

Articulating Learning Objectives for an Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program: Merging Teaching Practicum, Leadership Seminar, and Service Learning

Jeffrey W. Murray¹

Abstract: Since its inception in 2009, the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program (in the Department of Focused Inquiry at Virginia Commonwealth University) has evolved and expanded into an amalgamation of three distinct but overlapping elements: (i) teaching practicum, (ii) leadership seminar, and (iii) service learning experience. But only recently have we begun to fully and systematically itemize and map the precise learning objectives of the program. This task is particularly important, and particularly challenging, as the program merges learning objectives typically associated with each of the aforementioned elements. This essay seeks to more fully and more systematically articulate the precise learning objectives of this program, first by collating the observations and best practices of faculty who participate in the program into a list of seven skill sets and twenty-one subordinate classroom activities and modes of engagement, second by wedding those results with the “ABC” framework of experiential learning discussed by Carver (1996), and third by further mapping specific learning objectives within that framework through a process of triangulation. It is hoped that this process can be deployed in any similar undergraduate teaching assistant or peer mentoring program in order to reveal the interconnections among various programmatic elements and particular learning objectives.

Key Words: undergraduate teaching assistant, peer mentor, service learning, experiential learning, learning objectives, learning outcomes, teacher training

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant (UTA) Program in the Department of Focused Inquiry at Virginia Commonwealth University, the focus has been more on how students serving as UTAs would impact the engagement and learning of students in the Focused Inquiry course than on the specific learning outcomes of the UTAs themselves. This past year, as the UTA program acquired a “service learning” designation, the question of learning outcomes for the UTAs, distinct from those of the course in which they serve, has demanded greater attention.

Focused Inquiry is the name of a two-semester course sequence (Univ 111 and Univ 112) which constitutes Tier I of Virginia Commonwealth University’s General Education requirements. It is “a learner-centered, interdisciplinary course” which “takes the place of traditional freshman Composition and is required for all incoming first-year students” (Gordon, Henry, & Dempster, 2014, p. 104). Since its inception in 2007, the Focused Inquiry sequence “has proven to be

¹ Department of Focused Inquiry, Virginia Commonwealth University, 1015 Floyd Ave, Richmond, VA 23284, jwmurray@vcu.edu.

instrumental in enhancing the academic success of first-year students and in improving their retention” (Rankin, 2009). In the original curriculum proposal for the UTA Program, it was argued that because Focused Inquiry is “a required first-year course and one that is very different from high school English classes, it is believed that utilizing second-year students in the role of undergraduate teaching assistants underscores the program’s dedication to a learning-centered, student driven environment” (Rankin, 2009). With the program approved, selected students were able to enroll in a one-credit course, Univ 250, for which their primary role as UTA has been to “facilitate student engagement by modeling successful intellectual practices and offering assistance to students with coursework” (Gordon, Henry, & Dempster, 2014, p. 104).

In the original curriculum proposal, cited above, the learning objectives for students serving as UTAs were described directly and indirectly as follows:

Student engagement is impacted in two distinct ways: 1. For those students enrolled in the course as Teaching Assistants, they gain an understanding of the stewardship of learning as well as an ability to further develop the core competencies as designated by the Core Curriculum. These students are not only engaged with first-year students, they are also regularly engaged in their practicum meetings with peer leaders and FI faculty members who oversee their class work and progress in both written and oral communication. 2. The engagement for students enrolled in UNIV 111, 112 (Focused Inquiry) is enhanced by the presence of upper-class students in their classroom who are modeling proficiency in the core competencies on a daily basis. They not only serve as role models, they are also mentors and guides to the first-year experience. (Rankin, 2009)

While providing a clear foundation for the program, this description did not yet formulate precise and detailed learning objectives for the UTA program (i.e., Univ 250), as had been done for the Focused Inquiry course itself (i.e., Univ 111 and Univ 112). For additional background on the UTA Program, see Gordon, Henry, and Dempster (2014), and for a more general discussion of the impact of undergraduate teaching assistants on student learning, see Crowe, Cersola, and Silva (2014), Dempster and Dempster (2015), and Henry and Gordon (2011).

