Can we help? Mentoring graduate teaching assistants.

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Abstract

Due to the pressures of publish or perish placed on faculty members (Booth, 2004, DeRond & Miller, 2005) at large research intensive universities, conducting research can be regarded as more important than the teaching of courses (Booth, 2004). It is not uncommon for such universities to have large numbers of courses taught by non-faculty staff (Jensen, Farrand, Redman, Varcoe, & Coleman, 2005). The University of Alberta in Canada is regarded as a research institution. Approximately 85% of the education courses offered at the undergraduate level are taught by either Sessional staff or Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). In light of this, it would seem essential that non-faculty staff be provided with programs that support course teaching. This study investigated the effects of a mentorship program provided to two GTAs in preparation for the teaching of a Physical Education methods course. Field notes and reflective journal data were collected in an attempt to understand the lived experience of the GTAs and whether the mentorship experience was beneficial. The analysis of data indicated that the mentorship experience provided the GTAs with a line of open communication, a support network, and a connection with pedagogical-content knowledge expertise that was highly valued.
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Introduction

In today’s world of academia, it is not unusual for college and university administrators to report that at least 90% of their academic budgets involve personnel costs. Of particular note is that the largest component of these personnel costs tends to be faculty salaries (Thomas, 1997). Thomas further suggested that by the time tenure is either awarded or denied to a faculty member that institutions have invested between $500,000 and $1,000,000 on the new faculty member through such things as salary and support. In light of this, the development of new faculty members would seem to be a critical issue that requires careful consideration. In response to this, some institutions have begun to utilize mentors to support and assist in the development of their new faculty and to enhance their investment (Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991).

However, the current expectations for faculty members to conduct research and publish findings may be contributing to a complex phenomenon that has impacted institutions in a variety of ways. Due to the pressures of publish or perish placed on faculty members (Booth, 2004, DeRond & Miller, 2005) at large research intensive universities, conducting research is often regarded as more important than the teaching of courses (Booth, 2004). This has resulted in universities having large numbers of courses taught by non-faculty staff (Jensen, Farrand, Redman, Varcoe, & Coleman, 2005).

Therefore, due to the importance placed on research activity, the notion of who needs support and mentoring might well have changed considerably. Although new faculty members will most likely still need support in their development as they undertake their new roles in both research and teaching, it could be argued that it is important for colleges and universities to also consider those non-faculty staff members that are hired to teach courses. For it is these people who will be undertaking the majority of the teaching workload and have a direct impact on the learning experiences of the enrolled students.

Who mentoring programs are provided to is a critical issue. Consequently, what constitutes effective mentoring and how mentor programs can be delivered are also of vital importance. All three issues are worthy of research consideration. This paper investigates a program that attends to the mentoring of graduate teaching assistants for their role as teachers of courses in an undergraduate program.

Review of Related Literature

Roots of Mentoring and its Theoretical Base

The origin of the term mentor is from Ancient Greek mythology. In Homer’s epic poem the Odyssey, Mentor a friend of Odysseus was asked to guide and educate Odysseus’ son, Telemakhos, while Odysseus was away (Katz & Coleman, 2001). Telemakhos was entrusted into the care of Mentor and throughout their time together Mentor gave
Telemakhos advice, cared for him, and protected him. It is from this characterization that the present day interpretation of the term evolved (Sands, Parson, & Duane, 1991).

The present use of the term of mentor has been credited to Levinson (1978). It was Levinson’s work that provided the framework from which the development of current thinking concerning the mentor-protégé relationship evolved. In considering the theoretical basis of mentoring, Katz and Coleman (2001) declared that mentor programs are supported from a variety of standpoints. For example, mentoring is supported in theories of human development (St. Clair, 1994), social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), and motivational theory (St. Clair, 1994).

What is a Mentor?

When considering the term of mentor, Sands et al., (1991) suggested that the use and the understanding of the term itself has been problematic. For example, the term mentor has been used in conjunction with a number of similar terms such as: sponsor, role model, guide, tutor, coach, and confidant. The use of such different terms and the manner, in which they have been used interchangeably, even within a single article or study, has resulted in some problems. Such diversity of terms and the definitions utilized with each term has proven to be problematic when trying to compare results of different studies or pieces of writing. Consequently, this inconsistent use and wide difference in definition has hindered the development of a distinct line of research concerning the educational use of mentors (Sands et al., 1991).

