

Amy Berry 12/11/06
Breaking the Language Gap:
Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together

Writing Log

Proposal:

Task	Time
Gather ideas, Brainstorm	10 minutes
Define topic, write down main ideas	15 minutes
Stasis worksheet	15 minutes
Causal Analysis	20 minutes
Research Methodology	10 minutes
Research Map	25 minutes
Audience Analysis, research and writing	20 minutes
Rough draft, get ideas on paper	25 minutes
Research, edit rough for content, add where necessary	50 minutes
Edit content	15 minutes
Edit language and style	10 minutes
Edit grammar and mechanics	10 minutes
Add citations where necessary	5 minutes
Look over final, make necessary changes, make sure all requirements are met	30 minutes
Total:	~4 hours 20 minutes

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Problem-Solution:

Task	Time
Outline what is included, what needs to be done	15 min
Clarify purpose, map ideas	20 min
Research	45 min
Rough draft, get ideas on paper	1 hour
Research, edit rough for content, add where necessary	30 minutes
Create Survey	20 min
Hand out surveys, review once finished	25 minutes
Edit Rough content, add, make changes, viewed on multiple sittings to see differently, totaled	50 minutes
Edit language and style	25 minutes
Edit grammar and mechanics	20 minutes
Add citations where necessary	15 minutes
Look over final, make necessary changes, make sure all requirements are met	50 minutes
Total:	6 hours 15 minutes

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To: **Allen Brizee**

From: **Amy Berry**

Date: **December 11, 2006**

Subject: **Audience Analysis**

Introduction

This memo is to tell you about my audience and why I'm writing to them. I have researched the issue of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and their impact on the learning and resulting grades, of college students. The more that I research this topic, the more I realize that a greater number of students are affected by this than I ever thought. I need to reach the department heads in the Oral English Proficiency Program here at Purdue because these people help to ready ITAs for the classroom by monitoring their English language skills. I believe that my suggestions may help this program continue to help these ITAs once they are inside the classroom and teaching. A second group that I believe needs to be reached is the student body. This problem affects them in the most important place on an academic campus: the classroom. Many students have negative feelings towards their ITAs and this can only hurt their relationship with their ITA and their subsequent learning. My target audience will also include everyone involved on the academic campus from teachers to other TAs and possibly the whole world if it is submitted online.

Decision Makers

I need to get in contact with the main decision makers here at Purdue on this issue. I think that a good place to start would be with Dr. April Ginther who is the Director of the Oral English Proficiency Program. I believe that Dr. Ginther would be able to help make my solutions a reality by working with the ITA community, which has gone through her program in order to be able to teach here at Purdue.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders are people who will be directly affected by a policy change or by implemented programs that arise from my solution. In this situation, I suspect that undergraduate students and ITAs would be major stakeholders. The students would be affected if the new policies involved them being more involved with their ITA. ITAs would be affected by either more involvement outside of the classroom or by possible workshops that may arise.

Shadow Readers

Shadow readers are people that are not directly involved but may still read the paper. Shadow readers in this case may involve alumni and prospective students to Purdue University.

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1275 Third Street
Purdue University
West Lafayette, IN 47906
December 11, 2006

April Ginther, Ph.D.
Director, Oral English Proficiency Program
Director, Oral English Proficiency Testing
Associate Professor of English
302 Wood Street
816 Young Hall
West Lafayette, IN 47907-2108

Dear Dr. Ginther:

Enclosed is my Problem-Solution Report *Breaking the Language Gap: Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together*. My report includes information about International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and the stigma that is associated with them. It is important to increase communication between students and their ITAs because otherwise they may be missing a rich cultural experience and important information in the classroom.

My solution involves more communication and socialization between ITAs and the students being taught. My solution also includes seminars that would be held throughout the school year that are focused on helping ITAs learn the trickier parts of the English language, such as slang and idioms. These solutions will be of low cost to the university because faculty can run them. My solution will not only increase the ITAs common English skills but also make them more comfortable in the classroom because they will be more familiar with the students that they are teaching.