Following the launch of the full program in 2009, the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program immediately began to evolve and expand into what is now an amalgamation of three distinct but overlapping elements: (i) teaching practicum, (ii) leadership seminar, and (iii) service learning experience. Although this program may not appear to qualify as service learning in the familiar sense of students serving a community need *outside the university*, the fundamental notion of service learning is not contingent on the group in need existing outside the university. The concept of service learning concerns students enhancing their academic learning by serving an identifiable community and assisting (that community) in addressing an identifiable need. This definition of service learning was confirmed by UTA Program Co-coordinator T. Fortney; according to Fortney, at its heart “service learning is about providing service to a community identified as one in need” (Personal Communication, September 29, 2015). And sometimes this community of people in need exist within the university community itself (see Tough, 2014, for example).

According to the Division of Community Engagement at Virginia Commonwealth University, which ultimately oversees the UTA Program’s designation as a service learning course, “service-learning refers to an intentional teaching strategy that engages students in organized

service activities and guided reflection. The service activities benefit the community and, in combination with reflection and other classroom-based learning activities, enhance the academic curriculum of participating students” (*What*, 2015). Moreover, their definition of service learning describes an “educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity” while also acknowledging the variety of ways in which that service may occur, including how “service activities may be direct (e.g., mentoring youth, volunteering with patients, working in community gardens) or indirect (e.g., creating research reports, designing online or print materials); may be individual or group-based; may occur either on- or off-campus” (*What*, 2015). What is essential is that the educational experience involves service aimed at an identifiable community in need and that that service be integrated meaningfully with the student’s academic work.

In the case of the UTA program, the identifiable community in need is first-year students, particularly at-risk first-year students struggling to make the transition from high school to college. And while this community may not be as large, or this need as great, at the most elite and selective colleges and universities, for a large, urban university like Virginia Commonwealth University, with the mission of providing educational opportunity to all residents of the Commonwealth of Virginia largely regardless of the quality of their preparation in public education, incoming students constitute a discrete community with clearly identifiable needs. And those needs can be effectively addressed, at least in part, through the interventions and support made possible by the service-learning component of the UTA program.

While the UTA program, in hindsight, has in fact been serving this community since its inception, the recent addition of the “service learning” designation to the course has triggered a renewed and vigorous discussion of the precise learning objectives of the program, particularly as it attempts to merge learning objectives typically associated with each of the three aforementioned elements. This essay seeks to articulate those learning objectives, most notably by collating the observations and best practices of faculty who participate in the program, by wedding those results with the “ABC” framework of experiential learning discussed by Carver (1996), and by further mapping specific learning objectives within that framework through a process of triangulation.

Learning Objectives: Target Skills and Anticipated Activities

In “The power of experiential education,” Eyler (2009) discusses the necessary features of an effective service learning course:

In order to justify the inclusion of work or community service as part of the liberal arts curriculum, attention needs to be paid to ensuring the quality of the intellectual as well as the work experience. Guidelines for creating high-quality experiential education programs and helping students make the most of their experiences are similar and consistent with much of the literature on effective liberal education. They include:

- work or service clearly related to the academic goals of the course or program;
- well-developed assessments that provide evidence of the achievement of academic objectives;
- important responsibility for the student;
- site supervisors who understand the learning goals for the student and partner with the academic supervisor to provide continuous monitoring and feedback;

- an academic supervisor or instructor who pays close attention to the students' work in the field and partners with the site supervisor to provide continuous monitoring and feedback;
- attention paid to preparing students for both the practical challenges of their placements and for learning from experience;
- continuous, well-structured reflection opportunities to help students link experience and learning throughout the course of their placements. (p. 30)

Of these features, perhaps the two most important topics for orienting students to the Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program are the first and last: discussion of “the academic goals” of the program and the types of activities and engagements that will provide the topics of “continuous, well-structured reflection.”

