Investigating Perceptions of a Collegiate Physical Education Program's Organizational Culture, Instructional Supervision Practices and Socialization Processes: A Case Study

Jared A. Russell

Department of Health and Human Performance
Auburn University

Historically, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) have served as invaluable members of institutions of higher education teaching staff dating back to the 1800s. Currently, GTAs teach an estimated 40% of undergraduate courses offered at most major research institutions. The graduate teaching assistantship provides not only financial support for graduate studies but also allows graduate students opportunities to gain valuable and relevant experience as instructors To date, scant scholarly attention has been paid to examining the organizational culture of graduate academic programs in which GTAs seek to fulfill their instructional tasks and responsibilities (Meyers, 2001). The goal of this research

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Jared A. Russell, Department of Health and Human Performance, Auburn University, 2050 Beard-Eaves Memorial Coliseum, AL, 36849, U.S. E-mail: russej3@auburn.edu

was to examine the organizational culture of a collegiate physical education (CPE) program paying particular attention to the impact of explicit and implicit symbolic messages received by its GTAs as communicated by influential university administrators concerning their role in the overall educational mission of their respective CPE program, academic departments, institution and the greater academic profession in which they were preparing to join upon graduation. Specifically, the research uncovered the participants' perceptions concerning the CPE program's ability to effectively provide instructional supervision, socialization, and development processes while preparing their GTAs for future career aspirations.

Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are invaluable members of higher education teaching staffs. They serve as lead instructors for a considerable amount of undergraduate courses, primarily introductory level, in lieu of tenure-track and adjunct faculty. Currently, GTAs teach an estimated 40% of undergraduate courses offered at most major research institutions (Prieto & Meyers, 2001). For the graduate student the teaching assistantship provides not only financial support for their studies but also allows them opportunities to gain valuable experience as instructors. To date, scant scholarly attention has been paid to examining the organizational culture of graduate programs in which GTAs seek to fulfill their instructional tasks and responsibilities. The goal of this research was to examine the organizational culture of a collegiate physical education (CPE) program paying particular attention to the impact of explicit and implicit symbolic messages received by its GTAs concerning their importance to the overall educational mission of their academic departments and the greater academic profession in which they were preparing to join.

CPE programs serve as important fixtures in the curriculum of higher education institutions (Savage & Sharpe, 1998). Their primary role has been to provide undergraduates with opportunities to develop sport-related skills

and acquire conceptual knowledge regarding healthy lifestyle choices. Courses offered by CPE programs, such as weight-training, basketball, and wellness are developed with the goal of motivating students to be physically fit and active throughout their lifetime. This emphasis on life-long fitness is in response to alarming reports of increasing obesity levels in Americans by prominent national health organizations (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 1997; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2000). Commonly, CPE program courses represent the last formal instructional opportunities for young college-aged adults. It is for that reason that it is especially disheartening that CPE programs have done very little to explore how to best prepare their GTAs to meet the instructional needs of their respective students.

Overall, graduate academic programs throughout higher education that employ GTAs have in recent years ran into sharp criticism from constituents about the quality of instruction being provided by GTA-led courses (Meyers, 2001). Exacerbating this situation is the propensity for graduate programs to offer less than sufficient instructional training and support to GTAs in regard to the fulfillment of their designated instructional responsibilities. The reluctance by graduate academic programs to invest more in GTA instructional development is due in part to budgetary constraints and a lack of vision by administrators regarding the place of the GTA in the overall instructional hierarchy (Golde & Dore, 2001). Moreover, scholars have yet to adequately explore the means and obstacles associated with providing GTAs with appropriate instructional socialization experiences and how best to address their individual supervisory needs. Most notorious for this lack of scholarly inquiry are CPE programs (Russell & Chepyator-Thomson, 2004) commonly found within departments of kinesiology, exercise science, or physical education.

Historically, research efforts into CPE programs have provided survey-oriented, descriptive accounts of program student enrollment motivations and trends (Hensley, 2000; Leenders, Sherman, & Ward, 2003), program administrative and/or institutional policies (Mondello, Fleming, & Focht,

2000), and to a lesser extent, the impact of innovative instructional development considerations (Pennington, Manross, & Poole, 2001; Poole, 1991). However, Housner (1993) stressed more in-depth research should be focused on the processes by which CPE GTAs are developed and supported as instructors as well as prepared for future possible careers as professors. This research is an attempt to meet that scholarly mandate.

Review of Organizational Culture Literature

Organizational culture theory finds its conceptual roots in the academic fields of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and sociology (Tierney, 1988, 1991). The study of organizational culture has occupied a prominent position in corporate, business and educational literature since its theoretical and conceptual inception into mainstream scholarly research in the early 1900s. Early scholars' insights and contributions initiated the development of a line of inquiry that has stretched from the early research of administrative principles in corporate/industry organizations to the current emphasis of symbols, implicit messages and rituals in the analysis of contemporary higher education programs (Masland, 1991; Ouchi, 1981;). Their works demonstrated the importance of organizational culture as exhibited in implicit and explicit managerial practices of successful organizations.

