An examination of mentoring among graduate teaching assistants

Kimberly Kay Nehls

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

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AN EXAMINATION OF MENTORING AMONG
GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS

by

Kimberly Kay Nehls

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Dean of the Graduate College

Examination Committee Member

Examination Committee Member

Graduate College Faculty Representative
ABSTRACT

An Examination of Mentoring Among Graduate Teaching Assistants

by

Kimberly Kay Nehls

Dr. Thomas Burkholder, Examination Committee Chair
Professor of Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Mentoring is a communication process where an experienced guide helps a novice adjust to new surroundings. The goal is to assist newcomers with difficult transitions. The literature review determined that mentoring has recently evolved to academia with a desire to aid students and faculty. A need arose to examine peer communication between graduate students. This study specifically examined peer mentoring among graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Surveys were distributed to GTAs in every department and school at that university. Results indicated that GTAs believe the teaching experience has been good for them, but responded neutrally when asked if they work jointly on major projects or cases with associates that directly affect their teaching. Female GTAs, communication studies GTAs, and GTAs with the least amount of time in their department were least likely to find peer communication support. Findings indicated the need for further investigation of mentoring among graduate teaching assistants.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the King of Ithaca left his young son with a trusted friend named Mentor while he went to fight in the Trojan War. While the king was away negotiating the conflict, Mentor was teaching the young prince how to handle a spear and to orate. Henceforth, the word mentor became synonymous with a person who is a guide, role model, or teacher (Homer, 1937; Sinetar, 1998, 7).

Guides, role models, and teachers surround graduate students in today’s university setting, but to what extent are they used? The purpose of this thesis is to understand what, if any, mentoring communication occurs in graduate school. According to organizational communication authors Miglerney and Rubin, “To move toward an understanding of the adjustment process, research must yield better knowledge of the factors that contribute to newcomer uncertainty and the cognitive, affective, and behavioral communication components that facilitate successful entry” (1995, 54). One of the communication components that may exist in the assimilation of new graduate students is mentoring. The definition of mentoring according to Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobos is “a communication relationship in which a senior person supports, tutors, guides, and facilitates a junior person’s career development” (1989, 15). Therefore, mentoring is a communication process in which an experienced leader helps a novice adjust to new surroundings. The socialization into a new position can be eased with mentoring.
Communication support is the basis of a mentoring relationship. Migerney and Rubin write, “newcomers exposed to others who are performing similar tasks, or who are socialized by a veteran member of the organization, are given more information as to the norms that accompany their organizational positions” (1995, 78). These authors are describing the communication involved with mentoring. Myers describes mentoring as the, “supportive communication relationships ... with significant organizational others that enhance an individual’s work life” (1998, 56). The intent of this investigation is to discover whether mentoring communication exists for graduate teaching assistants in an academic setting. Mentoring is an age-old process that began with Homer and has been revitalized today. It is an ideal organizational communication study for the 21st century.

The recent mentoring phenomenon began in the 1980s when mentor and protégé relationships became prevalent in the business world (Moore, 23). In corporate America, mentors were usually upper-level personnel who served to train and develop new employees in a one-on-one relationship. Occupational mentors were expected to convey and uphold the standards of the organization while both challenging and offering support to the recipient. In return, the recipient of the mentoring endeavored to fulfill the profession’s expectations and acquire on-the-job competency.

By targeting new employees, companies hoped to create a stronger, more cohesive organization with fewer turnovers. Because “newcomers’ successful passage through the entry phase is dependent on their ability to obtain sufficient information to reduce uncertainty” (Mignerey and Rubin, 55), mentoring provides newcomers with access to organizational information from the more experienced counterpart. Information acquisition is imperative for successful entry into a position.
More recently, mentoring communication has progressed from business to academia with the desire for similar results. Megginson and Clutterback state, "mentoring is rapidly spreading outside the business arena. A remarkable diversity of schemes can be seen in schools and universities, among fledgling entrepreneurs, disadvantaged minorities, and even among recently released prisoners. Mentoring is so flexible an approach that it can help almost any group of people with difficult transitions to make" (1995, 19). In post-secondary education, difficult transitions are abundant. The move from one university to another, additional responsibilities in teaching and publishing, changes in pedagogical functions, and adapting to new methods and technologies are just some of the transitions students and educators must make on a regular basis.

Mentoring can aid in the initiation process of these endeavors. According to a 1986 article, "the benefits associated with mentoring in academia are similar to those in the business setting . ... From learning scientific knowledge and technical skills to learning the ropes of the system, the protégé can gain much from a mentor that will facilitate professional development" (Cronan-Hillix et al, 124). Examples of communication that create a mentoring environment include receiving special attention from a higher-ranking colleague, exchanging information about projects and issues, providing constructive criticism, sharing of ideas, and assisting one another in work-related tasks (Myers, 1998).

Whether the setting is corporate or academic, mentoring relationships are very much like other human relationships in a number of respects. Both parties usually have a genuine desire to understand the values and expectations of the other person, both parties
want to succeed, and both parties develop respect for one another. At the same time, mentoring relationships differ from personal ones because they are more like a business partnership. Ultimately, the goal of the mentoring relationship is the individuals’ and organization’s professional development. Johnston and McCormack write, “mentoring is a term used to convey the more formal relationships established to achieve career support, as well as those relationships which involve role modeling or various forms of information support and encouragement” (1997, 251). A mentor is like a trusted advisor who one turns to periodically for counsel in a career. Usually these partnerships are non-evaluative in nature, but do include a strong sense of sharing and challenging one another in the workplace or educational setting.

In addition, healthy mentoring relationships are evolutionary – similar to the setting in which they exist. The author of Organizational Behavior in Education indicates, “whereas the main concern of educational administration once was viewed as controlling the behavior of teachers, with planning and decision making closely held in the hands of the hierarchy, the emerging concept is focused on developing a vision that involves followers, inspires them, and motivates their efforts” (Owens, 218). Therefore, academia’s hierarchical perceptions have evolved to allow for mentoring relationships to exist. Owens (1998) attributes this change to two major trends in academic leadership: “growing recognition of and acceptance of the perception that the members of an organization constitute extremely valuable resources ... [and] a growing recognition of the relative ineffectiveness of command and coercion as forms of leadership, in contrast to the development of organizational environments that are motivating, caring, inclusionary, and empowering” (219).
Mentoring relationships mature with the changes present. The perceptions of both members of the relationship evolve as the recipient's performance ascends to new levels of professional competence under the mentor's guidance and support. In the post-secondary field, graduate students could be in the most need for a mentor's support and guidance. The reasons for this are numerous. One encounters a plethora of changes when starting a graduate program, from moving to a new university to adapting to course workloads and understanding departmental relationships. Most graduate students do not have a friend or advisor who works in the same capacity as a mentor (Waldeck et al, 1997). A mentor would be able to smooth the transitions while also encouraging professional development. According to Hill, Bahniuk, and Dobos (1989), mentored graduate students felt there was ample information sharing between mentor and protégé that resulted in more support and lower levels of communication apprehension.