Now, in attempting to articulate the academic goals—i.e., learning objectives—of the UTA program, one can either work top down (from the broadest programmatic goals) or bottom up (from specific daily activities and roles in the classroom). Given that the program has been in place for several years, there is a lot of experience and observation to build upon. So working from the bottom up, we can begin by generating a list of the most common and recurrent activities and modes of engagement—what we might call the expectations or “assignments” of the course—in which UTAs are typically involved regularly, if not daily. The resulting list, reorganized by skill set, follows below. From this initial list, we can then cluster specific activities and engagements into discrete skill sets. [For reference, the seven target skill areas of the Focused Inquiry course (in which UTAs serve) are: critical thinking, written communication, oral communication, information fluency, quantitative reasoning, ethical reasoning, and collaborative work.] And so, at a general level, and in parallel with the seven target skills of the Focused Inquiry course, the learning objectives of the UTA program are to develop the students' personal and professional skills in the following areas:

- confidence building skills
- written communication skills
- oral communication skills
- mentoring skills (motivating, coaching)
- facilitation and leadership skills
- pedagogy / metacognition skills
- collaboration skills

And under each of those skill areas, the more specific daily activities and engagements in which they are regularly involved include:

confidence building skills

- dealing with uncertainty / anxiety / lack of confidence
- dealing with / learning from failure
- dealing with / building on success

written communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in writing (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students out of class—in writing (e.g. email)
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

oral communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in conversation (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students in class—in conversation
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

mentoring skills (motivating, coaching)

- meeting with students outside of class
- observing and diagnosing (classroom climate, struggling students, etc.)
- motivating / encouraging (struggling) students
→ including building social integration (e.g. international students)
- dealing with difficult / resistant students
- being patient / maintaining a professional demeanor

facilitation and leadership skills

- working one-on-one with students in class
- facilitating small group discussion
- modeling student behavior and engagement
- facilitating / herding a class activity (“hovering”, task-mastering)

pedagogy / metacognition skills

- engaging in different classroom structures, formats, modalities (comparative reflection)
- intentional lesson planning
- leading a class discussion or activity (implementing a lesson plan)
→ including traditional teaching, formal presentations, etc.

collaboration skills

- co-planning or co-facilitating with course instructor = collaboration
- co-planning or co-facilitating with another UTA = collaboration

The result is a set of learning objectives paired with the specific (and regular if not daily) activities and engagements in which UTAs are involved—see Appendix A for a one-page (i.e., user-friendly/printable) “handout” of these general and specific learning objectives.

While each of these clusters is worthy of extended discussion, confidence building, mentoring, and collaboration (particularly faculty-student collaboration) are perhaps the most unique to the UTA experience—in comparison to the skills developed in the Focused Inquiry course itself—and the most foundational in relation to other skills sets. Indeed, facilitation and leadership skills, for example, are perhaps in large part derivative activities for the ultimate development of student confidence and agency. Hawkins and Edwards (2013) provide an insightful discussion of the inherent doubt and anxiety that accompanies leadership learning, concluding that it is “this liminal process that enables the student to try out, perhaps to ‘try on,’ a variety of new perspectives, mindsets and identities” and that it is “a vital experiential learning process, which familiarizes students with a common way in which the *practice* of leadership is experienced” (p. 16). Similarly, the dynamics of UTA-to-student mentoring can differ significantly from more common student-to-student collaboration within the classroom. Murray (2014) usefully examines the “mirror function” role of undergraduate teaching assistants for the students they serve, arguing that “if we are in the business, at least in part, of creating / indoctrinating mindful scholars, we cannot achieve this aim through traditional instruction . . . but rather through the presence of effective role models” and that “the principal objective of the UTA is not to

facilitate student learning . . . but instead to facilitate the student's own heightened consciousness concerning their own-most potentialities as a student, scholar, and life-long learner" (p. 28). And the potential benefits of significant faculty-student collaboration cannot be understated, especially as they also provide the context in which students experience meaningful or even transformative meta-cognition. Chavez and Soep (2005) provide a powerful illustration of such collaboration in their analysis of the Youth Radio program, discovering that what is crucial is "how and what they learn when they jointly frame inquiry with collaborating peers and adults, through which the work they produce makes an intervention in the larger social world" and that what is key is "a deep focus on joint production, with young people and adults mutually invested in a project in which both parties are vulnerable to critique" (pp. 430-431). To be sure, all seven of the skill sets listed above promise numerous and varied possibilities for on-going academic learning, professional development, and personal transformation.