A wide range of organizational norms and attributes including language, behavior, values, dress, myths, ceremonies, and methods of subversion have been examined through conceptualizations that seek to delineate the exact definition of organizational culture (Scott, Mannion, Davies, & Marshall, 2003). Noted anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) explained that culture "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (p. 89). As Bolman and Deal (2003) stated, "culture is the glue that holds an organization together and unites people around shared values and beliefs" (p. 243). Edgar Schein (1992) wrote,

"organizational culture may be defined as a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented...taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems." (p. 12)

The study of GTAs has become increasingly significant since the early 1970s due to their roles as instructors in the continuously growing undergraduate programs in U.S. institutions of higher learning. Three broad areas of inquiry have dominated the literature: (a) socialization and development (Nyquist & Wulff, 1996; Rikard & Nye, 1997), (b) instructional training program development (Ronkowski, 1998; Zapata, 2002), and (c) cultural issues in relation to international graduate teaching assistants (Alsberg, 2002; Sarkisian & Maurer, 1998). However, missing from the discourse is the utilization of organizational culture theory to understand the instructional training, socialization, and development of GTAs.

Significance of Study

The significance of this study lies in its providing a descriptive account of the GTA supervisory strategies and practices that were shaped by the organizational culture of the CPE program from the standpoint of the various constituencies that influenced it. Moreover, this research contributes to the growing body of literature focused on the development and evaluation of GTA program instructional support mechanisms. The research questions that guided this inquiry were:

1. How was the organizational culture of the GTA program described and communicated throughout the organization by its constituents?
2. Has time as a GTA prepared them for future career goals and aspirations?

Methods and Procedures

An ethnographic case study research design utilizing qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods was most appropriate for this study. Ethnographic research focuses on uncovering and describing

beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure the behavior of a group within a specific cultural setting and utilizes the "voices" of the participants to communicate aspects of the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Merriam, 1998). Moreover, case studies are highly effective means of evaluating extensive and intricate patterns of cultural behavior in "bounded" instructional program (Patton, 1990).

Context of Study: Setting
This study focused on a major university in the southeastern part of the United States. In particular, the School of Health Performance's (HLP) collegiate physical education (CPE) program was examined. The School of HLP offered Master's and Doctor of Philosophy degrees in physical education and sport science (PESS), health promotion and behavior (HPB), exercise science (EXRS), leisure and recreation studies (LRST) academic disciplines. The university mandated all undergraduates to take and successfully pass one credit hour of collegiate physical education to satisfy graduation requirements.

Participant Groups
Twelve GTAs volunteered for this study. The primary researcher interviewed and twice observed the participants in their instructional settings. This group of participants was identified as GTA-Observation/Interview Group. Also, five institutional, departmental, and program administrators accepted an invitation to participate. Their current or former instructional or administrative position, allowed them to make decisions concerning the selection, employment, and development of GTAs. The participants took part in a one hour semi-structured interview with the primary researcher and provided relevant departmental and institutional documents. This participant pool was comprised of: (a) the former and current chairs of the Physical Education and Sport Science (PESS) department, (b) the CPE program GTA supervisor; (c) the former School of Health Performance (HLP) director, and (d) an Office of Instructional Development (OID) administrator.

This group of participants was identified as the Institutional Administrator Group.

Lastly, all participants signed consent forms at the onset of the research process giving permission to audiotape their interviews and/or observe their classes. Pseudonyms were selected by the GTA-Observation/Interview Group for confidentiality. Participants who comprised the Institutional Administrator Group were only identified by the title "Institutional Administrator".

William Tierney's (1991) Organizational Culture Framework

William Tierney's (1991) model for analyzing organizational culture is divided into multiple areas of inquiry (see Figure 1). This framework was effective at focusing this research and developing a holistic and representative portrait of the organizational culture of the CPE program under investigation. As Ennis stated (1999) in his theoretical frameworks, "organize a complex environment... and helps you to know where to look, what questions to ask, and which answers are more likely to provide new insights"(p. 133). Furthermore, Tierney's framework was utilized to categorize and sort findings and subsequently aided in the identification of emergent themes in the data.

Figure 1   William Tierney's (1991) Organizational Culture Model
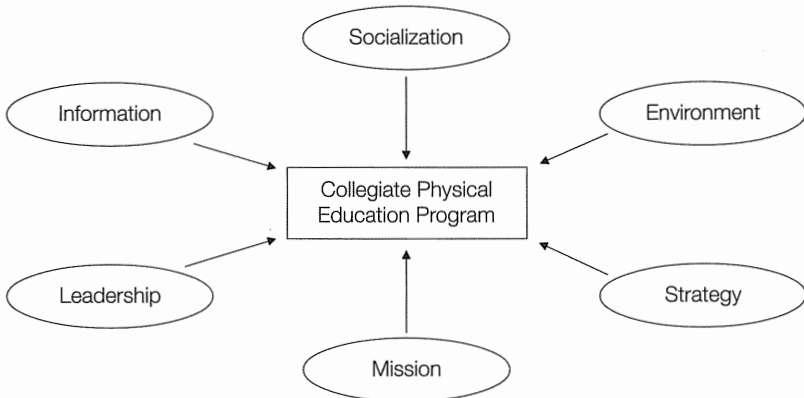
Data Analysis

The data analysis process in qualitative research involves the systematic organizing of interview transcripts, survey responses to open-ended questions, and other documentation in an effort to enhance understanding and aid in the presentation of results to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Data obtained are analyzed by developing coding categories, constant comparison between responses, analytic induction and finally, the identification of emergent themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The product of this process is commonly referred to as a "thick description" of the phenomenon (Geertz, 1973; Merriam, 1998).