In one (1996) study of graduate students who completed all degree requirements except the thesis or dissertation, problems with advisors and the absence of someone "to encourage and give good ideas" were noted by students as second only to the need to withdraw for financial reasons (Ad Hoc Panel on Graduate Attrition Advisory Committee, 30). To combat this attrition, the study recommended a stronger need for a "support system that faculty and peers provide, and in some programs, for some people, such support is never provided" (30). This research suggests a legitimate need for mentoring in graduate school.
Purpose and Justification

The purpose of this study is to analyze mentoring among graduate teaching assistants (GTAs). Graduate students, whether master's or doctoral candidates, benefit greatly from their academic experiences. However, graduate school is not limited to course work and research, but it also includes teaching experiences as graduate assistants. For this study, a GTA is defined as a student with graduate standing who works part-time on departmental duties in either instruction and/or research. In return for completing duties, the student receives tuition waivers and a stipend (Myers, 1998; UNLV Graduate Catalog, 1999).

Although GTAs are, in general, technically proficient in instruction and research matters, other factors can cause their assistantship to go awry for them, their students, and their supervisor. Therefore, another article reiterates, "helping [G]TAs become effective classroom managers is of urgent necessity. No [G]TA can be left on his or her own to sink or swim in the complex and changing demands of college teaching" (Luo, Bellows, and Grady, 2000, 374).

These factors arise out of a need for quality training and consultation with experienced GTAs. According to Shannon, Twale, and Moore, "in many instances, department chairs assign [G]TAs with no training or teaching experience to teach undergraduate classes," (440) and "when asked to make suggestions to improve training efforts, [G]TAs have consistently recommended mentorship opportunities" (1998, 445). Another article published the same year also rates mentoring as an effective training opportunity. Boyle and Boice (1998a) state, "graduate teaching assistants rate mentoring as the most effective form of training when compared to campus-wide seminars or
departmental training programs” (158). Mentoring was found to be extremely beneficial when it complemented the official training programs. This is because while most official training occurs at the beginning of the semester, the mentoring partnership is a training program that continues throughout the term. The intent of this investigation is to determine whether mentoring is providing continuous service to new GTAs adapting to their surroundings.

This study will be the only one of its kind, first examining trends of mentoring in academics, then determining the current status of graduate assistant relationships, and eventually discussing options for future research. This study hopes to assess mentoring communication in graduate school and better comprehend the effectiveness of current efforts to transition GTAs into their positions.

Several causative factors warrant the study of mentoring among graduate assistants. First and foremost according to Boyle and Boice (1998b), “mentoring may be the most important variable related to academic and career success for graduate students” (90). Past mentoring experiences in academia have focused on mentoring between faculty members, mentoring between faculty and students, and mentoring among minorities and women in academia. Mentoring between experienced and inexperienced GTAs in the communication field has not been studied.

In general, The Journal of Teacher Education reports, “few empirical research reports on mentoring in academic settings exist” (Goodwin et al, 334). Those studies that do exist are mostly retrospective in nature according to an early (1986) article on the subject: “Successful individuals [in academics] have been asked to recall and discuss significant relationships that helped promote their careers” (Cronan-Hillix, et al, 123).
Once researchers have found certain successful individuals, they report on those subjects that had mentors, and conclude that the mentors led to success. Since only mentors equate to success in many studies, Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, and Rouner write, “successful unmentored men and women have been ignored in the literature, along with other explanations for success” (1989, 358). It is important to study this organizational communication behavior in more detail without a retrospective stance.

Many studies (Boyle and Boice, 1998 a and b; Myers 1998; Conrad, Duren, and Haworth, 1998) suggest additional peer-mentoring research in their recommendations for future research. A very small amount of literature focuses on graduate teaching assistant mentoring. Specifically, Myers writes, “future studies should continue to explore the association among mentor-protégé relationships, peer relationships, and information-seeking behavior in the GTA domain” (70). Myers continues, “GTA peer relationships have not been examined closely” (70). There is great need for continued research.

In addition, a chapter from The Experience of Being in Graduate School: An Exploration reports:

The literature on master’s degree programs suffers from two limitations. One, there is almost no literature on how students experience their master’s programs, much less the effects of their experiences on students themselves. Two, the literature does not draw on students’ perspectives: It is anchored mostly in the voices of faculty and administrators. … Conspicuously missing are the voices of students and program graduates” (Conrad, Duren, and Haworth, 1998, 65).

This study seeks to voice the opinions of current graduate assistants.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies of collegiate mentoring have been of three types: 1) Studies involving mentoring between faculty members; 2) Studies focusing on mentoring between faculty members and their students; and 3) Mentoring studies between business professionals and college students. As a subtopic to the second area, mentoring that aids college-level minorities and women will be explored. Since the GTA assumes the role of faculty person and student, the review that follows will examine all those areas.

Mentoring Between Faculty Members

One of the first articles to explore this topic was Robert Blackburn and Susan Cameron’s 1981 article, “Sponsorship and Academic Career Success.” This article “introduces a number variables to further explore the role of sponsorship in academic career success” (370). By focusing on mentoring, or sponsorship, between younger faculty and experienced senior faculty, this study found that early collaboration with senior faculty significantly impacted the outcome of four measures: publication rate, grants received, collaboration among departmental members, and increased professional network (373).
Following Blackburn and Cameron's article, very little was published on this topic. Over a decade later, an article by Joan Montgomery Halford appeared in *Educational Leadership* (Feb. 1998, 33) titled, “Easing the Way for New Teachers.” This article encapsulates the ever-growing need and desire for mentoring in academics. Halford explains that “nearly 30 percent of teachers leave in the first five years . . . further, research indicates that the most talented new educators are often the most likely to leave” (Halford, 33). Due to low retention, schools and departments are employing new tactics to overcome the negative consequences. According to Halford, one of these new tactics is mentoring: “Creating a positive induction experience for new teachers is an essential component of this reform. At the core of such support efforts is the recognition that all teachers, particularly new teachers, are learners. In addition to learning how to effectively work with a variety of students, new teachers are in the throes of developing a professional identity and navigating a new school culture” (34).

Modeling an experienced faculty member at work, and having that person to turn to for help, can be an ideal situation for new teachers. It can be an important pedagogical relationship for both the mentor and protégé. These partnerships can be formed on an individual basis or a more formal one. Halford continues, “some schools and universities are establishing more formalized partnerships. Among these partnerships are collaborations that develop cadres of trained mentors to bolster beginning teachers” (34).

One publication, written by Deborah Borisoff and titled “Strategies for Effective Mentoring and for Being Effectively Mentored: A Focus on Ph.D.-Granting Private Research Institutions,” explicitly delineates the reasons for supporting a “formalized partnership” among college faculty: “The mentor can help the new hiree create a balance...
between teaching and research so that neither activity becomes so unwieldy that it would compromise effectiveness of either area" (1997, 15). While the pressure to publish among new faculty is great, the pressure among graduate assistants to perform well in classes is also intense. Graduate students must also effectively balance their professional tasks among research and teaching. Borisoff’s paper explains how a mentor can be beneficial throughout each phase of a new faculty’s responsibilities, from research to teaching to service-related endeavors. This paper simply describes the ways a mentor can help along the road to tenure.

