

MENTOR AND MENTEE: BRIDGING TWO PERSPECTIVES ON GTA TRAINING
A CASE STUDY ON GTA TRAINING NEEDS IN
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AT UPRM

By

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Abstract

This case study investigated the opinions that Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) from the English Department at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez have regarding the training they received during their placement in the University Teaching Development (UTD) course, as well as the expectations that the coordinators of this course had. Thirteen GTAs and their two UTD coordinators participated in the research. The methods employed for data collection were GTA questionnaire, GTA focus group interview and UTD Coordinators' interview. Results showed that GTAs perceived the training course as redundant, as the materials assigned in the course were repeated for the three-semester time period graduate students were requested to take the course. GTAs stated that the course needed to include more hands-on activities dealing with topics such as teaching strategies and classroom management. The UTD coordinators identified classroom management, promoting active learning, and constructing a teaching philosophy as the main GTA training needs.

Resumen

Este estudio de caso investigó las opiniones que los asistentes de cátedra (GTAs, por sus siglas en inglés) del Departamento de Inglés tenían sobre el adiestramiento que recibieron en el curso University Teaching Development, así como las expectativas y opiniones que las encargadas del entrenamiento tenían sobre el mismo. Trece GTAs y las dos coordinadoras del curso participaron en la investigación. Los datos se recopilaron mediante cuestionarios y entrevistas. Los resultados indican que los GTAs percibían que el curso era repetitivo, ya que los temas discutidos en los tres semestres que se requiere tomar el curso, son los mismos. Éstos también indicaron que se necesitaban más actividades prácticas que aborden temas como estrategias de enseñanza y manejo del salón de clases. Las coordinadoras, por su parte, identificaron manejo de salón, promoción de aprendizaje activo y redacción de una filosofía de enseñanza como las necesidades primordiales de entrenamiento de los GTAs.

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Dedication

Por ser un modelo a seguir en todo el sentido de la palabra.

Por enseñarme a no darme por vencida y que las cosas pasan por una razón.

Mami, éste es también tu logro. Te amo.

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Chapter I: Introduction

“The beginning is the most important part of the work.”

--Plato

“For, usually and fitly, the presence of an introduction is held to imply that there is something of consequence and importance to be introduced.”

--Arthur Machen

The English Department at the University of Puerto Rico-Mayagüez (UPRM) employs an average of twenty to twenty-five graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) each semester. GTAs are responsible for independently teaching a wide array of undergraduate courses under the supervision of faculty course coordinators. From 2005 to 2008, GTAs from the English Department were required to participate in a program called Teaching Assistants' Development and Support (TADS), which was designed to provide training, support and assistance to GTAs to help them address the questions and situations that arose in the courses they were assigned to teach. In August 2008 TADS was renamed University Teaching Development (UTD), and became a one-credit course that GTAs are currently required to take for three semesters.

The reason for this study arose from the needs that GTAs voiced among themselves in the English Department regarding the training that they were receiving. These discussions served as a catalyst for me, motivating me to formally study and comprehend the reasons for a situation of perceived discontent. Thus, the aim of this study was to document and analyze the opinions that GTAs from the English Department had regarding the training that they received during their placement in the UTD course, as well as the expectations and opinions that the developers and coordinators of this course had of the program.

Historical Background

In order to discuss the aspects considered in GTA training in Puerto Rico, more specifically in the English Department at UPRM, it is crucial to present a brief background

regarding the employment of GTAs. However, since the review of literature has thus far not identified any published scholarship on the history of GTA employment in Puerto Rico, I will therefore focus on the history of this phenomenon in the United States.

The history of GTA employment in United States universities is not thoroughly documented; therefore, researchers cannot reach a conclusion regarding the origin of this practice (Hendrix, 1995; Luo, 2000). However, F. Rudolph, in his book *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (as cited in Luo, 2000), established that Yale University began to employ graduate students as tutors in undergraduate courses in the 1700s. According to Rudolph, graduate students were responsible for leading discussions about class lectures. This practice increased gradually to the point that in the 1800s, universities began providing students assistantships in order to entice them towards the continuation of graduate studies (Rudolph, as cited in Luo, 2000). Yet, at that time, the universities “did not require any service from the students who received the small stipends” (Luo, 2000, p. 8); they just wanted to increase the level of education among the students.

Subsequently, as some issues revolve around politics, the use of GTAs was as well a result of history driven by politics. World War II caused universities to rely more and more on graduate students as class lecturers (Hendrix, 1995). The enactment of the G.I. Bill of Rights, better known as the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, provided WWII veterans the opportunity to obtain a postsecondary education. With this idea in mind, and to fulfill the requirements of this law, the graduate students who were provided with the assistantship were placed in college classrooms as teachers (Hendrix, 1995; Luo, 2000).

The shift in university teaching practices, from professors teaching a class to graduate students teaching a class, also provided for the employment of more GTAs to lecture classes. At

this time (1950s to 1960s), professors were asked to conduct research in order to excel academically in scientific findings, and even work with other countries in order to provide solutions to the world's problems (Lucas, 1994). Due to the professors' change of priorities, from teaching to doing research, most of the teaching load was deposited on the graduate students with fellowships (Luo, 2000; Park, 2004). In addition, the 1960s and 1970s boom period¹ in college enrollment forced universities to have larger classrooms with more students (Lucas, 1994). To address this situation, GTAs were given more and different responsibilities such as leading small group discussions, grading, holding office hours, and even having full responsibility for a course (Luo, 2000), which is the case of the GTAs who are the focus of this study.

Employing GTAs in the universities has advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages are the following: graduate students who want to become professors in the future gain important teaching experience; the assistantships provide financial support for these students and provide universities with inexpensive and available staff that frees faculty members from teaching introductory courses (Hendrix 1995; Luo, 2000; Park, 2004). Among the disadvantages are these: instructors with no previous teaching experience are often assigned to teach college-level courses; the workload the graduate students have is excessive, considering that they have dual roles as students and teachers; and the needed supervision and training for the GTAs are not always available on a regular basis (Luo, 2000; see also Feezel & Myers, 1997; Hendrix 1995; Park, 2004).

This last disadvantage becomes the concern regarding the employment of GTAs to teach undergraduate general education courses, for these courses are the base for college students'

¹ The boom period refers to the time in which Vietnam War veterans enrolled in universities to pursue an undergraduate degree.

academic achievement. If the graduate students who are granted the assistantship do not have prior adequate experience to teach, it is the responsibility of the institution to provide the needed training for them to responsibly and effectively teach a class. According to Knapper and Rogers, “The failure to provide this type of teacher education is thought to be ‘a dereliction of responsibility both to the teaching assistants themselves and to the undergraduate students they instruct’” (cited in Hendry, 1998, p. 1). Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that these GTAs need proper training that fits their needs, for most of them aspire to pursue an academic career (Park, 2004). Thus, their GTA experience is their first career step.

Purpose and Rationale

These issues surrounding GTA employment and training can be studied in the context of Puerto Rico as a special case due to the political relationship that Puerto Rico maintains with the United States. This political relationship influences our higher education context and practices since Puerto Rico receives federal funding which grants students the opportunity to undertake undergraduate studies. The student demand for undergraduate studies in Puerto Rican universities require that there be instructors to teach the courses they need GTA employment often supplies this demand.

Furthermore, with the need and desire that students have to continue graduate studies, universities are employing the same method that was used in the United States at least as early as 1700, as mentioned above. Statistics show that there is an increase in students pursuing graduate studies; an example of this is the fall 2003 enrollment of graduate students at UPRM, when 1,072 students matriculated in the 36 graduate programs the university offers, which was the first time enrollment had surpassed 1,000 (Cesani, 2003). The enrollment in graduate studies has been increasing over the academic years at UPRM. For instance, in August 2004 the enrollment was

1,072 (Walker, 2004) and a year later it was 1,079. The figure slowly increased over the years to 1,104 graduate students enrolled at UPRM in January, 2009 (Serrano Gastón, 2009).

Unfortunately, the research conducted so far has yielded no specific data that provide information about the beginning of the employment of graduate students in Puerto Rican universities. Thus, I cannot draw any comparisons between the history of GTA employment in the island and that history in the United States.

Context: University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez

The four colleges at UPRM (Arts and Sciences, Agricultural Sciences, Business Administration and Engineering) employ graduate students as graders, researchers, laboratory instructors, and conference instructors, as is the case of the English Department—the site for my research. Table 1 presents the most recent available data (from Spring 2009) regarding the distribution of assistantships at UPRM.

Students who are granted a teaching assistantship (laboratory instructors and conference instructors) must attend at the beginning of the school year a one-week orientation provided by the *Centro de Enriquecimiento Profesional*² (CEP), and complete additional orientation hours during the academic year. At the yearly CEP orientation, new GTAs get 18 hours of “training” out of the 25 hours that each must complete in the year. What CEP offers graduate students is mainly an orientation about institutional regulations and policies. Nonetheless, there are cases in which graduate students are granted the assistantship in the second semester of the academic year, which makes it nearly impossible for them to be fully oriented about the policies and regulations of the institution before they begin teaching. The additional training hours consist of workshops given throughout the academic year; these are created and presented by campus faculty members who have expertise in various teaching practices, methodologies and resources.

² Center for Professional Development.

This workshop program is part of the CEP mission, which aims to “expose faculty members and teaching assistants to a diverse range of teaching skills that help promote academic excellence, in order to ensure a better academic progress for students” (“Misión del CEP”). Still, there are occasions when a faculty member presents a conference on a particular subject and students who attend it receive CEP contact hours, disregarding whether the conference is related to pedagogical matters, which some of the times it is not.

Table 1³

Number of Graduate Students with Assistantships in Spring 2009 Semester

College	Department	Type of Assistantship			
		Grader	Research	Laboratory Instructor	Conference Instructor
Arts and Sciences	Biology		12	60	2
	Chemistry	5	34	88	2
	English		1		26
	Geology		4	4	
	Hispanic Studies				7
	Marine Sciences		29		
	Mathematics		29	3	41
	Physics		1	21	1
Agricultural Sciences	Agricultural Economy	1	3	2	
	Agricultural Engineering		8	2	
	Agronomy and Soils	1	24	18	
	Animal Industry			16	
	Crop Protection		10	4	
	Food Science and Technology	1	2	1	
	Horticulture		4	4	
Business Administration	Business Administration	9	6		
Engineering	Chemical Engineering		22		6
	Civil Engineering	10	62	17	2
	Electrical Engineering	1	12	34	
	General Engineering	4	2	8	2
	Industrial Engineering		1	4	11
	Mechanical Engineering	3	26	19	
Total		35	292	305	100
Total		732			

³ Retrieved from <http://grad.uprm.edu/oeg/Estadisticas/PDF/enero2009departamento.pdf> .

In addition, there are specific norms to manage the assistantships granted to graduate students in the Mayagüez Campus. These norms are presented as objectives, under Academic Senate By-Law (*Certificación*) 0562. Among these is one that fully illustrates the need to train students who are granted assistantships. It reads as follows: “[The department is required] to provide a source of support for teaching staff in the areas of instruction and research, among others”⁴ (“Normas para regir las ayudantías”). The certification also stipulates the graduate teaching assistants’ duties and responsibilities, including the following:

- A. To contribute to the teaching of courses, laboratory activities, tutorials, or internships;
- B. To hold office hours;
- C. To participate in the administration of departmental examinations;
- D. To prepare, correct and grade exams or other works related to the course, laboratory, tutorials or practice;
- E. To attend training, orientation, and coordination meetings;
- F. To verify the availability of materials and equipment needed for the teaching of the course;
- G. To present the students’ grades on schedule to the supervisor. (“Normas para regir las ayudantías”)

As can be noticed, there is no specification regarding what type of training these graduate students need, or are required to have had in the past. In fact, throughout the entire campus, there is only one formal course that focuses on GTA training and development, which is the aforementioned UTD course offered by the English Department. As I mentioned before, this

⁴ Objective 1.4 in Spanish, “Proveer una fuente de apoyo al personal docente en la enseñanza, la investigación y en otras áreas.”

course began as TADS, as a departmental support program for graduate students who were granted assistantships, in 2005. It was mainly a venue for GTAs to exchange their experiences and reflections about teaching through the use of WebCT—an on-line learning system. The discussion posts ranged from practical questions and individual concerns to reactions to assigned pedagogical texts. At the end of each semester, each GTA was evaluated on the submission of a teaching portfolio that documented their GTA work throughout the semester. For the creation of this portfolio, students attended a series of brief workshops in order to work on aspects of its development, such as their teaching philosophy statement.

