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Preparing Learning Assistants for University Instruction and Beyond

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Learning Assistants (LAs) are talented undergraduates who work with faculty members to improve large-enrollment courses. Effective LA programs support university course transformation, provide undergraduates with low-pressure early teaching experiences as junior university instructors, and recruit undergraduates into the teaching profession. LAs are supported in their growth as teachers by participating in a required course in broad issues of teaching and learning. However, there are few opportunities for LAs and supervising faculty to engage in supported, collaborative reflection on real teaching situations. In a new project supported by the Physics Teacher Education Coalition, we are developing a Video Resource for LA Development, a package of thematic case-based “video workshops” that showcase compelling episodes from a variety of exemplary LA-relevant instructional formats. Semi-structured discussions of the video episodes illuminate the issues facing both novice and expert university instructors. The Video Resource for LA Development provides LAs with opportunities to observe, discuss, and reflect on teaching situations similar to the ones they themselves face, developing their pedagogical content knowledge and supporting their emerging identity as teaching professionals.