One of the only empirical studies of mentoring among college faculty was recently published in the Journal of Teacher Education (Nov-Dec 1998, 334+). It was written by Laura Goodwin, Ellen Stevens, and G. Thomas Bellamy and titled “Mentoring Among Faculty in Schools, Colleges, and Departments of Education.” This study consisted of a questionnaire that was sent to faculty at 13 Colorado universities to determine their current mentoring practices: “A major theme [in this article] is the positive value respondents placed on mentoring, particularly mentoring focused on research and scholarship, teaching, and professional socialization” (Goodwin et al, 341). This study found that mentoring among faculty caused traditional faculty roles, including teaching, research, and service, to be enhanced. Due to the mentoring relationship, the new faculty member is “perpetuating traditional academic norms and values” (334) easily and with more confidence than a new faculty member without a mentor. The protégé was not the only one to benefit in this study; mentoring also proved advantageous for the mentor. Of significant value were the increases in the mentor’s scholarly activities and accomplishments, increases in confidence, and mutual support (340).
Lastly, organizational communication scholar Michael Kramer studied the behaviors and responsibilities of newcomers at length. Regardless of the situation, Kramer’s studies (1993, 1994) indicate that there is a genuine need for the senior members of a company to assist with welcoming new employees. Kramer (1994) writes, 

Organizations may need to develop programs which emphasize both peers, and particularly supervisors, of new and transferred employees play an important role in providing feedback and information needed to reduce uncertainty in new positions. Currently, peers and supervisors may surmise that it is the other’s responsibility to socialize new employees; as a result, it is possible that neither provides the necessary information (396).

All of these studies have indicated that mentoring among faculty members is a positive campaign for any department looking to strengthen ties among the staff and increase output. However, a critical review will note that most research lies in these senior/junior faculty mentoring relationships; no prior research has focused on peer mentoring between teaching assistants. A small amount of research exists on mentoring between faculty and graduate students. The next section will explore this topic.

Mentoring Between Faculty and Their Students

Jennifer Waldeck, Victoria Orrego, Timothy Plax, and Patricia Kearney examined the faculty and graduate student mentoring relationship in communication studies: “Graduate Student/Faculty Mentoring Relationships: Who Gets Mentored, How it Happens, and to What End.” This research was presented to the National Communication Association in 1997. According to the authors:
Successful student experiences in and beyond graduate school are frequently tied to mentoring relationships with faculty. Mentoring is an effective way for students to establish productive connections with professors. Without the guidance of a good mentor, the graduate student’s road to an advanced degree becomes unnecessarily anxious and difficult. ... Unlike assigned academic advisors who simply direct students’ course of study and other procedural matters, mentors go beyond by fulfilling other important functions for their protégés (Waldeck, et al, 3).

The paper continues by outlining these functions as providing invaluable information on department politics, increasing student publication productivity, developing professional skills, making contacts and gaining visibility (4). The authors surveyed 145 graduate students across various disciplines at 12 universities. Results indicated that “graduate students most frequently target middle-aged full professors as mentors” (14). In addition, “results indicated that students are more satisfied with both their working and personal relationships with their mentors than would be expected by chance” (20).

One other important piece of literature that reflects mentor relationships between graduate students and professors was published in 1986. Terry Cronan-Hillix, Leah Gensheimer, W.A. Cronan-Hillix, and William S. Davidson wrote “Students’ Views of Mentors in Psychology Graduate Training.” In this study, graduate students were asked about five topics: 1) whether or not they had a mentor; 2) about common characteristics of mentors; 3) the roles mentors played in their professional and social lives; 4) the qualities associated with good and poor mentors; and 5) their experiences with mentors or other faculty members (124). Interestingly, respondents were allowed to interpret the
word mentor as they pleased without any indication of a specific definition on the survey. Regardless, "of the 90 students who returned their questionnaires, 53% reported having a mentor" (Cronan-Hillix, 125), and the results indicated that "mentoring promotes productivity at early stages of professional development. Students with mentors demonstrated higher levels of productivity in research, publications, and conference papers than those without mentors" (127).

The other studies on mentoring between collegiate faculty and students focus primarily on relationships with undergraduates. One such study was "Professors as Models and Mentors for College Students" by Erkut and Mokros (1984). Related studies include "Are Mentor Relationships Helping Organizations? An Exploration of Developing Mentee-Mentor-Organizational Identifications Using Turning Point Analysis" by Bullis and Bach (1989), and Martin Gerstein’s (1985) article entitled, "Mentoring: An Age Old Practice in a Knowledge-Based Society."

More specifically, some articles focus on the advancement of undergraduate minorities and women in academics due to mentoring. The mentoring relationship is especially important for traditionally underrepresented students who may feel more isolated and a greater need for legitimacy. James Blackwell (1989) writes, "Diversity in academe is more and more a priority, yet it seems increasingly difficult to achieve" (8). He continues,

The mentoring process can be an effective strategy for remedying this problem. Mentoring is a process that can increase the retention of minority students in colleges and universities, a process through which larger numbers may be
graduated from colleges, enter and complete graduate training, be hired for
faculty positions, and be retained as contributing members of the professorate (8).

The development of a degree program, frequent communication, and mutual
respect can aid in the progress and retention of underrepresented students. However,
according to Moore (1982), since “minority group members and women may have
particular difficulties in being selected as protégés” (25), many universities have devised
special mentoring programs to work with these students. Examples of minority
mentoring emphasize the academic relationships that can occur. Elon College in North
Carolina has a specific mentoring program currently in place for helping African
American students with their transition to college. The program’s web site explains,
“mentors consist of Elon College faculty and staff. First year African American students
are encouraged to establish contacts as needed with any professional mentor. . . . The
primary role of the mentor is to provide support for their personal and intellectual
development” (www.elon.edu/minority-affairs/).

On the other coast, a program at San Jose State University matches faculty
members in the college with incoming underrepresented minority students (African
American, Latino, and Native American). However, “no student who requests mentoring
assistance is turned away”
(www.sjsu.edu/campus_climate/edeqcouncil/humarts/humfastaf/FMP.html).

The current president of the Ivy League school, Brown University, is an African
American woman named Ruth J. Simmons. President Simmons was recently profiled in
Brown’s Online Alumni Magazine. She stated, “I had very bad advice as a young faculty
member. It’s even fair to say that I had no advice. People talk a lot about mentoring
today, but I had no mentoring. I was the only African American faculty member in all of the humanities at the University of New Orleans when I started. People didn’t quite know what to do with me, and so they mostly kept their distance. I had no one say, ‘Here is the way an academic career works. This is what you have to do to get tenure. This is what you have to do in order to get published’” (Boucher, 2001). Mentoring may have helped Simmons in these endeavors.

In addition to minorities, “women remain greatly underrepresented in research universities,” according to Blackburn and Cameron’s 1981 article entitled “Sponsorship and Academic Career Success” (376). Therefore, women’s needs for validation within a department may be more acute as well. Mentoring can be a tool used to increase the number of women in academia. In regards to the gender bias, Waldeck et al. write, “the most logical explanation is that there are more male than female faculty at the senior rank” (22), but increasing a support network at the student level may impact the number of women going on to the faculty rank.

President Simmons surmised that being a woman in academia was even more difficult than being a minority: “Because the academy has long been influenced by powerful male voices, those voices shaped the academy. They even deliberately excluded women for a period of time” (Boucher, 2001). Because women have great challenges in academics, the communication support that mentoring could provide could assist women in overcoming these obstacles.

