

## Moving from the One and Done to a Culture of Collaboration: Revising Professional Development for TAs

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### ABSTRACT

*In this article, we argue for a model of TA professional development that is collaborative with TAs themselves, ongoing throughout a TA's time in graduate school, and distributed across departmental and institutional locations. We present an example of a sustained professional development program for experienced TAs teaching composition at a large state university. Seeking to address the gap in TA professional development scholarship that extends beyond initial training and the composition practicum, we profile the professional development programs implemented during our tenures as WPAs over the course of two years. The programs designed were based on surveys and focus group interviews and, as such, responded to local needs and increased TA buy-in in the programming offered.*

*—I felt like teaching support was fairly strong in my first term, but after that there was little support.*

*—Initial training is often good, but in continual, ongoing support with teaching classes I had taught before, I often wanted more opportunities for professional development.<sup>1</sup>*

Our epigraphs, written in the comment section on a survey we distributed to graduate student alumni in fall of 2012, point toward an issue familiar to many WPAs. Despite the prevalence and history of graduate teaching assistants (TAs) teaching writing courses at many universities, the field continues to struggle with how to prepare them meaningfully for the teaching they will do in their immediate future as TAs and for the responsibilities they will take on as they move forward in their careers. In their *WPA*:

*Writing Program Administration* article, E. Shelley Reid, Heidi Estrem, and Marcia Belcheir argue for a professional development (PD) program that spans the graduate school careers of these teachers: “Just as we have long known that no one writing course can inoculate college writers forever, no ‘one-shot’ approach to pedagogy instruction (‘the’ TA seminar, for example) can be expected to succeed in dramatically altering students’ root practices” (34).<sup>2</sup> Although we as WPAs agree with Reid et al.’s call for sustained instruction in composition pedagogy during graduate school, we also recognize that the actions we take at our own institutions to move away from the one-shot approach to pedagogy instruction may not be immediately clear. Reid et al. suggest an approach based on local needs, and they charge the WPA community to

Go gather data—not just impressions—from your own TAs. . . . What new (or old) learning do they value? How do they talk about teaching when you’re not in the room? To what degree do they change as they move beyond their first year of teaching? How do their responses differ from the TAs we studied? (62)

Our research answers this call to gather data. We share and analyze data collected in our program at a large state university from 2011–2012, discussing how we used these data to create new forms of professional development for TAs from 2011–2013. Moreover, we focus on how professional development might better meet the needs of experienced TAs and how WPAs might refine or create programming that facilitates TA development as they move beyond their first year of teaching. This is a focus overlooked by scholarship in the field that mainly addresses initial training, PD, and coursework for inexperienced TAs teaching first-year writing (FYW) (Bullock; Dobrin; Ebest “When Graduate Students Resist”; Restaino). Beth Brunk-Chavez calls this typical model into question and points out that “our field understandably gives more attention to that ‘unstable cadre of graduate assistants’ who are considered unstable primarily because they are new to the teaching of writing. But what about the rest of our faculty?” (153). At our institution, a large part of this faculty is experienced TAs, those who are no longer new to the teaching of writing and thus receive much less formalized attention through PD programming. As a way to acknowledge the needs of these experienced TAs, we build on the extended writing pedagogy education laid out by Reid et al. Our suggested approaches to PD reject what we have come to think of as the one and done model of TA training.

Through our data collection and resulting program development, which we detail in this article, we argue for a TA professional development model in English departments that is:

1. collaborative and engaged with the TAs themselves, valuing their expertise and experiences. TAs should be consulted as programming is developed and their expertise utilized in a variety of ways so they come to understand themselves as participants in the design of the programming, and ultimately as serious, reflective, and professional teacher-scholars.
2. ongoing, and thus breaking the accepted pattern of the one and done training. Developing the skills and strategies for teaching writing should be communicated and understood as an ongoing learning process.
3. distributed across departmental and institutional locations, acknowledging that PD in teaching is not just a WPA endeavor. Distributing PD in this manner contributes to institutional memory in programs with high WPA turnover and leads to increased sustainability in PD programs.

Our conclusions are embedded in the local context of our research site, but we also offer a TA PD approach that has broader applications and implications, an approach we hope others will further develop and adapt.

#### LOCAL EXIGENCIES: A PORTRAIT OF OUR INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Throughout their tenures in our department, TAs may teach a variety of courses, but all begin by teaching first-year writing, English 1110, typically for one year. During that first year in our program, TAs complete the required departmental training for 1110, which includes a pre-semester, week-long orientation and training session; semester-long teaching practicum that includes an introduction to composition pedagogy; and a class observation by a WPA. TAs are also given a syllabus template for the course, which centers around Rossenwasser and Stephen's *Writing Analytically*. While the first-year writing (FYW) syllabus does allow the flexibility to select certain readings and design the course thematically around those texts, TAs neither create their own assignments nor the plan for semester-long arc of instruction.

