had this meeting because we were having a lot of trouble, not a lot of trouble, but there was some concern that we weren’t getting all of the ITAs. There would be some kind of anecdotal information that we would find out that
someone would say, “Oh I’ve been teaching at BGSU and we never knew were an ITA. So we had some meetings with the Associate Graduate Dean about how to ensure that we are really in compliance with the state law. And, so we met with the university council and kind of explained our procedures, and he kinda said he thought just passing the class was not a sufficient way of saying that we were maintain the state law, like we had to do some kind of assessment. So that was when we came with the Spoken English Test.
Soha: So that was very recent. You said 2013?
K: Yea.
Soha: Okay
K: So that’s when we did the Spoken English Test at the end of the semester. So, because before, all students really needed was the 70%. And actually because universities like Ohio State, for example, they do not have a probationary clearance period like we do here. So we would say if they take 5050, they can be in the classroom; however, at Ohio State that wouldn’t be the case. So we have set precedence because we did do some benchmarking with other schools when we saw the other schools like Ohio University and some others were giving probationary clearance, so that’s how we are giving probationary clearance. So the only other main change that I would say has happened is that we have had two classes, which you might not be aware of, but we had that class called 5040 and 5050. 5040 used to be a class that students would take before they were in the classroom and they would take that. It was very kind of what would happen in the Communicate textbook, we would do the first half of the chapters, and we would do that before they were in the classroom. But they would focus very heavily on pronunciation, then they would go into 5050. After we made the changes in 2013, one of the things that we were really interested in then was this idea of the different need between people who are assisting in labs, like the chemistry students versus those who were actually the teacher of record. So we decided to split it and have 5040 became the class, probably that happened in uh I’ll check back. But that 5040 became the same thing as 5050, but it was just for people who are teaching and who are teaching assistants, so labs and computer science. And then 5050 is the same level of proficiency, but it was more focused on the pedagogical aspects because the needs are very different. And we were able to do this I think for one year. The chemistry student department used to have a lot more students, they can basically fill up an entire section by themselves. Changes in the funding model and recruitment model, they just don’t have enough students now. I think it was a very good idea if we were a bigger program. If we ever had more student numbers, I think that would be the best way to go. Like some of the math students, for example, well, they are not really teaching, they are working in the math emporium. So they’re just going around answering student questions. That’s very different than, uh, so the classes like 5040 would still focus on, it wouldn’t have necessarily used the Communicate book very much. It was more interactive communication, how do you answer student questions, how…
Soha: That actually makes sense
K: Yea. So that was the plan. And it’s still on the records, like 5040, but the last three years we haven’t had enough students to do it. So that’s the big change. So now we went, so when we did that, we made 5030, which is basically just a pronunciation class. That would be the class students who didn’t have the probationary status, they would take that one first.
Soha: Okay. That makes sense
K: Does that make more sense now?
Soha: Yea. I have always thought like there is that 5040, but no one teaches it, so I wasn’t clear on how that is working.
K: Yea.
Soha: That makes it clearer now.
K: Yes.
Soha: And, you already answered the question about the SET test and how it started?
K: Yea. Probably 2005. Students did our regular oral interview, and we would place them into the ITA class based on that. So that was back in 2005, Dana and I worked together. I wasn’t the director at that time, but she was the Assistant Director of the Program. We talked about coming up with something for the Spoken, like to have some kind of test that students would do. I think at the time it was called the ITA test. But mostly they would do the teaching demonstration. I think your question was about the rubric?
Soha: Yea
K: We adopted the rubric from the Communicate book, which was the class textbook that they were using. So we adopted that kind of a better way to assess.
Soha: And the rubric to me at least makes sense because it is split into language and pedagogy
K: Yea
Soha: And the students when they look at it, like I go through the rubric with them in class many times, so I would explain what each category is, so they understand the language that we are using with them. So do you have any reservation on the SET rubric or do you feel like it’s a good one?
K: Um. It has gone through a couple of revisions. I think if you look at the actual rubric in the textbook, it’s kind of, it is exactly split like 50/50 between the pedagogy and the language. However, given the State Law, we had to adjust more to the language. I think that it has worked pretty well. I don’t know, I think it might be too dense for them. I think sometimes it’s hard because we do wanna share with students how they are being assessed, but I think it’s a little intimidating.
Soha: It’s true. If they look at it before they get into the classroom, they would be like “what! What’s a phoneme?” They are not familiar with that kind of language.
K: Yea. So I think it’s a little intimidating to them, and I do think I have struggled over the years trying to decide what is the minimum score for, like as I told you I think a little bit earlier, originally we had the TOEFL score being set at 21, which we can talk about here in a minute, to get the probationary 21 to 23 which would put you into 5050. I’m not sure that, we’ve kind of gone back and forth over what the actual minimum score should be to get into 5050. We feel pretty good and I still feel really good about the 25 being exempt. So people who get the 25 can handle being in the classroom, not that it necessarily is going to be easy for them, but they are comprehensible and they have met the skills from the class. That’s kind of the dilemma that I have had. If you get a 2 on every single category, that would give you a 20. So right now it is an 18, which means they have some categories that are in the ones. They can still get into 5050, having some categories in the 1. And I think that if those are pronunciation, it depends kind of what the categories are. So if those are pronunciation and someone is getting the lowest category, and that’s something else someone else brought up: there is no zero. So I think the lowest score they can get is a 1, and so I think if some students get into 5050, I think that it is really hard for them to improve enough in one semester to get out.
Soha: That’s true. And it’s a lot of work in 5050 from my experience.
K: Where it seems to me students who are being placed by the TOEFL and they have that either 21 to 23, they seem they can get through pretty easily. So I feel like that number actually works pretty well. But I do think we need to raise the score a little bit on the SET probably for me, I’d
probably make it at least a 20, where at least it was a 2 and maybe they might have a 3 in one category and 1 in another, but that can balance out. But that’s gonna be a huge thing because it has to go through all the way through the Graduate Council to change the scores.

Soha: So you talked about students who are placed based on their iBT scores and it’s only the speaking section, right? So do you feel or do you think that those who, because the iBT is only speaking, there is no teaching, but then those who are placed based on the SET test are rated based on both aspects like pedagogy and language. Do you feel that one is better than the other. I understand that the State Law only focuses on pronunciation, so there is that contention between the three.

K: Yea. And the pedagogical part, which is I think like we should not make someone take a language class because of pedagogy because each department has their own kind of pedagogical class that they give ITAs, not ITAs, but TAs in general. And so to be fair to students, as much as I find the pedagogical part so important in terms of how domestic students are going to respond to ITAs, there also, like it is difficult determining which part of the pedagogical thing, which part of the difficulties might be due to cultural differences in terms of teaching versus somebody might be just not a good teacher. And you wanna be as fair as possible because there might also be domestic students coming in who might also not be familiar with teaching and they have to learn how to teach too. So like trying to balance what can they get from their department in terms of assistance, and some departments provide more than others, but what is the responsibility of the department to make sure that their classes are being taught in pedagogically sound ways. So for the decision to use the TOEFL test was basically just benchmarking with other universities in the state and in 2013 when we looked at the score, we were one of the few that were not using the iBT for placement. So for example I know at Ohio State at least in 2013 ITAs had to have 28 on the Spoken Test. And a 28 is a really high score. So students couldn’t complain. With the State Law students really only have the right to complain if it is about language. I think anyone who has a 28 on TOEFL iBT has the language, absolutely, to be in the classroom. So we realized that we don’t have the numbers in other schools such as Ohio State. We looked at other schools. So, for example, like OU or Kent State, they were using like a 24. There were some schools who were lower than that, but we decided to go with the 24. And what I always try to say to Graduate Coordinators across campus is that 24 means that a student is basically or a speaker is basically comprehensible. It doesn’t mean necessarily that speaking in English in front of a group for an hour is an easy thing.

Soha: That’s true. There’s a difference.

K: yea. Whereas with the 28, someone might have a stage fright or might be afraid, but there is not anything language-wise that is gonna block the communication. The person is going to be fluent enough to talk and understand students pretty easily. A 24 means that the student is comprehensible, and the student has basically, uh, because even though it is the spoken section of the iBT, there is some listening involved in that as well

Soha: that’s true. They have the integrative skills.

K: Yea. So they have to listen to things and then answer. So if they don’t understand, they’re going to be, uh, so I’d say for a 24 that we have decided, could this person understand most of students who are speaking to them. And maybe not 100% of the time, but most of the time they’re gonna be able to understand their students. And their pronunciation is comprehensible enough. So it doesn’t necessarily mean for all students. I’d say most students that I meet with who have the 24, we actually don’t get to see them as much because they’re exempt. But students I have met that were exempt, they are understandable and are able to communicate
pretty well. But it does not necessarily mean that they are not going to experience any problem or that they don’t need support from their department. And we’ve had some students who have chosen to take the ITA class. And for those students, it was more they really were nervous about the pedagogical part in teaching. They’ve never had to teach. There were parts of pronunciation to me, like we’re talking about before, the individual phonemes might be more difficult for them, but I didn’t notice much difficulty with word stress and intonation. So they were pretty comprehensible.

Soha: But they chose to be in the class just to get the pedagogical part.

K: Yea. They definitely had accents, and they definitely had parts of their pronunciation to work on, but they didn’t have parts of their speaking that made me think, “Oh their students aren’t going to understand them.” Their students would probably know they have trouble with the sounds, but it didn’t take away from the meaning of what they were trying to convey.

Soha: So there was never a phase when we would rely on iBT listening and speaking?

K: No.

Soha: It’s only the speaking and through the integrative part of the iBT it’s

K: It’s basically benchmarking, and that’s what the other schools were using. And in my decision-making of the time, I felt comfortable enough with it because how integrated that section was.

Soha: Yea. Makes sense. Yea. Um, let’s see what I have here. I have questions about the Ohio State Law like how the law itself informs the ITA training program, and I think you sent me some documents about the State Law, like it started in 1986 till 1992, if I remember correctly. And if you can tell me a little bit of history, like, did the State Law change?

K: They said it was updated, but I don’t think it changed too much.

Soha: And I think the wording was like, uh, was it “comprehensible?”

K: I’ll check here. It says, “orally proficient.”

Soha: Yes. I think you’re right.

K: Yea. And basically, let me go to the Graduate College page: “each department is to establish a program to assess the oral English language proficiency of all teaching assistants providing classroom instruction to students, and shall ensure that teaching assistants who are not orally proficient in the English language attain such proficiency prior to providing classroom instruction to students.” And so this was mandated in 2011, but I’m not quite sure. I can’t tell what it said. So orally proficient could mean a lot of things.

Soha: Exactly! It’s kinda vague.

K: Yea. And so I think this does give us some leeway. I would say from the years that I’ve been at BGSU, I often have students come and interview me, like they wanna write papers for GSW, or they wanna talk about ITAs, and so I would say I think pronunciation is a big issue. And sometimes when I go into the classroom I see problems. I feel it’s a lot like the cultural part, but there are some ITAs who I think are difficult to understand. So you have to remember often that ITAs are teaching classes that are anxiety-ridden for students. So they are not teaching the 4000-level math classes; they are teaching the 1000-level, even remedial math classes. Students are placed in those classes because they have difficulty with math. And so if it’s not a subject that you feel you’re very strong in and you do feel like you’re having a bit of trouble understanding your professor, you could see how anxiety would rise, like that would make it stressful for you. So how we’ve taken “orally proficient” to be if we talk about 5050 where I think half of the focus should be pronunciation and language development, especially knowing how to pronounce the words in their field, like making sure about word stress and things like that are correct. But
the other 50% I feel that proficiency is also understanding kind of the pedagogical communication skills like knowing that kind of language. So we’re not necessarily teaching them how to teach, but we’re teaching them pedagogical communication, responding to students, understanding the culture.

