

**The Basic Course Using GIAs: One Department's Journey through the Ups  
and Downs of Establishing a Lecture/Lab Delivery Model for the  
Basic Communication Course**

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The basic communication course has many demands placed upon it—and in turn, places many demands on communication departments and their faculty and staff. According to the 2013 National Communication Association (NCA) president, Steven A. Beebe, the basic course serves as the “discipline’s front porch,” making it “the most important room in the disciplinary home of communication studies” (Beebe, 2013, p. 3). Morreale, Myers, Backlund, and Simonds (2016) elaborate further on the critical role of this hard-working course: “The basic course serves to introduce students to the communication discipline, recruiting undergraduates as majors and acting as the primary means by which communication students learn the praxis of communication education while completing their degrees” (p. 338). The multi-section basic course has been identified as “usually central, in many ways, to the general health of the entire academic program” (Sawyer & Behnke, 2001).

In addition to serving the discipline well, the basic communication course also serves the needs of many constituencies outside the discipline because of the important skills the course teaches. One of the most significant examples from within academia is Liberal Education, America’s Promise (LEAP). LEAP self-identifies as “a national advocacy, campus action, and research initiative that describes essential learning outcomes for college students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (*About LEAP*, n.d.). Those outcomes include the overarching category of “Intellectual and Practical Skills,” which includes six subcategories, all of which are addressed and enhanced by the basic speech course: inquiry and analysis; critical and creative thinking; written and oral communication; quantitative literacy; information literacy, and teamwork and problem solving” (*Essential Learning Outcomes*, n.d.).

Both the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) (Gray & Koncz, 2014) and the National Association of Colleges and Businesses (NACB) (Ingbreetsen, 2009) have identified effective oral communication skills as critical for college graduates. A 2016 survey conducted by NACE of its employer members showed that verbal communication, specifically, the “ability to verbally communicate with persons inside and outside the organization,” is the most important skill desired of employees by employers, outpacing both “ability to work in a team structure” and “ability to make decisions and solve problems.” And presentations, the hallmark of the university public speaking course, were identified by 70% of employed Americans in a sponsored Harris poll as “critical to their success at work” (Gallo, 2016).

The trend of employers either directly or indirectly seeking skill development from colleges and universities has increased. Donoghue (2008) points out, “Skill development, once the exclusive bailiwick of the vocational school, now dominates the curriculum of many colleges and universities. As a result “higher education is job training” (p. 12). The

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interest in, and demand for, these communication skills, fostered and demonstrated through the basic course, is not surprising given the results of a 2013 survey conducted by the AAC&U. When the organization surveyed business and non-profit leaders nationally, 93% of survey respondents indicated that “clear communication skills are more important than a potential employee’s undergraduate major” (Hooker & Simonds, 2015, p. 103).

However, despite constituencies both inside and outside of academia valuing the skills fostered by the basic course, resources to support the course appear to be tight across the country. “The ranking of ‘financial support’ as a most prevalent problem in the basic course went up from 29.2 percent in 2010 to 43.7 percent in 2015” (Morreale et al., 2016). This is not surprising given the status of funding for public universities. After adjusting for inflation, funding for public two- and four-year colleges is, in total, nearly \$10 billion below funding levels just before the recession (Mitchell, Leachman, & Masterson, 2016, p. 1).

One way of coping with this budget loss is to increase tuition. However, these increases, “while substantial in most states, have fallen far short nationally of fully replacing the per student support that public colleges and universities have lost due to state funding cuts. In nearly half of the states, tuition increases between 2008 and 2015 have not fully offset cuts to state higher education funding” (Mitchell et al., 2016, p. 14). And for some institutions, tuition hikes are not the answer. The authors’ institution did not raise tuition, as state funding cuts were paired with a state-mandated five-year tuition freeze. Another way of coping with budget pressures is to increase enrollment. Public higher education experienced an 8.6 percent increase in enrollment nationally from the beginning of the recession through the 2013-2014 academic year (the last year for which there is data) (Mitchell et al., 2016, p. 10). The authors’ university experienced a 13.2 percent increase from the start of the recession (2008-2009) through the fall of 2016 (University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, 2016). Regardless of how funding cuts are addressed at an administrative level, the end results are often the same when it comes to impacting the basic communication course at the day to day level—the faculty and staff delivering the course are asked to do more with less.