There is though a common acceptance that the mentor role consists of an experienced person who provides the mentee, normally a younger less experienced person, with support, encouragement, and knowledge (Katz & Coleman, 2001). Darling (1985) also described a mentor as someone who leads, guides, and advises a person more junior in experience. In agreement with this interpretation, Sands et al., (1991) suggested that the mentoring experience usually consisted of a seasoned member being paired with a newcomer or trainee. In this situation, the mentor serves as a guide or sponsor. A person, who looks after, advises, protects, and takes a special interest in another’s development.

Moore and Salimbene (1981) stated that mentoring involves an intense, professionally centred relationship between two individuals in which the more experienced individual mentors, guides, advises, and assists in any number of ways the career of the less experienced, often younger, upwardly mobile mentee. The positive effects of being involved in a mentor partnership were also identified by Merriam (1983) who suggested that a mentor helps to shape the growth and development of a mentee.

It is important to note that mentor programs are not the same as induction programs though. Induction programs are often provided to new staff members but these programs are very different and so should not be confused with mentor programs. Induction programs enable a newcomer to be brought up to speed as quickly as possible (Trethewan & Smith, 1984). Tickle (1994) suggested that induction programs are not as extensive as mentor programs, as induction programs tend to only introduce the new staff member to
the institutional culture and provide opportunities to meet other staff, understand the new role, and be introduced to the resources and support available. The embedded nature of mentor programs identified by Coleman (1997) suggests a far more enriched experience.

**The Benefits of Being in a Mentor Partnership**

Katz and Coleman (2001) postulated that the main purpose of a mentor partnership is to enable the mentees to become active and valued members who contribute to the academic community. Earlier work from Coleman (1997) suggested that mentor programs enabled the mentee to become “embedded in wider professional development” (p. 155). In a similar vein Kelly, Beck, and Thomans (1992) stated that mentoring provides the mentee with opportunities for feedback, questioning, sharing, discussion, challenge, and guidance through the learning cycle.

The benefits from being part of a mentorship experience are quite far reaching. Generally, there is conclusive evidence that links mentoring to career development, organizational effectiveness, and career satisfaction (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Coleman (2000) found that mentoring was one of the top three reasons for encouraging career development in teaching. Katz and Coleman (2001) declared that the mentoring experience can assist staff to lay the foundation for a life-long professional career. However, the benefits of being part of the mentor partnership are not confined to just the mentee. The mentor can also gain from being part of the mentor partnership. The experience of being a mentor is likely to foster professional activity and growth in the mentor (St. Clair, 1994, Gaia, Corts, Tatum, and Allen, 2001).

**The Use of Mentors in Educational Settings**

Any search through educational literature will likely provide a number of links to the term of mentor. Some 15 years ago Sands et al. (1991) had recognized that the term of mentor had become to be frequently used in educational settings. However, due to the lack of a distinct line of research on mentorship experiences in educational settings, it is unclear whether practices have been formalized and experiences effective.

As Thomas (1997) suggested, institutions have a crucial role to play in the development of faculty. The adjustment process for new staff in an academic work environment can be difficult. Often times, the combined responsibilities of teaching new courses, establishing a research program, and providing service to the university community can be stressful for new faculty. Not only are expectations high but also immediate. This places the new faculty member under considerable pressure. Thomas summarized his thoughts by concluding that institutions need to have formal practices for mentoring in place for new faculty.

**Mentor Programs for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)**

Due to the pressures of publish or perish placed on faculty members (Booth, 2004, DeRond & Miller, 2005) at large research intensive universities, conducting research can
often be regarded as more important than the teaching of courses (Booth, 2004).
Therefore, it is not uncommon for such universities to have large numbers of courses
taught by non-faculty staff (Jensen, Farrand, Redman, Varcoe, & Coleman, 2005).
Large research intensive universities in North America have long used graduate students
as teachers of undergraduate courses (Shannon, Twale, & Moore, 1998). Often it is the
challenge of teaching ever-increasing numbers of undergraduate students, coupled with
the considerable resource constraints in regards to funding, facility availability, and
staffing that has resulted in GTAs being hired to assist in the delivery of the teaching load
of undergraduate courses. At times, this assistance has been in the form of tutorial or
seminar leaders, lab demonstrators, or as a course teacher.

