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Teaching Assistant in Residence: A Novel Peer Mentorship Program for Less Experienced Teaching Assistants

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Teaching Assistant In Residence
A Peer Mentorship Program for Teaching Assistants

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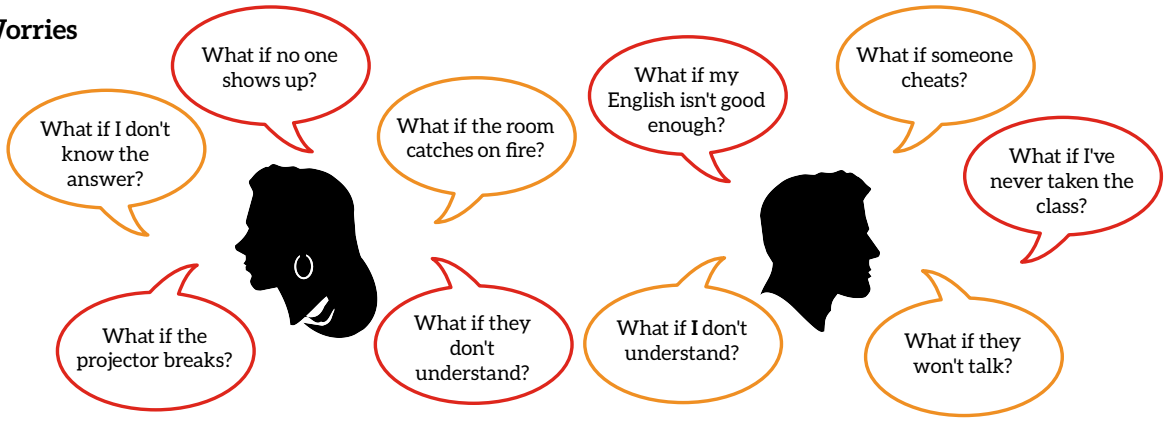
The Worries



The Program

The TA in Residence program provides training, feedback and support to approximately 80 teaching assistants in the Department of Computer Science each semester. An expert TA hired to serve as the TA in Residence delivers a workshop on teaching skills and coaches their peers by providing observation-based feedback and advice.

The Work of the TA in Residence

The TA in Residence Program is:

- **Peer-based**: The program establishes a "safe zone" in which teaching assistants receive formative feedback from a peer rather than summative feedback from a supervisor or instructor.
- **Specialized**: The TA in Residence is able to deliver information about discipline-specific topics which generalized training may not provide.
- **Collaborative**: The TA in Residence is able to identify new techniques and best practices and propagate these to other tutorials.

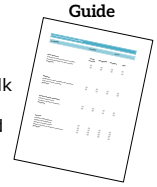
The New TA Workshop

- How the TA in Residence Program Works
- How to prepare for and run a tutorial
- How to do all the unspoken things
- How to grade
- How to interact with all the stakeholders
- How to be a balanced TA

Tutorial Observations

- The TA in Residence observes a tutorial and then the TAiR and the TA meet to talk about how they felt about the tutorial, what could be improved and what should be shared with other TAs.

The Observation Guide



The Skills and the Confidence

The program boosts TA confidence, provides an environment to share what I've learned as a TA, and classroom observations are really useful for improving my teaching skills.

It is reassuring to have a colleague help you improve your tutorial who isn't as personally invested in the course as the instructor and students are.

There are times when I'm not excited to teach, and it can help to talk to somebody who's encountered similar obstacles.

Helping other TAs helps you too!

References

B. Stephenson, A. Kuipers, R. K. Adl and F. Stephenson, **Teaching assistant in residence: a novel peer mentorship program for less experienced teaching assistants**. *Journal of Computing Sciences in Colleges*, 29(4): 183--190, 2014

T. Kendon, **TA in Residence - Winter 2015**. <http://pages.cpsc.ucalgary.ca/~tjkendon//ta/tair/w15/> April 25, 2015

TA OBSERVATION SESSION FORM

TA NAME	COURSE	DATE

	Could Improve	Acceptable	Excellent	N/A
Class Structure				
Provides an overview of day's content	☐	☐	☐	☐
Directs preparation for next tutorial	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments				
Methods				
Materials are well-designed and prepared	☐	☐	☐	☐
Uses non-lecture activities	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments				
Teacher-student Interaction				
Solicits student input	☐	☐	☐	☐
Involves a variety of students	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments				
Content				
Appears knowledgeable	☐	☐	☐	☐
Appears well-organized	☐	☐	☐	☐
Explains concepts clearly	☐	☐	☐	☐
Relates concepts to students' experience	☐	☐	☐	☐
Comments				

This document is based upon the Classroom Observation Checklist
(http://www.austincc.edu/hr/eval/procedures/ClassObservCheck.pdf)