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TYOLOGY OF ASSISTANTSHIP PROGRAMS IN US UNIVERSITIES AND THEIR ROLE IN FUTURE FACULTY TRAINING

Nataliia Dolinska

*Ivan Franko National University of Lviv
Tuhan-Baranovskoho Str., 7, Lviv, Ukraine, UA-79005*

The paper describes the modern practice of assistantship and the peculiarities of its functioning at US universities. It presents the actual typology of programs for faculty assistants, and identifies the structural, organizational and methodical aspects of the professional activity of young faculties within the assistant programs. The article also determines the role of assistantship practice in training a prospective faculty of higher education within the doctoral program.

Key words: assisting, socialization, doctorate, faculty assistant, junior faculty, assistant in research work, tutor, reader, facultative introductory meeting, training workshop.

The issue of young faculty training along with their readiness for the academic career in higher education has always been one of the major concerns of pedagogical research. Theory and practice of both domestic and foreign professional education dwell upon the issues of psychological adaptation, enhancement of motivation for professional growth, and creation of favourable conditions for realization of professional capabilities of young faculty in real-life academic environment. With this in mind, practical application of diverse forms and techniques of professional socialization of young faculty to US higher education generates our interest.

A considerable body of literature pertaining to young faculty socialization has emerged in US pedagogical research over the last two decades. Shulman, Austin, Golde, Duncan, Nyquist, Gardner, and others called for a reform to better prepare doctoral students as future faculty through their socialization to higher education.

Socialization (from Latin *socialis* – social) has widely been described as the process of individuals' entry into particular social groups, their active learning and adoption of social knowledge, social roles, norms, and values required for a successful well-being in a particular community [1]. Professional socialization is widely viewed as a process of formation of a so-called *professional self* – an identity that encompasses characteristics of the group [10].

The concept of socialization in the field of higher education is largely viewed as a professional communication of doctoral students with experienced

professors. Tierney (1997) suggested that socialization is the process through which new faculty come to understand and create meaning of the culture or sum of activities that exist in individual institutions and the profession as a whole. Through direct and indirect interaction with members of an institution and the larger profession, the newcomer learns “how to behave, what to hope for, and what it means to succeed or fail” [13].

Importance of successful socialization of future faculty to higher education is supported by statistics: almost a half of 43 thousand individuals that obtained doctoral degrees in 400 American universities in 2008 pursued academic career in US colleges and universities. The socialization of doctoral students to academic profession is therefore of central importance to the doctoral education experience.

The aim of this article is to provide analysis of organizational and pedagogical aspects of functioning in the US system of university graduate education of teaching assistantship programs as an effective technique of future faculty entry into the academic profession in order to make creative use of this experience in the current processes of reformation of higher education in Ukraine.

One effective way of young faculty socialization to US universities is through teaching assistantship that they do as doctoral students. Cooperating with experienced faculty in real-life academic environment facilitates teaching assistants' understanding and fosters formation of norms, values, and duties of the profession. Teaching assistantship programs provide young faculty with invaluable empirical professional experience of teaching, research, and service. Though the whole spectrum of existing teaching assistantship programs often faces criticism and reformation, they are still viewed as a major prerequisite for successful future faculty socialization to higher education and an imperative for effective realization of both individual and cumulative academic goals.

Teaching assistants (TA) were first engaged to provide instructional support by teaching undergraduate students during 1960-70ies, years that followed the post-war baby boom. As the number of students grew and the demand for instructors increased, it was teaching assistants who were engaged into teaching practical and laboratory classes, monitoring discussion groups, correcting and grading students' papers.

Involving graduate TAs in the instruction process in the higher education of the USA proved successful and evolved over the years to widely apply today in a variety of forms and models. The following assistantship positions among others are provided to successful graduate students who intend to pursue career in the academy:

- teaching assistant – TA;
- teaching associate or teaching fellow – TF or graduate student instructor – GSI;
- research assistant – RA;

- reader or tutor.

With regard to the pedagogical value of this foreign experience, functioning and realization of the above mentioned models is worth considering in detail.

Graduate students (both master and doctoral students) demonstrating high level of academic performance can be granted *teaching assistantship (TA)* positions. Some universities also require that the international students applying for TA positions submit TOEFL or IELTS certificates with particular minimum grades to prove their language competence. In some universities graduate TAs are required to teach in a classroom for an entire academic year or a semester while in others they spend limited time in a classroom.