Soha: Yea. The language used in the classroom is very different than any other language. So they may not be familiar with those idiomatic expressions in the classroom.

K: It is the way to interact with students, answer student questions, provide proper responses, typical things that happen. So that’s kind of, as you said, it’s vague: “oral proficiency.”

Soha: Yea. What does that even mean?

K: Yea. And for them in 5050 like we do use just the speaking section, I mean we interpret that to also be listening comprehension. You could probably argue it’s not. But we do in 5050 have some listening assignments and things like that to help build the listening comprehension, focusing on the reduced speech and idiomatic language so that they can understand their students better.

Soha: Yea. Yea. So we talked about the TOEFL scores and how they changed over the years and the SET and how it evolved.

K: And so the SET, up until before 2013, they were taking it before going into 5050; they weren’t taking it at the end. So we decided to make that change.

Soha: So far, you feel that the evolvement of the course itself, and the SET, and the iBT score, you feel we’re going in the right direction?

K: I think we’re going in the right direction with the resources that we have. Because we are a small program and we do have a limited number of ITAs as well. So if we had a 100 ITAs every semester, I think we could do some things differently. I have been talking to the Learning Commons about the possibility of maybe, they’re interested, I don’t know if this will happen, but they’re interested in hiring an ESOL specialist over there. One of the things I would like an ESOL specialist to do is to see if we could start training students to be pronunciation tutors as well. So if they had that, that person could split their time: half overseeing tutors helping international students with writing, but also having kind of a pronunciation. So that could really assist the ITA teachers because there is just so much in 5050. I guess I should say one other change would be, there used to be, back when I first started teaching the class, there were a lot more observations of the ITAs in the classroom. And so I think I observed all of my ITAs the first several times I taught the class, I observed every single ITA at least three times in their classroom, but also as you can imagine, that is also time consuming. That’s a lot of time for the instructor. So we were meeting with them every other week individually in tutorials. Also observing each student at least three times in the class they’re teaching. I mean, that worked better when we had the 5040 and the 5050 split because now it’s also tricky: half of them are leading, half of them are just assisting. When you have a whole class of people who are actually leading, the classroom is a lot easier to observe. But for the teacher, that’s a lot of work. Some of them are teaching really late at night. So I would be observing people starting 8 am in the morning. And for a fulltime instructor who has a 4/4 teaching load on his or her own, going to observe ten students in their classrooms.

Soha: Like the students I’m teaching right now in 5050, most of them, I’d say 95% they only work in a lab.

K: And I think you have an unusual semester. Cause we usually have more math ITAs.

Soha: So maybe next semester I’ll get a different perspective?
K: And physics. Yea. Cause this semester is, this group that you have is, and I think it’s because most students last semester got placed in the CDIS 6000. But in the past the majority of the students have been teaching math and physics. And they all have been leading their sessions. So I would mix it in with 2 or 3 chemistry students who weren’t, but everyone else I was able to observe.

Soha: Wow. Yea. I was hoping for that kind of experience. Cause I always heard you say, “Oh I go and observe them.” But then I asked my students in the beginning of the semester, and they were all like I just run a lab, and one of them is a research assistant.

K: And why is that student a research assistant?

Soha: He’s taking it to be able to be cleared to teach

K: Ah, okay.

Soha: So in the future he will have a teaching assistantship, but he has to pass.

K: And that’s the other dilemma with the class. The other dilemma is that we say 5050 is for students who are in their first semester of teaching; however, there are students who want to take it before they start teaching, which makes sense too. Because wouldn’t that be great to improve before you actually go into the classroom.

Soha: And I have noticed a couple of my students have been teaching in other institutions during their Master’s, or undergrad, not undergrad, but I think Master’s, a couple of my students had that experience, but they weren’t cleared to teach automatically just because they had taught before in the U.S., and that’s like a policy?

K: Yea. What I do if someone was cleared. I mean, we might not even know, but if someone was cleared to teach in another Ohio university, we can

Soha: Oh, it has to be Ohio university?

K: Yea. Cause we don’t know that standards for different states. So, for example, I had an ITA once who had taught in Texas; however, in Texas, she was teaching in Japanese. And in BG she was teaching something in communication. Does that make sense? So teaching a class in Japanese is different than teaching in English.

Soha: Of course. The nature of the class itself is different.

K: But if someone has received clearance in another university, especially in Ohio, I can waive that and say they have the experience already. But usually we make them take the Spoken English Test too. And then kind of take that into consideration.

Soha: Yea. Both those students actually took the SET in the beginning of the semester, and one student from China, probably you remember her, she was like a borderline student, and she needed just a little push. And the other one is the research assistant who is not teaching currently, but he taught before in Nebraska.

K: And I don’t know if we necessarily knew that when they took it. So we only know that if a student comes and says I took it. But I’ve worked with students from, and especially if they took some type of, like when the students take the Spoken English Test here, we give them a letter at the end that says how they did and whether they are cleared to teach. It’s helpful if students provide that with us.

Soha: I see. Like they had from the previous

K: Yea. Because I have had students from other states who didn’t have the same laws that we have, and they just taught without any clearance whatsoever, like they didn’t do any testing going in.

Soha: But that can be problematic.
K: Yea. So we wanna maintain the consistency but I do always tell my students who take 5050 who did their Master’s here that they’re going to do PhD, like “keep your letter.” Like I’ve had students say I was able to use this letter and didn’t have to take the test. But there has to be some type of verification that they did it instead of a student just saying “I did this.” Cause the standards are different.

Soha: I think I read somewhere, I think on our website, that students who are naturalized citizens or they had their undergrads here or they have residency here, they don’t have to take. I have never seen any example like that who are citizens. Have you had any experience with students who are citizens and do not have to take 5050? Because that doesn’t necessarily mean that they have the language proficiency, right? They can be citizens, but not proficient.

K: So we’ve been relying on departments to send us the names of students. So usually our program does not test citizens. However, we do test permanent residents, and some of our permanent residents have placed into ESOL 5050. And so and we have an incoming ITA for the next semester who is a permanent resident who has to take 5050. Because the state law does not say, it just says, “orally proficient.” And so departments, when they ask, and I’ve had some where we have the English Spoken Test, and I have had some when the department would call and say, “Hey! This person has lived in the United States since they were five.” So what I would do is just to make sure we’re clear like I have done phone conversations with students just to say, “Okay. This student isn’t a citizen, but they’ve been in the United States since they were five. So can they just call me, and I’ll do a 10-15 minute interview.”

Soha: To be fair.

K: Yea. But it feels like making the student come and do the Spoken English Test when they have been living in the United States for 20 years is a little extreme.


K: However, we don’t have, right now the policy for BGSU says, “Graduate assistants who are U.S. citizens or permanent only need if they do not have a graduate or undergraduate degree from a U.S. institution.” So if they have an undergraduate or graduate degree, I feel like they were a couple of weird situations.

Soha: Yea. Like I haven’t experienced any and that’s why I was asking if you had experience with a situation when it’s tricky.

K: So I feel like, I know I did one this summer. And I know the person wasn’t even a permanent resident, but they have been in the U.S. for like 20 years, and so that’s when I was, “Okay. You can demonstrate it.” But if they have an undergraduate degree. But I think there was a case a long time ago when the person was a permanent resident, and did their degree somewhere else. So they didn’t have, it was one of those really weird situations, like 1 in a 1000. Like it was this but they didn’t have the U.S. degree. So but BGSU, the State Law doesn’t say anything, however, the BGSU policy says that if they have the undergraduate degree or permanent resident, they are cleared.

Soha: Going back to CDIS 6000. Because we’ve talked about it off the records. So if you can tell me again the changes that happened in the course, like is it a State requirement? Like when did that happen? What’s the connection between CDIS 6000 and the State Law that says that students have to be orally proficient?

K: So in 1986 when the State Law was passed, BGSU didn’t have a big ESOL program. So we had a writing class for graduate students. That was basically it. We didn’t offer ESOL classes even for undergrads at the time. So at that time that it was passed, I obviously wasn’t involved in the program back then, but the idea was this is the resource that we have on campus already. And
so the graduate students and CDIS needed to have some international work or training ESL kind of tutoring to get their graduate degree. And so that was how the arrangement was set up. And then early like 2000, it was decided that there needed to be, that just that one-hour class wasn’t enough. So that’s when they developed ITA classes here. So there was a long period of time when we did our placement testing where there would be a representative from CDIS and where they would be screened both from CDIS and from the ESOL program. So it used to be when I first started the program that they take our placement test, and if they were an ITA, we had a sign-up sheet where they have to go over there. So they were receiving clearance from both programs. And so we would place them, and they might place them too. And then we started doing it when they would have them come together once we started the Spoken English test, they just came and did the Spoken English Test with us.

Soha: Okay. So they were on the committee?
K: Yea. And they were filling out their own form, and when that happened, and then that became, I think, it was difficult for them because they weren’t on contract during that time, so then they just kind of started letting us decide. So there used to be a lot of time, like now we try to say unless someone has a lot of difficulty with pronunciation, they will take 5050, first, and then maybe take CDIS 6000 afterwards. However, there was a time when students were taking them at the same time. And I think it was just a little too much for the students. So starting this year, CDIS has not really had the staffing to support all of the students. So this semester I have been doing two tutoring with some of the students on my own. So what I’m hoping to do is to develop our own pronunciation class that we can require of ITAs. And maybe we can open for other students as well. They won’t have to take it, it can be optional, like a 1-credit hour pronunciation class. So I’m still trying to work out the logistics of that.

Soha: So you think that will be of place of CSID 6000?
K: Yea. Where it would be taught by ESOL faculty instead. So the difficulty that I’m having is if it’s only a 1-credit hour for the student, how many students does that mean for the instructor if you’re giving one-on-one tutoring, it’s quite a lot of work to do 10 students, one hour a week. So.

Soha: That’s the administrative part
K: Yea. But in theory they really like the idea of having our own pronunciation class. And I think a lot of students would like it.

Soha: Yes. Absolutely. Yes. So just like the final question to wrap everything up, what do you perceive as the strengths and weaknesses of the current program? And how do you envision the future of it? I think you brought upon some of the future part. But right now, like I think we talked before about having the pronunciation to be half of the total, like not to focus more on the pedagogy, and to focus more on the pronunciation. So is that all? Or do you want to add something.

