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Preparing and Sustaining Teaching Assistants

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For the past 15 years, we have developed and implemented a systemic approach to using the approximately 80 teaching assistants employed by the physics department. The goal of this program is to make the experience valuable for the teaching assistants, the undergraduate students they serve, the professors, the department, and the university. This operation puts teaching assistants into teaching situations in which they can be successful and then gives them the minimal support they need to be successful. The teaching situation emphasizes their role as coaches for their students. The minimal support includes five full days of orientation to get them ready for teaching, a weekly seminar program to address components of their teaching as they arise, mentor TAs to give personal feedback, and planned meetings with the course professor to make sure that their actions are integrated into a course. This talk will describe the features of this program. Some of the materials used can be found at <http://groups.physics.umn.edu/physed/>