On the whole, assistantships as well as a variety of existing fellowships and traineeships in US universities are often viewed as a form of financial support granted to graduate students. For instance, international graduate students can have their non-resident graduate studies fee reduced or cancelled if they work as TAs for minimum 4 hours a day in their university or department. TAs normally receive their stipend traditionally or in the form of a tuition discount.

Graduate students may be appointed to TA positions for an academic year or a semester. Reappointment policies of different universities and departments vary: on the one hand, experienced assistants prove to work more efficiently, on the other hand, the valuable empirical teaching experience should be available for as wide a range of graduate students as it is possible. Normally, a full-time appointment may vary from 15 to 20 working hours per week and a half-day appointment is usually up to 10 hours per week [7]. It is also possible for graduate students to obtain assistantship appointments at more than one department at the same time, however, the total number of TAs' working hours is limited – e.g. at the Columbia University it is 27 hours per week.

The specific duties of graduate teaching assistants vary across disciplines and departments. For the majority of teaching assistants, however, assignments and responsibilities fall into the following categories:

- teaching a classroom section of a multi-sectional course;
- teaching laboratory or practical classes;
- conducting discussion clubs or discussion sections of a multi-sectional course;
- assisting a faculty member in designing and administering tests and assignments for undergraduate students;
- assisting a faculty member in correcting and grading of undergraduate students' papers;
- assisting a faculty member in developing and teaching of online courses;
- advising undergraduate students;
- assisting in general departmental administrative duties.

It is worth noting that all graduate teaching assistants completely subordinate to faculty members in charge of their courses and, therefore, bear no responsibility for the content or structure of the course that they teach or students' grading [6].

It is general practice for departmental administrations to monitor and evaluate TAs' performance by the following means:

- a written report of the overlooking faculty member on the results of a TA's work;
- a committee of faculty members visits of classes conducted by a TA;
- undergraduate students evaluation [7].

In case of negative evaluation results a TA's appointment may be terminated before the expiration of its designated term. Other causes for termination include: loss or reduction of funding; incompetence, inefficiency or neglect of duty; repeated or extended absence; misconduct; academic delinquency; voluntary agreement [7].

In addition to existing formal assistantship programs provided by university departments, voluntary orientation meetings organized by Teaching Centers and content-based departmental trainings are available for young faculty [8]. Though the aim of such voluntary events is to facilitate the development of professional and pedagogical knowledge and skills of the young faculty, statistical analysis proves that it is the voluntary form of such events that impedes their efficiency. According to the research by Mena et al. conducted at Purdue University in 2013, only 43% of graduate teaching assistants attended a week-long training at the beginning of fall semester and only 29% kept participating in departmental seminars and masterclasses across the year [9]. In order to avoid such neglect, it is mandatory for TAs in some universities to attend an obligatory college-wide orientation and then a multi-day departmental training. Specifically, TAs are engrossed in learning the university policies and procedures, as well as individually selected topics regarding teaching methodologies, student learning styles, and instructional design. Departmental training focuses on specifics of the discipline, and often on transitioning a student's mindset to that of a teacher's [12]. In practice, it is common for a university-wide teaching assistant program to be voluntary at the university level, but mandatory in select departments, as is the case with the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW) [11].

Among innovative approaches to assistantship applied in US universities, organization of thematic educational and methodologic seminars is worth noting. From 2001 to 2004 a History PhD Program at the University of Texas at El Paso included the History Teaching and Learning Seminar. The Seminar was designed to assist graduate teaching assistants to integrate the different elements of their academic careers in a way that prepares them to become teaching professors who understand and exploit the interdependent relationship between teaching and scholarship. In that capacity the Seminar provided training in three major areas: 1)

it provided a guide on how to develop coherent career plans integrating the different elements of an academic career; 2) it promoted understanding of the learning styles and behaviours of college students; 3) it provided practical knowledge of the teaching techniques used in a college classroom. The significance of conducting this and the like seminars is demonstrated by the subsequent interviews with the Seminar participants who admitted that they had got to realize the connections between their own mastery of content material with the learning needs of students [14]. Obviously, this experience emphasizes the importance of real-life empirical classroom programs for young faculty.

The position of a *teaching associate* bears significant resemblance with that of a *teaching fellow* (TF) and is otherwise referred to as a *graduate student instructor* (GSI) in some universities. The major difference between this position and the position of a graduate teaching assistant is that teaching fellows bear full responsibility for all aspects of the undergraduate disciplines that they teach. As a rule, TFs act as instructors for the courses that are tightly linked with the area of their dissertations or Master's theses. TF positions are normally granted to those graduate students who have certain teaching experience (e.g. had been teaching assistants), have succeeded in their own research and are on the final stage of its completion.