As mentioned above, the UTD course was institutionalized as a one-credit course in the second semester of the 2007-2008 academic year, and was implemented as such beginning the following semester (fall 2008). My study consisted of documenting the training and support needs these GTAs had and their perceptions of the usefulness of the training they received in the course, as well as presenting the perceptions the UTD coordinators had regarding the material covered in the course.

The review of literature on GTA training which follows in the next chapter presents several studies that have taken place in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. These studies are based on both qualitative and quantitative paradigms, and present similar findings which conclude that there is an increased need for training of graduate students because the courses GTAs teach are the foundations for the academic achievement of undergraduate students. The scholarship consulted documents the need to train GTAs on ethical matters (Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000), classroom management (Luo, 2000), among other issues. It also proposes alternate GTA training methods (Davis & Kring, 2001), and offers models for the design of assessment research (Hendry, 1998). Considering this literature, I planned to study the

same situations that the researchers present but based in the context of Puerto Rico, specifically the UPRM.

Research Questions

As mentioned above, GTA training is a topic that has been studied in different contexts, which include the United States, Canada, and Europe. Due to the lack of inquiry in this matter in the Puerto Rican context, I decided to transfer issues or aspects that are presented in these studies to such context. With this in mind, the general objectives for the research were:

- To document the contents and methodology of the UTD course (including interviews with course coordinators and evaluations of the course syllabus by GTAs, course coordinators, and myself);
- To document what MAEE students would like to cover in the course;
- To inquire about the levels of GTA satisfaction with the UTD course;
- To inquire about GTAs' opinions regarding the relevance of UTD for their professional development and support.

In order to pursue these objectives, I had to consider the previous teaching training that GTAs might have had, the topics and materials given in the course syllabus for the GTAs' development course, the perceptions and opinions of the UTD coordinators, and GTAs' opinions about the effectiveness and relevance of the course for their professional development and teaching responsibilities.

Considering these objectives, the central question that guided my research was:
What training do GTAs expect to receive from the UTD course?

This central query included the following sub-questions:

1. What training, support and professional development needs are identified by GTAs in the English Department?
2. What training, support and professional development needs are identified by the coordinators/faculty teaching the course?
3. How does the UTD course propose to prepare GTAs for the undergraduate courses they teach?
4. What are GTAs' perceptions of how the UTD course meets their needs and expectations?

As further discussed in Chapter III, my methodology consisted of a case study where data was collected by means of a questionnaire, interview and focus group.

Significance of the Study

Since the English Department's Masters program is in English education (MAEE), I believe that this study is highly significant for the English Department at UPRM. By researching and presenting the training and support needs that GTAs in the Department have, the department may use these findings for further development of the UTD course. Hence, the audiences for this study are UPRM's graduate teaching assistants, GTA mentors/UTD coordinators, policy makers, university administrators, and the English Department faculty.

This research also explores an area that has been rarely examined in the Puerto Rican context, which can be further studied. In this sense, this study makes inroads, for it can inform all programs in Puerto Rican universities that rely on GTAs as class instructors. Furthermore, the unusual situation of the English Department of UPRM training GTAs, who are pursuing a Masters degree in English education, to teach at a higher level also brings an opportunity for future researchers across the world to study this phenomenon.

The following chapter presents the training approaches that are available for institutions to rely on, as well as some of the pertinent research conducted on different issues in which GTAs might need more training such as classroom management, ethics, and assessment, to name a few.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

“Reviewing the past helps us to understand the present.”
--Confucius

As mentioned in the previous chapter, no information about the training needs of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in Puerto Rico has been published so far. Not only is there no scholarship regarding this topic in Puerto Rico, but there are also few studies and articles on this matter in the United States, Canada and England that have been published in recent years. However, based in those contexts, the scholarship presented here is sufficient to inform my research. I am drawing from and adapting aspects of the research conducted elsewhere to the Puerto Rican context, thus presenting a new area in which more research can be conducted further on. The information that follows presents the situation that some graduate schools have had concerning GTA training, followed by the models that researchers have proposed, and research that scholars have conducted regarding this matter.

Ideally or in practice, graduate programs are driven by two broad responsibilities: to educate graduate students to be contributors in their profession, and to help graduate students create judicious choices when it comes to their teaching responsibilities. According to Byrnes (2001), departments are not defined by the quality of scholarship and the way each faculty member teaches, but by the conglomeration of the qualities and qualifications all the people who have a teaching responsibility hold. GTAs may be a considerable number amongst those who teach in a department. Therefore, it has been extremely important to provide them with all the necessary tools to use and adapt for their roles as teachers, or instructors in each department (Byrnes, 2001; Hardré, 2005). For this reason, several training and support models have been proposed, mostly by former GTAs and professionals in the area of GTA training. However, these models have not served their

training purpose, since most of them are generically constructed and do not focus on the real training needs that GTAs have identified in the existing literature. Worthen (1992) presents this problematic area by stating that indeed there have been some training programs that have been developed to fit GTA needs; however, these programs were constructed to deal with what the coordinators or faculty members in charge of the training assumed were the GTAs' training needs.

GTA Training Models

The training and support models that are available have a series of techniques or approaches in common. For example, before the beginning of each semester there is a one week general orientation that aims to present to the students the university policies and some teaching tips (Azevedo, 1976; Brandl, 2000; Shannon, D. M. et.al., 1998). Yet, there are specific programs that offer a more detailed training. In some cases there are departments working together to provide more specific training to their graduate assistants, although this training is not specific enough to meet all the needs of each academic discipline (Azevedo, 1976; Brandl, 2000). These programs involve classroom visits by a GTA supervisor with follow-up conferences, GTA to GTA classroom visits, videotaping of a class session, seminars, student evaluations, senior GTAs mentoring newcomer GTAs, the use of active learning, and modeling, among others (Brandl, 2000; Gaia, Corts, Tatum, & Allen, 2003; Hardré, 2005; Park, 2004).

The course under study, University Teaching Development (UTD) from the English Department of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) has used several of the strategies mentioned above. Graduate students working as teaching assistants have classroom visitations by a faculty member from the Graduate Committee that is scheduled, by custom, every semester. GTAs also need to visit a peer's class period and two faculty

members, and write reports on these visits. They meet once a month to attend workshops or present activities that they have used in their classes. GTAs also have an online tool (WebCT) that they use to discuss chapters or issues that are brought up by the UTD coordinators, and GTAs are assessed by their students. According to my review of the available literature, the English Department seems to have used very similar techniques to that of other universities. However, as stated in Chapter I, GTAs feel that the time they dedicate to this course does not pertain to their development as teachers or instructors. So, where does the problem lay, if many of the approaches to train GTAs in the English Department at RUM are similar to models that other universities have used? Hence, a description of the research done on GTA training is necessary in order to approach this problem.

Previous Research on GTA Training

Quantitative as well as qualitative studies have been conducted focusing on areas that are important for GTA training. Worthen (1992) conducted a qualitative study to identify GTA needs. The study used six GTA participants, all of them working on a master's degree in speech communication. The GTAs were asked to reflect on their previous teaching experiences and to keep a teaching log where teaching issues surfaced and these served as triggers for informal group discussions. GTAs presented concerns regarding their preparation to teach, which included confidence issues, how to motivate their students, and their dual role of teachers and students. Since GTAs did not know what to expect from the teaching experience or the department where they were teaching, they reported feeling lost in a way. According to Worthen (1992), even with an orientation before classes begin—which is an approach that many universities use, including UPRM—graduate students may be anxious because they feel unprepared to teach, even more when

some of the topics addressed in these orientations might not be related to classroom practices. And even if some universities make it possible for GTAs to have training and support, the administration's "lack of planning make these a waste of time" (p. 16), which leaves GTAs to rely on their fellow GTAs as consultants if they have concerns or doubts regarding their teaching practice (see also Brandl, 2000).

Feezel and Myers (1997) also assessed, but in a quantitative manner, the concerns that both newcomers (GTAs in their first semester) and experienced GTAs had regarding their "self, task, impact, and role conflicts" (p. 112). The researchers distributed a questionnaire to 233 graduate teaching assistants from all departments at the beginning of the school year at a Midwestern university in the United States in order to study their concerns. Results demonstrated that GTAs' concerns varied depending on the teaching experience that GTAs had. Graduate students who had previous teaching experience such as former teachers and more experienced GTAs "arrive at the classroom with different levels of preparation, training, and supervision" (p. 112). Newcomers had different concerns from the experienced GTAs such as learning the area they were going to teach. Thus, the study showed that indeed, GTAs have different training needs that in no circumstances can be approached by having one general training program for all.

Similarly, Park (2004), after conducting research on GTA training in various institutions from North America in order to improve the training GTAs receive in the United Kingdom, argued that a training program is not a "case of 'one size fits all'" (p. 352), and that the decisions on how to train GTAs must be informed by several factors such as teaching experience and the graduate students' backgrounds. This approach makes it possible to front the need for each training program to be adjusted to fulfill specific GTAs' training needs, rather than providing a generic curriculum.

Likewise, Hendry (1998) explored the training and the need for a support system among 234 GTAs who were pursuing either a master's or a doctorate's degree at an institution in Canada with the goal of providing evidence of the need to develop adequate support and training programs in the institution. In order to do so, Hendry developed and distributed a needs assessment to GTAs from all the departments of the institution that surveyed their "experiences, opinions and suggestions" (p. 10) on how to improve their training. A similar study reviewed by Hendry reported that "previous teaching experience, and prior learning appear to enhance GTA self-efficacy" (Prieto & Altamier; quoted in Hendry, 1998, p. 12). Hendry's results yielded the responsibilities and concerns that GTAs had related to their assistantship and their training such as learning more about grading, teaching a class, preparing a class, and receiving more training on "learning styles, teaching methods, and developing teaching evaluations" (p. 32). This study is relevant to my research since I am focusing on the same aspects and circumstances that Hendry examined, such as the English Department's GTAs' opinions and suggestions concerning their training.

Branstetter and Handelsman (2000) conducted a quantitative study with the purpose of assessing the training of psychology GTAs and their knowledge regarding teaching ethics, taking into account three aspects: their obligations, their ethics training and their behavior. This research was done with the perception that GTAs were not assessed formally regarding their ethical behavior with undergraduate students and were not properly trained on ethical matters. The study was mainly based on a questionnaire distributed to

psychology programs from different universities⁵ that included items about four aspects: GTAs' ethical beliefs, GTAs' ethical practices, demographic data, and GTAs' profiles (training, experience, background, among others). A total of 543 questionnaires were distributed throughout these universities, from which 256 were answered by GTAs. Findings demonstrated that GTAs receive little to no ethical training for their role as teachers, as well as minimal or no teaching training.

Similarly, Luo (2000), concerned with a lack of GTA training on classroom management, conducted an instrumental case study at a US Midwestern university with the purpose of understanding how GTAs perceived their instructional roles and managed their classes. His goal was to improve the training model for future GTAs. Relying on the data he collected (interviews with six GTAs—pursuing doctoral degrees in psychology, human resources management, business administration and chemistry—and their supervisors, observations, field notes and document review) Luo (2000) presented the challenges that GTAs face when assuming their roles as students and as teacher figures. These were grading, developing a syllabus, maintaining their students' interest with the topics being discussed in class, and “enhancing motivation and promoting understanding” (p. 122). Also, similar to Worthen (1992), he argued that GTAs “are typically faced with lack of training, insecurity regarding their teaching capability, time/role conflicts, and uncertainty regarding their departmental status” (p. 14).

Brandl (2000), on the other hand, was interested in examining GTAs' preferences regarding training and their opinions about “the usefulness of the training elements” (p. 357) that they received at the University of Washington. In order to pursue his inquiry,

⁵ Thirty-four psychology programs were contacted for this study. These included universities from Arizona, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Montana, Nevada, Nebraska, North Dakota, Kansas and Idaho.

Brandl distributed a semi-structured questionnaire to 56 newcomer and experienced graduate students from five language departments in which GTAs were asked to rate the effectiveness of different training elements based on their teaching development and growth. Interviews with 23 out of the 56 surveyed participants then followed in order to have a more in-depth view and understanding of these GTAs' needs. From Brandl's results, I identified three main needs that I believe are pertinent to the present study. Regarding the training or advice GTAs seek, Brandl (2000) found that they usually go to their peers or to their supervisor. This means that GTAs look for additional resources to fill that gap that might exist between their training program and their actual needs. Second, GTAs want to receive feedback, since it provides a means to hear suggestions that will lead to improvement; and last, GTAs reported that "practical applications and concrete examples of teaching activities" (p. 366) are the most direct ways for them to learn. In light of this, Brandl (2000) recommends that "When planning a TA training program and determining what training elements to include, program coordinators need to take into account a variety of individual factors such as the TA's developmental stage and her or his cultural background and personality" (p. 367).

