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TA Professional Development: A Graduate Student's Perspective

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Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are essential for teaching large introductory physics classes. In such courses, undergraduates spend approximately half of their in-class contact time in instructional environments (e.g., labs and recitations) supervised by GTAs, which means GTAs can have a large impact on student learning. Therefore it is crucial to adequately prepare GTAs before they first enter the classroom, and to offer them continued support throughout. Since many of the skills required to become effective teachers will also be relevant to their future research careers, it is useful for a GTA preparation program to also include professional development strategies. But what exactly do GTAs get out of these programs? The School of Physics at Georgia Tech runs a preparation and mentoring program for GTAs that focuses on pedagogical knowledge, physics content, and professional development, as well as their intersections. Nearly seventy graduate students have gone through this program in the three years since it was established. Here we discuss the impact this program has had on our GTAs, from their own point of view: the program's effect on their teaching abilities, how it has influenced their attitudes towards teaching, what elements they have found useful, and what changes they have suggested to its curriculum. We find that, in general, GTAs are more receptive when the curriculum is more hands-on and they are presented with frequent opportunities for practice and feedback.