For example, an increase in enrollment means that at colleges and universities where the basic course is required of all students, both administrators and instructors find themselves trying to serve additional students without additional funds to do so. This is by no means a recent problem. In a 1972 edition of *Speech Teacher*, Cheatham and Jordan worried about “the failure of higher education budgets to expand proportionately with increased college enrollments” (p. 107).

According to the National Communication Association, performance-based courses such as Public Speaking shouldn’t have more than 25 students per section (NCA, 2011). Although the authors’ institution offers 3-week face to face summer courses and online courses during the semester that are capped at 25 students, all traditional 16-week fall and spring sections of the basic course are capped at 32 students. As budgets kept being cut and enrollments kept increasing at this institution, the challenges of offering over 2000 course seats per calendar year required some creative thinking to help meet the demand without new resources. The department was already offering 32-seat sections, a course cap which made it difficult to offer all students in the class enough individual speaking opportunities to increase their skills. Making sections larger than 32 was not an option for the basic course. However, creating large lecture sections and assigning multiple “speaking lab” sections to these lecture sections was. Thus, the lecture/lab model of delivery for the basic communication course was adopted for approximately 50 percent of the basic course offerings per term. Honors sections, learning community sections, and other “specialty”

sections of the basic course are still offered in the traditional one-instructor format. Additionally, the authors' department offers online sections, hybrid sections, and winter/summer term sections to fully meet demand.

### **Program Design**

The current lecture/lab delivery model used in the authors' department for the basic course has an instructor of record who is responsible for delivering the large lectures, and for creating all curriculum, assignments, and assessment measures, and policies for the course, as well as for supervising and mentoring the graduate instructional assistants (GIAs). There are five GIAs on the team who are responsible for facilitating discussions and class exercises in the lab sessions of the course as well as watching and assessing student performances. Together, the team instructs 15 sections of the basic class per term and serves an enrollment of 450 students. The course cap was reduced by two students per section to accommodate the shortage of large lecture halls at the university. The slight reduction allows five sections to come together in one lecture hall for a 50 minute lecture lead by the instructor of record (with the current schedule being 8 am, 9 am and 10 am on Fridays). The lab sessions take place in traditional classrooms and are conducted by the GIAs (with the current schedule being 8 am, 9 am and 10 am on Mondays and Wednesdays).

It is important to note that the use of a lecture/lab format for general education courses across the curriculum is nothing new. Science departments have been delivering courses using this format for decades, and lecture/lab models for delivering the basic communication course have been used at large research universities for many years as well. However, the authors' university is a comprehensive teaching-focused university that is part of a large state-wide university system. A lecture/lab module that uses graduate students as part of the instructional team is unique for comprehensives in this system as there are strict system regulations that needed to be overcome. The system has very specific rules about the type and level of training one needs in order to be an instructor at one of the state comprehensive universities. A master's degree in a related field is a minimum requirement. Additionally, hiring of instructional staff is regulated carefully by the system Human Resources Office for fair and diverse hiring practices. Thus, it took a long time and very careful structuring of the program to ensure that the graduate instructional assistants were truly assisting in the classroom, and were not responsible for content delivery or creation. Additionally, the requirements for the position had to be carefully crafted so that they did not conflict with system hiring practices. When the program was approved, the communication department became the only program on the authors' comprehensive university campus to have graduate assistants in any kind of classroom role. All other graduate assistantships on that campus are research or student services based.

The current graduate instructional assistant program developed over a number of years, starting with a team-taught approach in 2007 in which three of the department's strongest public speaking faculty members and instructors collaborated on a combined syllabus. The course included a 96-student lecture section roughly once a week and individual lab sections of 32 students with each instructor. Over the course of three years and the rotation of different instructors, the combined lecture/lab process was fine-tuned. Then the paperwork began seeking system approval to convert this team-taught model to one of an instructor of record and graduate instructional assistants (GIAs). The program has now been in place for 9 years and has operated under three different instructor of records.

