

Teaching Orientation for AIs

Workshops, Microteaching, and Peer Observation

Chris Meyer/IU



Each year, orientation activities provided by departments and campus offices introduce Associate Instructors to basic teaching expectations and classroom management strategies as well as to the resource people, policies, procedures, and degree requirements. Each department typically addresses the unique instructional needs posed by its discipline. For example, in science departments, lab instruction orientation also includes laboratory safety and waste disposal training. And in foreign language departments, AIs receive hands-on training in language enhancement technologies. Some orientation sessions include experienced AIs and faculty as panelists to provide first-hand perspectives on teaching in the department. Campus offices which often participate in departmental AI orientations include:

- Campus Instructional Consulting
- Campus Writing Program
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- Division of Student Affairs
- Office of Student Ethics
- Teaching and Learning Technologies Center
- Teaching Resources Center

Departmental orientations, which vary in length from less than one day to over a week, usually are conducted during the week before classes begin in late August since most new Associate Instructors are also new graduate students. However, departments which delay the graduate teaching requirement until the second or third year, such as the Department of Sociology, may conduct their orientations during the prior spring and summer. Numerous departments also offer semester-long pedagogy courses (see page 22).

MAKING DEPARTMENTAL TEACHING VISIBLE FOR NEW AIs

IU departments incorporate a variety of observation and mentoring strategies into departmental teaching orientations.

Observation of other AIs – Peer observation, often a requirement in pedagogy courses, is a low-stress mechanism for AIs to receive feedback and to reflect upon their teaching by observing others. Peer observations can be part of a formal mentoring program pairing new AIs with experienced AIs, such as the Department of Communication and Culture AI mentoring program which was highlighted in the 2007 AI brochure.

Observation of Faculty – Often a requirement in pedagogy courses, focused observation of faculty teaching strategies can help new AIs reflect upon their own teaching.

Associate Instructor Coordinators and Trainers – These faculty provide instructional guidance to graduate students teaching sections of large courses; AI coordinators are particularly common in language departments as language coordinators.

Course Preparatory Sessions – Some departments devote a substantial portion of orientation week to preparing graduate students to teach a particular, multi-section course. These preparatory sessions may continue through the semester to provide ongoing instructional support for a particular course.

An Archive of Course Resources – Teaching materials, compiled from departmental undergraduate courses over many semesters, may be kept in a common space (physical or electronic) so that graduate students can examine samples of syllabi, assignments, student work, and reflections from the instructor.

THE CAMPUS CLIMATE WORKSHOP FOR ASSOCIATE INSTRUCTORS

This campuswide workshop, held during orientation week, helps new AIs work effectively with undergraduate students from diverse backgrounds and learning styles. Most departments require their new AIs to participate in the workshop, which was recommended by the Bloomington Faculty Council in 1991 and is sponsored by the Office of Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculties. Over 400 new AIs from nearly every department participated in the August 2007 Campus Climate Workshop.

MICROTEACHING

In microteaching, new Associate Instructors practice teaching a disciplinary concept to an audience of graduate student peers and faculty mentors. As highlighted in the 2007 AI brochure, new AIs in French and Italian present their lessons to undergraduates who have registered for first-year courses. Microteaching opportunities may be a component of an orientation program, a pedagogy course, or a stand-alone AI development opportunity. Each 5- to 10-minute lesson incorporates interactive teaching strategies and disciplinary content at the 100- to 200-level. The observers follow up each lesson with feedback to the presenting AI about organization, communication skills, and incorporation of active learning strategies.

Each microteaching lesson may be videotaped, as occurs in both the Department of Economics and the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, allowing for multiple opportunities for feedback to the AI. In addition to the feedback received from the group of peer observers, the AI can review the tape individually or with a faculty member or instructional consultant. The videotape can then become part of the AI's teaching portfolio as evidence of instructional skill and development.

- In 2006–2007, 13 departments reported offering microteaching opportunities for their new AIs.
- Campus Instructional Consulting collaborated with six of those departments to provide microteaching workshops to almost new 140 new AIs.

THE DEPARTMENT OF STUDIO ARTS

MICROTEACHING PROJECTS

Studio MFAs take part in a microteaching project as part of their pedagogical training. In an early class discussion, class members are asked to determine what constitutes “teaching art.” This conversation helps locate various levels of learning that are each essential to art making, from knowledge about principles and techniques, to the analysis of the effectiveness of their application, to making critical judgments about one’s creative efforts.

In a second discussion in small groups, class members identify learning objectives for an introductory level course. Each group then places their objectives along the taxonomy as presented by Benjamin Bloom: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation. These graduate students then choose a microteaching topic whose educational goals align with the categories in the latter half of Bloom’s taxonomy.

Before the actual lesson presentation day, the class members evaluate each other’s microteaching outlines. Considered is how effectively abstract concepts are made concrete through the use of analogies. Because class members come from a variety of studio disciplines, they are an audience for each other that uses different terminology, materials and techniques to approach similar principles.

In one effective microteaching lesson about selective editing, one presenter began with the analogy of silhouetted forms as seen in a child’s darkened bedroom; ambiguity feeds the child’s imagination, and the forms become frightening. Likewise, the use of selective editing can create greater drama than would drawing everything. Reflecting on his microteaching experience, graduate painting student Joseph Holsapple stated, “The microteaching project was most useful in terms of identifying the ‘why’ in any given teaching experience. The question is not only ‘What do you want your students to learn?’ but also ‘Why do you want them to learn it?’”