Ekrut and Mokros’s (1984) article, “Professors as Models and Mentors for College Students” specifically addressed the sex-related patterns in mentoring. Their results indicated that “female students neither gravitate toward nor avoid female role
models. They choose female faculty as models to the extent that women are available on campus. Men on the other hand, avoid female mentors. They prefer high status, powerful male models who can promote their educational or career goals" (399). This study also showed that more women than men were taking advantage of their mentor relationships and were pursuing additional ones.

Mentoring Between College Students and Professionals

Research on the college student/professional mentor relationship is a relatively new area. Tony Carter authored a short article entitled “Mentor Programs Belong in College, Too” that was published in The Journal of Career Planning and Employment (1994). This article examined the benefits of such a professional partnership: “When offered in college a mentor program provides students the opportunity to meet and talk with professionals in various career fields. This interactions allows students to benefit from the mentors’ insights and experiences and to use them in developing their own career directions” (Carter, 52). This partnership will allow students to develop personal relationships with a professional in their field of study: “The objective of a mentor program is not to force students into particular career tracks, but instead to give them valuable information about specific job positions as well as on a variety of career opportunities” (52).

Another article on this subject was written by Andrew Miller (1999), who is head of education at Focus Central London Training and Enterprise Council in London. He wrote, “Business Mentoring in Schools: Does it Raise Attainment?” Rather than focusing on the dynamics of the mentoring relationship, and who was mentored and to
what extent, this study focused on the outcomes of the relationship. Miller was most notably interested in whether or not the mentoring relationship raised student achievement. His study showed that "mentoring can have a significant impact on students' motivations to succeed at school, and ultimately, a small, but positive impact on their performance in school" (8).

Two southwestern universities have formalized student/professional mentoring programs in place. The University of Arizona offers the Freshman Year Center Mentor program for all undecided freshmen. These freshmen are encouraged to attend "Pizza with a Professional" sessions with their mentor twice each month. The sessions are complete with specific topics and information from business professionals in the community. Examples of the biweekly topics include "I'm a People Person: Majors to Prepare You for Careers Working with People" and "Make Me a Star: Majors to Prepare You for Careers in Radio, TV, and PR" (http://w3.arizona.edu/~fyc/mentor.htm)

At the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the Hotel Administration College sponsors the largest student/professional mentor program. For one academic year, students are paired with a mentor whose work is related to the student's academic pursuits. For example, a student majoring in restaurant management could be paired with a catering manager or a food and beverage director at a local hotel. Currently, the Hotel Administration College at UNLV has 365 mentors paired with students (www.unlv.edu/Tourism/mentor.html).
Summary of Literature and Questions for Research

Mentoring is a form of communication that has existed for centuries, but more recently it has gained notoriety in business and academia. Mentor pairs are being matched on a formal and informal basis to promote stronger cohesion and greater solidarity between employees in a variety of institutions. The literature indicates that long-term faculty members have been matched with newcomer faculty, faculty members have been matched with students, and finally, students have been matched with professionals. Although the majority of these studies verify a great need for mentor pairs, few focus specifically on graduate students, a component indicative of a need for a study. The preceding argument leads to the following research question: What is the status of informal, peer mentoring among graduate teaching assistants at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas?

There are approximately 200 graduate assistants at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, and it would be advantageous to sample this entire population. In addition to the mentoring variables, basic demographic information, such as gender and length of time one's current position is necessary to complete this analysis. This current study of graduate teaching assistants will examine how mentoring relates to gender, marriage, race, and program differences.

As previously stated, Blackburn and Cameron (1981) and Ekrut and Mokrus (1984), determined that female students did not find as many mentoring opportunities as their male counterparts. Ekrut and Mokrus also discovered a sex bias in choice of role models, “in terms of men avoiding female role models” (412). A current study needs to reevaluate these positions. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study emerges:
H1: Men and women will differ in terms of the mentoring variables.

Ekrut and Mokrus (1984) also determined that “female students who choose female [role] models look for the exemplification of a career woman’s total lifestyle. …The female professors’ family status is better known” (413). Family and marital status may play a role in mentoring, but has not been thoroughly explored in prior research. This study will attempt to assess marital status.

H2: Married and non-married GTA’s will differ in terms of the mentoring variables.

To reiterate a different point, Moore (1982) indicated, “minority group members and women may have particular difficulties in being selected as protégés” (25). Again, a current study is needed to evaluate this stance. The preceding argument leads to the following hypothesis:

H3: There will be a difference between Blacks, Whites, and other races and the mentoring variables.

Lastly, the length of time within the department or school may play a role with the individual success of mentoring. In general, the longer an individual holds a position, the more likely he or she would be comfortable with that position and their environment. Authors Kabfleisch and Davies explored this topic in further detail in their article, “An Interpersonal Model for Participation in Mentoring Relationships” (1993). The authors surveyed 177 faculty members at a large western university. The average career length for the respondents was between 16 and 25 years, and “these respondents were able to identify an average of three mentors and five protégés from relationships they had been involved with over the course of their careers” (406). It seems likely that the longer an
individual holds a position, the more mentoring relationships in which they partake. This study will attempt to analyze time as a variable.

H4: There is a significant relationship between the length of time spent as a graduate assistant and the mentoring variables.

In 1989, Susan Kogler Hill, Margaret Bahniuk, Jean Dobos, and Donna Rouner published "Mentoring and Other Communication Support in the Academic Setting." In this article, they further developed a method for analyzing mentoring in academia called the "Mentoring and Communication Support Scale." Respondents were asked to complete their 15-item questionnaire using a Likert scale ranging from (5) strongly agree to (1) strongly disagree. The scale is used to determine and support the "notion of informal, multidimensional communication support behavior (mentoring) operating within academic organizations" (Hill, et al, 365). The Mentoring and Communication Support Scale examines various types of informal mentoring behavior. This survey has been featured in Rubin, Palmgreen, and Sypher's book, Communication Research Measures, as well as several other scholarly articles since its publication in 1989. It is a self-administered questionnaire that can be adapted to other forms of mentoring research.

This survey is beneficial for this study because "although most previous research has investigated only paternalistic mentoring, the Mentoring and Communication Support Scale allows for the delineation of the various types of mentoring and communication support behaviors. The instrument has the potential for enriching studies involving minorities and women" (Rubin et al, 231). Because of these factors, this survey best meets the needs of the research questions. A few adjustments to survey questions will make this survey applicable for the needs of this study. It will focus on various types of
work and social communication, such as connectedness, coaching, sharing confidences, working jointly on projects, receiving special attention, and exchanging ideas. Myers (1998) writes,

Collegial-task relationships center around an exchange of work-related ideas, information, and criticisms, whereas collegial-social relationships focus on the exchange of personal, intimate information. Typical collegial-task communication behaviors include working on joint projects with colleagues, assisting each other in accomplishing work-related tasks, and engaging in constructive criticism. Typical collegial-social communication behaviors include sharing personal problems, exchanging confidences, and defending each other (58).