## **Rewards of the Program**

### **Cost Savings**

The benefits of the program are numerous. The most significant one is cost savings. The program saves nearly 39 percent per year in comparison to having the 15 sections of the basic course taught by faculty or academic staff. When the program was being developed, the authors' department received excellent advice from faculty at another university who had developed a similar cost-savings program. They stressed that a plan for spending the savings needed to be built into the program and the whole program approved with those spending plans in place. Otherwise, the savings could easily be "lost" to the college or the university over time, and not be re-allocated to the department. When the program was first established, the department received the following benefits:

- Providing an additional one-course load reduction per semester for the Graduate Coordinator (2 courses per academic year)
- Providing coverage for 2 courses per semester for the Instructor of Record (4 courses per academic year)
- Additional course releases (2 per semester) for tenured and tenure-track faculty in the Communication Department (4 courses per academic year)
- Additional 700-level offerings to enhance graduate curricular offerings (1 per semester; 2 courses per academic year)

Unfortunately, during the budget crisis, the department lost many of cost-savings from the program, as they were redirected to the College level and the dean. For example, the monies for research course releases were redirected to the College.

### **Graduate Student Stipends**

The authors' graduate program is able to offer six graduate stipends (five for the GIAs and one research assistantship). Previously, the department had no assistantships. The graduate school had some assistantships that our department's graduate students could apply for, but we had no funds to provide assistantships of our own. These new assistantships allow the department to be more competitive with other comparable graduate programs at attracting and recruiting high quality graduate students.

### **Reduction in Part-time Adjuncts and Course Cohesion**

An additional benefit was a reduction in the number of short-term and often very part-time adjuncts that had been used to cover the course in the past. Because the department tries to take a unified approach to COMM 110, using the same rubrics and several mandatory assignments across all its sections, this instructor of record/GIA-approach provides much more educational cohesion than the department would receive from twelve to fifteen extremely part-time adjuncts teaching the course. Most adjuncts also teach at night, which means that they function largely outside the life of the department, increasing a feeling of isolation and exacerbating the difficulty of maintaining the cohesion in the course that the department seeks. As the department has found anecdotally that students

are far less interested in taking night classes than they were several years ago, a reduction in night courses has also been a plus.

### **Graduate Student Employability**

GIAAs are required to be full-time graduate students (taking 9 credits per semester), which is in keeping with the School of Graduate Studies' other assistantships. In addition to full-time course work, GIAAs are required to perform 20 hours per week of instructional activities related to their COMM 110 sections. GIAAs are on campus much more than students working full time and/or commuting for one or two night classes. In addition, GIAAs interact more with faculty and fellow students, and simply become more immersed in academic life. Building a sense of community is less challenging when students are here for larger amounts of time; thus our GIA graduate students are more connected to the program and, in turn, have a more satisfying graduate experience. They become more connected to faculty and often take part in research because of those connections, receive faculty recommendations, and ultimately, thrive in the job market. Our GIAAs have gone on to a wide variety of professional experiences, including corporate trainers, sales, legislative aides, research analysts, college instructors, and PhD candidates.

### **Diversity & Global Perspectives**

The ability of the program to offer assistantships helps to recruit students from international locations, and from under-represented populations, as well as nontraditional students with professional experience. A greater diversity in COMM 110 instructors enables undergraduate students in these classes to better understand the value of multiple perspectives.

### **Challenges**

While the benefits of the lecture/lab basic course delivery model seem to outweigh the challenges, the goal of this paper is provide an honest, detailed overview of the process of creating this program so that other departments struggling with budget restrictions and growing enrollments can learn from our experiences. Thus, significant time will be spent discussing the challenges faced and the strategies implemented to address those challenges. Some of these challenges evolved over time and some are still being overcome.

### **Physical Space Limitations**

When the program began, the department was able to reserve both the large lecture room and the small lab rooms for all class meeting dates. This allowed flexibility in scheduling. Lectures were usually Mondays and labs were usually Wednesdays and Fridays, but lectures could be moved to Wednesdays or Fridays— or two lectures could be scheduled in one week if necessary. Some weeks could even be all discussion days if students were giving speeches. However, as enrollments across campus increased, demand for classroom space increased as well. It was no longer possible to book both rooms for all class periods. Now the class is limited to three large lecture sections of 150 students each (and course enrollments cannot go any bigger as there is not a lecture hall on campus that seats more than 150 available to us) and lectures must be scheduled back to back in one block of time in