– Martha MacLeish, Assistant Professor, Department of Studio Arts

THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC THEORY JACOBS SCHOOL OF MUSIC

GENERAL TRAINING SESSIONS FOR ASSOCIATE INSTRUCTORS

The Department of Music Theory employs approximately 40 Als. They work mainly in our undergraduate sequences in Music Theory and Literature and Musical Skills (ear training and sightsinging), as well as Rudiments of Music and three graduate review courses. Most of our Als are responsible for teaching two drill sections of one course under the supervision of the course instructor. The Als who serve as skills instructors are the instructor of record for the Rudiments and Musical Skills courses. Loosely supervised by a faculty coordinator, they have substantial autonomy in implementing a departmental curriculum.

A key instructional challenge for our Als is to make the content relevant enough that students will make success a priority. Also, our Als range in experience from new master's students, often just out of their own undergraduate degrees, to third-year doctoral students in their fifth year of graduate study. And many Als, though their own skills in music theory are very strong, have had no formal teacher training. While the department offers a Teaching of Music Theory course, the course is not required, and Als often do not take it until their second or third year of study.

To address these instructional challenges, the Department of Music Theory provides 7.5 hours of general training sessions each year, in addition to weekly course staff meetings. In these general training sessions, a 90-minute general orientation on the Friday before the fall semester focuses on policies and operating procedures and provides an overview of the curriculum. There is also a three-hour session on the Saturday before each semester. Our chief aim in these sessions is to encourage Als to think about teaching more intentionally, to think about more new ways to do things, and to give them a chance to learn from each other.

Because all AIs attend all general training sessions, we vary the focus each time. Recent topics and activities include: tips from experienced teachers, developing a lesson plan, asking effective questions, effective classroom management, learning strategies, collaborative learning, avoiding and dealing with classroom “disasters”, and handling academic dishonesty. Presenters are typically faculty who teach core courses or the coordinating AIs. We have periodically invited a consultant from Campus Instructional Consulting to make presentations and have used instructional videos.

One of the chief benefits of the sessions, frankly, is that they reinforce our appreciation for the work of the AIs as teachers in our department. These sessions also serve to refocus the AIs’ attention on the teaching duties that they are about to start or resume. Finally, the sessions provide new AIs with the opportunity to learn from more experienced AIs, and provide the experienced AIs with a chance to reflect on what strategies and tactics they have found effective in their own teaching.

– *Eric Isaacson, Associate Professor and Department Chair,
Department of Music Theory, Jacobs School of Music*

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAM FOR PREPARING GRADUATE STUDENTS TO TEACH

In addition to its course offerings for majors, the IU Department of English is also responsible for writing courses that fulfill general education requirements. The professionalization of English graduate students, therefore, typically includes preparation to teach a variety of courses in expository, professional, and/or creative writing, as well as courses in literature. Here we summarize our initial orientation activities for graduate instructors in the Department of English.

To read a complete description of our program for preparing graduate students to teach, see Supplemental Materials at <http://www.aiprep.indiana.edu>.

INITIAL ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

In addition to required fall semester pedagogy proseminars, all first-time teachers of composition and creative writing participate in faculty and administrator-led orientation workshops held for five full days in August the week before the school year begins.

In the composition workshop, led by the director of composition and the four assistant directors of W131, Elementary Composition, about 30 AIs receive both an introduction to teaching issues and an introduction to the composition course that includes discussions of the theoretical and practical aims of the first-year course (including the master syllabus and all assignments), department procedures, responding to and grading sample student essays, sample lesson plans and classroom activities, and guidance in strategies for analyzing readings and leading discussion. The workshop structure includes presentations to the whole group and small break-out sessions, in which new AIs begin working with the assistant-director led group of peers (7 or 8) with whom they will meet once a week throughout fall semester. The orientation concludes with a two-hour group meeting with an assistant director to review each AI's week-by-week syllabus, and, finally, a microteaching session in which AIs present a sample ten-minute lesson and receive feedback from peers and the program directors. New AIs also attend the campus-wide workshop on diversity issues.

The creative writing pedagogy coordinator, in consultation with the Director of the Creative Writing Program, conducts the creative writing workshop and serves as the fall semester lecturer in English W103, the large lecture course for which new creative writing AIs serve as discussion section leaders. Topics covered include guidelines for teaching W103, syllabus building, methods for connecting lectures and discussions, managing in-class discussion of texts and student work, critiquing and grading, as well as department procedures and problem resolution.

Central to the orientation workshop on teaching composition is a 250-page spiral-bound handbook that is updated every year. The handbook provides materials for each segment of the August orientation workshop and valuable resources on each course unit, sample student papers, information on evaluating writing, plagiarism, etc. Materials for the binder are designed and updated each year, and reflect in part materials (e.g., case studies of revised assignments) submitted in the teaching portfolios which AIs turn in as their final projects in the W501 Proseminar.

Central to the preparation of our first-time teachers of composition are the four assistant directors of W131—advanced graduate students hired for their abilities to redesign course materials and supervise and mentor new AIs in weekly small group meetings. Not just their presence but their investment in a course that is always changing from within helps to establish a sense of a community of reflective teachers. The assistant directors, in consultation with the director of composition, have also compiled and published two editions of a custom course reader with Bedford/St. Martins, along with an instructor's manual just for our IU-Bloomington course.

– *Christine Farris, Director of Composition; Kathy Smith, Composition Coordinator; Romaine Rubinas Dorsey, Creative Writing Pedagogy Director, Department of English*