Nonetheless, there is an aspect that is not discussed or referred to in any of the above studies and even proposed models, which could present a possible solution regarding the inadequate training GTAs seem to receive. According to Calkins and Kelley (2005), little has been written about faculty members being GTA mentors or supervisors. Consequently, their study focused on finding out what experience in training their GTAs faculty had, which concluded that most faculty members who worked with GTAs had not received any training on how to work with GTAs, or even how to mentor them. Most of the participants declared that they used their previous experience as GTAs to treat and teach

their GTAs, which, as previous scholarship mentions, has not been efficient. Moreover, by reviewing GTA handbooks from several universities, Calkins and Kelly (2005) reported that these present the responsibilities GTAs have, yet few of these present any specifications as to how faculty members can mentor graduate students. Although this study does not focus on a certain program or model to train GTAs, it is pertinent to my research since it might inform why GTAs in all of the studies mentioned above, and even the ones under study at UPRM feel they have not been properly trained.

Guided by this scholarship, I decided to explore the above issues in the Puerto Rican context, particularly in the Department of English of UPRM. Even though the literature presents models and studies conducted throughout different academic departments, such as GTAs pursuing a master or a doctoral degree in speech communication (Worthen, 1992), psychology (Bransletter & Handelsman, 2000), or any other major (Feezel & Myers, 1997; Hendry, 1998), one aspect that is new and deserves investigation is the one under study: GTAs who are pursuing a master's degree in English education. Since these GTAs are taking pedagogy classes as part of their curriculum, it will be important to acknowledge their training and support needs as well as their perceptions on the training they are receiving as GTAs.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation Framework

Since the focus of my research is GTA training, I believe the analyzed data can inform, to a certain degree, the theory of legitimate peripheral participation, also known as situated learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced this theory by stating that learning occurs in social situations where the “learner participates in the actual practice of an expert” (p.14) by having little participation to having full participation in a practice. In other words, the apprentice begins as a subordinate, engaging thus into several roles at the same time,

such as “learning practitioner, sole responsible agent in minor parts of the performance, aspiring expert, and so forth” (p. 23). Lave and Wenger (1991) thus define legitimate peripheral participation as “the way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old timers, and about activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. This framework proposes the idea in which everybody is responsible (directly or indirectly) for everyone’s learning. However, there is a person who is viewed as a master (or mentor) and there is the learner who is referred to as the apprentice (mentee). Since this framework looks at the interactions that occur when learning a particular practice, it focuses its attention on how the apprentice attends to his/her task and how the master works to teach or train this mentee.

By my studying the English Department’s UTD training course, I will be gathering data that will present how both the GTAs and the UTD course coordinators engage in their respective roles as masters (trainers) and apprentices (mentees).

Chapter III: Methodology

“It's one thing to have the tools, but you also need to have the methodology.”
--Michael Sanie

Since this research inquires about the training that Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in the English Department at the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM) receive, I decided that the best way to gather data was by conducting a case study. Stake (2005) defines a case study as an “interest in an individual case,” while drawing “attention to the question of what specially can be learned about a single case” (p. 443). The singularity of the case under investigation would thus shed light on the training needs that GTAs from the English Department of UPRM have, considering several particular aspects which include the master’s degree in English education (MAEE) they are pursuing, their previous teaching experience (or lack thereof), and last but not least, the University Teaching Development (UTD) coordinators’ beliefs about what the GTA training must be about. However, Stake argues that a case study is not “a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied” (p. 443), drawing the attention to what is being studied, rather than on how it is being studied. The case in this research is thus the UTD course, with emphasis on studying both GTAs and the course coordinators’ perceptions of the training course.

Stevenson (2004) fronts the importance of case studies in the field of education because these can transform educational policies and practices. Guided by the question that Stake presents in his discussion, “What can be learned here that a reader needs to know?” (p. 449), my goal was to study the most approachable aspects that my selected case had, which was the GTAs, and the UTD coordinators, in order to provide insights and make recommendations to this training program. In this sense, my research is an evaluative-instrumental case study. Merriam (1998) defines evaluative case studies as studies that

entail “description, explanation, and judgment” (p. 39). In other words, through this research, the GTAs’, the UTD coordinators’ and my own evaluation of the formal curriculum of the UTD course will help “develop a better understanding of the dynamics” (Merriam, 1998, p. 39) of the training and support program. Similarly, an instrumental case study seeks “to provide insight into an issue or to draw a generalization” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). This means that the case is used to understand “something” else. Such is my purpose in conducting an instrumental case study: to understand the perspectives GTAs and the course coordinators of the UTD course have regarding the training GTAs receive.

Role of the Researcher

When I designed and conducted this research I was a graduate student in the English Department at UPRM. I was also a GTA, and as every GTA in the Department, I had to take the three semesters of the training course under study here. I had a working relationship with all the participants at the time the study was being conducted. Being an insider could have affected the way in which I analyzed the data because my prior knowledge includes the reasons I decided to undertake this investigation in the first place.

That said, conducting a case study allowed me to further examine reflectively “into meanings, working to relate them to contexts and experience” (Stake, 2005, p. 450); thus, I was constantly reflecting and revising my analyses and meanings of what I perceived during my study. Because I experienced personally the UTD training course, I could come to understand better the case “in the most expected and respected ways” (Stake, 2005, p. 455). This is what Stake calls an “embraceable case” (p. 455), because I was extremely acquainted with the case.

Research Site and Time Period

The research site for my case study was the Department of English at UPRM, since I was addressing the training needs that GTAs have in that specific department in this institution. The data gathering took place in spring 2009, commencing in February when I interviewed the UTD coordinators, and ending in April with the GTA focus group interview. My methodology included three data gathering methods: GTA questionnaire, GTA focus group interview, and UTD coordinators interview.

Participants

There were a total of 15 participants in this study: thirteen were GTA participants, which included those who answered the questionnaire (n=13); those who took part in the focus group (n=4); and the UTD course coordinators at the time (n=2). The fact that I was a GTA in the English Department, and a former student in the course, allowed me to gain access to the participants. Thus, it was relatively easy for me to contact the participants and let them know what my research was about, and since most of them knew me, they agreed to participate without any reservations. Once they had agreed to participate, they all received a detailed description of the research project and those who were interviewed were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendices A and B).

Data Collection Procedures

Interview. In February 2009, I interviewed the current UTD coordinators in order to gather data about their viewpoints regarding what they thought the training and support needs of the GTAs in the English Department were. As Seidman (1998) notes, little educational research has focused on studying the standpoint “of students, teachers, [and] administrators” (p. 4) whose experiences and knowledge are part of education; thus by interviewing these participants I was seeking to have a firsthand view of their perspectives

on GTA training. I employed a standardized open-ended interview protocol (see Appendix E). This type of interview asks the researcher to have the questions already determined before conducting the interview (Nunan, 1992; see also Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Its strengths, as noted by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), are the increase of data understanding and the fact that data is collected in a particular order, which allows the researcher to compare the data within the data set.

Before commencing the interview with the UTD coordinators, I asked them to read the description of my research (see Appendix A) thoroughly, stressing that if they had any questions about it, I would answer them as clearly as possible. However, since they did not have any questions about it, I asked them to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix B). They kept a copy while I kept one as well. The interview was recorded, transcribed and coded analytically. According to Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995), the process of coding data analytically happens in two manners. First, the data is coded openly, which is when the researcher can or will “identify and formulate any and all ideas, themes, or issues” (p. 143) presented in the data. Then, the researcher proceeds to do what is called focused coding, where a more in-depth analysis is done to the already identified ideas, themes and issues in the open-coding process. The main research question that this interview sought to answer was: How does the UTD course prepare all GTAs for the undergraduate courses they teach? With this interview and with the GTA focus group, I intended to see and subsequently compare the different perspectives and opinions that both shareholders—GTAs and their UTD professors—have regarding the training GTAs were receiving in order to have a more complex picture of the scope and perceived merits of the training available for GTAs in the English Department.

Questionnaire. The week after the interview with the UTD coordinators, the GTAs enrolled in the course met in a UTD course session to engage in a workshop, facilitated by one of my peers and myself, on the use of Gradekeeper—an electronic roll book. At the end of the workshop I distributed a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix C). I had previously asked one of the coordinators if it were possible for me to have a time slot in their next scheduled meeting⁶ in order to administer the questionnaire, and the professor granted me the last 20 minutes of this workshop meeting. During that time and after finishing the Gradekeeper presentation, I introduced myself to the group of GTAs since some of them knew me (I was formerly part of the course) and some of them did not. I told them what my research topic was about and stressed the value their participation in answering the questionnaire had in terms of data. I handed out the research description and asked them to read it; then, I proceeded to distribute the questionnaire. It contained both closed and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions asked for the participants' profiles such as demographical information and their opinion on whether the UTD course objectives were being met or not. The open-ended questions focused on GTA support and training needs intended to record the training that GTAs have had in the past, if any; their training expectations of the UTD course; and any suggestions that they might give for improving the course which reflected their training needs. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) justify the use of questionnaires in a case study, specifically open-ended questions, because these can “capture the specificity of a particular situation” (p. 321), which in this study is the GTA training experience.

Focus group. The last method of data gathering that I employed was a two-hour focus group interview (see Appendix D) with four GTAs. The session was recorded,

⁶ The course usually meets once a month.

transcribed and coded. Focus groups are a commonly used method to gather data in the academic setting (Cheng, 2007). These types of interviews serve to collect qualitative data in a comfortable environment, by providing a space to dialogue about the topic of inquiry. The sampling strategy to select the participants for the focus group was purposive sampling. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007), purposive sampling is when the researcher chooses the “cases to be included in the sample” based on the “typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (p. 114-115). In my case, I wanted to see if there was any difference in the needs of GTAs enrolled in the course in different semesters. However, due to the lack of experience new GTAs had with the course—as it was reflected when they answered the questionnaire (see results in Chapter IV below) I decided to choose GTAs enrolled for the second time on.

Since there is no principle that defines the amount of participants that must be included in a focus group (Cheng, 2001), four GTAs⁷ were selected taking into account the semester they were attending the course: second (n=2), third (n=1), and fourth semester or more (n=1). I decided to use this strategy sampling since I wanted to study the training and support needs GTAs with different levels of training-teaching experience in the English Department had. This is important since focus groups, for researchers doing pedagogic research, inquire about the participants’ pedagogical experiences, which might include the following:

Student experiences of a particular teaching and/or assessment method; when they need to generate ideas among a group of staff for the purposes of curriculum

⁷ Originally, I had planned to choose GTAs who were attending the training course in different semesters. For instance, I wanted to include a participant who was in his/her first semester in the course, another participant in his/her second semester and so forth. However, I eventually revised the design to include first semester GTAs because the data I gathered from the questionnaires gave me no indication that they would be informed participants for the focus group interview protocol.

development; or when they need to find out how a new policy will be received by staff and/or students in order to devise appropriate means of implementation.

(Breen, 2006, p. 464)

My focus group included open dialogue. The use of dialogue, in a focus group, can present examples of everyday situations that involve critical conversations that contributes to analyzing the contexts in which the learners are entrenched (Stevens, 2000). Through dialogue and collective reflection, the group of learners may transform their various observations and opinions into critical knowledge, which might serve as input for training for GTAs in order to improve their teaching skills and to have a better notion (from both the UTD coordinators and the GTAs) of what is needed and expected in their training.

Data Analysis

According to Dyson and Genishi (2005), “In all qualitative case studies, the researcher’s purpose is not merely to organize data but to try to identify and gain analytic insight into the dimensions and dynamics of the phenomenon being studied” (p. 81). Thus, the analysis was an inductive process grounded in the collected data. As previously stated in this chapter, the three methods of data collection—questionnaire, focus group and interview—were coded analytically. This means that I assigned codes to the data sets, which helped me analyze the themes more in depth. Since my research focused on gathering and presenting the participants’ opinions regarding the UTD training course, I focused on presenting, and discussing the themes that surfaced in the three sets of data, which then allowed me to present my analysis on the issue under study.