K: So in terms of strengths, I do feel like the program, we try to make it very student-centered. In the courses, we try to have students focus on the language of their field, we try to have them do class observations in their own fields, so it’s not us telling them this is how you teach, but it’s helping push the students to be kind of self-learning and going and seeing what does it mean to be a teacher in my field, in my department. And I really like that part of the program. I do think it’s pretty student-centered. The program has evolved. I think we have some really good assignments that the students do. I like the observations, I like the mini lessons. I think that we do a lot of practice. So I do think the content of the class. It is a very popular class too. In terms of looking at student evaluations of it over the years, students do find it a lot of work, but they do see a lot of progress, and they do find a nice sense of community.
Soha: Yea. Absolutely.
K: And I do think that’s one of the strengths, like teaching in the United States for the first time, having that community of support to discuss things and go through things. In terms of moving ahead, I do think that we could provide more support for students. So I would love it if we could have some pronunciation tutoring available at the Learning Commons. So I think that part, a continuing struggle is students who are taking the ITA classes that they often feel often overwhelmed with the amount of work that they have, of taking full graduate classes, and teaching, some of them teach multiple sections in their first semester of teaching. Teaching two classes and then taking an ITA class on top of that. So I feel we have to always be conscious of that, and try to balance that with how to help them improve their language proficiency and be confident at the same time and not making it a burden.
K: And I don’t know we’ve met the perfect balance for that. But that’s the challenge that we have.
Soha: I had my students take a survey, like the survey to the study, and I can share the link with you. But one student said, he or she said that what we teach them in the class is different than what they do in the class. And they didn’t elaborate on that. So I have to wait till next semester if they would want to have an interview with me. And I have no idea who said that.
K: It might be that lab. I have had that in the last time I taught it. And my course evaluations, one of the students, I can’t remember the question, but one of the students was like the class is wonderful, I love the teacher, none of this applies to what I’m doing, which was really sad for me because even if I really did teach, like the skills would be good for presentations, but I’m pretty sure I know the student. It was kind of like that in every answer, like I love the class, I loved everything we do, but this doesn’t matter to me at all in what I do in computer science. So in computer science, all they do is if a student has a question, they raise their hand, and they go answer. So it reminds me it is matching those two. So if the changes we’re thinking of making where making the class not so much on the mini lessons and more on. But the textbook is very focused on the teacher of record too. And so balancing that if you do have a section where half of the students or more aren’t actually teaching, how do you make it work. So I think if we reduce the number of mini lessons, you could say okay I am explaining a visual. You might be going around and answering student questions, but you still might need to explain this visual and use these words, like kind of use these cues, things like that. Like it would still be helpful. So I think that would help, but I’m curious to see what your students will say. But next semester you will have more students who are actually, I think there are a couple of physics students
Soha: That would be interesting because as I said 90% if not more are actually run the lab, so they do not teach anything.
K: Do you have some physics students?
Soha: Um. I think one or two. I have statistics and chemistry, a lot of chemistry.
K: So the statistics or maybe they are in the math emporium. They are not teaching and just going around. But in the math students, they in the future will probably be the teacher of record, even if they are in the math emporium now. And so I think what the math department has been doing is if they are placing into 5050, they place them in the math emporium. So once they finish 5050, they are the teacher of record.
Soha: Oh, okay.
K: So kind of like scaffolding, which is nice. A lot of time they don’t have enough, like they have to have them in the classroom right away. So but the physics sometime they say even at the
beginning of their lab, they all have to do like a 10 minute spiel. After that, they are just going around. But there is 10 minutes at the beginning of every lab when they have to introduce what they’re doing.

Soha: So they need those skills. The pedagogical.
K: Yea.
Soha: My students are mostly STEM students. Like only one is from American Culture Studies, I believe. So that’s the nature of the population, right?
K: Well, this year was a weird year. Like we did not have any incoming Communication, and in the past, I think this is the first year we haven’t had Communication students.
Soha: Cause when I noticed that I was like why am I getting all STEM
K: The largest number of the students are always gonna be from Chemistry, statistics, or math. But in the past we would always have a couple from Communication, and American Culture Studies. And part of it is that students who are coming into those graduate programs, sometimes have high TOEFL scores in the speaking section because they’ve been studying English a lot longer or that’s kind of an area of specialty for them. I mean going into a communication program you need very high speaking skills and sometimes students test out. However, I don’t know we’ve ever had a semester or a year of 5050 when we didn’t have students from Communication, and this year that would be the case. I think they just had a change in their grad coordinator. The graduate coordinator who was here before was very, I don’t know who the grad coordinator is, but I know from the person who was here before, she had been an international student herself, so it was important for her to do a lot of recruitment of international students in the program. And so I don’t know if that’s something the program is moving away from or just an anomaly this year. But I was really struck because usually we test at least a 6 or so from Communication every year.
Soha: I noticed that when I was on the SET committee
K: Yes. And this year it was zero. And I don’t know if there was a change in who they’re recruiting or
Soha: Just an anomaly. Okay. That was wonderful. Actually I learned a lot. So thank you so much.
K: You can fix my language. [laughter]
Appendix L

Focus group facilitated by Adam Kuchta (Session one)

April 12th, 2017
32 minutes

Hi there, Soha. About a month and a half from now you’ll be getting this. This is Adam. We’re gonna go around the table real quick and list our pseudonyms, so that you can match the name with the voice when you’re doing transcription later on. Then we’ll get started with the questions. Alice, if you’d like to start us off.

Alice (Fernanda): What do I say? [sounding confused]
Adam: Oh just say your name, your pseudonym.
Alice: My name is Alice. [laughter]
Adam: Yea. It’s gonna be really weird.
Rick (Minhazul): So my name is Rick.
Adam: Hello, Rick! It’s good to meet you.
Gu (Chao): I’m Gu
Adam: Hello Gu.
Tom (Won): Nice to meet you. I’m Tom.
Adam: Hi Tom.
Fred (Aco): Okay. My name is Fred.
Adam: Hello, Fred.
Fred: Nice to meet you.
Jim (Andrej): Hi guys! My name is Jim.
Adam: Hi, Jim. It’s good to meet you too. Now that we’re all acquainted with each other and our fake names, we can go into the set of questions that Soha has here. So the first thing that Soha would like to know about. I’ll read the question directly as she has it and if we need to we can break it down from there. So what she asks is, “Would you please describe your experiences with undergraduate native English speaking students in the American classroom?” (repeated twice).
Jim: Can I?
Adam: Okay, Jim. You can start us off. Sometimes I’ll say your pseudonym to give a cue to Soha.
Jim: I’m a TA for the first time. And I don’t know any foreign language. I must admit that it is an amazing experience for me because at the beginning I was struggling with words or with sentences or things like that and today everything is going smoothly. And I like this. So like I said, this is the first time I’m doing that. And it’s really useful to me like TA and I don’t know I think for them it is useful too.
Adam: Jim, can you tell me more about your experiences? Some of things you said was that you struggled early on with sentences and [interrupted]
Jim: Yes.
Adam: and with words
Jim: Yes. At the beginning when I just came here
Adam: And how long have you been in the United States doing TA work at this point?
Jim: I’m in the United States for 3 months.
Adam: uhm
Jim: So I came in January. And I’m a TA in organic chemistry. So I’m doing a lot of lab
observation. And I’m doing office hours. So at the beginning I had a student in the office hours.
And I realized I’m struggling to explain him something in that field. Because. I don’t know.
Maybe because it is the first time I need to explain to someone something in English. So that was
my struggle and after that everything is becoming better and better. So I’m improving myself and
now I don’t have a struggle to explain to anyone anything from my field.
Adam: Okay. Let’s open it up to the whole group. How many of you and for the sake of getting it
on the recorder, say something like a yes or a no. How many of you have experienced struggles
with students kind of in the way that Jim has talked about with being able to explain concepts
from your field to students who’ve come to see you. How many of you have had experiences like
that?
Fred: [interrupting] I can say that I’ve had a very similar experience as Jim has because also I
came here in January. And this is my first semester doing this TA assignment. So this kinda feel
different. The course is general chemistry. So it’s more theoretically and it requests more
knowledge of English I guess. Like I stand up in front of them, like in front of students. Like at
least 30-40 in each group.
Adam: Are you leading like recitations?
Fred: Yes.
Adam: Wow. Okay.
Fred: Yes. So probably it was really difficult for me in the beginning but I have help from my
instructor and from another assistant who is American, you know, so these recitation sessions are
organized in a way that we are making some introductions in front of them like 10 minutes of
introduction like what we’re going to do this day. Like this is our turning [in] sheets, ask
questions and stuff like that. And usually how it was in the beginning, students would just raise
their hands or ask me a question, okay, “can you help me specifically about this question, to
elaborate a little bit, to make more understandable?” So at the beginning it was really hard for
me. I admit. Yes. But somehow it is much easier for me to explain someone in my field of study,
in my major. So I know how to use the chemical names. I use hand drawings on paper. So but
right now, I think that’s like this course [ESOL 5050] is helping me a lot to be more
comprehensible in those recitation sessions and specifically as I told Soha in this class that mini
lessons are really helpful.
Adam: Mini lessons?
Fred: Mini lessons are really helpful for this class for this kind of TA assignment. For these
recitation sessions. Because right now I’m doing introductions in the recitation sessions. So the
instructor will tell me “Okay. So do your introduction like say what’s your opinion about today
task and topic.” So I’m trying to interact with students in that way that’s immediately explain
what is the topic and ask questions about that and stuff like that.
Adam: And Fred, if you feel more effective doing that, what are the things that you think you
have now that you didn’t have at the start? Like what are the skills? What’s the knowledge that
you have now that you think you didn’t have at the beginning of the semester?
Fred: That’s actually a good question.
Adam: And Fred, for the sake of hearing from other people, I’ll try to get a quick answer to hear
from other people to see if they agree or disagree.
Fred: Okay
Rick [interrupting]: Yea. I have a somehow different kind of experience because as Jim said that he was struggling with kinda pronunciation thing, vocabulary also. I also came to the United States in January. I was also a TA when I was studying in my undergraduates. So I have some experience explaining things to the students, mostly. So here what I’m doing in the lab is first time, in a sense, is a bit tricky. To try to explain something it’s really more than just English. Okay.

Adam: All the other complex concepts you’re trying to explain.
Rick: what I had experienced earlier in that in the beginning of this course I was trying to explain everything at once. That made my pronunciation a bit incomprehensible. So after getting this course and having some classes with Soha, I think I understood that issue that actually what I was trying to do, trying to say everything at once, in the lab. So I was a little bit incomprehensible in the beginning. Then I found out and tried to just slow down and just explain in simple English, using simple terms. So that’s something. Another thing that I still struggling is mostly pronunciation. Sometimes undergrads find it a little bit hard to understand my pronunciation. I mean just a little bit. Yea.

Adam: Now, Rick, I was trying to pick this up what you said in the beginning. You said you taught before in Bangladesh before coming here?
Rick: Yea. But it was in mother tongue and it was in Bangladeshi, not English. So it was like to explain something, someone is thinking twice: once, in native language, and then translating it in English. So I was struggling that I took a little more time for me to explain everything clearly.

Adam: But one thing you did have, though, is previous teaching experience.

Rick: Yea. So it was not like teaching; I was helping my professor because it was not. Especially in my country that universities are particularly research-oriented, you know. So there is not much that students get out of professors. So professors mainly pick some undergraduate students who are doing well in their field, so I was that kind of one. I was helping my professor to teach after the class. Some junior students who are struggling with their concepts to understand. I just explain it to them. So it was a little bit experience doing that as undergrad.

Adam: So pronunciation was a big thing. And Fred, we didn’t quite hear from you. I would like to hear from the back of the room up here too. What is the difficulty that was separating you from being able to communicate effectively with your students at the beginning of the semester? Cause that’s I think where we left off.

Fred: Yea. Yea. It’s an important question I guess. So what kind of improvement I kind of make during this semester is specifically how to make interaction with students. So these mini lessons really helpful for this specific kind of that. Specially the self-reflection that we can see how we’re doing that and connect with opinion from audience and from Soha as our professor here. So that kind of interaction including like how way of speaking like ‘am I too fast, ‘am I too slow,’ am I like, you know, trying to be comprehensible in that way that they can in every second understand what the concepts in chemistry I’m trying to explain them.

