BACKGROUND

Introduction
Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) at the University of Utah are often given the opportunity to teach undergraduate courses. For many GTAs, this is their first teaching experience. In order to maintain high standards for undergraduate teaching, GTAs must be provided with resources that teach them how to develop effective and engaging teaching materials and curricula. Although some departments provide GTA training in the beginning of the year and provide support to GTAs through regularly scheduled meetings, many of these departments do not have the time nor the resources to develop a comprehensive GTA preparation curriculum. This project moves one step in that direction by providing a cross-disciplinary manual for effective teaching.

Goal
To provide an introductory teaching resource that guides new teachers through the basics of developing effective daily instruction. This manual is appropriate for: 1. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs); 2. Professors and instructors who are interested in learning more about pedagogy; 3. Professors, program coordinators, and Master TAs who oversee and mentor GTAs.

APPROACHES TO COURSE DESIGN

Three approaches to course design frame the content and organization of this manual.

Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)
Backward Design follows a three step design process that can be applied to course and individual lesson design: 1. Identify desired results; 2. Determine acceptable evidence; 3. Plan instruction.

Teaching with Themes and Threads (Stoller & Grabe, 1997)
Theme: A larger topic that brings related sub-topics together into a unified whole. A concept that recours throughout the themes in a course. Ex. An introductory biology class might have “evolution” as a theme, and “change in a system over time” as a thread.

A Reflective Approach
Reactivity is considered important at all levels of course and lesson planning. Teachers should constantly ask themselves whether or not an instructional strategy or general approach was effective. If not, then these must be revised or revalidation to that instruction. Some components of course design that require constant assessment and reflection are shown in the diagram below.

THE MANUAL

Section of the Manual | Rationale for Inclusion
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Introduction A. Setting and maintaining expectations | Clear expectations reduce stress for instructors and students.
C. A reflective approach to teaching | Reflectivity is considered to be essential to effective course design (Graves, 2000; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Organizing & Sequencing Course Content
This section includes tips for using themes and threads (Stoller & Grabe, 1997) that help teachers create a coherent organization of topics that improves student learning by facilitating connections across content topics.

Writing Performance Objectives
If written using the formula below, performance objectives (POs) frame instruction and assessment. When made explicit to students, POs help keep students to track of their own learning.

Lesson Planning
A. Into-Through-Beyond (Brinton & Holten, 1997) | Lessons that use the into-through-beyond sequence are effective in promoting student learning and engagement.
B. Lesson Plan Templates | This model is research-based.

Assessing Student Learning
A. Formative & Summative Assessments
B. Authentic Assessments | Assessing student learning is central to determining the effectiveness of instruction. Authentic assessments improve engagement and deepen students’ understanding of content.

Bloom’s Taxonomy
This taxonomy of verbs is a reference for writing performance objectives (see diagrams below).

Assessing Your Instruction
Reflection is essential to improving teacher performance and in turn, student learning.

Resources on Campus
There is a limit to how much one can grow through self-reflection and reflection alone.

INTO-THROUGH-BEYOND

INTO: Connect to teaching, GTAs, or build background knowledge through experience

THROUGH: Guide students through the material by asking scaffolding questions

BEYOND: Provide opportunities for students to apply what they are learning in new contexts

BENEFITS

Benefits to the Department of Linguistics
- Provides a resource for GTAs to improve their teaching thereby providing undergraduate ESL students with better instruction.
- Provides a resource for the ESL Program Coordinator who is conducts GTA teacher training.

Benefits to the University
- Provides a resource for GTAs to improve their teaching thereby providing undergraduate students in any department with better instruction.
- Provides a resource for mentors who are responsible for GTA teacher training.

ASSESSMENT & SUSTAINABILITY

Department Internal Assessment Procedure
1. Obtain feedback on the usefulness of the manual as a training tool from the ESL Program Coordinator via an interview.
2. Acquire feedback on the usefulness of the manual as a reference to GTAs in the Department of Linguistics via surveys and direct communication.
3. Attend meetings in the department to determine how and to what extent the manual is being used by new GTAs.

Campus-wide Assessment & Sustainability
1. Provide the manual to GTAs at the annual CTLE training session in August and develop an email list to contact GTAs who have the manual.
2. Periodically email GTAs across campus to request direct feedback about the usefulness of the manual or use an online survey.
3. Periodically check in with CTLE staff about the dissemination of the manual.
4. Provide an electronic copy of the manual to CTLE so that it can be modified and updated over time.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS & REFERENCES

Acknowledgments: Thank you to Dr. MaryAnn Christison, Dr. Beverly Brehl, and the 2011-2012 TA Scholars.

References
Bloom, B. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives; the classification of educational goals. New York: Longman.