Data Collection

Multiple sources of data were gathered to investigate the perceptions of the organizational culture of the CPE program.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were used to understand the participants' perceptions of the CPE program's organizational culture (Merriam, 1998; Seidman, 1998). The interviews lasted approximately one hour, were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Interview topics included: (a) instructional concerns and needs of GTAs, (b) the institutional and departmental GTA training and development mission and vision statements, and (c) the roles and responsibilities of GTAs.

Participant observations of GTA in instructional settings. Participant observations allowed the researcher to have prolonged contact with the participants within the natural settings, describe their work environment and identify aspects of their instructional experiences that were possibly particular to their experiences (Merriam, 1998). Participants were observed twice and field-notes related to the instructional setting were taken. Before and shortly after each observation, the principal investigator met with the participant to discuss the instructional episode.

Focus group interview. The GTAs-Observation/Interview Group had a focus group interview that was audio-taped. Discussion focused on a range of topics associated with instructional concerns and needs they had that

impacted their instructional experiences, instructional development and professional socialization (Vaughn, Schumm, & Singagub, 1996). Secondly, participants were asked to generate a proposed mission and vision statement for the CPE program. These documents allowed the researcher to understand the manner in which the GTA viewed their roles and responsibilities within the CPE program.

Data Trustworthiness and Research Limitations

Qualitative researchers seek to interpret and represent the multiple realities of their participants and then examine connections between these interpretations in order to develop a cultural portrait of the phenomenon. In addition, qualitative researchers are more concerned with the dependability or consistency of the results obtained from the data and that given the data as well as the degree to which the data collected and the subsequent results make sense (Guba & Lincoln, 1981). In this context, findings of this study might provide insight onto the experiences of graduate teaching assistants in similar settings at other institutions but those experiences are still particularistic to that setting (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the uniqueness of the participants in their particular setting limits the generalizability of findings from one setting to another. However, in order to best represent the perspectives found in this study's setting, multiple strategies were utilized to ensure the trustworthiness, validity and reliability of the qualitative data: (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, (c) peer reviews, (d) an audit trail, and (e) researcher's subjectivity statement.

Findings

Perspectives of the CPE Program's Environment
Instructional autonomy and isolation. From the start of their assistantship experience, CPE program GTAs were considered "teacher-of-record" for their courses in accordance with university policy.

Unfortunately, despite the considerable responsibilities of the designation, the CPE program's administration did not provide the GTAs with any formal and structured instructional supervision, mentorship or guidance in regard to conducting their courses. A member of the Institutional Administration Group described the posture taken by administration and departmental faculty as being that of an available instructional resource rather than a formal part of the GTAs' instructional development processes. The administrator stated the following:

> As far as course development and actual teaching is concerned, I think the TAs have a lot of autonomy. I think our posture has been that the faculty and the administration are there as a resource and that we can provide as much assistance or help as the TA would require. But beyond that and beyond just some very basic policies that the department has, the TA has a lot of flexibility to do what they see fit in their classrooms. The program coordinator fills in the gaps as needed or in case of a problem.

The GTAs asserted that being designated as "teacher-of-record" for their courses had both positives and negatives in regard to the subsequent teaching autonomy. On one hand, it allowed them considerable freedom to be creative in deciding what content and teaching strategies to utilize in their classrooms without pressure or criticism from the CPE program's administration. However, in retrospect, the GTAs acknowledged that the lack of formative instructional support, supervision, and evaluation processes negatively impacted their development of effective teaching habits. Moreover, they clearly asserted that supervisory interaction would most benefit them if it was formative rather than summative in nature.

Prompting a culture of pedagogical adequacy. Partially due to the aforementioned shortcoming in instructional supervision and mentorship, the GTAs characterized some of their peers as being ill-equipped to provide a high level of instructional excellence. Often being singled-out were GTAs from academic departments that did not emphasize teaching in relation to research (EXRS, HPB). GTAs in the more traditionally teaching oriented programs (PESS) expressed that "lazy or rogue" GTAs with poor teaching

habits did a disservice to the students as well as the reputation of the CPE program as a whole. A PESS doctoral student discussed the hypocrisy of the CPE program of allowing GTAs who he perceived to be "incompetent and unmotivated" to teach — "I have personally witnessed several GTAs who were given courses to teach in which they had no or little experience! The sad part was they didn't want to learn the content or strategies to teach the course. ... how can a department that advocates the need for specialist physical education teachers allow 'non-specialists' to teach their own courses?"

The CPE program's administration did very little to "police" their GTAs and to assess their instructional effectiveness. Some GTAs were perceived by their peers (and administration) as being ineffective instructors but little was done to remove these GTAs from teaching or work with them to improve their instruction. This unwillingness to make changes in training and supervisory practices only aggravate the more instruction-oriented GTAs' sense of "pedagogical adequacy" rather than "pedagogical excellence" being the norm within the culture of the CPE program. They suggested, in the least, the CPE program administrators should consider rescinding or reassigning the assistantships of GTAs who proofed to be ineffective instructors based on evaluative data over consecutive academic terms. However, the CPE program administration interviewed were reluctant to take such action due to their "commitment" to providing consistent financial support for graduate students accepted into their respective academic programs.