I am dedicated to helping ITAs and their students here at Purdue. I have devoted many hours to this project, and I hope that it will succeed. With your help, I believe that this project will flourish and benefit all that attend Purdue University.

Thank you for taking time to read my proposal. If you have any questions or comments, feel free to contact me at alberry@purdue.edu.

Thank you,

Amy Berry

Enclosure: Problem-Solution Report

Breaking the Language Gap: Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together



December 11, 2006

Breaking the Language Gap: Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together

Prepared For

English 106-3301, First Year Composition
English Department
Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN

By

Amy Berry
Freshman, Pre-Pharmacy Major

“I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance in the completion of this assignment. All work contained herein is my own. All referenced work is cited correctly” Amy Berry 12/11/06

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Breaking the Language Gap:
Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together

Title: Breaking the Language Gap: Bringing International Teaching Assistants and Students Together

By Amy Berry

Abstract: This problem-solution report addresses the problem between the English communication skills of International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and the comprehension levels of students that they teach. A fairly large number of students eventually have at least one ITA during their academic career. Although some students have extremely proficient ITAs, some students struggle with subjects because of language barriers in the classroom. There are two main low budget solutions that can make a significant impact on this issue if implemented.

This proposition directly affects ITAs and the students that they teach. These programs are designed to help ITAs better their English proficiency and to help their confidence levels in the classroom. Students can benefit because they are involved with helping these ITAs, and therefore helping themselves later in the classroom. With the help of these students and with the cooperation of the ITAs, this may eradicate the stigma that is sometimes associated with ITAs.

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Introduction

This problem-solution report addresses the problem that is associated with international teaching assistants' English proficiency while in the classroom. International Teaching Assistants teach many different recitations here at Purdue, and therefore teach a significant number of undergraduate students.

I think that this will be accomplished by working on solutions that involve undergraduates participating more with ITAs. I believe that my programs and activities have been designed to bring ITAs and undergraduate students together will accomplish this.

The amount of language help for international students is almost minimal on campus. I think that if a seminar program was in place, then many people that needed some extra help could get it. The most important part of this solution is that it is not mandatory, rather a supplemental program.

This program will be low cost, approximately \$1400, and will be faculty run. My schedule includes twelve lunches for undergraduates and ITAs and two seminars for ITAs. This program can be easily set up and efficiently planned in a short amount of time.

In the next section, I will generally discuss my proposed solution.

Solution Overview

The basic problem in this situation is that some undergraduate students view ITAs as something to dread. They believe that nothing good could come from the experience. This attitude only makes the problem worse. In order to overcome this issue, undergraduate students must be willing to go the extra mile in order to get to know their ITAs. They also need to overcome the stereotypes that are commonly associated with ITAs. I believe that either a weekly or a bimonthly University sponsored lunch would be a perfect opportunity for students to socialize and better understand their ITAs. Many people's accents may be hard to understand when you first meet them, but once you become accustomed to their way of speaking, it becomes easier to understand and comprehend.

Another solution would be to implement a twice a semester seminar program for ITAs in order to better accustom them to slang, idioms, and other language difficult to comprehend. This program would be not be required, but rather offered in an attempt to help the ITAs assimilate better in the classroom in order to better teach students and avoid the classroom stigma of not being able to speak fluent English.

Definitions

According to Webster's Online Dictionary, proficiency is defined as:

1. having great knowledge and experience in a trade or profession
2. a thorough competence derived from training and practice
3. special aptitude as well as proficiency
4. stresses mastery of technique
5. individual dexterity in execution or performance
6. extraordinary proficiency and often connotes knowledge as well as technical skill

The synonyms that are listed are as follows: adept, skilled, skillful, and expert (*Definition*). This definition is important because the oral English proficiency of the ITA will be mentioned many times throughout this report.