To answer subquestion #1 (What training, support and professional development needs are identified by GTAs in the English Department?) I drew from the questionnaire administered to the GTAs and the focus group interview, whereas to answer research sub-

question #2 (What training, support and professional development needs are identified by the coordinators/faculty teaching the course?) I drew from the interview with the course coordinators. On the other hand, the data set employed to answer research sub-question #3 (How does the UTD course propose to prepare GTAs for the undergraduate courses they teach?) was UTD coordinators' interview. Finally, to answer research sub-question #4 (What are GTAs' perceptions of how the UTD course meets their needs and expectations?) I relied on the data gathered from both the questionnaire and the interviews with GTAs.

The three methods used to gather data in order to answer my research questions allowed me to triangulate the results, which serves to validate my findings.

The next two chapters will present the results of the study, addressing first the GTAs' perceptions about their training in the UTD course, followed by the UTD coordinators' views and opinions on their job as trainers and designers of the course.

Chapter IV: Results—GTAs' Stance

“We must reinforce argument with results.”
--Booker T. Washington

As stated in the introduction, the central query that this study seeks to answer is what training do GTAs expect to receive from the University Teaching Development (UTD) course? This main inquiry includes the training needs that are identified by GTAs in the English Department, how the course provides to meet these needs and the perception these graduate students have regarding this training. Therefore, this chapter presents descriptive data regarding the training GTAs receive in the Department of English from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez (UPRM). The results are presented according to the methods used for data collection. First, I present the results from the GTA questionnaire and then I will continue with the results from the GTA focus group session. The next chapter will present the results obtained from the UTD course coordinators' interview.

GTA Questionnaire

As indicated in the previous chapter, a questionnaire directed to gather the students' profiles, training needs and perceptions about the course was distributed in February, 2009 at the second meeting of the course for the spring 2009 semester. I had the last 20 minutes of the one-and-a-half hour meeting to distribute and explain the survey to the students. Of the fifteen graduate students that were enrolled in the course, thirteen were present and acceded to answer the questionnaire. There were ten females and three males of ages ranging from 21-46 years old. Three of these students were taking the UTD course for the first time—which resulted in minimal data gathered from them since they did not have

much experience with the course. Four were in their second semester, three were taking the course for the third time and three had taken the course four or more times⁸.

When asked whether they had had any teaching experience prior to being granted the teaching assistantship, only two GTAs said *no*, whereas the others had either teacher preparation experience, or had taught K-12. Based on their responses, four major themes appeared in the data: (1) GTA training needs, (2) training expectations for the course, (3) perceptions on the relevance of the course and (4) suggestions for improving the course.

GTA Training Needs

The five sub-themes that the participants identified as their training needs were classroom management, how to motivate students, teaching strategies, how to effectively correct essays and teacher development. All of these represent the areas that they feel are necessary to improve and master in order for them to be better teachers. (Refer to Table 2 to see GTAs' training needs according to the semester they were matriculated in the course.)

It is important for them to be acquiring knowledge to teach a class where their students can learn. For instance, on the topic of teaching strategies, one participant said that s/he hoped "to gain knowledge in teaching at this level and to develop dynamic activities with ease in class (for the benefit of the students)." Another participant declared that s/he wanted to learn "how to improve my classes by having more ideas for lesson plans. How to make students read more, how to reach out different learning styles in the classroom."

Grading student work was another aspect in which some felt they need more training. For example, two students voiced their concern with correcting essays and they wanted workshops focusing on this aspect. One wanted to know "what things should we be

⁸ Students who do not pass this course are required to take it again in order to retain their assistantships.

looking for in an essay? How can we establish criteria that are most important for the student to remember and implement?”

Their training needs according to their previous teaching experience and their time matriculated in the course was also important to this study since I wanted to see how these needs might vary across levels. Table 2 presents an overview of the reported training needs GTAs had in spring 2009. This table also presents the number of students enrolled in the course and their needs according the semester they were in the course.

Table 2

GTAs’ Previous Teaching Experience (PTE) and Training Needs per Semester

Semesters in UTD	First semester	Second semester	Third semester	Fourth or more semester
Number of Students and Previous Teaching Experience (PTE)	3 (Two had PTE)	4 (All had PTE)	3 (Two had PTE)	3 (All had PTE)
Reported Training Needs⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom management - Development of teaching portfolio - Development of syllabus - Grading essays - Teaching strategies - Pre-service training - University and classroom policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom management - Development of thematic units - Motivation strategies - Putting theories into practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of lesson plans - Gradekeeper - Teaching strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awareness of students’ learning styles - Classroom management - Development of lesson plans - Grading essays - Motivation strategies - Teaching strategies - Time management - University and classroom policies

Table 2 shows that there were some areas where GTAs expressed needing more training regardless of their PTE—or their current experience as GTA—and the amount of

⁹ Some students reported more than one training needs. Some specific training needs were reported more than once.

times that they had enrolled in the course. Regardless of how many times they had enrolled in the UTD course, most GTAs identified classroom management and learning teaching strategies as areas where they needed more training. Also, it is interesting to see that GTAs in their first and fourth or more semester have training needs in common, such as learning techniques to grade essays and having more knowledge on university and classroom policies (i.e. what can and cannot be done in the UPRM classroom).

Training Expectations

Regarding their training expectations for the course, GTAs presented a range of answers, from not knowing what to expect from it to learning not to expect anything from the course, since some of them (senior GTAs) do not consider the course as training. However, the majority of the GTAs (n=10) that answered the questionnaire showed that they wanted to develop and improve as teachers by indentifying different areas that they felt they needed to learn more about, such as helping their students “become better ESL speakers,” having more “ideas to implement in the classroom like games, and fun things to do,” being able to successfully manage a classroom, being aware of students’ variable ideas and expectations of the course, having more confidence for teaching and being better oriented about their teaching responsibilities.

Yet when they were asked if the course syllabus fulfilled these expectations, three GTAs reported that they had not seen the syllabus, although it is available on WebCT. On the other hand, one of the senior GTAs stated that “some of the objectives are vague, [and] others repetitive. We are essentially taking the same course every semester,” while another answered that “a syllabus for a course that meets once a month is more of a meeting schedule.”

Nevertheless, there were others who thought that the syllabus might meet these expectations, clarifying that it depended on each person's needs. One added that since the syllabus had been modified, these expectations could be met. However, this last comment cannot be taken as entirely accurate, since the syllabus was not modified when the training program became a one-credit course. Thus, I suspect that that this GTA was referring to the modifications the coordinators were making to the course itself rather than to the syllabus.

Relevance of the Course

About the relevance of the training received in the course, five students expressed that the course provided materials or topics that were not so relevant to their teaching or training needs since most of them had been covered in their teacher preparation program. "As a certified teacher I have been trained in similar areas. I think that this course should not be taught to students that did the teacher preparation program," stated one of the respondents. Another one responded, "So far, I feel that what I have received in the meetings I already had it from my teaching practice." On the other hand, there were students (n=4) who noted that some of the training has been relevant such as technicalities, the use of the electronic roll book Gradekeeper, and GTAs giving presentations on different strategies one might use in the classroom.

When they were asked about their opinions on the training available to them, the feedback showed both negative and positive assessments, and they even provided some suggestions as to how to improve the course, which will be presented below. Among the negative perceptions were that they felt that the course was another load instead of it being a "helping hand," and that GTAs did not learn much, since "the readings are not always particularly interesting, especially when it is the fourth time around." Others felt that the concept of having a training course for graduate students was good, yet the structure and

implementation of it needed improvement. They indicated that there were so many things that could be covered in the course, and they were not being covered. However, these respondents did not mention the topics that they thought were relevant for the course. Another positive evaluation was articulated by a student who liked the course “although it needs improvement in strategies [in] which they [UTD coordinators] are working on it right now.”

Suggestions for Improving the Course

Under the suggestions presented throughout the questionnaire to improve the course to make it more relevant to their needs, respondents indicated that they would like to know how they are graded in the course (specific point values for the assignments that they must do); they would like to see more workshops on different topics such as lesson plans, time management and development of thematic units.

In other words, GTAs requested more hands-on training than theory since their MAEE is in education; therefore they argued their classes present the theoretical aspect of education. Learning more teaching strategies and activities to help their students to better understand the material they are teaching was very important to the GTAs. For this reason, they felt that the course objective of having students complete a teaching portfolio¹⁰ should be eliminated (for those who have done it more than twice) because they regarded it as a waste of their valuable time. Another aspect that they would like to see changed was the number of times they must take the UTD course, for a similar reason: some argued that no more than two semesters was enough since most of them had some previous teaching

¹⁰ The teaching portfolio weighs 50% of the course grade. In it, GTAs need to present their statement of teaching philosophy, their teaching responsibilities, the course objectives with artifacts and reflections of the class(es) they teach, and present how they applied “The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” in their classes.

experience (i.e. teacher practicum or professional teaching experience). Therefore, they recommended having one semester for those who have had a teacher's certificate and two for those who did not. They also felt very strongly that it was essential to change the number of times they needed to read and rely on the reading of the "Seven Principles,"¹¹ which was necessary—and a requirement—for the preparation of their teaching portfolio. Using this reading as their only guide and model to follow for each semester they took the course might make the experience monotonous, since they were always doing the same work over again. Furthermore, repeated use of the same guide made it impossible for them to explore other ways in which they could present their work as teachers.

Moreover, respondents expressed that they would like to keep having senior GTAs providing them with workshops and additional resources as part of the UTD course since they feel comfortable asking them questions or clarifying doubts. On the other hand, they wanted their course experience to be as rigorous as it would be in any other course. For example, they would like to have weekly meetings as any other one-credit course does, and to be given the specifics on how they are going to be evaluated in the course. Table 3 presents an overview of the revisions GTAs reported they would like to see taking place in the course according to the semester each participant was in at the moment of the study. As can be noted, newcomers presented two areas they would like to see addressed in the course. However, since it was their first time taking the course, they could not draw from previous experience to answer what they would like to see changed and/or deleted in the course. This fact might have also affected the way in which they answered the

¹¹ Chickering and Gamson's *Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* may be retrieved from <http://learningcommons.evergreen.edu/pdf/fall1987.pdf>. The professors in charge of the course make sure this reading is available since the beginning of the semester for the students to use, since the portfolio is a work in progress which is to be worked on throughout the semester.

questionnaire. Among the GTAs who did draw from previous experience in the course, there was a marked difference among the aspects each of them would like to see revised. However, all of these aspects can be summed up as hands-on activities.

Table 3

Course Revisions Proposed by GTAs

Revisions to the Course	First semester	Second Semester	Third Semester	Fourth or more semester
Add	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Classroom situation techniques - Pre-service training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Know how they will be evaluated (rubric) - Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actual Training - Lesson plans - Teaching strategies - Workshops 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hands-on activities - Topics dealing with post-graduate life
Delete		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conferences - Portfolio for those who have already done it 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chit-chat - Reading assignments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peer classroom observations
Change		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Methodology of the course - Take the course one semester only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have weekly meetings - Take the course one semester only 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation - "Seven Principles" reading

The data gathered from the questionnaire presents the training needs and perceptions of almost all GTAs taking the UTD course in spring 2009. Regardless of their semester in the course, there were needs that GTAs in different semesters shared, as well as aspects that converged throughout levels. The perceptions they had regarding the course were mostly negative as they continuously expressed the opinion that the course was repetitive for the most part.

GTA Focus Group

The focus group took place in April 2009 and it consisted of a two-hour open dialogue with four participants. As mentioned in Chapter III, I selected them through purposive sampling since I wanted to compare the experiences of students who had taken the course two, three and four times. I decided not to include newcomers (first time GTAs)

since the data from the questionnaire yielded little information on their experience with the course; thus they did not have a structured opinion of the course.

Participants' Profiles

In order to have a better understanding of the data presented here, the participants' profile is important. However, I am refraining from presenting physical descriptions or any details that might give away their identities; thus, their profile will include what I think is relevant for this study. The order in which the participants are presented corresponds to the number of semesters they had taken the course, beginning with those who were in their second semester. Pseudonyms are used to identify the participants.

Norma. Norma was in her second semester in the master's program and in the UTD course. As an undergraduate who majored in English she took 30 credits in education, in addition to her B.A. credits, as part of the teachers' preparation program that is available at UPRM. She taught tenth grade as part of her teacher practicum, which was the last requisite to be able to take the teacher's certification exam granting her the license to teach seventh to twelfth grade in the public education system of Puerto Rico. Her plans after completing the MAEE degree are to gain more teaching experience and then continue towards a doctorate's degree. Of all the participants, she seemed to be the most reserved as she spoke very little, but when she did, she seemed to be as objective as possible.