Perspective of the CPE Program's Mission

During the course of this study, an explicit instructional mission statement for the CPE program and a statement that clarified the instructional role of the GTA were not found. However, those GTAs who taught Fitness for Life (FFL) courses were guided by a course handbook that provided a general philosophy, course objectives and goals. When asked, both participant groups acknowledged that this information was not explicitly communicated during

the pre-teaching orientation or via materials provided by the program. Nevertheless, the instructional mission of the School of HLP was seen as the model for the CPE program. The School of HLP's mission statement was "to advance the goals, as reflected in the title of the School, Health and Human Performance, so as to enhance the quality of life through knowledge, understanding and physical activity of the students, faculty and staff of the University community... and the people of our nation".

During the GTA focus group session, the participants were asked to develop a proposed CPE program mission statement. This statement was consistent with the aforementioned mission statement for the School of HLP. The GTAs developed their perspective of the CPE program mission, based on the following: (a) their past educational experiences as physical education or related academic field majors; (b) what they assumed it should be based on the CPE program being part of the department of PESS and School of HLP; and (c) comments and actions of their peers, fellow graduate students, and faculty. The proposed mission statement was as follows:

> The instructional mission of the CPE program is to provide fundamental principles and basic functions of exercise and sport to allow individuals to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This will be done through a variety of activities that allow individual students to work and develop in an area of interest.

Furthermore, the GTAs used a similar rationale to develop perspectives of their instructional roles and responsibilities. Marcie, a doctoral student, explained the following: "I just assumed my role was to teach the skills, strategies, and techniques they need to be able to perform this sport for recreation when they complete the class... My thing is that they should leave at the recreational level so that they will be active as adults".

As defined by the participants, the instructional mission of the CPE program and the instructional role of the GTAs were to provide an opportunity for undergraduates to learn and participate in various athletic or health-enhancing activities in the hope that they would continue to do so across their lifetime. The explicit mission statements of the School

of HLP and the department of PESS directly reflected on and served as a model for the implicit instructional mission of the CPE program. However, there were no written statements that supported this perspective, rather the participants explained it was "understood" to be the case based on a variety of factors.

Perspectives of the CPE Program's Strategy (Decision-making) Processes

Selection of graduate teaching assistantship recipients: Academic promise vs. teaching ability. CPE program administrators were asked what criteria were used to select prospective graduate students for teaching assistantships.

A CPE program administrator expressed a balance between two major criteria for choosing an applicant to be a GTA, academic promise and teaching ability. However, this mindset was not consistent among other key administrators. For the most part, the administrators put a premium on academic promise. There are no interview processes or teaching episodes to ascertain whether or not the prospective GTA could teach or even wanted to teach now or in the future. A CPE program administrator noted that some departments, traditionally non-teaching oriented, totally disregarded the applicant's demonstrated ability or willingness to teach in considering granting them a teaching assistantship.

During the application process, the applicant is asked to fill out the Personal Rating of Teaching Competency (PRTC) that identifies whether or not the individual can teach particular activity courses offered by the CPE program. This portion of the application is the only real estimate that the administrators use to determine the ability of the GTA to teach effectively. Thus, more focus is placed on the applicant's academic standings and standardized test scores than on their actual teaching experience, motivation to teach, or aspirations to teach as a career. In fact, few of the administrators expressed that an applicant's experience or interest in teaching was necessary to get a teaching assistantship.

Perspective of the CPE Program's Information

Lines of communication. The first line of communication consisted of placement of memos in the GTAs' departmental mailboxes as well as mass e-mails sent via a departmental list-serve. This information exchange represented the prevalent administrative hands-off and top-down approach to GTA instructional supervision and management. The information consisted of messages traditionally concerned with logistical matters such as deadlines for submission of grade reports or academic schedules for the following semester. The second line of communication was found to be informal and between GTAs within the CPE program and with other non-GTA graduate students. Instruction-oriented information was the primary content communicated. Issues such as the teaching strategies, availability of equipment for classes or changes in the instructional settings were quickly communicated to GTAs that would be affected via e-mail, notes in their departmental mailboxes or by word-of-mouth.

Student instructional effectiveness course evaluation. The most often noted and important information collected and communicated within the CPE program was that taken from the student course teaching effectiveness evaluation. These end-of-the-semester course evaluations served as the only formal measure of the GTAs' instructional effectiveness. Ideally, the course evaluation's statistical analyses and written student comments should have provided the GTAs and administration with a means of improving the GTAs' instructional habits. However, the findings suggest two major reasons for why this was not the case. One, the evaluations were the only form of feedback the GTAs received concerning their teaching during the semester. As suggested by the findings, the GTAs and administrators supported the use of student course evaluations but they acknowledged the need for multiple measures to provide a valid and comprehensive understanding of a GTA's instructional weaknesses and strengths.

Secondly, the timing of the evaluations and lack of formal supervisory consultation in light of the feedback did little to improve the instructional effectiveness of the GTAs. The student course evaluations were conducted

near the conclusion of the academic term. Furthermore, the GTA was provided the evaluative data well into the following academic semester leaving no time to make meaningful changes to their instructional strategies for the current group of students.

