As an international graduate student and an international teaching assistant (TA), the diversity in cultures and learning styles is a tremendous challenge in building a learning environment at UGA. This may not be apparent to many, but even the cultural background that people hail from influences their learning. Most students from other countries are used to completely different modes of instruction and learning processes. For example, students from Asian countries such as India and China are used to their instructors being the “guru”. The teacher delivers the lectures and the students assimilate the information without question. Critical thinking and questioning the teacher is considered somewhat disrespectful in those cultures. However, the mode of instruction here is centered more on developing logical and critical thinking. Assimilating the subject matter is more dependent on these than on just plain memorization. Thus, students that hail from these entirely different learning styles may not do well in the typical American classroom, be it as students or as graduate teaching assistants (GTAs).

However, the University has in place, many training programs for GTAs that hail from foreign countries. This includes language training, dealing with problems in the American classroom and efficient teaching practices. On campus resources such as the Office of Instructional Support and Development (OISD) are tremendous support systems for these GTAs. The one issue that must be addressed is the fact that international students are thrown into the American classroom even before receiving said training. Most international TAs may not do too well in their first attempts at teaching. Departmental support should be made available to these new TAs for their first semester to avoid the pressure of teaching in the American classroom without training.

Finally, teaching as a graduate student is looked upon as just a “job” and not something too important. This is true for both graduate students and faculty. This outlook affects the quality of knowledge being imparted to the undergraduate students in the classroom and must change. Faculty need to recognize the fact that some graduate students actually enjoy teaching and do look upon it as an important part of their graduate student training program. Research and teaching are as important and more emphasis should not be placed on one or the other.