Isa. Just as Norma, Isa was also in her second semester both in the M.A.E.E. and in the course. She also obtained the teacher's certificate and taught tenth grade as part of her practicum. Her post-grad plans are not defined since she does not know if she will work or continue studying to get a Ph.D. At the time of the interview, she was serious when answering the questions yet she was also sarcastic from time to time.

Erika. Erika was the most talkative of the participants as she showed her eagerness to express her viewpoints about the training she has received in the course. She was in her third semester in the MAEE program and in the course and she did not have any previous experience in teaching before becoming a GTA. Regardless of it being her third semester, she had to take another semester of the training since she failed it when she first took it. Her plan after finishing her degree is to continue with the Ph.D, which, as she expressed it, would then grant her opportunities to work as a translator or a professor at a university.

María. María was the senior of all GTAs in the course, as she was in her sixth semester in the master's program and the fifth in the UTD course. Even though she did not have a teacher certificate or take any pedagogy courses during her bachelor's degree, she did have prior teaching experience, for she had taught fifth to tenth grade at a private school. Once she finishes the program, she plans to work for a semester and then pursue a doctorate's degree in curriculum and instruction.

Based on their experience as GTAs and their training needs, these participants voiced their perceptions regarding the training they were receiving in the UTD course. As a consequence, six major themes were identified: (1) training needs, (2) complaints about the course, (3) GTAs relying on GTAs, (4) discrepancies between teaching rhetoric and teaching practice, (5) suggestions for improving the course, and (6) relevancy of the course.

Training Needs

This theme is the one with most significance since, as discussed in Chapter II, the focus of any training program must be directed towards the specific needs that have been voiced by the trainees (see Brandl, 2000; Branstetter & Handelsman, 2000; Gaia et. al., 2003; Hardré, 2005; Hendry, 1998; Luo, 2000; Worthen, 1992). When I asked the participants what their training needs were, their answers were straightforward. Norma said

that they needed to have hands-on workshops dealing with how to organize a class schedule, and that it would be helpful if they could develop (faculty and GTAs) some kind of database where GTAs could go to when they needed ideas on how to approach and teach certain topics. Isa concurred with Norma on the need to learn how to schedule a semester, as well as to having a balanced class where no student would go too far ahead of the others, and no one would stay behind. Erika mentioned scheduling as well, and added that there was a need to show and explain different ways in which a topic could be addressed in class, which would depend on the English proficiency level of the students, since GTAs teach different levels of English courses at UPRM. And María fronted a specific need which was to learn how to deal with students who had special needs as she recalled an experience she had with two students who had Attention Deficit Disorder and she did not know how to handle them or how to approach them in the classroom. Having a balanced class was also another of her training needs.

Dissatisfaction With the Course

The dissatisfactions expressed by the focus group participants included the design of the course, the use of WebCT as the main channel of communication for the class and for the submission of coursework, the lack of feedback from the UTD coordinators when grading the work submitted by students enrolled in the course, and the lack of communication between the UTD coordinators (the professors teaching the course) and their graduate students.

On the subject of the design of the course, the main grievance voiced by the research participants was the number of times GTAs are required to take the course, followed by the issue of having repetitive experiences with the materials and the topics

being covered throughout those three semesters such as being required to create a new teaching portfolio every semester. On this matter Erika made the following comment:

If you're a TA [and] you have to suffer three semesters of TADS [as students refer to the course], then why not suffer just one semester, and have something that is continued, [...] then you can talk about that semester, instead of prolonging it through three semesters, and you complete the three credits that now you are required to take, but you have more hands-on [experience] and you can see the professors, you don't have to be on WebCT. I know that maybe it's not the department, they don't have a say or they don't, or they can't control that that much, it goes to a higher level, but that's an idea that they could do. And that way, we can have more workshops, and it can be something on a weekly basis, instead of three or four times in the semester, and then having to wait another semester to start with the same thing because, honestly, what do you do during the first meeting, or the first reaction? It's always your teaching philosophy, or the seven principles. The principles are the same, they don't change, so, how do I apply them to my class, to my course? Maybe what I did last semester is the same thing that I'm doing this semester because it works, so it's not going to change that much. So, why am I saying the same thing over and over again?

The creation of a teaching portfolio fits into this category. At the end of every semester, the students were evaluated (on a pass/fail basis) based, mainly, on their performance in the preparation of the portfolio. To the majority of them, this assignment was repetitive because most of the time they teach the same course. María gives voice to this experience:

Another thing that gets really repetitive, at least for me, is the elaboration of the TADS portfolio. I've done it like five times already, it really sucks for me to have to do it every time because it doesn't change that much! If they would ask other principles, then it would be another thing, but everything is repetitive, and I think that, I mean, the elaboration of the TADS portfolio is important because when you graduate and you're gonna search for a job, you could show it to them, "Look, I've taught this, this is how I applied everything" and is helpful because you can show them your portfolio. But, I don't think we should elaborate it every semester. One semester is sufficient for that.

María's comment demonstrates that GTAs know the importance of learning how to create a teaching portfolio since it constitutes a proof of the work they have done in their classes. However, since most of the time they teach the same courses, what they include in their portfolio does not vary significantly from semester to semester, which makes the process repetitive and stagnant instead of advancing the development of their training.

The use of WebCT as the main channel of communication between course participants and course administrators was also seen with grim eyes because GTAs felt that the material that was presented there for them to discuss amongst themselves most of the time was not relevant to their specific needs. Also, since some of these materials were too long to read, they claimed that the purpose of having a written group discussion failed because they did not have the time to read long discussions. Regarding this, María argued as follows:

[The] discussions are not very helpful in towards our teaching. It's once again supervising and making sure that we are learning or giving teaching philosophies, which are not that important to me because you can have a teaching philosophy and

then when you are in the classroom, you totally turn it upside down, or don't know how to apply it.

The assigned postings on WebCT brought yet another issue. These included reactions to assigned readings, statement of teaching philosophy, and GTAs responses to hypothetical classroom situations, among others. However, there was no defined amount as to how many GTAs must produce, which ranged from eight and more per semester. These assignments were frustrating to GTAs since they claimed that they did not receive feedback on their work, or even know how they were being evaluated. Hence, they did not see the point in complying with the assignments if they would not be receiving any type of reaction from the coordinators. For them, constructive criticism would help them more than receiving a grade for this work. Erika reflected on this by asking a rhetorical question:

Why am I posting what I do in my classroom if I'm not going to receive something saying "oh that's a good idea, or you could do this?" [...] If we're putting out there what we're doing in our classroom, then we should receive feedback saying, "This is good, or you can do this better," or "That's not a good idea." So, we're not receiving that in WebCT. We're just posting there and receiving a grade for just posting, but not receiving feedback, which is to me more useful than getting an A.

But I'm not getting the feedback, which is what I really need as a professor or as an instructor.

This lack of feedback went hand in hand with a lack of communication (or miscommunication) in terms of the way in which instructions were presented for the work GTAs needed to submit. Participants alleged that the professors would tell them what an assignment was about, yet they did not present to their students what must be included in the assigned work—as a tool such as a rubric would do.

For example, when discussing some of the workshops that they have received, the participants expressed disapproval by fronting one of the flaws they had seen in terms of the presenters not knowing what to present specifically, or them not having clear written instructions as to how to comply with a certain task. Erika commented with noticeable confusion about her assignment to present a lesson plan because she did not know what to include:

But if I only do the [mini lesson plan] activity, am I going to be punished or at least am I going to get less credit because I didn't provide background information? [...]
So, we don't know exactly what to do, so that's something that we need; even if it's not graded, so for example the senior TAs they went in and they did their presentations and they were not going to be graded on that. But still, they need to know what is it that they want you to present.

This confusion would not take place if, as the participants argued, the coordinators had taken the time to discuss assignments in detail.

GTAs Relying on Fellow GTAs

This lack of communication between the UTD coordinators, the coordinators of the courses that GTAs teach¹² and the GTAs themselves made possible, at the same time, a sense of comradeship among new GTAs and senior GTAs when they sought each other to clarify doubts or to discuss a possible way to present a topic in class. In fact, they felt better and more at ease when they relied on fellow GTAs, mostly because they did not feel as if someone was above them in terms of power. In other words, they felt positive when there

¹² Multi-sectional course coordinators were not considered in this study. However, participants mentioned some professors' lack of engagement with them, and how this affected them.

was a symbiotic relationship where everybody took advantage of each situation. Erika illustrated this point very well:

The best way that we can learn is from each other and that's how you get ideas.

That's how I get ideas on how to teach my class. I've given ideas to newer TAs, but you have to sit down and talk. That's what I do with my officemates, that's how we do it. We sit down [and ask] "What are you teaching?" "I'm teaching this," "Oh what did you do for this class?" [We] give each other ideas.

Yet sometimes they went to fellow GTAs not because they wanted to but because they could not gain access to the coordinators of the course they teach. This usually happened at the beginning of the semester when they were preparing their materials to teach a course that they had not taught before. A good illustration of this problem was presented by Isa, when she commented about the time she was assigned a course she had not taught before:

I had to run to somebody because nobody else, I mean, if I can use the word *administratively*, nobody helped me out with what I had to do. Because the persons that were in charge [of the course] were on vacation, and they were not accepting any type of questions, and they were not available to help until day one; classes have already started. And, if my bosses, to say it like that, are asking me to have a class ready before the first day of class, how am I gonna be able to do that if the persons that are supposed to help me out are not available? I had to run to the next [G]TA that I [could] find that has taught the course already so that he or she can help me!

Norma also reflected on this issue and acknowledged that she had to go to a GTA, María herself, to know what to do because it was her first semester and she had no idea of

what to teach or how to do it, and she could not reach her multi-sectional course coordinator:

So, that was my first semester, and my course coordinators were not there for me, 'cause we never had a meeting. I had María helping me out [...] I didn't even know where to look up for the information to cover up that gap [on the topics she needed to address in class], cause I had to teach MLA and all that. OK, but from where do I get that information? And that's when she told me about the OWL website, so we need that in TADS [UTD].

Discrepancies Between Teaching Rhetoric and Teaching Practice

The third theme that emerged from their discussion was the inconsistency between what they were taught in the UTD course and required by UTD and course coordinators to do in their classes and how the UTD course coordinators actually behaved as the professors in charge of the course. As the participants claimed, the course coordinators did not act according to what they preached. In other words, they saw that there was a double standard for professors and GTAs. Erika noted that she did not know why the UTD course coordinators did not make available a schedule listing the topics and issues they were going to present in the course for the semester, when all GTAs were asked to submit a schedule of the course they were teaching to the coordinators and to the Chair of the English Department:

As TAs we're asked to hand in a portfolio with a course schedule, or at least a course outline; but most of us have to have what we're gonna teach the entire semester. So, I don't think it's really that difficult to write a course schedule for four meetings, if we have to do it for an entire semester. We didn't have that, and I know that it was because in the first meeting we were asked what we want to have

[presented in the course], which I think was good. I don't know if it was because they didn't have any idea of what to do, or they actually cared about our opinion, but I think that was good. After they had chosen what was going to be taught during the semester, you can have a schedule with everything that you're going to do every meeting, and also the due dates for important things such as the portfolio. And it's not there in the syllabus, I mean, it's not anywhere, and the syllabus is really, really short and it doesn't have that much of a description.

Norma, Isa and María strongly agreed with Erika on this statement.

Participants noted other important contradictions in the policies of the UTD course and the assignment of teaching assistantships in the English Department. They thought that it was contradictory to tell GTAs they needed to take three semesters of the UTD course and pass it in order to teach at the university level, and to tell them that continued GTA funding would depend on their performance in the course when they have seen that some of their peers have retained their teaching assignments despite the fact that they have not passed the UTD course on a given semester, as were the cases of Erika and María.

When Erika first took the course, as she recalled, it was going through some changes as someone else was the course coordinator, which according to her made her feel more lost because neither the professor nor she knew what to do. The lack of information and instructions, she claimed, were the reason why she did not pass the course that first semester. However, the following semester she received a teaching assistantship.