The survey to follow will include both collegial-task communication questions and collegial-social communication questions since both are representative of mentoring behaviors.
CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

This study focuses on graduate teaching assistants in master’s degree programs. In light of the compelling need for a study of this sort, surveys were distributed to all current graduate teaching assistants at UNLV, a large, southwestern university. Nearly 200 students received a self-administered survey and return envelope to determine the question at hand: How do graduate assistants interpret and evaluate their experiences? A series of questions were formulated to characterize the development of academic, personal, and professional skills at the graduate level. Results of the study will reflect the current climate for graduate assistants, what Owens (1998) calls, “the perceptions of participants of factors in the organizational environment that are likely to reflect the culture of the organization” (183).

This study used a respondent self-administered, five-page survey based on Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, and Rouner’s Mentoring and Communication Support Scale. Overall, the survey had two parts. The first 22 questions asked respondents their opinions of their role as a graduate teaching assistant and a member of the graduate student community at UNLV. Respondents were instructed to circle the number which best described how much or how little they agreed with an item. Responses to these questions ranged from
strongly agree to strongly disagree. For each question, the coding was 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree.

Subjects used this scale to indicate their feelings toward the following items: (1) One of my graduate assistant peers frequently devotes extra time and consideration to me (DEVOTES). (2) One of my graduate assistant peers has shown an interest in me and my future career (INTEREST). (3) I receive special attention from one of my graduate assistant peers (ATTENTIO). (4) I have had an associate teach me the informal rules of my organization (INFORMAL). (5) I have been coached about office politics (OFFPOLIT). (6) My associates and I are friends as well as coworkers (FRIENDS). (7) My associates and I share confidences with each other (SHARING). (8) My associates and I frequently exchange constructive criticism (CRITICIS). (9) My associates and I assist each other in accomplishing assigned tasks (ASSIST). (10) My associates and I frequently exchange compliments and positive evaluations (COMPLIME). (11) I work jointly on major projects or cases with my associates that directly affect my teaching (WORKJOIN). (12) I frequently exchange ideas with my associates on teaching or research (IDEAS). (13) The teaching experience has been good for me (GOODEXP). (14) I had past course materials available to help me prepare for my class materials (PASTMAT). (15) I feel connected to UNLV (UNLVCONN). (16) I feel connected to my program (PROGCONN). (17) I feel connected to the other GTA's in my program (GTACONN). (18) I have felt like dropping out of the program (DROPOUT). (19) I plan on staying active as an alumnus of this university (ALUMACTV). (20) I would recommend this program to another student (RECOMEND). (21) I enjoy being a graduate teaching assistant (ENJOYGTA). (22) I am satisfied being a graduate teaching
assistant (SATISFID). One question (18) was reversed coded as a validity check. These items were combined into one mentoring variable (MENTOR) using the SPSS compute function. The MENTOR scale was assessed for reliability using the SPSS reliability function that computes Alpha.

The second part of the survey pertained to demographic information including gender, citizenship, marital status, age, race, length of time as a graduate assistant, and department on campus: (23) Gender; males were coded as one, and females were coded as two. (24) Student Status; U.S. citizens were coded as one, and international students were coded as two. (25) Marital status was categorized with a number: 1 = married, 2 = single, and 3 = divorced/separated/widowed. Age was categorized into eight groups with a number: 1 = 19-24 years old, 2 = 25-30 years old, 3 = 31-36 years old, 4 = 37-42 years old, 5 = 43-48 years old, 6 = 49-54 years old, 7 = 55-60 years old, and 8 = greater than 60 years old. Race was categorized into six groups with a number: 1 = White/Caucasian, 2 = Black/African American, 3 = Latino/Chicano/Hispanic, 4 = Asian/Pacific Islander, 5 = Native American, and 6 = Other.

Question number 28 asked respondents to indicate the number of semesters, including summers, that they had been a graduate assistant. The number of semesters was entered as such. The final question, number 29, asked participants to list the school or department in which he or she is a graduate assistant. The schools and departments were not coded with numbers; these were nominal data.

Collectively, there were 29 questions: 22 mentoring-related variables coded on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree), and seven demographic items. The survey was approved on April 30,
2001, by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board through the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects. The survey was distributed to University of Nevada, Las Vegas graduate teaching assistants in all academic programs. In order to ensure anonymity, the first page of the survey was an informed consent letter that did not require a signature. After the respondents read the informed consent letter, participants could choose to complete the survey and return it anonymously through campus mail. See Appendix I for a copy of the survey.

Data Analysis

The data collected from this survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software program. Data was statistically described using t test, ANOVA, and correlation. In general, tests of statistical significance allow the researcher to rule out chance as the probable explanation of results. Alpha was set at .05. This means, "if observed results could have been found by chance no more than five times out of 100, researchers will claim to have found real (non random) differences" (Reinard, 308).

The first hypothesis (H1) will be analyzed using a t test because the dependent variable is interval (mentoring items) and the independent variable is nominal (gender). A t test assesses the difference between the means of two groups, such as men and women in this case. The second and fourth hypotheses will also use the t test to determine significance. In the second hypothesis (H2), the dependent variable is interval (mentoring items) and the dependent variable is nominal (marriage). Alpha would also be set at .05 for these two tests.
The third hypothesis (H3) will be analyzed using ANOVA because it involves two or more groups represented in a single independent variable (blacks, whites, and other races) for a single interval or ratio dependent variable (mentoring items). The t-test is inappropriate for comparing these means because there are more than two groups. This is a one-way analysis of variance with three or more levels for the independent variable. Tukey’s HSD Post Hoc test would be appropriate to run because it “is used to make all possible comparisons of means, when the means are taken two at a time” (Reinard, 326). Testing for significance will again be with alpha at .05. (The standard $p < .05$ for rejection or acceptance of the hypothesis.) The calculated ANOVA yields an F value, and a significant F value denotes that a difference exists among the groups. It does not, however, indicate which specific groups differ from one another.

Finally, “correlations show the degree to which variables ‘coincide’ with each other by the use of formulae that show the amount of coincidence” (Reinard, 389). In other words, correlation measures the degree of interrelationship for two or more variables. Unlike ANOVA and t test, which were previously explained, questions of correlation are not based in difference, but rather in matters of association or degree. This is appropriate for the fourth hypothesis (H4), which studies the length of time in position (ratio data) and mentoring variables (interval data). When analyzing the data, the correlation coefficient could range from 1.00 to −1.00. A 1.00 indicates a perfect correlation; a zero would be interpreted as no correlation, and −1.00 is a perfect negative correlation. The coefficient determined in this study would indicate whether or not there is a relationship between the length of time as a graduate assistant and the mentoring variables analyzed. The statistics do not explain how these variables effect one another.
just that there is some correlation. It will be interesting to see if this is the case, especially since “graduate students need effective mentors” (Waldeck et al., 1997, 25).