Adam: Okay. So some of the rules that go beyond just speaking, like intonation, the speed of speech [interrupted]

Fred: But what I’d like to maybe mention here. I don’t know how or what that includes in English, but how to make structure of sentence in every moment. Like to be sure about your structure sentence. So this also includes intonation. It can be very important in my opinion, but I’m not sure if I will put that in the [interrupted]

Adam: top of your list
Fred: On the top of my list, yes. On the top of my list will be, okay, vocabulary is important but it counts how you read, and we’re probably experts in our field of study. We’re reading a lot, so we know how to like use the words in that moment when students ask us, I guess. Uh. But how to make the sentence like correctly.
Adam: So you’re talking about grammar then?
Fred: Essentially, yea. Grammar can be grouped in this kind of uh maybe. Okay. This is just my opinion.
Adam: Folks from the back! Experiences with students, struggles, successes?
Tom: I’m not TA. I’m just RA now. I expect to teach next semester. But I had one experience with presentation in front of American native English speakers. At the time, I was so worried about the communication between them, but I think it was pretty, uh, it was not bad, but I had two problems. One thing is the aural comprehension. Sometimes I miss what they talk, what they say. They have different pronunciation and slang. They say that I have better, formal English, for example,
Adam: You’re referring to idioms, right?
Tom: Yes
Adam: Yea, we have a lot of idiomatic expressions
Tom: Yes. I didn’t know ‘I could use this,’ but this sentence means ‘I need this.’ I totally
interrupted
Adam: Aaah. They said, ‘I could use this.’ You think they are just saying, ‘Of course you can use that. It’s over there.’
laugher
Tom: It was not mean
Adam: oh I totally understand. That literally does not mean what the sentence implied.
Tom: Second problem was that since English is not my first language, I need to sometime to speak because as Rick mentioned, we need time. First sentence in our mother tongue then translate to English. But at times, yea, I think I didn’t handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time. Okay, so? (laugh)
Adam: Do you feel that you have gotten strategies that like you can use to help you get the timing you need to think? Like they ask you a question, the teacher have ways of basically informing the student, like give me a second to think about that before I can answer. Do you feel you have a better grasp of that?
Tom: If I need more time, usually I tell them, ‘Okay. Let me make my sentence. I need time.’ After that I tell the answer.
Adam: Cool. So you identified for yourself, Tom, a couple of things that were important that you’ve picked up on are, I think you said you had some problems with understanding student oral speech particularly their idioms and then also learning how to use methods for buying yourself time. I used an idiom there, I’m sorry. To buy more time so that you can answer their questions and not leave them hanging.
Tom: Exactly.
Adam: Cool.
Fred: I agree completely. Also my experience.
Jim: Exactly. We needed time to catch every idiom.
Adam: It sounds that one of your needs here is, cause a lot of people are chiming in on this, is to have that time so you can think, so you can translate. Cause you have to think in your original,
your home language or primary language, then you have to translate it into something that a
native English speaker can understand well enough to get the job done, right?
Cool. Cool. We have a couple of people here who wanted to speak.
Rick: So the thing that. I understand idioms very well. I mean my aural comprehension is good,
my academic language is also good, but the thing is, the problem is with everyday English. In
every language, common people use the language in a slightly different way than the standard
way. So I understand that. But the problem is I work in labs, so it just sound weird when you
always use academic language with the students, I mean I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to
sound academic all the time.
Adam: Interesting.
Rick: So, I think that’s [interrupted]
Adam: Why do you think that’s important that you don’t wanna sound academic?
Rick: It’s like you know it’s creates a bit of a distance between students and the instructor, I
think. It seems like you’re not connecting with them, you know. I mean that some language
makes you more closer to your students than other language. If you use standard academic
language all the time, students sometimes don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions. In lab
they have so many questions that they feel maybe stupid, I don’t know. I don’t need to ask them
to the instructor. That’s not true. They should approach and ask those questions. So I think when
you can get more close to your students in the way that they use the language, they feel more
connected to you.
Jim: Yes. Because we want to speak in that way, I don’t know, for better understanding. Because
I think that small percent, or no one of native speakers is speaking academic language. So
everyone [interrupted]
Adam: There are a few of us nerds. There’re not many.
[laughter]
Jim: Yea. The most of people use slang, a lot of idioms and we come and use academic. So the
pure English. I don’t know. It can be weird.
Alice: I don’t think you should be worried about it. He’s an instructor, so he has to speak in an
academic way. And the slang will come in later, you know.
Adam: So you’re less concerned about the, what I hear Rick is sharing with the group is that
speaking, coming here and being most familiar with academic speech and sort of the way that
you were taught in a textbook of how to speak English.
Alice: I understand that he wants a relationship with [interrupted]
Adam: Yea. He doesn’t have that distance with students
Alice: Yea
Adam: But you feel differently?
Alice: No. I just feel that right now you have to worry about being comprehensible. And to give
the class the information, the information that you give to them. This is important. And with
time. He’s here since January. So it’s not important now. I don’t know.
Adam: So in your opinion you simply have a different order of what’s the most important. On
the top of your list, if we’re gonna use another idiom here, to be more comprehensible is the
most important thing. Do you all feel that your ability to be comprehensible has improved?
Alice: I’m just saying that it’s more important now.
Fred: You ask if we feel that right now we are able to be comprehensible, yea?
Adam: Yea, yea. Well you can answer a number of questions: Do you feel that you’re moving forward toward being more comprehensible? Is that not the case? Do you feel you’ve already reached a point of comprehensibility? You can answer any of these questions.

Fred: I have not reached that point yet. Still working towards that.

Jim: I think this class is very useful because at least we heard new things. I don’t know, new terms. I have never heard for thought group or something like that, natural pauses or something like that. I don’t know, pronunciation of vowels. I just learned like words, like letters. And not like these are vowels, they are not letters, if you understand me.

Adam: Yes. So when you’re learning language, they didn’t use the terms to separate different kinds of letters?

Jim: Exactly. And maybe I still cannot learn and use natural pauses, but I know it’s there. So it will come. And I’ll feel when I hear it and use it and I know that it exists.

Adam: Okay, which is an important first step.

Jim: Yes. And the most important thing in, I don’t know, communication with native students is to understand each other.

Adam: Is that like being aware is the most important thing in communication for teachers and students to understand each other. Is that something you understood before you came here? Is it something that you learned through the class? Is it something that maybe you already knew about, but you didn’t know consciously?

Jim: I think that, I don’t know, it’s a tricky question because I was afraid and I spoke with Soha for many times because I was afraid of many things and she said me, “Okay. But just the thing that’s important is that students understand you.” And that’s it, if they understand you, you’re okay. And you can improve yourself. And because of that I realized that, I don’t know, it’s crucial thing.

Alice: To answer your question, I come from Italy. So I understand better them. Because maybe it’s because the same part of the [interrupted]

Adam: Accent

Alice: Accent than them. Right now, I understand them better than the beginning of this class.

Adam: Interesting!

Alice: Yea. So I think they improved in this class [laughter]

Adam: Maybe it goes both ways, though, right? Like [interrupted]

Alice: Maybe. I don’t know.

Adam: Their pronunciation maybe clearer, your pronunciation maybe clearer, but it’s also a possibility that now you understand the patterns in their accents better because a lot of times what it is and I think this is the case with a lot of undergraduate students who may initially have negative reactions to ITAs. It’s that they are not used to the accent. And there are patterns to every accent. And if you listen long enough, they start to become, you start to understand what someone is trying to say. So perhaps, do you think that part of it?

Alice: That’s what I always see about academic way to talk. Because if he talks academic, then they would understand with time his accent. If he goes like slang and idioms, he doesn’t pronounce well, then they don’t understand what he’s saying. Because it’s not, I don’t know [interrupted]

Adam: Makes sense. Let me change directions a little bit here. We’ve spent a lot of time talking about the first question. We got a little bit of the next question, though. The next question is ‘What are your academic and professional needs in an ITA training program’ and what I hear
from you guys, and correct me if I’m wrong, but when you talk about that understanding is the most important, that sounds to me like you’re saying a need. Is that a fair thing to say?

Jim: Yes

Fred: Yes. Listening skills. And how to reflect that you’re using [incomprehensible speech]

Adam: So learning listening skills is important. Uh. Let me repeat the question once again to see what you guys can come up with: ‘What are your academic and professional needs in an ITA training program?’ Like what do you need from a program like this in order to feel like effective teachers in the classroom, that you’re reaching your students, that you’re able to answer their questions, you’re able to do all the things that you think a teacher needs to do. What do you think you need to get from a training program to be able to do all of those things? I know I said a lot of words real fast.

Alice: That includes, like they said, the mini lessons.

Jim: Yes

Adams: The mini lessons. Tell me what happens during those mini lessons?

Alice: I mean, the preparation that Soha does before the mini lesson is very good for us. Because she talks about how to organize the lesson, how to use the board, she has a word to say this, I don’t, when we talk we can write on the board, so people understand what we are saying.

Adam: Aha! Okay.

Rick: So five minute you talk, and then you video your lecture for that five minutes, and then you have to go home and send a self-reflection audio on how you did. I mean it’s very effective because not everyone every day watches themselves on a video and see how they move, how they talk. So the first time, you get conscious about yourself, what you actually do there. So I think it’s actually very helpful. To summarize, I think that about my need and what to get here, actually I think this course is pretty systematic. Everything is there. I’d say, everything that we need to improve. But it seems to me it’s just another course to pass. Most of the time it looks like we’re trying hard. We’re trying hard, it’s okay, but it’s like another course to pass and you know when it comes to a course to just pass, it becomes boring. So I think the course structure is okay, but what I found very much helpful here is just I mean, we learn pretty much everything about English before coming here like grammar, pronunciation, intonation, everything, but what we lack was that some native speakers in my country, for myself. I say that I didn’t meet any native speaker before coming here. So I mean just speaking with native speakers helps a lot. I’d say that. So and what maybe all of them would agree that we’re struggling with that intonation that native speakers use is very hard to capture, you know. Especially the rise and down of language.

Adam: Well, it’s not consistent amongst all native speakers, either. You say this is one of the problems.

Jim: I want to say why mini lessons are great and I think it’s because mini lessons include all of these things. So classroom culture, how to behave in classroom, how to teach, how to behave as teacher, pronunciation because we need to speak about the topic and vocabulary, and, I don’t know, we need to interact with the students, I don’t know, we need to know how to tackle their questions.

Adam: The pedagogy part here. You guys said so many things. I don’t know where to jump in at this point. We’re unfortunately at the end of our time. Um. Let me ask you this, there is not a lot time left in the semester, but maybe I might ask Soha if you would be willing to sit in on another session, um, cause there are two questions we didn’t get to. I’ll read them to you and I think they are a little bit less important, but one was ‘how would you define professional development?’ that was question three. Question four was ‘what are the means that you perceive available for
ITAs to achieve professional development on campus?” and I think what these questions are asking is do you know what professional development is, first of all, do you know the term, have you ever encountered it before?

Fred: Self-improvement
Adam: Self-improvement? Like in what way? Like what part of yourself are you improving?
Fred: Probably, okay so, you can go
Rick: In the profession. How you can be more efficient doing your job, something like that. How you can improve yourself, being more competence in your job and something like that. I don’t know.
Adam: Sounds reasonable for just looking at the words themselves, right?
Fred: I’m trying to see how I can connect this with English. Like kind of how to improve.
Jim: which way professional development? Like researchers or like TAs?
Fred: Maybe paraphrase the question a little bit?
Adam: Um, like unfortunately we’re out of time, but I think what she what Soha sees is going on in this class is two things: there is preparation to, there is language help that you get here with speaking English, but there is also teaching help. So you’re not just, what you’re engaged in doing here at the university is not only speaking to other people, but speaking in very specific contexts. Teaching, there is an art and science to teaching well. And I think Soha sees it as part of her duty to help further prepare you guys for teaching effectively, not just in English, like some of the things that you can learn, things you can take back, if you plan on going back to your home countries or continuing here. But it’s working in pedagogy as part of the curriculum.
Fred: That is much clearer. Now I have an idea how to answer this next time, if you want.
Adam: Sure. I will pose that to Soha and see if there is any possibility of doing that. I thank you for your time and your wonderful participation. And please feel free to go because you are two minutes over time already.
Fred: Bring more questions next time. It’s a great experience. I like those kinds of questions. [laughter]
Appendix M

Focus group facilitated by Adam Kuchta (Session two)

April 21st, 2017
37 minutes

Hello there again, Soha. This is session two of our focus group. I’m here today just with Rick. Say hi, Rick.