In their second year in the graduate program, TAs may request to be assigned another course, including second-year writing, a 2000-level general education composition class largely populated by sophomores and juniors. Required of all undergraduates in the university as part of the

general education curriculum (GEC), the second-year course is taught across departments universally as 2367 and is the only course in the university's Writing Across the Curriculum program. The GEC statement for 2367 demands more sophisticated composing, a focus on diversity and the US Experience, and more thorough introduction to advanced academic research that builds on the skills acquired in 1110. TAs also have more control in the course design; they move from using the standard syllabus template in first-year writing to designing their own syllabus for second-year writing (SYW) that meets general programmatic and GEC requirements, such as the inclusion of a scaffolded research project.

By the time these TAs are eligible to teach SYW, they have developed a core set of skills and strengths on which to build. At the same time, even within a group of TAs with a shared training program and similar set of teaching experiences in FYW, we found demonstrable differences in individuals' senses of preparedness and autonomy. Some TAs had previous teaching experience from MA programs or from working as classroom teachers in secondary school contexts, and these individuals often felt relatively well prepared, adaptable, and ready for a new challenge in SYW. Others still felt like novices, particularly because they had never been asked to develop their own syllabi.

#### RESPONSIVE METHODS FOR DESIGNING A LOCALLY RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

With our varied audience in mind, we put in place a PD methodology that continually evolved to respond to TA needs. As scholars such as Jeff Grabill and Doug Hesse suggest, we developed a methodology that was reflective and responsive to the population we were researching. During our two-year project, we collected a variety of quantitative and qualitative data, with each stage of our research leading us to collect further data and refine our understanding of the needs of TAs. Because our methods of data collection communicate and shape the philosophy of our PD, we discuss our methods in detail throughout the article, but we offer here a brief overview of the three tools we designed to enact our responsive methodology.

#### *Needs Assessment Survey of Graduate Students*

We began with a survey in the summer of 2011 asking TAs first to rank their professional development interests and then share particular successes, challenges, and concerns about teaching SYW (Appendix A). We conducted this survey electronically using a departmental graduate student email listserv. Fifty-two TAs participated, roughly half of whom had taught

SYW previously. The remaining respondents anticipated teaching SYW in the future.

### *Focus Groups of Graduate Students*

The 2011 survey supplied us with quantitative data, but TAs's discursive responses, especially their comments about challenges and confusion surrounding the course, motivated us to collect more detailed responses. To prompt this, we conducted focus group interviews (see outline of questions in Appendix B). Once again, we used the departmental listserv to identify and contact participants. Twelve TAs participated (six each in an experienced group and an inexperienced group). We conducted the focus groups with the assistance of a senior consultant from our university teaching center. The focus group interviews were audio recorded, and during each session, we took notes on large sheets of paper, which eventually helped us categorize the data. After the interviews, the audio recordings were transcribed and the notes saved. We coded both the transcripts and the meeting notes for recurring themes.

### *PhD Alumni Survey*

An addendum to our research was a survey of department PhD alumni. We conducted this brief electronic survey nearly a year after holding the focus groups. To do this survey, we reached out to the last five years of graduates (2007–2013) from the department (Appendix C). We used this survey to determine the current teaching commitments of these alumni and their impressions of how well the department prepared them for those commitments. The survey garnered twenty-two responses.

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS COLLABORATIVE

Data collected through these various tools first lead us to advocate for PD that is collaboratively designed with TAs themselves, valuing their input and experiences. As we researched approaches to the PD of graduate students, drawing on scholarship from educational development (introduced to us by our university teaching center, which we will discuss in more detail later), we realized a common error in PD happens before programming even begins: Participants are not asked for their input. In the terminology from educational development, this points to the necessity of a “needs assessment” (McClelland 22).<sup>3</sup> Understanding the context of the work of the writing program itself is also part of the heuristic for designing and reviewing TA development programs proposed by Kathi Blake Yancey. In the first of her twelve questions Yancey asks, “What are the characteristics

of the TAs for whom the program is designed?” (66). While we had a general idea, we had never directly asked.

