Teaching Assistant Training

Spring 2015
Teaching, Learning, Diversity, and Student Development

- Basic Concepts
- Relevance to Teaching Assistantship
A Definition of Teaching

- Teaching in an academic setting - defined as the act of facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision making, and evaluation skills. (Crookston, 1994)
This viewpoint suggests a holistic aspect to teaching, that it is much more than the efficient transfer of information.

One researcher, in the field of education and psychology, identified three components to working with students:

- Informational – Discipline/subject matter, processes,
- Relational – Interpersonal skills, “reaching” students,
- Conceptual – Knowledge of concepts in soc, psych, edu.

(Habley, 1995)
Three Basic Concepts in the Study of Student Development

- 1. Cognitive-structural Development
- 2. Social (PsychoSocial) Development
- 3. Psychological Type – (Typologies/Learning Styles/Mental Function Preferences/Traits/Temperament)

(From Student Development in College, 2010)
Teaching assistants support the educational mission and help to assure academic quality and consistency in undergraduate education.

Today’s teaching and occupational skill development rests on the ability to understand and adapt to a variety of human characteristics.
“Our student populations and the developmental issues they confront are more diverse and complex than ever in the history of higher education.” From Student Development in College, 2010
In what ways are student populations increasingly diverse?

Increasing numbers of:

- Students of different cultural and faith backgrounds,
- Lower socioeconomic backgrounds,
- Students of color,
- Gay, lesbian, transgender, bisexual,
- Students with affective disorders,
- Older students,
- Immigrants,
- International students,
- Combinations of these attributes.
What this means to you, as a Teaching Assistant

With greater diversity comes broader variability in:

- Learning styles, personality traits, and mental function preferences,
- Emotional states, temperaments, behaviors,
- Personal and academic needs and expectations and ‘ways of knowing’ (Perry, 1990)
As educators, how do we deal with these variables?

By getting and staying informed of concepts of personal development, cultural perspectives, and individual learning preferences through:

- Formal study and application of relevant theory, research, and best practices.
- Observing what is effective and refining and repeating your successful practices and those of your mentors.
As educators, how do we deal with these variables?

- Be aware, perceptive to student behaviors, needs, & personal perspectives.
- By equipping yourself with knowledge of educational research in the fields education, sociology and psychology, you will gain a deeper understanding of methodologies that lead to effective teaching.
- You will develop greater confidence in your abilities as a teacher and will better serve an ever-changing teaching and learning college or work environment.
- Minimally, knowing the Three Basic Concepts.
The Three Basic Concepts

1. Cognitive-structural Development
2. Social (PsychoSocial) Development
3. Psychological Type
Cognitive Development

- Cognitive development follows certain identifiable transitions.
- Undergraduates are near, entering, or in the midst of a major life transition cognitively.
- They are developing new ways of thinking about, adapting to, and organizing their environments. (Evans, *Student Development in College*, 2010)
Undergraduates are near, entering, or in the midst of a major life transition psycho-socially.

Ages 17 to 22, *Early Adult Transition*, “developmental bridge between preadulthood and early adulthood.”

Marked by changes in relationship of self with the external world.

(Levinson, 1986, p. 7)
Psychological Type

- Awareness of typology theory may assist students and teachers in understanding individual students' reactions to the varying teaching styles they encounter throughout their educational experience.
  
  S. Williams, 2007

- Some to study:
  - Isabel Briggs Myers – type indicators.
  - David Kiersey – ‘temperament sorter.’
  - Carl Jung – theorist upon whose work psychological type inventories are based.
Saw normal differences between healthy people
2 types of mental activities:

- **Perceiving** & **Judging**
  - *Sensation*
  - *Thinking*
  - *Intuition*
  - *Feeling*

**External** - people, experience, activity
**Internal** – ideas, memories, emotions

Dominant, auxiliary, tertiary, & inferior tendencies

- This theory led to the development of personality-type testing such as the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
## Preferences Briefly Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extraversion (E)</th>
<th>Introversion (I)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>External stimuli</td>
<td>Internal stimuli</td>
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<tr>
<th>Sensing (S)</th>
<th>Intuition (N)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Concrete reality</td>
<td>World of possibilities</td>
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<tr>
<th>Thinking (T)</th>
<th>Feeling (F)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Objectivity/true-false</td>
<td>Personal values</td>
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<th>Judging (J)</th>
<th>Perceiving (P)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coming to a conclusion</td>
<td>Taking in information</td>
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Dominant, Auxiliary, Tertiary, & Inferior tendencies

From Fairhurst & Fairhurst, 1995, p. 23
The MBTI is claimed to be effective in explaining behavioral variations amongst individuals.

As learners, knowing the different styles of information processing can help to optimize our own learning experiences, and as educators, to adapt our teaching styles to students’ individual abilities and preferences.
MBTI – Interactive Examples

- Es may think Is are withholding information when they are processing internally.
- Is may think Es are uncertain when they are processing a decision out loud.
- Ss may think Ns are avoiding or changing the topic when they are brainstorming connections.
- Ns may think Ss are unimaginative when they are raising realistic or practical questions.
- Fs may think Ts are harsh and cold when they take a detached, problem solving approach.

(From Briggs Myers, I., Introduction to Type, Using Difference Constructively)
The clearest vision of the future usually comes from an **Intuitive** type.

The most practical realism usually comes from a **Sensing** type.

The most incisive analysis usually comes from a **Thinking** type.

The most skillful understanding and handling of people usually come from a **Feeling** type.

(From Briggs Myers, I., *Introduction to Type, Using Type Differences at Work*)
Example MBTI – “ENFJ”
Extraverted, Intuitive, Feeling, Judging

- “ENFJ’s are the benevolent pedagogues of humanity”
- “ENFJ’s are global learners” “They see the big picture”
- “ENFJ’s often take more of the burdens of others than they can bear”
- “They have tremendous charisma by which many are drawn into their nurturant tutelage and/or grand schemes.”

The Center provides personal service to graduate students with questions about matters of academic, social, personal, and professional growth at Rensselaer.

Helps to resolve concerns you may have about campus life or interpersonal conflicts.

The Center can also refer you to other campus professionals or direct you to literature and bibliographic resources.

The Graduate Center
Issues that the Graduate Student Ombudsman may be able to help you with:

- Policy and procedural concerns,
- Academic freedom, academic integrity issues, academic disputes,
- Interpersonal disagreements, harassment or discrimination,
- Questions on authority, ethical conflicts, disciplinary matters,
- Disrespect, rudeness, incivility,
- Threats or retaliation,
- Health and safety concerns,
- Housing issues.

Adapted from Stony Brook University & the IOA Standards of Practice
The Graduate Student Ombudsman *does not*:

- Maintain identifying records,
- Represent individuals in formal procedures,
- Conduct or participate in formal investigations or processes,
- Provide psychological counseling,
- Offer legal advice,
- Testify or gather evidence for formal administrative processes,
- Advocate for individuals or departments,
- Establish, change, or set aside policies,
- Serve as an office of record.

Adapted from Stony Brook & the IOA Standards of Practice
Resources

- The Graduate Center
  http://gradoffice.rpi.edu/update.do?artcenterkey=5

- Resource Page
  http://gradoffice.rpi.edu/update.do?artcenterkey=230