

Curricular Middle Management

The Role of a Graduate Student Instructor in a Senior-Level Design Course

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The roles of a GSI

- Traditional
 - Grader
 - Supervisor
 - Helper
- In a design course
 - Mentor
 - Educational Psychologist
 - Confidant
 - Colleague

Different Roles for Different Phases

- A GSI must occupy different roles depending on the current design phase:
 - Gathering requirements
 - Mentor
 - Designing an initial solution
 - Mentor and psychologist
 - Implementing their initial solution
 - Psychologist and confidant
 - Testing their work
 - Colleague

GSI as...

- ...Mentor
 - Offer advice based on previous experience
 - Help teams get started and moving in the right direction
 - Prevent students from doing unnecessary work by overseeing each project's scope
- ...Educational Psychologist
 - Start discussions on team dynamics
 - Uncover unknown issues that may be causing problems by including all team members in discussion
 - Resolve conflicts

GSI as...

- ...Confidant
 - Create an open and welcoming atmosphere for meetings
 - Establish a high level of trust
 - Bring up issues that students are not comfortable discussing with the instructor
- ...Colleague
 - Offer advice on the more mundane aspects of the course
 - Behave like an extra team member
 - Have some fun

Results: Mentor

Statements	Average Score
1) I liked having the GSI give advice on our project	4.64
2) The GSI helped our group get started on our project	4.05
3) The GSI was able to get all group members motivated	3.81
4) The GSI helped keep our group stay focused	4.23

"[The GSI] was very helpful with comments and tips. [He] helped give us direction when we ran into trouble on our project."

"The GSI was familiar with the technology we were using and was able to give useful suggestions and advice. I found the GSI to be a good complement to the professor."

Results: Psychologist, Confidant, and Overall

Statements	Average Score
5) The GSI helped our group resolve any team issues	4.00 (10 N/A responses)
6) I felt comfortable discussing our progress with the GSI	4.82
7) I felt comfortable discussing team issues with the GSI	4.55
8) I would have liked the GSI to review the course material more	2.65
15) Overall, I felt that the GSI was effective	4.64
16) Overall, I feel that a GSI is an effective resource for this course	4.77

"[The GSI] did a great job at giving suggestions on our project, even though he's not working on it. So I guess having interest in a student's project is a must."

"I think it [was] crucial that we had someone to go to when we needed advice."