Results

A total of 52 usable surveys were collected (N=52) from the 177 surveys distributed for an almost 30% return rate. Although presumably small, the number of collected surveys was comparable to other research that analyzed graduate students in a university setting. Waldeck, Orrego, Plax, and Kearney suggested that low response rates of mentored graduate students were problematic in prior research (1997, 7). Anticipating a low return rate, those authors distributed 500 questionnaires to graduate students; 122 were returned, and only 49 were usable (7). Another example of a small sample size in this type of research included Boyle and Boice’s 1998 article on the enculturation process in graduate school. They interviewed only sixty-six students and faculty from a large, public research university for that study (1998b, 88). Two other examples of small sample size include Bullis and Bach, N=26, (1989) and Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, and Davidsdson, N=90 (1986). Therefore, 52 useable surveys in this study seem adequate. However, as Riniolo and Schmidt (2000) indicate, there should not be “overconfidence in the stability of results obtained from small samples” (144). Riniolo and Schmidt suggest replication studies to determine reliability (145). This item will be referred to in the areas for future research, chapter four.

The 52 respondents consisted of graduate teaching assistants who ranged in age from 19 to 60. No respondents reported an age more than 60 years old. Despite the range of ages, 72.5% of the sample was less than 30. In addition, 80% of respondents
were White, 6% Latino, 4% Asian, 2% Black, and the last 8% reported "other" for race. Ninety percent were United States citizens. In terms of gender, 51% of the sample was male; 49% was female. The largest percentage of the sample was single: 58.8% reported being single, 33.3% were married, and 7.8% were divorced, separated, or widowed. The length of time spent as a graduate teaching assistant ranged from one semester to ten semesters. Seventy percent of the respondents had been teaching for four semesters or less. Respondents were from a variety of programs across campus, including Anthropology, Biological Sciences, Civil Engineering, Communication Studies, Criminal Justice, English, Finance, Geoscience, History, Hotel, Kinesiology, Mathematics, Physical Therapy, Physics, Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Theater.

Twenty-four surveys were coded as humanities programs; 27 were coded as non-humanities programs, and one was left blank. Due to the anonymity guaranteed by the researcher, respondents were not required to identify themselves.

Twenty-two mentoring variables were defined in this study, one for each non-demographic question asked on the survey. Variables ranged from receiving special attention from a graduate assistant peer to feeling connected to the graduate program and the university. A frequency table was run for each variable to determine accuracy. No problems were discovered. Most answers had 52 valid responses; however, 12 questions were missing at least one response.

Fifty-two respondents judged the 22 mentoring questions on a scale from one to five; again, a score of one was strongly agree, and five was strongly disagree. These items were added together using the SPSS compute function and one variable coded MENTOR was created. Had a respondent circled a one for each answer, meaning they
strongly agreed with each statement, a score of 22 was possible. On the other end of the spectrum, 110 would have been the highest potential score for a respondent who strongly disagreed with each statement. The SPSS descriptive statistics for MENTOR indicate that the scores ranged from 29 to 97, with an average response of 59.02. Therefore, the respondents generally agreed or were neutral to all of the questions posed.

Also according to the SPSS descriptive statistics function, survey participants were most favorable toward question 13 (GOODEXP); "the teaching experience has been good for me." This question had a mean response of 1.72, indicating a fairly strong agreeableness ($sd = 0.86$). Participants were least favorable toward question 11 (WORKJOIN); "I work jointly on major projects or cases with my associates that directly affect my teaching." This question elicited a mean response of 3.34 ($sd = 1.35$). Closely following that question for an unfavorable response was survey question 19 (ALUMACTV), "I plan on staying active as an alumnus of this university." The mean response for that question was 3.16 ($sd = 1.17$). Table 1 outlines the average response for each question.
Table 1  Descriptive Statistics for Each Variable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEVOTES</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTEREST</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTENTIO</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFORMAL</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFFPOLIT</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRIENDS</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARING</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRITICIS</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.35</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSIST</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPLIME</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKJOIN</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEAS</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOODEXP</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASTMAT</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.29</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNLVCONN</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PROGCONN</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.52</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTACONN</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DROPOUT</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALUMACTV</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RECOMEND</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENJOYGTA</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SATISFID</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scale:
1 = Strongly Agree    5 = Strongly Disagree
The first hypothesis (H1) was analyzed using a \( t \) test to determine statistical significance between men and women and the mentoring variables. The \( t \) tests revealed that male and female graduate teaching assistants perceived five mentoring variables as different due to a \( p < .05 \): questions numbered five (OFFPOLIT), 13 (GOODEXP), 14 (PASTMAT), 15 (UNLVCONN), and 18 (DROPOUT). See Table 2.

Question number five (OFFPOLIT) asked respondents whether they had been coached on office politics. Men ranked that question 2.6, leaning toward agree, and women ranked that question 3.58, clearly leaning toward disagree; equal variances assumed, \( t = -2.745, df = 47, p < .05 \). Question number 13 (GOODEXP) asked if the teaching experience had been good for the respondent. Both men and women agreed it had been a good experience, with a slight, but significant variation. Men ranked that answer 1.48 and women 1.96; \( t = -2.041, df = 48, p < .05 \). Question 14 (PASTMAT) probed respondents to determine whether they had past course materials available to help prepare for their own class materials. Again, men responded more favorably toward this question with an average response of 1.92 versus women's mean of 2.64; \( t = -2.111, df = 47, p < .05 \). The fifteenth question (UNLVCONN) asked respondents if they felt connected to UNLV. Although neither group felt extremely connected, averaging "neither" on this question, men ranked their connectedness to the university at 2.38 and women at 3.63; \( t = -3.399, df = 48, p < .05 \). Lastly, the \( t \) test showed statistical significance between male and female respondents on question number 18 (DROPOUT). Men responded to this question about dropping out of the program with a mean score of 2.16. Women were less likely to be as favorable, with an average response of 3.24 for that question; \( t = -2.647, df = 48, p < .05 \).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>OFFPOLIT</strong> (coached on office politics)</td>
<td>x=2.60</td>
<td>x=3.58</td>
<td>t=-2.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td>df=47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOODEXP</strong> (teaching experience has been good)</td>
<td>x=1.48</td>
<td>x=1.96</td>
<td>t=-2.041</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>df=48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PASTMAT</strong> (past course materials available)</td>
<td>x=1.92</td>
<td>x=2.64</td>
<td>t=-2.111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>df=47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>UNLVCONN</strong> (feel connected to UNLV)</td>
<td>x=2.38</td>
<td>x=3.63</td>
<td>t=-3.399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=26</td>
<td>n=24</td>
<td>df=48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DROPOUT</strong> (have felt like dropping out)</td>
<td>x=2.16</td>
<td>x=3.24</td>
<td>t=-2.647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>n=25</td>
<td>df=48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Scale:**
1 = Strongly Agree    5 = Strongly Disagree
To examine differences in programs, when a humanities filter was put on the data to flush out respondents not involved in humanities programs on campus, two more questions confirmed a statistical difference between male and female perceptions of the variables. In addition to the questions aforementioned, questions 21 and 22 had a difference between men and women’s responses in humanities programs. Question 21 (ENJOYGTA) asked if the respondent enjoyed being a graduate teaching assistant. Men in humanities programs strongly agreed with that statement; mean score was 1.29. However, women only slightly agreed with a mean score of 2.35; \( t = -2.415, \text{df} = 22, p < .05 \). Question 22 (SATISFID) showed similar results. Men were more often satisfied (mean = 1.57) than women (mean = 2.41) being a GTA in a humanities program; \( t = -1.971, \text{df} = 22, p < .05 \).