Lastly, in light of the evaluations the CPE program administration neglected to provide formal consultation to explain the feedback; consequently, the GTAs expressed difficulty in interpreting the evaluative data which came in the form of statistics. The GTAs asserted that they wanted a formal opportunity to meet with the CPE program supervisor or a faculty member so that they could assist them with identifying their instructional strengths, weaknesses, and strategies for change in regard to their teaching. Departmental and CPE program administrators were reluctant to allocate additional resources (i.e., equipment, manpower, etc.) to redesigning the GTA evaluation process. This reluctance was due partially to perceived budgetary constraints and concern about the GTA supervisor's willingness and ability to carry out the necessary innovative evaluative measures. Several administrators and GTAs openly questioned the validity and reliability of using the student evaluations as the sole measure of teaching effectiveness but stressed that such evaluations were the most efficient and cost-effective means available. As it stood, the current evaluative process was limited in its ability to aid the GTAs in recognizing their instructional strengths and weaknesses and facilitating their development as effective instructors.

Perspectives of CPE Program's GTA Socialization Process

Pre-teaching CPE program orientation format and content. The CPE program holds a fall pre-teaching orientation for School of HLP GTAs several days prior to the start of the academic year. It serves as the primary instructional socializing mechanism for new GTAs and the only formal meeting in which GTAs, School of HLP faculty and CPE program administrators meet. The format of the orientation was primarily lecture-oriented and focused on logistical matters such as how to properly record student grades and where to find equipment for classes. Scant orientation

time was spent on discussing instructional matters, course exam construction and course development. The GTAs described the orientation as helpful to some extent but it did not truly prepare them for the instructional difficulties of the classroom.

The GTAs expressed that too much emphasis was placed on logistical matters rather than more relevant instructional matters. However, the orientation served one vital role in that it allowed the GTAs to meet one another and develop relationships that would later be used to develop lines of communication for instructional information, mentorship, and support. It was during the orientation and subsequent graduate classes that the GTAs developed important instructional support and social networks between each other that lasted throughout the year.

Perceptions of the teaching assistantship. In order to best ascertain whether or not the graduate teaching assistantship experience prepared them for their future career goals and aspirations, the following question was posed to the participants and examined: Do you feel that your experiences as a GTA and the skills you have obtained will transfer to future occupation? Responses to this question differed considerably between GTAs and administrators, especially those within the School of HLP. Overall, the GTAs were confident that their experiences as GTAs and the skills they acquired would prove helpful to them as they moved into their future career opportunities.

However, the administrators were not as convinced that these experiences would transfer as readily and prove helpful in their future careers as the GTAs envisioned. An administrator discussed the need to take into account what types of occupational positions the GTAs were aspiring to obtain and to make a distinction between public sector and academic jobs. He continued by pointing out that the transfer of skills would not necessarily be as valuable to those GTAs going into higher education positions.

The GTAs expressed that they perceived the teaching assistantship as a worthwhile endeavor in relation to financing their graduate education and developing skills necessary for future career aspirations. However, the GTAs

and CPE program administrators differed significantly on the transferability of skills acquired as a GTA in relation to what current faculty advertised positions required. Moreover, the administrators expressed that unless a GTA went into the public school sector, such as elementary or high-school physical education positions, very little of the skills that they obtained during their time as a GTA would prove useful or relevant.

Perspectives of the CPE Program's Leadership

In relation to who was considered the instructional leader of the CPE program, the GTAs, CPE administrators, and PESS departmental administrators were consistent in that the CPE program supervisor "*should be*" the leader. However, as suggested by the findings, it was clear that he was the instructional leader on paper but not seen as such by the GTAs via relevant supervisory action. The GTAs confirmed that the CPE program supervisor primarily provided them with needed textbooks and equipment, but provided scant leadership in the way of preparing them for their instructional responsibilities. The GTAs expressed that although approachable and quick to provide assistance, the CPE program supervisor had little formal interaction with them in relation to instructional supervision and evaluation. They noted that there hadn't been any workshops, meetings, or observations concerning their teaching since the fall pre-teaching orientation. Overall, they expressed disappointment in the lack of a visible and active instructional leader.

Based on interviews with administrators, the CPE program supervisor position called for him to serve as the primary socialization agent of the GTAs. This responsibility manifested itself as a result of being responsible for coordinating the fall pre-teaching orientation as well as being the primary resource distributor (i.e., equipment, textbooks, classroom assignments, etc.) and instructional role-model. Further, fellow administrators concluded that the CPE program supervisor, as stipulated by his employment guidelines, was to supervise the GTAs, provide instructional mentorship, take part in the formal evaluation of the GTAs, as well as provide instructional assistance

as needed. Based on these findings, the CPE program supervisor did not fulfill these obligations nor seem aware that he was not doing so.

GTA instructional support network. The primary source of instructional support was found to be fellow GTAs and non-GTA graduate students. In regard to support they expressed that the best mentorship and support came from more senior GTAs, not faculty and administrators.

Primarily, fellow GTAs, especially more experienced GTAs, served as the instructional role models and mentors within the CPE program. They often exchanged syllabi, instructional strategies and assessment tools with each other and provided social support. Due to a lack of scheduled formal meetings being administered by the CPE administration, the GTAs often discussed their teaching and concerns with each other during informal gatherings in their shared graduate academic classes or during their free time. This network of colleagues and fellow GTAs proved to be the most salient and influential instructional socialization and support mechanism within the CPE program.