Rick: Hi

Adam: So what we’re gonna do is we’re gonna move through the last two questions we had, and we started answering one of these last time. And then with whatever time we have left over, we might go back to the first couple of questions. One thing that happened in the first session that I wanted to follow up on, but didn’t, is a lot of people were telling great individual stories about things that they, issues that they’ve encountered teaching in the classroom in English with native English speakers, things they were getting out of this class, things that they wanted out of this class, and if we can, I’d like to try and conjure up, I’d like to call up those memories and see if we can say anything more about them cause the deeper we can go in talking about what your experiences are, the things that you’ve gotten out of this class, the things that you still want to get to be a better teacher, the more useful the data will be for Soha.

Rick: Yea.

Adam: Okay. So where we’re at, the question was ‘How do you define professional development?’

Rick: Okay, Adam. As I said last class that professional development is a lot about science and art. I mean, you have to apply your artistic capabilities and also the scientific method to [incomprehensible speech] skills and things like that. I think, do you want me to answer what is professional development?

Adam: I think that would be a good place to start, just to you know what you understand the term to mean.

Rick: Okay. I think it’s. I’m not sure about the whole thing.

Adam: Have you heard the term before?

Rick: Yea, I’ve heard it. As I understand it, I think it’s like making yourself more ambitious in your job and it’s like that and improving your skills or something.

Adam: Right. Right. I think that’s where we started off last time. And I can only speak from my own experience if you can care to hear it, but professional development is sort of, did you mention art and science?

Rick: Yea.

Adam: Tell me a bit more about that.

Rick: Yea. Sometimes it’s like, as you know, my profession is teaching, you know. So I think teaching is more like you need to understand the psycho of your students, how they think.

Adam: The psychology?

Rick: The psychology of the students. So you know it’s not like, a lot of people know a lot of things, but the thing is as a teacher you have to just deliver those knowledge to your students. So that they can pick it very easily or something like that.

Adam: Is learning that skill part of professional development to you?
Rick: Yea, I think that. Yea. That’s what I think about it. Professional development is, uh, I don’t know.
Adam: When you talk about, do you see teaching then as both an art and a science? Cause you used those words.
Rick: Yea. In teaching you can apply those things in many ways.
Adam: Apply what things?
Rick: Like scientific methods of teaching.
Adam: Okay. What are some things that make for the scientific methods of teaching?
Rick: Okay. Scientific method is like the thing that you have to be more interactive with your students, you have to ask specific questions to judge their comprehensibility during the class. And also it’s like being more friendly with the students, be more approachable to the students. So that they feel they can ask you questions, anything they want to know. And also artistic things, you know, it’s all about how you use your visuals, how you use your blackboard, how you organize your board to present your lecture, and things like that.
Adam: Interesting.
Rick: I understand it like that. I don’t know if it’s correct or not.
Adam: I think it covers a lot of what I’ve understood the term to mean over the years. I think what you said earlier, and I’m gonna paraphrase cause I’m not gonna have it exactly correct. It’s becoming more efficient in your teaching. Does it mean becoming more efficient both in the science and art of teaching then?
Rick: I think that. Yea.
Adam: And so scientific things are things like basic skills of teaching that everyone has to have to be successful and then art. Art is some other things about teaching. Some things about presentation it sounds like you said knowing how to use your visuals, knowing how to present that information. Maybe that’s a bit harder to break down to a scientific method or something like that. I don’t know. So you have some awareness of what professional development is, it seems like, cause you’re able to define it. What opportunities have you had to engage in professional development here on campus?
Rick: Of course, this course helped me a lot. Yea. This course actually break down everything. Step by step. A lot of things I wasn’t aware about myself. It’s like, you know, teaching is sometimes is not intuitive, you have to learn some things from more skilled ones, from the people who know better about teaching. So I didn’t actually have any kind of experience before coming here. Not like teaching experience. I did some work with students. It’s nothing like teaching, though. It was like they’d ask me questions in my country. They were undergraduate. Most of students come. They just ask me questions, and I answer them. It’s like that. So here it’s different.
Adam: when you were working with these students before, were you working like a teaching assistant?
Rick: It doesn’t work the same way in the USA. It’s not a day post or anything. It’s like a professor really liked me. He told me to help him a little bit with the assignments.
Adam: Okay. So it was informal.
Rick: Yea. Informal.
Adam: It was like, hey would you help me out and you said sure I can do that.
Rick: Because the professor was busy during the semester. After coming here I am teaching in the laboratory. I explain to them the procedure of the laboratory, and also the instructor show them different laboratory apparatus during the lab.
Adam: You said a couple of minutes ago, there was something interesting I thought you said where like, ‘this class showed me how to break things down.’ Can you give me an example of something it helped you break down?
Rick: One thing is how to [incomprehensible speech] students like the linguistic skills.
Adam: How to do what with students?
Rick: How to [incomprehensible speech] students based on language skills. Also teaching skills. In language skills, they have different part or segments, like pronunciation, voice projection, and something like that. So I wasn’t actually before aware of those things. I mean, I was aware of some of the things, but as I said how to project your voice, I learned in the classroom, and also teaching skills like how to interact with the students more efficiently. And how to make your presence more lively in the classroom, like that.
Adam: These are things that the class helped break down for you?
Rick: Yea.
Adam: Just to get down even further on the examples, what are some of the things or tips that this class gave you about working with students, how to interact with them effectively?
Rick: Okay. It was actually a lot of things. One thing that I can say, like, compensation of your pronunciation. That sometimes I could be incomprehensible because of my trouble of pronouncing some specific syllables or something. So in this class, we learned that we can compensate those kind of lackings in pronunciation by explaining it or paraphrasing it, by explaining more elaborately, using different words, maybe.
Adam: Right! You actually helped me out a few moments ago. There was, I don’t remember which word it was, but then you said it in a different word that was a synonym. And then I was like, oh now I know. So I see you practicing some of those skills here which is great.
Rick: Yea. As I said I was actually, you know, this education system classroom experience is nothing that I have experienced before, it’s completely different and some information have been lacking for me. I’m a quick learner and trying to learn a lot. And this course actually helped me a lot understand myself and expressing myself.
Adam: Cool. So one of the things, to summarize, one of the things that’s helpful is you’ve learned some mechanisms to like cope with if you’re currently lacking in one thing like pronunciation, there are things you can still do to help with comprehensibility and have those communication situations when you’re working with the students. You can keep them from breaking down if you used these other ways to help with it. To handle the situation. That’s cool. So what other professional development opportunities have you experienced or you think are available on campus other than this class?
Rick: Okay. I think [pause] I don’t know. I didn’t engage in any other activities in the campus yet because I just came here in the fall.
Adam: Absolutely. Are you aware of any other stuff? Do you know any others exist?
Rick: Yea. I know something like, they talked about in the orientation program. So it was like making a group with a native speaker and make conversations for an hour, for half an hour like that. I’m aware that something like that.
Adam: Oh so you’re saying that you’re aware of a group that meets where you can converse with native speakers? I think that if that’s the one I’m thinking of, I think it’s called four Cs. It stands for Cross Culture Conversation Connection, I think. And I believe it’s run out of our department. I think, if it’s the same one.
Rick: Yea. I think so. I don’t know actually.
Adam: so that’s an opportunity to speak with a native speaker and like practice speaking skills. Cool. What else if anything are you aware of?
Rick: [Pause] not specifically about professional development. No I’m not sure about anything else. I sometimes, yea, there is a seminar in the student union, there are seminars
Adam: there are seminars?
Rick: Yea, seminars to develop the skill of the professionals in the teaching
Adam: Do you know who runs those?
Rick: Uh. Not exactly.
Adam: And that’s fine. Whatever you’re aware of is what you’re aware of. I think you might be, like I know one of the places on campus that or one of the groups on campus that cares about professional development is the Center for Faculty Excellence. So it’s possible they’re putting on some of the seminars. They might be hosting seminars.
Rick: Yea, Center of Faculty Excellence, or something like that.
Adam: That name rings a bell?
Rick: Yea.
Adam: Okay. Yea. There could be other groups too. I have no idea. But you are aware that there are seminar opportunities. Do you ever seriously consider going to any of those? And I gotta be honest with you. I have never seriously considered going there. I don’t wanna make you feel like you’re gonna be judged (laugh) if you say “no.”
Rick: The only thing is, you know, I am in grad school, like, it’s pretty busy over there. There are a lot of classes, like seminar classes of our labs. I did not have the ability or opportunity to check out what they are doing over there. But I’d like to go there. I mean, I don’t know maybe I could maybe sometimes go there, but I just didn’t (laugh).
Adam: Do you think is it something like, I mean could it, it’s honest to say whether or not it’s a priority for you. You know if there are other things that are more important, you know, that you wanna do other than going to a seminar like that, you know.
Rick: Maybe, okay (laugh)
Adam: Sometimes we’re busy. You don’t have to justify it. It’s just, you know, because I’ve never gone to one.
Rick: Okay (laugh)
Adam: and I don’t know that most TAs ever have. Um. So I thought we kinda run through the questions, um, I kinda want to return back to our first couple questions sort of. And I’ll remind you what those questions are, and then I’ll say a little bit more about what we maybe looking to get out of those. So we started last time with asking about what are those academic and professional needs in an ITA training program, um, and in a moment I’m gonna rephrase that question because I think what we really want to know is what you still need from us? What do you still need from the university to make yourself feel like and being an effective teacher in a classroom full of native English speakers?
Rick: [pause] Okay. So I don’t know. I’d say that I had plenty of materials in this course. So I actually improved myself. Improved my teaching skills. But also I try to apply those things in my class too. And I think that experiencing. I think the material cover pretty much everything I don’t know. The only thing that I need is interacting more with these students. Which I’m doing right now. And also I plan to do it again and again to improve myself. I don’t know. I think in the classroom it helps a lot. You know, you figure what you need to change or what you need to modify your strategy to teach or something. I’m not actually aware that what I need.
Adam: Oh, you’re saying you’re not necessarily aware of what you need still?
Rick: Yea. I think this helped a lot. I don’t actually know what else I need to improve myself. I’m sure if I knew that, I’ll do that. (laugh)
Adam: Okay.
Rick: so the thing is I don’t know actually what else I need.
Adam: Aaah. And you’re not saying that you’re feeling you’ve mastered teaching, right? Like this is like a statement of saying like [interrupted]
Rick: It’s like my lacking of knowledge
Adam: Okay.
Rick: Of what I need.
Adam: There is a saying in English we sometimes say: “A person doesn’t know what they don’t know.”
Rick: Exactly. (laugh)
Adam: Is that it?
Rick: Yea.
Adam: Okay. So it’s that kind of situation, like you’re so new to teaching that the entire wealth of knowledge about what is available to you, um, how to teach well, you don’t even know what that is yet or all of it. You know some of it because you had this course, but you don’t know all of it yet. Is that fair to say?
Rick: Uh, yea, I think to some extent, yea.
Adam: You know even though you said something like that, you did say that one of the things that you could still use is more practice in interacting with students. Um. Do you have much interactions with native speakers outside of the course that, you’re TA-ing a lab, right?
Rick: Yea. In the lab, in the classroom too, and also some of friends in the department I mean some of the native English speakers. I have some interactions. Not anything rather officially.
Adam: How would you characterize the conversations you have with these colleagues in your department? are they very long? Are they kinda short? What kinda things you, excuse me, are you talking about?
Rick: I wouldn’t characterize it like short or long. I just talk if I want to know something or if there is anything to discuss, I just discuss it. Just like that. It’s like pretty much friendly with the students and also with my colleagues too.
Adam: so is it mostly about work-related issues? Like things related to your program?
Rick: You know how things go in the grad school
Adam: I know you’re busy
Rick: we talk about academic materials and those kind of things (laugh)
Adam: do you feel like any of your conversations that are also like are personal in nature of to establish friendships or anything like that?
Rick: Yea, I have some, I like to share things with my friends, so I have some couple of friends, native speaker, sometimes I share with them, just everyday stuff, nothing else.
Adam: Interesting. Okay. Um. Do you think that interacting with native-speaking students could be a part of this course? You know, more opportunities to [interrupted]
Rick: I strongly think about that. I think in the last class [session] too I mentioned that. It would be very nice if we had some native speakers too. I mean, it’s because of improving your pronunciation like native speakers. Sometimes language is more easy to learn by just mimicking. Not by following rules or something. As I said my writing and also listening skills are very good, but I never actually have opportunity to use my speaking skill because I just like I came here
three months ago. In my country, I never met a foreigner before. I think for me it would be really helpful to have some native speakers during the class.