A closer analysis of the humanities and non-humanities programs reveals an interesting discovery between males’ and females’ perception of their enjoyment of their GTA positions. As already reported, men in humanities programs more often enjoyed their positions slightly more than their female counterparts. However, in non-humanities programs, it was the women who ranked this question higher. Women in non-humanities programs had a mean score of 1.88 for question 21 (ENJOYGTA), and men’s mean score was 2.0.

Hypothesis two examined married versus single graduate teaching assistants. Married respondents made up 33.3% (\( N = 17 \)), single respondents made up 58.8% (\( N = 30 \)), and divorced, separated, or widowed (d/s/w) respondents made up 7.8% of the group (\( N = 4 \)). The d/s/w group was combined with single respondents for a total of 34 in the group. A \( t \) test was run for these two groups against each of the mentoring variables.
Hypothesis two (H2) was not supported because only one variable was significant: question 21 (ENJOYGTA), "I enjoy being a graduate teaching assistant," $t = 2.178$, df = 49, $p = .034$. Single and d/s/w respondents answered more favorably to that question with a mean of 1.76 and married respondents mean was 2.47. One other variable approached significance, question two (INTEREST), "One of my graduate assistant peers has shown an interest in me and my future career," $t = -2.015$, df = 48, $p = .05$. Married respondents answered more favorably to that question; the mean for married respondents was 1.88 and single and d/s/w was 2.64.

As previously stated, the third hypothesis (H3) was to be analyzed using ANOVA because it involved two or more groups represented in a single independent variable (blacks, whites, and other races) for a single dependent variable (mentoring items). However, post hoc tests cannot be performed because at least one of the race groups had fewer than two cases. Therefore, ANOVA is inappropriate for hypothesis two. Instead, two groups were created out of the races; white respondents ($N = 40$ or 80%) and non-white respondents ($N = 10$ or 20%), and a $t$ test was run. Absolutely no areas were deemed significant in this analysis. That means that whites and non-whites did not respond very differently to any question posed. For example, the mean score for whites to question three (ATTENTIO), "I receive special attention from one of my graduate assistant peers" was 2.74, and the mean response of non-whites was 2.70. With means that close to one another, no areas were significant or even approached significance.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) examined length of time as a graduate teaching assistant as a function of the mentoring variables. Correlations were run between time
and each question. Two questions were found to have significance: question one (DEVOTES), “One of my graduate assistant peers frequently devotes extra time and consideration to me” and question three (ATTENTIO), “I receive special attention from one of my graduate assistant peers.” There was a slight, positive interaction between the length of time spent as a graduate teaching assistant and a GTA peer devoting extra time and consideration: $r = .282, p < .05$. As the length of time as a GTA increases, extra attention and consideration increases. There was also a slight, positive interaction between the length of time spent as a graduate teaching assistant and receiving special attention from a peer: $r = .309, p < .05$. As the length of time as a GTA increases, there is an increase in receiving special attention from a peer. Table 3 outlines the results of Pearson’s Correlation using SPSS.
Table 3  Pearson's Correlation between DEVOTES and ATTENTIO and TIME

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>DEVOTES</th>
<th>ATTENTIO</th>
<th>TIME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DEVOTES</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTENTION</td>
<td>.839**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIME</td>
<td>.282*</td>
<td>.309*</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.047</td>
<td>.029</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
One area that was not studied as a hypothesis, but did emerge in the research was a comparison of communication studies GTAs and all other programs' GTAs. Out of the 22 questions posed on the survey, communication studies GTAs responded less favorably to 17 of the variables. What that indicates is the GTAs in other programs are more likely to make friends with their peers, feel more connected, share ideas and critiques, and recommend their program, among other things. An example includes question number eight (CRITICIS), "My associates and I frequently exchange constructive criticism." For this question, non-communication GTAs indicated a mean response of 2.18, whereas communication GTAs responded negatively with a mean of 4.33.

Communication studies GTAs are also less likely to feel connected to UNLV, their program, and the other GTAs in their program. Non-communication GTAs responded to question 15 (UNLVCONN), "I feel connected to UNLV," with a mean of 2.82, but again communication studies GTAs were much more negative with a mean response of 4.67, indicating almost no connectedness. These same GTAs were also likely to indicate feelings of dropping out of the program; DROPOUT mean was 4.33 for communication studies GTAs versus only 2.59 for non-communication GTAs.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and their peers. It also investigated the way GTAs feel about their program and their role within the university. Four hypotheses were developed based on the review of literature. The first hypothesis (H1) predicted that men and women would differ in terms of the mentoring variables. Hypothesis two (H2) predicted that married and non-married GTAs would differ in terms of the mentoring variables. The third hypothesis (H3) predicted a difference between Blacks, Whites, and other races and the mentoring variables. The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted a relationship between the length of time a GTA holds their position and the mentoring variables.

The first hypothesis was supported to a small extent. Some of the mentoring variables were found to be significant in each test. For example, men and women did differ on five questions, including the way they were taught office politics, whether or not they believed that being a GTA has been a good experience, whether or not past course materials were available to them, if they had a connection to their university, and if they have had feelings of dropping out of the program. In each situation, men had the more positive responses. The results of the study also showed that men in humanities programs were more likely to enjoy their experience and find it satisfying. The reasons
for this could stem from what President Simmons referred to in chapter two, "Because the academy has long been influenced by powerful male voices, those voices shaped the academy. They even deliberately excluded women for a period of time" (Boucher, 2001). Perhaps women still feel excluded when communicating with their peers. The perceived differences between men and women is an area that mentoring could help resolve in the future. Formalized mentoring pairs could open the lines of communication and create a more supportive environment for both genders.

In regards to the second hypothesis, single and divorced, separated, and widowed respondents were more likely to enjoy their experiences as a GTA. Speculation leads one to believe that married GTAs have responsibilities to a spouse outside of their schoolwork, therefore they are finding happiness elsewhere. Respondents without a significant other may look to their work and studies for personal pleasure. An interesting area of future research would be to study GTAs with children and those without children since these responsibilities may also create distance from school or program.

The third hypothesis was not supported. There is no relationship between race and the mentoring variables. This could be due to time and advancements for the minority communities; it could also be due to the increasing number of minorities involved in post-secondary education and the demands placed on institutions to increase the number of minority students and faculty.

The fourth hypothesis examined time as a factor of the mentoring variables. There is a small relationship between the length of time a GTA holds his or her position and the mentoring variables. When those variables were correlated, two items appeared as significant. First, as the length of time as a GTA increases, extra attention and
consideration increases. And second, as the length of time as a GTA increases, there is an increase in receiving special attention from a peer. These areas make sense, since it would be assumed that the longer one invests in a program, the more likelihood they have of garnering attention.

In this study, there were only three communication GTA respondents, so it is difficult to assume these three respondents represent the entire communication studies GTA population. However, this does provide for an area for future research. It would be interesting to see whether the three communication studies GTAs who responded are among the norm. Perhaps the strong feelings of dropping out, the lack of connectedness, and little interest in others represents all communications GTAs. As indicated in chapter three, the small sample size of the entire study creates an area of future research. This study should be conducted at several college campuses to get a larger amount of respondents. More programs can be studied in depth, including communication studies.