An essay in *Pedagogy* by Estrem and Reid (which draws on the same data discussed in their *WPA: Writing Program Administration* article) provides one framework for why collecting data from composition TAs, particularly through interviews, is a valuable and necessary practice. Estrem and Reid detail their interview methodology, suggesting that it “opened up new possibilities for imagining alternate spaces for our mentorship of TA instructors” (450). Similarly, we discovered that assessing TA needs through both discursive and conversational means allowed us to create developmentally appropriate PD. Further, engaging the concerns and feedback of TAs positioned them as collaborators in their own professional development and helped them identify more readily as professionals. In “Using Interviews in Development Programs for Beginning TAs,” James Shaeffer and Lawrence McGill similarly advocate for the use of interviews with TAs, whom they note “really seemed to enjoy talking with us about teaching” (105). This simple observation points to an implicit yet far reaching benefit in assessing the needs of TAs before planning PD. Sometimes this is their only formalized chance to talk about teaching in a reflective and thoughtful way, even though teaching is frequently a significant part of their graduate careers and likely will continue to be in their post-graduate school lives. By thoroughly assessing and attending to the needs expressed by the TAs in the SYW program, we demonstrated that their input and experiences were taken seriously and showed them that teaching itself is a valuable site of reflection, critical discussion, and scholarship.

### *Diversifying Modes of Professional Development through Collaboration*

The dynamic and often participant-guided nature of focus groups allowed these interviews to become complex and thought provoking conversations for all involved, thus facilitating a more collaborative approach to data collection and interpretation. We see ourselves as having employed the focus group interviews in the spirit of the work of Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher who advocate for approaching interviews as “conversations . . . in which all participants—researchers and informants—understand that they are engaged in mutually shaping meaning” and ultimately working toward a more “participatory model of research” (36–37). Focus groups afforded just such an opportunity to talk with both experienced and inexperienced TAs to get a deeper understanding of what had been expressed in the needs assessment survey. On a practical level, this participatory model of research resulted in buy-in from the TAs. Programs we sponsored were fairly well

attended and the responses to the programming, according to formal and anecdotal evaluations, were almost unanimously positive. But perhaps most importantly, because we made the active decision to engage with these TAs as professional colleagues and teachers, they saw themselves that way, too.

Our methodology was driven by a desire to solicit rich commentary and feedback from the TAs and to engage them as collaborators in determining the content of our programming. In the end, our collaboration with TAs not only led us to revise the content of the programming but also to completely reshape the format of that programming. For instance, before holding our focus groups, we envisioned offering a series of topic-driven workshops, the topics determined by the survey data collected, so we viewed that as one form of collaborative PD. This was a step in the right direction; however, once we held our focus groups and collected more detailed, qualitative data from the TAs, we discovered as too limiting our assumption of workshops as the best or only mode for delivery of PD. For instance, TAs from both focus groups (experienced and inexperienced teachers of SYW) expressed an interest in more structured and supported time to talk to one another about their experiences and course plans for SYW. Additionally, TAs suggested reducing the number of sample syllabi on the SYW program instructor-support website and instead offering annotated syllabi that explained teachers' course decisions, such as why a teacher had selected a certain textbook or used a particular theme in a course. In short, TAs wanted increased community and reflection surrounding their work as teachers in SYW, not unlike what they would have experienced teaching FYW, but with a bit more freedom and flexibility.

We took up TAs's suggestions by 1) selecting successful former SYW teachers to annotate their syllabi and post them on the course website; 2) building discussion sessions, experienced TA-led breakout groups, and TA question and answer panels into our workshops; and 3) piloting in the spring of 2013 an optional, loosely structured peer-to-peer observation program where TAs could observe and collaborate with one another. These more diverse modes of professional development directly acknowledged feedback received from TAs resulting in increased collaboration between WPAs and TAs and foregrounding PD in teaching writing as integral to the preparation of all teacher-scholars.

#### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS ONGOING: MOVING BEYOND THE ONE AND DONE MODEL

As our discussion of collaboration and the diverse modes of PD suggests, our data indicated that PD for TAs should not stop after their first semester

or first year of teaching. While this one and done approach to TA development in teaching is well established in English departments, our experienced TAs expressed concerns about its long-term effectiveness. Implementing ongoing PD rather than focusing it all at the front end of graduate school raised questions for us about how to better address the needs of TAs at different points in their development. To this end, our work with our university's teaching center brought to our attention Jody Nyquist and Jo Sprague's developmental model for thinking about TAs.<sup>4</sup> Nyquist and Sprague propose three stages of TA development, which they term "senior learner, colleague-in-training, and junior colleague" (66). The characteristics of each stage are

[that] senior learners still identify strongly with students, but they function as experts who are capable of providing assistance; colleagues in training have begun to shift their identification to the role of teacher . . . and junior colleagues have reached a level of confident functioning in many parts of the role and may lack only the formal credentials. (66)

Nyquist and Sprague note that these stages of TA development can overlap, and they do not occur at the same rate or at the same time for all TAs.