For the purpose of this report, a Teaching Assistant will be defined as a graduate student that teaches recitations and grades papers for professors. This is better explained in the Purdue Graduate Student Handbook where it states:

First year students whose oral English is satisfactory are usually assigned to teach 2 recitation sections (4 contact hours per week) of a large lecture course and to grade papers in that course. Advanced students are expected to be able to eventually teach their own courses. (*Graduate*)

For the contents of this paper, the term International Student will be defined as a student that originally comes from any country outside of the United States. The student may/may not speak English natively.

The next section will discuss the background information on the situation.

Background Information

The background of this problem stems to the 1980s. One source that I found by Mark Clayton was titled "Foreign teaching assistant's first test: the accent" talks about laws that were enacted in the 1980's to make sure international teaching assistants speak English fluently before ever entering the classroom (Clayton). From this source, I was able to determine that many states enacted laws that forced Universities to start English proficiency testing, like the Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP) in place at Purdue. These programs are in place to test the English proficiency of the international students that are applying to be prospective ITAs.

The next section will include all of the initial research that I have conducted, which includes web-based research, an interview, and a survey.

Initial Research

Web Based Research

A majority of the research found was obtained using Purdue Library's Online Databases. I began my research using *Academic Search Premier*, a database that contains academic articles from different parts of the country. The first article that I obtained was by Mark Clayton and was about ITAs that taught at the University of Missouri at Columbia. Clayton mentions that many students become frustrated with the ITAs that teach them on a regular basis (Clayton). The article also goes on to talk about the rising numbers of ITAs throughout the country and the decrease of native English speakers that he witnessed at The University of Missouri at Columbia. The most surprising data that was included in this article was about final grades. Clayton states, "Undergraduate Americans in sections taught by foreign-born TA's received lower final grades than those taught by native speakers – about 0.2 points lower" (Clayton). This data was obtained only for the University of Missouri at Columbia, but I think that this data is important towards this paper even though it is only a small sampling of information and grades.

Interview

In order to get more insight on this issue, I decided to interview Dr. April Ginther, the Director of the OEPP here at Purdue. She spoke to me about the importance of undergraduates participating with ITAs and about the prospective students in her programs. One component of the OEPP is undergraduate feedback. Undergraduates volunteer their time to go to the OEPP classes and listen to presentations that are given as part of the learning experience for the prospective international students. I went to a few of these sessions and found them to be much like an actual classroom experience. The prospective ITA gave a presentation, normally on PowerPoint. After they were done, an evaluation sheet was handed out and the undergraduates assessed how well they felt the information was given. The evaluator then rated the prospective ITA on their speaking skills and on whether they felt the prospective ITA was ready to enter the classroom.

While speaking to Dr. Ginther, I was given some surprising information. She told me that many students that enter the program actually do not pass the first time that they enter the class. In order for the international student to become an ITA, they must pass the class, pass an oral exam, and be reviewed by faculty in the OEPP program to access their oral skills. After this process, the international student either passes or has to retake the entire program again. The percent of students that pass each year, according to Dr. Ginther, is about 40%. This leaves 60% of the prospective international students either to retake the class or to do research for their graduate work.

Survey

In order to find out how undergraduate students feel about their ITAs, I chose to do a survey. The survey was conducted anonymously. The questions were open ended and allowed students to add their own comments about the questions. My main goal was find out how many total Teaching Assistants (TAs) undergraduates had on average and how many of those TAs were ITAs (See Appendix A).

My survey was designed to determine the following:

- How many TAs and ITAs undergraduates have on average
- Whether or not undergraduates would volunteer their time in order to socialize with their ITAs more outside of the classroom
- The student's feelings about their TAs and ITAs

The following section details the results of the survey.

Survey Results

This survey gave me promising results. I began my survey by asking the undergraduate students if they had any TAs and how many they had. Every student surveyed had at least one TA. The next question asked if the student had any ITAs and if they did, how many they had. Of the 25 students surveyed, 20 students had ITAs and five did not. I used this data to figure the average number (per student) of TAs and ITAs (See Table 1).