Discussion

Central to this discussion of the findings, subsequent implications and recommendations is the question, "is the CPE program a training program for GTAs or is it primarily an example of a labor organization designed primarily to meet the instructional needs of the University?" Findings from this study demonstrated that the CPE program has not taken an active role in the preparation and training of its GTAs and has not taken necessary steps to ensure the quality of instruction that they provide. This perception of a "lack of quality assurance" demonstrated that the GTAs have not been exposed to training, evaluation and developmental experiences that could go far in preparing them for their immediate instruction and potential careers as members of the professoriate.

Extant literature reveals the importance of effectively evaluating the instructional performance of GTAs and the benefits of providing formative

training, evaluation and supervision to enhance their instructional effectiveness and development (Prieto, 2001). The processes of evaluation used to determine GTA instructional effectiveness were limited in their ability to produce the valid and reliable feedback needed to facilitate their instructional development. Participants offered primary limitations, which corroborates existing literature, to include: (a) reliance on the use of student end-of-the-semester course evaluations (Yunker & Yunker, 2003) and (b) lack of a formal consultation between the GTAs and the CPE program supervisor to discuss the evaluative feedback (Prentice-Dunn & Pitts, 2001).

Despite openly questioning the validity and reliability of their evaluation methods, the CPE program administration did not consider making an effort to change this process. This finding is consistent with Piccinin and Fairweather's (1996) conclusions that the reluctance of administrators to provide more comprehensive evaluation processes was due primarily to a lack of incentive to allocate additional resources (i.e., equipment, manpower, etc) and a lack of knowledge on how to effectively contextualize the instructional practices of GTAs. The CPE program supervisor did not aid the GTAs in the development of effective instructional practices and the GTAs were unable to make use of the responses that were in the form of statistics, from the student course evaluations to make meaningful changes to their teaching practices. This finding corroborates Black and Kaplan's (1998) research that without assistance from faculty or their supervisors, GTAs are reluctant and often unable to clearly delineate from evaluation data what changes are necessary to improve their instruction.

Both the GTAs and administration stressed the need for a formative or growth-oriented process of instructional evaluation for GTAs. However, similar to Prieto and Meyers' (1999) findings, the CPE program administration were unwilling to shift their current evaluation approach to a more effective, comprehensive, and formative approach through the provision of necessary resources, time, and effort. Such an approach depends to a great extent on the ability and willingness of the "instructional leader" to take an active role in the development and socialization of the GTAs

which would require systematic, consistent and thoughtful interactions. Unfortunately during the time of this study, neither the CPE program supervisor nor administrators expressed willingness for such a change in supervisory and subsequently evaluative practices.

Based on the analysis of data, the most salient aspect of the organizational culture of the CPE program with regard to failing to meet the aforementioned goals was the lack of consistent instructional training and preparation. Existing research points out that although seen as important members of the instructional team in universities and colleges, GTAs often receive inadequate instructional preparation for their responsibilities (McNaron, 2002; Prieto, 2001). During the course of this study there were no formal gatherings of the GTAs with regard to instructional development and training. The fall pre-teaching orientation, which served as the only formal gathering of the GTAs and CPE program administration during the year, was devoid of any relevant content that could enhance the instructional effectiveness of the GTAs. Furthermore, the subject matter during the orientation focused primarily on administrative issues such as effectively documenting student grades, safety issues, placement of equipment, and facility allocations for various courses. In light of research notes that a lack of instructional training and preparation has a detrimental impact on the instructional development of GTAs, more time should have been allocated to developing a general understanding of effective teaching in education and specifically to CPE type courses (Meyers, 2001; Rikard & Nye, 1997).

By neglecting to deliver a comprehensive and instruction-oriented pre-teaching orientation, the CPE program left the GTAs to "sink-or-swim" and learn via trial and error the correct instructional practices for their classes (Sherblom & Jensen, 2002). Secondly, the GTAs did not have a secure grasp of their instructional responsibilities, roles as instructors, and how they fit into the overall educational mission of the university and specifically that of the School of HLP after attending the pre-teaching orientation. This is consistent with the researches by Rikard and Nye (1997) and Lucas (2001) that described role ambiguity as an important factor impacting the overall

instructional development and self-efficacy of GTAs. Due to a lack of information concerning how to teach, *what* to teach, and *who* am I, the GTAs were left to their own devices and turned to each other rather than faculty and administration for instructional support, modeling, socialization and resources. This finding documents the necessity of the CPE program GTAs to take an active role in their own socialization process despite possibly coming into conflict with their peers and administrators (Austin & Wulff, 2004).

Lastly, instructional supervision within the CPE program was non-existent in regard to the CPE program supervisor actively preparing the GTAs for their instructional roles and presenting himself as an instructional leader by which the GTAs could emulate in their teaching (Zapata, 2002). Again, this shortcoming in providing formative and effective supervision found in the CPE program is all too common in the existing literature (Rikard & Nye, 1997). The GTAs expressed that as an instructional resource distributor and manager, the CPE program supervisor did a "fine job"; however, the GTAs voiced that they needed more supervisory and instructional support. In this case, no consistent efforts were made by the CPE program supervisor to interact with the GTAs in an instructional capacity despite the GTAs expressing that they were willing to take part in collaborative experiences.