In North America, the GTA is a recognized position with a status attributed to it within
the higher education system. This paid position often serves as the first career step for an
aspiring academic (Park, 2004). Park further suggested that this role has served many
purposes. It has helped to reduce teaching loads and increase research time for academic
staff, provides financial support for graduate students, helps cope with large class sizes,
and offers an apprenticeship model for future professors.

However, Gaia et al. (2001) stated that, at times, GTAs may ask themselves when faced
with a class of expectant faces at the start of the course “What do I know about
teaching?” This is because although GTAs handle a large percentage of undergraduate
instruction in higher education institutions, research has found that graduate students are
often ill-prepared for such a role.

Jensen et al. (2005) stated that although GTAs are often provided with all the material
resources they might need for their teaching such as texts, course requirements, and
assignment sheets, they receive very few directions on the teaching process itself. They
suggested that although GTAs might be expected to attend weekly meetings, often these
meetings were focussed upon the course content and what to teach rather than the issues
surrounding how to teach. It could be argued that this dilemma is added to even further
by the lack of supervision provided to GTAs during their teaching assignment. Prieto
(1999) declared that GTAs go about the task mainly unsupervised and that GTAs
reported that the supervision that was provided to them was often inadequate.

The effect of the lack of support for GTAs extends beyond the issue of the undergraduate
experience. Long-term issues are also potentially created. The skills, behaviours, and
attitudes developed as a GTA have a major impact on a GTAs future development as an
academic (Staton & Darling, 1989) and few programs exist to prepare graduate students
for the professoriate role (Gaia et al., 2001).

When GTA mentor programs do exist they often consist of a GTAs teaching being
supervised by the leader of the course or faculty member (Park, 2004). However, the
supervisor role that can emerge from the course leader or faculty member is very
different from a mentor. The supervisor role can be seen as a manager or director and not
necessarily a role model or support provider. Prieto, Scheel, and Meyers (2001) found
that the supervisory or manager style role is not always well received as GTAs prefer a collegial relationship with faculty members rather than an evaluative one.

The GTA role is, without doubt, complex. On occasion, GTAs can struggle with their different roles and responsibilities. GTAs declare that there is tension between their status as a student and as a novice teacher (Park, 2004). In this regard, GTAs occupy an ambiguous niche. At different times, serving as apprentices, teachers, and students. This can result in GTAs often being seen by others and even themselves as “neither fish nor fowl” (Park, 2002).

Quality Mentor Programs

In regard to the provision of mentor programs, Park (2004) suggested that interest is higher now than in previous years. Higher education institutions have begun to establish resource centres, conduct workshops, and provide manuals that support teaching. The implementation of appropriate professional development for GTAs to optimize their effectiveness as teachers today and to prepare them for the professoriate of tomorrow is a critical issue that has begun to be attended to (Marinkovich, Prostko, & Stout, 1998).

Mentor programs need to assist GTAs in developing appropriate content area knowledge, an understanding of how to advise students in terms of resources, study skills, academic advisory, and special needs services, develop effective communication skills (Park, 2004), and understand how to deal with conflict situations (Roach, 1997). It has been suggested that quality mentor programs should include discussion and understanding of active learning strategies, such as modeling and observation (Johnson, 2001), suggestions on how to develop questioning techniques to support the implementation of constructivist learning strategies (Etkina, 2000), and an understanding of how to implement and provide appropriate evaluation both formative (Lawrenz et al., 1992) and summative (Robinson, 2000).

One of the most significant research findings has been that mentorship is a complex, multidimensional activity. Katz and Coleman (2001) stated that mentoring should incorporate a range of factors to meet all needs. Mentors are required to be a friend, career guide, information source, and an intellectual guide. Mentoring programs need to be designed to meet the individual needs of the mentee and should also recognize the diverse character of the mentoring phenomenon. Therefore, programs can be systematic and planned, and can be delivered as part of an institutional approach, or even be individually crafted.

Park (2004) concluded that if appropriate mentor programs are established for GTAs, the potential gains are numerous. The many stakeholders, the: department, academic staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students all have the potential to gain. Benefits range from providing release time for research activities, increased funding opportunities for graduate students, and offering an apprenticeship experience for future professors.
The Research Study

Purpose

The University of Alberta in Canada is regarded as a research intensive institution, and provides programming for over 35,000 students. Approximately 85% of the courses in the Faculty of Education offered at the undergraduate level are taught by either Sessional staff or Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). In light of this, it would seem essential that non-faculty staff be provided with programs that support the effective delivery of courses. This study investigated the effects of a mentorship program provided to two GTAs in preparation for the teaching of an elementary school physical education methods course at the undergraduate level.