María's case was even more revealing of the contradictions noted by the participants since she had not passed the course on two occasions, which was why she was taking it for the fifth time. According to her, the course coordinators did not give her any reasonable excuse for her failure, as they continued to change versions as to why she did

not pass the course. Moreover, the alleged policy of terminating assistantships for students who do not comply with the requisites of the course was allegedly compromised in her case. When I told her that she was the perfect example of this discrepancy, she revealed an interesting fact:

I always get the TA-ship even if I didn't post or if I didn't do the portfolio. [...] I didn't do the portfolio when [X] was the professor, I didn't do it, I was "No, this is a mess, I'm not gonna do it." And they still gave me the TA-ship because they need us!

Another contradiction that was voiced was the fact that there were no clear instructions as to what to do in the course or in a particular assignment, when the professors were constantly reminding them of the importance of their being clear, as GTAs, in the instructions they were to give to their own students. On this problematic area, Norma poignantly expressed the lack of clarity in the UTD coordinator's instructions:

When we had to give the workshop on the portfolio, we never received like a guide of what they wanted us to present, or when we did the mini-lesson activity, we never had, also, like a paper saying "this is what you have to do," and when we teach, we give guidance to our students and we give them specific instructions.

Recommendations for Improving the Course

Even though all the data that has been presented so far can be used to improve the course in one way or another, the participants made sure to voice how they would want to see the course take place by changing its approach. The main aspect that all of them wanted to see change was having more face-to-face time and less postings on WebCT. The reason behind it was that they felt that not everybody would read their postings, specifically if these were extensive. However, if an issue were to be addressed when everybody was

present, a dialogue would occur, which might bring richer comments and experiences to their professional growth. Isa forcefully argued this point:

If we're in a group, and we're discussing and it goes out verbally, people is [sic] going to listen, especially if you feel that is something like you can sit down and say "wait a minute, I think that this would help me in my classroom," so I sit down and I listen.

The amount of times they must take the course was another aspect of the course they would like to see change. The ones who had previous teaching experience said that one semester was enough, whereas Erika suggested having one semester dedicated to learning how to teach a class from each course GTAs might get to teach, be it Pre-basic, Basic, or Intermediate English. Also, they fronted the need to have a better relationship with the multi-sectional coordinators of the courses they were to teach (or were teaching) and they would like to see more interaction between both poles: the UTD coordinators and their respective course coordinators.

Relevance of the Course

It is quite interesting and worrisome to see that most participants thought that the materials and the topics that were presented and discussed in the UTD course were not relevant to their needs. When I asked about their training expectations from the course, Norma responded that the course was "not guiding us towards what we have to teach and how to teach it." As a matter of fact, only two course activities kept surfacing over and over again as the two topics that were important for them to learn or that they saw some potential in. One was the Gradekeeper workshop mentioned above. The other one was a ten-minute lesson plan in which GTAs would model a lesson to the UTD class in order for everybody to see how each taught certain topics in their respective classes. However, it is

interesting to see that they have relied on ideas and workshops that have been presented through other means such as course coordination meetings and the classes they have taken as part of their MAEE program. Erika's statement clearly illustrates this point:

[In the class] Foundations of English Education¹³, that some of us were not able to present on [Puerto Rico] TESOL¹⁴, so some students presented a lesson plan, or something in that class, and I really used... I remember, [that someone¹⁵] used *The Sims*¹⁶ cartoon, and she presented that also, [and another student¹⁷] used *The Simpsons*. So, those ideas were not presented in TADS [UTD], but I used them. So, I think those are the kinds of things that we need.

Conclusion of GTAs' Stance

The above results showed that the GTAs have clear and articulate statements to make about their training needs, training expectations of the course, perceptions on the relevance of the course and suggestions to improve the course. Based on the combined results of the questionnaire and the focus group, my main findings were that GTA training needs were not being met until the coordinators asked the students the areas they wanted to see covered in the course. GTAs' training expectations, based on their need for learning teaching strategies and classroom management, were not being met. Their perception of the relevance of the course mostly is negative since they found the topics repetitive or not appropriate for them. They had complaints about the lack of feedback they received and the poor communication there was between the UTD coordinators and them, and they have

¹³ As part of the class, students needed to submit an application to present in Puerto Rico TESOL. However, some students were not able to present in the symposium; therefore their professor arranged a class to present their topics or their papers.

¹⁴ Puerto Rico TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) is an association of English language teaching professionals that provides professional development through publications and symposia.

¹⁵ I eliminated the name for anonymity purposes.

¹⁶ A video game series where players create their character, which behaves as the player wishes.

¹⁷ Name was also eliminated.

experienced contradictions in the double standard between faculty and GTAs and in the assignment of assistantships in the English Department. Notably, they had many clear and specific recommendations for improving the course. Some of these were to have a more hands-on experience with relevant workshops, to make a teaching portfolio only once, and to take the course no more than twice.

The next chapter explores the opinions and perceptions of the faculty coordinators teaching the course about the training and support the UTD course provides to GTAs in the English Department.

Chapter V: Results—Course Coordinators' Perceptions

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his [sic] point of view.”
--Harper Lee

As mentioned previously, one of the purposes of my research was to identify the training GTAs from the Department of English expect to receive from the UTD course. Chapter IV presents the results for the graduate students' training needs, perceptions, complaints and suggestions for the improvement of the course. It is also important to know the perceptions the faculty in charge of teaching the training-course have regarding the training and support they are giving to these graduate students. Hence, the data collected from the course coordinators' interview sought to answer two sub-questions from my main query: (1) what training, support and professional development needs are identified by the course coordinators/faculty teaching the course; and (2) how does the UTD course propose to prepare GTAs for the undergraduate courses they teach? In order to present the results, I will first offer background details about the participants and then will proceed to present the themes that arose from the data. The names used below are pseudonyms.

Participants' Background

Professor Moore. Professor Moore worked as a mentor for GTAs during the 2000-2001 academic year. As she explained, she saw a need to supervise GTAs since faculty members and students taking classes with GTAs were complaining about their work. At the time, GTAs were not complying with their teaching obligations by not teaching for the entire class period, not holding office hours, among other reported problems. Thus, Professor's Moore work, as she explained, was to supervise the students' responsibilities and to provide guidance. When this study was taking place, she and Professor Evans were the coordinators of the UTD course and this was their second semester in that role.

Professor Evans. Professor Evans, on the other hand, has been involved with the course (as it is nowadays) since its beginning, apart from one semester when another faculty member took responsibility for it. In fact, in 2003 she developed what was called TADS (Teaching Assistants Development and Support), which was a non-credit course aiming to help and guide GTAs in their teaching responsibilities. This non-credit course was the basis for what is now a one-credit course that all GTAs must take for three semesters, UTD (University Teaching Development)—although she and Moore, and everybody in the department still refers to the course as TADS.

Results

One interview with the two professors was conducted in February 2009, in Professor Evan's office, over the course of forty minutes. The professors seemed calm but eager to let their viewpoints about the course be heard, while sometimes they revealed discouragement with the attitude they have seen in the GTAs regarding the course. From the data, five themes emerged from their discussion: (1) approaches to GTA training and mentoring, (2) definitions of GTA profile, (3) GTA training needs, (4) UTD course syllabus design, and (5) their perception of the training the course provides.

Approaches to GTA Training and Mentoring

This topic encompasses the beginnings of the idea of the training, when it was not a course, but rather some kind of faculty supervision to ensure that GTAs were doing their job, as well as the approach it had in the semester when my research was conducted, spring 2009, as a one-credit course¹⁸.

¹⁸ The approach it currently has at the time of this writing, Spring 2010, as a one-credit course is not part of my report.

First mentoring approaches. Regardless of the main reason for there to be someone in charge of supervising GTAs (the process of creating an official course began in 2003), Professor Moore made sure to establish other goals as well, such as orienting GTAs, answering or clarifying questions and concerns about their teaching, and teaching them and making sure they understood their responsibilities. On this last issue, Moore explained one of her experiences when supervising GTAs:

I'd pop into a classroom, which at that time was scheduled [her visitation], and the student is teaching for half an hour and then they say "OK, class is over." You can't do this in real life. You're supposed to have many more activities up your sleeve. How do you work like that? That's only showing me that you're not really an educator, you're just there 'cause of the money. And we've got people out because of that.

Based upon the experiences of Moore, and going along the idea of being a mentor for GTAs, Evans realized that the English Department could provide support for the graduate students, hence the idea of TADS. As she described it, she was concerned that GTAs did not have any support or someone to go talk to. Thus she offered her time to be the graduate students' mentor and eventually she created the new TADs course.

Back then [in 2003] it was more of a "come-to-me-if-you-need-me" basis and then they did have the final project which was the teaching portfolio, which at that time was a paper-based portfolio. And if they wanted to do an electronic [version], they could; but it was something that substantiated, that proved, gave evidence of what they had done over the semester.

One-credit course approach. Once the UTD course was first taught in fall 2008, the training and support was more or less the same, with the exception being that now two

professors—Evans and Moore—were in charge of coordinating the course. The professors still met once a month with the students, which has been the approach since 2000 when Moore took responsibility of supervising GTAs’ work; and they assessed previous semesters to improve the mechanics of the course. For instance, they decided to pay visits to a GTA’s class (aside from one that is regularly scheduled by the department’s graduate committee) without previous notice to see if the student is doing his/her job and complying with his/her responsibilities. Also, at the beginning of the semester, they asked their students what they would like to see in the course, such as topics, workshops, etc. As Moore explained, “It’s really a negotiation with the students. But more important, it’s what they want and need, not what we wanted. There is no imposition.” Furthermore, it was important for them to create a balance in the topics addressed between theory and practice for they acknowledged this was a flaw in previous semesters, as Evans reflected:

I think—that’s something that we’ve noticed in previous TADS courses—that maybe there was theory but there was not application, or maybe there was application and not theory, so we’re trying to balance those two odds, and provide some variety to them as well.

When asked why the GTA training and mentoring initiative was refashioned as a one-credit course, both Evans and Moore replied that it was conceived as a course from the beginning. Regardless of the main reason for the training to take place, which was to be a reference source for GTAs and to supervise their work, they thought that if the support system was institutionalized as a course, that way they could prove to graduate students their effort in the course has an institutional value, apart from it being in the students’ transcripts, which will come in handy when applying for graduate schools or jobs. As

Evans asserted, “If they want to be teachers, this is evidence that they actually did take a course that helped them to develop as a teacher, [a] professional.”

Definitions of GTA's Profile

A graduate student must comply with a series of requisites in order to receive an assistantship, such as being matriculated in nine credits or thesis, and having a GPA of 3.00 or above. However, the Department of English looks for certain attributes when deciding who will receive an assistantship, a matter that is always intertwined with the idea of the assistantship being a privilege. Thus, not everybody who applies will be considered.

Professor Moore explained what they looked for in an applicant:

We're looking for someone who has some sort of experience already in the area. And experience can be they did their teacher training program, they've been exposed to what it is to teach, because that's number one. That's very important. [...] They also have to be able to cope with workload, which is very intense, which is not proposed by the English Department, it's proposed by the Graduate School Office. And I want you to understand that. It's not for fun that I have to tell you that you have to register in 9 credits; it's the Certification 9721 that says that you have to be registered in 9 credits. So, we know there is a lot and it's intense, and knowing that, coming in, you know, they have to be able to cope with that, and be able to want to do it. They have to be disciplined, organized; these are all things that they need to be before going in. And if in the long run they cannot do that, and we notice that because we observe them, or they don't come to meetings, they're not responsible, it affects them in the long way.

To the above list of traits a prospective GTA must have, Evans added that they ask graduate students if they intend to be teachers in the long run, for “If they don't want this as a career

and they just want a teaching assistantship so they don't have to pay their tuition, that's no longer accepted. It used to be, but it isn't anymore." So, overall, they looked for GTAs with some teaching experience and who were considering working as teachers in the future, and who will be able to cope with all the responsibilities that having an assistantship entails such as doing well in their classes, and being disciplined and organized, among others.

GTAs' Training Needs

Both professors reported being aware of the training needs GTAs currently taking the course had. This is due to a first day assessment they did, part of the new approach to teaching the course. "The majority rules because we can't cover everything in five meetings," as Evans clarified. The needs are basically the same that GTAs presented in the questionnaire I administered as part of my research, plus others that the coordinators themselves identified. Among these needs, Evans acknowledged the following:

Management of time in the classroom, active learning (promoting that active learning in the students, that discussion environment), instructional theories, a teaching philosophy. They should be developing a teaching philosophy, they should look into the instructional theories, they should explore different strategies, and instruction, not just instructional media-technology, but other areas, to be able to have a diverse classroom and to try new things with the students.