The GTAs in this study brought into the CPE program a variety of levels of instructional effectiveness and skills. However, similar to perspectives offered by developmental model advocates Nyquist and Sprague (1998) and Meyers (2001), little attention was paid to the developmental levels of the GTAs in terms of allocating their instructional assignments and providing them with the appropriate instructional support as they matriculated through the academic year. Due to the various nationalities, educational and athletic backgrounds, and instructional skill levels of the GTAs who took part in this study, the CPE program supervisor would have been wise to investigate the developmental needs of the GTAs as part of structuring an effective training and preparation program.

Implications for Graduate Academic Programs

As suggested by Russell and Chepyator-Thomson (2004) higher education programs that employ graduate students as instructors have an obligation to meet two standards of managerial practice. The first is to train, support, and evaluate GTAs so that they provide quality instruction. Secondly, the experiences of being a GTA should be applicable to their future career aspirations. Failing to meet both of these standards is a disservice to students, their parents, other constituents of the institution, and the graduate students serving as GTAs.

Historically, the burden of meeting these managerial standards has been that of the academic department in which the program is established and more specifically, the GTA supervisor. GTA supervision is a complex and demanding aspect of higher education administration that calls for systematic and consistent instructional resource allocation, supervisory vigilance, and comprehensive evaluation. Supervisors form the front-line of graduate programs for ensuring that GTAs meet the demands of their positions. To say it frankly, supervisors must get their "hands dirty" and deeply involved in the GTA supervisory process in order to ensure that they effectively prepare graduate students for their instructional responsibilities.

However, too often as in the case of the CPE program, the GTA supervisor fails to fulfill these responsibilities thus throwing into question the true nature and purpose of the program itself. Without adequate departmental support or mandates there is little incentive to continuously and comprehensively develop graduate students as quality instructors and well-prepared future members of the professoriate. Any program in higher education that employs GTAs must successfully balance itself on the fine line of the exploitation of GTAs for cheap instructional labor and providing a means of graduate students to finance their education in preparation for future jobs. Successfully navigating this tightrope is truly dependent upon the willingness and effectiveness of the supervisor to perform his or her duties. In relation to GTA development, the impact of the supervisor goes well beyond the initial recruitment and orientation of GTAs. Their impact

moves into the nurturing (or lack of) of effective instructors, future practitioners, and advocates of a given academic discipline. This, in itself, is a tremendous responsibility that is often neglected.

In conclusion, failing to take an active role in the preparation of GTAs goes against the philosophical goals of the graduate teaching assistantship and results in unprepared doctoral students entering the job market without the necessary instructional skills to excel. The graduate teaching assistantship is a viable means of not only providing graduate students with financial support but also exposing them to the responsibilities and expectations of being faculty members. To do so will take a considerable collaborative effort by graduate students, GTA program administration, and departmental faculty, driven by a sense of urgency to prepare excellent — not simply adequate instructional leaders — for their respective academic disciplines.

Implications for Further Research

Future areas of research should continue to focus on a myriad of issues facing GTAs concerning their instructional development. Further, research focused on the extent to which GTAs utilize gained instructional knowledge and factors that impact their learning is necessary. Tierney's (1988, 1991) organizational culture framework was effective at exploring multiple aspects of the CPE program. Graduate programs administrators should consider this method to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs from participants' viewpoints as well as through the lens of departmental policies, classroom settings and socialization/training processes. Future studies should continue to discern and document various obstacles and triumphs GTAs may experience as they are socialized into graduate programs and pursue professional careers in their respective field of study.

Recommendations for CPE Programs

Numerous recommendations in response to the findings are applicable to CPE programs. Graduate academic programs need to formally acknowledge

their responsibility to prepare GTAs for immediate instructional roles as well as their socialization into the future professoriate of related academic disciplines. Departments should establish a permanent and web-based instructional resource center, which contains instructional materials, statements of departmental policies and procedures, and other relevant materials. Departmental faculty must take a formal part in the instructional supervision and mentoring of GTAs. Pre-teaching orientations must provide relevant instructional information and strategies, incorporate the perspectives of veteran GTAs and faculty, as well as provide sufficient time for novice GTAs to form a relationship (no matter how tentative) with administrators, faculty, and their peers. Lastly, utilize multiple instructional evaluation techniques to ascertain from the GTAs and their students the effectiveness of the CPE program overall in meeting established instructional goals.

References

Alsberg, J. (2002). Effective change in pronunciation: Teaching ITAs to teach themselves. In W. Davis, J. Smith, & R. Smith (Eds.), *Ready to teach: Graduate teaching assistants prepare for today and for tomorrow* (pp. 139–146). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Austin, A., & Wulff, D. (2004). The challenge to prepare the next generation of faculty. In D. Wulff, A. Austin, & Associates (Eds.), *Paths to the professoriate: Strategies for enriching the preparation of future faculty* (pp. 3–16). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Black, B., & Kaplan, M. (1998). Evaluating TAs' teaching. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, & F. Stout (Eds.), *The professional development of graduate teaching assistants* (pp. 213–234). Boston: Anker Publishing.

Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2003). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (1997). Guidelines for school and community programs to promote lifelong physical activity among young people.

Journal of School Health, 66(2), 75–78.

Ennis, C. (1999). A theoretical framework: The central piece of a research plan. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education, 18*, 129–140.

Geertz, C. (1973). Deep play: Notes on the Balinese cockfight. In C. Geertz (Ed.), *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (pp. 412–435). New York: Basic Books.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* Chicago: Aldine.

