Chapter 9
When in Rome:
Socializing International Teaching Assistants into the US Higher Education Norms

Gwendolyn M. Williams
Auburn University, USA

Rod E. Case
University of Nevada, USA

ABSTRACT

Mentoring for graduate teaching assistants (TAs) provides socialization within the higher educational system so that the TA can learn the expected benchmarks in knowledge and teaching. Furthermore, explicit mentoring approaches are significant for international teaching assistants who may not be familiar with methods and norms in American higher education. The authors in this article describe a qualitative study that examined how international teaching assistants viewed departmental mentoring strategies. After exploring various strategies of departmental mentoring and the ITAs’ responses, the authors will conclude with general recommendations for effective mentoring strategies for international teaching assistants.

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of higher education has facilitated the mobility of international students who seek to pursue education abroad in order to advance their careers. In particular, international graduate students often secure positions as international teaching assistants (ITAs) so that they can obtain professional experience while supporting themselves. These student-teachers come from prestigious academic backgrounds and bring a cultural wealth to the classroom (Yep, 2014). However, (ITAs) face the challenge of learning to teach in a new culture and an additional language (Boman, 2013). International teaching assistants come from a variety of cultures, each with their own norms of educational practices. When learning to teach in the United States, the ITAs must be taught and socialized into the expected norms of

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-9749-2.ch009

Copyright © 2016, IGI Global. Copying or distributing in print or electronic forms without written permission of IGI Global is prohibited.
teaching for American higher education in order to meet the expectations of their undergraduate students (Ashavskaya, 2015; Zhou, 2009). This adjustment is often facilitated through different forms of mentoring provided at different levels by the host institution so that the ITA can learn the expected benchmarks in knowledge and teaching (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Thompson, Li, White, Loewen, & Gass, 2012). Given that most international teaching assistants have no prior teaching experience (LeGros & Faez, 2012) the need for ITA teacher training has become readily apparent. The authors in this chapter will address this gap in the research by describing a qualitative study that examined how ITAs responded to the mentoring strategies that were provided through their respective departments and how they viewed these strategies as socializing them into the expected teaching norms of an American university.

BACKGROUND

Formal teacher induction is needed in order to explicitly teach the norms of teaching which may be implicitly understood by domestic teaching assistants (DTAs) and their students teacher socialization can occur through several different forums, such as institutional orientation sessions (Gorsuch, Stevens, & Brouillette, 2003), departmental mentoring activities (Boman, 2013; Gallego, 2014), or peer mentoring partnerships (McDonough, 2006; Ryan, 2014;). For the purposes of this chapter, the authors will focus on the various departmental mentoring strategies that our participants described as contributing to their socialization into the higher education practices in the United States.

Socializing ITAs into the norms of higher education is based on the concept of legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Through such a model the newcomer, in this case the ITA, interacts with members of the community (e.g., the department and institution) in order to learn the skills and practices needed to be full participants in the community (Hasrati, 2005). Within the realm of higher education ITAs need guidance to understand the values and norms which undergird the pedagogical practices in American higher education. Such a socialization enables ITAs to be taught explicitly the expectations of teaching and learning in the classroom rather than allowing them to learn independently through a sink or swim method. Recognizing that ITAs may be unfamiliar with the local practices in higher education, universities and departments often step in to provide information about the procedures commonly used in their institution. Curtin, Stewart and Ostrove (2013) found that ITAs who received socialization from departments actually adjust better to teaching in the United States and interact more with other international students, thus making them more competent in intercultural relationships as they become more confident in their professional pedagogy.

Beyond the generic training transmitted through institutional sessions, departmental mentoring can provide more discipline-specific pedagogically-based norms that are expected within their field (Boman, 2013; Gorsuch, 2006; Hardré & Burris, 2012). Departments have the freedom of adopting their own method of teaching assistant (TA) training for both domestic and international teaching assistants; common methods are departmental pedagogy courses and TA supervisor activities, which may include observations and follow-up conferences, as well as peer teaching and teacher journals (Allen & Negueruela-Azarola, 2010; Gallego, 2014; Le Gros & Faez, 2012; Thompson et al., 2012). Departmental mentoring becomes more personal when both the faculty member and TA have more occasions to interact and learn from each other over an extended period of time in order to develop a close interpersonal relationship (Finch & Fernández, 2014). Gray and Johnson (2005) argued that successful mentoring often depends
Related Content

Alternative Concepts of Economic Development and Their Implications for Higher Education
Isaias Álvarez García, Juan de Luna Flores and Maribel del Carmen Casas Haro (2016). Systemic Knowledge-Based Assessment of Higher Education Programs (pp. 86-101).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/alternative-concepts-of-economic-development-and-their-implications-for-higher-education/154352?camid=4v1a

Combining the TAM and IS Success Models to Validate E-Learning System Satisfaction and Continuance Intention
Tung-Cheng Lin (2014). Advanced Research in Adult Learning and Professional Development: Tools, Trends, and Methodologies (pp. 290-301).
www.igi-global.com/chapter/combining-the-tam-and-is-success-models-to-validate-e-learning-system-satisfaction-and-continuance-intention/99539?camid=4v1a

Intercultural Dialogue Framework for Transnational Teaching and Learning
www.igi-global.com/chapter/intercultural-dialogue-framework-for-transnational-teaching-and-learning/143817?camid=4v1a

Convergence and Internationalization of Higher Education in Europe: The Case of Romania
www.igi-global.com/chapter/convergence-and-internationalization-of-higher-education-in-europe/110094?camid=4v1a