The ABC's of Learning Objectives: Agency / Belonging / Competence

We can, however, go at least one step further. Indeed, it may be beneficial to begin to map the seven general skill areas and twenty-one specific activities against the three components of experiential learning that Carver (1996) discusses in "Theory for practice: A framework for thinking about experiential education." These are known as the "ABC's of experiential education: Agency, Belonging, and Competence. The first component is **agency**: "allowing students to become more powerful change agents in their lives and communities; increasing students' recognition and appreciation of the extent to which the locus of control for their lives is within themselves, and enabling them to use this as a source of power to generate activity" (Carver, 1996, p. 154). The second component is **belonging**: students come to "see themselves as members with rights and responsibilities, power and vulnerability; learn to act responsibly, considering the best interests of themselves, other individuals, and the group as a whole" (Carver, 1996, p. 154). And the third component is **competence**: "the development of student competence . . . in a wide variety of areas (cognitive, physical, musical, social, etc.). Developing competence means learning skills, acquiring knowledge, and attaining the ability to apply what is learned" (Carver, 1996, p. 154).

Whereas a typical college course—the large lecture hall experience of INTRO 101—focuses on increasing a student's competence in a particular discipline, most typically with respect to a body of factual information, a service-learning course simultaneously focuses on building the student's sense of agency and belonging—i.e., that they can actually do something with the knowledge/competence they are gaining and that they have a community upon which they can have an impact. With that in mind, the general skills and daily activities/engagements generated above might be further classified within this tripartite framework as follows:

AGENCY

confidence building skills

- dealing with uncertainty / anxiety / lack of confidence
- dealing with / learning from failure
- dealing with / building on success

mentoring skills (motivating, coaching)

- meeting with students outside of class
- observing and diagnosing (classroom climate, struggling students, etc.)
- motivating / encouraging (struggling) students

- including building social integration (e.g. international students)
- dealing with difficult / resistant students
- being patient / maintaining a professional demeanor

pedagogy / metacognition skills

- engaging in different classroom structures, formats, modalities (comparative reflection)
- intentional lesson planning
- leading a class discussion or activity (implementing a lesson plan)
 - including traditional teaching, formal presentations, etc.

BELONGING

oral communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in conversation (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students in class—in conversation
 - answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

collaboration skills

- co-planning or co-facilitating with course instructor = collaboration
- co-planning or co-facilitating with another UTA = collaboration

COMPETENCE

written communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in writing (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students out of class—in writing (e.g. email)
 - answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

facilitation and leadership skills

- working one-on-one with students in class
- facilitating small group discussion
- modeling student behavior and engagement
- facilitating / herding a class activity (“hovering”, task-mastering)

The result here is not only a pairing of specific activities and engagements with the target skills of the UTA service learning course, but a further characterization of those activities and skills with the more fundamental dynamics of experiential education: the simultaneous development of competence, agency, and belonging—see Appendix B for a one-page “handout” (i.e., user-friendly/printable) of these “ABC” framework-categorized learning objectives.