Nyquist and Sprague's framework suggests that the needs of experienced TAs are different from their needs when they first start in the department. In particular, our data showed that as TAs develop, they often express an increasing interest in composition theory and pedagogy that they do not articulate in their first year. Experienced TAs's interest in composition theory and pedagogy was a marked shift from inexperienced TAs who sometimes were outwardly frustrated by (what they viewed as) theory presented during their early TA FYW training, teaching, and coursework. During that first year of teaching, where the majority of professional development is concentrated, most TAs, as Nyquist and Sprague explain it, are in "survival" mode as teachers, just looking to get through each day (66). TA resistance in English departments is well documented in studies by Sally Barr Ebest ("When Graduate Students Resist"; *Changing the Way We Teach: Writing and Resistance in the Training of Teaching Assistants*) and Jessica Restaino and is a common topic in casual conversations among WPAs. Our data illustrated, though, that as TAs move forward in their careers, this resistance lessens, perhaps because they are now more committed to developing themselves as colleagues and less as learners—that is, they are more interested in PD in composition theory and pedagogy because they have the survival part of teaching down. It is only after TAs are confidently surviving that they can shift toward developing critically informed teaching philosophies



and practices. For the TAs we worked with, the relevance of ongoing PD in composition became apparent to them as they designed and taught new courses, such as SYW, and as they cultivated a professional awareness about the role that teaching writing could play throughout their careers.

### *The Relevance of Composition Studies in Ongoing Professional Development*

In a concrete way, our alumni survey verifies the relevance of ongoing professional development in composition. Over 75% of alumni respondents were teaching writing courses at their current institutions. Although they identified as having various specializations and the majority of them were not PhDs in rhetoric and composition, they taught writing either as their entire course load or in addition to courses in their areas of specialization. This figure was significant and certainly one we shared with TAs and English department faculty alike as we launched our more robust PD program.

Like the alumni, the current TAs also indicated the necessity of ongoing PD. In particular, as we analyzed survey data from the current TAs we realized that just because they had been trained to teach FYW did not mean they wanted less support as they moved on to teach SYW. We learned that 82% of the survey participants wanted to know more about the course objectives and goals for SYW. Related to that, nearly 90% of the participants felt unsure about how SYW was supposed to be more advanced than FYW. These percentages demonstrate that TAs did not feel confident in what the institution and program understood as the goals and purposes of SYW.

We also found that many TAs requested additional training in areas about which we assumed they felt confident, given their preparation for and experience in teaching FYW. For instance, 85% of participants wanted to know more about teaching the writing process, 65% wanted more training in planning in-class activities, and 61% were interested in learning more about grading student work. All of these topics were covered in detail when these TAs were teaching FYW, but a desire to further develop their knowledge and skills remained. Put simply, as the TAs developed, so did their needs. We were working with TAs who were in a variety of developmental stages; some still felt like Nyquist and Sprague's senior learners while others were well on their way to becoming junior colleagues as teachers of SYW. But no matter the stage, it was increasingly clear that that a one and done approach to PD in the teaching of writing was insufficient.

Our focus group data elucidated the demand for more PD that emerged in the survey. Some of the experienced focus group participants explained that they felt confused by the seemingly straightforward requirement that the general education statement, which outlines course objectives and

learning outcomes, be included in their syllabi. Questions articulated by the experienced TAs included “What are the goals of the course?” and “Do these goals necessitate a certain type of writing?” Further confusion surrounded how these goals and the corresponding writing was different from the FYW course. As one experienced TA put it, “What’s the difference, especially in terms of teaching writing, between FYW and SYW?” We asked TAs who had never taught SYW to spend some time reading and analyzing the General Education statement for the course, and their questions were fairly similar to their more experienced colleagues: “What’s the point of SYW?” “How do you define making the class ‘more challenging’ than FYW?” “What types of writing should you assign? Is that different than FYW?”

While the inexperienced TAs’ questions were understandable given they had not previously taught the course, the experienced TAs also asked many questions about the basics of the course. The experienced TAs in the focus groups indicated that they needed more time and support to understand the goals and outcomes of a course like SYW, especially in the context of how it aligned with their previous teaching experience. Perhaps more important than that, we needed to find ways to integrate PD about what sort of writing and writing instruction could accomplish these goals and reach these outcomes.