The overall results indicate that some peer mentoring exists between GTAs; however, there is much room for improvement. None of the questions had extremely favorable responses. The timing of the survey (i.e. surveys were distributed at the end of the school year) could have lead to a negative response since many students, professors, and GTAs are “burn-out” by the end of school year. Additional studies mid-way through the year could produce different responses.

Overall, GTA peer mentoring should be examined in more detail. Of extreme interest are the disparities between programs and men and women GTAs. A suggestion would be to implement a formal mentoring program for students who fall into these groups. The GTA coordinator in each program could be responsible for pairing seasoned
GTAs with newcomer GTAs with similar characteristics. That creates another area of future research: Implement a formal mentoring program for all GTAs, and then re-submit this survey to them. The before-and-after results may indicate more positive results for peer mentoring and the questions posed.

In conclusion, mentoring has evolved into academia, but this study indicates that many communication components, such as working jointly on projects, are only mediocre for many GTAs. Only a modest amount of peer mentoring is occurring on an informal basis among GTA peers. This thesis sought to address the current climate of peer mentoring communication among graduate teaching assistants. It appears women, GTAs with little time invested in the program, and communication studies GTAs are most at risk for a lack of mentoring. However, no GTAs are extremely satisfied, so future research is necessary. More mentoring programs and supportive communication are definitely needed to aid newcomers in their assimilation process to become graduate teaching assistants.
APPENDIX I

INSTRUMENT
SURVEY

This research is being conducted by Kim Nehls, a graduate student in the Hank Greenspun School of Communication at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project that studies communication behaviors among graduate teaching assistants. Your views are important to the success of the project.

It is expected that the survey process will take about ten minutes. During this time you will be questioned about your experience as a graduate teaching assistant at UNLV.

Your participation is voluntary. You have the option of agreeing not to take part in the project. If you elect to take part in the project you may quit the survey at any time you desire. There is no obligation on your part to finish the survey.

By participating, you will be adding to the general body of knowledge on this subject. The risks involved in this research are minimal. This survey is anonymous. Your name will not be revealed in the results of the study, and your answers will be kept completely confidential. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in an undisclosed location for at least three years after the completion of the study. You will not be compensated in any way for your participation.

The student sponsors this research. The student is undertaking this research for her thesis. The results of the survey will become public information. All data will be reported in group-form only for research purposes. The benefit of the study will be that the results may help departments on campus have a better understanding of their GTA’s and how to serve their needs.

Kim Nehls can be reached at 240-7963 or UNLVkimmy@aol.com. Her faculty supervisor is Professor Thomas Burkholder. His number is 895-4376. This informed consent document is part of UNLV’s procedures for research involving human subjects. The Office of Sponsored Programs at UNLV administers these guidelines. The phone number for the Office of Sponsored Programs is 895-2794.

Again, your participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw from participation at any time. By filling out the attached questionnaire, you are acknowledging your understanding of the information provided and agree to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Nehls
Master of Arts student
Survey Questions

Below, I would like to focus on some specific activities in which you may have participated. For the following situations, indicate whether or not you agree that you have engaged in the activities and what your perception is. Circle the number which best describes your feelings.

1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

1. One of my graduate assistant peers frequently devotes extra time and consideration to me.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

2. One of my graduate assistant peers has shown an interest in me and my future career.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

3. I receive special attention from one of my graduate assistant peers.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

4. I have had an associate teach me the informal rules of my organization.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

5. I have been coached about office politics.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

6. My associates and I are friends as well as coworkers.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

7. My associates and I share confidences with each other.
   
   1  2  3  4  5

8. My associates and I frequently exchange constructive criticism.
   
   1  2  3  4  5
1 = Strongly Agree
2 = Agree
3 = Neither
4 = Disagree
5 = Strongly Disagree

9. My associates and I assist each other in accomplishing assigned tasks.
   1  2  3  4  5

10. My associates and I frequently exchange compliments and positive evaluations.
   1  2  3  4  5

11. I work jointly on major projects or cases with my associates that directly affect my teaching.
   1  2  3  4  5

12. I frequently exchange ideas with my associates on teaching or research.
   1  2  3  4  5

13. The teaching experience has been good for me.
   1  2  3  4  5

14. I had past course materials available to help me prepare for my class materials.
   1  2  3  4  5

15. I feel connected to UNLV.
   1  2  3  4  5

16. I feel connected to my program.
   1  2  3  4  5

17. I feel connected to the other GTAs in my program.
   1  2  3  4  5

18. I have felt like dropping out of the program.
   1  2  3  4  5
1 = Strongly Agree  
2 = Agree  
3 = Neither  
4 = Disagree  
5 = Strongly Disagree  

19. I plan on staying active as an alumnus of this university.  
1 2 3 4 5  

20. I would recommend this program to another student.  
1 2 3 4 5  

21. I enjoy being a graduate teaching assistant.  
1 2 3 4 5  

22. I am satisfied being a graduate teaching assistant.  
1 2 3 4 5  

Demographic Information  

Gender:  
_____ Male  
_____ Female  

Student Status:  
_____ U.S. citizen  
_____ International student  

Marital Status:  
_____ Married  
_____ Single  
_____ Divorced/Separated/Widowed  

Age:  
_____ 19-24  
_____ 25-30  
_____ 31-36  
_____ 37-42  
_____ 43-48  
_____ 49-54  
_____ 55-60  
_____ 60+  

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Race:

_____ White, Caucasian
_____ Black, African American
_____ Latino, Chicano, Hispanic
_____ Asian, Pacific Islander
_____ Native American
_____ Other

How many semesters, including summers have you been a graduate assistant?

__________

School or department in which you are a graduate assistant:

____________________________

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Please return this survey in the enclosed envelope to:
Kim Nehls
UNLV Campus Mail 5007
APPENDIX II

HUMAN SUBJECTS PROTOCOL
DATE: May 3, 2001

TO: Kimberly Nehls
Communications
M/S 5007

FROM: Dr. Fred Preston, Chair
UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board

RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol Entitled:
"Status of Informal Peer Mentoring Among GTSs"
(Reviewed by Dr. Terry Miethe, UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences IRB)

OPRS# 381s0401-027

This memorandum is official notification that the protocol for the project referenced above has been reviewed by the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects and has been determined as having met the criteria for exemption from full review by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board. In compliance with this determination of exemption from full review, this protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of this notification and work on the project may proceed.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond a year from the date of this notification, it will be necessary to request an extension.

If you have any questions or require assistance, please contact the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 895-2794.

cc: OPRS File
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VITA

Graduate College
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Kimberly Kay Nehls

Local Address:
9404 Water Flow Court
Las Vegas, Nevada 89134

Degrees:
Bachelor of Arts, Political Science and Speech Communication, 1998
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Special Honors and Awards:
Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society, 2001
Lambda Pi Eta Communication Honor Society, 2000

Thesis Title: An Examination of Mentoring Among Graduate Teaching Assistants

Thesis Examination Committee:
Chairperson, Dr. Thomas Burkholder, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. David Henry, Ph. D.
Committee Member, Dr. Lawrence Mullen, Ph. D.
Graduate Faculty Representative, Dr. John Bowen, Ph. D.