Golde, C. M., & Dore, T. M. (2001). *At cross purposes: What the experiences of today's graduate students reveal about doctoral education.* Philadelphia: The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1981). *Effective evaluation.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hensley, L. (2000). Current status of basic instruction programs in physical education at American colleges and universities. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 71*(9), 30–36.

Housner, L. D. (1993). Research in basic instruction programs. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 64*(6), 53–58.

Leenders, N., Sherman, W. M., & Ward, P. (2003). College physical activity courses: Why do students enroll, and what are their health behaviors? *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 74*(3), 313–318.

Lucas, S. (2001). Departmental orientation programs for teaching assistants. In L. Prieto, & S. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. 25–50). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Masland, A. (1991). Organizational culture in the study of higher education. In M. Peterson, E. Chaffee, & T. White (Eds.), *Organization and governance in higher education* (4th ed., pp. 118–125). Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press..

McNaron, T. (2002). Here today, not gone tomorrow. In W. Davis, J. Smith, & R. Smith (Eds.), *Ready to teach: Graduate teaching assistants prepare for today and for tomorrow* (pp. 5–9). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education* (rev. ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyers, S. (2001). Conceptualizing and promoting effective TA training. In L. Prieto, & S. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. 3–24). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Mondello, M., Fleming, D., & Focht, B. (2000). The organization, administration, and operational procedures of an elective, physical education program at a research one university. *Physical Educator, 57*(2), 77–83.

Nyquist, J., & Sprague, J. (1998). Thinking developmentally about TAs. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, & F. Stout (Eds.), *The professional development of graduate teaching assistants* (pp. 61–88). Boston,: Anker Publishing.

Nyquist, J. D., & Wulff, D. H. (1996). *Working effectively with graduate assistants.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ouchi, W. (1981). *Theory Z: How American business can meet the Japanese challenge.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pennington, T., Manross, D., & Poole, J. (2001). Exploring alternative assessment in college physical activity classes. *The Physical Educator, 58*(4), 206–210.

Piccinin, S., & Fairweather, S. (1996). A local analysis of TA training needs: Implications for the planning and development of TA training programs. *The Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development, 4*(1), 23–34.

Poole, J. (1991). Seven skills to improved teaching: Enhancing graduate assistant instruction. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 62,* 21–24.

Prentice-Dunn, S., & Pitts, G. (2001). The use of videotape feedback in GTA training. In L. Prieto, & S. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. 89–102). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Prieto, L. (2001). The supervision of teaching assistants: Theory, evidence and practice. In L. Prieto, & S. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. 103–129). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Prieto, L., & Meyers, S. (1999). The effects of training and supervision in the self-efficacy of psychology graduate teaching assistants. *Research in Higher Education, 35,* 481–497.

Prieto, L., & Meyers, S. (2001). Introduction. In L. Prieto, & S. Meyers (Eds.), *The teaching assistant handbook: How to prepare TAs for their responsibilities* (pp. vii–xi). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Rikard, G. L., & Nye, A. (1997). The graduate instructor experience: Pitfalls and possibilities. *Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance, 68*(5), 33–37.

Ronkowski, S. (1998). The disciplinary/departmental context of TA training. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, & F. Stout (Eds.), *The professional development of graduate teaching assistants* (pp. 41–60). Boston: Anker Publishing.

Russell, J., & Chepyator-Thomson, J. R. (2004). Help wanted!!!: Perspectives of physical education graduate teaching assistants on their instructional environment, preparation and needs. *Educational Research Journal, 19*(2), 251–280.

Sarkisian, E., & Maurer, V. (1998). International TA training and beyond: Out of the program and into the classroom. In M. Marincovich, J. Prostko, & F. Stout (Eds.), *The professional development of graduate teaching assistants* (pp. 163–180). Boston, MA: Anker Publishing.

Savage, M., & Sharpe, T. (1998). Demonstrating the need for formal graduate student training in effective teaching practices. *Physical Educator, 55*(3), 130–138.

Schein, E. H. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Scott, T., Mannion, R., Davies, H., & Marshall, M. (2003). The quantitative measurement of organizational culture in health care: A review of the available instruments. *Health Services Research, 38*(3), 923–946.

Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Sherblom, P., & Jensen, K. (2002). Using systematic feedback from GTAs. In W. Davis, J. Smith, & R. Smith (Eds.), *Ready to teach: Graduate teaching assistants prepare for today and for tomorrow* (pp. 118–127). Stillwater, OK: New Forums Press.

Tierney, W. G. (1988). Organizational culture in higher education: Defining the essentials. *Journal of Higher Education, 59,* 2–21.

Tierney, W. (1991). Organizational culture in higher education: Defining the essentials. In M. Peterson, E. Chaffee, & T. White (Eds.), *Organization and governance in higher education: An ASHE reader* (4th ed., pp. 126–139). Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). *Healthy People 2010* (2nd ed.).Washington, DC: DHHS.

Vaughn, S., Schumm, J., & Sinagub, J. (1996). *Focus group interviews in education and psychology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yunker, P., & Yunker, J. (2003). Are student evaluations of teaching valid? Evidence from an analytical business core course. *Journal of Education for Business, 78* (6), 313–318.

Zapata, G. (2002). A comprehensive model for graduate teaching assistant education. *Journal of Graduate Teaching Assistant Development, 9*(1), 5–11.