

Peer Possibilities: Undergraduate Teaching Assistants for Introductory Agronomy and Soils courses. (A01-butler163815-Poster)

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Abstract:

One goal of teaching is capturing and maintaining students' interest while providing a forum for meaningful interaction. Encouraging student engagement can be a challenge in large introductory technical courses where students often lack prior experience with course material. At Penn State we recruit undergraduate teaching assistants (UGTAs) as peer instructors for introductory courses in agronomy and soils to improve the teaching and learning process. The UGTAs work with fellow UGTAs, graduate TAs, and faculty and provide an effective bridge between students and instructors. With UGTAs the introductory students benefit from the experience of the peer instructors who have completed the same course and from the improved student/teacher ratio. At the same time, the undergraduate TAs gain a better grasp of the material, develop more self-confidence and learn important professional skills. Instructors also benefit from the insights and perspectives the peer instructors bring to their attention. We will present approaches we have employed to teach UGTAs about pedagogy as well as students' evaluations of the peer instructor experience.

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