Ongoing PD was necessary, and especially ongoing PD with a heavy composition studies focus—what Reid et al. refer to as “writing pedagogy education” (34). While the inexperienced TAs had general questions about designing assignments and curricula, the experienced TAs expressed interest in composition theory and pedagogy explicitly. As one TA asked, “Why don’t we get exposure to more pedagogies from the field of composition and even the expertise of professors in the department?” One TA expressed concern that he simply was not doing enough toward the “teaching writing” end of SYW. This group of TAs agreed that they wanted more professional development in how to teach writing; in the words of one TA, “best practices” of composition should “anchor” any future events we hosted.

While we do not interpret our limited data to indicate a total disappearance of TA resistance, the data lead us to encourage more professional development in composition studies to situate TAs as professionals in the field. From our research, we conclude that as the experienced TAs grew in their understanding of their own career trajectories and commitments, they were able to connect to composition studies in ways that they simply could not as inexperienced TAs concerned largely with survival. By the time TAs enter their second year of teaching, they likely have a more developed sense of the academic job market, the role that the teaching of writing may play

throughout their careers, and a better sense of themselves as academics—all of which could contribute to composition studies becoming a more relevant part of their professional development.

### *Flexibility and Sustainability in Ongoing Professional Development*

Based on these data, we revised the SYW program to create ongoing PD opportunities for TAs. First, we moved from offering just one SYW PD workshop each year to offering optional and more frequent workshops throughout the academic year. We tied these workshops to specific objectives and requirements for SYW and also used them as sites for developing and expanding what TAs already know from their training and experience teaching FYW. For instance, we offered a workshop in the fall of 2012 about developing diverse curricula and pedagogical approaches for SYW and designed a workshop for the spring of 2013 that shared methods and rationale for incorporating multimodal composing into SYW courses.

Further, we are committed to an ongoing model of PD through a peer-to-peer (P2P) program. We piloted this program in spring 2013 as a way for TAs to observe and collaborate with one another. It was motivated by survey and focus group data collected in the fall of 2011, which indicated that TAs desired more collaboration with and observation of colleagues; our alumni survey data suggested this as well. The P2P program offered a slightly more formalized way of accomplishing this. Fifteen TAs participated in the spring 2013 pilot semester of the P2P classroom observation program. We placed the TAs with partners or groups, offered a loose structure of how to conduct classroom observations (pre-observation meeting, observation, conversation after the observation), and provided a short reading about best practices for non-evaluative observations. After this introduction, the P2P observation and dialogue were self-guided processes for the participating TAs. The feedback we collected from this pilot indicated that TAs found the P2P program filled a gap in their professional development as teachers. They asked us to make the P2P program more in depth and include more than classroom observations. In the spring of 2014, an expanded teaching buddies version of the P2P was available for TAs to have a peer partner for grading, designing assignments, observing classes, etc. It is our hope that this P2P program, in its ease and flexibility, can serve as another sustainable form of ongoing professional development.

### PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS DISTRIBUTED ACROSS DEPARTMENTAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LOCATIONS

The final piece of our approach advocates making PD for TAs a wider departmental and institutional commitment. Our data, as well as existing

scholarship (Boice; Meyers; Neal and Peed-Neal), show a powerful need to involve more people and offices in creating, offering, and sustaining professional development for TAs. Writing for a cross-disciplinary audience, Shirley Ronkowsky identifies several components to sustaining TA development programs (56–58), but of particular interest for us is her emphasis on institutional memory, which she explains can be established through collaboration with university teaching centers. While Ronkowsky is largely interested in teaching centers, we see ourselves forming similar partnerships within our own department. By suggesting that professional development in teaching be more distributed across the institution, we argue that work with TAs in English departments should not be solely a WPA endeavor. Instead, it can and should engage other English faculty to make use of their varied expertise to meet TA needs. The results of increased distribution are twofold: 1) increased range of who participates (and how they participate) in TA professional development can contribute to institutional memory in programs with high WPA turnover and; 2) distribution can lead to sustainability of PD programs.

### *Connecting Professional Development to Broader Teaching Interests*

Through our initial needs assessment survey, we realized some concerns about teaching did not fall neatly under our domain as WPAs and specialists in rhetoric and composition. In fact, in their survey responses, TAs expressed interest in topics that went far beyond teaching SYW. For instance, 65% of participants marked selecting texts (textbooks, articles, films, etc.) as of high or moderate priority; 64% were interested in planning class lectures; and 82% articulated as a concern meeting the needs of students with various learning styles and levels of experience. In the write-in section about “Other concerns?” one participant stated, “Film studies tips would be great.” Another participant explained, “Need help picking texts, facilitating appropriate activities and assignments in order to meet course goals.” We increasingly wondered if we could handle the diverse needs and interests our TAs expressed. For instance, many of the concerns focused on selecting texts aligned specifically with the section of SYW that focused on literature, a section none of the authors has taught nor did we identify as having particular knowledge about the teaching of literature. Although we felt well prepared to help TAs accomplish tasks like planning short lectures, meeting the needs of diverse students, or planning activities to align with course outcomes, we also realized that these were pedagogical approaches TAs would utilize in nearly any course they would teach in their careers. In short, the data suggested that drawing on the expertise from other mem-