Adam: And I don’t know because I never taught that kind of class, so I don’t know what would happen, but maybe there’s some kind of assignment worked in, maybe, where you have to work with a native speaker? maybe native speakers are brought in to the class for some kind of activity? Some kind of conversation?

Rick: No

Adam: No. You don’t like that?

Rick: No, I mean it’s not included in this course like bringing some native speaker or interacting. I mean assignments are like providing materials to improve yourself, giving assignment, like as you heard in the last class [session], like some mini lessons, to reflect yourself, to see your movement, your speaking etiquette and things like that.

Adam: So you would see like that kind of thing is not part of what the course ought to be doing?

Rick: I think that should be included in the course, like having some volunteers, some undergraduate volunteers, yea, to come and interact with ITA. I mean it would be helpful.

Adam: Interesting. Um. I guess, I think that could be really interesting. I’m trying to imagine cause I’ve been a teacher for a long while, and so I’m trying to, based on my limited knowledge of what I know Soha does in this class with you guys, based on what you guys have told me and what Soha’s told me, I’m just wondering what it would look like you know, what kind of things could you do with native speakers once they’re here, you know, do you have some kind of conversation with them?

Rick: Exactly. Maybe some kind of discussion, or explaining some topics to them. Also having something interesting, just discussing with them. That would be [interrupted]

Adam: Interesting. So you can actually practice some of these communication skills on individual people brought in into the classroom?

Rick: Yea, I think so. That can be helpful.

Adam: Interesting. That might be a productive suggestion and obviously Soha will hear this at the end of the semester, but I will also say something to her cause I think Soha is very much interested in addressing the concerns that you guys bring in, um, I know that she shared with me that one of the concerns that the department had is that there ought to be a lot of work on pronunciation, and so she did a lot of work with that [interrupted]

Rick: Yea. She did. She did actually.

Adam: throughout the semester, but she said beyond that exactly what the curriculum is very much up to the instructor, which means there is a lot of room for her to incorporate things that are responding to your specific needs.

Rick: Okay.

Adam: so I think that’s a very productive suggestion. Um. Is there anything else while we’re on this topic of your needs, is there anything else you can think of that would be useful for this class to do? Any other issue with communicating? Or teaching in English that you think that the course could do more to address?

Rick: Uh. I’m sorry, I don’t. I can’t figure anything else.

Adam: No no. That’s fine. That’s fine. Um. I thought maybe we kind of end our session here today, um, talking about your experiences with undergraduate native English speaking students, um, because these experiences you have might tell us something else that might be interesting, something that you got out of the class or something that you wish you got out of the class. So
what I’m gonna ask you is this question: what is the worst experience you’ve ever had communicating with a student? Worst that you feel comfortable sharing.

Rick: Okay. I’ll say. I don’t know, I had a student in my laboratory. I don’t know he was kind of just like don’t care about anything. The laboratory apparatuses, they are pretty expensive and also you have some responsibility for your safety too. So you have to wear goggles and you have to do many things, like there are standard procedures, I don’t know some people don’t like to follow these standard procedures.

Adam: Some people just don’t like to be safe, I guess, I don’t know.

Rick: I mean, it is for the safety, I don’t know maybe some students are not enough mature to understand. So I had a student I just repeatedly in almost every lab, I just told him you should follow these rules you know, I’d follow these rules if I were you. Because it’s for your safety. For the first two or three classes, I don’t know why he just doesn’t care.

Adam: so what kind of things was he not doing?

Rick: And then I follow some strategy you know like he maybe feel more alienated or something for some reason, maybe he’s not, so I just tried to communicate with him more like “what do you like? Do you like soccer? I saw you play soccer or something.” I mean I started this kind of conversation for two or three minutes, you know, so and also he had actually told me that he don’t understand my language, he doesn’t understand my pronunciation, I mean that’s okay. I was [interrupted]

Adam: was he nice about it though? Or was he kinda mean about it?

Rick: No, not mean. I’d say he was straightforward, though. He was like “I don’t get anything of what you’re saying.”

Adam: (laugh)

Rick: just like that. So I thought, everyone understood, why he doesn’t? Maybe. Maybe he’s not, I don’t know, as I was doing a lot of sections, a lot of students, I mean, I was doing pretty good. So then I had to have some conversation with him, what he likes and why doesn’t he like this lab or something like this. So I think after that he was more curious about this lab, and he was asking questions about the experiment and how to do it.

Adam: Oh yea?

Rick: Yea. Maybe he was nervous to ask those questions because he thought that a lot of stuff he should know, he doesn’t know. Maybe some kind of thing. So that was the hardest thing I’ve experienced.

Adam: Did he eventually start following the safety procedures in the lab?

Rick: Yea, actually (laugh)

Adam: That’s good. I’m glad for both of you.

Rick: For the last session of the laboratory, he actually followed those. Actually I had an experience but for myself because I burnt my hand doing, working in the lab.

Adam: You burnt your hand?

Rick: Just a little bit.

Adam: And this was not here in the United States?

Rick: No.

Adam: Back in [interrupted]

Rick: So

Adam: Bangladesh you said?

Rick: Yea. So I told him how things could go wrong here. How things can go very, very wrong. So you wouldn’t have much time to regret those things. (Laugh)
Adam: (laugh)
Rick: I think at the last lecture, he was cool. I mean that lab was over last week. I think then he was pretty good. He was pretty friendly. He even said “Have a good day.”
Adam: so things turned around for you?
Rick: Yea, I think so.
Adam: Do you remember how were you when you first started interacting with the students way back in the beginning of the semester? Do you remember how you, cause one thing you said was that you know “Hey, please follow the directions!” basically, right? That’s what you said earlier. Um. How did you address the student? Did you call him out in front of everybody? Did you pull him over to the side?
Rick: Oh, I’m really aware of that. I don’t want to embarrass anyone, like calling. But the one thing that helps, you know, as I said earlier the scientific method to interact with the students is calling their name. If you call their name, they’d feel more connected or something.
Adam: But did you speak with him kinda privately, like individually just like move over to him?
Rick: I did a mistake maybe the first time.
Adam: Ah.
Rick: in the lab, it’s congested. Many students. It’s like 50 students in the small two labs.
Adam: So it’s hard to move from one side to another?
Rick: Exactly. So I thought. First I thought because it was kinda different in my country. In my country we could just tell students what to do, and they would just follow. So maybe first he didn’t like that. He didn’t like.
Adam: That’s possible. That’s possible. Um. I’ve taught a couple different levels. I used to teach high school here in the United States. I’ve taught college students here. And I have found that students usually they very often react negatively if you call them out. Like kinda chastise them or uh
Rick: I know that term
Adam: verbally shaming them. They can react very negatively to that.
Rick: I know. But I was trying not to do that. I don’t like that at all. I mean.
Adam: Oh that’s fair. I mean if you did, that would be an honest mistake. It’s a mistake that I made when I first started out. It’s a mistake that native English-speaking teachers make too. It’s not something that’s unique to just teaching you know if you’re coming from another country you know.
Rick: Sometimes it’s just language. Sometimes maybe. It’s an entire language. You know I know two other languages. Maybe a couple of others. A little bit. So I think it’s a lot of struggle for me to work with them. I mean everything is different. Etiquette is different here.
Adam: Etiquette, you’re saying?
Rick: Yea. Sometimes you know. I don’t know. I try to get those things like “am I being rude by my language or something?” and I quickly follow what others do, like what other native speakers do. Like you know as I said in my country it’s okay to say “Just do it. Just follow the rules.” But here it’s more to say “If I were you, I’d do that.” So I learned those things.
Adam: Right. Right. Right. Although to be fair, teachers will call out people directly. But it’s usually like. It’s often at a point in which the person’s behavior can no longer be ignored and really needs to be addressed, and it’s something more common than I would have done as a high school teacher than as a college teacher. Cause rarely there is a behavior that’s disruptive at this level. But it sounds like you’re reading or interpreting a lot of these situations, like you’re mimicking a lot of the behavior. Trying to understand the cultural, like how the culture works.
Rick: I always try to learn about that. To know how native speakers handle things here. I mean that’s good to know. To learn.
Adam: Has the course like helped you in any way with kinda knowing the culture?
Rick: Yea. Exactly. There was an assignment in this course like observing a fellow TA.
Adam: ah, okay.
Rick: and a fellow ITA. So I think that was, that triggered something to me. Okay. So that’s another way to learn. Okay. So maybe I’ll apply that.
Adam: I think that’s really smart. You’re like oh shit now I know that I can learn by watching other more experienced people.
Rick: Exactly.
Adam: Like I can learn about the culture. I think that’s a really smart thing. And you said it was the experience of watching for the assignment that helped you understand that?
Rick: Yea.
Adam: Wow. I think that’s powerful. Um. Great. Okay. What was. I think our very last question is a good place to end. I asked you to tell me about the worst experience you had with the students. Tell me about the best experience you had so far?
Rick: Okay. The best thing is I think students like me.
Adam: Yea?
Rick: yea. I had two sections to teach. Also students like me. I got that because at the end there’s some evaluation of teaching assistants here. So I saw that they gave me pretty good rating. I mean, it’s anonymous but almost everyone, almost everyone said something good about me, like conducting lessons. So I think there are a lot of good experiences. It was related to teaching. Any good experience I’m talking about. So uh okay I don’t know what specifically you’re trying to.
Adam: Oh well if there is a memory of a specific interaction you had with the students that you think went really well maybe?
Rick: Uh actually I can’t remember anything specific. Yea. So I think it’s just.
Adam: No times where you had to explain a concept to a student that you think went particularly well?
Rick: I do that a lot of time.
Adam: Too many to name (laugh)
Rick: Yea. So I think I have to do it in every lab session. They have a lot of questions about laboratory. Because some things are very complicated to understand. And another thing, it’s practical. You have to do everything practically like by yourself. So there is a lot of questions. So I have to explain a lot of concepts to the students. I have to show them how to use those instruments in the laboratory. So there is a lot of experience and I can’t remember.
Adam: That’s totally fair. I can’t usually remember students names after the semester is over. Like there is
Rick: Oh my god. That was a horrible thing when I first came here.
Adam: Just learning their names?
Rick: Yea. I mean it was so embarrassing that I can’t remember their first names. That’s not fair. (laugh) I was trying the names are so different and so confusing for me. I had to work on that. I had to repeat those names for a couple of times to remember those.
Adam: Yea. I think what I found as a teacher it seems like we develop a special section of our short term memory that eventually, like I can learn names a lot faster, but I can’t retain them once the semester is over. So once the semester is over, it’s like my brain is a computer and I’m just doing a memory dump of all the names. They just go right in the trash can when I’m done.
Rick: That information is not necessary anymore.
Adam: Yea. It’s only available when you need it, but I feel like the longer you teach, you develop that part of your memory where you learn them quickly, you store them when you need them, and then you dump them at the end of the semester.
Rick: Exactly. Yea. That’s an efficient way to remember new things. To learn new things by forgetting (laugh)
Adam: That’s interesting. Well, I think we’ve come to about the end of our time here, so I’m going to express my thanks to you, Rick, for giving up your time today with this conversation on behalf of Soha. And also for myself; I’ve enjoyed talking with you today. I hope that this experience of talking with a native speaker has itself been helpful for you, as you develop as someone here trying to make the way.
Rick: Yea. Exactly. I also I’ve enjoyed it very much to talk with you. Yea. And thank you very much for also giving me company.
Adam: Oh no problem. Um. So that’s it. Let’s adjourn.
## Appendix N