Triangulation: The Daily Activities, Target Skills, and ABC’s of Undergraduate Teaching Assistantship

Finally, what remains to be elucidated are the significant overlaps of the particular activities and skills within the tripartite structure of agency / belonging / competence. For example, it would seem clear that the written communication skill of providing written feedback is not only (if primarily) building competence but also developing agency as well as reinforcing a sense of belonging with students in the classroom—hence its placement within the triangle (see Figure 1 below). Similarly, it would seem clear that the mentoring skill of dealing with difficult/resistant students is primarily about building agency and secondarily about establishing community with

students, but only indirectly about developing course-content-related competence—hence its placement on the line connecting agency and belonging (see Figure 1 below). What is needed, in other words, is the generation of a diagram or map to represent the placement of each skill set (or individual activity) within the terrain of agency / belonging / competence, with the hope that such a map—and more importantly the *process* of generating such a map—will lead to a deeper understanding of the overarching mission and specific learning objectives of the (UTA or similar) program under examination, as well as a deeper appreciation for the diligent work of the students participating in the program.

The diagram below suggests one possible arrangement of each skill set within the triangle of Agency / Belonging / Competence. Obviously, any or all of these suggested placements can be debated—indeed, that is the point. The goal here is NOT to offer some definitive taxonomy,

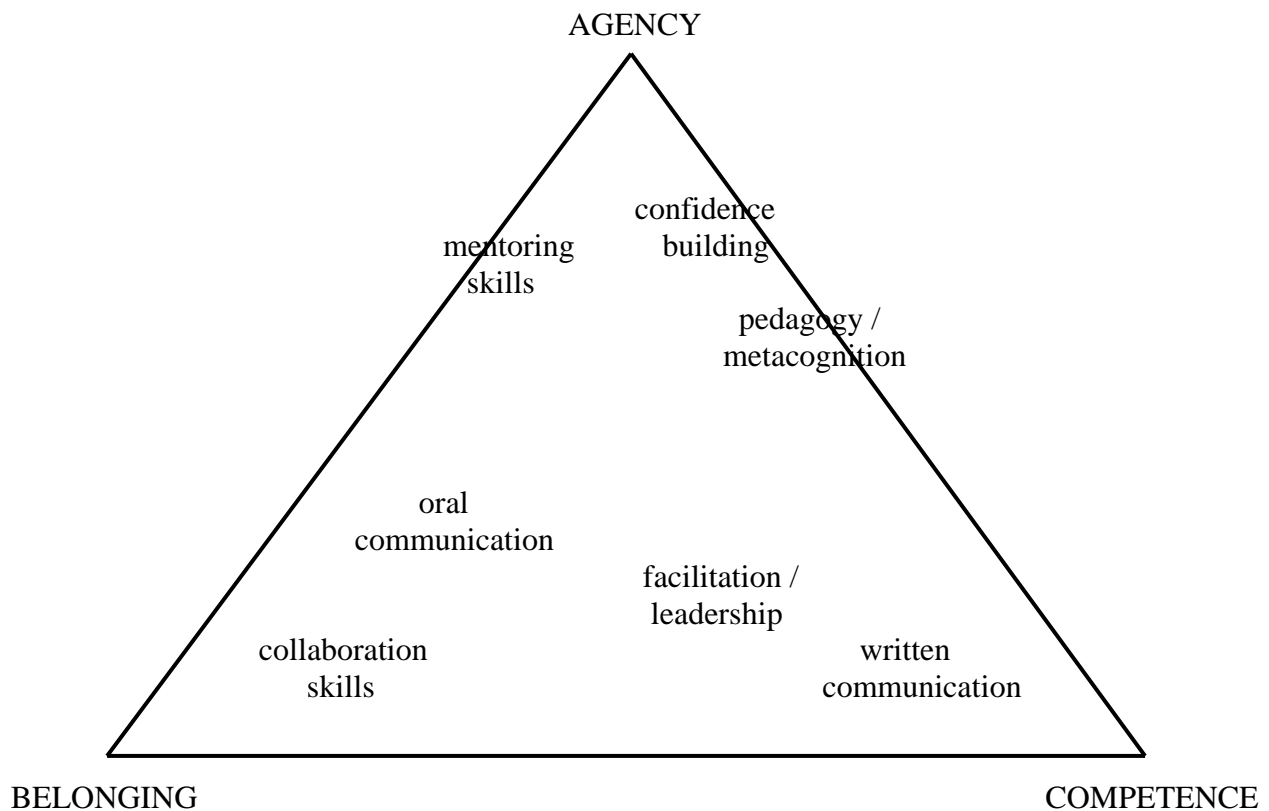


Figure 1: Triangulation of UTA Program learning objectives with “ABC” experiential learning framework.