bers of our department and the university community would be a meaningful move, especially because it would amplify the value of teaching across the department and university, contribute to broader understanding of our commitments as WPAs, and potentially enhance the knowledge of our work and thus sustain it after we had left our positions. While we certainly recommend increased, ongoing PD in composition studies, we also argue it is necessary to understand how this PD can undergird and connect to the other teaching TAs undertake. Such connections can be better facilitated by pulling from various loci of expertise held in departments and universities.

Our focus group data corroborated this need, especially because many participants were interested in talking about diversity in the classroom, broadly defined. This interest was partially motivated by the SYW as fulfilling a “social diversity in the US Experience” general education requirement. The discussions that circulated around notions of diversity and how to integrate it into the SYW course brought in topics and questions that went beyond composition studies. One experienced TA noted that he felt the diversity and US experience aspect of the course really needed to show up on his syllabus to have it approved. (He was right.) Other experienced TAs raised critical, thought provoking questions about the social diversity requirement—admittedly part of the course that had not received much attention in past PD: “What’s up with the diversity requirement? How do we really meet that?” and “What are ways to get at the diversity requirement? How can SYW as a program articulate multiple ways to meet this requirement?” These comments and questions from the TAs pushed us to see the diversity requirement as more than just an add-on to a writing course. Instead, it was a central aspect of pedagogy that the TAs themselves (and the WPAs) needed more support to appropriately theorize and apply. We thus felt a need to bring scholars and teachers who could speak to designing a course that meaningfully utilized diverse content and met the needs of a diverse student population into the professional development conversation

Finally, our alumni survey offered very direct feedback from former TAs that called for enhanced PD in areas of teaching beyond the typical WPA purview. As we collected data, we frequently wondered: Is offering professional development in the teaching of writing really just about the teaching of writing? Concerns raised by TAs were far from strictly the domain of compositionists or WPAs, and the alumni survey helped us demonstrate this in a way that we hoped would be persuasive to departmental colleagues. Alumni expressed that they felt relatively well supported as graduate students teaching at our institution; twenty-one out of the twenty-two participants “agreed” or “somewhat agreed” that they had been well sup-

ported. They still indicated ways they could have been better prepared for their faculty positions, and most of the suggestions called for more people to take part in their professional development. For instance, 59% of the alumni said they would have appreciated the opportunity to observe the classes of others, and 55% of them desired more observations of their own classes by faculty members. In the discursive section of the survey, some alumni requested more observations by faculty members in their areas of specialization, others referenced the value of mentoring programs in their current jobs, and others simply noted that there was a lack of balance since there was formalized preparation to teach composition but not other kinds of English courses. One participant wrote this lengthy and illustrative comment:

I felt very well prepared to teach composition, but not as well prepared to teach other courses. More opportunities to observe the teaching of advanced literature courses, I think, might have been beneficial. More opportunities to discuss how teaching literature is different from teaching writing (even if literature-based) would also have been helpful (perhaps through brown-bags or mentoring opportunities). While I could talk about this in an unofficial way with my dissertation advisor and committee, it would have been nice perhaps to have a dedicated teaching mentor with whom such conversations would be expected.

#### MERGING KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY

We have committed to early efforts toward creating a more distributed model of TA PD in our department. First, and most importantly in terms of enhancing sustainability and disseminating locations of institutional memory, we initiated a strong relationship with our university teaching center. Alongside teaching center consultants, we discovered that high quality TA and faculty development can be achieved by merging knowledge from the field of educational development (the domain of many teaching centers) with our own knowledge of writing program administration and composition studies. Our experience working with our teaching center has made available to us both educational development scholarship and practical resources. Specifically, the teaching center provided us with grant money for increased administrative support and program assessment, and center consultants have proven allies in both collecting data and administering workshops for which we needed additional expertise.