A table illustration of all eight themes and the thirty corresponding codes

ESOL 5050 meets ITAs’ needs (8 codes):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio State Law Requires ITAs to be Orally Proficient</td>
<td>For ITAs in ESOL 5050 to meet the Ohio State law (i.e. be “orally proficient”), they need to equally divide their attention between two aspects: pronunciation and pedagogical communication skills. The former has to do with understanding how to correctly pronounce field-specific terms as well as practicing suprasegmental linguistic features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. Pedagogical communication, on the other hand, has to do with understanding the U.S. classroom culture, means of asking questions, responding to students’ questions, and negotiating meaning with their undergraduate NESSs.</td>
<td>Kimberly: “So we’re not necessarily teaching them how to teach, but we’re teaching them pedagogical communication, responding to students, understanding the culture… It is the way to interact with students, answer student questions, provide proper responses, typical things that happen.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ needs for compensation strategies</td>
<td>ITAs should be explicitly made conscious how to effectively use their bodies to conceal possible nervousness or to make up for linguistic potentials, hence, using their bodies as affective and linguistic shields or as compensation tools.</td>
<td>Alice: “[the instructor] talks about how to organize the lesson, how to use the board, she has a word to say this, I don’t, when we talk we can write on the board, so people understand what we are saying.”</td>
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<td>Mini Lessons &amp; Observations address ITAs’ needs for student interactions (More interactions, better interactive skills)</td>
<td>ESOL 5050 raised ITAs’ awareness of the vitality of instructor-student interactions and provided a safe space where ITAs practiced meaning negotiation—though simulated—with</td>
<td>Alexander: “It’s like one of those things like talking with more people would like help you talk with more people.” Jim: “And I realized I’m struggling to explain him something in that field.”</td>
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Similarly, the more interactions undergraduate NESs have with people who do not speak English as a first language, the more familiar they become of those linguistic patterns, and the easier the communication turns out. Because. I don’t know. Maybe because it is the first time I need to explain to someone something in English. So that was my struggle and after that everything is becoming better and better.”

**Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ needs for self-reflection and peer/instructor feedback**

ITAs not only found Mini Lessons helpful, but also recognized the value of self-consciousness that they gain as they listen to feedback from peers and instructor, watch video recordings of their teaching performance, and audio-record their observations accordingly. Rick: “You have to go home and send a self-reflection audio on how you did. I mean it’s very effective because not everyone every day watches themselves on a video and see how they move, how they talk. So the first time, you get conscious about yourself, what you actually do there. So I think it’s actually very helpful.”

**Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ needs for strategies to increase comprehensibility**

Strategies such as paraphrasing, using synonyms, slowing down, simplifying complex scientific concepts, or adding elaboration were tips that ITAs learned in ESOL 5050—tips that ITAs found useful in making themselves more comprehensible and in avoiding communication breakdowns with students due to pronunciation struggles. Similarly, for undergraduate NESs, ITAs are expected to be able to use compensation strategies, such as paraphrasing and re-paraphrasing ourselves, with the goal of achieving clear communications. Rick: “sometimes I could be incomprehensible because of my trouble of pronouncing some specific syllables or something. So in this class, we learned that we can compensate those kind of lackings in pronunciation by explaining it or paraphrasing it, by explaining more elaborately, using different words, maybe.” Alexander: “if [ITAs] can’t directly explain one way, find another way to try to explain it. And realize that like maybe the first, maybe the second time [undergraduate NESs] may not get it, but keep trying you know, completely make yourself clear.”

**Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ needs for Raising ITAs’ awareness about suprasegmental**

Raising ITAs’ awareness about suprasegmental

Jim: “And maybe I still cannot learn and use natural
knowledge of linguistic terminology (Raising awareness of linguistic terminology)

features of language and providing them with the proper tools for linguistic self-monitoring practices are necessary components of an effective ITA preparation course.

pauses, but I know it’s there. So it will come. And I’ll feel when I hear it and use it and I know that it exists.”

On the (W)PA survey, five (W)PAs narrowed down ITAs’ needs to “suprasegmental” features, such as stress, intonation, and thought groups. One (W)PA pointed out that ITAs need “self-monitoring training” in suprasegmental pronunciation features.

Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ needs for learning classroom culture through observation

Observations, like those assigned in ESOL 5050, create a space where ITAs explore and reflect on successful pedagogical practices in their own fields, learn the language typically used in their fields, as well as understand U.S. classroom culture. Additionally, explicitly teaching ITAs about mitigation and framing could prevent tension with their undergraduate NESSs due to cultural differences or due to ITAs’ unawareness of what would be considered “rude” in the U.S. classroom.

Kimberly: “we try to have students focus on the language of their field, we try to have them do class observations in their own fields, so it’s not us telling them this is how you teach, but it’s helping push the students to be kind of self-learning and going and seeing what does it mean to be a teacher in my field, in my department.”

Rick: “So I think that was, that triggered something to me. Okay. So that’s another way to learn…I always try to learn about [U.S. classroom culture]. To know how native speakers handle things here.”

Mini Lessons & Observations address ITAs’ needs for learning about U.S. classroom culture, pronunciation, and pedagogy

ITAs appreciated the Mini Lesson assignment as it encapsulates the three main components in which ESOL 5050 is grounded: U.S. classroom culture, Pronunciation, and Pedagogy.

Jim: “I want to say why mini lessons are great and I think it’s because mini lessons include all of these things. So classroom culture, how to behave in classroom, how to teach, how to behave as teacher, pronunciation because we need to speak about the topic and vocabulary, and, I don’t know, we need to interact
with the students, I don’t know, we need to know how to tackle their questions.”

Ways ITA coaches/instructors perform to prepare ITAs (2 codes):

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<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<tr>
<td>ITA Coaches Performing as Observers</td>
<td>Because of the extra labor ITA coaches/instructors take upon themselves to observe ITAs and because of departmental peers’ practical and epistemic knowledge of the content being taught, it might be less taxing for ITA coaches and more beneficial for novice ITAs if departmental peers performed the observations. In addition, peer mentoring/observing could create a sense of community between domestic TAs and ITAs.</td>
<td>Kimberly: “Back when I first started teaching the class, there were a lot more observations of the ITAs in the classroom. And so I think I observed all of my ITAs the first several times I taught the class, I observed every single ITA at least three times in their classroom, but also as you can imagine, that is also time consuming. That’s a lot of time for the instructor.”</td>
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<td>ITA Coaches Performing as Mentors</td>
<td>Though mentoring ITAs is not mandated in their institutions, Olivia and Kimberly volunteered to provide one-on-one weekly and biweekly mentorship for ITAs, respectively. Though Olivia left it to ITAs to decide on the focus of the sessions based on their needs, Kimberly focused on pronunciation to satisfy to Ohio State mandate of ITAs being orally proficient. At research-focused institutions, though, mentorship tends to take an informal shape and is provided only for ITAs who express interest in teaching.</td>
<td>Kimberly: “So [ITAs] would have one week in class and then the next week there wouldn’t be class. The students would come and meet with the instructor for like 30 minutes or something like that in individual pronunciation tutorial.”</td>
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Ways to improve ESOL 5050 and suggestions for ITA preparation programs (9 codes):

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<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
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<th>Topic</th>
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<th>Quotes</th>
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<tr>
<td>ESOL 5050 does not address ITAs’ needs for interactions with NESSs</td>
<td>Experiencing a need to interact with undergraduate NESSs in ESOL 5050, ITAs suggested those interactions to take the shape of either small-group discussions, engaging activities, or having undergraduate NESSs as potential audience during Mini Lessons.</td>
<td>Rick: “Sometimes language is more easy to learn by just mimicking. Not by following rules or something.”</td>
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<td>Interpreting undergraduate NESSs’ feedback</td>
<td>Designing feedback surveys, analyzing the data, and reflecting on themes/patterns are not skills ITAs learn in ESOL 5050, but they are indeed skills that ITAs need.</td>
<td>Olivia emphasized the value of “walk[ing] ITAs through the process [of constructing and analyzing feedback surveys],” “talk[ing] about the cultural value of feedback,” and the “language around feedback.”</td>
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<td>ITAs’ Need for Meaning Negotiation Strategies</td>
<td>Explicitly teaching ITAs meaning negotiation strategies could help them navigate situations where they are unsure what undergraduate NESSs are asking and/or saying, could buy them some time before they are able to formulate complete responses to student questions, and would address undergraduate NESSs’ expectations of ITAs’ properly addressing their questions.</td>
<td>Tom: “Since English is not my first language, I need to some time to speak because as Rick mentioned, we need time. First sentence in our mother tongue then translate to English. But at times, yea, I think I didn’t handle well their questions. They asked me, but I think I spent a little time. Okay, so? (laugh)” Alexander: “Yea. Sometimes you have to ask [the Geology ITA] to repeat herself or to speak up.” Marina: “I think that like I feel like [negotiating meaning with nonnative English speakers] helps my brain sometimes because of like I don’t know it makes me think a little bit more.”</td>
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<td>Asking Questions in Class across Cultures</td>
<td>Because in some cultures, asking questions in class is “considered a waste of time and very selfish,” Olivia found that examining pedagogical differences</td>
<td>Olivia: “So in her country, asking questions in class is always considered a waste of time and very selfish, whereas Q &amp; A and that sort of exchange in the U.S. is”</td>
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through a cultural lens proved useful for ITAs to reflect, learn, and think consciously about ways teaching in U.S. classrooms could be different from their own home classrooms. Such activities could prepare ITAs for undergraduate NESSs’ expectations from ITAs to be able to understand and answer their questions in class.