Although TFs are fairly autonomous in their duties, many universities, such as the University of Pittsburg, require supervision of TFs by professors experienced in teaching the course content, with whom TFs must hold regular meetings and receive feedback about the quality of their teaching.

In view of the high level of responsibility and accountability of a TF position, its holder's appointment is regarded with scrutiny by university administration. Many universities, such as the University of California requires that a candidate for a TF position be approved by the Dean of the Graduate School and the academic Personnel Committee of the University Academic Senate [6]. As a rule, TFs receive a higher stipend than TAs in accordance with the higher responsibility and time commitment of a teaching fellowship, but like TAs, their contracts are renewed on a semester-by-semester basis.

As of today, TA and TF positions predominate in US universities for those graduate students who intend to pursue an academic career. Only very few universities offer less demanding positions connected with teaching such as a *reader* or otherwise referred to as a *course assistant* and a *tutor*. The University of California is one of those where reader and tutor positions are available for successful graduate students. Tutors and readers working responsibilities include correcting undergraduate students' written assignments and laboratory works and commenting on such works during their mentoring professor's office hours. Tutors also provide consultations to individual students or groups of students in order to assist them to learn the material [6].

As a result of the review of US universities' currently announced on their websites vacancies for graduate students, it is worth admitting that graduate students are increasingly involved into departmental and individual academic research projects through *research assistantship* (RA) positions. Normally, working conditions and responsibilities vary according to the nature of research, terms of a project or a grant, and funding. Like TAs, RA full-time appointments vary from 15 to 20 hours per week in different universities. Graduate students working on research projects may also be working on material directly related to their own theses or dissertations. However, often the opposite is true – they have to work on the projects of a certain university unit including administrative work and statistical data analysis related to the research mission of the unit. Specifically, RAs are involved in preparing unit reports on research data, international cooperation, projects development, faculty's achievements, and the like.

Considering the brief overview of the major duties and responsibilities that are typical of an RA position, it is notable that the experience that a graduate student gains as an RA makes an integral part of the professional experience that young faculty need to pursue their academic career.

Working under guidance and scrutiny of experienced faculty in real-life academic environment facilitates graduate students' understanding and realization of norms, values, duties, and responsibilities of a pedagogical profession as well as provides invaluable empirical experience in the course of facing and solution of real professional challenges. Appointed to any of the available assistantship positions described above will a graduate student obtain an opportunity to be involved in classroom teaching, research, and/or service – all integral parts of the academic career – experience badly needed by the young faculty.

All in all, assistantship programs functioning in US universities facilitate the development of both educational and professional knowledge and skills of graduate students. Through assistantship, they acquire supplementary competences in their professional subject area, master their skills in the sphere of leadership, interpersonal communication and assessment along with educational management and administration, and peer cooperation with mentors, advisors, other researchers and faculty. Such experience might equally be valuable in the area of business administration, public offices administration, and NGO management.

Therefore, the practical application of assistantship in US universities is viewed as a valuable and integral component of professional socialization of young faculty to academic career. Creative adoption of US practices and learning from this experience in the current processes of reformation of higher education in Ukraine will develop the pedagogical and professional potential of the Ukrainian academy and increase the level of Ukrainian higher education as a whole.

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ТИПОЛОГІЯ АСИСТЕНТСЬКИХ ПРОГРАМ В УНІВЕРСИТЕТАХ США ТА ЇХНЯ РОЛЬ У ПІДГОТОВЦІ МАЙБУТНЬОГО ВИКЛАДАЧА

Наталія Долінська

*Львівський національний університет імені Івана Франка,
вул. Туган-Барановського, 7, Львів, Україна, 79005*

Охарактеризовано сучасну практику асистування та особливості її функціонування в університетах США. Подано актуальну типологію програм для асистентів викладачів та виокремлено структурно-організаційні та методичні аспекти професійної діяльності молодих викладачів у рамках асистентських програм. Визначено роль практики асистування у підготовці майбутнього викладача вищої школи у рамках докторантури.

Ключові слова: асистування, соціалізація, докторантура, асистент викладача, молодший викладач, асистент з наукової роботи, тьютор, рідер, факультативна ознайомча зустріч, тренінг.