

Abstract 4B

Expanding the role of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) within Level 1 Biology.

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Level One Biology is the largest undergraduate course in the university with ~700 students. With 14 repeat labs each week, the course also requires 42 Graduate Teaching Assistants. According to the Boyer Commission Report Reinventing Undergraduate Education (1998), developing the abilities of GTAs teaching first year students is of utmost importance. Traditionally, in Level 1 Biology, GTAs have been used in practical classes to assist the Lab Leader (usually a University Teacher).

The GTAs can enhance the taught lab experience and the motivation of the undergraduates as they inform the students of the current developments in their subject. This develops the graduate attributes of the students who become subject specialists and develop their critical thinking skills. By providing the GTAs with the resources available to the students they can encourage the reflective learning of the undergraduates by helping them to see the links between the taught materials.

We have recently developed the role of GTAs in the course. These developments include; provision of GTA teaching development (Coffee and Cake) sessions for GTAs to discuss teaching and learning issues, leading tutorials, marking assignments, lab leading, and the development of lab material. We have also asked students for feedback on their GTAs which is used to improve GTA teaching. Using Moodle, GTAs are given information on each lab session and further background information and can feedback to staff on their perception of each lab. GTAs also contribute by adding further resources that they have identified in order to help their colleagues. Student feedback following these changes suggests an improvement in GTA performance. GTAs express satisfaction in being able to make a wider contribution to the course, interaction with the literature has allowed them to value their teaching contribution which is reflected in their perception of their academic identity.

Boyer Commission Report (1998) "Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities" Available online from [http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/673918d46fbf653e852565ec0056f3e/d955b61ffddd590a852565ec005717ae/\\$FILE/boyer.pdf](http://naples.cc.sunysb.edu/Pres/boyer.nsf/673918d46fbf653e852565ec0056f3e/d955b61ffddd590a852565ec005717ae/$FILE/boyer.pdf) [Accessed 30/11/2010]

Learning outcomes

Ways to engage GTAs effectively in the learning process and develop their graduate attributes.

Reflect on the academic identity of GTAs.