

2013 EDC Grants Program Application Form

1. Applicant Information

Principal Applicant's Contact Information:

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2. Overview

Descriptive Title – Preparing First-time Teaching Assistants (TAs): A National Survey of Canadian Post-secondary Institutions' TA Orientations

Intended Outcomes – The outcome is to have at the end of the year a comprehensive analysis and report about teaching assistant (TA) orientations from all Canadian post-secondary institutions. The report and analysis is initiated by the Teaching Assistant and Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA) executive committee. TAGSA is a special interest group of the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). The report will be readily available to all EDC and TAGSA members, and will be available on the TAGSA website. Additionally, the TAGSA executive committee with the graduate student RA hired for the project, will submit a paper about the findings to a selected journal.

The report will assist educational developers, faculty, and departments as they strive to provide the best teaching preparation possible for TAs before taking up their TA role on Canadian campuses. Anticipated timeline:

July 2013 – recruitment of graduate student.

August to October, 2013 – Graduate student, working closely with TAGSA Chair, Cynthia Korpan, will construct and then conduct a survey of all Canadian post-secondary institutions about orientations held specifically for TAs.

November, 2013 to April, 2014 – Compile data, write report, prepare article for submission to selected journal

January, 2014 – Interim report to EDC

May, 2014 – Distribute report widely to EDC, TAGSA, and on website

June, 2014 – Present findings at STLHE

July, 2014 – Final report to EDC and hopefully article is accepted for publication in a selected journal

Rationale – TAGSA purpose is to raise the profile of teaching assistant (TA) and graduate student development in Canada and to provide leadership in highlighting initiatives to develop teaching skills and other professional skills in graduate students. One of the ways that the executive committee of TAGSA strive to achieve this is to produce yearly reports about issues important to members. In 2011, TAGSA published, *TA Professional Development in Canada* that gave a snapshot of initiatives in program development and research being undertaken at higher education institutions across Canada. In 2012, TAGSA published, *TAGSA Key People Directory*, which is updated annually.

Building off of these two successful publications, the executive committee has decided that the next publication address TA orientations. TA orientations are typically the first introduction graduate students have to the culture of teaching and learning at their graduate institution. The way that TA orientations are organized across the country differs immensely. A comprehensive survey and analysis of how TAs are introduced to teaching at Canadian institutions will allow for sharing of best practices and resources, development of some national standards, research initiatives cross-institutionally that measure impact of standards and programs, and further initiatives.

The *TA Professional Development in Canada* report gave a broad look at what was occurring across Canada but now it is time to dig deeper into the programs taking place.

The project connects to the following EDC Living Plan themes:

Building Professional Capacity: Developing Job Skills – anytime someone is asked to talk about programming, he or she tends to reflect on that programming. Provoking reflection about TA orientations will bring focus on this important event. Reflection about work helps build his or her professionalism.

Engaging our Community – this will be a cross-country collaboration that will connect educational developers, whether they are part of the TAGSA community or not. This work will connect individuals at institutions who have not had the chance to engage with the TAGSA community previously.

Building Resources – the report published will add to the library of reports produced by TAGSA but as well, the journal article, jointly written by the executive committee, will add a further resource to literature about TA professional development.

Organizational development/Facilitating Change – a distinct focus on TA orientations may provoke change at the institutional level. With a national report as the outcome, each institution will be encouraged to distribute the report widely to key people.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning – the report may lead to some research initiatives in certain institutions and/or cross-institutionally.

Scholarship –TA orientations are the most common structured professional development that is offered to graduate students. Since this is typically the first encounter graduate students have with professional development, orientations set the tone for future engagement. Therefore, it is imperative that we take a close look at the content offered, the quality of orientations, and try to understand how effective orientations are at preparing TAs for their role.

To date, there has only been one cross-institutional survey of TA orientations (Robinson, 2011). Robinson (2011) surveyed 20 institutions, two in Canada and 18 in the US, to get a broad and shallow view. Research at singular institutions at the department or university level exist (Boman, 2008; Lucas, 2001; Temple et al., 2003), which can offer ideas and be useful for further planning at those institutions but does not offer an in-depth analysis to work towards best practices across institutions.

This report will strictly look at university-wide orientations at all Canadian post-secondary institutions. Building off of Robinson's (2011) survey questions, some of the questions that the report would ask about TA orientations are:

- Institutions – type, location, size
- Demographics of TAs – international, how many in each department, percentage that attend TA orientation
- Characteristics:
 - Attendance mandatory or recommended
 - Timing and duration of orientation
 - Fixed structure or open to choose
 - Centrally designed curriculum or designed by presenters
 - Presentation formats used
 - Collect feedback or not
- Curriculum categories, does it include:
 - policies
 - students
 - teaching
 - professional development
 - campus resources
 - other

With the increased concern about the quality of undergraduate education and quality of teaching at post-secondary institutions, it is time to ensure that our initial introduction to teaching is of the highest quality.

Dissemination – The report, *Preparing First-time Teaching Assistants (TAs): A National Survey of Canadian Post-secondary Institutions' TA Orientations*, will be made available on the TAGSA website, distributed through the TAGSA and EDC listserv. The findings will be presented at the annual AGM of TAGSA at STLHE, but we will also propose a special session to share the findings with the STLHE community at the annual conference. Additionally, an

article will be prepared to submit to a journal selected as appropriate for the topic.

3. Budget

Item (including any applicable taxes)	Cost
Salaries One graduate research assistant at \$23.98 per hour plus 4 % vacation pay x 100 hours	2494.00
Honoraria TAGSA chair, Cynthia Korpan, time in kind	0.00
Total Costs	2494.00
Less matching funding obtained from other sources (e.g. Department/Dean)	0.00
Less in-kind contributions	0.00
Total amount requested from the EDC Grant Program (not to exceed \$2500.)	2494.00

4. References Cited

Boman, J. (2008). *Outcomes of a Graduate Teaching Assistant Training Program* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Western Ontario, Canada.

Lucas, S. G. (2001). Departmental teaching assistant's orientation. In L. R. Prieto & S. A. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant training handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. 25-41). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Robinson, S. S. (2011). An Introductory Classification of Graduate Teaching Assistant Orientations. *Studies in Graduate and Professional Student Development*, 14, 19-35.

Teaching Assistant and Graduate Student Advancement (TAGSA)
<http://www.stlth.ca/special-interest-groups/tagsa/>

Temple, N. F., Isaac, L. A., Adams, B. A., Hughland, D. L., Engelstoff, C., & Garcia, P. F. J. (2003). Development of a peer based, department-specific teaching assistant manual and orientation. *The Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development*, 9(2), 75-80.