Figure 1

Question

Do you have any TAs	100 % of students do	
Average number of TAs (per student)		3.05
Do you have any ITAs?	80 % of students do	20% of students do not
Average number of ITAs (per student)		1.5
Average number of non ITAs (per student)		1.88
Socialize with ITA out of classroom?	55% yes	45% no

In the next section I will discuss my proposed plan to increase contact between ITAs and their students and a seminar program to help ITAs.

Proposal

In order to help the students and ITAs here at Purdue, I am proposing a two-part program. The first part of the program is designed to help undergraduate students participate more with their ITAs. I plan to do this by having University sponsored lunches. These lunches will be an opportunity for students to take a short amount of time out of their busy schedules to get to know their ITA. I believe that a lunch function would be a perfect way to bring together both groups, ITAs and students, and allow them to connect on a necessary level.

This program will take place in the Purdue Memorial Union. This is a central point of many students' classes, and is a fairly large building. The lunches will take place either weekly or bimonthly, depending on sign-ups for that week. One of the Ballrooms would be a perfect area to gather around all the ITAs and undergraduates.

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There will be a reservation process for this program. Every week, no more than 30 people can attend these events. This is because of limited space and resources, mainly food. The reservation process would occur through the ITA.

The second part of my solution is a seminar program aimed at ITAs. Most people find that idioms and slang are the hardest parts of a new language. These are commonly used inside the classroom by undergraduates. I sense that there is some kind of interest in the ITA community to learn more about this.

This seminar program will be staffed by OEPP faculty and occur twice per semester. The seminars will be free of charge, but will require a RSVP from the ITA. These seminars would also welcome international students as well.

In the next section, method, I will discuss the research that I accomplished for this paper.

Method

I began researching this topic when I wrote my exploratory essay titled, "Speak the Language?" It explored the topic of ITAs and the way that they affect universities. I started my research using internet databases. I found these sources to be reliable and relevant to my research.

For this problem-solution report, I had to change my research from exploratory to empirical. I was able to use a few of my sources from my original paper. I also found additional sources that complemented my previous research.

Some additional sources that I found were necessary included the *Graduate Student Handbook*, which I found using the Purdue University search engine, and an online dictionary source, which I used to define additional terms.

These sources were necessary because one, the *Graduate Student Handbook*, was Purdue specific. The other source that I used helped me to define terms that were not originally used in my first report. These sources helped me to elaborate on my existing information.

In the next section, I will discuss the required actions that must occur in order to implement this solution.

Timeline

The following tasks must be completed for this project:

Figure 2

Task	Time
Submit my proposal to Dr. Ginther	Jan-07
Dr Ginther submits proposal to Provost	Jan-07
Provost overviews proposal	Feb-07
Decision is made	Mar-07

The timeline for this solution is not very complex. After submitting my proposal to Dr. Ginther, she would then submit the proposal to the Provost's office. After review, the Provost would decide if the proposal, and my solution, were possible on this campus and whether or not they wanted to support it.

The most important part of this program is when it is in effect. The schedule of events become more important. For Fall semester of 2007, a schedule of events would look like this:

Figure 3

Task	Date
Announce lunch program	Aug-07
Determine need for seminars	Aug-07
Send out emails to OEPP staff to teach seminars	Aug-07
First lunch program (every week subsequently)	Sep-07
First seminar for international students	Sep-07
Second seminar for international students	Nov-07
Lunches end	Dec-07

The next part of my proposal will include the budget of my projects.

Budget

The budget for this project is projected at about \$1400 per semester. This includes lunch and drinks for 30 undergraduate students and their ITAs weekly. I include no advertising costs because this program must be brought up in the classroom and students sign up there. I think that this will encourage more interactions with the ITAs. These lunches would occur from the first week in September to the last week in November. For the 2007 Fall semester, that would be twelve lunches. For the seminars, as long as they were staffed by the OEPP faculty, a very low budget can be maintained. Here are some projected costs:

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Figure 4

Item	Amount of times per semester	Individual cost	Final Cost
Food for 30 people	12	\$100	\$1,200
Seminar	2	\$100	\$200
		Total Cost	\$1,400

The cost of this project is minimal when compared to costs of other programs at Purdue. I believe that through donations from the University that the \$1400 could be easily raised. Another way to cut the cost on this solution would be to convince local food stores to donate food. Many people in the community are not from this country, and I think that they would be willing to donate a small amount of money in order to help students.