Participants

The participants in this research study were two graduate students. Both of the graduate students were enrolled in a master’s degree program and were qualified teachers at the elementary school level. Although neither of the participants had worked as a graduate teaching assistant previously, both had experience of working in the public school setting. One participant was an experienced teacher with more than 10 years of work experience at the elementary school level. The other participant had less practical experience and had completed one year of teaching experience at the elementary school level.

Setting

The University of Alberta is a large research intensive university in Edmonton, Canada. The Faculty of Education was the first education faculty in Canada and is currently one of the largest faculties in the country. Students can enrol in one of nine undergraduate degree programs and a wide array of graduate degrees. With four teaching departments and one school, the faculty employs over 108 full time professors, 130 full and part-time sessional instructors and educates more than 3,400 undergraduate students and 750 graduate students. All preservice teachers are required to take their subject area courses, such as physical education methods courses, through the Faculty of Education.

Description of Mentor Program

The mentor program was based on the research findings and opinions of effective mentor programs. The focus of the program was to provide the knowledge, skills, and attributes to teach the undergraduate physical education methods course; to ensure that the GTAs were exposed to the issues of not only what to teach and but also how to teach (Jensen et al., 2005).

The mentor program consisted of an eight point program plan. These interrelated program points varied in topic content and ranged from topics that attended to course preparation experiences and understanding prior to the GTA teaching experience through to reflection
sessions that occurred throughout the duration of the course. The eight point plan consisted of the following:

• **Subject Area Content Knowledge:** This program point concentrated on ensuring that the GTAs had the requisite knowledge to teach the content material of the physical education methods course (Park, 2004). This program point was mainly covered prior to the delivery of the undergraduate course.

• **Understanding the Undergraduate Student:** Information focused on understanding the characteristics and needs of undergraduate students (Park, 2004) and how to be successful in teaching (Roach, 1997). This program point was covered prior to the delivery of the undergraduate course and was also included in the weekly discussion sessions.

• **Communicating with the Undergraduate Student:** The information focused on understanding how to effectively support the undergraduate student (Park, 2004). This program point was covered prior to the delivery of the undergraduate course and was also included in weekly discussion sessions.

• **Course and Lesson Planning:** How to structure a course was the main focus of this program point. Discussion topics such as how to plan for the effective delivery of a university level course (Etkina, 2000), how to structure lessons to foster learning and understanding, and how to integrate both theoretical and practical experiences. This program point was attended to prior to and during the delivery of the undergraduate course.

• **Course and Student Evaluation:** Understanding how to plan for, implement, and evaluate student knowledge and understanding was considered to be an integral component of the mentor program (Lawrenz et al., 1992; Robinson, 2000). Also covered in this program point were such issues as assignment creation and marking schemes. This program point was covered prior to and during the delivery of the undergraduate course.

• **Observation of Demonstration Teaching:** Participants were provided with opportunities to observe an experienced faculty member teach the physical education methods course (Johnson, 2001). Opportunities for this program point were provided prior to and during the delivery of the undergraduate course.

• **Peer Coaching Opportunities:** Opportunities for peer coaching with the experienced faculty member were provided. As with the demonstration teaching program point, opportunities were provided prior to and during the delivery of the course.

• **On going Opportunities for Discussion, Reflection, and Dialogue:** Weekly meetings were held to discuss emerging issues, reflect on experiences, and decide on future directions (Kelly et al., 1992). Both GTAs were present at these meetings. This program point was attended to throughout the delivery of the undergraduate course.
The mentor program was implemented prior to and during the time that the GTAs delivered the physical education methods course. However, the various program points were provided at different times. Figure 1 illustrates the timeline that was followed. For example, the program point Subject Area Content Knowledge was the first program point to be covered with the GTAs and was delivered prior to the GTAs teaching the methods course. The program points Communicating with the Undergraduate Student and Understanding the Undergraduate Student were the second and third points of the mentor program and started prior to the start of the course but also continued while the course was being taught. Whereas, the program points Peer Coaching Opportunities and Observation of Demonstration Teaching were only provided during the delivery of the course, once the GTAs had started their teaching.