To which she added the following:

[...] it's how to teach and it's not necessarily how to teach specifically English literature or English composition, but how to teach in general; and how to get students to participate, and how to be ethical, how to follow the proper ethics with these students as well [...] I think this is a course that should be required to all graduate teaching assistants, and it may be departmental, it could be more

institutionally, but they need that support. They need to be able to learn how to apply Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles" in education, which is very specific. So, those are the things that we look for; and [for them] to be able to compile all that into a nice portfolio that they can use in their career. That's our aim.

After giving the students the chance to present their training needs on WebCT, Evans tabulated the results in order to identify which topics they would be in charge of presenting in the course, be it by assigning a discussion on WebCT or by finding someone willing to facilitate a workshop (faculty member or senior GTA). About this, Moore said that Evans was good at finding GTAs to present and that they usually relied more on GTAs because, "At the same level they [GTAs] tend to listen more than if it's higher-up coming down." Moreover, Evans looked for the needs identified by the students in the assessment and listed them, while adding how she would address them in the course¹⁹:

Senior/junior TA activity: that's what we want to promote, we want to get the seniors in here and talk with the juniors, get them into groups by course [level]. [...] They were ten [topics] all together that were brought up and I tabulated it based on what I have and then, you know, [GTAs said they need to know more about] student's participation and motivation, so I pulled out some chapters of the *Teaching Tips* [textbook] that had something to do with [...] participation. There's [also] another chapter on motivation that I'll probably add into the WebCT discussion area. [...] So, I mean, yeah, we've been working on this, and absolutely, their needs are absolutely essential because that's what we want to, how we want to serve them; it's what they want.

¹⁹ To see the full list, please refer to chapter IV. The training needs reported in the UTD course assessment are the same GTAs presented in the questionnaire. .

So far, Professor Moore and Evans had demonstrated, through their responses, that they were trying to address not only the training needs reported by GTAs but the ones that they as coordinators of the course had identified. Since these needs would not be the same in the following semester, we also discussed how these needs were presented in the course syllabus.

UTD Course Syllabus Design

When the coordinators were asked how the syllabus provided to the students enrolled in the UTD course for the training to happen, they agreed that the syllabus was not thoroughly developed. As a master syllabus, it made it easier for them to accommodate the students' needs to fit the curriculum. Evans explained:

Since it's a course that's repeated three times, then we don't want to get into too much specifics because we want to be able to offer variety over three semesters. So, it's the basics, it's the objectives of the course, it's the description of the course, it's how you are going to get graded, and then it's a list of the bibliography.

Moore added the following comments:

The needs unconsciously-consciously fit the syllabus, because we have those topics that we can discuss in the syllabus and they're practically falling within one of those main topics of the syllabus. So, we haven't really left the syllabus there, except we don't do exactly the ten topics. Of course we ask for their feedback, and we incorporated it within our topics. [...] So the syllabus is there; it's very general, so that we can fit in the topics that are very specific to their needs.

As noted above, the coordinators agreed that the syllabus was not thoroughly developed. However, they explained their reasoning behind this approach, stating that it was deliberately undeveloped. They felt that having a very short syllabus gave them the

flexibility they needed to use it for several semesters. The mismatch between this approach and the perceptions of the GTAs who take the course (as presented in chapter IV) will be discussed in the final chapter.

Coordinators' Perceptions of GTA Training

When Evans and Moore were asked about their perceptions on the training they were offering to this selected group of graduate students, their reactions were fluently voiced. Mostly, they thought their effort was being taken for granted, since they saw themselves as mentors and not so much as the professors who wanted to make GTAs' lives harder than it was; as Evans expressed, "We want to be there for support, we really want to help." But according to the coordinators, the students' attitudes do not help them do their job, which made them think that GTAs were, as Evans expressed, "resentful of the course," since it was something that GTAs saw imposed on them as more work for them. Thus, their perceptions can be easily seen or perceived as complaints—just as GTAs presented their complaints regarding the course. For example, Evans established that it all depended on the effort students put to comply with their assignments:

I have an assignment due tomorrow; we have 15 students enrolled in the course.

Three people have responded. There's a deadline, I mean, I posted this two-and-a-half weeks ago, I'm not going to send them an e-mail and say "Hey, don't forget to go to WebCT and do your homework" [...] And this is one of the things they asked for, this is a subject they asked for. I'm not giving them a presentation on it. They're reading 30 pages of a book that's extremely easy reading and for those 30 pages they're applying what they get, you know, into their own classroom environment.

This situation, the issue of students' sense of responsibility, made Evans question GTAs' work in their classroom, which was something these trainers tried to focus on in the course, although they weighed this issue with the fact of the course being new to the students.

It is frustrating because you have some [students] that are OK, and you have others that are kind of like "Well, this is after everything else added to," and it shouldn't be. If you're a [G]TA, then this is required; this goes hand-in-hand with your teaching assistantship. And eventually, *eventually* we won't have to convince anybody; it'll be TA-ship, you know, TADS.

With this comment, Evans seemed to be saying that because the course was still relatively new, students have not adjusted to the fact that it was now a requisite. However, she expected that eventually, the course will become a normal and accepted part of being a GTA. When this happens, she postulated, the problem of non-compliance will be solved.

According to the coordinators, GTAs who have had previous teaching experience presented another disturbance. These GTAs felt they should not be taking the course for more than one semester, which is something that the coordinators reflected upon. The coordinators presented the difference between a teaching practicum and real life college teaching duties, since a practicum is not the same as teaching at a university level, even more when GTAs teach in their classes are often freshmen, who, according to Moore, have high school expectations:

If you're not ready for that mentally, it could really affect you as a [G]TA. So, we've tried to see them before classes begin, to let them know "this [UTD course] is what you want to receive."

Yet, Evans and Moore were resolved to make GTAs see that this course and what it entails must be taken seriously. As Moore stated:

We might have given them a break in the first semester because it was the first semester, they weren't really mentally prepared that now it's a course, but the second semester we're giving, and we're strong. If in May they do not pass this class and their GPA is below 3.0, bye-bye.

The beginning of this chapter presented the two main queries that the interview with the UTD coordinators sought to answer. The first sub-question aimed to acknowledge the GTA training needs identified by the UTD coordinators. The revision of the course's approach to focus more on the training needs that GTAs taking the course report answers this query. However, there are areas that these coordinators believe GTAs need to learn that may not have been identified by GTAs (i.e. instructional theories); hence the way the training occurs will depend mostly on the needs identified by GTAs but the UTD coordinators' will be considered as well. The second sub-question sought to answer how the UTD course prepares GTAs to teach their undergraduate courses. Evans explicitly answered this query by stating that the course was directed towards how to teach in general instead of students being trained to teach any specific course.

So far, I have presented the results for the methods employed to gather data. Chapter IV suggests that GTAs have needs and wants that are not being met. The present chapter gives the UTD course coordinators' perceptions about the purpose of the course which in some aspects may turn out to be different from the needs and wants expressed by the GTAs in chapter IV. The next chapter will explore and discuss the results presented in this and the previous chapter.

Chapter VI: Building the Bridge of Understanding

“The aim of argument, or of discussion, should not be victory, but progress.”
--Joseph Joubert

Up to this point, I have identified GTAs’ training needs and their viewpoints concerning the preparation they have received and were receiving in the English Department’s UTD course in spring 2009. I have also presented the UTD coordinators’ opinions of the purpose of the training and mentoring that takes place in the course, as well as the areas in which they believe GTAs need to be trained. The results I presented in chapters IV and V bring light to my research questions which aimed to explore the training GTAs expect to receive from the UTD course by looking at the training, support and professional development needs identified by the GTAs and the UTD coordinators, and the GTAs’ perceptions of how the course meets their needs and expectations. In this chapter I present a discussion of the results gathered from the data as I answer my research questions.

Training, Support and Professional Development Needs Identified by GTAs

Questionnaire and focus group results presented the needs GTAs had at the moment this study took place. These included more hands-on activities directed towards learning to manage a classroom, motivate their students, grade essays, develop lesson plans, and organize a class schedule; and learning strategies to teach in class. Also, I noticed that GTA needs in terms of training, support and professional development varied across the number of semesters they had taken the course. In other words, GTAs in their first, second, third and fourth or more semesters in the UTD course reported different needs (refer to Table 2). However, there were instances where GTAs in different semesters shared needs such as classroom management and teaching strategies, which could mean that the course had not prepared GTAs well enough in these areas or that it did not address their expressed needs

up until the time of this study. However, it is important to state that when this study took place, the UTD course was in its second semester as a one-credit course and the training approach was changing from the one used previously in TADS, which relied mainly on Web-CT postings to probes provided by the course coordinator and the completion of a teaching portfolio, to one based on GTA training requests based on a needs assessment protocol employed by the UTD course coordinators.

Training, Support and Professional Development Needs Identified by the UTD

Coordinators

Professors teaching the course identified classroom management, promoting active learning, and constructing a teaching philosophy as the main GTA training needs. However, they acknowledged the needs presented by the students in the assessment they gave at the beginning of the semester, and, as reported by GTAs and themselves, they worked to approach some of these needs—senior/junior GTA mentoring and learning to motivate participation in the classroom are two of them—throughout the semester either by assigning readings and postings about these issues or by having someone, such as a faculty member or a senior GTA, presenting a workshop.

How the Course Prepares GTAs to Teach Their Undergraduate Courses

This is one aspect where GTAs and UTD professors' perceptions regarding the goal of the UTD course clashed. On one hand, some GTAs wished for the course to be directed to train them to teach the courses they taught, and they even suggested how to do so by proposing that each of the three semesters they needed to take be dedicated to a different course they might teach. In contrast, the UTD professors stated that the course was not devised to train GTAs to teach any specific class; rather, it was developed to deal with how to teach in general.

GTAs' Perceptions on UTD Course

Most GTAs perceived the UTD course as a good idea that failed when put into practice, since most of the time they were not being trained as they repeatedly dealt with the same topics over and over. However, this was the perception of GTAs who were enrolled in the course for the third time or more. This means that their opinion was based on how the training was taking place when it was not yet a one-credit course—when the training was not better designed and might have failed to satisfy GTAs' needs. By the same token, the training's lack of efficiency (as perceived by the GTAs) could be the result of the UTD coordinators' misuse of the term "mentor". Even though they perceived themselves as mentors, they acknowledged that part of their job was supervising GTAs and making sure they were complying with their duties; this muddled area between supervising and mentoring GTAs could negatively affect how the training was taking place in the course.

On the other hand, newcomers did not share senior GTAs' opinions about the course, as they had little time to form a viewpoint about its training and support of GTAs. GTAs in their second semester showed to be more grounded about the course, since they acknowledged that the course was going through some changes and these could be beneficial for them. However, GTAs' main training expectation was professional development since all GTAs believed that the UTD course should be a channel to improve the way they teach and to develop themselves as professionals.

Implications about the Training in the English Department at UPRM

Teaching and Training Are Not the Same

Apart from answering the research questions of this study, results also presented other aspects to take into account regarding this specific training program. First, the GTAs and UTD professors who partook in this study had different conceptions of what the course is about. GTAs perceived it as an additional burden to their student/instructor dual role, and as a way to be controlled and supervised rather than being trained or being mentored. Professors, on the other hand, viewed the course as a means to mentor and support GTAs' professional development, while being complemented with supervision. However, as expressed by both parties, the way in which topics were presented in the course was mainly by assigning readings which would then lead up to students posting reactions on WebCT or by faculty or senior GTAs presenting workshops.

These views can concur if there is a clear distinction between what constitutes teaching and what constitutes training. Kern (2009) establishes that teaching is not the same as training because the goals are not the same. Training, as Kern illustrates, "is as much for the needs of the workplace as for the employee" whereas "teaching is for the student" (p. 331). In other words, actual training makes it possible for trained people to transfer acquired skills learned in the training. Consequently, training students should be the foremost aim of the course, rather than teaching them, as they receive teaching related lectures and education in their MAEE classes. Therefore, instead of assigning readings for GTAs to react to, more hands-on practical activities must be the focus of the course, as suggested by GTAs in the questionnaire and in the focus group.

GTAs' Reliance on Their Peers

Brandl (2000) and Worthen (1992) in their respective research found that GTAs relied on other GTAs when they could not reach their mentors or to get ideas to teach a class. Just as presented in the review of the literature, GTAs participating in this study claimed that they preferred to go to a fellow GTA when they needed advice on any aspect related to teaching rather than asking any capable faculty member for help. This might be due to the fact that they can seldom communicate with their multi-sectional course coordinators at the beginning of each semester, which is when they need the most help to construct a syllabus and a schedule for the class. Another explanation for this phenomenon might be due to the few occasions they have to meet in the UTD course with their mentors throughout the semester, which is five times. Since they do not see their UTD professors frequently (although these mentors have an open door policy), GTAs build relationships with officemates, which lead them to rely more on each other than on anyone else.