the mornings because that is when the room is available. This is draining for the instructor of record. It is hard to maintain the level of energy and enthusiasm necessary to engage 150 students in a lecture setting when you are lecturing three times back to back. Additionally, as the 150-seat room is in high demand, we are limited each term in what day we can have it. Some semesters we only get it every Friday morning, for example. Thus, regardless of what scheduling might work best for the flow of the class and the timing of various lectures or speaking days, these room restrictions mean that the structure and organization of course content is determined by space limitations rather than by what best enhances student learning. Thus, when planning for a large lecture/small lab course, room availability and scheduling is something that should be carefully examined to see if it can be appropriately adapted to the nature and needs of the course being considered.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Quality GIAs**

Many of the challenges for the department relate to recruitment and retention of high quality GIAs. Unlike some graduate programs, the authors' state does not allow tuition remission. Out-of-state GIA candidates are able to qualify for in-state tuition, and GIAs earn a salary (approximately \$16,000) but they are all still responsible for their tuition bill. Thus, financial incentives are limited in the authors' program. Their graduate program is strong and attractive, but was designed more for working professionals than for potential PhD students. Thus, from within the pool of graduate students, there is a far smaller pool of candidates who are strong students, who can be successful as classroom assistants, and who have the time available to dedicate themselves full-time to graduate school and working as a GIA. While the ability to offer stipends has increased the attractiveness of the program, there is still a struggle to find enough qualified GIA candidates.

To date, the program's most successful recruits are its own undergraduates. As they near the end of the graduate careers, faculty will encourage them to consider graduate school, and will tell them about the department's GIA program. As many of them are considering working in fields where a master's degree is an asset, or where experience in adult education is valued, they benefit from considering a GIA position. Additionally, the graduate program coordinator shares the GIA position possibility with all incoming graduate school applicants. However, the small pool of students in the program who are able to commit to full-time graduate school has resulted in semesters where there have been limited qualified candidates to choose from. This has led to offering contracts to candidates who have potential, but who are more vulnerable to mistakes. The danger in hiring GIAs who require extensive nurturing, training and guidance is the potential that a weak GIA could bring down the quality of the program as a whole. Additionally, these GIAs require an inordinate amount of time and investment on the part of the instructor of record and other faculty mentors in the department. This means that other GIAs do not receive as much time and attention as they deserve and may be asked to do more work independently because the instructor of record is spending so much time on one struggling GIA.

The department is exploring a variety of strategies to strengthen the pool of applicants, including recruiting at collegiate forensics tournaments and increasing the department presence at NCA and CSCA. Talbot, Hartley, Marzetta, and Wee (2015) suggest using undergraduate learning assistants in the classroom in order to accomplish two goals. The first is that strong undergraduate assistants would be able to help support the GIAs with their significant workloads. The other is that the strongest of the undergraduate learning

assistants would make strong GIA applicants. Although the department has not pursued this option, it is an interesting and appealing one.

### **Stresses of the GIA Position**

Each GIA is responsible for assisting with three sections of the basic course—90 students in total, while also being required to take nine credits of graduate coursework (graduate students must be enrolled full-time in order to be eligible for an assistantship). These responsibilities can cause stress. Although the vast majority of GIAs in this program have thrived, there were two instances where GIAs ultimately failed. One was a high-spirited instructor who was very popular with the students and had very strong and natural teaching ability. A perfectionist, he found the position of being both graduate student and instructor too stressful because he could not find the time to complete each assignment and instructor task to perfection. The other was a returning vet in his 50s who seemed extremely motivated for the position and the opportunity to earn a degree that would lead to permanent college instruction. Unfortunately, the stress of the situation exacerbated a preexisting mental health condition, causing the instructor to barely finish the semester. It is essential that programs figure out ways to mitigate the stressors this position can place on GIAs. In the authors' department, new faculty hires have "light" teaching loads the first semester, so they can adapt to the challenges of the tenure track. The authors' program is considering something similar with the GIAs. For example, this upcoming fall, the department has two students who are starting graduate school in September, but will not begin their GIA duties until January. These students will be able to adapt to the rigors of graduate school, and will be able to participate in GIA training to have an understanding of their responsibilities and acclimate to the position before being immersed fulltime.