Figure 1. The mentor program plan and timeline of implementation.
Methodology

Field notes and reflective journal data were collected in an attempt to understand the lived experience of the GTAs and whether the mentorship experience was beneficial. Each participant was asked to keep a journal in which they reflected on their experiences during all phases of the mentorship experience. Field notes were also completed to understand the mentor experience and the impact it had on teaching performance during the delivery of the methods course. The journal entries and field notes were also used as a basis for discussion points during the weekly meetings. Once collected, the data were analyzed and themes identified.

Results

The collected data were interpretationally analyzed. This is a “process of examining data in order to find constructs, themes and patterns that can be used to describe and explain phenomenon being studied” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 453). The data analysis was completed by undergoing the following process: segmenting of the data, developing categories, coding and grouping category segments, and drawing conclusions.

The analysis of the collected data not only identified a series of themes that were consistent between both participants but also indicated that the participants concluded that their participation in the mentor program was most beneficial.

“I could not ask for anything better to start off my career path as a teacher educator. I believe that I now have the understanding to do the job properly and it is due to this program.”

“A really, really worthwhile experience. I have become a better teacher by being part of this mentor program…”

The participants also identified three main themes of why this experience was so positive. The three main themes that were identified were: an appreciation of an open line of communication, the importance of a support network, and the significance of a connection with pedagogical-content knowledge expertise. All three themes were deemed to be of significant value by the participants.

An open line of communication…

“...it was really helpful to know that whatever I needed I could just pick up the telephone, knock on your door, or e-mail and know that it would be dealt with. It made me feel so comfortable and also it helped me get through some difficult times. Like the time I needed to rearrange the exam for that one student. You being there to answer my questions helped me deal with the situation and deal with it in a way that the student felt supported…”

“I never felt judged when I asked you a question. Thank you!”
“...the weekly meetings helped a lot. Having time to discuss things was good. It helped me to understand better. I find that when I can discuss things at length and really understand the whys, I do a lot better. Being able to talk things through like this was good and it helped me understand how to talk to students.”

Importance of a support network...

“...I felt supported by you, I knew that I could count on you to assist at any time and knew that I could ask for help and advice. For example, I normally do not like to openly discuss things that I have done. I do not take criticism too well! But here I felt comfortable to do so. I never felt judged. I felt as if you wanted to help me, to support me.”

“It was great to be supported. I know of other TAs who were pretty envious of what I had when I told them of everything that we do and what I have experienced!”

“...doing the mentor program was beneficial to me in many ways. But probably it showed me the most what can be achieved when people work together. I am not sure whether I would have enjoyed teaching the PE course so much if I had not been part of the program and I definitely would not have done such a good job. The fact that I was helped so much along the way was something that has really stuck in my mind as being so very important.”

A connection with pedagogical-content knowledge expertise...

“I used the ideas that I saw you use in your class. They worked really well for me. I had to change a couple of things as my class is a bit smaller but I was really pleased with what transpired.”

“Both of you were amazing. I have learned so much from you both. I thought that I knew just about everything about physical education teaching but was I wrong! You were able to point out things that I had not considered and would not have thought about.”

“Each and every lesson that I watched I learned so much from you both. Having the experience of observing you teach the course made my teaching so much better. I do not think I would have taught so well without your ideas and examples. It was really helpful to have experts to watch!”

“How could we fail when we had such great role models working with us!”

“Knowing that you always were able to point us in the direction to solve our problems, answer our questions, or to just listen to us was very comforting. You always seemed to be able to pull out an experience from your past to help us think about our issues and to shed light on potential solutions...”
“Teaching alongside you both was so enlightening. I learned so much over the mentorship experience time period - how to deal with undergraduate students, how to evaluate, and how to teach students physical education!”

Discussion

Data were collected to understand the lived experience of the GTAs and whether the mentorship experience was beneficial. The analysis of this data indicated that the mentorship experience provided to the GTAs was highly valued. The two participants declared that the experience was rewarding from several different perspectives.

From a personal perspective, in regard to the value of participating in the program, the participants suggested that their participation in the program was very helpful in their development as a teacher educator and in understanding of what to expect when teaching at the university level. Overall, both participants believed that participation in the program provided them with an experience that was of great benefit. Interestingly, both participants further noted that they thought that the program was something that other GTAs would benefit from being part of.

“The whole experience was really good for me. I am glad that I took part in the project. It has helped me a lot...”

“I think that every teaching assistant should have such a program. It helped me to understand what I was expected to teach and how I was to teach it.”