Newcomer and Experienced GTAs Need Training and Support

Regardless of their expressed discontent with the number of times they need to matriculate in the UTD course, the data gathered show that GTAs need more than one semester of training—should the training course continue as a three-semester training meeting five times per semester. Most of the GTAs taking the course had previous teaching experience, which lead them to think they did not need to take the course. However, these experienced GTAs declared they needed more knowledge in certain teaching areas. For instance, one newcomer who had worked at a private school stated that it would be helpful to have more training before being assigned to teach a class, whereas the senior of the UTD course wanted to know how to effectively organize a class. Thus, GTAs' suggestion to take the course once if they had previous teaching experience, and twice if they did not, cannot

be considered as one or two semesters in the course will not be enough to address their stated training needs.

Feedback Is Important for GTA Development

GTAs want to have more hands-on activities in the course. However, should there be a reason for them to do a written assignment on WebCT or to do a presentation before the class, they want to receive specific guidelines, know how they are going to be evaluated and receive a grade for each assignment. Moreover, they want to receive feedback that lets them know what they can do to improve in their teaching practices and in their course work. As presented in Chapter IV, this was one issue that GTAs constantly referred to; hence, UTD professors need to keep those pedagogical recommendations in mind.

Transition in the English Department's Training Program

When this study took place, the Department of English's training program was functioning as a one-credit course for the second time. This fact could have affected the way GTAs in their second semester and beyond viewed their training. As a GTA who took two semesters of training when the course had not been formally implemented, and one semester when it was a one-credit course, I could relate to my colleagues' experiences and opinions when they stated that training was not relevant to their needs and the topics and assignments were repetitive. Thus, these GTAs' perceptions might trace the transition the training was going through. Their negative perceptions of the training are rooted in the fact that at first, the training was not fully conceived to address their specific needs, as was happening the second time the training was institutionalized as a course when the UTD professors had explicitly asked GTAs what they would want to see throughout the semester to fulfill their needs. This time, GTAs acknowledged that they were seeing changes in the way the training was occurring as it was directly related to their specific needs.

Summary and Conclusion

In brief, participant GTAs presented their opinions regarding the poor training they have received for professional development since the training has not always been relevant to their needs and expectations of the UTD course. They expressed their training, development and support needs and expected that with the changes happening in the course these needs could be approached. UTD coordinators' presented their perceptions about the course as well. They were aware that training in previous semesters might not have been appropriate or balanced in order to provide meaningful experiences. However, as discussed in Chapter V, they also expressed that they were working to ensure that the training the English Department provides in the UTD course is relevant and practical to the GTAs' professional development.

These results present the interactions that Lave and Wenger (1991) established in their legitimate peripheral participation for learning to occur. However, the data collected and analyzed establish that the actual training or mentoring at the time the research was conducted was taking place amongst peers, since GTAs were recurring to more experienced GTAs to look for information about the courses they were assigned to teach, tips for activities to develop in class, etc. As I noted earlier, it would be important and indispensable for the faculty in charge of teaching this GTA training and development course to draw a clear line between mentoring and supervision roles since the stated purpose of the UTD course is to train and support GTAs during their first semesters of employment in the English Department, which represent their incursion into college-level teaching. The clear separation of these roles would enable UTD coordinator(s) to perform as support and mentoring agents to graduate teaching assistants in the English Department at UPRM.

Limitations of this Study

There are two aspects that I did not consider when planning this research. One of them was the lack of input newcomers (first semester GTAs) could bring to the study since new GTAs did not have previous experience with the training provided by the course to create the kind of informed opinion about their needs and their perspectives regarding the course that I expected respondents to report in the questionnaire and the interviews. If I had designed the research in a way in which I could distribute the questionnaire and conduct the focus group at the end of the semester, I would have been able to include their surely important input as well.

Observing the UTD course's activities during my research, such as going to its meetings and learning about the work assigned to GTAs, also could have brought more light to this study. I wish I had thought about this, for I could have been more acquainted with the changes in the course design that were being implemented at the time.

Recommendations for Further Research

This investigation focused on gathering GTAs and UTD coordinators' perspectives on the training the Department of English's UTD course provides. However, a more thorough assessment of the training GTAs receive would need to include the multi-sectional course coordinators. Doing research in which GTAs, UTD mentors and multi-sectional course coordinators express their viewpoints on their roles and experiences in the area of GTA training could present much richer data on GTA training in the EnCglish Department in general.

Also, since GTA training and development is an important topic as it tries to ensure GTA students get an appropriate education, it would also be interesting to study how each department in the UPRM prepares and trains GTAs to teach laboratories and/or

teach/lecture classes paying special attention to the dynamics between mentors and students and to the topics addressed during the training. Moreover, assessing the training that the Centro de Enriquecimiento Profesional (CEP) provides to newcomer GTAs at the beginning of the semester can also bring insight to specific needs students might have, which could be addressed later on in workshops that the CEP provides throughout the semester.

As a last suggestion, it is imperative that this topic of GTA training is further studied in the Puerto Rican context as there is no scholarship available on this phenomenon. The review of the literature on GTA training presented in Chapter II presents several ways in which this topic can be addressed across Puerto Rican universities by transferring issues, such as classroom management and ethics, to mention some, which have already been studied in other contexts, to Puerto Rico.

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Appendix A

Description of the Research Project

Jeniffer Sanabria Morell
Master's Candidate
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
Master of Arts in English Education
Tel.
E-mail:

Research Description

Title: “Mentor and Mentee—Bridging Two Perspectives on GTA Training:
A Case Study on GTA Training Needs in the English Department of UPRM”

As a requisite of my program of studies at the University of Puerto Rico, Mayagüez Campus, I am working on a research project for my thesis in which the core of my study is to conduct a needs assessment, which focuses on graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) training and support needs in the Department of English of the aforementioned institution. Therefore, I am requesting your voluntary participation in this research, as well as your permission to present the data gathered in my thesis.

In this research the data will be collected through the use of questionnaires, individual interviews and discussion groups, better known as focus groups. These pretend to examine the previous teaching experience that GTAs might have had—other than the one received by TA-ing, the training and support needs that GTAs have in the Department of English, the expectations that GTAs of the newly implemented University Teaching Development (UTD) course, before known as TADS have, as well as recommendations for the improvement of the training program. This process of data collection will take place during the Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 semesters. It will commence with the distribution of questionnaires, followed by dialoguing about concerns, recommendations, and training and support needs that the GTAs have in focus groups. Lastly, an interview with the current course administrators will take place, in order to have a more in depth view from both sides—the GTA trainees and their trainers.

Because of the nature of these methods to gather the data, it is important for you to know that I will keep your name and participation confidential. You have a right to ask and/or clarify doubts regarding your participation in my research. Moreover, you must take into account that, should you decide to participate in the research, you can choose to withdraw from it at any time.

All of this data will be presented and discussed in my thesis, however, I will make use of pseudonyms that will be given to you, should you decide to participate in the research. Also, results may be published and/or presented at professional conferences. Once again, I reiterate that your identity will be confidential at all times.

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form²⁰

Jeniffer Sanabria Morell
Master's Candidate
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Department of English
Master of Arts in English Education
Tel.
E-mail:

Researcher: Jeniffer Sanabria Morell

Research Title: "Mentor and Mentee—Bridging Two Perspectives on GTA Training:
A Case Study on GTA Training Needs in the English Department of
UPRM"

- I have read and discussed the Research Description with the researcher. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the purposes and procedures regarding this study.
- My participation in this research is voluntary. I may refuse to participate or withdraw from participation at any time.
- The researcher may withdraw me from the research at any given point.
- If, during the course of the study, significant new information develops, which may relate to my willingness to continue to participate, the investigator will provide this information to me.
- Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies me will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without my separate consent, except as specifically required by law.
- If at any time I have questions regarding the research of my participation, I can contact the investigator, Jeniffer Sanabria Morell, who will answer my questions. The investigator's cellular number is _____ and her e-mail address is _____.
- I should receive a copy of the Research Description and this Participant's Rights document.

²⁰ I am adapting a consent form previously devised by Irmaris Rosas Nazario, MAEE graduate from the English Department at UPRM. I am using this document since it covers all the main details that a consent form must include.

- I am aware that my participation could be audio taped, and the written and/or audio-taped materials will be viewed only by the investigator.
- I understand that written materials may be viewed in an educational setting outside the research.
- By signing this consent form I indicate that I agree to participate in this research.

Participant's name: _____

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C
GTA Questionnaire

I. Demographic Information

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: _____M _____F
3. Semester in the MAEE program _____1st _____2nd _____3rd _____4th _____5th+
4. Semester in UTD _____1st _____2nd _____3rd _____4th+
5. Did you have any teaching experience before entering the UTD program?
 _____No _____Yes. If so, select the best that applies (You can choose more than one)
 _____Teacher Preparation Program
 _____K-6th Grade
 _____7-12th Grade
 _____Other: _____
6. What are your plans after graduating from the MAEE Program? (You may choose more than one)
 _____Teach K-12th Grade
 _____Teach at a college/institute
 _____Pursue a Ph.D.
 _____Work outside Puerto Rico
 _____Other: _____

II. These are the University Teaching Development (UTD) course's objectives. Please state whether these objectives were met by the course, or not.

Objectives	Yes	No	Not Sure
Create a teaching portfolio			
Construct and defend a philosophy of teaching and learning			
Identify, evaluate, and apply instructional theories and strategies			
Identify and compare student learning styles			
Put into practice knowledge of student learning styles			
Design and evaluate lesson plans			
Put into practice material learned in the required core courses for the MAEE			
Apply instructional media			
Analyze classroom issues (e.g. ethical teaching, discrimination in classroom, etc)			

III. Please answer these questions as directly and detailed as possible.

1. What are your teaching needs that you would like to be trained on?
2. What are your training expectations of the course?
3. Does the syllabus of the UTD course provide to meet these expectations? (If so, how; if not, why not?)
4. How relevant has the training that you have received been? Please explain.

5. What are your perceptions/opinions on the training available to you?

6. If the UTD course were revised, what would you like to be:

a. Added:

b. Deleted:

c. Changed:

7. Please write any additional comments that you would like to be considered.

Thank you for your time and participation

Appendix D

Focus Group Protocol Questions

1. Please mention your name, and your semester in the MAEE program.
2. Mention how many semesters have you taken the UTD course.
3. Did you have any teaching experience before entering the UTD course?
 - a. If so, what was your experience, and for how long?
4. What are your plans after graduating from the MAEE Program?
5. What are your training expectations of the course?
6. Does the syllabus of the course provide to meet these expectations? (If so, how; if not, why not?)
7. What are teaching topics that you would like to see developed and discussed in the UTD course?
8. How relevant has the training that you have received been? Please explain.
 - a. What kinds of activities presented in the course have been beneficial for your development as a teacher? What activities have not been beneficial?
 - b. How have you used what you have learned in the course for your teaching development?
9. What are your perceptions/opinions on the training available to you in the course?
10. What would you like to be added/deleted/changed from the course?

Appendix E

UTD Coordinators' Interview Protocol

1. Can you tell me your recollections about the history of the course? Why was it created --or in response to what need in the Department?
 - a. What is the mission of the course?
 - b. At first it was created as a training and support program, known as TADS (Teaching Assistants Development and Support), why was it implemented as a course? What was the aim for it?
2. What profile should graduate students have in order to be chosen as GTAs?
 - a. What do you look for when deciding who will be a GTA?
 - b. How do you decide?
 - c. Are there graduate students who have applied, yet didn't meet the standards?
(If there are standards)
3. What do you think GTAs should be trained on, specifically in the course?
4. How do you identify and decide what to present in the course? What topics, materials, or assignments to address?
5. How do you choose to present materials, or topics that might benefit all GTAs who are currently taking the course?
6. How does the syllabus of the course provide for this training to happen?
7. What are your perceptions or opinions on the training, for GTAs development as instructors, that GTAs receive throughout the three-semester-period that they need to take the course?
8. Have you formally assessed —through students' evaluations—the perceptions that these students have regarding their training in the course?

- a. How have these evaluations been taken into account for further use?
- b. Do you plan to revise the course in the future? What would you do differently?