One factor that makes a big difference in reducing the stress levels of our GIAs is a determined effort by the department and the instructor of record to ensure that the GIAs know they are a valued part of the department staff. The morale of the GIAs is considered throughout the semester. GIAs have a lot to balance in their lives (the demands of graduate school, grading and managing 90 undergraduates, personal lives, etc.), and keeping them in a positive frame of mind is beneficial to everyone involved, particularly during periods of the semester when grading gets overwhelming. For that reason, end of semester celebratory lunches, occasional thank you notes and treats, and appreciative emails and texts are purposely built into the program to help maintain an upbeat atmosphere within the GIA team.

### **Breakdown of Instructor of Record and GIA Roles**

A critical element of the program structure is the breakdown of responsibilities between the instructor of record (who over the years has been a tenured faculty member, a tenure track faculty member, and a permanent academic staff instructor) and the GIAs. The instructor of record is the one who creates all class rubrics, schedules, syllabi and course policies. He or she is also the one responsible for ultimately providing grades for students—although GIAs play a large role in their calculation. It is critical that the instructor of record be the one to provide the final grade, as this helps take "heat" off the GIAs. All disputes and complaints go to the instructor of record, ensuring that graduate instructors are not forced to deal with high-level conflict resolution situations.

The following job descriptions were developed to provide clarification on the roles:

GIAs undertake the following responsibilities:

1. Lead three discussion sections of Speech 110 per semester which includes:
  - facilitating class discussions and in-class activities
  - watching and evaluating presentations
  - grading outlines, reflection papers, etc.
  - proctoring exams.
2. Observe all COMM 110 lectures presented by the Instructor of Record.
3. Hold office hours.
4. Attend training meetings for GIAs and individual conferences scheduled with the Instructor of Record.
5. Participate in evaluation of the GIA program.
6. Attend additional training sessions as needed for D2L, use of Library, LEARN Center offerings, etc.

The Instructor of Record for COMM 110 courses taught in conjunction with GIAs, would be a graduate faculty member (*this policy has changed since the inception of the program*) who has exhibited a high level of teaching ability. The IOR would have the following responsibilities:

1. Preparing and delivering lectures
2. Designing the course and writing the syllabus in consultation with the Basic Course Coordinator.
3. Creating assignments and the associated grading rubrics.
4. Creating exams and quizzes.
5. Setting up a D2L site for GIA sections of 110
6. Being the point person for COMM 110 student concerns and disputes (e.g. student problems with their GIA; academic misconduct issues, etc.).
7. Entering all student grades for team-taught COMM 110 classes.
8. Acting as the substitute when a GIA is unable to meet with his/her class.
9. Participating in GIA selection including developing application materials, talking with prospective applicants, reviewing applications, participating in the interview process, informing GIAs of their selection and responsibilities.
10. Coordinating and leading GIA orientation in the Fall with input from the Graduate Coordinator and Basic Course Coordinator
11. Leading periodic, scheduled GIA meetings
12. Meeting individually with GIAs as needed
13. Participating in GIA's assessments/reviews
14. Participating in assessment of the GIA program.

Talbot et. al (2015) stresses that GIAs should have a consistent presence in the lectures—so that they can be assessed by the faculty member as they facilitate breakout sessions, interact with students, etc. This also helps the students see the faculty as a team. It is up to the individual instructor of record to determine what type of interaction he or she would like GIAs to have with students during the large lecture sections.

### **Concerns about Student Engagement and Learning**



Talbot et al (2015) states that large enrollment courses are the least effective way to teach, and that student engagement and satisfaction in such classes is moderate at best. Much is riding on the success of the large lecture section, including serving as a key indicator as to whether or not a student will continue at that particular university (Twigg, 2003). Researchers have shown that a sense of community in the classroom instills a greater “greater academic motivation, affinity for school, and enjoyment of class” (Glaser and Bingham, 2009). And this community can be difficult to establish in a large lecture setting. Thus, using the lecture/lab model in a general education course that is important to attracting and retaining new majors is potentially risky.