One workshop that is worth discussing more specifically as an example of this distribution of PD responsibility was held in fall of 2012 and focused on teaching diversity. Driven by the data about the social diversity requirement we collected through focus groups, we designed this workshop to meet the needs of TAs in ways that were theoretically sound, interactive, and immediately applicable in the TAs's current classes. The workshop was designed as three parts. The first part was a lecture from a guest speaker, the associate director of our teaching center, on how to conceptualize diversity as an integral part of course design. The second part of the workshop featured a panel of experienced teachers who shared their expertise in creating diverse learning environments. These experienced teachers were both faculty members and TAs from various specializations within English Studies, allowing us to draw on the wide array of expertise available across our department. The third part was a breakout session that allowed TAs time to talk with their peers about how they could incorporate diversity into their own SYW classes. The evaluations indicated that the twenty participants found each of the three sections either "important" or "very important." The more distributed approach modeled by this workshop demonstrates how the responsibility of PD in teaching can move beyond the WPAs, into the department, across the university, and thus show to TAs the broad commitment to teaching at the university. Beyond those immediate benefits, in the long-term, the program becomes more sustainable because the institutional memory is strengthened by the involvement of more people and places.

#### CONCLUSION: LOCALLY DEVELOPING PROFESSIONALS

We conclude by recalling the mandate issued by Reid et al.: "Go gather data—not just impressions—from your own TAs" (62). Like Reid and her co-authors, we recognize the need for more research on TA professional development programming across institutional types. We also realize that local contexts for teaching and learning—and TAs's own goals—should and will shape PD in these local contexts. At the same time, we emphasize that although our institution may be radically different from others, the model we describe involving collaboration with TAs, ongoing PD and rejection of the one and done model, and distribution across locations in the university is applicable across a variety of programs.

Our approach to ongoing professional development takes seriously that supporting experienced TAs means providing opportunities for them to develop as professionals. Our data showed that in their transition to greater teaching independence, TAs become more invested in their professional

development, not less. Related to this investment, we discovered that TAs, especially experienced ones, need to be more involved in their PD as teachers and approached as colleagues in the field rather than novices in need of training, inoculation, or the one and done approach. Given the frequency with which our program alumni from all areas within English studies teach composition, our ongoing PD program quite literally prepares them for their profession. Finally, we observe a powerful trend that demands more people/places get involved with the PD of TAs. We need more diverse expertise, more models of approaches to teaching, and increased mentoring to make TA professional development sustainable in terms of both labor and institutional memory. By systematically collaborating with our TAs, our campus teaching center, and other English department faculty, we embrace the process of creating a locally relevant ongoing professional development program.

## NOTES

1. All survey and interview data collected have been approved by the University Institutional Review Board (Review board number 2014E0043).

2. We use the term *professional development* to emphasize the collaborative and distributed model we outline here, working intentionally away from describing these programs as *training*, a metaphor that places TAs as novices rather than colleagues collaborating. At our institution, for instance, the FYW workshop is often referred to as a training session to certify them. *Training* brings to mind Paulo Freire's notion of banking education where the TAs are empty containers waiting to be filled by experts with teaching knowledge and skills.

3. Needs assessments and the collection of ongoing feedback from TAs are crucial to understanding local needs as they change. While WPAs certainly value feedback collection, educational development scholarship emphasizes the practice even more and provides practical guides for how to collect feedback. See Samuel B. McClelland's 1994 article on survey questionnaires, for instance.

4. Reid et al. also find this framework helpful and rely heavily on it in their 2012 *WPA: Writing Program Administration* article.

## APPENDIX A: SUMMER 2011 NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

*Email text:*

Hello all,

Professor K and I are in the process of planning some new and improved professional development workshops for GTAs that teach (or will teach)



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Second-Year Writing. To assist with our planning, we wanted to get input from the grad students in the department about what they want to know when it comes to planning and teaching this course.

So, since most of you have or will teach SYW, we ask that you fill out the following survey. We thank you in advance for your participation!

Best,

L

### *Online Survey*

Experience:

\_\_\_\_\_ I have taught Second-Year Writing (SYW) before.

\_\_\_\_\_ I plan to teach SYW in the future.

If you have taught SYW before, what version(s) of it have you taught? (.01, .02, etc.)

Your Professional Development Interests/Concerns:

### Ranking Your Interests

Please rank the topics that you would like to know more about through professional development workshops about teaching English SYW. You may rank as many or as few of the topics as you would like, but we ask that you rank according to the following system:

- The ranking scale is goes from 1 to 3.
- 1=high priority; 2=moderate priority; 3=low priority
- Please rank NO MORE THAN SIX for each number.
- We also encourage you to write in any concerns/ideas you have that are not already listed here.