but rather to stimulate conversations (1) among faculty about the curriculum design of UTA, peer mentor, or other service-learning programs and (2) between faculty and students about the learning objectives of the program in which they are involved, understood as target skill sets, more fundamental ABC’s, and the interconnectedness of the two. To reiterate, the goal of such a triangulation is not to pinpoint “correct” locations, but to bring into relief the various learning objectives, pedagogical strategies, and curriculum-design decisions of the program.

Lastly, the diagram above could be generated with not just the seven target skill clusters, but the twenty-one specific activities and modes of engagement. Quite obviously, many of the sub-

activities do not belong in the exact same place within the triangulation. For example, collaborating with faculty may have more to do with developing knowledge and competence than collaborating with fellow UTAs, whereas collaborating with fellow UTAs may have more to do with developing independence and agency than collaborating with faculty. And so on. There is not room here to undertake such a mapping of all twenty-seven activities/engagements. Moreover, doing so here would be counter-productive insofar as appropriate placements on the triangle will of course depend on the specific circumstances of any given program. Hence, Appendix C offers “tiles” that could be easily printed and cut out in order to tape them onto a chalk-board or white-board (onto which the triangle has been drawn or projected), as a way to stimulate productive discussion of these three levels at which one can better conceptualize the learning objectives of a UTA, peer mentor, or other service-learning program.

Conclusion

Since its official start in Fall 2009, the Department of Focused Inquiry’s Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program at Virginia Commonwealth University has evolved and expanded into an amalgamation of three distinct but overlapping elements: (i) teaching practicum, (ii) leadership seminar, and (iii) service learning experience. But only recently have we begun to fully and systematically itemize and map the precise learning objectives of the program. This undertaking is particularly important, and particularly challenging, as the program merges learning objectives typically associated with each of the three aforementioned elements. Toward that end, this essay has sought to articulate those learning objectives, first by collating the observations and best practices of faculty who participate in the program into a list of seven skill sets and twenty-one subordinate classroom activities and modes of engagement, second by wedding those results with Carver’s (1996) “ABC” framework of experiential learning, and third by further mapping specific learning objectives within that framework through a process of triangulation. Perhaps most important, it has been suggested that this process of triangulation can be deployed in any similar (undergraduate) teaching assistant or peer mentor program in order to reveal the interconnections between various programmatic elements and among particular learning objectives.

To be sure, although our UTA program places undergraduate students in the primary roles of teaching assistant and small-group discussion facilitator inside the classroom, whereas peer mentor programs more typically place undergraduate students in the primary roles of tutor and mentor working with students one-on-one or in small groups outside the classroom, there are nevertheless several important similarities between our UTA program and peer mentor programs in general. Among those similarities is the fact that students in these types of programs often develop close working relationships with particular students over the course of a semester or academic year. Also, both our UTA program and many peer mentor programs provide undergraduates with numerous and varied opportunities to work with students. Our UTAs occasionally lead an entire class discussion, frequently work with students in small groups, and often work one-on-one with students both inside and outside the classroom. And they often informally advise or counsel students about non-academic issues with which they are dealing in their lives. Similarly, many peer mentors find themselves moving between working with small groups of students in Supplemental Instruction programs, working with individual students on specific subjects over time as tutors, and working with students from a variety of disciplines as consultants in campus writing centers (see Searight, Retzlöff, & Narkiewicz (2015), for example).

And they too find themselves often attempting to help students navigate the non-academic challenges of their often turbulent lives as (especially first-year) undergraduates.

