

# THE LEARNING & TEACHING OFFICE

# MONTHLY DIGEST

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The Monthly Digest is produced by Ryerson University's [Learning and Teaching Office](#) for distribution via the LTO's [Teachnet](#) mailing list. It highlights new scholarly publications in learning and teaching, as well as recent news from the world of higher education.

## *In this issue...*

- Journal of Excellence in College Teaching
- Teaching in Higher Education
- Modern Language Journal
- Journal of Faculty Development
- International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

### *Excellence in College Teaching*

#### *Graduate Teaching Assistants in the Learning Paradigm: Beliefs about Inclusive Teaching*

By Priscilla B. Embry and Joan M. McGuire

"The learning paradigm emphasizes teaching in ways that facilitate learning for all students. As novice instructors of an increasingly diverse student population, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) frequently have full responsibility for teaching undergraduate courses. This study investigated GTAs' beliefs about including diverse learners in their teaching and their teaching practices. GTAs from varied disciplines and cultural backgrounds described wanting to teach inclusively. Participants' beliefs and teaching strategies indicate they have a platform for learning to understand inclusive instruction through Universal Design for Instruction (UDI). UDI provides a structure for GTA orientation activities that emphasize inclusive teaching in the learning paradigm."

### *Teaching in Higher Education*

#### *Exploring Teaching Concerns and Characteristics of Graduate Teaching Assistants*

By YoonJung Cho et al.

"The purpose of the study was to explore a conceptual structure of graduate teaching assistant (GTA) teaching concerns. Results indicated that GTAs experience five distinct, inter-related types of concerns: class control, external evaluation, task, impact and role/time/communication. These 'teaching concerns' were further analysed by examining their relationship with the value placed on them by the GTAs and the confidence in dealing with the teaching-related issues of concern. The results revealed that GTAs tend to have concerns about self, task or role/time/communication-related issues when the nature of the concerned issues is perceived as being valuable but challenging. On the other hand, GTAs are more likely to have concerns with impact-related issues when the nature of the issues is perceived as both being valuable and manageable. Several GTA characteristics, such as teaching experience, teacher efficacy, participation in professional development and values on teaching practices, were examined as predictors of GTA teaching concerns."

### *Modern Language Journal*

#### *Teaching Assistants' Self-Efficacy in Teaching Literature: Sources, Personal Assessments, and Consequences*

By Nicole Mills

"Byrnes has suggested that the disconnection be-

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tween language and literature instruction within many foreign language departments has consequences on the professionalization of graduate students. These structural issues lead to questions about graduate students' development. How do teaching assistants (TAs) perceive their competency as 'language' and 'literature' instructors? What are the sources and consequences of their self-beliefs? Teacher self-efficacy (TSE), or a teacher's perception of his or her capabilities to bring about desired objectives in student engagement and learning, was explored to gain insight into TAs' perceptions of teaching competence. This qualitative study evaluated 10 French literature doctoral students' TSE beliefs to teach literature and their accompanying sources, personal assessments and analyses, and consequences. Results revealed that although the TAs found the graduate program to be highly effective in its formation of literary scholars and language instructors, they found that the pedagogy of literature 'falls in a gap between these two holes.'

*Journal of Faculty Development*  
*Knowledge or Feelings: First-Year Students' Perceptions of Graduate Teaching Assistants in Engineering*

By Monica F. Cox et al.

"In a first-year engineering course with an enrollment of approximately 1900 students per year, seventy-eight undergraduate engineering students' perceptions of their graduate teaching assistants were obtained. Based upon student feedback, researchers identified three themes of highest concern to the students: graduate teaching assistants' knowledge levels, their overall effectiveness, and their approachability. Examining the sequence of reflective words and informed by current literature, researchers found that most undergraduate students initially emphasized the knowledge level and the overall effectiveness (i.e., academic traits) of their graduate teaching assistants and then referred to the approachability of teaching assistants (i.e., personal traits)."

*International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*  
*Educating Reflexive Practitioners: Casting Graduate Teaching Assistants as Mentors in First-Year Classrooms*

By Jim Henry and Holly H. Bruland

"Reflective practice has become a mainstay in many inquiries into teaching and learning, presenting reflective practitioners with the challenge of accounting for their own institutional positions when interpreting student performance in the binary teacher-student configurations of most classrooms. This study analyzes the perspectives of TAs cast as mentors to students in a unique trinary configuration of instructor-mentor-student. During four semesters, TAs in English mentored first-year university composition students by attending all classes alongside them, conducting intake interviews, and following up with numerous out-of-class conferences during the semester. Using standardized end-of-term evaluations by mentors supplemented by focus group transcripts and administrators' field notes, analysts determined that mentors' ranges of actions in the classroom and course enabled them to 'think through' the perspectives of both instructor and student to develop 'positional reflexivity.' That is, mentors incorporated the factor of institutional position into reflexivity about teaching and learning to gain insight into such issues as interpretations of student performance, power dynamics that inflect students' senses of agency, the challenges of transitioning to college, mentors' own professional goals, and more. Implications are drawn for leveraging this unique form of TA training to enhance learner-centered approaches to teaching when TAs later find themselves teaching their own courses."

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