TAs are very important, but most universities (including ours) allocate little resources and time to training and supporting them. GIAs are graduate students first and TAs second. Despite it being critical to their success that GIAs focus on their own studies first, the demands on their time are extreme. It is imperative that instructors of record take a supportive viewpoint of their GIAs’ educational goals and needs. Given the financial savings that such a course structure has to offer, the change from the self-contained model to the GIA model seems a win for the department, but there is concern that it is not as good for the students (Wildermuth, French and Fredrick, 2013).

## **Solutions**

### **Training**

Given that the large lecture sections employ a more traditional lecture format, allowing for less student feedback and instructor interaction, the ability of the GIAs to provide engaging lab sections that encourage student interaction is key to the success of the program.

The demand for high quality engagement in each of the lab sections places a great deal of responsibility squarely on the GIAs. Talbot et al. (2015) lists 5 research-based things to do in large lecture/lab classes to help counter the fact that they are one of the least effective ways to teach—and number 1 is: use pedagogically trained TAs. Because so much of the program’s success depends on the pedagogical skills of the GIAs, appropriate training is a key component. Existing research clearly supports an emphasis on training for teaching assistants. Instructional effectiveness and overall confidence as teachers were greatly improved when graduate academic programs provided appropriate, consistent, formal and systematic instructional support, mentorship, and support processes (Russell, 2009).

Training at the graduate instructional assistant level provides the opportunity to strengthen the academy as a whole, as some GIAs will continue on to permanent higher education teaching positions. It is still true that most faculty members receive little or no teaching training (Jones, 2008) even though they report spending more time teaching than conducting research (Tulane & Beckert, 2011; Gale & Golde, 2004; Golde & Door, 2001; Magnuson, 2002).

The authors’ program starts training with a two-day intensive training workshop prior to the start of the semester. The goals of this workshop are to begin getting the new GIAs acclimated. This involves helping move their point of view from one of student to teacher, and since many GIAs are joining the program after just finishing up their undergraduate degree, this perspective shift doesn’t always happen immediately. Training elements also include introductions to course policies, course assignments, and the overall teaching philosophy of the instructor of record. Additionally, since the GIAs need to work

closely and ultimately share in the important teaching process for students, the beginning pieces of camaraderie begins forming at this training.

To reach these goals, the workshop is held over two days. On the first day, the instructor of record and new GIAs meet to discuss the responsibilities and expectations for them, for the course, and for the students. They also explore the online course management system. On the second day, the veteran GIAs join the “rookies”, and can lend their insights to some of the common challenges and rewards of the position. The new GIAs seem to appreciate the insights of their new colleagues who they perhaps view as more “in the trenches” than the instructor of record. Together the rookie and veteran GIAs work with the instructor of record on speech grading, and speech norming (watching and grading some speeches together). This is purposefully done very early in the training process; naturally, the new GIAs aren’t usually sure what to look or listen for, and this process often makes them quite uncomfortable. This very early submergence into some of the grading experiences they will be facing, however, serves to help them understand what the early weeks in class will ultimately be leading up to.

Training doesn’t end when the two-day workshop is over. Weekly meetings are crucial for new GIAs, and even for veterans who continually run into new student situations. The weekly training consists of several important parts. First, GIAs are encouraged to discuss troubling or potentially troubling situations or students. Typical topics that surface are students who haven’t attended class for several weeks, a student causing a disruption in the classroom that the GIA isn’t sure how to handle, or students who are causing a conflict after earning poor grades. In the past, however, these frank discussions have also included less common but perhaps more alarming issues such as students exhibiting depressive, withdrawn behaviors, and students who might have been succumbing to other addictive and/or troublesome actions, which allows the instructor of record to be able to get in touch with the proper professionals on campus just in case the student needs extra resources.

Another part of the weekly meetings includes a walk through the week of lesson plans. A binder is given to each GIA at the beginning of the semester which includes a lesson plan for every class day, all assignments and handouts, and supplemental training materials (articles, etc.) for the GIAs to refer to as needed. This binder is brought to each weekly meeting, and this makes it very easy to cover the expectations for each class period, and the activity and assignment they will be working on and discussing with their students. Having all of the materials in one spot makes meetings flow much more efficiently. By going over the weekly lesson plans, both the instructor of record and veteran GIAs have time to share information about best practices for those lessons.