But perhaps the most important similarity is that both our UTA program and many peer mentor programs benefit both the students participating in those programs and the students they serve. Regarding peer mentor programs, Searight, Retzliff, and Narkiewicz (2015) observe that “While the benefits of peer education for recipients are well established, the benefits for providers are not well known” (p. 8). With respect to the UTA program at Virginia Commonwealth University, Henry and Gordon (2011) and Dempster and Dempster (2015) have undertaken initial studies of the program’s benefits to the first-year students it serves—see also Crowe, Cersola, and Silva (2014). Searight, Retzliff, and Narkiewicz (2015) supplement existing literature by demonstrating a range of benefits to the peer mentors themselves, including “improved interpersonal and communication skills, development of leadership abilities, and a stronger knowledge base” as well as greater “self-awareness” (p. 15; see also Weiler, Haddock, Zimmerman, Krafchick, Henry, & Rudisill, 2013). Additionally, Searight, Retzliff, and Narkiewicz’s (2015) study found that working as a peer mentor “increased their metacognitive skills” and that they “became ‘deep learners’” (p. 15). Not surprisingly, these are the same learning and developmental outcomes that my colleagues and I have been witnessing in our UTAs, as evidenced primarily through students’ end-of-semester reflections on their experiences in the program and subsequent involvement in other on-campus and off-campus leadership positions. Indeed, many of our UTAs have gone on to serve as UTAs in other courses and programs, to become Resident Advisors, and to work in a variety of peer mentor programs on campus. And though our program has not yet undertaken a systematic or quantitative study of the benefits of the program for the students who go through it, there is considerable reason to be optimistic. Speaking from my own experience, while the students who have worked with me as UTAs have all been excellent students who almost certainly would have been highly successful and actively engaged in their community regardless, I have noticed that students who go through the program have, without question, acquired an increased and accelerated sense of self-confidence, ownership, and initiative concerning their continued professional development.

Aside from demonstrating those benefits in a more systematic way, the second task that lies ahead is to ensure that the learning objectives of the program, which this essay has tried to map, actually match the learning outcomes of the students who participate in the program. As with any intentionally-designed curriculum, learning objectives and learning outcomes should match up, hand-in-glove, and it is through the identification of points of misalignment that curricula and programmatic objectives can be improved. The hope is that this essay’s articulation of this program’s—or of any similar undergraduate teaching assistant or peer mentor program’s—learning objectives will contribute meaningfully to that larger endeavor.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the Department of Focused Inquiry’s Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Program’s Co-coordinators Thaddeus Fortney and Peter Henry, as well as all members of the UTA Program Faculty Learning Community, for their commitment and leadership, collaborative support and intellectual generosity, and helpful advice on this manuscript.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of Learning Objectives and Activities / Engagements

confidence building skills

- dealing with uncertainty / anxiety / lack of confidence
- dealing with / learning from failure
- dealing with / building on success

written communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in writing (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students out of class—in writing (e.g. email)
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

oral communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in conversation (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students in class—in conversation
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

mentoring skills (motivating, coaching)

- meeting with students outside of class
- observing and diagnosing (classroom climate, struggling students, etc.)
- motivating / encouraging (struggling) students
→ including building social integration (e.g. international students)
- dealing with difficult / resistant students
- being patient / maintaining a professional demeanor

facilitation and leadership skills

- working one-on-one with students in class
- facilitating small group discussion
- modeling student behavior and engagement
- facilitating / herding a class activity (“hovering”, task-mastering)

pedagogy / metacognition skills

- engaging in different classroom structures, formats, modalities (comparative reflection)
- intentional lesson planning
- leading a class discussion or activity (implementing a lesson plan)
→ including traditional teaching, formal presentations, etc.

collaboration skills

- co-planning or co-facilitating with course instructor = collaboration
- co-planning or co-facilitating with another UTA = collaboration

Appendix B: Skill Sets and Activities Mapped to the ABC's of Experiential Learning

AGENCY

confidence building skills

- dealing with uncertainty / anxiety / lack of confidence
- dealing with / learning from failure
- dealing with / building on success

mentoring skills (motivating, coaching)

- meeting with students outside of class
- observing and diagnosing (classroom climate, struggling students, etc.)
- motivating / encouraging (struggling) students
→ including building social integration (e.g. international students)
- dealing with difficult / resistant students
- being patient / maintaining a professional demeanor

pedagogy / metacognition skills

- engaging in different classroom structures, formats, modalities (comparative reflection)
- intentional lesson planning
- leading a class discussion or activity (implementing a lesson plan)
→ including traditional teaching, formal presentations, etc.

