

Shaping Graduate Teacher Identity: A Model for the Training and Support of GTA Graduate Attribute and Skills Development

Here, we present our Graduate Teaching Identity Framework within the School of Geographical and Earth Sciences (GES) as a transferable model for professional training, underpinned by both the UKPSF and the University of Glasgow's Graduate Attributes. Our three-tiered interdisciplinary model aims to support Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) through a trajectory of teacher identities, embedding transferable skills and graduate attribute development at each stage, supported by core pedagogical and teaching skills. Our findings from two data sets include reflections from past and current GTAs between 2019-2023 (Mathers et al., 2021) that demonstrate how our framework supports 'career learning' and recognised attainment of selected UofG graduate attributes.

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01 Introduction

Teaching and learning in the early undergraduate years plays a significant role in Honours level attainment, with effective pedagogies and learning environments being catalysts for student retention (Rushin, et.al, 1997). Across UK Higher Education (UK HE) GTAs play a crucial role in teaching delivery and student experience.

Our working model of GTA support and training, developed over the last four years, aims to provide a supportive and nurturing platform of pedagogical training, community of practice, and skills development for GTAs in GES. Graduate Attribute development is encouraged during weekly teaching meetings, where discussion and activities foster opportunities to share best practice.

Our model is informed by ongoing wider GTA-impacting issues around casualisation of contracts (Rawat and Meena, 2014; Young, 2006), lack of training (Austin, 2002), and hierarchical departmental culture (s) (Watson, 2018; Zotos et al, 2020).

02 GTAs in GES

Practical classes (labs, workshops, and tutorials) are predominantly led by GTA teaching teams across our first and second year undergraduate programs.

GTAs are postgraduate students from a wide range of academic backgrounds (e.g. geology, maths, planetary science, physics, social sciences etc.); they provide a diversity of knowledge and experience in complementary subjects to the geosciences and geo-humanities and serve as active role models for interdisciplinarity.

GTAs are coordinated and supported by subject-specific practical class convenors, who co-create teaching materials, and design the consistent approach to the design and delivery of practical classes.

03 The Liminal Space: Student or Staff?

Teaching identity is strongly influenced by **departmental culture, self-image and confidence, and teaching skills and experience** (Sandi-Urena & Gatlin, 2013; Park, 2004; Muzaka, 2009; Pierson, 2018). Our model builds on our (Mathers et al., 2021) teaching identity framework, where guidance and training is tailored across three stages of identity development:

On the Wing

GTAs with substantial skills and experience, occupying roles with greater teaching and peer-mentoring responsibilities

Fledgling

Diverse GTAs who cover a range of subjects, typically in demonstrator and tutor roles

Hatchling

GTAs that may teach a variety of subjects, typically as demonstrators

04 Our Model in Theory: Teaching Identity Framework

Our model builds upon Sprague and Nyquist (1989), where GTAs progress through three stages of teacher development and associated teaching concerns. Our teaching identity framework allows tailored guidance and support across three stages of GTA maturation: 'hatchling', 'fledgling' and 'on the wing' (Mathers et al., 2021).

Through embedding graduate attributes (Figure 1), we encourage career-learning, with space for both teaching-specific and transferable skill acknowledgement throughout the semester. Emphasis is also placed on facilitating peer-support, with more experienced GTAs being paired with new/less experienced GTAs in the classroom; lab classes in particular encourage collegial support and guidance for early-stage GTAs (Park, 2004). Through peer-engagement GTAs are encouraged to reflect on their teaching in a supportive environment.

Weekly Teaching Meetings are a space for...

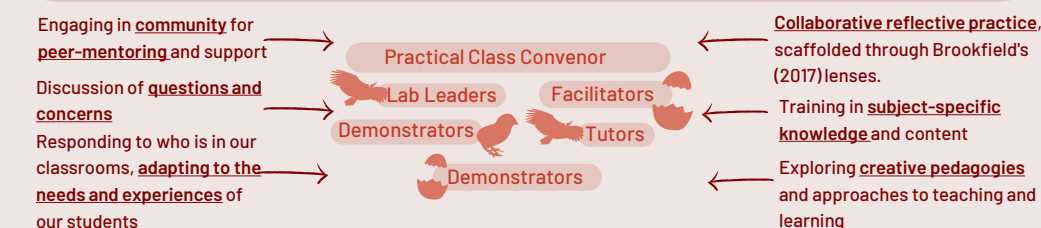


Figure 1. Framework and training is embedded and across weekly teaching meetings, with acknowledgment of wider skill development within the Graduate Attributes Framework

Alongside the mandatory GTA-ITLHE university-wide training, GTAs in GES attend in-house training at the beginning of Semester 1, which is open to all GTAs regardless of their experience, training is also embedded on a weekly basis with semi-structured practical teaching meetings.

The approach to our teaching meetings are inspired by Fuller's (1969) Model of Concern, where GTAs reflect on their practice, tasks, and impact of teaching, as well as class control and student feedback (communication) (Cho et al., 2011). This embedded collaborative reflective practice, through Brookfield's (2017) lenses, encourages recognition of teaching identity, transferable skill development, and wider connections with teaching pedagogy.

05 Our Model in Practice: GTA Reflections

In theory, our model is predicated on GTA attainment and development of Graduate Attributes through sustained and tailored support. In practice, the model is a working one, evolving in line with cultural change within GES, with student and GTA feedback/feed-in.

Reflections from GTAs past and present demonstrate the importance of embedding UofG Graduate attributes into our training, particularly as GTAs at varying stages of the model demonstrate similar concerns regarding self-confidence and sense of belonging. Similar studies have found teaching meetings influence sense of belonging and identity as teaching staff (Sandi-Urena & Gatlin, 2013). The majority of GTAs reported that the teaching meetings fostered a strong sense of community and peer-support, in addition to preparedness for teaching and subject-specific knowledge.

We argue that by targeting and tailoring training to different stages within the model, we can address common concerns as they arise more effectively and support GTAs to develop a better understanding of their teaching identity through ongoing training.

"[I've developed skills in] public speaking, organization, multi-tasking, collaboration in terms of co-teaching labs."
- Anonymous

"I've had to reinforce and deepen my knowledge of certain subject areas which has made me more confident in my understanding."
- Anonymous

"The variety of labs in different disciplines [human and physical geography] certainly helped me to develop ... discipline-relevant professional skills, knowledge and competences. I've also been learning to work in groups and teams of varying sizes and a variety of roles."
- Anonymous

Figure 2. Quotes from self-identified hatchling GTAs when asked how their role as a GTA contributed to their attainment of Graduate Attributes.

07 Conclusion

While our model is effective in supporting GTAs in their progression from 'hatchling' to 'on the wing', we are continually developing this in line with arising challenges, such as casualisation of contracts, lack of staff buy-in and support, and integration of GTAs.

Although Park (2004) posits that these experiences encourage GTAs to form a 'teaching community', we believe that a more effective teaching community would fully integrate GTAs. To do this, our model going forward will incorporate a greater focus on in-house training around subject-confidence, pedagogic approaches, and graduate skills through ongoing training opportunities.

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