Finally, weekly meetings include any announcements and/or reminders the instructor of record may have regarding the course, which may include things like reminding GIAs to be firm with attendance and tardiness, etc., letting them know a visitor will be coming to class to make an important announcement, etc.

Additional training also occurs prior to the two big assignments in the class, which are the informative outline and speech, and the persuasive outline and speech. Because the team strives for consistency, norming is a critical form of training. Prior to collecting speech outlines from students, sample outlines are graded and then discussed among GIAs and the instructor of record. This allows for all GIAs to weigh in and discuss how they assess any given element of the assignment, share their thoughts, and see how their opinions stacked up to others. The same practice is done with speeches—the team watches sample speeches and grades them together, and in all cases consistency and uniformity is the goal.

This consistency is an important part of the success of the class. A student in the class needs to feel that he/she would receive similar instruction, and presumably the same feedback and grade, regardless of which of the five GIAs he/she is working with. New GIAs seem to appreciate the high amounts of structure; each lab day usually contains anywhere from three to six items that need to be accomplished that day. Flexibility is permitted in certain spots, however, because complete rigidity can become frustrating for veteran GIAs. One example of an area of flexibility is activities. Although every GIA is expected to facilitate the same activity, the actual manner and format can be determined separately. Some GIAs prefer students to work in groups, some prefer students to work independently, some GIAs prefer to make Powerpoint slides to help debrief an activity, and some prefer just to discuss the ideas orally.

### **Assessment**

There is a lot at stake with our GIAs—if we have significant problems in a classroom, the entire program is affected. For that reason, assessment is important. The first part of this evaluation process is for the instructor of record to visit each lab section of each GIA, thus watching each GIA three times each semester. This allows the instructor to take notes regarding the GIA's teaching style, the class climate, any mistakes or omissions that might have occurred, as well as noting positive behaviors demonstrated by the GIA. Additionally, it's useful for students to see the instructor of record present in their lab class for the period, so they see the instructor as connected to and involved with what goes on in those classes. If any GIA seems to be having problems in their classes, the instructor will visit even more often.

At the end of every semester a performance review is conducted between the instructor of record and each GIA individually, to let each of them know things they are doing well and to provide one or two goals for the upcoming semester. These are based on classroom observations, student opinion surveys, observations of student interactions in the GIA office, etc. This is a great opportunity to offer corrective behaviors, if necessary, as well as to praise efforts and let GIAs know they are valued.

Programs should be encouraged to allow GIAs to evaluate the instructor of record as well. This feedback will be valuable not only to the IOR, but to the program as a whole, and should be valuable in improving not only GIA training, but the large lecture sections as well as the course overall.

### **Discussion**

The program described in this article is a complicated one to execute well because it combines the challenge of the large lecture section with the equally great challenges of the public speaking classroom where few students are willing participants. This means that the teamwork between the instructor of record and the graduate instructional assistants is absolutely critical. Although the instructor of record is, indeed, the supervisor of the GIAs, there must be mutual respect and support for the program to work.

The biggest challenge might be the actual establishment of the program itself for comprehensive universities where instruction by graduate assistants has been frowned on in the past as violating the university's mission of small class sizes taught by professors. Each university will need to deal with their own administration and supervisory structure (such as a board of regents) to establish a similar program.

Other challenges include the financial ability to set up a program where GIAs can receive significant financial compensation for their work. In the authors' case, their university system prohibits the waiving—or even discounting—of tuition for graduate assistants, beyond allowing out-of-state students to receive in-state tuition. Because many graduate students today already have employment or have family obligations that prevent them from full-time graduate study, the pool of students from which these types of programs will attempt to draw is already small. It is advantageous for programs to be as competitive as they can be to attract the best qualified graduate instructional assistants.

There is significant savings to be found in such a program, which can have many advantages for the department housing it. Sadly, these savings may become nearly irresistible for administrators, which is what happened to the authors' department. Most of the flexible funds the department enjoyed from the program were absorbed at the college level and not seen again.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of planning is developing a strong training program. The first year will be critical to start strong out of the gate as there will not be any veteran GIAs to help support the instructor of record and new GIAs. If expectations are made clear – and the critical difference in responsibilities between the instructor of record and GIAs is outlined clearly, this can be a great learning experience for both those in front of the classroom and those in the seats.

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