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<th>ITAs’ Need to Create Rapport with Undergraduate NESSs through Slang (but when?)</th>
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<td>During focus groups, ITAs agreed that producing slang would create rapport with undergraduate NESSs. What they seemed to disagree on is when such production would be deemed appropriate: in early stages while they are working on their comprehensibility, or in later stages after they achieve comprehensibility. Similarly, undergraduate NESSs expressed an expectation from ITAs to understand the slang that undergraduates tend to employ heavily in their speech.</td>
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| Rick: “so it just sound weird when you always use academic language with the students, I mean I don’t want to do that. I don’t want to sound academic all the time…[Academic language] creates a bit of a distance between students and the instructor, I think. It seems like you’re not connecting with them, you know… If you use standard academic language all the time, students sometimes don’t feel comfortable to ask you questions.”   
   Alice: “I just feel that right now you have to worry about being comprehensible. And to give the class the information, the information that you give to them. This is important.”   
   Alexander: “another thing that would be good for [ITAs] to learn I guess lingo and like slang…like the extremely crucial thing is obviously the classroom, but I feel like [understanding slang] would completely help them understand their students a lot better.” |
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<tr>
<th><strong>ITAs Creating Rapport with Disruptive Students</strong></th>
<th>ITAs see value in creating rapport with undergraduates, especially those who appear alienated, resistant, and/or disruptive. Rick, for example, created rapport with a disruptive student through small talk, conversations about his sport interests, calling him by his name, and inquiring about his opinion about the lab (i.e. what he likes and does not like).</th>
<th>Rick: “If you call their names, they’d feel more connected.”</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Undergraduate NESSs Expect ITAs to Create Rapport</strong></td>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs reported dramatically more positive experiences with ITAs who tried to connect with undergraduate students and show care for them than those who did not.</td>
<td>Marina had quite a positive experience with a nonnative English-speaking professor because “[h]e’s like trying to interact, trying to get to know us, cares about us, and trying to connect with us… But the ones I’ve had for chemistry and right now biology, they’re very science-focused, like they’re like I am only here to like grade your papers and you know give you the information.”</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ITAs Creating Rapport with Undergraduate NESSs by Showing Vulnerability</strong></td>
<td>Olivia brought up an observation that often times undergraduate NESSs presume they would not understand someone upon hearing a foreign accent and/or realizing their interlocutor does not speak English as a first language. To address this issue, Olivia encourages ITAs to be vulnerable, transparent, and address the fact that they have a foreign accent with their undergraduates on the first day of class—a practice that could open up a channel of conversation with their undergraduates in a way that</td>
<td>Olivia: “Let’s all say, I have this accent. And sometimes you are not gonna understand me, but if you don’t, please, by all means raise your hand, interrupt me, I’m happy to answer any question about anything I’ve said. But you know now let’s communicate. So everybody could relax about that and just really try to communicate.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Undergraduate NESSs Expect Scaffolding as an Instructional Strategy</td>
<td>ITAs often forget that undergraduate NESSs do not necessarily have the same amount of knowledge that they themselves have or the level of knowledge that they would expect of undergraduates in their home countries. As a result, ITAs tend to not provide much details to transition from the theoretical part of the lab to the practical part. In other words, scaffolding as an instruction strategy is an expectation of undergraduates and, hence, a component that might prove beneficial for ITAs in a preparation course.</td>
<td>Marina: “So one of my issues right now is that my TA doesn’t, like he will lecture on the concepts real quick, but then he doesn’t really tell us like what we’re doing. Like he’ll read the title. So he’ll be like, “This is your diffusion lab,” and then he’ll be like, “Okay, start.” And we’re like, “Okay. I read the lab, (laugh) but I don’t know what this thing is that they’re talking about. Can you just like point it out real quick?” And then I know he definitely gets frustrated because we’re asking him so many questions, but um I wish that he would just lay everything out before, so we know where we’re going, what we’re doing.”</td>
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How culture informs our understanding of the distribution of labor in the classroom (1 code):

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<tr>
<td>Instructor-Student Division of Labor in the U.S.</td>
<td>ITAs realized that the U.S. classroom tends to hold the instructor accountable for her/his students’ learning and academic success, with little responsibility put on students’ shoulders, which creates an imbalance in instructor-student division of labor. However, there are exceptions to this observation, such as Marina who, based on her existing knowledge about ITAs’ classroom cultural expectations and standards,</td>
<td>Yahampath: “I don’t think that teacher always should take that responsibility. Maybe a student has faults if they are not studying.”</td>
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decided to work harder, be more prepared for the lab, and find a study partner to help her with the material that she might not be familiar with.

What departments can offer ITAs (2 codes):

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<tr>
<td>ITAs’ Need for Peer Mentoring &amp; Observations</td>
<td>Suthakaran associated his success in the classroom with the Statistics department’s “peer mentoring” program that pairs “experienced TAs” with new ones, where experienced TAs observe and video-record inexperienced TAs’ classes three times per semester, for two semesters. Following the observation, experienced TAs provide new TAs feedback in terms of what is working in the classroom, what is not working, and areas for improvement. Peer mentors also meet biweekly.</td>
<td>Fred stated that receiving “help from my instructor and from another assistant who is American” assisted him in overcoming the initial difficulties he had while explaining concepts during recitation sessions.</td>
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<td>STEM ITAs Enrolling in Practica through Departments</td>
<td>Enrolling in departmentally-designed practica, ITAs develop professionally. They learn about classroom culture, pedagogy, behavioral issues that might arise and ways to address them—topics equally fundamental for domestic and international TAs.</td>
<td>Suthakaran raved about the three practica the Statistics department offers teaching assistants: “how to handle disruptive behavior of students,” “how to use technology to improve graduate teaching,” and curriculum design.</td>
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How ITA preparation programs can be (re)designed based on ITAs’ instructional duties (2 codes):

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<tr>
<td>STEM ITAs are Expected to Provide Formative Feedback on Lab Reports</td>
<td>Nancy discovered that ITAs had irrational fears to receive negative student evaluations, lest they should lose their TA-ships. As a result, ITAs</td>
<td>Nancy: “It’s thinking about okay so how can we, how can I train them to provide more effective feedback… we have them think about what are the</td>
</tr>
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</table>
often “grade[d] very lightly, not providing much feedback.” That is why the technical communication preparation program focused on preparing ITAs to provide effective formative written feedback, especially those who are assigned courses that demand a large amount of writing from undergraduates. aspects of good communication, and then we do not have them focus on things like grammar and punctuation.”

| Assignments in ITA Preparation Courses should be Informed by ITAs’ Duties | ITA coaches/instructors should design ITA preparation courses in a way that is relevant to the ITA population at hand (i.e. teaching duties versus lab duties). If it is a mixed population, ITA coaches/instructors should make the strategies and cues learned through assignments explicitly relevant to ITAs’ assigned tasks. Kimberly suggested that ITA coaches/instructors should tell complaining ITAs “You might be going around and answering student questions, but you still might need to explain this visual and use these words, like kind of use these cues, things like that. Like it would still be helpful.” |

Prior experiences and external resources that help ITAs (2 codes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ITAs’ need for additional English language practice</td>
<td>ITAs’ linguistic potentials cannot be met through practicing the English language only inside the ESOL 5050 classroom. Yahampath: “[practicing language] takes time” and “in-class practice doesn’t help much…we cannot practice English like that.”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prior experience explaining concepts and teaching</td>
<td>ITAs’ pedagogical skills and confidence improve with more practice explaining concepts from their majors. Rick: “To try to explain something it’s really more than just English.”</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Institutional limitations (4 codes):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes that emerged</th>
<th>My interpretation</th>
<th>Example responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutions offering Pre-Semester Orientations for ITAs</td>
<td>Spreading out orientations throughout the semester (instead of limiting orientations to prior to or at the beginning of the</td>
<td>In survey responses, one (W)PA stating that her/his institution offers “a variety of courses and a very strong pre-semester teaching orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITAs’ Time Limitation Informs Enrollment</td>
<td>Both Olivia and Rebecca reported on perceived frustration from ITAs due to time limitations that prevent them from enrolling in the ITA preparation course and professional development workshops, respectively. This is especially true when ITA preparation courses are offered as electives or when they demand a semester-long commitment (compared to a 3-hour seminar).</td>
<td>Rebecca: “I wouldn’t say resistance. I would say a sense of maybe a little bit of frustration or just feeling like oh I wanna do it, but I can’t. I know that your classes are good, but I have to do that thing. And I mean I get it.” Olivia: “[ITAs] are so darn busy, you know. And I had at least every semester, a handful of students, three to four students come up and say “I really want to take your course, but it just doesn’t fit my schedule.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Budgetary Limitations</td>
<td>Institutional tight budgets do not only result in a scarcity of resources for ITAs, it also shapes the perception of ITA preparation programs. One (W)PA mentioned on the survey that her/his program is now perceived by some ITAs and departments as “a compliance/testing unit than a support unit.”</td>
<td>Olivia: “It’s a very, very tight budget and it’s never reliable. But when our time and finances allow, I try to run as many of those support services as possible. I’ve done like a brownbag luncheon, you know, just whatever I sense that people could use.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problematics of Non-Centralized ITA Preparation</td>
<td>Though the non-centralization of ITA preparation programs might be perceived by many (W)PAs as problematic, Olivia perceives it as</td>
<td>Olivia: “when you’re operating on a big university, you know with tens of thousands of people literally it’s just hard to do that. To get that coordinated into</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
inescapable in large programs. Centralized ITA preparation such as the Carnegie Mellon model, however, requires (W)PAs’ labor in the form of reaching out to departments, understanding departmental requirements for ITAs’ proficiency, visiting departments during orientation week, sending reminders to departments to have them direct ITAs to the ICC, and ensuring the relevancy of the ITA preparation in a way that addresses ITAs’ needs.

| some centralized, streamlined system.” |
Appendix O

Mini lessons and observations assignment sheets

Mini Lessons Assignment Sheet

For these 3 mini lessons, you are asked to choose a visual from your field of study. You can choose from the visuals provided in the textbook Appendices or from any textbook you're familiar with. Either way, you must use the board to represent the chosen visual in the beginning of your lesson. In addition, it is your responsibility to bring a video recording device to record yourself. That video will help you with the self-evaluation portion (see below).

Throughout your lesson, follow the following steps as you see appropriate:

1. Introduce the visual by giving its title, name, or purpose
2. Discuss the overall organization, layout, or structure of the visual
3. Explain any symbols, terms, or any information that may be new for your students
4. Give at least one specific example (preferably something students can relate to in their daily lives) which demonstrates the information the visual contains
5. Discuss overall trends or patterns or make predictions based on the information conveyed by the visual
6. Close by summarizing the points you wish to emphasize regarding the visual
7. Whenever you find appropriate: define one difficult term AND elicit questions from your students
8. Make sure to use transitional phrases to move from one point to the next

Following each of your 3 mini lessons, you will be allowed one week to record an audio self-evaluation of your performance.

*For more details and/or useful expressions, please consult the following pages in your textbook:

- pp. 42-3
- pp. 53-4
- pp. 57-9

**I will be using the SET rubric (please see syllabus) to assess your performance in these 3 mini lessons.

***Your grade will also reflect the depth of your self-evaluation.

First Observation Assignment Sheet

For this assignment, you are to observe one experienced domestic TA in your department. To do so, you will need to:

1. Send a formal request of observation to the TA in mind and CC me to that email.
2. Show up on time and pay close attention of the following points:

- Organization of the lesson
- Classroom vocabulary, idioms, and expressions
- Use and organization of the board and visuals
- Interaction with students
- Method of handling student questions
- Clarity of response to student questions

3. Record a thorough audio analysis of your observation. This analysis must, first, provide an overview of the lesson, then, cover all the bulleted points in number 2. Push yourself to reflect on the pedagogical aspects you would (not) consider implementing in your own classroom/lab.

Second Observation Assignment Sheet

For this assignment, you are to observe one experienced ITA in your department. To do so, you will need to:

1. Send a formal request of observation to the ITA in mind and CC me to that email.

2. Show up on time and pay close attention of the following points:

- Organization of the lesson
- Classroom vocabulary, idioms, and expressions
- Use and organization of the board and visuals
- Interaction with students
- Method of handling student questions
- Clarity of response to student questions

3. Record a thorough audio analysis of your observation. This analysis must, first, provide an overview of the lesson, then, cover all the bulleted points in number 2. Push yourself to reflect on the pedagogical aspects you would (not) consider implementing in your own classroom/lab.
DATE: September 14, 2016

TO: FROM: Soha Youssef  Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [922705-3] International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Training Program at Bowling Green State University: Putting the Needs of ITAs and the Expectations of Native English-Speaking Students in conversation  Revision

SUBMISSION TYPE: Revision

ACTION: DECISION DATE:

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS September 13, 2016

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has determined this project is exempt from IRB review according to federal regulations AND that the proposed research has met the principles outlined in the Belmont Report. You may now begin the research activities.

Note that an amendment may not be made to exempt research because of the possibility that proposed changes may change the research in such a way that it is no longer meets the criteria for exemption. A new application must be submitted and reviewed prior to modifying the research activity, unless the researcher believes that the change must be made to prevent harm to
participants. In these cases, the Office of Research Compliance must be notified as soon as practicable.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records.

If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Hagemyer at 419-372-7716 or khagemy@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board's records.