“...some of the TAs and even some of the professors that I have had teach me in the past during my undergraduate degree, should have taken this program as they would do a lot better job if they learned the things that we did.”

From a knowledge perspective, the participants noted that the information gained from participating in the mentor program was relevant and pertinent to their stage of career and in preparing them to teach the methods course. In particular, the participants declared that the program had provided them with information, knowledge, and understanding that would assist them in their journey to become teacher educators.

“...it helped me a lot. I learned so much. I never realized what teaching at a university really required and I think I would have been pretty bad without the program. Well, I definitely did better because of the program. In the future I will look at my teaching differently. This has helped me in becoming better and I think that it will help me on my journey to becoming a fully fledged professor!”

“I am glad that I was able to be a part of all this now, early in my grad. program. It has helped me re-think what I thought I knew about P.E. Also, it means that I have learned to do things right the first time of trying rather than after messing up.”
“In the future, when people talk about professional development, this is what I will now think about. This program professionally developed me in so many ways. I will be a better teacher/professor because of the things that I now understand and have learned about...”

From the perspective of the delivering a course to undergraduate students at the university level, the participants indicated that involvement in the mentor program assisted them in the teaching of the physical education methods course.

“Great! I loved being part of all this! I now have started to feel that I can be an effective professor in the future. I know that I still have a lot to learn but I do feel that I am on the right road and I know what I can achieve...If I had just taught the course, without being mentored, I don’t think it would have gone too well. I taught the P.E. course better because of the mentor program.”

“I feel that I can teach others how to teach physical education well now. I have a much better understanding of it all. I can see how to plan a course and what to expect at different stages. Also, I think that participating in the mentor program has helped me to understand the role of a teacher educator better. In fact, I think that I am a better teacher educator already.”

The three main themes identified by the participants, an appreciation of an open line of communication, the importance of a support network, and the significance of a connection with pedagogical-content knowledge expertise have all been identified as critical issues to include in mentor programs.

In regards to the identified theme of an open line of communication, this is supported in the literature by the work of Kelly et al. (1992), who stated that mentoring should provide the mentee with opportunities for feedback, questioning, sharing, discussion, challenge, and guidance. Also, the open line of communication could be important in providing opportunities for collegiality and collaboration as Prieto et al., (2001) suggested that GTAs prefer a collegial relationship with faculty members rather than an evaluative one.

The second identified theme was that of the importance of a support network. Katz and Coleman (2001) and Moore and Salimbene (1981) suggested that a mentor needs to support and encourage the mentee. A mentor program that does support the mentee is likely to assist in shaping the growth and development of the mentee (Merriam, 1983) and provide the mentee with opportunities of being valued (Katz & Coleman, 2001).

The significance of the third theme that was identified in the data, a connection with pedagogical-content knowledge expertise, was alluded to by Gaia et al. (2001) who stated GTAs can question what they know about teaching due to being ill-prepared for such a role. Park (2004) also identified that quality mentor programs needed to assist GTAs in developing appropriate content area knowledge and developing an understanding of how to support students in their learning.
In summary, the participant data overwhelmingly supported their involvement in the mentor program. It was an experience that was enjoyed and was regarded to be beneficial and rewarding on both a personal and professional level.

**Concluding Thoughts**

In today’s academic world, university administrators need to not only be creative in managing large scale work environments that incur tremendous personnel costs but also in ensuring that quality educational experiences are provided to the students enrolled in courses. As the popularity of undergraduate education continues to grow and the investment costs of developing new faculty remain high, the need for viable programs to assist in the effective delivery of undergraduate courses and supporting the development of potential new faculty seems to be essential.

Choosing the appropriate methods to support the GTA role has the potential to solve these issues. As Park (2004) concluded, effective mentor programs have the potential to support the department, academic staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. All partner groups stand to gain if such programs are established. Staton and Darling (1989) also identified another critical issue when they concluded that the skills, behaviours, and attitudes developed as a GTA can have a major impact on a GTA’s future development as an academic. Therefore, effective GTA mentor programs can have an impact on a number of levels.

The results of this research study indicate that a mentor program can provide many benefits. Although it is not possible to generalize the results of this research study, the findings do suggest that it is important for institutions to examine and change, if necessary, the programs that they provide to GTAs. In doing so, institutions can ensure that GTAs receive the support and are provided with opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding in order to effectively deliver course material and also become to be the faculty of tomorrow!
References