\_\_\_\_\_ Research/using sources

\_\_\_\_\_ Responding to student work

\_\_\_\_\_ Grading student work

\_\_\_\_\_ Creating a syllabus

\_\_\_\_\_ Facilitating/encouraging/teaching revision

\_\_\_\_\_ Understanding the course objectives/goals for English 367

\_\_\_\_\_ Designing a curriculum that emphasizes “diversity”

\_\_\_\_\_ Creating writing assignments/prompts

\_\_\_\_\_ Selecting “texts” (broadly defined) to read/watch

\_\_\_\_\_ Creating daily lesson plans

\_\_\_\_\_ Teaching about the writing process

\_\_\_\_\_ Planning a writing course that is more “advanced” than English 110

\_\_\_\_\_ Facilitating class discussion

\_\_\_\_\_ Planning class lectures

\_\_\_\_\_ Planning in-class activities

- \_\_\_\_\_ Meeting the needs of students with various learning styles & levels of experience
- \_\_\_\_\_ Conducting writing workshops/peer review
- \_\_\_\_\_ Teaching students who do not speak English as a first language
- \_\_\_\_\_ Topic of your choice: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Topic of your choice: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Topic of your choice: \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Topic of your choice: \_\_\_\_\_

### Discursive Section

If you would like to elaborate or say more about any of your interests/concerns, please do so here:

If you have taught SYW before, what was your greatest success in teaching the course?

If you have taught SYW before, what was your biggest challenge?

If you've never taught SYW, what is your biggest concern about teaching the course?

### APPENDIX B: AUTUMN 2011 FOCUS GROUPS OF GRADUATE STUDENTS

#### *Questions for Experienced TAs*

Discuss your previous experience(s) teaching Second-Year Writing (SYW).

What do you perceive to be the goals/objectives of SYW?

How do you plan and teach to meet those goals?

What were your strengths/successes in teaching SYW?

What were the challenges?

If the department were to offer professional development for TAs planning to teach SYW, what sort of topics would you like to see covered?

#### *Questions for TAs Who Have Not Yet Taught English SYW*

What do you perceive to be the goals/objectives of English SYW? (We showed them a handout that articulated the Gen Ed requirements to help start this piece of the conversation.)

What do you look forward to about teaching SYW?

What concerns do you have about teaching SYW?

If the department were to offer professional development for TAs planning to teach SYW, what sort of topics would you like to see covered?

### APPENDIX C: WINTER 2012 ALUMNI SURVEY

The Second-Year Writing Program is undertaking a self-study this academic year. As part of that assessment we are gathering data from recent graduates to determine the effectiveness of current teaching and professional development opportunities in the department. We hope that you'll be willing to take a few minutes to answer the ten questions below.

The data collected will assist us in creating more robust and productive programming for graduate teaching associates. The self-study report and external program evaluation will be available in late Spring 2013.

1) Where do you teach?

WRITE IN ANSWER

2) At what type of institution do you teach?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

2-year college

4-year college that grants only bachelor's degrees

4-year college/university that grants master's degrees

4-year college/university that grants master's degrees and PhDs

Other:

3) What is your current appointment?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

FT Tenure Track

FT Lecturer

Adjunct

Other:

4) What are you teaching at your current institution? Please write course titles or subjects rather than numbers.

WRITE IN ANSWER

5) What did you teach while at OSU?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

FYW

SYW

Business Writing and Technical Writing

Literature surveys

Creative writing workshops

Other:

6) Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: (5 pt likert scale: Agree; somewhat agree; neither agree nor disagree; somewhat disagree; disagree; NA)

- In general, I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching at this institution.

- I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching FYW.

- I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching SYW.

- I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching Business Writing and Technical Writing.

- I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching literature surveys.

- I felt well supported as a graduate student teaching creative writing workshops.

7) What other kinds of professional development programming would have been helpful during your time at this institution?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

- None; I was satisfied
- Workshops about teaching
- Observing others' classes
- More frequent observations of my own classes by faculty members
- Observations of my own classes by peers
- Panel discussions on teaching
- Brown bag sessions to discuss teaching concerns
- Additional rewards and recognition for teaching
- Teaching mentoring program
- Other:

8) What other kinds of teaching experiences (as instructor, as a TA, teaching internship with professor, etc.) would have been helpful during your time at this institution?

MULTIPLE CHOICE

- None; I was satisfied
- Opportunities to serve as a grader, assistant, or recitation leader in a faculty member's course
- Teaching a greater variety of courses
- Tutoring in the Writing Center
- More robust/satisfying teaching internship experience
- Other:

9) What other formal classroom instruction/courses about teaching would have been helpful during your time at this institution?

MULTIPLE CHOICE:

- None; I was satisfied
- Graduate workshops on pedagogy from visiting scholars
- Graduate seminars on literature pedagogy
- Graduate seminars on creative writing pedagogy
- Graduate seminars on writing pedagogy (beyond your FYW teacher training)
- Other:

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