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## On Graduate Teaching Assistantships: Dustin Ledford, MAPW Student

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# Dustin Ledford



Dustin Ledford--Photo taken by Kelsey Medlin

*Dustin is an MAPW student pursuing a degree in Composition and Rhetoric with an Applied Writing supporting area. He plans to graduate in Spring 2019 after finishing his capstone.*

In a few sentences, please describe your GTA position, so that our readers get to know a little more about what you do.

Some people may know teaching assistants as aids to professors who help them grade, take attendance, and address student concerns. In the MAPW it's a bit different because I operate as a full instructor in English 1101 and English 1102 classes. I teach two courses during the semester with all that entails—teaching class, grading papers, and holding office hours. It can be a lot of work, but it can also be very rewarding.

How long have you been in this GTA program and how did you find out about its availability?

I've been in the program since fall of 2016 and teaching since fall of 2017. GTAs in the MAPW spend their first two semesters working in the Writing Center while they develop their courses and practice writing pedagogy and strategies for helping students develop as writers. I learned about the program through a colleague of mine who graduated from the MAPW several years ago, actually. When I was accepted into the program I was sent information on several different funding opportunities, including GTA positions.

What was the process for you to apply and pursue your GTA position?

Once I was accepted into the MAPW, I applied for a teaching assistantship. Since I've spent the last few years working part-time as an English instructor at a technical college, I wasn't nearly as intimidated by the prospect of teaching as I would have been had I applied right out of my undergraduate program. Even with that experience, however, I've learned a great deal about teaching writing and working with students to help them become better writers.

Are there any specific reasons surrounding your professional development that led you to this assistantship? If so, please share them with us.

I've already been teaching for a few years in the technical college arena, but I knew I needed to pursue a master's degree if I wanted to advance professionally into a full-time position. The MAPW program drew me in because it's such a diverse set of concentrations where I could improve my teaching while also delving into other types of writing like grant and technical writing.

How do you think this assistantship has helped you professionally? Any new skills or renewed skills that you may have developed as a GTA?

I am certainly a much more experienced and well-rounded teacher than I was when I started the program. In honesty, since I was not a English education major there was a lot I needed to learn about strategies to better teach writing. I had the fundamentals through experience, but this program gave me a lot of theory and opportunities to practice that. Additionally, the faculty involved in the TA program, like Dr. Harris, Dr. Odom, and Professor Greil, have been a great help in sharing their own experiences teaching.

Any special stories about your assistantship? Funny moments? Insightful moments?

I think teaching is full of special (and funny) moments in general. One that stands out in particular though was reading my first batch of course evaluations. I was dreading opening them up because I tend to be pretty critical of myself at times, but I was thrilled with some of the rave reviews I received from some of my students. For the most part they were very positive, and it made me realize students do tend to look for the best in their teachers if you treat them fairly and try to help them where you can.

Have you participated in other assistantships or internships that may have provided you with professional development opportunities? If so, could you briefly tell us about them?

Since GTAs don't teach during the summer, I worked as a marketing assistant with Professor Grooms this past summer. Since there are a lot of rules and regulations regarding how the university is represented and what gets sent out to potential students, I mostly did research on potential opportunities to showcase the program to various colleges, businesses, and nonprofits in the area. It gave me a new appreciation for just how many opportunities there are to write professionally in and around Atlanta.