In the next section, staffing, I will discuss who will help with these projects.

Staffing

The OEPP program here at Purdue is specifically designed to help international students become more fluent in their English. They also want to help these ITAs become the best that they could possibly be inside the classroom. That is why I think that OEPP faculty should staff this program. The lunch program does not need staffing but the seminars need a staff member to lead them.

The commitment of this endeavor would be minimal, only a few hours twice a semester, and they would be compensated for their efforts. I do not think that any other program on campus is as fully prepared and/or qualified as OEPP to teach these seminars.

I am a freshman in the school of Pharmacy and I have been involved with various volunteer related activities for the past several years. While in high school, I weekly volunteered my time to the local food pantry and helped deliver food to shut-ins at my church's bi-monthly dinners. My senior year of high school, I was business manager of both the high school's newspaper, the *Tomahawk*, and the yearbook, the *Tiogan*. This experience gave me the ability to handle money well and learn how to prioritize my time. I believe that these experiences make me well qualified to assist in this program, especially in obtaining sponsors for the lunches. A major part of my management job was to obtain advertisers from the surrounding area.

Conclusion

This problem-solution report offers insight on the problem of ITAs and undergraduate students. This important issue will follow many students into the workplace if it is not corrected here. My proposal will increase the time that ITAs spend with their undergraduate students.

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This will help students realize that the stigmas that surround ITAs are incorrect. They will also then be able to learn in a culturally rich environment.

As long as Purdue University opens its doors to graduate students, there will be ITAs. This is a fact that is prominent at this University. The students must make the conscience choice either to make this situation work to the best of their advantage, or to make the worst of it.

The next step of this project is for you to accept this proposal and to send it to the Provost office. I believe that this proposal, if enacted, will add to the cultural experiences that are already prevalent here at Purdue. I can be reached through my school email address: alberry@purdue.edu. For the benefit of all undergraduate students and ITAs here at Purdue, I recommend that you accept this proposal.

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Works Cited

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Appendix A

Survey International Teaching Assistants

1. Do you have any Teaching Assistants (TAs)?
2. If so, how many?

3. Do you have any International Teaching Assistants (ITAs)?
4. If so, how many?

5. What were your initial feelings about your TAs and/or ITAs?

6. Why do you feel this way?

7. What are some positive things about your ITA? Negative?

8. Do you have difficulty understanding or communicating with your ITA?

9. What are some solutions or ways to improve this situation?

10. If the university offered programs that allowed you to socialize more with your ITA, would you participate?

Explain your answer:

Any additional comments:

Appendix B

Personal Interview with Dr. April Ginther

Q. What is OEPP and what does it do?

A. OEPP stands for Oral English Proficiency Program. It was enacted in the 1980s when many states were making statewide mandates for testing of international students that wanted to be teaching assistants. Purdue started this program before there was a state mandate for it.

Q. After ITAs are in the classroom, what support is provided to them to supplement their English skills?

A. There are a few different options around campus like the University Church and personal tutors, but other than that there are not many options for non-academic supplemental instruction. There is a composition course every year for ITAs and it is always at capacity.

Q. Do you feel that additional contact with students outside of the classroom would be beneficial to ITAs and their confidence level while teaching?

A. Yes I do. I feel that students need to be more involved with international students and realize that they are good teachers.

Q. How do you feel about additional seminars throughout the year for ITAs that cover topics such as classroom etiquette and idioms?

A. I think this is a good idea but I don't think that many ITAs would attend these programs.

Q. Would faculty from the OEPP be willing to assist with these programs?

A. Yes, I believe that staff would be willing to help out with the programs if the attendance level was high enough.

Q. If my proposal was submitted to you, what committee would go over it?

A. It would go from me to the Provost. After that I'm not sure where it would go.