BELONGING

oral communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in conversation (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students in class—in conversation
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

collaboration skills

- co-planning or co-facilitating with course instructor = collaboration
- co-planning or co-facilitating with another UTA = collaboration

COMPETENCE

written communication skills

- providing feedback to student work—in writing (informal assessment)
- communicating effectively with students out of class—in writing (e.g. email)
→ answering “technical” question (re: assignments, course concepts, policies, etc.)

facilitation and leadership skills

- working one-on-one with students in class
- facilitating small group discussion
- modeling student behavior and engagement
- facilitating / herding a class activity (“hovering”, task-mastering)

Appendix C: “Tiles” for Interactive Discussion

Confidence Building	Written Communication	Oral Communication
Mentoring Skills	Facilitating / Leadership	Pedagogy / Metacognition
Collaborative Work		
dealing with uncertainty	dealing with failure	dealing with success
providing written feedback	(other) written communication	providing oral feedback
(other) oral communication	meeting with students outside of class	observing and diagnosing
motivating and encouraging	dealing with difficult students	being patient and professional
working one-on-one in class	facilitating small group discussion	modeling student behavior and engagement
facilitating / herding a class activity	different classroom structures and formats	intentional lesson planning
leading a class discussion or activity	co-planning with instructor	co-planning with other UTAs

References

- Carver, R. (1996). Theory for practice: A framework for thinking about experiential education. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 19(1), 8-13.
- Chavez, V., & Soep, E. (2005). Youth radio and the pedagogy of collegiality. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(4), 409-434.
- Crowe, J., Ceresola, R., & Silva, T. (2014). Enhancing student learning of research methods through the use of undergraduate teaching assistants. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 39(6), 759-775.
- Dempster, M., & Dempster, G. (2015). Undergraduate teaching assistants and student performance: Innovation in a first year core curriculum. *Business Journal for Entrepreneurs, Special Edition: Entrepreneurship in Higher Education*: 40-56.
- Eyler, J. (2009). The power of experiential education. *Liberal Education*, 95(4), 24-31.
- Gordon, J., Henry, P., & Dempster, M. (2014). Undergraduate teaching assistants: A learner-centered model for enhancing student engagement in the first-year experience. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, 25(1), 103-109.
- Hawkins, B., & Edwards, G. (2013). Managing the monsters of doubt: Liminality, threshold concepts and leadership learning. *Management Learning* 0(0), 1-20.
- Henry, P., & Gordon, J. (2011). Do undergraduate teaching assistants increase student engagement?: University College and the UTA program at Virginia Commonwealth University. Unpublished manuscript, Virginia Commonwealth University.
- Murray, J. (2014). Rethinking the role of undergraduate teaching assistants: Designing best practices from psychoanalytic theory. *Proceedings of the Lilly Conference on College and University Teaching and Learning*, Traverse City, MI, 24-28.
- Rankin, D. L. (2009). Curriculum approval request form. Unpublished internal document, Virginia Commonwealth University.
- Searight, H. R., Retzlaff, C., & Narkiewicz, G. (2015). "It's much more than just teaching:" The experience of undergraduate peer educators. *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 2(6), 8-17.
- Tough, P. (2014, May 15). Who gets to graduate? *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.NYTimes.com>.
- Weiler, L. Haddock, S., Zimmerman, T. S., Krafchick, J., Henry, K., & Rudisill, S. (2013). Benefits derived by college students from mentoring at-risk youth in a service-learning course. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 3-4, 236-248.

What is service learning? (2015, October). Retrieved from the Virginia Commonwealth University, Division of Community Engagement Web site:
<http://www.servicelearning.vcu.edu/what-is-service-learning/>.